Contents

Acknowledgments vii
List of Abbreviations ix

1. Introduction: Mugabeism and Entanglements of History, Politics, and Power in the Making of Zimbabwe 1
   Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Part I Mugabeism, Economic Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism

2. Robert Mugabe: An Intellectual Manqué and His Moments of Meaning 29
   David B. Moore
3. Mugabe on Land, Indigenization, and Development 45
   Alois S. Mlambo
4. Mugabe’s Neo-sultanist Rule: Beyond the Veil of Pan-Africanism 61
   Gorden Moyo

Part II Diplomacy, Solidarity, and Power

5. Intransigent Diplomat: Robert Mugabe and His Western Diplomacy, 1963–1983 77
   Timothy Scarnecchia
   Munyaradzi Nyakudya and Joseph Jakarasi
   Henning Melber
8. Robert Mugabe: The Will to Power and Crisis of the Paradigm of War 121
   Busani Mpfu and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni

Part III Masculinity, Gender, and Corruption

9. Mugabe the Man-Nation: Two Views of Culture in the Construction of Masculinities in Zimbabwe 137
   Robert Muponde
CONTENTS

10. Grappling with Mugabe’s Masculinist Politics in Zimbabwe: A Gender Perspective  
Rudo B. Gaidzanwa  

Wesley Mwatwara and Joseph Mujere  

Part IV Global Coloniality, Racism, and Militarism

12. Mugabe’s Land Reform and the Provocation of Global White Antilblack Racism  
Chimusoro Kenneth Tafira  

13. A Fanonian Reading of Robert Gabriel Mugabe as Colonial Subject  
Tendayi Sithole  

Morgan Ndlovu  

15. Mugabe and the Military Alliance: Zimbabwe’s Prospects of Democratic Transition  
Kudzai Matereke and Niveen El Moghazy  

Bibliography  

Notes on Contributors  

Index
CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Mugabeism and Entanglements of History, Politics, and Power in the Making of Zimbabwe

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President Robert Gabriel Mugabe of Zimbabwe belongs to the first generation of African nationalists who led Africa into independence. He is 91 years old. He has been in power since 1980. For over 30 years, Zimbabweans have known only one president (Mugabe). One distinguishing feature of the first generation of African nationalists is that they initially fought for inclusion into the colonial power structures. They used personal acquisition of modern education as a justification for demanding inclusion. It was only when colonialism proved to be too inflexible to accommodate the black elite that they engaged in politics of anti-colonialism. They mobilized peasants and workers to constitute foot soldiers of anti-colonial struggles. African nationalism became a noble badge that indicated how the educated African elites loved the imagined postcolonial nation.

Mugabe is one of those black elites that embraced African nationalism in the 1960s. He became actively involved in the anti-colonial struggles. Anti-colonialism gestured towards taking over power by black elites from white colonialists. Anti-colonialism enabled black elites to inherit the colonial state. Once the black elites inherited the colonial state, they never bothered to radically transform it. Deracialization became conflated with decolonization of colonial state institutions. Africanization degenerated into nativism, xenophobia, retribalization, chauvinism and racism. Therefore, anti-colonialism must not be confused with decoloniality. Decoloniality is an encapsulation of a more profound African quest for radical transformation of colonial structures of domination and repression, colonial economic logic of exploitation, and gestures towards a rebirth of new post-racial humanity.

Mugabe’s politics have always been anti-colonial rather than decolonial. This is why his postcolonial practice of governance is not very different from that of colonialists at many levels. Mugabeism has embraced violence as a pillar of governance. Racism has continued despite Mugabe’s earlier pronouncement of a policy of reconciliation at independence in 1980. Tribalism became normalized and exacerbated to the extent that Mugabe’s regime unleashed ethnic violence on the minority
Ndebele-speaking people of Matebeleland and the Midlands regions in the period 1982 to 1987 (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation Report 1997). Sexism and patriarchy has continued unabated. State institutions have been heavily militarized. Those in power have been allowed to engage in primitive accumulation at the expense of poor ordinary people. Therefore, Mugabeism might be anti-colonial but falls short of being a genuine decolonial project aimed at ending colonial logics of governance to inaugurate a new postcolonial dispensation.

Within his ruling party known as the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) Mugabe is a demi-god. He is feared. He is rarely challenged. This is why despite his advanced age, ZANU-PF, at its December 2014 Sixth People’s Congress, elected Mugabe unopposed as its presidential candidate for the 2018 elections. By 2018, Mugabe will be 94 years old. Since coming to power in 1980, Mugabe’s pictures have adorned all public buildings making him omnipresent in Zimbabwe. His biography and hagiography is, therefore, inextricably intertwined with the political rise and economic collapse of Zimbabwe. It is however doubtful whether Mugabe will preside over the rise of Zimbabwe from its unprecedented crisis that commenced at the beginning of 2000. What is beyond doubt is that Mugabe is an important African political figure who has gained both admiration and criticism partly because of his anticolonial and pan-Africanist rhetoric/posture, and partly due to his ability to cast himself as a victim of neocolonialism and neocolonialism. Western bashing of Mugabe and imposition of sanctions has enabled him to heighten his self-representation as a victim of neocolonialism and neocolonialism.

At 91 years of age, Mugabe has been elected to chair the African Union (AU) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). While these positions are rotational and largely ceremonial, they also indicate that Mugabe is trusted as a pan-Africanist. As the new chair of the AU, Mugabe has already taken the lead in telling the world that “Africa is for Africans” and that the natural resources of Africa must benefit Africans, and in stating categorically that Africa must pull out from the International Criminal Court (ICC) by April 2015.¹

Mugabe gained fame first as a committed nationalist revolutionary and uncompromising guerrilla leader based in Mozambique in the late 1970s who gallantly fought for the independence of Zimbabwe, and second as a champion of compulsory land redistribution at the beginning of 2000. The Fast Track Land Reform Programme that commenced in 2000 won Mugabe support of some black elites desperate for quick embourgeoisement, war veterans, and landless peasants. At the same time, it provoked severe criticism from Western powers that condemned the violence that accompanied the Fast Track Land Reform Programme and emphasized the importance of respect for property rights of white commercial farmers.

But Western powers are also not helping matters in Zimbabwe. While they collectively rail against Mugabe’s authoritarianism and violation of human rights, they tend to ignore that there was an unattainable situation that Mogobe Ramose (2002) termed “constitutionalised injustice” in which a minority of white Zimbabweans who were privileged by white settler colonialism continued to own vast tracts of land at the expense of the majority of black people who were dispossessed by colonialism. Such insensitivity on the part of Western powers gave Mugabe ammunition to speak the language of restitution and redress of colonial wrongs. In short the unresolved land question in Zimbabwe as is the case in South Africa and Namibia
could not be simply interpreted from the discourse of protection of property rights because of the historical background of white settler dispossession and primitive accumulation that left indigenous people without enough land. Mugabe effectively used land question to gain popularity among landless peoples of Zimbabwe. Consequently, the resolution of the land question became one of the central motifs of Mugabeism (Mugabe 2001).

With the above background in mind it is not surprising that Mugabe is also seen as a cunning and ruthless politician who spearheaded a massacre of over 20,000 Ndebele-speaking Zimbabweans in the period between 1980 and 1987. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation Report of 1997 provides details on how the Mugabe regime deployed the Fifth Brigade that committed what became known as Gukurahundi atrocities in the Midlands and Matebeleland regions of Zimbabwe. The Ndebele-speaking people who were targets of Operation Gukurahundi were openly ‘Othered’ ethnically by the Mugabe regime as threats to the nation who deserved ethnic cleansing for Zimbabwe to survive. These atrocities constitute a major negative chapter in Mugabe’s political trajectory. Mugabe’s depiction of the atrocities as having taken place during a “moment of madness,” has not resolved the matter. Rather it indicated to an admission by Mugabe that there were no objective security concerns that warranted Operation Gukurahundi. This episode and many others such as Operation Murambatsvina (Urban Clean-Up) of 2005 and Operation Mavhoterapapi (who did you vote for) of 2008 among many forms of governance by military operations makes Mugabe a very difficult political figure to understand. This is mainly because as his popular political and social support base was fast declining, he not only resorted to populist policies that tapped into long-standing economic grievances but also retched the process of militarization of state institutions and gradually built a securocratic state. What emerged was indeed a schizophrenic and chameleonic political character in Mugabe that blamed external forces for Zimbabwe’s problems while at the same time dealing ruthlessly with internal opponents (that were defined as enemies of the state). While his political rhetoric is steeped in popular decolonial redemptive politics that appeals to a broad section of all those people who emerged from exploitative and repressive settler colonial domination, his political practice is far from democratic, tolerant, and peaceful. Mugabe is, therefore, both popular and unpopular.

Use of violence to achieve political ends has been part of Mugabe’s political practice and ZANU-PF’s DNA since its break up from ZAPU in 1963. But at the same time, his commitment to land redistribution speaks to his concern with socio-economic justice. How do we understand and make sense of such a political figure, who has now allowed his wife (Grace Mugabe) to imbricate herself in the toxic succession politics, resulting in the fall of some long-standing allies of Mugabe, including a serving vice president? In a surprising and fast turn of events taking place within the context of old age immobilizing him and influence in ZANU-PF declining, the young Grace Mugabe was positioned as Mugabe’s storm trooper dealing with imagined and perceived opponents. For 90 days prior to the Sixth ZANU-PF People’s Congress of December 2014, Grace Mugabe unceremoniously jumped into party and national politics and consistently savaged a sitting and serving Vice President Joice Mujuru who was elected at the 2004 ZANU-PF People’s Congress (Mandaza 2014). Mujuru’s political sin was to wish to succeed Mugabe as a leader of Zimbabwe. This process of purging of the so-called Mujuru faction
within ZANU-PF “was completed at the Congress itself, with husband and wife—imperious and therefore in total control of the appointments in a would-be ‘elective’ Congress—managing and concluding the slate that purports to be ZANU-PF’s ruling elite for the next five years” (Mandaza 2014: 2). It would seem the post-Sixth ZANU-PF People’s Congress witnessed the rise of Mugabe-Grace as “First Family Oligarchy” that is brutal to any force that purports to be opposed to it. How do we make sense of this latest version of Mugabeism where the first family is happily ensconced within a triumphant securocratic state? Are we witnessing the rise of a Mugabe dynasty?

Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe delves deeper into what could be gained from unsententious and diverse analyses of such an ill-defined, incoherent, and difficult signifier as Mugabeism from various disciplinary vantage points. While Mugabeism as a political practice might be punctuated by negative passion and articulated in high emotion, it cannot be totally dismissed or merely reduced to an unfounded inveighing by an archetypal African populist dictator against colonialism, imperialism, and Euro-North American-centric hegemony. With the dismantling of direct colonial administrations after 1945, Africa did not progressively move into a postcolonial dispensation. Colonialism gave way to ‘global coloniality’ with its invisible colonial matrices of power that continue to sustain an asymmetrical global power structure in place since the time of colonial conquest. But Mugabe’s correct critique of neoimperialism and neocolonialism constitutive of global coloniality is, however, rendered ineffective by his authoritarism, dictatorship, and violence at the domestic front. His legitimate and decolonial push for redistributive socioeconomic justice in a former white settler colony of Rhodesia is compromised by patrimonialism, clientelism, kleptocracy, and corruption. Perhaps, Mugabe, like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, will go down in history as a great African leader due to his courageous stand against coloniality but remain as a questionable Zimbabwean leader because of his antidemocratic political practices at the home front.

The contributors to this book make concerted efforts in their individual chapters and collectively to offer a variety of well-thought-out intellectual ways of understanding Mugabe, a complex political actor that was made and produced by specific but complicated histories as well as a man who has been and continues to be actively engaged in making complex histories. In this book, Mugabe is not only characterized as being a product of colonialism as he has played an active role in the making of Zimbabwean nationalism but also as a construction and political production of African anticolonial nationalism and the exigencies of leading an armed liberation struggle. The book is therefore about a political actor who is simultaneously a colonial, nationalist, and postcolonial subject.

How Mugabe as an individual was produced historically and politically might be the ideal entry point in understanding Mugabeism. Mugabe is a product of colonial and nationalist histories. But he is also more than that as he has played an active role in the making of postcolonial African history for the past three decades and has in the process been shaped by that postcolonial history in which the past, the present, and the future are entangled paradoxically (Mbembe 2001). Colonialism was a terrain of conquest, violence, dispossession, displacement, coercion, police rule, militarism, racism, authoritarianism, and antiblack racism. It was never a school of democracy and human rights. Radical difference was introduced by colonialism into Zimbabwe in particular and Africa in general. Mugabe was born in 1924 under conditions of the dominance of white colonialism. He was educated in colonial
mission schools and trained as a teacher within a colonial environment. In other words, Mugabe was born as colonial subject.

*Mugabeism? History, Politics, and Power in Zimbabwe* is not an attempt at producing a biography of Mugabe. To write an academically meaningful biography of Mugabe, one needs to have been close to him and his political party (ZANU-PF) to the extent of being able to conduct deep interviews with him as a subject of study. This has not been possible for me as well as for the contributors to this book. Because of this reality, the idea was never to produce a biography of Mugabe but a book about the complex entanglements of history, politics, and power within which Mugabe and Mugabeism emerged. Because the book privileges history, politics, and power, it is also about the idea of Zimbabwe and how this idea emerged, traveled, and traversed the political trajectory of the violent shifts from a colony to a sovereign state as well as the degeneration of a postcolonial state into an unprecedented multilayered crisis under the leadership of Mugabe.

**Of Colonial and Nationalist Subjects and Their Consciousness**

African colonial and nationalist subjects like Mugabe have a complex consciousness. The weakness of consciousness of colonial and postcolonial subjects is well treated in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skins, White Masks* (1967) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1968), Albert Memmi’s *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1974), and Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonizing the Mind* (1986). For the black colonial subject, acquiring education was considered as one possible avenue to gain some ontological density as a black professional under colonialism. Colonialism denied sovereign subjectivity to black people. But education was advertised by colonialists as a gateway to civilization and personhood. As put by the Peruvian sociologist Aníbal Quijano (2007: 169):

> The colonisers also imposed a mystified image of their own patterns of producing knowledge and meaning. At first, they placed these patterns far out of reach of the dominated. Later, they taught them in partial and selective way, in order to co-opt some of the dominated into their own power institutions. Then European culture was made seductive: it gave access to power. After all, beyond repression, the main instrument of all power is its seduction.

But colonialism had a racial ceiling for the social mobility of black colonial professionals. They were denied the right to vote. Only a few and particular professions such as teaching and nursing were available for black professionals. This colonial ceiling frustrated the black elite that were thirsty for embourgeoisement within a colonial environment. To sustain the ceiling and to ensure that only a few black people acquired modern colonial education, colonial authorities, according to Jean-Paul Sartre, became strictly selective of those Africans they wanted to produce as part of manufacturing “native elite.” Mugabe fortuitously was part of those who were selected. Missionaries also played a key role in this colonial selection. This is why Sartre (Sartre quoted in Fanon 1968: 7) argued that

> the European elite undertook to manufacture native elite. They picked out promising adolescents; they branded them, as with red-hot iron, with the principles of
Western culture; they stuffed their mouth full with high-sounding phrases, grand glutinous words that stuck to teeth. After a short stay in the mother country they were sent home whitewashed. These walking lies had nothing left to say to their brother.

As noted by Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986: 9) the classroom and “the chalk and the blackboard” were used effectively by colonialism to commit “psychological violence” known as epistemicide. But it was mainly colonial racial ceiling and colonial restrictions faced by those black people who had deeply imbibed colonial knowledge and education that forced members of the emerging black elite to embrace nationalism and anticolonialism as means of fighting against the colonial white bourgeoisie and its political leadership that was in charge of the colonial state. This is why some scholars have expressed an idea of a weak social base of African nationalism as liberatory force. Mahmood Mamdani (2000: 45) has this to say about the social base of African nationalism:

I argue that the social base of nationalism who was the native who had crossed the boundary between the rural which incorporated the subject ethnically and the urban that excluded the subject racially. Though beyond the lash of customary law, this native was denied access to civic rights on racial grounds. It is this native . . . who formed the social basis of nationalism. For a mass-based militant nationalism to be created, though, it was necessary for the boundary between the customary and the civic to be breached. Having crossed that boundary from the rural to the urban, it was once again necessary for cadres of militant nationalism to return to the countryside to link up with peasant struggles against Native Authorities. Nationalism was successful in gaining a mass base only where it succeeded in breaching the double divide that power tried to impose on society: the urban-rural, and the inter-ethnic.

It is this nationalist school (the nationalist movement) that Mugabe entered into in 1960. It was already dominated by other nationalists like Joshua Nkomo, Ndabaningi Sithole, James Chikerema, George Nyandoro, Paul Mushonga, Joseph Msika, George Silundika, Jason Moyo, and Josiah Chinamano, among many others. The nationalist school was deeply interpellated by the colonial school despite its claims to produce cadres that would destroy colonialism. Stefan Mair and Masipula Sithole (2002: 22) captured this interpellation well: “The authoritarianism of the colonial era reproduced itself within the nationalist political movements. The war of liberation, too, reinforced rather than undermined this authoritarian culture.” This point was reinforced by the Asian cultural decolonial scholar Kuan-Hsing Chen (1998: 14), who also noted that because of interpellation of third world nationalism by the immanent logic of colonialism, it “could not escape from reproducing racial and ethnic discrimination; a price to be paid by the coloniser as well as the colonised selves.” But it was only after civil disobedience to colonial rule proved ineffective that some African nationalists concluded that colonial violence simply needed to be countered by nationalist violence. When this happened, the interpellation was complete. Colonial violence was being reproduced by the African nationalists. Colonial paradigm of war was reproduced as nationalist paradigm of war. This is why some decolonial theorists strongly condemn nationalism.
of reproducing Eurocentrism. The leading decolonial theorist Ramon Grosfoguel (2011: 18) has no kind words for nationalism:

Nationalism provides Eurocentric solutions to a Eurocentric global problem. It reproduces an internal coloniality of power within each nation-state and reifies the nation-state as the privileged location of social change. Struggles above and below the nation-state are not considered in nationalist political strategies. Moreover, nationalist responses to global capitalism reinforce the nation-state as the political institutional form par excellence of the modern/colonial/capitalist/patriarchal world-system. In this sense, nationalism is complicit with Eurocentric thinking and political structures.

This sustained critique of both colonialism and nationalism assists us in understanding the behavior of people like Mugabe who were born as colonial subjects but who then embraced African nationalism and anticolonial struggles as part of their fight to take over the colonial state. While there is no doubt about Mugabe’s consistent anticolonial rhetoric, he is yet to escalate that to a genuine decolonial agenda that transforms colonial structures of power, deviates from Eurocentric colonial epistemology and radically shifts from hierarchization of being according to “tribe” as a reproduction of racial hierarchization of being under colonialism. Decoloniality is superior to mere anticolonialism because it envisages new political forms of power that do not reproduce coloniality; is very critical of how anticolonial struggles ended up as reformist movements seeking inclusion in the very Euro-North American-centric powers structure that are underpinned by coloniality; and is acutely focused on epistemological paradigm shift as an essential prerequisite for genuine decolonial transformation. At another level, the crisis in which political figures like Mugabe are entrapled manifests itself in the practice of deploying leftist political language, while remaining steeped in right-wing Eurocentric epistemology that reproduces all the negatives of coloniality such as reverse racism, tribalism, patriarchy, sexism, nativism, and xenophobia (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013).

Such an analysis also help us to understand the ambiguities, contradictions, and ambivalences displayed by Mugabe as a political actor, particularly his railing against Euro-North American hegemony while at the same time maintaining an authoritarian, repressive, and violent state in Zimbabwe that is intolerant of any dissent. These ambiguities, contradictions, and ambivalences were well-captured by the leading African philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992: 56–60):

Railing against the cultural hegemony of the West, the nativists are of its party without knowing it. Indeed the very arguments, the rhetoric of defiance, that our nationalist muster are . . . canonical, time-tested . . . In their ideological inscription, the cultural nationalists remain in a position of counteridentification . . . which is to continue to participate in an institutional configuration—to be subjected to cultural identities they ostensibly decry . . . Time and again, cultural nationalism has followed the route of alternate genealogizing. We end up always in the same place; the achievement is to have invented a different past for it.

A nationalist paradigm of “conquest of conquest” entrenched and consolidated earlier colonial cultures of conquest and violence as forms of political practice. However
well-meaning and rational the adoption of violence as a tool of liberation was, this meant that the nationalist school became a terrain of violence too. Mugabe, for instance, became a graduate of both colonial and nationalist schools of violence. It is therefore not surprising that he can boast of having degrees in violence and take pride in the fact that his political party (ZANU-PF) has a long and successful history of use of violence to achieve political ends (Blair 2002). Even his approach to elections spoke of the inseparability of votes and guns: “Our votes must go together with our guns. After all, any vote shall have, shall have been the product of the gun. The gun which produces the vote should remain its security officer—its guarantor. The people’s votes and the people’s guns are always inseparable twins” (Mugabe, 1976, quoted in Meredith 2002a). While it is true that Mugabe spoke this way within a context of intensifying armed struggle where the gun was indeed the weapon that would make it possible for black people to achieve the right to vote, the realities of use of violence in every election since 1980 confirm that he actually meant that people had to be coerced to vote for him and his party even after the end of the liberation struggle. At another level, the success of African nationalism depended on unity that was often enforced violently.

In reality, adoption of the armed struggle transformed mass nationalist movements (ZANU and ZAPU) into semi-military formations with armed wings. Military exigencies brought in not only regimental but also commandist tendencies. Violence was now officially accepted as a legitimate tool of liberation just like it was officially accepted by the colonialists as a legitimate tool of colonial conquest and maintenance of white settler colonial power. Mugabe emerged from this milieu. This is why it is important to understand and highlight the complex history, entangled politics, and complicated power dynamics as part of the intellectual agenda to understand Mugabe as a political actor.

Fanon (1968) is a pioneer in seeking to unmask the African nationalist leader and the black middle-class that dominated postcolonial governments as suffering from pitfalls of consciousness. He highlighted the fact that black elites in charge of postcolonial African states were basically intellectually lazy, parasitical, and corrupt. When the nationalists came to power they steered anti-colonial trajectory into a narrow path of Africanization. At the centre of this Africanization agenda was the call for nationalization of the commanding heights of the economy. This nationalization was itself interpreted in very narrow terms of transferring wealth from white to black elites in charge of the postcolonial state and their clients. Decolonization became bastardized and ideologised into a vehicle to justify primitive accumulation and looting. Zimbabwe under Mugabe has not escaped this tendency. This is why it is important to seek to understand Mugabe as a nationalist leader.

**Mugabe as a Nationalist Leader**

Being a nationalist leader became a terrain of contests because it was linked with power. The role Mugabe played in the epic nationalist struggle that delivered an independent Zimbabwe in 1980 is itself contested by such political figures as Joshua Nkomo (1984) and Edgar Tekere (2007), who also claimed prominence in the anti-colonial nationalist liberation struggle. A close reading of their autobiographies reveals a continuation of contestations over who made history in Zimbabwe as well as over power, political positions, memory, and political legacy. While Tekere seems to contest Mugabe’s heroism and tries to elevate himself above him, Nkomo is keen
to maintain his status as the “Father of Zimbabwe” through claims to history and appeals to memory, despite having lost political power in 1980. The message that comes through is that of a senior politician that felt cheated by history and political practice and who strongly thought Mugabe was envious of the role he played in the foundation of Zimbabwean nationalism (Nkomo 1984).

This argument is used to make sense of why Mugabe used the notorious Fifth Brigade in his attempt to physically eliminate Nkomo in 1983. Despite these contestations, Mugabe has been at the helm of Zimbabwean politics first as prime minister (1980–1987) and then as executive president (1987–present). As such, Mugabe’s political life is part of the broader story of the decolonization of Rhodesia into Zimbabwe as well as the tale of political trajectory of postcolonial Zimbabwe from 1980 up to the present. Mugabe’s biographies and hagiographies have increasingly been made to be inextricably intertwined with the very idea of Zimbabwe albeit in a very problematic manner in which he becomes simultaneously the “liberator” and the “destroyer” of Zimbabwe.

This narrative of a “liberator” and “hero,” who degenerated into a “dictator” and a “tyrant,” dominates the existing biographies of Mugabe. Inevitably, numerous attempts on writing Mugabe’s biography became hostage to this binary understanding. Many of the biographies are not only largely journalistic but are also very thin on revealing the complexities of the structural terrain within which Mugabe had to make history and practice politics. For example, those biographies of Mugabe that were produced during the pick of the Zimbabwe crisis became locked in what Mahmood Mamdani (2008: 7) termed the “regime-opposition polemic.”

What also emerges is the idea that there was a sudden, enigmatic, and puzzling shift in Mugabe’s political trajectory taking the form of a biblical fall from grace to evil. This is a simplistic understanding as it is not based on a nuanced understanding of Mugabe as a political actor whose actions were largely shaped by complex histories of colonialism and nationalism, global coloniality and its machinations, as well as complicated power dynamics that involved politics of survival and competition.

Consequently, existing biographies do not fully capture complex entanglements of the “postcolony” within which a “colonial subject” like Mugabe, who was born during the colonial period and who was forced to join the nationalist struggle by settler brutalities and colonial disdain for African subjectivity. With the achievement of political independence, “colonial subjects” had to graduate into “postcolonial” subjects. The challenge facing Mugabe as a “postcolonial” subject and a leader of a new “postcolony,” was how to avoid reproducing coloniality together with its primitive accumulation and corrupting tendencies, patriarchal and sexist traditions, racist, ethnic, and xenophobic cultures, as well as repressive, violent, and authoritarian political inventories as forms of postcolonial governance. These realities are well-captured by the leading African postcolonial theorist Achille Mbembe in his celebrated book On the Postcolony (2001: 14), in which he wrote: “As an age, the postcolony encloses multiple durees made up of discontinuities, reversals, inertias, and swings that overlay one another, interpenetrate one another, and envelope one another: an entanglement.” As a colonial subject, by the late 1950s and early 1960s, Mugabe was a typical part of the emerging African elite known as petit-bourgeois class. That class, according to Frantz Fanon (1968), emerged suffering terribly from pitfalls of consciousness. First of all, it attempted to imbibe as much as possible Euro-North American cultures, mannerisms, and mission-education in
the mistaken belief that this would enable it to be accommodated into colonial structures. This accommodation was not forthcoming.

It was only when the African petit-bourgeoisie realized that despite having accumulated mission-education and even university degrees the colonial state of Rhodesia was too racially inflexible to accommodate black people that they then decided to rejoin the bulk of the black population with a view to mobilize it to fight against racism and denial of the right to vote mainly. The mobilization of the black masses by the leading African nationalists must not be misread as part of the revolutionary Cabralian (1979) “class suicide” process and action. Far from it, mobilization of popular support was the essential prerequisite for the success of the bourgeois anticolonial struggle aimed at replacing white colonial bourgeoisie with black African bourgeoisie.

How Mugabe ended up a leading figure in the anticolonial nationalist struggle is subject to contestations. One narrative is that of a reluctant teacher-trainer from Ghana who while on leave was invited to join the liberation movement. This narrative was given by Jonathan Moyo (quoted in Holland 2008 175–176) during an interview with the journalist Heidi Holland, and it shows Mugabe as a reluctant nationalist who was invited to the nationalist movement because he was from Ghana, a country that was led by a respected pan-Africanist Kwame Nkrumah, had high qualifications from the University of Fort Hare, and was articulate: “So he is approached, persuaded to join the liberation movement, and he agrees to give it a try. Nowhere in his record prior to becoming the leader of ZANU do you see Robert Mugabe driven by political passion or a vision of a better future for Zimbabweans.” However, there is another narrative that emphasizes that Mugabe was actively involved in sharpening his ideology while in Ghana. The narrative indicates that while based in Ghana between 1958 and 1960, Mugabe underwent ideological training at the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute at Winneba. During this time, he was teaching at Apowa Secondary School in Takoradi. It was at the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute that Mugabe imbibed both Nkrumahism and the principles of Marxism (Norman 2008: 18; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009a: 1142). This second narrative differs from Jonathan Moyo’s reading of Mugabe as a mere teacher-trainer that had no clear passion for liberation but was persuaded into the nationalist movement. If the second narrative is taken into account, then Mugabe came to Rhodesia in the 1960s already ideologically trained in the principles of Nkrumahism and Marxism (Norman 2008; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009a, b).

Once he joined the nationalist movement in 1960, Mugabe gradually climbed the ladder of leadership, not through open initiative but again by being invited to lead when Reverend Sithole, the founder president of ZANU, was found to be wavering while in detention in 1975. The year 1975 also witnessed the assassination of national chairman Herbert Wiltshire Chitepo (White 2003). These developments opened the way for Mugabe to rise to the helm of ZANU in exile. By 1977, he was comfortably in charge of ZANU.

On Biographies and Hagiographies of Mugabe

A biography is a document detailing the life of a person by highlighting his or her positives and negatives, strengths and weaknesses, failures and successes as well as trials and tribulations. A hagiography is a particular type of biography that is designed to idealize, admire, celebrate, revere, and eventually elevate the person
to sainthood. While there are numerous biographies of Mugabe, they rarely celebrate him. Mugabe’s life history lacks hagiographies. Most of the biographies were produced during and after the unprecedented crisis that engulfed Zimbabwe from 2000 and apportion blame on him for the collapse of the economy and descent of Zimbabwe into lawlessness and authoritarianism.

The earliest attempt at a biography of Mugabe was made by David Smith, Colin Simpson, and Ian Davies in *Mugabe* (1981). This early biography was written at the time of Mugabe and ZANU’s triumphalism. Inevitably, it is different from those that were produced after 2000. There is an element of celebrating Mugabe. The focus of this early biography is on Mugabe’s childhood, his detention in Rhodesian prisons, and his leadership of ZANU and ZANLA in exile right up to his election as the first black prime minister of independent Zimbabwe.

By the time of its publication (1981), the policy of reconciliation though unwritten was still resonant in Zimbabwe. The coalition government was still working and Zimbabwean economy was functioning very well. But even at this early period, the authors picked a disturbing idea of Zimbabwe that Mugabe presented to Lord Soames. Mugabe spoke of a Joshua Nkomo country (Matabeleland) and a Mugabe country (Mashonaland and Manicaland). Mugabe’s “two-nation” speech is said to have arisen during a meeting between him and the British governor Lord Soames at the heat of the political campaigns for the independence elections. Nkomo had complained to Soames that his party was being prevented from campaigning in Manicaland by ZANU-PF and ZANLA. Mugabe is quoted as having said:

> Look Lord Soames, I am not new to this game, you know. That’s my part of the country, Manicaland, that’s mine. The fact that Nkomo can’t campaign there is down to the fact that I control it, I’ve a cell there for five years. Is it surprising that people don’t turn out there for Nkomo? Would I go to Nkomo’s country (Matebeleland) and expect to raise a crowd there? Of course, I wouldn’t. (Smith et al. 1981: 187)

What emerges poignantly from this is how an ethnically bifurcated nationalism that emerged in 1963 with the birth of ZANU as a splinter formation from ZAPU was producing such ideas of Zimbabwe in which Mashonaland, Masvingo, and Manicaland became Mugabe’s country and Matabeleland became Nkomo’s country. This bifurcated idea of Zimbabwe was also compounded by the way in which the armed liberation struggle was fought. Nkomo’s ZIPRA operated mainly in Matabeleland and the Midlands regions. Mugabe’s ZANLA operated in the Mashonaland regions, including Manicaland. But this “two-nation” thinking did not augur well with the idea of a Zimbabwe that was expected to be born as a unitary state underpinned by monolithic unity.

In 1981, David Martin and Phyllis Johnson published *The Struggle for Zimbabwe: The Chimurenga War*, which was very supportive of ZANU-PF’s narrative of the liberation struggle. The armed struggle was traced genealogically to the Sinoia/Chinhoyi Battle of 1966, where ZANLA forces engaged the Rhodesia forces though they all perished in the encounter. The book had some hagiographical orientation and was most welcomed by ZANU-PF and Mugabe to the extent of being freely distributed to all secondary schools and teachers’ colleges. In this book, Mugabe emerged as a hero of the liberation struggle, who played a crucial role in delivering an independent Zimbabwe.
SABELO J. NDLOVU-GATSHENI

The Rise of Mugabe in ZANU

Mugabe’s speeches were published as Our War of Liberation: Speeches, Articles, Interviews 1976–1979 (1983). This was important in positioning Mugabe as a central figure in the struggle for decolonization. The period 1976–1979 is crucial for Mugabe as it was in 1977 that he formally took over the overall leadership of both ZANU and ZANLA after cracking down on the Zimbabwe People’s Army (ZIPA). Zvakanyorwa Wilbert Sadomba (2011), a sociologist and veteran of Zimbabwe’s liberation war, divided the liberation history of Zimbabwe into three crucial phases: the Chitepo Phase (1964–1975), the ZIPA/Vashandi Phase (1976–1977), and the Mugabe Phase (1977–1979). He elaborated that:

There is no doubt that Mugabe’s leadership, spanning more than a generation now (1977 to present), is not only the longest in the history of the liberation movement but also had the greatest influence on that movement. In terms of internal ideological and power struggles, the phase was the most turbulent, commencing with the violent purgation of the Vashandi/ZIPA group in 1976/7 and within a year repeating the process by removing the Hamadziripi/Gumbo/Maparuri group in 1978. This phase also saw the most dramatic developments, including the formation of the Patriotic Front—a union between ZANU and ZAPU, even as their two anti-colonial guerrilla armies were violently splitting. It is also significant that the final peace negotiations took place during this period starting in August 1979. The Mugabe era therefore clearly has a very shallow guerrilla war foundation of two years and nine months, i.e., March 1977 to December 1979, when the peace negotiations began . . . By comparison, Chitepo played a far greater role and for a longer period (nine years—1966–75) than Mugabe’s two years nine months and ZIPA’s two years of leadership . . . This is important to bear in mind in view of the fact that the ruling oligarchy of ZANU-PF has mainly used the history of the liberation struggle to legitimate its political hegemony. (40)

Sadomba, like Tekere, is very critical of Mugabe’s leadership even prior to independence. He documents that when Mugabe took over leadership of ZANU and the post of commander in chief of ZANLA in 1977, he declared that year to be “The Year of the Party.” This involved surrounding himself with admirers like Simon Muzenda, “who did not want Mugabe to be opposed and who would close discussion at any opinion presented by Mugabe, as final decision” (43). Muzenda was one of those politicians in Zimbabwe who was considered not to be ambitious beyond being a perpetual deputy to Mugabe. Sadomba concluded that Mugabe effectively used “divide-and-rule tactics and clinical personnel management” as well as “creating and controlling structures through careful deployment of loyal individuals over whom remote control is possible” (42–43).

Consequently, the centrality of Mugabe in the liberation struggle was depicted by the imposition of the slogan “Pamberi na Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe” (Forward with Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe) on the ZANLA High Command. This meant that the old slogan of “Pamberi ne Chimurenga” (Forward with Chimurenga/Nationalist Armed Revolution) was now subordinated to a slogan that privileged the name of Mugabe as an individual. The Mugabe era is depicted by Sadomba (2011: 43–45) as the genesis of ZANU becoming an authoritarian and despotic organization where adherence to the “party line” included avoiding contesting leadership positions in the party.
The liberal British historian Terence Ranger, who was involved in African nationalist politics in the 1960s, also agonized over the question of why a Zimbabwean nationalism that emerged promising liberation and freedom ended up delivering repression, violence, and authoritarianism. Ranger had also published such books as *Revolt in Southern Rhodesia, 1896–7: A Study of African Resistance* (1967), which positively evaluated the primary resistance of 1896–7 and even made some connections between primary resistance and the period of nationalism. But by the late 1990s, Ranger like many other intellectuals was hard pressed to explain what went wrong with Zimbabwean nationalism. He proffered two related possible causes and reasons:

Perhaps post-independence authoritarianism was the result of liberation wars themselves, when disagreement could mean death. It was difficult to escape the legacy of such a war. Maybe it sprang from the adoption by so many nationalists and especially liberation movements, of Marxist-Leninist ideologies. These implied “democratic centralism,” the domination of civil society by the state and top-down modernizing “development.” (Ranger 2003: 1–2)

Ranger went further to argue that

but perhaps there was something inherent in nationalism itself, even before the wars and the adoption of socialism, which gave rise to authoritarianism. Maybe nationalism’s emphasis on unity at all costs—its subordination of trade unions and churches and all other African organizations to its imperatives—gave rise to an intolerance of pluralism. Maybe nationalism’s glorification of the leader gave rise to a post-colonial cult of personality. Maybe nationalism’s commitment to modernization, whether socialist or not, inevitably implied a “commandist” state. (1–2)

Indeed trappings of a personality cult started to emerge during the course of the anticolonial liberation struggle and were further consolidated after 1980. Even as recent as 2000, attempts were still made to produce a hagiography of Mugabe as a revolutionary leader who was now dedicated to delivering land to the black people. Therefore, the Ministry of Information and Publicity under Jonathan Moyo, who has been depicted by many as the spin doctor of Mugabe, published a hagiography entitled *Inside the Third Chimurenga* (2001).

The publication consisted of well-selected speeches of Mugabe that depicted him as a consistent revolutionary that was perpetually anticolonial and anti-imperialist. The land question features prominently in these speeches as well as the issue of national sovereignty and territorial integrity and condemnation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as a Trojan horse of imperialism aimed at delivering recolonization of Zimbabwe. In this hagiography, Mugabe emerges as progressive pan-Africanist and an indefatigable fighter for the economic empowerment of black Zimbabweans through delivery of the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme.

The land reform became the central leitmotif of the Third Chimurenga, which was christened as the war for land restoration. Pushing forward the overdue program of land reform was indeed a progressive part of the incomplete liberation struggle. Landless peasants, landless war veterans, and aspiring black bourgeoisie, including progressive intellectuals and academics, supported the land reform.
But Sadomba (2011) depicted the land reform as championed not by Mugabe but by the war veterans in alliance with the landless peasants. To Sadomba, what took place was a revolution that challenged the state, ruling ZANU-PF, the MDC, Mugabe, settler and international capital—all at once. Again, the authority and role of Mugabe in the Third Chimurenga is contested. Sadomba presents Mugabe and ZANU-PF as an oligarchy that was no longer with the people but that had to hijack the war veterans and peasants’ land revolution for purposes of political survival and regime security. Norma J. Kriger in her *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980–1987* (2003) articulated how Mugabe and ZANU-PF have tendentiously used veterans as storm troopers in political games aimed at retaining political power.

**Mugabeism of the Post-2000 Period**

The post-2000 period witnessed the publication of a particular breed of biographies of Mugabe that blamed him for presiding over the collapse of the Zimbabwean economy. The land reform program was depicted as a disaster brought about by Mugabe as a leader. These condemnatory biographies informed by neoliberal global politics and ideologies included Martin Meredith’s *Robert Mugabe: Power, Plunder and Tyranny in Zimbabwe* (2002) and *Our Votes, Our Guns: Robert Mugabe and the Tragedy of Zimbabwe* (2002); David Blair’s *Degrees in Violence: Robert Mugabe and the Struggle for Power in Zimbabwe* (2002); Stephen Chan’s *Robert Mugabe: A Life of Power and Violence* (2003); Andrew Norman’s *Robert Mugabe and the Betrayal of Zimbabwe* (2004); Heidi Holland’s *Dinner with Mugabe: The Untold Story of a Freedom Fighter Who Became a Tyrant* (2008); Daniel Compagnon’s *A Predictable Tragedy: Robert Mugabe and the Collapse of Zimbabwe* (2011) and many others. Compagnon (2011: 1) introduced his book thus:

When the Zimbabwean flag was raised officially in the early hours of 18 April 1980, symbolizing the dawn of a new era and the end of a bitter liberation war, who could have imagined then that the crowds cheering their hero—Robert Mugabe—would come to hate him some thirty years later after he led them to starvation, ruin, and anarchy? Who would have expected Zimbabwe to become the “sick man” of southern Africa, a security concern for its neighbours, and an irritant in the mind of progressive opinion leaders such as former anti-apartheid lead activist and Nobel Peace Prize winner Archbishop Desmond Tutu, who would, in 2008, call for Mugabe’s forced removal from power? As we shall see, this disaster should not come as a complete surprise since there were, from the beginning, many worrying signs of Mugabe’s thirst for power, his recklessness, and his lack of concern for the well-being of fellow countrymen and women, as well as the greed and brutality of his lieutenants in his party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF).

The post-2000 titles on Mugabe reveal a Mugabe-centric approach to the understanding of causes of Zimbabwe’s descent to crisis. This Mugabe-centric literature largely communicates and delivers a message of an African leader who played a central role in the anticolonial struggle, who ascended to power on the shoulders of the liberation struggle, who was once admired as a statesman and a voice of reason, but
who eventually degenerated into a dictator, a tyrant, and a monster. It would seem from a close reading of some literature existing on Mugabe since the late 1970s that he was never a good leader. The dictatorial tendencies were there from the beginning. This is why Compagnon projected Mugabeism as an inevitably tragic part of Zimbabwe. But the post-2000 period also witnessed the emergence of an array of memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, and hagiographies of other political actors that disputed the heroic image of Mugabe. Works like *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter* (2011) openly depict Mugabe as the villain who hijacked the nationalist revolution for his own ends. But others, such as Fay Chung in *Re-living the Second Chimurenga: Memories from Zimbabwe’s Liberation Struggle* (2006), continued to present Mugabe as a respected pragmatic leader, an uncompromising revolutionary, and a far-sighted visionary.

This literature emerged at a time when scholars were raising serious concerns about violence, dictatorship, repression, ideological bankruptcy, patriarchy, executive lawlessness, rigging of elections, and militarism as the major constituent elements of Mugabeism of the post-2000. It was during this period that scholars increasingly became active in explaining what was happening in Zimbabwe with Horace Campbell publishing *Reclaiming Zimbabwe: The Exhaustion of the Patriarchal Model of Liberation* (2003), which emphasized the issues of masculinity, machismo, patriarchy, and militarism as major markers of the Zimbabwean model of liberation as well as the major leitmotif of postcolonial governance and political practice. At the same time, Amanda Hammar, Brian Raftopoulos, and Stig Jensen published a groundbreaking work entitled *Zimbabwe’s Unfinished Business: Rethinking Land, State and Nation in the Context of Crisis* (2003), which demonstrated theoretically, conceptually, and empirically the complex intersections of contested histories and memories, complicated political trajectories, and well as multifaceted political dynamics that produced a Mugabeism that was ambiguous, militant, and violent while promising to deliver redistributive social and economic justice.

During this same time, the opposition desk was also producing biographies of the opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai that countered the positive narrative of Mugabeism. These included Sarah Huddleston’s *Face of Courage: A Biography of Morgan Tsvangirai* (2005); Stephen Chan’s *Citizen of Zimbabwe: Conversations with Morgan Tsvangirai* (2005); and William Bango’s *Morgan Tsvangirai: At the Deep End* (2012). In these works, a concerted effort was made to create a hero and extol Tsvangirai’s political virtues in such a way that Mugabe would emerge as lacking political qualities needed to rescue Zimbabwe from crisis. Chapter 9 by Robert Muponde in this book provides a deep literary analysis of Mugabe and Tsvangirai as symbols of the postcolonial nation. The current book picks the topical issue of the meaning and essence of Mugabeism and tries to further unpack it from different disciplinary vantage points. The key questions that continue to cry out for a response include: Is there Mugabeism? If yes, what does it stand for or mean to warrant all these writings? Can one speak of a Mugabe phenomenon?

**Mugabeism**

It is clear that Mugabeism is used in this book to encapsulate a critical scholarly search for understanding and making sense of the ubiquitous Mugabe phenomenon.
that is itself inextricably intertwined with the equally complicated idea of Zimbabwe. Its ubiquity in local, regional, continental, and global politics was well captured by Mamdani (2008: 1) when he wrote:

It is hard to think of a figure more reviled in the West than Robert Mugabe. Liberal and conservative commentators alike portray him as a brutal dictator, and blame him for Zimbabwe’s descent into hyper inflation and poverty. The seizure of white-owned farms by his black supporters has been depicted as a form of thuggery, and as a cause of the country’s declining production, as if these lands were doomed by black ownership. Sanctions have been imposed, and opposition groups funded with the explicit aim to unseat him.

Mugabeism as unpacked in the various chapters of this book assumes a form of a highly contested political phenomenon albeit one that has no coherent ideological content. It does not exist as a coherent ideology. It is inherently eclectic. This is why it is not reducible to a biography of Mugabe. Mugabeism has assumed a form of populist reason. It is a multifaceted phenomenon. It masquerades as a revolutionary phenomenon linked to pan-African anticolonial and anti-imperialist decolonial project. Its rhetoric has a radical left-nationalist, pan-Africanist and anti-imperialist as well as nativist orientation. On the nativist element featuring as radical nationalism, as the Marxist postcolonial theorist Benita Parry (2004: 40) noted and argued:

When we consider the narratives of decolonization, we encounter rhetorics in which “nativism” in one form or another is evident. Instead of disciplining these, theoretical whip in hand, as a catalogue of epistemological errors, of essentialist mystifications, as masculinist appropriation of dissent, as no more than anti-racist racism, etc., I want to consider what is to be gained by an unsententious interrogation of such articulations, which often driven by negative passion, cannot be reduced to mere inveighing against iniquities or repetition of canonical terms of imperialism’s conceptual framework.

Indeed there is an element of nativism in Mugabeism informed by autochthonous discourses that emerged poignantly when Zimbabwean nationalism demonstrated its antiliberal and redemptive ethos (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Muzondidya 2011; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013). Read from this perspective, Mugabeism depicts a degenerated nationalism in which a single individual and his political party try to symbolize the nation and as put by Issa G. Shivji (2003: 80), “Nation-building turns into state-building. Nation is substituted by party and party leader, the father of the nation. The National Question is reduced to a race question or ethnic question or cultural question.”

Practically, Mugabeism is compromised by such inimical processes as primitive accumulation and corruption, crisis of ideology, chaos, and tyranny. It is ensnared in a nest of contradictions that often make it appear as nothing but part of politics of survival and opportunism. Amanda Hammar and Brian Raftopoulos (2003) captured very well the discursive terrain within which Mugabeism became prominent and the complex issues it is grappling with, trying to discipline some, accommodate...
others, and yet delegitimize those that appear to threaten Mugabe’s power and ZANU-PF’s hegemony. They wrote of:

a historised and racialized assertion of land restitution and justice, versus an ahistorical, technocratic insistence on liberal notions of private property, “development” and “good governance”; a new form of “indigenous,” authoritarian nationalism (based around claims of loyalty and national sovereignty), versus a non-ethnicized, “civic” nationalism (grounded in liberal democratic notions of rights and the rule of law); a radical, Pan-Africanist anti-colonial, anti-imperialist critique of “the West,” versus a “universalist” embrace of certain aspects of neoliberalism and globalization; and a monopoly claim over the defence of human rights. In large part, these polarities and their persistence are founded on competing narratives of Zimbabwe’s national liberation history which are critical both to the ruling party’s ongoing attempts to sustain its hegemony, and to the counter-hegemonic moves of various opposition actors. (17)

The post-2000 period witnessed a Mugabeism that was consistently working to delegitimize all those political formations and civil society forces that threatened Mugabe’s power. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) became the face of all those political formations and forces that were identified not only as constituted by enemies of the nation and the state but as inauthentic parties that “give a perverted and false expression of the national will” (Luxemburg 1976: 141). It is within this context that Mugabe (2001: 88) made it an important and personal task to discursively unpack and delegitimize the MDC in these piercing and poetic words:

The MDC should never be judged or characterized by its black trade union face; by its youthful student face; by its salaried black suburban junior professionals; never by its rough and violent high-density lumpen elements. It is much deeper than these human superfcies; for it is immovably and implacably moored in the colonial yesteryear and embraces wittingly or unwittingly the repulsive ideology of return to white settler rule. MDC is as old and as strong as the forces that control it; that drives and direct; indeed that support, sponsor and spot it. It is a counter-revolutionary Trojan horse contrived and nurtured by the very inimical forces that enslaved and oppressed our people yesterday.

The MDC failed to defend itself effectively against this penetrating delegitimiza-
tion by Mugabe. This failure to come out clean boosted Mugabeism’s post-2000 posturing as a defender of the hard-won independence, national sovereignty, and territorial integrity. As part of defending national sovereignty, a particular version of history that Ranger (2004) termed “patriotic history” was propagated and it played on real national grievances such as the historic land question, indigenization of the national economy, and empowerment of black people (Tendi 2010).

In their various vantage points and multiple disciplinary perspectives, the contributors to this book offer refreshing, scholarly, and critically reflective interventions on the complicated and contested Mugabe phenomenon. They relate Mugabeism to the pertinent issues of economic nationalism and pan-Africanism;
diplomacy and regional solidarity; masculinity, patriarchy, gender, and corruption as well as challenges of global coloniality, racism, and militarism. Consequently, a complicated albeit nuanced picture of Mugabeism is established, which is far superior intellectually and academically speaking to the existing numerous biographies of Mugabe.

Organization of the Book

The essays in this book—grouped broadly under part I, “Mugabeism, Economic Nationalism, and Pan-Africanism”; part II, “Diplomacy, Solidarity, and Power”; part III, “Masculinity, Gender, and Corruption”; part IV, “Coloniality, Racism, and Militarism”—capture and interrogate various aspects of Mugabeism while at the same time shedding light on complex and contested historical milieu, complicated power dynamics, and difficult political practices as well as the equally complex and contested idea of Zimbabwe from different vantage points.

David B. Moore’s chapter, which opens the first section, deploys a nuanced historical political analysis as it tries to penetrate and access the meaning of Mugabe and make sense of his political formation. The important concepts of individual agency and sociohistorical determinations (structure) are carefully used in an effort to understand Mugabe as the “man” who makes history and the “man” made by history. Moore’s analysis transcends the narratives of Mugabe as the personification of evil or virtue used by those vilifying him from “imperialist” quarters and those celebrating him as victor for all things “Africanist.” His chapter delves deeper into the historical formation of Mugabe’s political skills in the context of his struggles within Zimbabwean liberation movements and global diplomatic spaces, then throughout the first decade of Zimbabwe’s era of liberation and on into its crisis phase. The chapter draws its data from archival and oral interview material gathered over the past decade.

The following chapter, by the leading Zimbabwean economic historian Alois Mlambo, deals with the interrelated issues of land, indigenization, and development in Zimbabwe as ingredients of Mugabe’s economic nationalism. Just like Moore, Mlambo is also concerned with unpacking the meaning of Mugabeism but from the perspective of economic history. One of his central propositions is that perhaps “the difficulty in defining Mugabeism could be the result of scholars looking for a non-existent ideological coherence in what may, in fact, be historically shaped and emotionally driven actions of nationalists that lived through a traumatic colonial period whose pain and scars they seek to assuage by hitting back at everything they regard as the source of their previous suffering.” To Mlambo “Mugabeism is not, in reality, a uniquely Zimbabwean innovative approach to address postcolonial challenges, but merely a continuation of the African nationalism of the 1950s and 1960s and the economic nationalist ideology that accompanied it, which saw many African countries nationalizing and indigenizing their economies as an assertion of independence and as part of the struggle against neo-colonialism.”

Consequently, Mlambo’s chapter situates Zimbabwe’s current controversial policies of land reform, indigenization, and empowerment within the historical nationalist strategies of the early independent Africa and denies that these policies are uniquely Mugabean. Mlambo concludes that what might be Mugabean “is the violent, authoritarian, and arbitrary implementation style and a particularly virulent
type of nativism that defines ‘indigenes’ in a very narrow way, to the exclusion of other groups that have equal claim to Zimbabwe.”

Chapter 4 is by Gorden Moyo, an opposition politician and scholar who served in the inclusive government as a cabinet minister from 2009 to 2013. The chapter deconstructs the “patriotic history” that sought to reproduce and portray Mugabeism as a form of progressive pan-Africanism par excellence. This “patriotic history” has been carefully manufactured by a pantheon of public intellectuals, ruling party officials, and state media to present Mugabe’s liberation war credentials; his populist redistributive policies on land, empowerment, and indigenization; and his anti-Western antics as the befitting descriptors and signifiers of his pan-Africanist pedigree. Mugabe’s election victory in July 2013, which is viewed as pyrrhic in this chapter, appears to have further bolstered the pan-African claims of these “patriotic historians.” Admittedly, the pan-African portrayal of Mugabe has earned him some respect among a legion of people in mainland Africa and in the Diaspora who are genuinely searching for champions of African Renaissance and bulwarks against the Euro-American hegemony and its global imperial designs.

Moyo’s chapter tries to penetrate beyond and behind the veil of Zimbabwe’s “patriotic historical” narratives to reveal the deeply embedded neo-sultanist Mugabeism (personalistic rule) that hardly qualify him as a true pan-Africanist in the same league with Marcus Garvey, William E.B. Du Bois, Frantz Fanon, Julius Nyerere, and Nelson Mandela, among others. Moyo elaborates that more practically, the generality of the people of Zimbabwe have endured Mugabe’s versions of praetorian democracy, elective authoritarianism, and human security breaches throughout the era of the postcolonial state. Invariably, Mugabe’s neo-sultanism is entrenched and perpetuated by the nationalist-military oligarchy whose loyalty is based on a clientilist system. Moyo concludes that Mugabe’s neo-sultanism not only undermines the normative values of pan-Africanism but also the authentic decolonial project that is imminent in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

Part II opens with the historian Timothy Scarnecchia’s nuanced historical examination of Mugabe’s long career as a diplomat, going back to the months after the formation of ZANU in 1963, as well as his return to international diplomacy following his release from prison and detention in 1974. Particular attention is given to the years 1976–1980, the period in which Mugabe successfully negotiated not only for the end of minority rule in Rhodesia but for international recognition of his electoral victory in the 1980 elections leading to Zimbabwe’s independence and his role as Zimbabwe’s first black prime minister.

Scarnecchia highlights the similarities of Mugabe’s strategies within ZANU (and later ZANU-PF) to maintain control of the party’s leadership, with his strategies in negotiating with Western powers in the early 1960s, the mid-1970s, and in the 1980s. After consolidating ZANU-PF’s power by 1987, this strategy continued into the 1990s and 2000s, especially in terms of President Mugabe’s responses to Western criticisms and Western support for the opposition MDC party. Based on archival sources up to the mid-1980s, and press coverage for the more recent period, Scarnecchia emphasizes Mugabe’s consistent combination of diplomatic intransigency with often close and collegial personal diplomacy in his dealings with Western diplomats over the years.

through a case study of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). They argue that from its inception as the old Southern African Development Coordination Conference (SADCC) and its transformation to the SADC, the body has been instrumental in shaping the region’s political, social, and economic dynamics, particularly with reference to issues pertaining to security, self-determination, and democratization, among others.

Nyakudya and Jakarasi proceed to evaluate how Mugabe has used his eloquence and rhetoric to influence the regional body’s policies, protocols, and general decisions regarding such topical issues as regional security, the conduct of elections, the region’s relations with the “outside” world, and positions in various global fora like the African Union and the United Nations, among many others. While Mugabe was not specifically instrumental in the origination of the Front Line States, he became actively involved in the transformation of the regional body from SADCC to SADC, always making sure that his own motivations and reading of the global/regional politics drove SADC. In the post-2000 period, Mugabe made all the efforts to make sure that SADC played a supportive role in his new war against the West. This chapter provides an important background that is useful in explaining why SADC in the past decade could not take a clear, tough, and divergent position to that of Mugabe even if it was given a mandate by the African Union to make sure Zimbabwe returned to normalcy.

Also writing on the theme of regional politics and solidarity, Henning Melber discusses the dynamics of how Mugabeism impinged on Namibia with a particular focus on the politics of solidarity and anti-imperialist posturing and rhetoric. He reveals the popularity of Mugabe and his policies among the “hard core” Namibian nationalists. The closeness of Mugabe and Sam Nujoma has a long history though it was after independence that ZANU-PF and SWAPO knitted and consolidated their solidarity. The solidarity deepened in the mid-1990s “due to the regional shifts and subsequent strategic alliances.” Mugabe and Nujoma share common perspectives on three issues: anti-imperialism, homophobic-antigay sentiment, and the topical land question. But Melber ignores how the Mugabe regime soon after coming to power had given material and diplomatic support to SWAPO through the New York/Lisbon Accords struck with Angola and the Front Line States giving birth to Resolution South West Africa.

Building on these commonalities, Melber argues that the leaders of Namibia seem to be following in the footsteps of Mugabe, imbibing populism and increasingly becoming vocal against what they consider to be reincarnation of imperialism. To Henning though, the anti-imperialist position is bogus. It is underpinned by a reverse-racist and homophobic sentiments. The anti-imperialist posture is also increasingly focused on land question, which according to Henning is meant to divert people’s attention from lack of delivery of services by the state. This conclusion, however, does not mean that the question of land reform in a former settler colony like Namibia can be simply ignored but is a warning against instrumental use of genuine grievances of the people by the political elite for purposes of maintaining regime security.

The last chapter in this section, by Busani Mpofo and Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, deals with the pertinent issues of power and the paradigm of war and violence that also define Mugabeism. Mpofo and Ndlovu-Gatsheni focuses specifically on the will to power as the central leitmotif of Mugabeism’s proclivity toward the paradigm war as a solution to political questions and as a guarantor of regime security.
They counterpoise the Mugabean paradigm of war with the paradigm of peace that has been lacking in Zimbabwe for some time.

Deploying what they have termed “a critical decolonial ethics of liberation that privileges paradigm of peace, humanism, and racial harmony as opposed to the imperial/colonial/apartheid paradigm of war and racial hatred,”Mpofu and Ndlovu-Gatsheni argue for socialization of power, demilitarization of institutions, deracialization and de-ethnicization of politics as well as depatriarchalization of thought, if Zimbabwe is to return to normalcy. They also provide a detailed exposition of Mugabe and ZANU-PF’s understanding of politics and power as driven by the paradigm of war that is celebrated as Chimurenga and Gukurahundi and then reveal its negative political consequences.

Part III of this book opens with the literary scholar Robert Muponde’s chapter, which focuses on the topical issues of manhood, masculinity, and patriarchy as constitutive aspects of Mugabeism. This chapter looks specifically at the ways in which the powerful try to symbolize the nation, how they try to be the nation using the contrasting examples of Mugabe as the incumbent and Morgan Tsvangirai as the main opposition leader. Election campaigns provide the raw materials for Muponde’s interesting and penetrating analysis.

The chapter also innovatively draws its sources and ideas from novels, poems, songs, viral e-mail, web-based newspapers, gossip, and text messages surrounding post-2000 elections as it traces the movement of images and social energies in these two broadly limned figures of seemingly diverse manhood and politics. Muponde argues that far from being just a struggle about democratic space and culture, current renovations of the man-nation (by which he means both the persona of Mugabe and the ideas about a single version of masculinity that he perpetuates as the ideal of the nation) are bedeviled by their inability to imagine a more troubled binary of masculinity beyond the austere vision represented by Mugabe, and the softer, malleable, seemingly empathetic, “tea-boy” version represented by Morgan Tsvangirai.

In “Grappling with Robert Mugabe’s Masculinist Politics in Zimbabwe: A Gendered Perspective,” the Zimbabwean sociologist and feminist scholar Rudo B. Gaidzanwa conceptualizes masculinities and articulates how they have been deployed in politics through a careful analysis of the political career of Mugabe. Her chapter delves deeper into the historical, cultural, social, economic, and gender contexts in which Mugabe has used specific types and tropes of masculine behavior, norms, and values in his political practice and political engagements. This important chapter offers a rewarding gendered analysis of the idea of Zimbabwe from the time of the liberation struggle up to the present, without losing its focus on Mugabe’s patriarchal tendencies and how they impinge on politics.

Wesley Mwatwara and Joseph Mujere’s chapter shifts the focus from masculinity, gender, and patriarchy to another cancerous aspects of Zimbabwe—that of corruption and how Mugabe has consistently failed to successfully fight against it. They juxtapose this failure to the state media narrative that often present Mugabe as a protector of the so-called African values and a no-nonsense leader who has taken a clear stance toward issues such as homosexuality and lesbianism. Mwatwara and Mujere posit that at present, Zimbabwe stands among countries most affected by graft. Their chapter utilizes various case studies from the 1980s to the present in its examination of how and why the all-powerful leader seems to freeze in the face of corrupt activities involving some of his lieutenants and the impact this has had
on the generality of Zimbabweans. Mwatwara and Mujere also discuss popular conceptions of corruption and how Mugabe has managed to coexist with obscene wealth and naked corruption since independence despite an earlier commitment of ZANU-PF and Mugabe to a leadership code.

The fourth and last part of this book commences with Kenneth Tafira’s chapter, which links three intricately connected phenomena that have characterized the Zimbabwean situation in the recent past: Mugabe, land reform, and the global white antiblack racism. It deepens our understanding of why and how Mugabe moved from liberation era “communist terrorist,” to postindependence celebrated statesman and back to dangerous dictator. Tafira delves deeper into the often neglected global matrices of power together with its global media complex, which, like an octopus’s arms and tentacles, are quick and fast, are well-resourced, and have a devastating capacity to drown all other discourses on Mugabeism.

Unlike in previous chapters, Tafira focuses not on Mugabe but on his media representation while at the same time unpacking the anti-Mugabe Western imperialist discourse on Zimbabwe. He posits that the binary representation of Mugabe as a liberator/oppressor, saint/demon is subject to both internal and external factors, whereby he has always reacted to actions borne out of political expediencies and opportunities. Tafira’s take is that Mugabe has consistently been in an unenviable position. As a colonial product, just like all African liberation leaders, he was caught up, as Du Bois explains, in a “double consciousness”; on one hand, there is commitment to liberation, including traveling a journey of harsh personal experiences and sacrifice, and on the other is confronting a desperate ambition to be accommodated by the very system they were fighting.

In an interesting and revealing way, Tafira produces a complex picture of Mugabeism in which Mugabe is beholden in a conflictual desire to be accepted by the West, while at the same time unleashing anti-West, anti-imperialist and anticolonial rhetoric that endears him to all those seeking redemption from depredations of colonialism, thus earning himself the wrath of imperial assaults. The significance of Tafira’s chapter is that it explains the ambivalences of Mugabe’s policy positions: while seemingly oppositional to the West, his regime has also been eager to be recognized by the same Western governments and financial institutions. This complicates Mugabe’s decolonization project: it is difficult to discern whether Mugabeism’s project is an honest and radical anticolonial and anti-imperialist stance or it is something born out of bitterness of a colonial subject, who always seeks accommodation and attention.

In “A Fanonian Reading of Robert Gabriel Mugabe as Colonial Subject,” Tendayi Sithole systematically deploys the Fanonian perspective in an endeavor to understand Mugabe’s subject position, subjection, and subjectivity. He admits from the outset that Mugabe is a difficult subject to define and understand. This is largely because he is a colonial subject that played a pivotal part in the decolonization struggles but continues to manifest multiple contradictions as a postcolonial actor. Sithole argues that since the dawn of the twenty-first century, Mugabe’s signification became locked in the form of two registers—of liberal and the nationalist signification. The liberal signification holds that Mugabe is a villain, despot, tyrant, human rights violator, and the figure of evil. This liberal signification, with its hegemonic form and content, creates a liberal consensus where a world without Mugabe will be a just world. This even goes to the extent of having a one-dimensional narrative of who Mugabe is, and this is the signification that has even
assumed the level of common sense. Mugabe is all things gone badly—a leader who degenerated from a liberation hero to the typical postcolonial tyrant—and thus, the cause of the Zimbabwean crisis.

Sithole further argues that the nationalist signification, on the other hand, creates its consensus of Mugabe as a revolutionary, the father of the nation, the liberation hero, and the outstanding African statesman alive. This signification also assumes the counternarrative to the liberal consensus, and Mugabe is also seen as the victim of the colonial and imperialist vile, and advocates the cementing of the gains of liberation struggle. The nationalist signification also advocates a nationalist monolithic history, patriotism, and memory. The liberal and nationalist significations are complex registers on their own as they are fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. However, what they seek to do is to assume the point of common sense in understanding Mugabe, thus claiming to be definitive truths themselves.

Sithole’s chapter complicates and critiques both liberal and nationalist positions as mere political registers. He posits that truth is not absolute and that there are various positionalities of truth in relation to Mugabe. The political idea of Mugabe can be convincing or not depending on positionality of the truth from which he is being looked at. He concludes that Mugabe cannot be enclosed in one explanatory framework simply because he is a complex subject who is a product of colonialism and that he continues to be influenced by its subjectivity as he is the president of the neocolonial state. Sithole underlines the fact that Mugabe must not be misunderstood to be a sovereign subject because he is a colonial subject that is caught up in the colonial logic and its infrastructure, which is the inherited colonial state. Consequently, for Sithole, Mugabe cannot be unproblematically praised or simplistically dismissed.

Morgan Ndlovu extends some of the arguments raised by both Tafira and Sithole in his reflection on the trials and tribulations of Mugabe as an African leader within a discursive context of Euro-North American-centric modernity and neoliberal dispensation. His starting point is why, in spite of the advent of an age dubbed “postcolonial” in Africa, African people are still languishing in abject poverty, violence, and disease; this makes the present spatiohistorical temporality resemble many of the features of the colonial past—a development that cast some doubts over the idea of the advent of postcolonial order. Ndlovu’s chapter is therefore a retrospective decolonial epistemic analysis of the leadership of Mugabe highlighting how it is entangled in structures that constrain and complicate agency. He posits that in spite of the challenge of exercising leadership within the constraining structural order of the postcolonial neocolonial period in Africa, those constituting the leadership of Africa can be apportioned a fair share of blame for failing to outmaneuver the snares of the colonial matrices of power. The question of Mugabe’s leadership is an important aspect of understanding Mugabeism.

This book closes with a chapter by Kudzai Matereke and Niveen El Moghazy, which is a critical navigation of complex civil-military relation as another lens through which they try to unravel Mugabeism, the person of Mugabe, and his rule as state president of Zimbabwe as well as president of a political party (ZANU-PF). A comparative reflection of Mugabe and Mubarak of Egypt who was another long-serving president helps Matereke and Moghazy to open up the debate of civil-military relations wider. By casting the debate to another African postcolonial context, they highlight how Zimbabwe’s civil-military relations, despite some historical dissimilarities, are not sui generis.
Materoke and Moghazy’s chapter grapples with some of the most difficult questions that inform the debate on political-military alliances in postcolonial Africa: How should we understand the history of Zimbabwe’s military? How is the person of Mugabe implicated in this history? What insights can we draw from Egypt and Mubarak that can shed more light on Zimbabwe’s context? What are the structures, ethos, and styles of operation, and how have the two leaders been able to use these elements in their rule? What public image does the military deploy, and how does it define the postcolonial political terrain? The authors pursue these questions by tracing the unfolding trajectory of the military from the establishment of colonial rule by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) through the phase of anticolonial nationalism to the independence period. By advancing the contention that the Zimbabwean military is both an inheritance of colonial modernity and also of an anticolonial establishment, the authors open up space to argue how the Zimbabwean military, like that of Egypt, albeit under different conditions, has been amenable to political control. There is no doubt that Zimbabwe’s blocked democratic transition has been heavily premised on the question of how to transform the complex nature of civil-military relations so that the military evolves into a “professional body” that stands outside politics and civil society.

**Conclusion**

What emerges poignantly in this book is that seeking to understand a complex and controversial political actor like Mugabe, whose political career spans over half a century, is not an easy task partly because his story is inextricably intertwined with the very development of the idea of Zimbabwe and the political trajectory of Zimbabwe from a colony to a neocolony and to crisis and partly due to the fact that his political behavior and policies have produced polarities domestically and globally. Mugabeism does not easily lend itself to easy dismissal or glorification. What is also clear is that the run-up to the Sixth ZANU-PF Congress that took place in December 2014 revealed some more disturbing aspects of Mugabeism in their most detestable forms. Mugabe and his wife Grace actively worked together in defense of the First Family and in the process purged all those who were perceived to be opposed to it. The causalities included 9 out of 10 elected provincial chairperson, 100 out of 160 legislators, and 10 out of 20 politburo members (Mandaza 2014). Joice Mujuru, who has deputized Mugabe since the 2004 ZANU-PF People’s Congress, became the face of those who had to be purged. Her liberation war credentials were taken. She became reduced to the face of corruption in Zimbabwe. It would seem that all these Machiavellian strategies and tactics were unleashed for the sole reason of safeguarding the power and wealth of the First Family in a post-Mugabe era. The question that remains and cries out for a response is posed by Ibbo Mandaza: “If all this is designed to safeguard the interests and future of the First Family in the first instance, will the new ‘custodial’ leadership live up to both the political and economic challenges at hand, and when Mugabe finally departs in the not too distant future?” (Mandaza 2014: 2). Of course, only time will tell as no academic can scientifically predict the mysterious future of Zimbabwe precisely. The strength of this book is not that it captures the complexities of the subject under study better that existing works, but it courageously grapples with the murky present with a view to shed light on the mysterious future of a country where even discussing succession has been made a political crime under Mugabeism.
I wish to thank Dr. Martin Rupiah for comments on this introductory chapter.

1. From Mugabe’s speech during his acceptance of chairmanship of the AU in 2015. At home in Zimbabwe, Mugabe had popularized the slogan of “Zimbabwe for Zimbabweans” as he justified compulsory land acquisition from white commercial farmers that were depicted as foreign settlers.


3. Global coloniality is a concept that refers to continuation of colonial-like relations long after the demise of direct juridical colonial administration.

4. It was Ali A. Mazrui that characterized Kwame Nkrumah as a Leninist-Tsar: a Leninist on the continent (i.e., a revolutionary pan-Africanist) and a Tsar in Ghana (i.e., a monarchical dictator).

5. ZIPA was a unique military formation that included ZIPRA and ZANLA in unity for the liberation of the country amid disunity at the political level.
Index

5 Brigade. See Fifth Brigade
5th Brigade. See Fifth Brigade

AAG (Affirmative Action Group), 54, 56
AASU (All African Students Union), 63
Aboriginal Nations and People of Australia, 69
Abrams, P, 238, 239
Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act. See AIPPA
Administrative Monitoring Authority (Egypt), 267
Affirmative Action Group. See AAG
Africa Centre (Covent Gardens), 37
Africa Prize for Leadership for Sustainable End of Hunger, 63
African anticolonial nationalism, 4
African Democratic Socialism, 47
African Land Husbandry Act, 51
African National Congress. See ANC
African nationalism, 1, 6, 7, 8, 18, 45, 46, 47, 123, 124, 127, 208, 254
African Peer Review Mechanism. See APRM
African Renaissance, 19, 65, 105
African Union. See AU
Africanization, 1, 8, 47, 48, 85, 124
Africanized Civil Service, 53
Afro-radicalism, 64
AFZ (Air Force of Zimbabwe), 269
Agriculture and Rural Development Authority. See ARDA
AIPPA (Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act), 171, 246
Air Force of Zimbabwe. See AFZ
Airport Road Scandal, 194
al-Barudi, Mahmud Sami, 263
Ali, Ben, 268
Ali, Muhammad, 262, 263, 272
All African Students Union. See AASU
Amin, Idi, 49, 69, 97
ANC (African National Congress), 42, 69, 103, 112, 120, 122, 193, 254, 256
Anderson, Benedict, 29
anti-apartheid, 14, 86
anti-apartheid, activist, 163
anti-colonial politics, 1
posture, 2
rhetoric, 2, 7, 22, 203, 246
struggle(s) (see struggles, anticolonial)
anti-colonialism, 1, 2, 6, 7, 42, 68, 70
Anti-gay campaign (Namibia), 113
anti-imperialism, 20, 43, 68, 69, 70, 74, 107–20, 227
anti-neoimperialism, 74
anti-neoliberalism, 74
Apartheid, 21, 50, 64, 91, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 105, 121, 122, 123, 190, 206, 212, 220, 255
Apowa Secondary School, 10
APRM (African Peer Review Mechanism), 65, 66
Arab Spring, 268
Arab-Israeli War, 263
ARDA (Agriculture and Rural Development Authority), 54
Ariel Foundation, 36, 37
Aristotle, 63
armed struggle. See struggles, armed
AU (African Union), 2, 20, 25, 63, 65, 66, 69, 74, 77, 105
authoritarian populism, 61, 63, 66, 71, 72
authoritarianism, 2, 4, 6, 11, 13, 19, 66, 93, 104, 127, 267
Azikiwe, Nnamdi, 65
INDEX

Badza, Dakarai, 185
Badza/Nhari rebellion. See Nhari rebellion
Banana, Canaan, 31, 162, 163
Banda, Joyce, 94, 104, 105
Banda, Rupiya, 104
Bango, William, 15
Barltrop, RAR, 34
BEE (Black Economic Empowerment), 45, 49
Bekker-Smith, NM, 210, 216
Biko, Steve, 205, 211
bin Laden, Osama, 209
biographies of Mugabe, 10–11
black bourgeoisie, 13
colonial professionals, 5
nationalism, 207, 208, 214
Black Economic Empowerment. See BEE
Black United Front (UK), 69
black-on-black violence, 215, 225
Blair, Tony, 31, 111, 117, 157, 158, 163, 178, 225, 246
Bourne, Richard, 125, 128
Boy Code, 139–43, 154, 155
British South Africa Company. See BSAC
British South Africa Police. See BSAP
BSAC (British South Africa Company), 24, 208, 252, 253
BSAP (British South Africa Police), 253
Buckle, Roy, 82
Buka, Flora, 197
Bush, George, 111, 138, 178, 209, 210, 225
Cabo Delgado prison camp, 41
Cabral, Amilcar, 64, 65, 206
Cabralian class suicide, 10
CAF (Central African Federation), 78
Cameron, David, 111
Campbell, Horace G, 15, 65, 178
Campbell, Michael, 211
capitalism, 207, 247
global, 7, 42
predatory, 33
settler, 30
Carrington, Lord, 89
Carson, Johnnic, 38
Carter, Jimmy, 79, 90
Casey, William, 91
Cashmore, Dr THR (Dick), 34, 35, 40
Castro, Fidel, 72, 205
Castro-Gomez, S, 244
Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace. See CCJP
CCJP (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace), 2, 3, 86, 98, 129
Central African Federation. See CAF
Central Intelligence Agency. See CIA
Central Intelligence Organization. See CIO
Central Security Force. See CSF
Cesaire, Aime, 61, 64, 65
Chakaipa, Archbishop Patrick, 152
Chama cha Mapinduzi of Tanzania, 69
Chan, Stephen, 15, 125, 132
Changare, 145
Charamba, George, 30, 140, 183
see also Manheru, Nathaniel
Chasi, Fortune, 197
chauvinism, 1, 132
Chiang kai Shek, 40
Chidyausiku Commission, 192
Chihuri, Augustine, 169, 170, 171, 192, 198, 261
Chikerema, James, 6, 190
Chikowore, Godfrey, 64
Chilubu, Frederick, 97, 98
Chimedza, Paul, 197
Chimoio massacre, 159
Chimurenga, 11, 12, 15, 21, 63, 67, 71, 123, 125, 126, 130, 131, 132, 153, 207, 219, 222, 253
Chinamano, Josiah, 6, 174
Chinese investments, 47
Chinoyi battle, 256
Chinotimba, Joseph, 183
Chinweizu, Ibekwe, 215, 216
Chirau, Chief, 258
Chissano, Joaquim, 105
Chitepo, Herbert Wiltshire, 10, 12, 37, 38, 39, 41, 51, 80, 95, 96, 126, 177, 255, 256, 257
Chitepo assassination, 37, 38
Chitepo Phase (1964–1975), 12
Chivaara, Vimbai, 64
Chiyangwa, Philip, 54
Chocha, Stephen. See Chihuri, Augustine
Chombo, Ignatious, 195
Chung, Fay, 15, 41, 126, 189, 256
CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), 36, 90–1
CIO (Central Intelligence Organization), 269
Citizen Entrepreneurship Development Agency (Botswana), 50
civil disobedience, 6
Civil Service Authority. See CSA
Cold War, 33, 38, 78, 82, 90, 91, 208, 255
Cold War Rhodesia, 78, 86, 88
colonial administration, 4, 34, 49, 221, 242, 243
domination, 1, 3, 243
exploitation, 1, 207
injustice, 204
power(s), 1, 8, 81, 209, 218, 219, 224, 243, 245, 246, 248
subject(s), 5–8, 9, 22, 23, 35, 217–36, 245
violence, 6, 212, 224, 225, 246
colonialism, 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 22, 23, 46, 57, 58, 64, 65, 98, 112, 119, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 127, 178, 203, 206, 211, 215, 218, 219, 220, 221, 222, 223, 225, 226, 227, 229, 231, 237, 238, 241, 242, 243, 246, 248, 254, 270
coloniality, 4, 7, 9, 18, 11, 203–72, 301, 302
Coltart, David, 211
Columbus, Christopher, 241
Commonwealth, 106, 221, 255
Compagnon, Daniel, 15, 125
Congo Crisis, 78–9
CONSAS (Constellation of Southern African States), 96, 97
Conservative Alliance, 130
Conservative Monday Club, 36
Constellation of Southern African States. See CONSAS
constitutionalised injustice, 2
constitutionalism, 5
Corning glass, 36
corruption, 4, 16, 18, 21, 22, 24, 71, 74, 119, 135, 155, 167, 170, 175, 181, 181–202, 206, 209, 251, 263, 266
corruptocracy, 67
Crocker, Chester, 86
Crocodile Gang, 256
Crush, Jonathan, 125
CSA (Civil Service Authority), 265
CSF (Central Security Force), 264
Dabengwa, Dumiso, 87, 184, 256
Dag Hammarskjöld Foundation, 299
Daniels, Don, 74
Dare reChimurenga, 95, 126, 255, 257, 258, 259
Davies, Ian, 11
Davies, Mike, 196
De Chassiron, Charles, 83
December 12 Movement (US), 69
decolonial
epistemic device, 62
epistemic toolkit, 73
ethics, 21, 62, 74, 122, 123
humanism, 123
intellectuals, 62
transformation, 7
decoloniality, 1, 7, 123
decolonization, 8, 9, 12, 16, 22, 36, 47, 49, 70, 81, 119, 123, 124, 203, 205, 206, 212, 215, 217, 221, 223, 225, 226, 227, 229, 231, 237, 238, 241, 242, 243, 246, 248, 254, 270
democracy
liberal, 45, 209
multiparty, 103, 123
participatory, 73, 74
popular, 43
praetorian, 19
socio-economic, 73
sustainable, 65
democratic centralism, 13
Democratic Republic of the Congo. See DRC
deprivation, 144, 228
deracialization, 1, 21, 205, 208, 213, 248
Diaspora, 19, 61, 64, 65, 68, 69, 140, 167, 174, 204, 215, 300
dictatorship, 4, 15, 106, 146, 247
Diop, Cheikh Anta, 61, 64, 65
discrimination
  ethnic, 6
  in legislation, 51
  racial, 57, 64, 184, 211
  sexual, 114
dislocation, 62, 241, 247
dispossession, 3, 4, 123, 167, 208, 220, 226, 234
Ditchley Foundation, 36
Dos Santos, Eduardo, 97, 99
DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo), 49, 55, 94, 108, 173, 261
Du Bois, William EB, 19, 22, 61, 64, 203
Dube, Cuthbert, 182, 195
Dube, Jefta, 162
Duff, Anthony, 36
Ebo, Adedeji, 250, 251
economic
decolonization, 49
liberation, 96, 98
nationalism, 17, 18, 29–76
Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), 32, 55, 98, 190, 206
Egyptian nationalism, 263
El Moghazy, Niveen, 23, 24, 299
Elders Council (Namibia), 110
1980, 19, 77, 84, 85, 86, 128, 130
1985, 34
1990, 186
2000, 171
2002, 42
2008, 54, 94, 103, 110, 141, 144, 148, 172, 173
2013, 73, 104, 111, 172, 174, 175
2014, 116, 166
2018, 2, 146, 176
conduct of, 20, 73
harmonized, 94, 173
independence, 11
multiparty, 97, 98
practices, 102
provincial, 196–7
rigging, 15
stealing, 32
women, 165
embourgeoisement, 2, 5
epistemic
  analysis (on leadership of Mugabe), 23
device, 62
perspective (on leadership of Mugabe), 237
toolkit, 73
violence, 212
epistemicide(s), 6, 62, 247
ethnic
cleansing, 3, 31, 32, 125, 247
cultures, 9
discrimination, 6
minority/minorities, 57, 168, 247
politics, 224
violence, 1, 302
ethnicity/ethnicities, 33, 128, 151, 300
Eurocentrism, 7
Euro-North American
cultures, 9
epistemides, 62
hegemony/hegemonism, 4, 7, 67
mission education, 9
modernity, 23, 121, 237–48
neoimperialism, 67, 74
power structure, 7
sanctions, 70
ejection, 68
Ewans, Martin, 88, 89
exclusion
  of Africans, 53, 72
  of Asians, 56
  of groups, 19, 57
  of immigrants, 48
  political/politics, 73, 224
  of whites, 57, 68
exclusionary political model, 69
exclusive nativism, 66
exclusivist nationalism, 63, 69
exploitation, 1, 3, 39, 47, 51, 116, 123, 152, 207, 214, 228, 243
Extraordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government, 102

faction struggles, 32
Fanon, Frantz, 5, 8, 9, 19, 61, 62, 64, 65, 69, 119, 122, 123, 124, 205, 206, 211, 213, 218, 220, 221, 222, 223, 226, 227, 228, 229, 230, 234, 235, 242
farm invasions, 50, 55, 56
Fast-Track Land Reform Programme see FTLRP; Land Reform and Resettlement Implementation Plan
Fifth Brigade, 3, 9, 33, 88, 129, 157, 225
FLS (Front Line States), 20, 83, 93, 94, 185, 258
presidents, 79, 80
Focauldian power strategies, 62
Ford, Gerald R, 79
Freeth, Ben, 211
FRELIMO (Mozambique Liberation Front), 38, 69, 82, 83, 99, 122, 256, 257, 259
Front Line leaders, 93, 95
Front Line States. See FLS
FTLRP (Fast-Track Land Reform Programme), 2, 13, 50, 56, 123, 165, 166, 167, 208
Gaddafi, Muammar, 65, 72, 235, 268
Gaidzanwa, Rudo B, 21, 299
Gara, Tony, 168
Garvey, Marcus, 19, 45, 61, 64
Garveyite tradition, 207, 214
Gays and Lesbians of Zimbabwe (GALZ), 113
Gbagbo, Laurent, 268
Geingob, Hage, 113, 116
General Intelligence Directorate (Egypt), 264
Geneva Conference/talks, 31, 39, 41, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 260
Geren, Paul, 79
Geza, Sam. See Musoni
Giddens, Anthony, 240
global capitalism, 7, 42

colonialism, 243
coloniality, 4, 9, 18, 25, 201, 243
Global Political Agreement. See GPA
Glow Petroleum, 197
GMB (Grain Marketing Board), 185, 191, 193
GNU (Government of National Unity), 32, 71, 94, 102, 103, 104, 106, 111, 143, 154, 172, 174, 189, 261
Goche, Nicholas, 176, 194, 197
Godwin, Peter, 82
Gono, Gideon, 194, 195
Gore reGukurahundi, 127
Government Defense Anti-Corruption Index 2013, 266
Government of National Unity. See GNU
Gowon, Yakubu, 48
GPA (Global Political Agreement), 94, 101–6
Grain Marketing Board. See GMB
Gramsci, 30
Gramscian coercion, 29
Gramscian equation, 31
Gramscian power strategies, 62
Gramscian use of coercive state power, 67
Grennan, Dennis, 35, 36, 37, 38, 40
Grosfoguel, Ramon, 7, 62, 241, 242, 243
guerrilla(s), 31, 38, 39, 41, 125, 128, 129, 259, 260, 261
army/armies, 12, 129, 259
forces, 81
leader(s), 2, 42
life, 80, 258
strategy, 272
struggle, 206
war, 271
warfare, 257
Gukurahundi, 21, 31, 35, 41, 42, 87, 129, 215, 244, 247
atrocities, 3, 162
campaign, 86–7, 245
crimes, 90
force, 245
massacre(s), 63, 131, 245
policy, 67, 71
strategy, 123, 126–9, 130, 131, 132
Guma, 168, 169
Gumbo, Rugare, 12, 171, 172, 176, 260, 262
Gurirab, Theo Ben, 114
Gutu, Obert, 132

hagiographies of Mugabe, 9, 10–11, 13, 62, 64
Hain, Peter, 163
Hamadziripi, Henry, 12, 260
Hammar, Amanda, 15, 16
Hancock, Ian, 82
Hanlon, Joseph, 210
Harare Airport Scandal, 194
Harare Declaration, 63
harmonized elections, 94, 173
Hawkins, Tony, 210
hegemony/hegemonism, 4, 7, 67
Her Majesty’s Service, 36
hierarchization, 7, 123
High Command (ZANLA), 12
High Command (ZANU), 38, 95, 126, 185
Holland, Heidi, 10, 43, 95, 157, 190, 272
Home Office (UK), 37
homophobia, 113–15
homophobic-antigay sentiment, 20, 107
homosexuality, 21, 113, 114, 163, 181
homosexual(s), 158, 162, 163, 178, 183
Hondo, Eiias, 170
Hondo Yeminda. See Third Chimurenga
Huddleston, Sarah, 15
abuses, 63, 68, 106
activist(s), 37, 109
campaigners, 268
defenders, 62
organizations, 88
victims, 224
violation(s), 2, 51, 63, 66, 67, 73, 74, 211, 216, 247
human security, 19, 66, 74, 108
humanism, 21, 122, 123
Hunzvi, Chenjerai “Hitler,” 191
Hussein, Saddam, 72, 209, 235

IBDC (Indigenous Business Development Centre), 54, 56
IBWO (Indigenous Business Women’s Organisation), 54, 56
ICC (International Criminal Court), 2, 62
IMF (International Monetary Fund), 42, 55, 69, 206
imperialism, 4, 13, 16, 20, 35, 36, 64, 65, 69, 74, 90, 113, 114, 121, 125, 206, 210, 215, 226, 231
Inception Phase Framework Plan, 165
Inclusive Government, 19, 72, 102, 15
indigenization, 17, 18, 19, 30, 42, 45–60, 64, 124, 143
Indigenization and Economic Empowerment Act 14, 2007/2008, 56, 57, 58
Indigenization and Economic Empowerment (General) Amendment, 56
Indigenization and Economic Empowerment (General) Regulations, 56
Indigenization Decree (Nigeria), 49
Indigenous Business Development Centre. See IBDC
Indigenous Business Women’s Organisation. See IBWO
Information and Media Panel of Inquiry, 173
injustice, 66, 74, 178, 210
colonial, 204
constitutionalised, 2
correcting, 207–8
racial, 212
social, 66, 68
Inkandla corruption case, 105
intellectuals and academics, 13
Interior Ministry (Egypt), 264
International Criminal Court. See ICC
International Monetary Fund. See IMF
intimidation, 73, 128, 141
Islamic institutions, 266
Islamist groups, 266
Islamist militants, 265
Islamists, 265
Jakarasi, Joseph, 299
Jambanja, 50–3
see also Third Chimurenga
Jawaharlal Nehru Peace Award, 63
Jensen, Stig, 15
JOC (Joint Operations Command), 72, 269
Johnson, Phyllis, 11, 38, 154
Joint Operations Command. See JOC
Jukwa, Baba, 146
Kabila, Laurent-Désiré, 105, 108, 120
Kadungure, 162
Kagonye, Petronella, 197
Kahari, George, 190
Kangai, Kumbirai, 185
Karakadzai, Major General, 193
Kasu, Major General Elliot, 193
Kasukuwere, Saviour, 176, 194
Kaukonde, Ray, 176
Kaunda, Kenneth, 36, 37, 95, 97, 98, 106, 110, 256
Keane, John, 251
Keeley, Robert (Bob), 86, 90
Kereke, Munyaradzi, 195
Khama, Ian, 94, 104, 105
Khama, Sir Seretse, 95, 97
King Farouk/Farouq, 263
King Fuad, 263
King Lobengula, 143, 144
King Shaka, 122
Kissinger, Henry, 34, 39, 79, 80, 82
kleptocracy, 4, 67
Kramer, Beth, 153, 154
Kruger, Norma, 86, 128
Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute, 10
Land Apportionment Act, 51, 208
Lancaster House Agreement/Conference, 52, 85, 205, 221, 222, 230, 235
Lancaster House Constitution 1979, 55
Lancaster House negotiations/talks, 41, 53, 80, 82, 84, 128
Land Apportionment Act. See LAA
land grabbing, 32, 51, 116
land redistribution. See redistribution of land
Land Reform and Resettlement Implementation Plan, 56
see also Fast-Track Land Reform Programme
land revolution, 14, 204, 207–8, 215
Land Tenure Act, 51, 208
Laphner, Edward, 89
Legal Resources Foundation. See LRF
Lenin, 40
lesbianism/lesbians, 21, 114, 181
LGBT-people, 114
liberal democracy, 45, 209
nationalism, 30, 41
liberation economic, 96, 98
struggle, 4, 8, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 21, 23, 41, 46, 55, 62, 72, 93, 108, 114, 121, 125, 126, 130, 159, 172, 179, 185, 191, 199, 201, 204, 208, 209, 211, 216, 217, 222, 224, 227, 231, 232, 233, 245, 246, 271
LRF (Legal Resources Foundation), 2, 3, 86, 98, 129
Luanda Summit, 100
Lukashenka, Alexander, 71
Lumumba, Patrice, 78, 79
Lusaka, 80, 94, 95, 146
Lusaka Declaration, 98
Lusaka Prison, 38, 41
Lusaka State House, 36
Macheka, Elizabeth, 154
Machel, Samora Moises, 38, 39, 41, 42, 80, 83, 89, 95, 96, 97, 106, 110, 128, 159, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260
Machemedze, Elias, 152
Machingura, Dzinashes (Dzino), 170, 171, 178, 179, 260
see also Mhanda, Wilfred
Madamombe, WP, 152
Madhuku, Lovemore, 130, 195
Maharaj, Mac, 103
Mahoso, Tafataona, 29, 64
Mair, Stefan, 6, 127
Makoni, Dr Simba, 97, 138, 142, 143, 184
Makumbe, John, 66, 110, 126, 130
Malcolm X, 207, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216
Maldonado-Torres, Nelson, 62, 121, 211, 219, 242, 243, 246
Malema, Julius, 209
Malianga, Moton, 254
Mamdani, Mahmood, 6, 9, 16, 122, 124, 219, 223
Mandaza, Ibo, 24, 29, 94, 105
Mandela, Nelson, 19, 61, 64, 94, 98, 99–101, 105, 108, 120, 122, 123, 124, 137, 205, 234, 235
Mangena, Alfred "Nikita," 258
Mangwende, Witness, 272
Manheru, Nathaniel, 148, 153, 155, 183, 214, 216
see also Charamba, George
Manica, 158
Manungo, Kenneth, 64
Marareke, Claude, 64
Maridadi, James, 192
Martin, David, 11, 154
Marufu, Grace, 163
see also Mugabe, Grace
Marufu, Reward, 192
Marwizi, Walter, 151
Marx, 30
Marxism, 10, 128, 257
Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism-Maoism-Kim-Il-Sungism, 33
Marxist
soldiers, 260
state, 129
theory, 40
Marxist-Leninist ideologies, 13
Marxist-Leninist organizational structure, 261
Marxist-Leninist rhetoric, 206
Marxist-Leninist teaching, 46
Marxist-Leninist-Maoist thought, 32, 83
masculinity, 15, 18, 21, 135, 138, 139, 141, 142, 143, 145, 152, 153, 154, 155, 158, 162, 163, 164, 171, 173, 175, 177, 178, 179
Mashonaland, 11, 33, 193, 197
Masimirembwa, Goodwills, 170, 181, 182, 192, 196
Masire, President Quett Ketumile, 99
massacre(s), 3, 63, 122, 131, 159, 244, 245, 262
Masuku, Lookout, 87
Masvingo, 11, 179
Matabeleland, 2, 3, 11, 63, 71, 87, 88, 98, 129, 130, 131, 148, 149, 157, 162, 171, 225, 247, 190
Matereke, Kudzai, 23, 24, 299
Matthews, Konare, 65
Matyszak, Derek, 57
Mavhaire, Dzikamai, 179, 197
Mavhunga, Rotina, 151
Mazaire, Gerald, 127, 128
Mbeki, President Thabo, 29, 43, 44, 65, 101, 102, 103, 105, 110, 172, 174, 302
Mbembe, Achille, 9, 29, 231, 234, 245
MDC, 13, 14, 17, 19, 43, 51, 54, 55, 56, 62, 67, 69, 70, 74, 94, 101, 102, 104, 125, 130, 131, 132, 139, 140, 155, 172, 173, 193, 195, 209, 211, 248, 269
MDC-T, 73, 102, 132, 192
Melber, Henning, 20, 271, 299
Memmi, Albert, 5
Metz, Thaddeus, 32
Mgagao Declaration 1975, 80, 95, 258
Mgagao fighters, 258
Mhanda, Alfred, 179
Mhanda, Wilfred, 32, 38, 41, 80, 81, 95, 126, 130, 170, 171, 185, 258, 259, 260
see also Machingura, Dzinase
Mignolo, Walter D, 62, 241
military alliance, 24, 249–71
Miller, David C, 89, 90
Mining Ministry, 195
Ministry of Agriculture, 185
Ministry of Information and Publicity, 13
Ministry of Lands, 171
Ministry of Water and Rural Development Chinese tender scandal, 191
Ministry of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment, 57
mission education, 9, 10
missionaries, 5
Mlambo, Alois S, 18, 66, 299
Mliswa, Temba, 183, 193
INDEX 311

Mnangagwa, Emmerson, 43, 58, 176, 197, 270, 272
MNR (Mozambique National Resistance), 97
modernity, 121, 209
colonial, 24, 252, 253
Moghazy, Niveen, 23, 24, 299
Monbiot, George, 209
Moore, David B, 18, 66, 190, 300
Movement for Democratic Change. See MDC
Movement for Multiparty Democracy, 98
Movement for the Liberation of the People of Angola. See MPLA
Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola. See MPLA
Moyo, Basoppo, 254
Moyo, Bhekimpilo, 127
Moyo, Gorden, 19, 61, 300
Moyo, Jason, 6
Moyo, Jonathan, 10, 13, 29, 115, 133, 141, 142, 147, 155, 171, 172, 173, 176, 195, 196
Moyo, July, 179
Moyo, Nkosana, 171
Moyo, Sam, 29
Moyo, Simon Khaya, 168, 176, 177
Mozambican forces, 97
Mozambique camps, 41, 259, 260
Mozambique Information Agency, 39
Mozambique Liberation Front. See FRELIMO
Mozambique National Resistance. See MNR
Mpeperereki, Sheunesu, 64
Mphoko, Phelekezela, 176, 177
MPLA (Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola), 69, 79, 122
Mpfu, Busani, 20, 21, 300
Mpfu, Obert, 168, 194, 195
Msika, Joseph Wilfred, 6, 165
Mubarak, President Hosni, 23, 24, 71, 72, 249, 250, 252, 262, 263, 264, 265, 266, 267, 268, 269, 270, 271
Muchechetere, Happison, 182, 260, 261
Muchena, Olivia, 197
Muchinguri, Oppah, 175, 176
Mudarikwa, Simbaneuta, 197
Mudenda, Jacob, 170, 188
Mudenge, Stan, 169
Mudukuti, George, 254
Mudzingwa, Austin, 170
Mugabe, Cde, 152, 153
Mugabe, Donato, 190
Mugabe, Grace, 3, 24, 149, 154
see also Marufu, Grace
Mugabe, Sarah (Sally), 36, 37, 38, 159, 163, 189
Mugabe Phase (1977–1979), 12, 272
Mugabeism, 1–5, 14–24, 27–43, 46, 47, 57, 59, 66, 67, 68, 70, 139, 147
Mugabeism-lite, 32, 33
Mugabe’s nationalism, 123, 138
Mujere, Joseph, 21, 22, 300
Mujuru, Joice, 3, 24, 43, 132, 147, 155, 166, 171, 174, 175, 176, 177, 179, 182, 196, 197, 198, 258, 259, 262, 270
see also Nhongo, Teurai Ropa
Mujuru, Solomon, 174, 258, 259, 174, 177, 187, 188, 193, 258, 259
see also Nhongo, Rex
Mukazhi, Luckson, 198
multiparty democracy, 103, 123
elections, 97, 98
Munangagwa, Emmerson, 162, 174, 179
Mutambara, Arthur, 143, 173
Mutasa, Didymus, 193
Museveni, Yoweri, 113
Muslim Brotherhood, 266
Musoni, Paul, 6
Mushonga, Paul, 170, 171
Muzenda, Simon, 12, 89, 254
Muzenda, Tongai, 197
Muzondidya, James, 29, 45, 57, 66
Muzorewa, Bishop Abel, 39, 71, 77, 83, 84, 85, 106, 193, 258
Mwanawasa, Levy, 104
Mwatwara, Wesley, 21, 22, 301
Mzimbi, Walter, 168, 169, 176
Mzilikazi, 164
Naguib, Mohamed, 263
NAM (Non-Aligned Movement), 63, 86
Namibia Public Workers Union. See NAPWU
Namibian Agricultural Union. See NAU
NAPWU (Namibia Public Workers Union), 114
Nasser, Gamal Abdel, 263, 264, 265, 266
National Army. See Zimbabwe National Army
National Constitution, 72
National Constitutional Assembly, 173
National Democratic Party. See NDP
National Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Board. See NIEEB
National Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Fund, 56
National Investment Trust. See NIT
National Reconciliation Policy, 63, 124
National Transitional Council (Libya), 268
National Union of Namibian Workers. See NUNW
National Union of Students. See NUS
nationalism, 6, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 18, 24, 33, 42, 45, 46, 47, 63, 68, 123, 128, 229, 263
African (see African nationalism) economic, 17, 18, 29–76 exclusivist, 63, 69 liberal, 30, 41
nationalist populism, 67, 68, 74 struggle, 8, 9, 10, 47, 128, 253, 254, 257, 258, 270, 271 subjects, 5–8 violence, 6 nationalization, 8, 47, 48, 58, 124 native elite, 5 nativism, 1, 7, 16, 19, 32, 45, 46, 57, 66, 124 nativist economic nationalism, 47, 48, 50, 57 NAU (Namibian Agricultural Union), 116
Ncube, Archbishop Pius, 130
Ncube, Trevor, 130
Ncube, Welshman, 71, 130 Ndanga, Bishop Johannes Nyamwa, 169
Ndangana, William, 256
Ndebele, 88, 129, 144, 163, 164, 168, 208, 224, 244, 247, 252
Ndebele-speaking people, 2, 3, 130, 225, 244, 245
Ndlouvu, Morgan, 23, 301
Ndlouvu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J, 20, 21, 23, 29, 30, 32, 43, 44, 45, 46, 62, 66, 72, 124, 125, 127, 128, 130, 139, 142, 205, 224, 226, 301
NDP (National Democratic Party, Egypt), 266, 267
NDP (National Democratic Party, Zimbabwe), 78, 254
NEEEF (New Equitable Economic Empowerment Framework), 50 neo-apartheid, 206 neo-colonialism, 2, 4, 46, 49, 50, 63, 64, 72, 121, 205 neo-Garveyism/neo-Garveyists, 65, 69 neo-imperialism, 2, 4, 63, 67 neo-patrimonialism, 193, 206 neo-populism, 74 neo-sultanism, 19, 61, 62, 63, 66, 70, 71, 72, 74 neo-sultanistic beliefs, 71 grip on power, 72 ideographic mechanism, 71 policies, 74 regime, 62 rule, 61 tendencies, 72 NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa’s Development), 65, 66 Neto, Antonio Agostinho, 95, 97, 110 New Equitable Economic Empowerment Framework. See NEEEF New International Economic Order. See NIEO New Partnership for Africa’s Development. See NEPAD New York/Lisbon Accords, 20
Nguni languages, 213
INDEX

313

stock, 57
Nguni, Sylvester, 197
Nhari, Thomas, 126, 185
Nhari rebellion, 126, 257
Nhama, Francis, 176, 197
Nhongo, Rex, 38, 159, 174, 258, 259
see also Mujuru, Solomon
Nhongo, Teurai Ropa, 159, 166, 176
see also Mujuru, Joice
Nhongo-Simbanegavi, 159, 160, 161, 179
NIEEB (National Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment Board), 56, 194
NIEO (New International Economic Order), 46
Nietzsche, Friedrich, 122, 133
Nietzschean Chimurenga paradigm, 67
Nietzschean paradigm, 62
Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decree, 48
Nigerianization, 48, 49
Ngqakula, Charles, 103
NIT (National Investment Trust), 54
Nkala, Enos, 127, 129, 130, 162, 174, 184, 187, 188, 190, 254, 261
Nkandla. See Inkandla
Nkomo, John, 168
Nkomo, Joshua Mqabuko, 6, 8, 9, 11, 34, 38, 39, 41, 42, 71, 77, 79, 80, 81, 83, 84, 85, 87, 88, 90, 95, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 138, 142, 161, 162, 168, 174, 178, 190, 244, 254, 256, 260
Nkrumah, Kwame, 4, 25, 34, 46, 65, 85, 215
Nkrumahism, 10, 46, 50, 65, 69
NLMs (national liberation movements), 112
Non-Aligned Movement. See NAM
Nordlinger, Eric, 252
NUNW (National Union of Namibian Workers), 110
NUS (National Union of Students), 36
Nyagumbo, Maurice, 89, 162, 187, 188, 190
Nyakudya, Munyaradzi, 19, 20, 97, 301
Nyamubaya, Freedom, 161
Nyandoro, George, 6
Nyarota, Geoff(rey), 41, 129, 130, 182, 184, 189, 191, 192
Nyathi, Paul Themba, 130
Nyerere, Julius Kambarage, 19, 36, 37, 39, 61, 64, 65, 79, 80, 89, 95, 97, 106, 110, 258, 260
Nyikadzinashwe, James, 170
Nyikayaramba, Brigadier General Douglas, 193
Nzira, Madzibaba Godfrey, 169
OAU (Organisation of African Unity), 46, 63, 65, 86, 258
Obama, Barack, 138
Obasanjo, Oluseguni, 65
Oberholzter, Petrus, 256
Operation Chimumumu, 130
Clean Up, 179
Gukurahundi, 3, 86, 87, 224
Mavhoterapapi, 3, 130
Murambatsvina, 3, 31, 130, 140, 148
oppression, 66, 69, 207, 210, 219, 244
of former colonized body, 153
of indigenous people, 154
of peoples of African extraction, 64
of political opposition, 109
Order of Bath, 63
Organ on Politics, Defence and Security (OPDS), 94, 99, 100, 105
Organisation of African Unity. See OAU
Padmore, George, 64
pan-Africanism, 2, 17, 18, 19, 27, 42, 46, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 71, 72, 74, 209, 302
pan-Africanist President of the Decade Honour, 63
Parry, Benita, 16
patriarchal
culture, 113
masculinity, 142
models of liberation, 178
tendencies, 21
thinking, 160
traditions, 9
values, 156
world system, 7
patriarchy, 2, 7, 15, 18, 21
patrimonialism, 4, 191
Patriotic Front, 12, 41, 77, 81, 82, 88, 96, 162, 168, 205, 260
Patriotic Front Alliance, 162
Paweni, Samson Bernard, 185, 186
PCC (People’s Caretaker Council), 197, 254
Pearce Commission, 34
peasants, 1, 2, 13, 14, 52, 28, 30, 125, 131, 206
People’s Caretaker Council. See PCC
Perlmutter, Amos, 252
PF-ZAPU, 36, 71, 129, 130
phases of liberation history, 12, 254, 256, 258, 259, 261
see also Chitepo Phase; ZIPA/
Vashandi Phase; Mugabe Phase
Phimister, Ian, 43, 66
Pillay, Judge Arrianga, 103
Plato, 63
pluralism, 13, 74, 251
pluriversal
humanism, 123
society, 124
pluriversality, 123
Pohamba, President Hifikepunye, 109, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115
policy of reconciliation, 1
political
contestation, 54
exclusion, 73, 224
politics
anticolonial, 1
postcolonial, 250, 271, 272
Pollack, William, 139, 140, 142
popular democracy, 43
Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola. See MPLA
populism, 20, 107–20, 189, 226–8
authoritarian, 61, 63, 66, 71, 72
POSA (Public Order and Security Act), 171, 246
post-apartheid, 45, 49, 90
post-colonial
Africa, 24, 58
African economic policy, 47
African elites, 57
challenges, 19, 46
democratization, 250
dispensation, 2, 4
exploitation, 116
governance/government(s), 1, 8, 9, 15, 185, 229, 246
history, 4, 204
leaders/leadership, 46, 224, 238, 241, 247, 248, 250
nation, 1, 15
nation-state, 237, 238, 248
nativist economic nationalism, 47
neocolonial period, 23
neocolonial structural order, 240
oppression, 116
order, 23, 237, 238, 241
patriotism, 142
political economy, 46
political terrain, 249
politics, 250, 271, 272
regime, 219
rule, 271
rulers, 225
state(s), 5, 8, 19, 46, 225, 246, 253, 300
subject(s), 4, 5, 9
violence, 245, 246
world order, 243
Zimbabwe, 9, 19, 183, 194, 247
post-colonialism, 299
post-racial
humanity, 1
pluriversal humanism, 123
post-racialism, 212
poverty eradication/reducing, 65, 66
praetorian democracy, 19
primitive accumulation, 2, 3, 8, 9, 16, 29, 31, 182, 190–2
property rights, 2, 3, 51
provincial elections, 196–7
PSMAS (Public Service Medical Aid Society), 182, 195
psychological violence, 6
Public Order and Security Act. See POSA
Public Service Medical Aid Society. See PSMAS
Que Que prison, 94
Queen Elizabeth II, 63
Quelimane, 31, 37, 95, 257
quiet diplomacy, 102
Quijano, Anibal, 5, 62
INDEX

Shivji, Issa G, 16
Shona, 35, 57, 152, 208, 224, 247
   culture, 163, 168
   folktales, 152
   society, 144
Sibanda, Jabulani, 132, 175, 176
Sikombela Declaration, 255, 256, 260, 261
Sikombela Restriction Area, 254
Silundika, George, 6
Simpson, Colin, 11
Sinoia/Chihnoyi Battle, 11
Sithole, Masipula, 6, 66, 94, 127, 185
Sithole, Ndabaningi, 6, 10, 71, 79, 80, 84, 94, 95, 106, 159, 162, 178, 179, 190, 193, 254, 256, 257, 258, 271, 272
Sithole, Tendayi, 22, 23, 302
slavery, 64, 65, 212, 213, 215
Small Enterprise Development Corporation
see SEDCO, 54
Smith, David, 11
Smith, Ian Douglas, 31, 36, 42, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 106, 128, 130, 143, 144, 153, 162, 189, 205, 210, 211, 216, 221, 222, 228, 231, 244, 247, 254, 255, 257, 258
Soames, Lord Christopher, 11, 36, 84, 85
social injustice, 66, 68
socio-economic democracy, 73
Solarz, Stephen Joshua, 31, 32, 38, 39, 43, 80
solidarity, 18, 20, 65, 69, 70, 75, 90, 106, 107, 108–11, 206, 208, 209, 210, 216
South African Broadcasting Corporation, 234
South African Communist Party, 42
South African Department of International Relations, 103
South African Supreme Court of Appeal, 211
South West Africa People’s Organization. See SWAPO
Southern Africa Development Community. See SADC
Southern Africa Development Coordination Conference. See SADCC
South-South solidarity, 70
Spivak, GC, 243
SPYL (SWAPO Party Youth League), 109, 110, 116, 117
state-sanctioned violence, 66
state-sponsored violence, 63, 66
Stephan, Alfred C, 70
Stewart, Richard, 209
struggle(s)
   anticolonial, 1, 7, 10, 14, 46, 51, 82, 98, 112, 121, 133, 207, 238, 243, 271
   armed, 4, 8, 11, 50, 81, 83, 153, 205, 219, 254, 255, 256, 257, 261, 271
decolonization, 22
faction, 32
liberation (see liberation struggle)
nationalist (see nationalist struggle)
Suez Canal, 263, 264
sultanism, 70, 71
sultanistic tendencies, 71
sustainable democracy, 65
SWAPO and ZANU-PF, 108–11, 113
SWAPO Congress 2012, 111, 115
SWAPO Party Youth League. See SPYL
SWAPO (South West Africa People’s Organization), 20, 69, 107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 113, 115, 117, 120, 122
SWAPO Youth League. See SPYL
Tafira, Chimusoro Kenneth, 22, 23, 302
Tahir Square (Egypt) uprising, 270
Takawira, Leopold, 254
Tambo, Dali, 31, 163
Tambo, Oliver, 110
Tatchell, Peter, 163
Tekere, Edgar, 8, 12, 41, 42, 71, 129, 155, 157, 158, 159, 160, 162, 170, 171, 174, 178, 186, 188, 189, 190, 193, 254
Tendi, Blessing-Miles, 29, 188, 193, 269
Tevera, Daniel, 125
Thatcher, Margaret, 42, 84, 86, 90
Third Chimurenga, 13, 14, 30, 50–3, 131, 153, 157, 204
Third World, 204, 208, 215
Third Force High Command, 38, 80
nationalism, 6
radicalism, 46
solidarity, 69
surrogates, 210
urbanization, 300
Thompson, EP, 239
Tongogara, Josiah Magama, 38, 39, 41, 42, 81, 126, 158, 159, 185, 259
Tongogara, Sukai, 194
Towungana, 138
Transparency International's Defense Anti-Corruption Index, 266
tribalism, 1, 7, 125, 127
Tsetung, Mao, 40
Tshombe, Moise, 78
Tsvangirai, Morgan, 15, 21, 67, 70, 71, 74, 94, 102, 105, 110, 111, 130, 138, 159, 140, 141, 142, 143, 145, 147, 148, 149, 152, 153, 154, 155, 169, 172–4, 178, 179, 269
Tungamirai, Josiah, 162, 187, 188, 193
Tutu, Desmond (Archbishop), 14
UANC (United African National Council), 77, 84, 106
UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence), 77, 255
UEMOA (West African Economic and Monetary Union), 50, 59
UN (United Nations), 20, 42, 48, 78, 83, 91, 169, 219, 227
UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), 167, 174
unemployment, 66, 74, 143, 174, 182, 212
Unilateral Declaration of Independence. See UDI
Union Economique et Monétaire Ouest Africaine
see West African Economic and Monetary Union
UNITA, 97, 99
United African National Council. See UANC
United Conservative Party, 82
United Nations. See UN
United Nations Development Programme. See UNDP
Unity Accord 1987, 71, 99, 162, 245
Unity Agreement, 162
University of Fort Hare, 10
University of Zimbabwe Amendment Act 1990, 189
Urabi, Ahmad, 263
Urban Clean-Up. See Operation Murambatsvina
Ushewokunze, Herbert, 271
Utete Land Commission, 165
Vance, Cy, 34
vashandi, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261
vashandi Turks, 32
Vashandi/ZIPA group, 12
Victoria Falls meetings, 42
violation of human rights. See human rights violations
violence, 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 13, 14, 15, 20, 23, 34, 36, 56, 63, 66, 67, 68, 70, 72, 73, 74, 81, 84, 88, 102, 121, 122, 123, 126, 127, 128, 129, 140, 143, 148, 154, 155, 167, 172, 174, 219, 223, 224, 225, 227, 228, 229, 237, 244, 245, 246, 251, 257, 270, 271, 300
against black people, 244
black-on-black, 215, 225
colonial, 6, 212, 224, 225, 246
in elections, 8
epistemic, 212
ethnic, 1, 302
as form of political practice, 7
nationalist, 6
phenomenology, 223, 224, 225
political, 66, 127, 141, 183, 245
postcolonial, 245, 246
psychological, 6
state, 125, 129–32, 245
state-sanctioned, 66
state-sponsored, 63, 66
as tool of liberation, 8
wa Thiong’o, Ngugi, 5, 6
Wade, Abdoulaye, 65
Wampa ideological College, 40, 258, 260
war of economic liberation (Uganda), 49
war veterans, 2, 13, 14, 43, 50, 55, 68, 130, 131, 132, 164, 171, 173, 175, 176, 191
INDEX

War Veterans' Gratuities scandal, 191
War Victims Compensation Fund. See WVCF
War Victims' Relief Fund, 161
Wästberg, Per, 37
West African Economic and Monetary Union. See UEMOA
Western Powers, 2, 19, 51, 85, 86, 87, 90, 91, 112, 157, 27, 245, 248
white supremacy, 204, 205, 206, 208–11, 212, 213, 214
Whitehall, 37
Wicken, Joan, 36
Williams, Henry Sylvester, 64
Willowgate Scandal, 170, 187, 188, 189, 191, 192, 194, 206
Wilson, Harold, 36, 37, 255
Wisner, Frank, 39
Women’s League (Namibia), 110
World Bank, 55, 69, 206
World Students’ Congress, 36
World Summit for Sustainable Development. See WSSD
WSSD (World Summit for Sustainable Development), 111, 114
WVCF (War Victims Compensation Fund), 191, 198
xenophobia, 1, 7, 9, 62, 68, 69, 123, 124, 125, 152

Yamamoto, Ken, 170, 183, 184
YDF (Youth Development Fund), 56
Yeros, Paris, 29, 64
Youth Development Fund. See YDF

ZACC (Zimbabwe Anti-Corruption Commission), 194, 195
Zaire, 49
Zambianization, 48
ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army), 8, 11, 12, 25, 38, 39, 80, 81, 84, 85, 95, 97, 128, 129, 158, 159, 160, 161, 170, 177, 179, 185, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 272
ZANLA/ZIPRA merger, 260
ZANU Department of Women’s Affairs, 159, 161

ZANU Departments of Defence and Commissariat, 126
ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union), 10, 11, 12, 19, 24, 31, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 51, 55, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 93, 94, 95, 96, 106, 107, 125, 126, 1127, 128, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 162, 169, 170, 177, 178, 179, 185, 188, 190, 245, 254, 255, 256, 257, 258, 259, 260, 261, 271, 272
see also ZANU-PF
ZANU-PF and SWAPO, 108–11, 113
ZANU-PF central committee, 162, 186
ZANU-PF conference 1985, 187
ZANU-PF dynastic politics, 155
ZANU-PF election strategies, 172
ZANU-PF Leadership Code, 181, 184–90
ZANU-PF patriots, 140
ZANU-PF People’s Congress 2004, 3, 132, 133, 139, 156, 176, 196, 198
ZANU-PF Sixth People’s Congress 2014, 2, 3, 4, 24
ZANU-PF storm troopers, 130
ZANU-PF Succession Matrix, 196–9
ZANU-PF Women’s League, 175, 177
ZANU-PF youth gangs, 56
see also ZANU
INDEX 319

Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army. See ZIPRA
Zimbabwe Prison Services. See ZPS
Zimbabwe Republic Police. See ZRP
Zimbabwe Solidarity Front. See ZSF
Zimbabwe Unity Movement. See ZUM
Zimbabwean nationalism, 4, 9, 13, 16, 33, 79, 190, 254
ZIPA/Vashandi Phase (1976–1977), 12
ZIPA (Zimbabwe People’s Army), 12, 25, 35, 38, 39, 40, 41, 80, 81, 82, 127, 158, 185, 258, 259, 260, 261
ZIPRA/ZANLA merger, 260
ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army), 8, 11, 25, 38, 80, 84, 87, 97, 129, 185, 256, 258, 260, 261
Zisco Steel Blast Furnace Scandal, 190
ZISCO (Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company), 194
Ziscosteel, 194, 195
Zizec, Slavoj, 123
ZLC (Zimbabwe Liberation Council), 258
ZLWACO (Zimbabwe National Liberation War Collaborators’ Association), 132
ZLWVA (Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association), 269
ZMDC (Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation), 54, 181, 192, 194
ZPS (Zimbabwe Prison Services), 269
ZRP Santana Scandal, 191
ZRP (Zimbabwe Republic Police), 198, 269
ZSF (Zimbabwe Solidarity Front), 40, 43, 44
Zulu, Lindiwe, 103
ZUM (Zimbabwe Unity Movement), 157, 171, 186
Zuma, President Jacob, 94, 103, 105, 112, 193, 209
Zvimurenga, 124
Zvobgo, Edson (Eddison), 128, 159, 160, 174, 254, 272
Zvobgo, Julia, 159