

[Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe](#)

Politics, Intellectuals and the Media

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Introduction

Since 2000, Robert Mugabe the President of Zimbabwe and his Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) political party have made a sustained attempt to propagate a repackaged, authoritarian version of Zimbabwe's liberation history called Patriotic History. ZANU PF takes history seriously. It has drawn from its important role in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and advanced Patriotic History in the face of a strong Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition led by Morgan Tsvangirai. Patriotic History asserts the centrality of Zimbabwe's radical revolutionary tradition and it is premised on four themes: land; race; a dichotomy between 'sell-outs' and 'patriots'; and the rejection of Western interference based on what are perceived as 'Western ideals' such as human rights. My book examines the narrative's genesis, production and form. The key phase covered is the Third *Chimurenga*. While this is the period in which Patriotic History is most strongly articulated, my book also ranges over earlier eras in search of antecedents of Patriotic History. Moreover it brings Patriotic History up to date by examining its relevance from 2004 to 2010.

Patriotic History's primary theme is land dispossession. Land is a grievance going back to the First *Chimurenga* of 1896 when British South Africa Company rule was first established. Land was a central grievance in the Second *Chimurenga*. Land alienation remained unresolved in 2000 because the minority white population still controlled the majority of the most productive land. Thus, land became the driving ideology of the Third *Chimurenga*, which ZANU PF cast as the completion of the liberation struggle after the First and Second *Chimurengas* against colonial rule. Patriotic History's protagonists allege that land is the primary motive for their support of ZANU PF and the Third *Chimurenga*. Other themes in

this narrative, such as the ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’ distinction, as well as anti-white politics, had figured in liberation ideology and were given renewed force in Patriotic History.

The book’s central thesis is that Patriotic History was developed as a sophisticated interpretation of Zimbabwe’s past, and elaborated by a wide spectrum of intellectuals and politicians. The early chapters illustrate the range and ideological coherence of this construction of history, which has increasingly dominated the media. Patriotic History has become politically significant because it plays a key role in legitimising ZANU PF’s authoritarianism and the party’s hold on power. It has severely curtailed the development of an alternative view of Zimbabwe’s history. Patriotic History’s main effect is that it has deeply shaped the nature of political debate and discourse in Zimbabwe. Critics of ZANU PF see Patriotic History as a fabrication or a polemic with little relevance to the interests of Zimbabwe’s people. However, I emphasise that Patriotic History plays on real grievance. The narrative must be treated seriously.

Understanding Patriotic History

According to ZANU PF, Patriotic History emerged as a response to Western imperialism. The retort is well captured in *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, which is a collection of speeches and writings by Mugabe.¹ Mugabe is the primary definer of Patriotic History’s contours. In spite of this, ZANU PF’s intellectual allies are more prolific and sharper in their formulations, and their activities contribute to Patriotic History’s multi-layered nature. Their constructions are related to the themes in Mugabe’s speeches and writings, that is land, race, sovereignty and patriotism. ZANU PF Information Minister Jonathan Moyo’s uses of race surpass those of Mugabe in terms

1 See Robert Mugabe, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, Harare, Department of Information and Publicity, 2001.

of complexity. His writings weave the issue of race intricately into many facets of history. Moyo was a combative and prolific Information Minister whose uses of history in government are second only to Mugabe's in terms of their influence. As a result he features prominently in my book.

Nathan Shamuyarira, a political scientist trained at Nuffield College (Oxford) and ZANU PF's Information Secretary, claims that 'Mugabe has been *the* party intellectual since the liberation war years'.² This view of Mugabe as an intellectual politician is also shared by some in academic circles. For instance, Stephen Chan argues that Mugabe is 'the most intellectual of the African presidents': a 'philosopher who lost his way as a king – Nietzsche sitting in the rubble of Harare'.³ However, there were also other critical intellectual politicians in ZANU PF. Key among them was Edison Zvobgo. Zvobgo was a founding member of ZANU PF, poet, Harvard-trained lawyer, and a key negotiator and spokesman at the 1979 Lancaster House talks, who once famously boasted on national television that he was 'the most educated person in ZANU PF'.⁴ He was a frequent critic of Mugabe from the 1990s and the self-appointed champion of ZANU PF's internal democratic reform agenda.

According to Mugabe, the Third *Chimurenga* was a war to redress an enduring colonial land imbalance between the black majority and white minority commercial farmers who were supported by Western imperialism.⁵ Mugabe argues that Britain and the rest of the Western world were adamantly opposed to land redistribution, in order to protect the land interests of their kith and kin in Zimbabwe, and were therefore sponsoring the MDC to thwart equitable land reform. This account maintains that internal opposition is an agent of Western imperialism hence it is 'counter-revolutionary' and 'illegitimate'. It also argues that the MDC and West embarked on an international propaganda campaign to demonise the ZANU PF govern-

2 Interview, Nathan Shamuyarira, Harare, 21 September 2005.

3 Stephen Chan, 'Nietzsche in Harare', *Prospect*, 134, 2007.

4 Documentary on the Life and Political Career of Edison Zvobgo, Zimbabwe Television, 25 August 2004.

5 Mugabe, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*.

ment as a gross human rights violator.⁶ In this understanding of events, the rise of Patriotic History is a legitimate response to the challenge posed by the MDC, white farmers and their Western imperialist backers.

As a Zimbabwean and a keen observer of national politics, I became fascinated with ZANU PF's uses of liberation history in the 2000 parliamentary and 2002 presidential elections. My interest gained focus when I read Terence Ranger's 2002 article, 'The Zimbabwe Elections: A Personal Experience'.⁷ As a long-established historian of Zimbabwe, Ranger expressed his concern about the way that history was being used by ZANU PF, and the attack on a more pluralistic version of Zimbabwe's past. In 2004, Ranger produced a scholarly examination of the uses of history by some of ZANU PF's intellectual allies.⁸ The production of Patriotic History was ZANU PF's ideological response to its waning electoral support, amid economic downturn and popular disenchantment with the party's authoritarian politics. ZANU PF turned to Zimbabwe's multifaceted liberation history, and began to conscript elements it deemed best suited to shoring up its diminished support and legitimacy. This was done alongside a host of other tactics such as state-led violence against political opponents and the purging of the judiciary. Ranger argues that a complex history was reduced to an uncomplicated monolithic history, simplified in the service of ZANU PF.⁹

There was a blitzkrieg of Patriotic History in the state-controlled media from 2000. The state-run Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) broadcast repetitive liberation war documentaries that presented ZANU PF as the sole deliverer of independence, justified the land seizures as a means to redressing a colonial inheritance of racially biased land distribution, highlighted colonial atrocities, and wrote out personalities and

6 Ibid.

7 Terence Ranger, 'The Zimbabwe Elections: A Personal Experience', Unpublished Manuscript, 19 March 2002.

8 See Terence Ranger, 'Nationalist Historiography, Patriotic History and the History of the Nation: The Struggle over the Past in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 30.2, 2004.

9 Ibid.

historical events inimical to ZANU PF's quest to maintain political power. Catchy music jingles and albums, the majority of which were composed by Information Minister Moyo, reworking liberation war songs, and celebrating ZANU PF's role in liberation history, were aired on state-run national radio stations hourly.¹⁰ ZANU PF presented itself as the ordained guardian of Zimbabwe's political past, present and future. There was an obsessive concentration on history. Indeed, in his 2002 account Ranger noted, 'I want to begin discussing the elections by talking about history. You will say that this is because I am a historian. But I do not think anyone could fail to notice how central to ZANU PF's campaign was a particular version of history.'¹¹ There is clearly a need to better understand why Patriotic History is significant to ZANU PF politics, to examine the narrative's nature, and to grasp the motives and writings of the actors involved in its production. This book was motivated by the need to meet these requirements.

My book will help us understand the implications of the Zimbabwean intellectual community's role in the construction and dissemination of Patriotic History. In so doing it illuminates how the violence and farm invasions accompanying the Third *Chimurenga* were a deceptively crude veneer distracting from a thoughtful regime survival project. It is inaccurate to interpret the formulation of Patriotic History in an entirely top-down mode. Intellectuals within the political elite did not drive Patriotic History alone. Some professional academics wore the public intellectual's garb and became legitimisers of power by being fervent advocates of Patriotic History. My book explores more broadly than any earlier source the role of a range of public intellectuals in the media. This allows me to develop a nuanced account of their motives, to assess the key areas of difference between intellectuals and to identify the characteristic of intellectual irresponsibility existing in the Zimbabwean intellectual community. I also discuss the MDC's uses of history. History was one of ZANU PF's main

10 In an interview on 20 September 2005 in Harare, Jonathan Moyo confirmed to me that he composed the majority of these music jingles.

11 Ranger, 'The Zimbabwe Elections: A Personal Experience', p. 1.

political tools for delegitimising opposition. There is need to comprehend how the opposition responded to ZANU PF's uses of history.

Making History in Mugabe's Zimbabwe: Politics, Intellectuals and the Media is divided into nine chapters and an epilogue. This chapter serves as an introduction, while the ninth chapter is a conclusion. The epilogue assesses Patriotic History's relevance a decade after its emergence in 2000. In Chapter Two, on Patriotic History and nationalist public intellectuals, I argue that an exclusive group of public intellectuals aligned with ZANU PF commented on politics and liberation history, on a variety of TV discussion shows, prime time news and in the government-owned press. I discuss the activities of six nationalist public intellectuals, namely Tafataona Mahoso, Ibbo Mandaza, Claude Mararike, Vimbai G Chivaura, Sheunesu Mpeperekwi and Godfrey Chikowore. These six public intellectuals were prolific formulators of Patriotic History in government-owned newspapers and television. My exploration of their activities in the public sphere uncovers sophisticated uses of history that play on real grievance and powerful memories of the colonial period. The nationalist public intellectuals formulated conspiracy theories, made use of shifting global political events to explain local politics, exploited Western hypocrisy to delegitimise human rights, and eulogised Mugabe, as stratagems for defending and supporting ZANU PF.

Chapter Three focuses on Patriotic History and public intellectuals who were critical of ZANU PF policies. Public intellectuals such as Brian Raftopoulos, Masipula Sithole, John Makumbe, Elphas Mukonoweshuro and Lovemore Madhuku published articles critical of ZANU PF in the independent daily and weekly newspapers. Critical public intellectuals were effective in deconstructing the 'patriots' and 'sell-outs' distinction and in underlining that land was one of several grievances that caused the liberation war, but they failed to disentangle a local struggle for human rights and democracy from appeals to and comparisons with supposed 'democratic' and 'human rights respecting' Western countries. Critical public intellectuals' challenge to ZANU PF's uses of history was ineffective, and some of their writings played into Patriotic History's themes. I put forward a host of explanations for their ineffectiveness.

Chapter Four explains and critiques Patriotic History's elevation of land at the expense of other liberation ideals, civil and political rights specifically. While land was a significant grievance in Zimbabwean nationalism, it needs to be located in the milieu of the rest of nationalist ideology and current regional politics. Patriotic History endeavours to generate a division between civil and political, and economic rights. By championing equitable land redistribution, Patriotic History promotes economic rights. By legitimising authoritarian politics, and downgrading the worth of civil and political rights to Zimbabwean nationalism, Patriotic History rejects their validity. The creativity of Patriotic History lies in its adroitness at linking the significance of the land grievance in Southern Africa to a state operation denying Zimbabweans civil and political rights. In addition I introduce the Anyaoku narrative, which holds that the ZANU PF government delayed land redistribution in the early 1990s at the request of former Commonwealth Secretary General Emeka Anyaoku because rapid land reform in this period would have coincided with and destabilised South Africa's transition from Apartheid.

Chapter Five explores Patriotic History's race theme. In 1980, the ZANU PF government embraced a policy of national reconciliation between races in order to encourage amity, nation-building and economic growth between the country's white minority and black majority racial groups. In 2000, the ZANU PF government abandoned its reconciliation policy and replaced it with an exclusivist politics. The abandonment of reconciliation underscored a fundamental shift that I try to understand in terms of Patriotic History. The roots of reconciliation's collapse lie in the country's defective 1979 Lancaster House independence settlement. Britain drafted and managed the acceptance of a near-sighted independence settlement concentrating on the appeasement and protection of white privileges rather than durable nation-building. An 'indigenous' discourse with roots in the early 1990s, which explains white dominance in terms of unsettled colonial inheritances, left white Zimbabweans liable to envy and resentment by a majority black population. The collapse of reconciliation in Zimbabwe should be seen as part of a global phenomenon of 'mar-

ket-dominant minorities.’¹² Market-dominant minorities are small ethnic minority groups that dominate national economies, and are vulnerable to nationalist sentiment aroused by demagogues.

Chapter Six is an examination of Patriotic History’s ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’ distinction. ZANU PF uses history to isolate and deter the emergence of an opposition politics by dividing Zimbabweans into ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’. ZANU PF and its supporters are labeled ‘patriots’, while the opposition MDC and civil society are ‘sell-outs’. To be classified as a ‘sell-out’ is to be ‘illegitimate’, a ‘saboteur’ of revolutionary *Chimurenga* principles and a ‘legitimate’ target for political violence.¹³ I trace the distinction’s origins by making use of Timothy Scarnecchia’s study on rhetoric, violence and gender in Zimbabwe’s urban politics (1940–64).¹⁴ The distinction has its origins in late 1950s urban politics and has been a continuous theme in nationalist politics since. I also explore the nature and scope of the ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’ distinction, demonstrating its usefulness to ZANU PF in dealing with domestic and external detractors. The ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’ distinction is fluid but also inflexible at any one point in time. The meaning of ‘sell-out’ evolves over time depending on the nature of rivals. I substantiate this through four case studies of the political fates of nationalist figures Ndabaningi Sithole, Edgar Tekere, Wilfred Mhanda and Joshua Nkomo. Furthermore, the distinction has made Zimbabwean politics unattractive to young Zimbabweans and made the country’s politics exclusive. What is new about the ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’ distinction after 2000 is its increased intensity, and the nature of alleged ‘patriots’ and ‘sell-outs’. To be a ‘sell-out’ after 2000 is to ‘forsake’ nationalist history and ZANU PF’s role in it, to oppose the land seizures, and to prioritise human rights. ‘Sell-outs’ had not been defined in this way before.

12 Amy Chua, *World on Fire: How Free Market Democracy Breeds Ethnic Hatred and Global Instability*, New York, Doubleday, 2002, p. 7.

13 Mugabe, *Inside the Third Chimurenga*, p. 88.

14 Timothy Scarnecchia, *Fighting for the Underdog: Rhetoric, Violence and Gender in Zimbabwean Nationalism, 1940–1964*, New York, Rochester University Press, 2008.

Chapter Seven explores and conceptualises the Third *Chimurenga* as a clash between human rights ideals and the view offered by ZANU PF that national sovereignty is fundamental. Patriotic History depicts human rights as a form of Western ‘moral imperialism’ similar to historical justifications, such as ‘the white man’s burden’, for the colonisation of Africa. Thus, Patriotic History functions in an anti-colonial interference framework. Patriotic History presents sovereignty, hard won in the liberation struggle, as the reverse of colonialism and an important means of rhetorical and political self-defence against criticism, as well as threatened intrusions by external actors, which are abhorred given Zimbabwe’s history of occupation and exploitation at the hands of colonial forces. Patriotic History uses the harmful legacies of colonialism to undermine the morality of external interference. ZANU PF utilises Patriotic History to point out Western double standards on global human rights promotion and to strengthen its rejection of Western criticism. Western double standards also supported African states’ ability to invoke sovereignty in support of the ZANU PF government. The resort to sovereignty by African states is symptomatic of the unresolved 1990s global debate between human rights promoters and sovereignty upholders. Particular reference is made to Zimbabwe’s 2002 election, which Patriotic History presented as a struggle between an ex-colonial power and its former colony. Sovereignty is the single theme in Patriotic History that commands wide agreement or consensus in ZANU PF.

Chapter Eight examines the opposition MDC’s uses of history during the Third *Chimurenga*. The MDC’s choices on history and the factors that influenced these options are crucial. It is incomplete to see the MDC simply as a victim of ZANU PF’s uses of history. The MDC had the agency to prevent itself from falling into ZANU PF’s constructions and also to make use of the country’s past. I bring to light the reasons for the MDC’s selection of allies and demonstrate how the party’s broad composition affected its ideological coherence. I illustrate how the MDC gradually adopted some of Patriotic History’s tenets, such as the conviction that ‘founding’ leaders are perpetual holders of leadership positions, as evidenced in Tsvangirai’s proclaimed ‘irreplaceability’, his violation of the party’s constitutional provisions and expulsion of ‘sell-out’ members he argued

were aligned with ZANU PF.¹⁵ Other tenets of Patriotic History, such as the legitimacy of violence and the rhetoric of 'sell-outs' were a feature of MDC politics from 2000. I conclude that the MDC has adopted many of ZANU PF's practices.

15 See 'Sikhala Digs In', *The Herald*, 2 November 2005.