

*Memory & the*  
**National Question**  
**in Zimbabwe**  
**A re-reading of Obert Mpofu**

Richard R. Mahomva and Tawanda Zinyama (Eds)





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## Preface

This publication is in sync with Leaders for Africa Network's commitment to create a link between politics and the academia through nurturing thought which challenges all imperialist logic perpetuating Africa's dispossession. After the launch of Dr. Obert M. Mpofu's publication, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*, we responded to the call by the Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Retired Gen, Dr. CDGN Chiwenga's recommendation for a surgical inquiry on Zimbabwe's past. It was against this background that an open invitation for a critical analysis of Mpofu's memoirs was made. The call had an overwhelming response which culminated in the publication of this book.

We pride ourselves in being associated with the literary work of Dr. Obert Mpofu, whose liberation credentials validate his place as an authoritative archive in the making of Zimbabwe's history.

LAN is also grateful to the Vice President, Dr. CDGN Chiwenga for accepting our invitation to launch Dr. Mpofu's book, as well as giving his seal of endorsement to this academic volume. For us, this marks the genesis of continued interaction of our institution with the Government of Zimbabwe in mutually consolidating our shared pan-Africanist persuasion to nation building.

As a pan-Africanist/Afrocentred think-tank our task is to reclaim the African intellectual space through engaging as many voices which make up our diverse post-colonial identities. We assert this position because the Global South has succumbed to hegemonic pressures of western oligopolies. As a result, our function is to be an epistemic buffer zone to the global imperialist prejudice towards African knowledge systems. To this end, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is a philosophically steeped illustrative piece of this agenda.

If you find this particular collection of reviews engaging, as I do, it is purely because Mpofu is an astute organic intellectual whose reason imbues experience symbiotically intertwined with the revolutionary struggle of Africa. The diverse voices in this collection replicate that ideological pattern in Mpofu's book.

*Memory and the National Question in Zimbabwe: A Re-Reading of Obert Mpofu* marks yet another chapter in the life of Dr. Mpofu and highlights the invaluable contribution of a great statesman and most recently, a renowned author and writer of Zimbabwean history and development.

I thank the LAN family for this indelible work, including *madzisahwira edu/abangane bethu abakhulu* who contributed in the production of this academic volume.

To the editors, Richard Runyararo Mahomva and Tawanda Zinyama, on behalf of Leaders for Africa Network (LAN), I thank you for the rare distinction in editing and coordinating this project. Your commitment was immeasurable.

*Pofela Ndzozi, Research and Publications Coordinator  
Leaders for Africa Network (LAN)  
Bulawayo, 30 October. 2020*

## Foreword

The anti-imperialist agenda would be a piecemeal milestone if the frontline participants of our liberation struggle are not pro-active in reflecting on the role of the gun in the birthing of the post-colonial state in Africa. The failure to reconnect to the ideological foundation of our existence through authentic memorialization will wipe away the keenness to safeguard our liberation values. For too long, the narration of our history has been a preserve of institutions disposed to dignifying colonial control on knowledge production.

It brings so much delight that the archive of national history has been enriched by this monumental ideological preservation masterpiece in the form of Comrade, Dr. Obert Moses Mpofu's autobiography titled, "*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*". Surely, this contribution edifies the quest for liberating our liberation historiography which has long suffered the colonial capture through academics conniving with our long sworn detractors. By and large, our detractors have tried to arrest any effort by anti-colonial practitioners to narrate their experiences in view of the changing facets of imperialism in pre and post-independence Africa.

Therefore, it is delighting when a seasoned anti-colonial practitioner reminisces his past and situates his present role within the nationalist movement to preserve history and in the process defining the future. *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*, philosophically projects the need for Africa and Zimbabwe to resituate the founding ethos of our decolonisation agenda in tackling neo-colonialism by the jugular vein. This collection of essays giving a multidisciplinary academic analysis of Dr. Mpofu's autobiography is equally essential as it facilitates continuity a dialogue which supports and contests key submissions of the autobiography.

Dr. Obert Mpofu's book, affirms the need to credit His Excellency, The President of the Republic of Zimbabwe and Commander-in-Chief of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa for widely opening our political space to frank nation-building dialogue.

Dr. Mpfu's life record –discussed in this volume affirms the existence of free political-thought attached to the Second-Republic. In the past, we were only accustomed to the reactionary self-reflections by ousted political actors and those in the opposition. However, with the opening of the political space, we have seen active political participants writing their autobiographies which also serve as counter-accounts to our long-held traditions in ZANU PF. This alone signifies a change in our political culture. You will be aware that in 2019, Retired Col. Tshinga Dube also published his autobiography titled, “Quiet Flows the Zambezi”. Now with Dr. Mpfu depositing a similar national memory preservation instalment, it is clear that we are moving towards a new era of open dialogue as a nation.

After an extensive interface with Dr. Obert Mpfu's life-story, I got to reconnect to the ZANLA-ZANU's ideological recalibration oath dating back to the armed struggle that, ‘We Are Our Own Liberators’. Through this dictum, we adopted a highly confrontational path to topple colonialism. The gun became the only contrivance to our resolve towards total self-liberation. Likewise, today we are assigned to the call of being ‘our own liberators’ by taking up the pen. In this respect, the author should be applauded as he has acquitted himself in both respects as we sought for freedom through the barrel of the gun and of course in the contemporary, through the barrel of the pen.

Therefore, it is not surprising that from Chapter Three to Chapter Five of his book, Dr. Obert Mpfu narrates how he joined the struggle in 1967 following his early childhood political orientation. As a young boy, he found himself at the centre of ZPRA reconnaissance activity in the Wankie and Binga areas. This heightened his passion for the armed struggle leading to his formal military training and active midwifing of the birth-pangs of the Hwange and Sipolilo battles which were spearheaded by ZPRA and Umkhonto We Sizwe.

Fast forward to post-independence Zimbabwe, Dr. Mpfu who was a graduate from the University of Delhi in India, got employed as a Trainee Manager at ZimPapers and later a senior civil servant in the Customs and Excise Department before actively joining the then ZANU PF and assuming the reigns of ZANU PF Provincial Treasurer, Central

Committee, Politburo and Cabinet membership. It was no mistake that young Obert Mpfu joined the present-day ZANU PF having been a tested product of combatant revolutionary tutelage in Zambia and Tanzania's Morogoro camp.

Dr. Mpfu's transfiguration from ZPRA-ZAPU roots to being a fully-fledged member of the then ZANU PF in the early 1980 as confirmed in his autobiography, substantiates the mutual ideological inclination of our nationalist movements. The symbiotic inclinations of our liberation movements to the national question were rooted in the embryonic anti-colonial phases of our struggle which inspired the formation of the Southern Rhodesian African Nationalist Congress (SRANC), National Democratic Party (NDP) and ZAPU.

The formation of ZANU in 1963 remains evident in the maturation of the liberation cause and the mandate expansion of the nationalist movement. As such, Cde Mpfu's account invites critical readers of Zimbabwean politics to analyze how the protagonist contradiction within the nationalist movements facilitated broad-based attacks on the colonial system. As a result, the coming together of ZANU PF and PF ZAPU in 1987 boldly expressed the founding collective aspirations of our liberation powerhouses' in paving the path for the sustainable reconstruction of the nation and peace-building.

In articulating the formative path of liberation political parties since the late 1950s right up to the 1960s, Dr. Mpfu sufficiently CHRONICLES HIMSELF as a direct participant of the Zimbabwean armed struggle. This explains why his predisposition to ZANU PF became a useful tool for the formation of the Unity Accord. However, many do not know that Dr. Mpfu was a leading figure in the negotiation architecture of the Unity Accord signed on the 22nd of December, 1987. It was from this pact between the late former President of Zimbabwe, Cde Robert Gabriel Mugabe and the late Father Zimbabwe Cde Dr. Joshua Mqabuko Nyongolo Nkomo, that ZANU-PF was formed.

With all these credentials illuminated in the life story of this son of the soil, our aspiring young politicians should be inspired to commit to the Republic by being unwavering defenders of our independence. This is

because Zimbabwe is an emotive symbol of our territorial integrity which was won on the altar of countless life sacrifices.

I wish to underscore that this publication is intellectually enriching due to its thematic intersectionality which is interwoven in the direct experiences of an ex-combatant, a former minister, revolutionary academic, businessman and a senior member of the ruling ZANU PF. The exhaustive focus on the Land question in Cde Mpofu's book, emphasizes the source of Zimbabwe's ideological standpoint against colonial domination rooted in the armed liberation norm.

As a result, Dr Mpofu's book emphasizes the role of the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme as the pivot of contested partisan discourses in Zimbabwe from the late 1990s up to the early millennia. For Dr. Mpofu, the starting point to political democracy is economic democratization. The author invites the reader to a bigger scope of reading the constructs of post-colonial power contestations beyond selective rhetoric of "rehearsed concerns" around human-rights and good governance.

Given the magnitude of Dr. Mpofu's discursive traverse to the neoliberal notions of the so-called Zimbabwean crisis, our senior politicians especially those in ZANU PF, must be motivated to write authentic accounts of our post-independence politics. It is worth reiterating that Zimbabwe's land reform exercise produced an outrage of neo-colonial emotions expressed through the formation of a colonially sponsored opposition political party.

In buttressing this point, Dr. Mpofu argues that the Land Reform Programme produced reactionary academia which was mentored by the archbishop of colonial historiography, the late Professor Terrence Ranger who had been initially known as a friendly force to our liberation struggle until he turned his back against the very "Peasant Consciousness" which he claimed to defend through historiographical advocacy. However, Professor Terrence Ranger was later involved in spearheading a nationalist acrimonious narrative which desperately seeks to dissuade our people, especially our war veterans, from writing their history.

To this end, we have seen how the late founding father of the First Republic Cde. R. G. Mugabe, has been historically reproduced as a dictator simply because he actively challenged White monopoly capital



by launching the Land Reform Programme.

It is on this pretext, that Dr. Mpfu's reflections are significant in expressing the revolutionary movement's consistent tradition of consolidating the liberation struggle. As a result, I found the last two chapters of the book important particularly in explaining the role of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) in the preservation of the legacy of the armed struggle.

To this end, Dr. Mpfu gives the rationale of Operation Restore Legacy and how it captured the collective emotions of restoring Zimbabwe to the default settings of true democracy, building tolerance, equality and economic freedom.

With its entire comprehensive investigative midpoints, the autobiography under review is much more than the story of Dr. Mpfu. To me, it is the story of Zimbabwe from the perspective of many silenced voices of our ordinary people.

It is from this simplicity that the book is not just about power, guns and blood. It also re-centres Dr. Obert Mpfu as a family man with so much affection for his wife and family.

Therefore, I recommend the book for those young men who may want to extract some romantic charming genius from the wisdom of the old school as espoused by the writer's celebration of his longtime lover Mama Mrs. Sikhanyisiwe Mpfu. It was quite warming to be reading a fat section of the book, where the writer overturned its academic gravity by showering his wife with some enticing love punchlines.

Without doubt, Cde Mpfu's autobiography sends an important encouragement to Africa and Zimbabwe in particular, to occupy the history-making space to promote unity, peace and harmony in our nation. Above all, when all is said and written, we must never forget that, 'We Are Our Own Liberators'.

*Honourable General (Retired) Dr. C. G. D. N. Chiwenga  
Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe.  
Harare, 14 October, 2020*

## Acknowledgments

The editors of this compendium of reviews are indebted to Dr Obert Moses Mpofu for broaching an epoch-making autobiography centred on the Zimbabwean socio-political identity as exclusively captured in the themes of his autobiography *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*. Mpofu's retention of the liberation memory underpinned on self-based perspectives has reinvigorated a critical ideologically focused dialogue on the Zimbabwean national question. Through the writing of his memoirs, Mpofu has justified the need for continued writing of Zimbabwean history by active political players and liberation luminaries. It is from this phenomenal initiative that this publication extracts its existence from Mpofu's book which was officially launched by the Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Honourable Retired General Dr Constantine Guvheya Dominic Nyikadzino Chiwenga on October 14, 2020. As such, we take this opportunity to thank the Vice President Dr CDGN Chiwenga for his support throughout the launch and the follow-up review exercise of Dr Obert Mpofu's autobiography culminating in the writing of this volume.

We also extend our gratitude to Leaders for Africa Network (LAN)'s Research and Publications Coordinator, Pofela Ndzozi for commissioning this research project.

Finally, without the contributors, this collection would be a pipe dream. Therefore, we are grateful for the well-written essays by our esteemed comrades in the struggle for liberating the Zimbabwean knowledge production space. Without their keen interest and tireless commitment, this collection would not have been published. Therefore, we are thankful for the time they all invested in writing their respective chapters.

We are also grateful to Leaders of Africa Network's support staff for having confidence in us from the outset.

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# Introduction

Richard Runyararo Mahomva & Tawanda Zinyama

## **Background: Towards a Post-Colonial Theoretical Paradigm Shift**

Based on the foundational function of the post-colonial theory's commitment to outline the ontology of imperialism, this review collection of Obert Moses Mpofu's *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* (2020) asserts that the territorial collapse of colonialism produced another struggle after the struggle. Essentially, this has been the struggle to produce true accounts on the processes which gave birth to the African post-independent state (Williams & Chrisman, 1993; Schwarz, 2000; Young 2003). Put into perspective, Homi Bhabha (1993) submits the concept of re-membling as a conscious memory-making framework by the colonised to connect with their dismembered past(s) in making sense of the distress of their immediate realities. Unlike the erstwhile colonised, the coloniser also has a burden to re-member, but with a different mandate to sanitise the past and in the process normalise the trauma of the colonised who carry the burden of re-membling perpetual dismemberment.

The imperialist dominant memory, its technological and ideological infrastructure, imposes itself as the major source of authentic memory. This explains the hegemonic biases of post-colonial historiography which is characterised by the conflicting perennial binary identities of the coloniser and the colonised. It is from this perspective, that the essays contained in this volume assess how Mpofu's book traverses between the ideological chasms of colonialism and anti-colonialism; decolonisation and neo-colonialism; colonality and decoloniality. Therefore, this text is predicated on the thematic evaluation of Mpofu's autobiography to unpack its ideological underpinning.

There is consensus among the contributors that the book under review is founded on the post-colonial competing ideological landscapes of imperialism and anti-imperialism. The obvious imperialist and anti-

imperialist contrasts of imagining the post-colony survive in an atmosphere of mutual prejudices as clearly expressed in Mpfu's self-account. In maintaining the anti-imperialist stance to memorialisation, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is preoccupied with exposing and redressing past injustices whose presence in the post-colony bluntly substantiate the inherent character of neo-colonialism. The conviction of Mpfu's authorial ideology radically determined to counter the neo-liberal sponsored systematic silencing of the nationalist/anti-colonial/pan-Africanist past. In so doing, Mpfu posits a historical epistemology of rethinking colonial re-remembering to sustain the organic Homi Bhabha treatise to re-remembering defined as "...putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present". (Bhabha, 1993: 121). To this end, *Memory and the National Question in Zimbabwe: A Re-Reading of Obert Mpfu* submits a bona fide inclination to this exclusive epistemic agenda by giving a decolonial interpretive analysis of Dr Obert Mpfu's autobiography *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* (2020).

Here we argue that Mpfu's reflections should be situated within the terrain of colonial (dominant) and anti-colonial (oppressed) struggles to re-member the nation. Inevitably, there are substantial allegiances to these two types of memory and their inevitable antagonism. In negotiating his space into this contested space, Mpfu (2020) presents his autobiography in the category of repressed memory struggling to find its way into the public domain to affirmatively assert the national question:

However, not much has been said by those cadres who bore the brunt of the real combat operations against the vicious enemy. I represent that group of liberation fighters whose story of involvement in the fight for independence and the consolidation of its values has not been fully chronicled. Not much has also been exhaustively recounted about the countless men, women and children who came face to face with the full wrath of Rhodesian violence directed at obliterating the continuity of the nationalist struggle (p. 7).

This tension between the dominant and repressed memories of the nation form basis of the debate generated in this publication. As a voice of repressed and marginalised memory, Mpfu (2020), has demonstrated

the competition to define the national question by both actors in the construction of dominant and repressed memory. At the same time, Mpfu's writing substitutes and contests dominant memory narratives on Zimbabwe's past. Mpfu's input to national memory is crucial as it invites a multiplicity of other repressed sources of memory in balancing the supremacy of the dominant and homogenising official accounts informing the Zimbabwean national question.

Given the polarity of the Zimbabwean political landscape and discourse, any attempt towards self-remembering by a mainstream politician especially a member of the ruling ZANU PF attracts a plethora of ideologically multifaceted counter-discourses. However, apart from the partisan polarities deployed in reading Mpfu's book, such debates are expected of any writing inclined towards the subject of memorialisation. As a subject of memory either through self-representation or external representation, Obert Mpfu is a symbol of contested ideas and controversy ranging from protagonist to antagonist representation. In his autobiography, Mpfu is a protagonist and this publication grapples with this self-construction and its response to the author's external representations (Smith and Watson 2001). The chapters here revisit Mpfu's self-sanitizing style in his memoir. The reviewers of Mpfu's autobiography demonstrate extreme caution in their engagement of his reflections due to the subjective reality of self-remembering.

In full acknowledgement of this fact, *Memory and the National Question in Zimbabwe: A Re-Reading of Obert Mpfu* brings to the fore an interdisciplinary appreciation of the multifaceted socio-political personality of the author beyond the limited scope of his self-narration. The chapters of this book also critically interrogate Mpfu's credentials weighing into full account his external personality projection as a prominent Zimbabwean politician, businessman and academic.

### **The Autobiographic Significance of Obert Mpfu in Framing the National Question in Zimbabwe**

All identity is a product of collective re-membering. The notion of national memory assumes the form of cordial mutual re-membering by diverse nationals to forge a collective identity underpinned on shared experiences

and collectively envisaged aspirations. Usually, national memory is sustained by nation-states' commitment to propagating official accounts of their past with a unifying effect in support of postured national identities and sovereign interests. To this end, national memory is entrenched in shared ideological values, historiography patterns, national monuments, education curricula and the media among the many other utensils and devices of remembering. In all methods and spaces of memory-making the individual who is both the curator and consumer of memory is a centrifugal element. The individual is also the subject of remembering. In essence, all memory revolves around the individual. Therefore, all remembering by a person and those around them hoist memory to a shared identity of a particular class, race, gender and ethnic grouping. As such, individual remembering/memory is unavoidably born out of collective socio-cultural and political orientation(s) (Ryan, 2011).

The centrality of the individual in the making of memory of any society justifies the philosophical essence of auto/biographing in the tradition of forging self-images into the national question. This primarily validates the role of Obert Mpofu as an important repository of the Zimbabwean post-colonial memory archive. To this end, his writing has facilitated a very critical debate which has informed the writing of this book which discusses many themes of his lived experiences as a Zimbabwean nationalist and an important player in the continued agenda of liberating the post-colony.

## **Conclusion**

Therefore, we hope that the issues discussed in this book will promote a strong understanding on why prominent politicians like Obert Mpofu need to be actively involved in constructing pro-national interest narratives. Mpofu's writing comes at a time when Zimbabwe and the rest of the continent are antagonised by neoliberal epistemic warfare which dissuades the promotion and preservation of organic anti-colonial intellectual thought. With this contribution from Mpofu, assurances of posterity in the literary national dialogue has been sought.

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# **Tracing the Roots to Self-Remembering in Obert Mpofu's Political Journey: 1967-2020**

Rudo Barbra Gaidzanwa

## **Born into the Struggle**

The memoir by Obert Mpofu, former combatant and insider in the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) who was born in 1951 in what was then called the Wankie (Hwange) Jambezi area, in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), is quite revealing of the anti-colonial political culture of the time:

Joining the liberation struggle was the most virtuous decision that any politically conscious person could make. It was the most honourable thing to do. During holidays, with other teenagers at the time, we would covertly cross to Livingstone, Zambia. There alongside others, I received early reconnaissance grooming which later formed the science of information extraction about the activities of the enemy (Mpofu 2020 p. 22).

This makes the publication to transcend the locus of the narrator's political-self and situates his active political participation within the confines of a generational consciousness. At the centre of his acquired positive/liberation/anti-colonial peer-pressure (generational political culture), the role of the family as the primary socialisation unit is visible throughout the author's political orientation.

## **Political Awakening**

His father was a political prisoner who was detained without trial, incarcerated and tortured prior to the family's forced move by the state from the Nkayi-Gwayi area and eventually, to Jambezi. Obert Mpofu's father died in 1957 as a result of excessive torture at the hands of state agents. These experiences of Obert's family coloured and influenced his anti-colonial ideological leaning. This emotive and vulnerable phase

of his childhood becomes the cradle of political radicalisation (p 17). Having grown a rebellious political conscious teenager, he identified with the progressive groups of students who abandoned their education to join the armed struggle:

I belong to the generation of anti-colonial radicalised African teenagers who rebelliously dropped out of formal education to join the liberation struggle. During my time, most mission schools particularly Manama, Cyrene and Inyathi mission schools faced a massive exodus of students who swapped their student status to be on the frontline of the armed struggle. Most mission and government rural schools, particularly in Matebeleland, became the source of manpower for ZPRA. Due to the popularity of the liberation cause as I was growing up, the school environs became a site of emancipatory ideological mobilisation (Mpofu 2020, p. 47)

After being single handedly raised by his widowed mother, he joined the liberation struggle in 1967 as a Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) conscript. Mpofu, in this memoir, chronicles his youth in colonial Rhodesia, his decision to join the struggle for national liberation in 1967 when he was only sixteen years old and his role in reconnaissance, prior to the Wankie Battle. After the Wankie (Hwange) battle, the young Obert was forced to flee Rhodesia to Zambia once his links to the guerilla activity in Wankie were known.

### **Towards post-colonialism**

Mpofu remained a ZPRA/ZAPU devotee until the Lancaster House negotiations were held in 1979, resulting in the agreement to have a ceasefire and elections in 1980. The Lancaster House Agreement blocked mass expropriation of land, mandating a willing-seller willing buyer process for acquiring land. He describes the events and issues informing his decision to move from ZAPU to ZANU in 1980, in the wake of ZANU's victory in the first post-independence polls in which ZANU won 57 of the 80 common roll seats while ZAPU won only 20 seats. Mpofu explains his decision to join the ZANU after independence out of his recognition of ZANU's commitment to meritocracy, its popularity and its standing as

the party of the future in Zimbabwe (Chapter 5). Mpfu argues that in the ZAPU, there was some bias against people from Matebeleland North while people from Matebeleland South were favoured. He also indicates that Nkomo was not vengeful when he (Obert Mpfu) decided to join ZANU because they had a close relationship and had always understood each other:

I was grateful that Nkomo respected my decision to leave ZAPU. In so doing, he proved to be an accommodative leader who would not impose himself on anyone. Nkomo had always been that open-minded and he was objective in digesting views which he opposed. Nkomo transformed me from a combatant cadre to a conventional politician. In 1995, when I was campaigning for the Bubi-Unguza parliamentary seat, Nkomo took me to Ntabazinduna and endorsed my candidature. This solidified my relationship with him both at a personal and at a political level (Mpfu 2020 p. 172-173).

### **Serving in Government**

Mpfu served under Robert Mugabe as a Deputy Minister of Industry and International Trade in 1995 Governor and Resident Minister for Matebeleland North in 2000, and eventually, as Minister of International Trade in 2005, and Minister of Mines and Mining Development in 2008. Thereafter Mpfu became a Politburo Member, (2009) and Transport and Infrastructural Development Minister in 2013, Minister of Planning Development and Investment Promotion in 2013. He was later appointed Minister of Home Affairs and Cultural Heritage until 2018. He is currently full time ZANU PF Secretary for Administration. Given the maxim that the party is supreme over government, it signals the potential conflicts that can arise when citizens who operate through the state/government structures disagree with ZANU PF over various governance issues.

### **Inside the Contradictions of the Post-Colonial State**

On the emotive *Gukurahundi* issue where twenty thousand people are held to have died at the hands of Zimbabwe's security forces, Mpfu argues this was a result of mutual suspicion between freedom fighters from ZPRA and ZANLA, the perceptions and feeling of exclusion in Matebeleland



and divisive colonial rule that did not unite the peoples of Zimbabwe. The conflict that was generated by the *Gukurahundi* killings was resolved through the Unity Accord of 1987 between ZANU and ZAPU whereby the two political entities merged into the ZANU (Patriotic Front). Mpfu points out that the issues of the *Gukurahundi* and the land reform are divisive and often mobilized as “emotive capital” (p 97) to discredit the Government of Zimbabwe. Mpfu argues that there is need for peace, reconciliation and unity in Zimbabwe. This is despite the weakness of institutions that are needed to undertake this task. Mpfu criticizes the poor investment in agricultural infrastructure, pointing out that the land reform, undertaken without significant financing of rural infrastructure, would not generate much agricultural and rural development.

The chapters in the memoirs focus on a broad variety of issues, and needed common threads to maintain thematic continuity. The presence of the military throughout the struggle for national liberation and after, needed discussion beyond reference to war veterans, Rex Mujuru’s proposal for Mugabe to exit office and the entry of the military into the centre of governance in Zimbabwe. How does this affect people of various classes, ages, and genders in Zimbabwe? There are many issues that are raised about the politics and struggles within various political parties, especially ZANU PF. There was need to discuss the relationships between ZANU PF in its various incarnations, and its relationships to non-ZANU PF entities, social and political formations and the growth of poverty in Zimbabwe during the past two decades. While the goings on in ZANU PF, in its different incarnations need to be understood, it was necessary to factor into the narrative, the views of ZANU PF insiders about their co-existence and experiences with other entities outside ZANU PF since the context within which Mpfu and other ZANU members have operated and the groups that are not ZANU members, cannot be ignored or wished away. The current descent of the majority of Zimbabweans into poverty also needs to be factored into the discussions of ZANU PF insiders so that various groups of readers and people outside ZANU PF can understand how ZANU PF factors them into their plans for an inclusive Zimbabwe that values all its peoples. That way, the struggles by ZANU insiders can become more inclusive and relevant to all Zimbabweans.

## Significance of the Contribution

The memoirs by Mpofu shed light on some of the operations within ZANU PF in some of its historical incarnations. The publication exposes the thinking, calculations and actions of politicians, particularly those who have operated within the then ZANU and to a lesser extent, ZAPU and other parties and entities. While the memoirs by Mpofu may be criticized, contested and may not answer all the questions that readers might have about the thinking and actions within ZANU PF in all its incarnations, they constitute a start to enable Zimbabweans and others, to understand, debate and analyze the history, motivations and drivers of policies and practices within the historical and contemporary ZANU PF and its governance in Zimbabwe.

## Questions raised by the narrative

The author, in a glaring understatement on page 88, notes that

...The Matebeleland crisis indeed resulted in several people losing their lives... The perceptions and views about the impact of *Gukurahundi* have been....susceptible to political manipulation and political grandstanding by many political parties, civil societies, student movements, and trade unions.... sad phase of our past

This observation grossly understates what happened during *Gukurahundi* and this requires more truth-telling. More than “several” people lost their lives! The victims of *Gukurahundi* still desire closure and there is no need to deny or understate what happened during *Gukurahundi* since it has hurt, divided and prevented our peoples from trusting each other or engaging without fear of violence and retribution at some points in the future. This renders the role of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) in driving the agenda of national healing quite critical. As already indicated in Mpofu’s book there is need to calibrate the functions of the NPRC in the interest of genuine nation-building objectives and breaking all systems of impunity. We need to see more being done to address the polarisation of the nation that was induced by the history of violence which Zimbabwe has experienced over the years.

Mpofu lists the litany of scandals relating to corruption between 1987 and 1999, attributing them to the

“...colonially inherited ..centralised system of governance and ... structural adjustments which led to the following prominent cases of corruption.....between 1987 and 1999”.

This reasoning is not very convincing because the perpetrators of the corruption were not exactly the poorest of the poor of Zimbabwe! It does not follow that when a governance system is centralized, people are justified when they resort to theft of public resources. Systems of governance in Africa must be challenged to operate within clear frameworks of accountability and transparency.

## **Conclusion**

Mpofu has taken the plunge by publishing, with much caution, his perceptions and experiences of governance after independence to date, particularly during Mugabe’s tenure as Prime Minister and President. Mpofu, has chosen not to discuss the post 2017 politics and governance issues that have arisen in the ‘New Dispensation’ in light of his ministerial experiences under Mugabe and after. Nevertheless, his memoirs are a welcome contribution to the literature by ZANU PF insiders since they avail the readers some insights into and understanding of his thinking and actions on specific issues and political actors within ZANU PF. Mpofu’s focus on the issues that are fore-grounded in his memoirs are as eloquent as the silences about other issues such as the dominance of men in ZANU PF despite some reference to the need for generational and gender sensitive renewal of the party. In the memoirs, there are vague references to the “legacy” that was to be restored. There is need for ZANU PF insiders to continue where Mpofu left off and to guide readers through a journey which enables them to understand the deficiencies within ZANU PF and to indicate the direction in which ZANU PF intends to drive Zimbabwe.

# **On the Shoulders of Memory and Ideological Renaissance: An Opportune Moment to Reminisce?**

Dickson Dzora

The publishing of Dr Obert Mpfu's autobiography ushers in a novel precedent for Zimbabwe to reimagine the tenets of our nationalist historiography beyond the hegemonic parameters of our erstwhile colonisers and their present-day Zimbabwean anti-establishment proxies. This follows the Zimbabwean agrarian reform triggered neo-colonial counter-attack to decentre the centrality of ZANU PF in the Zimbabwean national memory market. The systematic silencing of the past through the exaggerated underscore of the ideologically flawed Zimbabwean "crisis narrative" by our crisis-regime academia makes Mpfu's publication a befitting epistemic counter-narrative to the politics of contested national re-remembering. I argue that beyond the internal historicity complexities and contradictions defining the existential personality of ZANU PF, Mpfu's piece is reflective of a new political climate within the party. At a broader level, Mpfu's memoir illustrates the Second-Republic's new political culture grounded on instilling political reform. As such, this review locates the ideological bedrock of Mpfu's autobiography in articulating ZANU PF and Zimbabwe's political reconfiguration under President Emmerson D Mnangagwa. To this end, this review focuses on the ideological motivations to the authorship of Mpfu's book and explains the significance of this timely publication to Zimbabwe's liberation legacy archive.

## **Context of Mpfu's Self-Writing**

The author is ZANU PF's Secretary for Administration and his political expression is guided by the party's norms and values as defined in its constitution—espousing the objectives and conduct of all bona fide ZANU PF members. This is both a limitation and a merit to any similar exercise of self-writing by any senior member of any political party. As a

limitation, autobiography writing by partisan insiders suffers censorship from party policy positions and realist interests. As a result, the enterprise of political self-writing is inherently marked by perennial partisan biases. However, Mpfu is not the first to have his narrative punctuated by partisan prejudice and ideological territorial marking. In the history of political self-writing in post-independent Zimbabwe, this trend is evident in Morris Nyagumbo's *With the People: An autobiography from the Zimbabwe Struggle* (1980); Nkomo's memoir, *The Story of My Life* (1984); Fay Chung's *Re-Living the Second Chimurenga* (2006); Tekere's *A Lifetime of Struggle* (2007); Judith Todd's *Through the Darkness: A Life in Zimbabwe* (2007) and Cephas Msipa's *In Pursuit of Freedom and Justice: A Memoir* (2015); Tshinga Dube's *Quite Flows the Zambezi* among other memoirs by Zimbabwean political insiders. The above-cited memoirs are self-narratives of individuals whose affinity to ZANU PF can be classified within periodical overlaps of membership and non-membership to the ruling party. However, the "insider" as a self-narrative voice in articulating the political is prevalent and proves the intertwined relationship between political personhood and national memory. Through his writing Mpfu affirms commitment and loyalty to the political particularly his allegiance to ZANU PF:

ZANU's electoral triumph leading to the 1980 landmark transition showed the extent of the party's popularity. It made more sense for me to situate my future political interests in ZANU. As a result, my decision to join ZANU was a result of a clear evaluation of the future of Zimbabwean politics. By then, ZANU presented itself as the party of the future. It did not make sense for me to be in the opposition. After all, opposition parties are formed to be the Government-in-waiting. I had the opportunity to join those in Government then. I did exactly that and, 40 years down the line, ZANU PF is still the party in Government. I recall tendering my resignation from ZAPU at the time. I was warned that I was headed towards the end of my political career (Mpfu 2020 p. 57).

Mpfu's account is rooted in his submission of allegiance to ZANU PF, at the same time, his writing serves as a special homage to the Godfathers of Zimbabwean nationalism such as the late Cde Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Dr Joshua Nyongolo Nkomo. The clearly defined pro-ZANU PF

perspective informing the themes of Obert Mpfu's autobiography asserts the legitimacy of ZANU PF's ideological existence within Zimbabwe's contested political space. Mpfu's life history immersed in the past and contemporary political gives the reader vivid insights on the Second-Republic's views towards political transformation and posterity:

...ZANU PF is the custodian of the triumph of the liberation agenda. In as much as the party was successful in leading the fight against colonialism, it needs to strengthen its cause for the realisation of new solutions for the contemporary challenges which the country is facing. The party needs to go beyond servicing its power consolidation interests. As custodians of the liberation of this country, we must be the vanguard of the objectives of our revolution... (Mpfu 2020 p. 66).

The author also fixates his current role as the ZANU PF Secretary for Administration within the ruling party's organisational culture-change. Mpfu attributes this to a glossary of ZANU PF's current professionalization standards inaugurated by President ED Mnangagwa's leadership in the party and its operational reform since November 2017. This internal institutional reform within ZANU PF can be credited for contributing to Mpfu's writing. Likewise, this could also explain Retired Col Tshinga Dube's autobiography publishing in 2019. This writing and many more to come from senior ZANU PF officials set the ground for a new narrative generation and alternates the silencing of nationalist actors in the claim to national belonging. This is even pronounced by the in the Foreword of this book:

The anti-imperialist agenda would be a piecemeal if the frontline participants our liberation struggle are not pro-active in reflecting on the role of the gun in the birthing post-colonial state in Africa. The failure to reconnect to the ideological foundation of our existence through authentic memorialization will wipe away the keenness to safeguard our liberation values. For too long the narration of our history has been a preserve of institutions disposed to dignifying colonial control on knowledge production (Chiwenga 2021 p. iii).

## The Targeted Reader and the Ideological Thrust of the Memoir

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is a self-narration of a patriot who takes the reader through his path of conviction to the liberation of Zimbabwe. Mpfu's recollection about his involvement in the formative stage of the construction of Zimbabwe's post-colonial state highlights a sense of continuity in his convictions to the Zimbabwean nation question. His contemporary role in Zimbabwean politics depicts a high sense of ideological consistency which is very pronounced in the norms and values of the nationalist movement.

Future generations must be constantly reminded that the modern African state, Zimbabwe, in particular, was born out of the need to break the inequalities created by colonialism. As such, this writing is a reminiscence of the ideas which united us yesterday and must unite us today and forever. Through the shared reflections in this submission, I hope to encourage our next generation of leaders to continuously embrace the dignity which our independence delivered to us to be free people (Mpfu 2020 p. 5-6).

From the above position, Mpfu's autobiography serves as a patriotic epistle to remind the previously colonised that our independence has its genealogy in the shackles of imperialism. As such, the book addresses the need for the constant unchaining of the African mind. This can be only achieved when the liberation legacy is located in our present political culture as the living law of the African continent. The emphasis on the continent and the footnote reference to the nation (Zimbabwe) substantiates the writer's propensity to the virtues of pan-Africanism. This makes Mpfu's book a valuable read for anyone with an interest in the retention of Global-South memory, political liberation, epistemic freedom and the self-reclamation of the African. With the emphasis on loyalty to the continent and the nation, Mpfu's self-account epitomises the core values of ZANU PF in continuing decolonisation by means of reinventing Zimbabwe's economic and political democratisation. The vigorous emphasis on the issue of ideology in the book resonates with the unique description of the Zimbabweans by Cubans as the "granite people who managed to tame the stone and eat its weathered residues". The granite is not only a strong national symbol linked to the architecture of

Great Zimbabwe. It represents strength and our firm virtues of existence as a people dating back to the Munhumutapa people. Great Zimbabwe –that ageless granite complex represents our timeless scientific brilliance as a nation. Therefore, Mpofu’s writing reminds us all that our politics cannot be disconnected from the ancient creeds of our existence before colonialism:

Even before colonialism eats into the scene, our broad-based value systems which translate into our indigenous political norms already constitute democracy without the Western terminology. Then, of course, democracy in Africa derives its contemporary existence mainly from the continent’s revolution against colonialism, a revolution which Lobengula and Nehanda did not need to invoke a duplicitous Western canon but rather our indigenous values. Africa compares favourably in the hostile exchange of civilisations at the juncture of imperial conquest and nationalist resistance. It is these values that African contemporary political thought refers back to for the elementary qualification of democracy (Mpofu 2020 p. 141-142).

In unpacking the political values unique to the Zimbabwean political space, Mpofu is unapologetic about the significance of the Third-Chimurenga – and its clarion call to Zimbabwe’s ground-breaking agrarian reform. This explains why the discourse of the land and the soil is eminent throughout the book:

At the centre of decolonisation, the “soil” was and is still a motif of reclaiming our economic, social and political birthright. The soil symbolises the geographic topography of the battles fought in Sipolilo, Hwange, Chinhoyi and many other parts of our country. The soil bears witness to the timeless trails by indigenous feet long before the arrival of the settler minority to loot and plunder. On many soils of this country, millions of umbilical cords are stashed as part of the sacred ritual of marrying every product of the womb with the divine: the soil. In the depths of the womb of this soil, the remains of the gallant fighters of our freedom are interred, not to mention the many heroic lineages of our beloved motherland (Mpofu 2020 p. 5)



Mpofu (2020 p. 5) further asserts that:

The struggle for this soil, therefore, represents the most sacred aspirations of our struggle, one to which our national interest must be incessantly aligned. This land, born out of the barrel of the gun, is a spiritual connecting point to our patriotism embodied in the ethnic and racial constructs of our society.

This position is closely attached to the “people-centred” policy of ZANU PF as a mass-line political party. What Mpofu clearly articulates in his book is that any political party detached from the discourse of the “soil” has no appeal to the “Sons and Daughters of the Soil” –to whom his self-reflection is addressed to in a bid to promote a decolonial political consciousness. As such, Mpofu credits the late President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Robert Gabriel Mugabe for championing the remarrying the land with its indigenous owners through the Fast-Track Land Reform Programme. With the same token, Mpofu acknowledges President Emmerson Mnangagwa’s ideological consistency with regards to the irreversibility of Zimbabwe’s land reform. Chapter 10 which exclusively discusses the land reform programme is prefaced by President Mnangagwa’s views on decolonising land ownership. In buttressing the subject of policy continuity in the Second-Republic the author is alive to Zimbabwe’s early entrapments in neoliberal global economic hegemony tenets of Structural Adjustment Programmes. The book challenges Africa to rethink its economic policy models beyond the local innovation-hindering prescriptions of economic development by institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). However, this critique of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) is in line with the principle of mutual beneficitation tenets of Zimbabwe’s current engagement and re-engagement policy. Without doubt, beyond Mpofu’s self-account, this book submits a political narrative paradigm shift in Zimbabwe as it silences artificial popularity of neo-liberal exaggerations of a continent in crisis awaiting the benevolence of the former coloniser for redemption.

## Political Transitions and Continuity in Zimbabwean Politics

Mpfu asserts that the anti-colonial ideology has manifested its existence throughout Zimbabwean politics. Likewise, virtues of democracy, sovereignty, distribution of the national wealth remain defined by the founding creed of independence. The transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe is exhaustively discussed. As a distant observer of the Lancaster Agreement and as one who was directly politically concerned at the time of the Lancaster Conference, Mpfu discusses the pitfalls of negotiated independence and how it produced anti-colonial hegemony pre-emptive mechanisms. This explains why the land question later dominated the quest for economic freedom.

Mpfu's discussion on the land reform programme entails a critical transitional revolution phase of the Zimbabwean economy. Mpfu insists that land reform as a revolutionary process formed the underlining principle of democratising the economy and breaking White monopoly capital. In Mpfu's view, this represents the total reinstatement of the liberation tradition in the sense that the armed struggle was premised on the fight for land in as much as the land remains a perennial symbol of wealth. As such, the land revolution remarried Zimbabweans with their ancestral wealth. Though the spiritual interconnection of wealth and power is abstractly tackled in the autobiography, the divinity of the politics of land is a reverberating theme of the book which deserves amplification if there are considerations to produce revised versions of the book.

It is through the land question that Zimbabwe's major call for political transition is neo-colonially pronounced through neo-liberal tenets of reform. It has been clear that the call for regime change in Zimbabwe has been founded on the need to contest the legitimacy of the agrarian revolt which culminated in the official mass redistribution of the land. In Mpfu's view, the land question becomes a contested transitional think-tank in the Zimbabwean political space –with discourses of “patriots” and “sell-outs”, “nationalists” and “reactionaries” being at the centre of distinguishing those supporting the aspirations of freedom and others inclined to the neo-liberal triggered course for regime change in Zimbabwe. As such, the landscape of power in Zimbabwe becomes

more defined in terms of nationalist and anti-nationalist contestations for political transition dating back to the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999. This also saw the widespread mushrooming of anti-establishment politically active Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) across Zimbabwe.

Beyond the obvious polarised definitions of power contestation at a national level, Chapter 14 and 15 firmly elaborate a protracted yearning for ZANU PF's self-renewal. Mpfu traces the consistent manifestation of the liberation philosophy and its obvious contradictions in challenging the then status-quo which was suppressing or purporting to support leadership change in ZANU PF. The role of the military as a central defining factor of Zimbabwe's political transition is also discussed with a view to deconstructing the narrow definition of the military as an institution which should not be accorded any space in deciding Zimbabwean politics. To this end, Mpfu posits that the:

The omnipresence of the military in Zimbabwean politics nullifies the narrow dictum of "politics leading the gun." The fraternal relationship between "politics and the gun" was symbolically expressed through the land reform which was initiated by war-veterans towards the new millennium. The resurgence of the economic decolonisation agenda led by war-veterans corrected a long-neglected injustice. With the politically negotiated terms of power, political independence was born, but it took a further militant step for economic equality to be realised (Mpfu 2020 p. 212).

The author further submits that the role of war-veterans (military) in the Third-Chimurenga "rescinded post-colonial policy compromises and defied the bureaucratic orders which secured interests of White monopoly capital" (Mpfu 2020 p. 212). Therefore, the military has always played a decisive factor in the construction of power in ZANU PF. Therefore, the November 2017 "civil-military aided transition" (p. 243)

## **Conclusion**

This submission must be a reminder to those who have been on the forefront of contributing towards the development of the modern-day

Zimbabwean nation-state to take an active role in curating our national memory. Through such collective efforts towards national remembering, we are then able to dismember any selective memory machinations and infrastructure inclined to emphatically posturing more of what divides us than what unites to shared goals and national aspirations. ZANU PF as an institution of national memory needs to take up the task of promoting this culture of writing and collecting memory. This will challenge the existing neo-colonial indoctrination within our political discourse.

The manifestation of neo-colonial nuances of power amplified through the academia is a perpetuation of the total overthrow of the African socio-economic and political system through settler occupation. In surviving the decapitation of the African knowledge space we need a total disconnect from the very pedagogical vestiges of colonial capture of the African mind. Therefore, Mpfu's writing imposes a relink to that long lost ontological claim to African liberation. As such, this publication unequivocally asserts that in as much as we are pursuing re-engagement in the realm of the political we also need to solicit the same at the level of the epistemological. The counterbalance to re-engagement at the paradigm of both the political and epistemological reinforces state-craft architecture which is deeply embodied in terms of long-lasting virtues of a people and their passionate self-defining path to total liberation.

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# ***On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* and the Landscape Auto/Biography Writing in Zimbabwe.**

Lawrence Mhandara

## **The Zimbabwean Landscape of Self-Writing**

Zimbabwe's historiography, both nationalist politics and post-colonial developments have been a subject of considerable debate and huggermugger. This situation persists four decades after uhuru. Consequently, published materials, especially autobiographies, authored by 'political insiders' tend to summon colossal interest as the audience anticipate some illuminating disclosures on the enigmatic political dynamics in the country's political corpus. Quick examples of such works include: Maurice Nyagumbo's *With the People: An Autobiography from the Zimbabwean Struggle*; Ken Flower's *Serving Secretly: An Intelligence Chief on Record: Rhodesia into Zimbabwe 1964 to 1981*; Ian Smith's *Bitter Harvest: The Great Betrayal and the Dreadful Aftermath*; Joshua Nkomo's *the Story of My Life*; and Coltart's *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe* among many others. These together with dominant scholarship on nationalist struggles and post-independence political economy development overemphasised the neoliberal agenda and the highly romanticised deficiencies of the nationalist project. The ruling party, its leadership and policies have been labelled absolute antitheses to democracy, human rights, rule of law and impediments to economic modernisation whilst the opposite applied to the opposition forces that were uncritically celebrated as moral and progressive.

## **A Nationalist Historiographical Re-centring**

Contemporary historiography is now showing that the ruling party, its leadership and policies have been a target of a negative publicity campaign fronted by powerful imperial forces that systematically employ local proxies to tame the emancipatory agenda of the liberation movement. It

is in this vein of challenging, reconstructing and deconstructing dominant ideologies and paradigms that Obert Mpofu's book, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* emerges. The publication of Mpofu's autobiography, written while he was still in active politics, arrived at a time of renewed political debate pitting the revolutionary, anti-colonial, anti-imperial and pan-African bloc against the neo-liberal brigade, supported by external patrons disparaging the edicts of governance pursued by liberation movement to reconstitute the victims of colonialism and neo-imperialism. The work is poised to stimulate enthusiastic responses along polarised political lines. In spite of the potential impact of politically polarised context, my view is that the book naturally elicits the commendation of anyone with a genuine interest in Zimbabwe's historiography.

### **Grappling with Neo-liberalism**

The contribution threatens to annihilate the neoliberal misrepresentations of history and events in the mould of Coltart's *The Struggle Continues: 50 Years of Tyranny in Zimbabwe*. Presented in a factually consistent and coherent pattern, the major theme in the book is positioned on the forceful rejection of the claims by neoliberal scholarship and grievance autobiography. Its fulcrum is the resilience of the emancipatory goals of the liberation project that sought to de-racialise and de-colonise an exclusionary political economy that safeguarded the rights and privileges of colonialism and imperialism. The book interlaces a rich mixture of events-telling and analytical paradigm employed by an existential insider who has indubitably experienced the colonial and the post-colonial dispensations. The book relies heavily on the rich memory of the story teller's voyage from childhood, liberation encounters to the Mugabe and Mnangagwa dispensations. The book is divided into 15 substantive chapters of reasonable length, covering 223 pages.

### **Anti-Colonial Ideological Stead**

A sober parsing of the treatise demonstrates that the prime motivation for Mpofu's book is to unpack the historical basis for comprehending the post-colonial socio-economic and political realities. Mpofu argues that his book:

...explores the ideological force and strategic military inputs which made the armed struggle a success... A key intention of the memoir is to also discuss the major political processes that our country has undergone from 1980 to date...it will leave the reader with a more intimate understanding of the Zimbabwe national question... (p. 2).

This motivation is reflected patiently and unfailingly. In nearly every chapter, considerable space is devoted to castigating colonialism and imperialism in all its manifestations while exalting Afrocentricism, nationalism and pan-Africanism. In fact, Mpfu implacably demonises the exploitative character of colonial and post-colonial Western footprint which justified both the war of liberation and the radicalised post-colonial states, represented by the post-fast track land reform epoch. Besides Chapter 6, “Professional Career, Business Empire and Marriage” all chapters, including the introduction, explicitly focus on the acrimonious relations with colonialism and imperialism and their timeless designs to weaken the liberation spirit. Mpfu argues that:

Our struggle for independence was driven by the will to decimate the economic marginalisation of our people... a response to our systematic downgrading as second class...by the colonial minority (p. 5).

Ninety nine percent of the book is made up of events and analysis focusing on Mpfu’s personal involvement, without undermining his compatriots, in the liberation struggle, and post-colonial political economy dynamics as he and other nationalists sought to democratise the economy to facilitate the emancipation of the African. He humbly concedes that the fight against colonialism was collective: “I consciously found myself committed to the assignment of collective African resistance to colonial domination” (p. 15). Throughout, the compulsion to state the case for liberation ideology and the urge by the neo-colonial and neo-imperial forces to destabilise and block its goals is consistent. Mpfu emotionally reminds the audience that the challenges in Zimbabwe, indeed in Africa, have never been de-linked from the Western capitalist schemes in the country. He echoes the affirmative revolutionary philosophy that “To understand the modern day relations of the formerly colonised and the colonisers, the history of colonialism and the ideologies it served must be



engaged” (p. 109). On this account, he grumbles at a political opposition in Zimbabwe which has become thoroughly ahistorical yet parroting and empowering the Western neo-imperial agenda in the flawed belief that it was championing the ideals of democracy (Chapter 9). Consequently, the book observes, instead of rallying behind distributive policies like the land reform, the opposition has lambasted it, going further to aid foreign agendas through calling for sanctions that aim to perpetuate the 1979 constitutional heist on land (Chapter 9, 10). This also manifests in the “...overemphasised misrepresentation of ...economic challenges as a product of the liberation movement’s failure” (p. 110), by a colonially backed opposition.

### **Power Struggles and Internal Contradiction in ZANU PF**

Even as the book explores the complex and asphyxiating power struggles which detonated along factional lines in the post-2013 period, Mpfu boldly states that revered cadres of the war of liberation such as Vitalis Zvinvashe, Solomon Mujuru and Dumiso Dabengwa capitulated to neo-imperial pressures to impose political transitions that would have weakened the values of the liberation project by pressuring Mugabe to prematurely retire. But Mpfu sees the replacement of Zvinvashe with Chiwenga as the ZDF chief as the salvation for both Mugabe and the party (Chapter 14). Equally, the internecine succession scuffles that catalysed the fall of Mugabe in 2017 are linked to the loss of ideological consciousness by the G40 faction of the ruling party which was underwritten by the former first lady’s marital proximity to the former president. This, Mpfu maintains, threatened to undercut the values of the liberation movement. According to Mpfu, the execution of Operation Restore Legacy (ORL) by the ZDF in 2018 was therefore a categorical imperative to rediscover the values of the liberation project and safeguard Mugabe’s legacy which was under siege from his wife’s faction which he publicly failed to keep under check on account of advanced age. Contrary to the belief that ORL was a factional intervention, the memoir amplifies the locus that the operation’s sole objective was to “...uproot all anti-revolutionary elements in ZANU-PF and ignite the rebirth of the liberation legacy. It was important for ZANU-PF to be remodelled to its giant liberation personality to decimate the impact of the party’s capture by...reactionaries” (p. 232). ORL thus

symbolically captured the fraternal relationship between politics and the gun (p. 212), that has imposing roots in the nationalists consensus founded during the anti-colonial struggle and nurtured around the enduring ethos of the liberation philosophy.

### **The Overriding Textual Merits**

My conviction is that reading the memoir while the author is still alive eliminates the problems of the ideologies of narrativity that is associated with posthumous autobiographies. *On the Shoulder of Struggle* was published in 2020 when the author was part of the reader, eliminating any speculation and gibberish that its contents had been tampered with by the editor. The fear of unilateral editorial alterations that often prejudice or even complicate the depiction of history and perspectives on contemporary discourses does not arise in the case of Mpfu's submission. *On the Shoulders of Struggle* documents the details of Mpfu's life from the point of his childhood, his education and business career to a liberation fighter, then the *Gukurahundi* experiences, up to being a high ranking government and ruling party official in proximity with Nkomo, Mugabe and ultimately Mnangagwa. Although it is natural for self-location treatises to conceal some facts and events for political and moral motives or even loss of memory, it is soothing to discover that Mpfu largely overcomes the temptation to suppress important facts about the contradictions that he experienced in his private and public life.

However, like many other self-writers, the author could not totally ward off the lure of the dominant approach at the heart of autobiographical writing that inclined him to explain his political journey based on an overt pan-African ideological stance. Only after more autobiographies from 'political insiders' of Mpfu's stature emerge to contest the accounts of historical and contemporary events presented in this book, we can begin to accept the central challenge in autobiographies that:

Any story is only half a story: there is no evidence, empirical or scientifically verifiable, to suggest that when we tell our stories we do or should remember every detail... As we remember details of our stories,

we suppress other details, dismember or disremember consciously or unconsciously only certain facts and deploy the words in certain calculated ways to elicit certain responses.”<sup>1</sup>

For now the book remains a good read for students of history and public policy, in particular those who seek to expand their warehouses of pan-African knowledge and governance told by a political insider keen to unshackle the African mind from the quirks of ahistorical and exploitative neoliberal discourses.

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1 Maurice Taonezvi Vambe (2009) *Fictions of Autobiographical Representations: Joshua Nkomo's The Story of My Life*, JLS/TLW, 25:1, p. 81.

# Obert Mpfu and Autobiographic Construction of the Nation

Chipo Chirimuuta

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is a memoir grounded on the Zimbabwean anti-colonial thought written by Obert M. Mpfu who joined the nationalist liberation struggle at the age of 16. He survived the colonial ruthless massacres and worked in the First Republic in various portfolios. He successfully made it into the Second Republic which was ushered in after the 2018 Presidential elections in Zimbabwe. In narrating his experiences in the struggle as an adolescent and as a seasoned freedom fighter, Mpfu gives the readers an insight into the ZAPU side of the struggle for the liberation of Zimbabwe which has in most cases been given a cursory approach. From the point he joins ZANU PF his writing becomes the mouthpiece of the party.

Mpfu's memoir is a must-read book for those people who have a keen interest in understanding the history of Zimbabwe. It would be a very good book for history students who need exposure to different narratives with regards to the history of their nation and how it has shaped their present and possible future trajectory. In Mpfu's book we witness the victims of 90 years of colonial subjugation writing their own story in which they themselves are protagonists of the storyline, taking action to determine and control their destiny. Mpfu's autobiography is an additional voice to the narratives documented on the protracted journey of Zimbabwe from colonial bondage, political independence right up to the economic empowerment of the masses on which the Third Chimurenga was hinged. Narrating from within the Party and the Government, Mpfu uses his narrative dexterity and brings out some of the contradictions and pitfalls of nationalism, characteristic of our struggle for emancipation, that have been circumvented by many narratives.

## Roots of Post-Independence Conflict in Zimbabwe

The ‘struggles within the struggle’<sup>1</sup> for independence are conspicuously painted right from the early anti-colonial resistances where he points out that the splitting of the nationalist movements was ethnic-based. The ethnic-based hostilities and seeming incompatibilities that showed their ugly head in Zimbabwe’s infancy (as an ‘independent’ state) are outlined and given clarity by use of examples such as the opening of fire against fellow combatants at Mgagao in the 1960s, the mistrust and purging of fellow combatants of different ethnic background within the ZIPRA and ZANLA camps and the Entumbane incident during the ceasefire period. Mpfu links these contradictions to the fuels that lit the gloomy *Gukurahundi* experience. Unlike some narratives that have been sponsored by neo-liberal players, Mpfu provides an alternative narration to the *Gukurahundi* problem. He tries to detoxify people’s minds of the toxic narratives of neo-colonialists who thrive on blaming the victims for their suffering. In this regard, Mpfu hints on external forces that peddled the bloody “ethnic” conflict which has attracted the attention of human rights organisations and the international community.

The book points to the idea that the champions of Western countries were accomplices in the *Gukurahundi* incident, since they watched silently when it unfolded, mainly because they believed an unstable Zimbabwe created a conducive atmosphere for the longevity of the imperial system in South Africa. Mpfu does not mint his words as he claims that *Gukurahundi* was indirectly used to thwart and undermine Soviet Union hegemony on the independent Zimbabwe. Whether deliberately or not, Mpfu decides to ignore the fact that China was also an alternative and potential communist sponsor of the liberation movements, that equally threatened the economic interests of capitalist nations, alongside Eastern European countries such as Yugoslavia, Romania, Czechoslovakia and Caribbean countries such as Cuba that had adopted the socialist ideology. His focus on the Soviet Union is premised on the fact that it was the sponsor of ZAPU and its military wing ZIPRA, hence the silence on China that was giving support to ZANU and its military wing ZANLA.

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1 Not necessarily in the context of Masipula Sithole’s text.

## **Vestiges of Colonial State Architecture**

The book locates the genealogy of present-day Zimbabwe's predicament to the capitalistic policy instruments that consolidated colonial enterprise hegemonic systems which were inherited on the eve of independence. It conjures that the economic crisis in Zimbabwe must be understood within the broader context of neo-colonialism. Through narrating his life experiences, Mpfu is able to paint a dazzling picture of the imperialist chicanery that manifested itself in the colonially orchestrated Lancaster House Agreement which created a pseudo independent nation. The memoir divulges that the agreement endorsed an economic set-up where the industry was colonial settler class dominated and the land ownership a preserve of the white minority. Mpfu demonstrates that the Lancaster House delivered nation had fertile structural grounds for mass disillusionment and despondency. The agreement, he discloses, consolidated White economic supremacy while negating the land reform for which the liberation war had been fought and human lives lost. In the book, the Lancaster House Agreement has been addressed in more than two chapters to give the settlement adequate room for exposure to scrutiny, allowing the author to effectively demonstrate that "by attaining independence through a negotiated settlement, the active precipitation of the Zimbabweans in the [economic] power matrix was compromised" (Mpfu, 2020 p. 191).

## **Tackling Neo-colonial Hegemony**

Mpfu also chronicles the role of the Global Financial Institutions in the consolidation of the minority white interests, through his handling of the IMF sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP). He paints a gloomy picture of the erosion of structures that protected the poor masses that ensued. The book points at the high levels of unemployment, retrenchment of civil servants, reduced social welfare expenditure, removal of subsidies, general decline of productivity and the setting in of urban poverty. For Mpfu, ESAP confined Africans to the receiving end of capitalism. With ESAP, the ruling party in Zimbabwe lost popularity and the support of the urban communities. It paved the ground against which the reader is expected to understand the prevalence of high levels

of opposition party support in the urban centres than in the rural areas. In the book Mpfu bemoans the empty-shell neo-colonial freedoms that sways the young generation from the struggle for the land and the restitution of other resources in favour of what he perceives as hollow freedoms that divert youth from the critical economic liberation.

### **The Land Question and the Fate of Neo-colonial Hegemony**

The book highlights that the agrarian reform that had propelled and given impetus to the First and Second Chimurenga will be a recurrent ugly side of our history and the Zimbabwean political arena if left unresolved. The Fast Track Land Reform/ Third Chimurenga/ Hondo Yeminda has been given great attention in Mpfu's book. This historical episode provided a living example of the people's agency in destroying, delinking and deconstruction of the imperial hegemonic structures. *Hondo Yeminda* witnessed the unfolding of the drama whose intention was to eradicate foreign monopoly of the means of production and the levelling of the skewed global political-economic terrain. It demonstrated the jittery and agitated response of the neo-colonial forces as expressed in the accentuated friction that culminated in the ZIDERA and EU sanctions of 2001 and 2002 respectively. The book paints a vivid picture of the vicious nature of the coloniality orchestrated conflict that ensued as the masses repossessed what had been stolen from their ancestors, their land, water sources, minerals, forests and wildlife. In response the neo-colonialists adopted a selective reflection of the past demanding to be compensated for 'their' land. For Mpfu, African states will face a bleak future if they do not repossess the land and use it as a critical resource.

### **National Question and Legacy Continuities**

The memoir further puts on the spotlight the glorified heroes of the Zimbabwe's liberation struggle for independence highlighting their ideological differences and areas of agreement. Mpfu tries to highlight how they were manipulated by the neo-colonial player demonstrating how the legacy of each one of them was dented in the process. The book explores Operation Restore Legacy. In addressing this episode of the Zimbabwean history that ushered in the Second Republic of Zimbabwe,

he associates it with the economic revival of the nation, rescuing Zimbabwe from international isolation and re-aligning the nation with the liberation tradition. However, he skirts on the fact that there was a constellation of contested factional interests from within the ruling party itself, in a background of foreign interference, from the Eastern and Western countries. Thus, the struggle became one of subduing one faction in an attempt to justify the emergence of the other faction. The paradox that still lingers is that the legacy of the liberation struggle which is hinged on total economic empowerment through land and agrarian reform, mineral resource extraction, processing, value addition and beneficiation that would lead to industrial development, seems to be losing momentum at a time when the indigenous people are expecting it to be gaining momentum.

Narratives on Operation Restore Legacy and the Second Republic have their own controversies, considering that they were and continue to be written within the context of a highly polarised knowledge ecosystem, Mpfu has been brave enough to write about the transition. The major issue that Mpfu, consciously or unconsciously, brings out through the book is that the Second Republic has an obligation of preventing the legacy from playing into the traps of the neo-colonialist. It has an uphill task of achieving total decolonisation and total economic empowerment of the indigenous people if it is going to accomplish the unfinished business of the armed struggle. The new leaders, thus, have to be careful to avoid playing into the tricks of the neo-liberalists who fan differences to divide and take advantage of the indigenous people. We all need to remember that “in our quest to enjoy freedom, we must not forget that our social contract was born out of the aggressive dislocation of the colonial powers” (Mpfu, 2020 p. 6).



# Self-Writing, Epistemic Freedom and Rethinking Masculinity of Memory in Zimbabwe

Vongai Z Nyawo

## Introduction

Following the production of *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* by Dr Obert M. Mpofu a successful book launch welcomed the new arrival. Mpofu's book launch on the 14th of October, 2020 officiated by the Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, Retired General Dr Constantine DGN Chiwenga who expressed the commitment of the government in championing epistemic freedom. Over the years, there has been an intense, but subtle rift between the state and the academia. The publication of such a political text and the consequent open discussion on its contents accentuates a high degree of Zimbabwe's academic democratisation. Having an entire Vice President of Zimbabwe engaging with real-time issues within the landscape of cognitive justice gave a refreshing feeling that for once the academia can directly interact with state elites in the divergence of ideas. This sets a sustainable trajectory to the national dialogue which promises the potential for the academia to safely speak truth to power. Besides creating a new avenue for the exchange of ideas, the book launch also gave a window view into a future of continued production of new knowledge by state actors to encourage the mainstreaming of the plural and contested of ideas. This is mainly because Mpofu's writing reaches out to readers of both official and alternative history. With the book's promising facet to stimulate debate on Zimbabwe's history and the continued struggle to find common ground to our diverse national and partisan identities, the author and the government must be credited for creating space for a far-reaching and cross-cutting national conversation. The publishers of the autobiography, Leaders for Africa Network, have yet again created another chance to interact with issues of national interest situated within Mpofu's life of service to Zimbabwe.

## The Writer and the Writing Style

Mpfu is a political, business and academic giant. A man who has seen it all, who is tried and tested in old and new political portfolios. Going forward he proffers an Africological strategy (read Nabudere on the theory of Africology: as abridged in Nyawo 2013) that he lays out and articulates for real African actualisation. Previous biographies, even if they conformed to the style of biographical writing, they did not come with solutions. In Mpfu's own words, his autobiography is dedicated "To the living and departed anti-colonial freedom fighters" (Mpfu 2020 p. xv), and this is a bold undertaking. What this does is to immortalise mere mortals by making their footprint indelible regardless of their status. This dedication is the more reason the women folk should write their own story.

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* takes the traditional self-writing posture with strong narrative nuances of active participation in Zimbabwean politics by an "insider". The authorship of Mpfu's self-account takes the obvious merit of transcending the narrow third-person account, allowing the reader to benefit through the stream of consciousness (read Dorothy Richardson and Virginia Woolf for more on this style of writing) of an active senior political player in this instance. We get the privilege to hear Obert Mpfu – a national political figure speak to himself and his heart, we listen in to conversations direct from his heart and mind. We are taken on a journey to explore his thoughts and experiences, a journey into the future unravelling the national question. However, this does not take away the partisan bias in Mpfu's attempt to articulate the past, present and perennial aspirations of the nation through his self-perspective.

As the title suggests; *Memoirs of a Political Insider*, the style and the content takes up the tradition of other African political insiders' style of auto/biography writing. At the heartbeat of the book's themes, the area of interest is the nation and the continent of Africa. This situates this publication more on the African political theory-centred literature which is usually focused on the need to:

- i. Trace the source of anti-colonial struggle mobilisation of the masses in Zimbabwe and Africa at large;
- ii. Consolidate the goals of our hard-earned liberation and finding strategies to confronting the pestilence of neo-colonialism;
- iii. Locate the persistent presence of ideological contradictions within African liberation movements. This he does by locating his direct affiliation to ZAPU and the present-day ZANU PF. His cross-cutting presence in the face of these contradictions only proves that nationalist movements are rejuvenated by existential ambiguities. Last, the book dwells more on a shared desire to;
- iv. Reinvent a lasting ideological locus for liberation movements in African to protect the sphere of national liberation, national sovereignty and the national economy through a strong self-defining culture of democratisation.

As such, this publication is more than just an autobiography. As I have underscored in the blurb, Mpfu has presented the academia and the general reader of Zimbabwean politics with philosophical rendition to self-location, thereby transforming the climate of auto/biography writing in Zimbabwe. This is because unlike others:

- i. The author is writing from the corridors of power. Probably, this could be why the book harbours less anger compared to other biographical works by dislocated former political insiders. Could this mean that the tone of the book would have been different had Mpfu written from the political wayside?
- ii. He avoids excesses of detail about his single-handed insider role in Zimbabwe's political processes. However, this leaves the reader thinking that such a style is deployed to conceal some deeper political questions of the day. Might this mean that there was deliberate self-censorship as the contents of the book are arrested by official secrecy? More questions can be asked but the author gave us this much.

### **Women in Struggle**

As an African feminist thinker, I feel the writer could have done more to at least tell us about his mother in detail. The book is highly patriarchal

as the writer seems to only derive his political inspiration from his father, uncles, brothers and other male comrades. One would think that the writer was only born of men. Even after the passing on of his father to be single parented by his mother, the writer constantly maintains that he remained inspired by his father. Chapter 12 and 13 are dedicated to the inspiration the author got from the founding fathers of Zimbabwe Dr Joshua Nkomo and Cde Robert Mugabe. Even his reflections on the ZANU PF succession issues are more patriarchal pronounced (Chapter 14). The patriarchal construction of power in Zimbabwe and the entire African continent is also representative of the generic patriarchal reality of various national memories. With men predominantly centred in power, the writing of politics and national identities is bound to remain masculine. In the case of Zimbabwe, we have more masculine auto/biographies and this may be mistaken to represent the demography of women's participation in institutions of power hence prejudicing their locus of legitimacy in competitive and counter-epistemic interactions with their political and academic male counterparts. This knowledge gap deserves important attention considering the prominent role of women in Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and throughout the country's post-independence phase. There must be a deliberate approach to bring into cognisance the role of the female political insider in modern-day state-building.

While a small section of Chapter 6 is dedicated to his wife, a lifetime business partner and pillar of political support, Mpfu makes no effort to involve any other women in his work. His speech at the book launch took the same tone. Mpfu still enjoys unwavering support from his dear wife. He was silent about women except for his lovely wife and daughters who graced the occasion. Whether deliberate or not, one can tell even from the few pictures that feature in the book, women appear on only two pictures depicting his classmates. Therefore, Mpfu proved that his only task was to tell his story and not anybody else's experiences. I guess if Mpfu had the chance to pull out the ladies in the old pictures from his high school days, he would.

## **Women in Future Writings**

Going forward, this justifies the need for women who have been in the political space to come forward and locate their role in the construction of national memory. Failure to have ZPRA and ZANLA female cadres tell their stories like their fellow ZPRA and ZANLA male cadres have done only reduces the role of women to political by-standing while the men continue to locate themselves more on the inside of power. Women should begin to engage in writing that makes a revolution in perspective and themes from a masculine method of exposition (Nyawo 2013).

## **Conclusion**

This literary work is a true demonstration of leadership by Dr Mpfu and by Leaders for Africa Network (LAN). As I conclude, I want to invite women to write, not only to get the chance to put women's experiences as points of departure instead of men's according to Dorothy Richardson in Pilgrimage but to come out of the slumber of assuming that somebody else is capturing their history. In the same breath with the poem 'Can the White man Speak for Me?' women need to push their own urgency through writing because no one will speak for them. In the same token, those who were involved in the nationalist anti-colonial fight must write their own narratives. Likewise, Zimbabwe must be opened for more dialogue which gives traction to the democratisation of the academic space as underscored by the publication and launch of Dr Obert Mpfu's autobiography *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*.

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# **Moments of re-writing? Obert Mpofu's *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* and the politics of auto/biographical Truths**

Collen Sabao

## **The discursive nature of Zimbabwean auto/biographical writing and Mpofu's memoirs**

The corpus of self-writings emerging from Zimbabwe and penned by Zimbabwean liberation war stalwarts re/present a multiplicity of often divergent discourses and collide in the public sphere of what could be termed 'contrasting narratives of the Zimbabwean nation state'. Narratologically, they represent a dialogic re-writing of the story of Zimbabwe nation state from the era of the second liberation war (the second Chimurenga) to the euphoric days of Zimbabwe's independence – and even to the politics of the first and second republics. In this manner, they discursively and dialogically discourse with each other and more importantly with Zimbabwe's official historical metanarrative. Often times though, they discourse seemingly against each other – quite common for writings within the "...genre of self-life writing [which] is defined more solidly by its contradictions than by what binds it together... imbued with a politics of its own that starkly threatens any form of theoretical cohesion or the possibility of narrating coherent self-identities through it, as much as this is the most salient of its claims" (Javangwe & Sabao, 2018).

Mpofu vents bold personal statements on particularly sensitive and controversial issues in Zimbabwean contemporary politics: the *Gukurahundi* 'genocide', the Mugabe factor, ZANU PF membership and the Second Republic, historicising all and unapologetically stamping positions on all of them. Appreciating that the concept of re-writing signals heterogeneity and diversity of ideological positions and often reflects personal subjectivities in the interpretation of phenomenon or events, re-writing signifies processes through which a text is in commune with

preceding texts in a dialogic manner (See Bakhtin, 1981). This process of identity construction, also characteristic of self-writing, is thus varying, inconsistent and evolving. As such, at best, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* should be read as exactly what it is, one voice in what Bakhtin (1981) would refer to as the multiplicity of discursively divergent voices that constitute a singular text – for our purposes, the story of the Zimbabwean nation state. As Nhemachena (2020) submits, “Mpfu’s contribution offers a relevant contemporary antithesis to a Western political doctrine that rallies African youths against their own liberators” (p. x). This is but only one way of envisioning Mpfu’s social vision.

Fully awake to these vices that define the genre of self-writing specifically that “auto/biographical writing is always a subjective enterprise; a highly selective use of linguistic resources in the narration of experiential processes, Mpfu jostles our memories, imaginations and reflections on the historiography of the Zimbabwe we know presently – from his perspective, of course. Auto/biographical form in itself thus, is partial with truth, especially so in the construction of self-identity” (Sabao & Jvangwe, 2018, p. 39), *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* (2020) provides a ‘new’ voice and criticism of Zimbabwe’s historiography - and Mpfu here makes bold claims of providing a contrasting narrative – a counter discourse to the tainted official historical metanarrative and other self-wrote historical accounts of the Zimbabwean nation-state. Writing within the genre of self-life writing, which is defined more sturdily by its paradoxes than by what bonds it together, the narrative (re)configures our percepts of some of Zimbabwe’s exalted father figures – glorifying and challenging ‘grandstandings’ by some of them – albeit controversially.

“Imbued with a politics of its own that starkly threaten any possibilities of narrating cohesive self-imaginaries of the Zimbabwean nation-state” (Sabao & Jvangwe, 2018, p.40), the memoirs further espouse Mpfu’s convictions on the contexts that shaped liberation war movements during the colonial era and continue to shape contemporary Zimbabwe’s political and economic landscapes. A powerful imaginary narrated from the perspective, for a change, of the foot soldier of Zimbabwe’s revolutionary war, the narrative unquestioningly explicates and



rationalises the decisions and views of the self-author on various critical issues and bravely exposes himself to critique and disdain. The memoirs evince overt preoccupations by Mpfu to “cleanse” an image tainted by accusations and a rationalisation of the often controversial decisions and choices by his person – mostly prominently his decision to join and continue to be a member of Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) (albeit to the chagrin of his former comrades within the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU), his continued celebration of the late Former President, Robert Gabriel Mugabe, his belief that the “*Gukurahundi* has been manipulated to expose the selective reality of our tensions” and finally his continued service to the Second Republic under incumbent President, Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa.

### **Re-writing and the politics of self-writing**

This memoir, as all memoirs from Zimbabwean liberation war heroes do, is a celebration of the history and life of the author - a personal and intimate account of their life from birth, contributions to the liberation war and independent Zimbabwe. As such, it does not preclude itself from criticism of inherent contradictions and accusations of peddling half-truths. We argue here that reading this narrative should be done cognizant of the fact that,

The theory of self-expression that has driven various strands of autobiographical theory assumes that self-identity emerges from a psychic interiority, located somewhere “inside” the narrating subject. There it lies in a state of coherent, unified, evidentiary, even expectant, awaiting transmission to a surface, a tongue, a pen, a keyboard (Smith, 1995, p. 17).

Bourdieu (2000, p.300) cited in Sabao and Javangwe (2018) explains this incongruity that typifies auto/biographical narratives by postulating that the notion self-narration evinces an “inclination toward making oneself the ideologist of one’s own life, through the selection of a few significant events with a view to elucidating an overall purpose” is in itself a controversial and an act of political performativity. And *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* (2020) is not immune to these vices, and must be read on its own account – of course dialogically as well. As Sabao and Javangwe (2018) observe, the whole process of self-writing

signifies an instance in which the “narrator exercises authority over the subject matter, scaffolds one’s own image, authorises excisions, makes deliberate omissions, privileges interpretations and views that promote certain desired images.” The sum effect of this process is that the claim to truths that the auto/biographical genre makes as its defining trait is not sustainable. At best, autobiographical writing is appreciated as partial in terms of its representation of truth and the construction of an individual identity.

In a very unapologetic manner, and without mincing his words, Mpfu reflects and celebrates the legacies of the two Zimbabwean leaders of both the First and Second Republics – Robert Gabriel Mugabe and Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa respectively. In not so nuanced ways akin to re/remembering Mugabe, Mpfu overtly pays homage to the departed leader and romantically memorialises his wisdom. These are decisions and perspectives that characterises subjectivities in making personal decision and subsequently permeate in the narration of the self – consciously or subconsciously. This subjective, and even imaginative aspect of self-writing has most notably been attributed to mediations of memory (Smith & Watson, 2001; Lessing, 1994; Obama, 2007), “as well as ideological and cultural biases that tend to promote the agenda of the individual subject. Life narratives are written in retrospect and therefore, depend on stoking memory. Past events and experiences are recreated based on memory, a process that also involves the imposition of preferred perspectives and interpretations on that memory” (Sabao & Javangwe, 2018).

### **Seeming contradictions in Mpfu’s memoirs?**

In *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*, Mpfu recounts his decisions to join ZANU PF after the liberation war. This was despite controversial and souring relations between ZANU and ZAPU then, characterised marginally by tribal divisions. As Mpfu recounts, and has also often been criticised by diehard ZAPU loyalists, many would imagine he would stay within ZAPU considering that he hailed from the Matebeleland Region which is predominantly ZAPU and Ndebele alike. Mpfu reaffirms a commitment to ZANU PF:

At independence, my commitment to the nationalist movement remained unwavering. After intensive retrospective and introspective

insights in a bid to map up my future in politics, ZANU PF became my new political home. It was in ZANU PF where I was born again politically. (Mupfema, 2020, p. 59)

Fully conscious of the potential criticism of him and his decision to join ZANU PF, Mupfema introduces an interesting dimension to understanding his decision to leave ZAPU, albeit controversial again and having the proclivity to stimulate a barrage of criticism within perhaps future narratives. Mupfema states that he,

...joined ZANU because of the party's commitment to meritocracy. Unlike in ZAPU, where there was a certain bias against people from Matebeleland North, in ZANU there was an all-embracing political culture. To think of it, the people of Matebeleland North had borne the brunt of the war. (Mupfema, 2020, p. 59)

Unapologetically, Mupfema exposes himself to criticism and challenges from scholars and party members alike regards the veracity of these claims. Mupfema displays confidence in the polity of ZANU PF and as such tackles several other seemingly controversial issues such as the historically divisive *Gukurahundi* 'genocide', quite single handedly responsible for the ethnic divisions that characterises the Zimbabwe political and social landscapes. Mupfema bemoans how the events of the past seem to continue to haunt the Zimbabwean nation state and threatens any chance of reconciliation and harmony. He submits that his belief is that while bickering and allusions seek to manipulate history to sow divisions among Zimbabweans,

ZANU PF's electoral popularity in the entire Matebeleland region can mainly be attributed to... [the] acceptance of the fact that the *Gukurahundi* issue was resolved by former President Robert Mugabe and the late Vice President, J. N. Nkomo through the signing of the Unity Accord... (Mupfema, 2020, p. 89)

Mupfema concludes by assuming the position that, "Government should not be coerced into making reactionary subjective "apologies" for *Gukurahundi* by forces pursuing a neo-colonial polarizing agenda" (2020, p. 95). This is a potentially highly contested view of the alleged atrocities of the early 1980s, one that has been challenged in many political forums and other narratives (see for example, Joshua Nkomo's *The Story of My*

*Life* (2001), in which still “the new government, led by Robert Mugabe as prime minister, is depicted in Nkomo’s autobiography as intolerant of alternative ideas that the new political dispensation does not agree with” (Vambe, 2009, p. 84).

The last seemingly contradictory position assumed by Mpfu discussed here is the celebration of both leaders of Zimbabwe’s First and Second Republics, Robert Mugabe and Emmerson Mnangagwa respectively. The populist view would imagine that all individuals within ZANU PF aligned to the incumbent President would be quick to distance themselves from Former President Robert Mugabe because of the fallout between the two Presidents that resulted in Mugabe’s deposition. Far from it, Mpfu recognises the sublime roles that the both leaders of the First and Second Republics have played in the re/construction of the Zimbabwean nation state. While celebrating Mugabe “...as a revolutionary mentor, founding father of the First Republic and outstanding champion of Pan Africanism [who] also finds his legacy entrapped in imperialist manipulations” (Mpfu, 2020, p. 189), Mpfu is not apologetic about his role in the deposition of Mugabe – having even chaired the meeting that made the decision that sealed Mugabe’s fate.

Mpfu rationalises that as the highest ranking cadre in the country then, the responsibility fell on him to chair the meeting that decided Robert Mugabe’s fate. While unapologetically continuing to celebrate the deposed and now late leader, Mpfu imagines that the downfall of Mugabe through the “Civil Military-Aided Transition” (Mpfu, 2020, p. 243) was necessary to salvage the legacy of the liberation movement and redeem the socio-economic status of Zimbabwe. He espouses a conviction that Mugabe never lost the love and respect of his fellow cadres. He says that the Central Committee meeting he chaired to decide Mugabe’s fate,

...unequivocally stated that our founding father had to be shown his way to retirement. This was done in good faith. It was agreed that Mugabe’s heroic status was to be preserved, but his wife and his cronies had to be flushed into the annals of history as villains of the liberation legacy. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 243 – 244)

Mpfu ends by believing that the birth of the New Dispensation also known as Zimbabwe’s Second Republic under President Emmerson

Dambudzo Mnangagwa was not a personal affront on Mugabe was meant to “...save the party’s legacy and preserve national interests...” (2020, p. 246).

Mpfu posits these seemingly controversial positions regards a host of heavily contested issues with the proclivity to generate a multiplicity of opinions and sentiments. He also delves into other interesting political processes and events not discussed here but which could warrant further exploration. For example the factional wars in ZANU PF, paying attention to the role played by the late liberation icon, Retired General Solomon Mujuru (Rex Nhongo) in the power struggles that characterised ZANU PF especially in the 2000s. Of course the goals of the current treatise as explicated earlier was not to question the veracity of the positions assumed by Mpfu in his memoirs but to simply espouse the manners in which the memoirs espouse contrastive perspectives in the whole discursive discourse of the Zimbabwean story.

## Conclusion

The past is not stashed somewhat neatly in some memory bank where it can be neatly retrieved for present use (Sabao & Javangwe, 2018). In the present, the past can only be accounted for through processes of reconstruction, in the hope that memory will be faithful to history and the past. Recounts and accounts of the past are thus subject to the narrator’s capabilities to faithfully memorialise the past in the present. This process is often a highly difficult one as it “is often typified by enchanted visions of distant events, blank memories, and deliberate suppressions of undesirable memories, falsifications as well as omissions and commissions” (Sabao & Javangwe, 2018). As such, theorizations and/or analyses of self-writings often dictate that we commit to them fully awake to the fact that factuality of historicised narratives are very subjective. Mpfu’s *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* should be read in the same frame of mind. Implied in this is the fact that memories in auto/biography writing are only useful to the extent to which they coincide with the act of the writer’s remembering, or preferred memories. As such in re/reading self-narratives, the keen eye should be alert to appreciative of what they really represent – contrasting narratives of a similar subtext – only but moments of re-writing.

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# Restrained Truths and Conservative Ideological Postures in Obert Mpofu's Political Self-Construction

Panashe E Marufu

“The victor will always be the judge, and the vanquished the accused.” From Hermann Goring to Winston Churchill, it is a truth universally acknowledged amongst conquered and conqueror alike that history is the tale of the triumphant. However incongruously, African National Liberation Movements, and indeed, the African experience as a whole, have not enjoyed the same universality as the Western historical doctrine. It is in this spirit that Dr Obert Moses Mpofu's *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* champions the African cause – earning its rightful place on the tip of the tongue and the top of the shelf.

As a disclaimer of sorts, it is important to establish from the outset that this review does not endeavour to thoroughly dissect Mpofu's account. Its intention rather is to serve as a topical compass of sorts – delineating Mpofu's key submissions and locating them within the context of Zimbabwe's colonial and postcolonial narratives.

The curtains open to an unapologetic Mpofu and radical pro-ZANU-PF posturing. Not to be mistaken for an exercise in self-reflection, his tone is proud, nostalgic, thoughtful even, as he recounts his contribution to Zimbabwe's transition from colonialism to post-colonialism, reaffirms his loyalty to ZANU-PF. Mpofu pledges allegiance to the “liberation legacy” which is constantly imbued with the partisan construct of his political and ideological identity. Although promising a depth of understanding attributable only to a “political insider”, with sensibilities steeped in Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) ideology and a reluctance to delve into the autobiographical, Mpofu falls short of his intentions. The account is befitting of a man with a long-standing seat in the upper echelons of ZANU-PF and has proven, in its divisiveness, ZANU-PF's flair for stirring the political pot. In full acknowledgement

of his place in Zimbabwean politics, he states that “I write to influence political debate which goes beyond the simplistic and linear intellectual confines of our polarised political discourse”. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 9)

Whilst many, if not most, may be put off by Mpfu’s apparent inability to separate his person from his political party, one would be remiss in dismissing the account as mere political propaganda. Perhaps unintentionally, though to the reader’s benefit, Mpfu, with his nationalist oriented narrative, elucidates the rationale behind ZANU-PF’s claim to seemingly perpetual power. In his advocacy for the preservation of the founding virtues of the liberation movement, Mpfu suggests an indivisible tether that binds the condition of Zimbabwe’s independence to ZANU-PF’s leadership. Simply, Zimbabwe’s continued independence can apparently only be guaranteed by its initial liberators. This edifies the philosophical construct of the book as stated in Nyawo-Viriri’s blurb:

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* offers a hybrid-third-space for a macro critical political sociology and historical development of the liberation movement in Zimbabwe. This biography is grounded in and grows out of a long history of (epistemic) engagement with nationalism and post-colonial political discourses. Mpfu tacitly exposes the Empire’s crafting of cultural technologies of dominance and submits a Global South counter-hegemonic challenge to neo-colonialism.

To this end, Mpfu goes to painstaking lengths to denounce the “neo-liberal forces” and their infiltration in African politics through various NGOs and other “Western-sponsored” endeavours, noting:

One recalls the mushrooming of several Western-sponsored intellectual movements against our Fast-Track Land Reform Programme. Against references to Operation Murambatsvina and our Look East Policy after our fall-out with Anglo-American powers, Zimbabwe has been labelled a failed state. Sadly, this position has not been aggressively contested. The unimpeded proliferation of post-independence ideological warfare encourages the need to right the misrepresentation of Zimbabwean politics by Western-funded human rights activists since the time of the land reform.



Colonial forces have not given up their manipulation of our ethnic diversity to keep Africans at war. The Global North is guilty of sponsoring the infrastructure of violence in Africa while equally playing the Big Brother role in cosmetic conflict mediation. This has seen calls for transitional justice for African conflicts being lobbied for in Western capitals. On the ground, NGOs are deployed as agents of defining post-conflict transitional terms. Oftentimes, such interventions are usually premised on underhand meddling of Western interests in African politics. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 8, 107)

Put in context, taking into account Zimbabwe's colonial history, Mpfu's personal experience with white minority rule, and the threat of Western political intervention, a degree of anti-Westernism can only be expected. However tellingly, such anti-Western sentiment is primarily directed towards the opposition and/or civilian-centred contact, while, in an apparent step back from indigenisation policies and Pan-Africanist ideology, the post-Mugabe administration lobbies foreign investors as part of its "Zimbabwe is Open for Business" policy. Though on the face of it a logical inconsistency, this political incongruence serves two purposes: the first being to bolster ZANU-PF's conservative position as custodians of Zimbabwe anti-colonial project. There is need to appreciate the Mpfu's overarching emphasis on challenging the undemocratic meddling of Western colonial powers in Zimbabwean politics:

The opposition, particularly MDC, has largely thrived on the dysfunctional state of the economy, which is mainly characterised by poor public goods and services delivery. To this end, MDC has been at the forefront of calling for the imposition of the illegal EU and ZIDERA sanctions on Zimbabwe since the launch of the land reform.

The analysis of the 'Zimbabwe Crisis' is deliberately ignorant of how colonial hegemony made the post-independence economy volatile. These attempts to conceptualise the depth of the Zimbabwean crisis is blind to the reality of the political fragility which the country was subjected to as a result of colonially driven transitional dynamics." (Mpfu, 2020, p. 11, 99)

Most contentiously for the Zimbabwean people perhaps, is Mpfu's, or

rather ZANU-PF's inability to acknowledge the impact of mal-governance and corruption on post-colonial Zimbabwe. In lieu of taking a semblance of accountability, Mpofu lambasts the colonial hand and "neo-liberal forces". Ostensibly, Mpofu's account is cast as a historical retelling – a supplement to Zimbabwe's colonial and post-colonial narrative of victory. However, paradoxically, Mpofu's account transcends the prototypical singular story – that of the victor – and establishes a dual narrative: that of both victor and vanquished. On a reading of Mpofu's account, one comes across a vividly illustrative highlight of the author's conception of the armed struggle for independence as a moral campus of Zimbabwe's contemporary politics. At the same time, Mpofu praises the land reform and points out that the current economic challenges experienced in Zimbabwe are a product of policy realignment to the armed struggle's values. Over and above, the author links Zimbabwe's political-economy challenges to Africa's imperialist exploitation:

The current economic challenges faced by the country are conveniently linked to the land reform, post-2000 collapse of public institutions, corruption and nepotism.

The continued escalation of poverty in Africa has been used as a decoy by imperialist forces to fracture the popularity of liberation movements. This has sustained the naïve depiction of Zimbabwe's underdevelopment as an exclusive and typical creation of the post-colonial state's bad governance culture. (Mpofu, 2020, p. 99, 110)

Throughout his account, Mpofu shies away from addressing the corruption and looting allegations waged against his senior party fellows. Could this be a deliberate selective amnesia technique to totally discredit the anti-ZANU PF predominant discourse on corruption, bad governance and human-rights violations? Mpofu seemingly attributes Zimbabwe's present, post-colonial grievances exclusively to the colonial hand and "neo-liberal forces". In a similar vein, Mpofu skirts the topic of wealth inequality between Zimbabwe's ruling class and ordinary citizens, all the while painting ZANU-PF's main opposition, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), as the sole economic benefactors of Zimbabwe's socio-economic dysfunction:

Concentrated focus on the human-rights discourse in Zimbabwe has alienated the importance of the debate on the democratisation of the economy. This explains why the efforts by ZANU PF to democratise the economy through the land reform and other economic empowerment policies deliberately tilted to the majority attracted international scorn. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 142)

The convenient argument of corruption, bad governance, deteriorating human rights and the collapse of democracy has been massively deployed to authenticate the neo-liberal ideological existentialism of the regime-change project in Zimbabwe. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 142, 147)

As Mpfu justly points out, there is an unavoidable paradox in subscribing to human rights norms and standards set by the historical oppressor. All the more damning – the modern human rights movement developed largely in response to the atrocities of World War II – never mind the brutality of white minority rule. In other words, the West’s humanitarian enlightenment was ignited by the experience of violence within their own communities – where the inherent humanity of the victims was presumably indisputable. Of course, this is not to say that the modern human rights doctrine is without merit. Indeed, the Constitution of Zimbabwe itself guarantees Zimbabweans fundamental human rights. Mpfu also gives credit to his political party for undoing the neo-colonial effort exploited by the country’s detractors to dissuade unity among Zimbabweans. In this respect, he boldly brings to the fore the reconciliatory and nation-building facet of the Unity Accord. Mpfu also calls for a rethink of the motives of the on-going interest on the *Gukurahundi* issue:

Although there was a Unity Accord in 1987 to signal a deliberate effort towards peace-building, reconciliation and, ultimately, an end to artificial ethnic and political divisions, over three decades later many actors still push for this issue to be part of the broader policy agenda-setting in the country. This has raised many questions about the sincerity of this agenda as it has been mainly used by the opposition for political expediency.

It may be noted that although *Gukurahundi* occurred, the timing of

this conversation points towards a deliberate attempt to: Discredit the legitimacy of the Government; question its sincerity towards inclusive development; criminalise the Government; seek the International Criminal Court (ICC)'s prosecution of Government officials; and, finally, give opposition parties an opportunity to retain relevance in Zimbabwe's political arena by manipulating this narrative. Opposition politicians and their proxies have used the issue of *Gukurahundi* as a smear campaign against ZANU PF. The sincerity of some of these discussions is questionable considering the CSO-sponsored polarisation of our politics in Zimbabwe. The same Western countries which were mute when this gross abuse of human rights occurred are the ones funding CSO advocacy on *Gukurahundi*. This reveals the ulterior motive behind the sensational construction this matter even beyond the Unity Accord." (Mpofu, 2020, p. 84, 94)

Mpofu largely addresses *Gukurahundi* in two exhaustive chapters. Within them, he moderately refers to the *Gukurahundi* alternately as the "Matebeleland crisis", "disturbances", or "conflict". His intention is to dissociate ZANU-PF from the external, neo-colonial narrative of genocide, along with its inherent socio-political implications. When Mpofu isn't placing the responsibility of the *Gukurahundi* squarely at the colonialist's feet (although to his credit, he rightly points out the colonial influence in stoking the flames of tribalism in Africa), he insinuates that the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987 sufficiently addressed the genocide – stressing that the inclination towards a re-remembering of the *Gukurahundi* atrocities is the result of external powers with the aim of sowing instability. As such he calls for a rethink of *Gukurahundi* atrocities:

"Beyond victimhood and instigations of violence, we need to regenerate a new narrative of belonging which binds us towards peace, national healing and reconciliation. As briefly highlighted in the previous chapter, the Second Republic's transitional political landscape presents us with an opportunity to evaluate our past and how we can construct ideas which frame lasting national values beyond the temporary positives of self-serving interests. Taking this direction calls for the absolute sacrifice of essentialist limitations to defining our national identity. It requires a genuine introspective commitment to auditing our sources

of conflict and how we can produce a new and lasting consciousness of nationhood which is built on the foundation of unity, peace and prosperity. This calls for the need to locate the origins of our divided memories and emotions to recreate progressive nationhood which redeems its existentialism from the “pitfalls of national consciousness. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 98)

In a society reluctant to address mental health concerns, Mpfu’s move to acknowledge the psychological impact of violence on the Zimbabwean psyche is commendable:

Some of these context-sensitive realities of our past were not dealt with properly. Many of our cadres never psychologically made it back from the bush. Many times, we talk of those who lost their lives in the war of our liberation and ignore those who lost their minds as a result of the war. Some lost their manhood; some returned from the war with some of their body parts amputated (Mpfu 2020, p. 55).

Mpfu recommends post-colonial restitution and the land reform forms the primacy of that agenda:

It only made sense for ZANU PF, as a liberation movement, to take the prerogative of leading the masses in reclaiming the land. Again, the mandate of rallying the people towards this cause further entailed the party’s material and ideological support to this agenda. This was critical as the opposition was taking a contrary route to destabilise efforts towards the land reform.

Given the conflict-rooted land question, Zimbabwe’s agrarian revolution will continue to be the epicentre of academic and political controversies. The land question continues to confine discussions around losses and reclamation of the human dignities of both the dispossessing imperial class and the once dispossessed Africans. With the former settler being the “now-dispossessed” a new discourse of human rights has been born. (Mpfu, 2020, p. 136, 140)

A recurring theme in the book, and indeed in post-colonial states the world over is the land question. In his account, Mpfu contextualises

the fight for land – taking the reader through the various permutations of expropriation. The controversialities of agrarian reform aside, wealth redistribution remains a central tenant of the national decolonisation project, and one of the few available means to redress economic inequality. It is the execution of the land reform programme, however, that set a dangerous precedent for titleholders and occupiers alike – potentially leaving Zimbabweans vulnerable to acts of dispossession. Indeed, the recent move to allow white farmers to “regain possession” of expropriated land at the expense of the black farmers who had been granted land under the land reform programme.

Democracy is an embodiment of ideas which guide how power relates to those who legitimise it. In this case, power refers to the right to govern which is derived from an electoral mandate. Therefore, democracy facilitates the creation of a system of power which should be answerable to the aspirations of the people. African democracy should be designed such that it responds to the historical factors which gave rise to the need to fight colonialism. Zimbabwean democracy cannot be expected to mimic the democracy of America, Asia or European. Our democracy should be grounded on our immediate forces of social change. Zimbabwe’s democracy must not be confined to the liberal enterprise. Instead, it must be an agency for ensuring mass economic empowerment in as much as it encourages mass political participation. This approach must ensure that institutions of colonial capital do not decide how we should be running our politics and our economy as was the case immediately after independence. The spirit of democracy must be kept alive to ensure that the unity of our people is preserved. Our democracy must be defined by our political morality. We need Zimbabwean democracy for Zimbabweans, not American or British democracy for Zimbabwe.” (Mpofu, 2020, p. 159)

## **Key Observations and Recommendations**

- The initiative by Mpofu to write must encourage others alike within the Zimbabwean political space to start compiling their life-narratives. This must take a fashion which gives multiplicity to the tales of Zimbabwe’s history.

- Government would be well-advised to publicly acknowledge, and appropriately address *Gukurahundi* in a victim-centred process, and to formally charge and prosecute the surviving alleged perpetrators.
- The uncertainties and intricacies surrounding land reform necessitate a concerted national effort to set a legal precedent which balances the need for economic redress against property rights.
- Undoubtedly, the values of the liberation struggle remain deeply entrenched within ZANU-PF's ranks, forming the yardstick by which the party measures its success. However, in the spirit of democratisation, it would be apt to spearhead an inclusive national dialogue to encourage Zimbabwean self-determination.
- Overall, the account traverses a wide expanse of personal and political experience, with Mpfu straddling the line between ZANU-PF loyalist and objective political analyst, leaning, as one would expect, towards his party's sensibilities. To this end, the autobiographical aspects of the account are not fully explored – denying the reader true inside access. The author may need to produce a second-edition of his memoir.

Ultimately, with a legacy rooted in the very inception of an independent Zimbabwe, Mpfu firmly entrenches himself as a political giant in the chronicle of Zimbabwe's history. To this end, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is a fitting ode to an illustrious political career, the sheer breadth of Mpfu's experience and contribution paints a self-portrait inextricably entwined with Zimbabwe's post-colonial identity. Imbued with fervent loyalty to the values of the national liberation struggle, the account is a catalyst for both historical and contemporary political discourse and a welcome addition to the proliferation of the African narrative.

# Writing the struggle through Autoethnography: Dr Mpfu and African epistemologies

Talent Moyo

The book *'On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider'* by Obert Mpfu offers an in-depth understanding of the African epistemic question – how do we arrive at African narratives informed by African subjective realities? This is a question that many academics and leaders have tried to grapple with ever since the African continent undertook the road to colonial emancipation. However, Mpfu's memoir responds to this question through the use of autoethnography to engage his subjective realities of the struggle and the broader experiences of those ones involved in the struggle up to the present day.

As a point of departure, autoethnography entails a 'qualitative research method that allows the author to write in a highly personalized style, drawing on his or her experiences to extend understanding about a societal phenomenon' (Wall, 2006 p. 146). As such, Mpfu's memoir is rooted on autoethnography to highlight his personal narratives of the struggle since he joined till the present day. Autoethnography locates Mpfu's memoir within the postmodern philosophy which takes into account the notion of reflexivity and voice within research. As Wall (2006 p. 146) submits that 'the intent of autoethnography is to acknowledge the inextricable link between the personal and the cultural and to make room for non traditional forms of enquiry.' This adoption of autoethnography establishes African epistemologies that are informed by firsthand experiences and narratives by African scholars. The ultimate result as evidenced by Mpfu's memoir is the creation of an African epistemology in presenting the African experiences.

The memoir should be credited for the use of reflexivity to address issues of representation in writing African narratives. Mpfu's memoir responds to Clough (2000: 283) observation that 'the question [has been] raised about political and cultural representation – not only about who should represent whom but what should be the forms of representation in relationship to hegemonic practices.' The question is addressed by



Mpofu's assertion that:

When our families were dumped in Jambezi, several people including my father had been incarcerated back in Lower Gwelo for mutiny. They were all detained in Gweru, some without trial. My father died in 1957, having failed to recover from excessive torture that he had endured under incarceration. Technically, I lost my father to colonial apparatuses and from then my anger towards the colonial system became relentless. It was from this position that I sympathized with the many nationalists who were detained for Zimbabwe freedom [p. 17].

The above quotation underscores the technical use of reflexivity as an aspect of social research in a quest to respond to the question of representation in writing African narratives particularly liberation war biographies. Mpofu unwittingly addresses political and cultural representation through his subjective narration of the struggle which directly touches his personal life and ultimately shaping his trajectories of the struggle and his political ideology. Despite being subjective, Mpofu's story represents the African masses who found themselves at the heart of the struggle due to the interaction with colonial systems.

Mpofu's autoethnographic memoir raises important points about the issue of authorship in writing African narratives. Authorship is a vital aspect in recording lived experiences. On reading any literature seeking to represent a particular issue or notion it is imperative to pose questions like 'who is the author?', 'what is the relationship between the researched and author?' , and 'what is the (ideological) position of the author?' These often taken for granted questions tend to raise important points on questions of representation and knowledge production. In this particular instance, we have Mpofu representing himself in the same process symbolizing the African within the struggle. Unlike other biographies authored by 'professional biographers' that tend to represent the position of the 'biographer', Mpofu's memoir stands as a representation of his lived experiences which symbolizes the position of Africans. As such, authorship and positionality are important aspects in producing evocative narratives. Therefore, the memoir makes an important contribution to the African epistemologies that are rooted on decolonial approaches to knowledge production.

Mpfu's biography employs a heuristic inquiry to attend to deep-seated personal questions regarding the struggle. As suggested by Douglas and Moustakas (1990: 40) heuristic inquiry tends to 'awaken and inspire researchers to make contact with and respect their own questions and problems, to suggest a process that affirms imagination, intuition, self-reflection, and the tacit dimension as valid ways in the search for knowledge and understanding.' In this view, Mpfu tends to self-reflect and use intuition to develop important questions that ultimately shape the understanding of the struggle. This self-reflection and intuition appears in many parts of biography and an example can be extracted from page 55 where Mpfu narrates that:

At the time, I was going through an evolutionary phase which entailed graduating into civilian life from the previous life. The painful reality of undoing the psychological traumas of war which I had borne since the age of sixteen was inevitable.

The above quotation highlights how Mpfu tacitly employs heuristic self-inquiry to rethink and frame the struggle through the African perspective. Here he appeals to the subjective realities that tend to symbolize the position of Africans during and after the struggle. This approach makes a valid contribution to the creation and sustenance of African epistemologies.

To conclude, like any other biography, the memoir's weakness lies on the writer's reliance on individualized subjective self. As Sparkes (2000 p. 22) has argued that 'the emergence of autoethnography and narratives of self...has not been trouble-free, and their status as a proper research remains problematic', Mpfu's memoir falls within the trap too. The memoir should have incorporated more conversations with the people who were within the struggle through the use of artifacts such as letters or documents that he and his social circle exchanged. However, this weakness is transcended by the postmodern philosophy and praxis which emphasizes on the existence of multiple realities to understanding social phenomena. Overall, it must be noted that Mpfu's memoir makes an important contribution to Zimbabwean history and African epistemologies.

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# Obert Moses Mpfu and the Question of Epistemic Residence

Teddy Ncube

## **Introduction: Grounding the thematic logic of the book**

Without a doubt, Obert Mpfu's autobiography ignites a new debate in Zimbabwe's body politic. It outlines the seemingly insurmountable challenges in Zimbabwe that call for philosophical and ideological re-examining. The autobiography generally responds to three strategic questions that are also definitive of this submission:

1. Is Zimbabwe correctly positioned ideologically?
2. Whose spectacles are being used to view Zimbabwe's past, present and future?
3. Are Zimbabweans using the correct lens for 'seeing' or they are using borrowed eyes and minds to view their existence?

Before we proceed to respond to these questions, it is important that I justify the legitimacy of using Mpfu's autobiography to navigate through Zimbabwe's politics. Firstly, Mpfu's autobiography comes at a time when there are manufactured concerns about the future of nationalism, it comes at a time when Zimbabwe's realities and challenges are being deliberately conflated by pseudo human rights champions who hide behind the humanitarian cloth to further neo-liberal interests. A contrast of Chapter One focused on 'The Mind and Pilgrimage of Struggle' and Chapter Eleven dealing with 'The Post-Independence Democracy Enigma' elapses the gap between Zimbabwe's past and present struggle for democracy. Mpfu argues that this literature gap has been successfully exploited by neoliberal scholars to assert the liberal hegemony over the discourse of freedom by way of erasing traces of democracy in nationalist memory. To dismantle this misguided belief Mpfu argues that:

Democracy is usually credited to the Global North. Political cultures of Western Europe and North America invoke democracy as an idea and a practice. However, one notes, already at this point, that it is

not possible to talk of global democracy. Whether in the U.S, Britain, France or Germany, democracy takes a national character so that no one democracy is compelled to be a replica of the next (Mpfu 2020 p. 141).

Mpfu's autobiography essentially confronts the colossal problem of an absent nationalist theorist. In page 99, Mpfu rightly states that Western scholars, diplomats and their proxy NGOs within Zimbabwe are the major culprits for this onslaught on Zimbabwe's history. It is also in this context that this submission argues that despite the vast literature on nationalism, it remains unclear on who wrote it and why they did so. An analysis into the title of the book can also reveal that there is a lot to be questioned about Zimbabwe's epistemic composition. In essence, Mpfu avidly captures the phenomenological linkages between the nationalist as a historical agent of democracy and the nationalist as a modern day practitioner of democracy.

In articulating his "Philosophical Urge to Write" (p. 5), Mpfu argues that there are very few nationalist scholars that have re-lived the liberation struggle through the pen, he continues to posit that the few nationalist scholars that have written something have done so outside their nationalist garb subsequently compromising their nationalist credence. The enormous literature by many nationalist scholars has mainly focused on the contradictions between nationalism and the colonial order and have in the process left out internal contradictions within and between the nationalist movements. Mpfu argues that contradictions between nationalism and other political ideologies do not define the nationalist and neither do they define nationalism. However, internal contradictions within the nationalist movement are the best unit of analysis which can be exploited to profile both the nationalist and nationalism.

Who, after all, are the authentic African nationalist theorists of today? Many on the political and academic theorise African nationalism as an extension of Western philosophical reason devoid of the true African context. Even recent defenses of liberal or civic nationalism have been by liberals or social democrats trying to come to terms with the nationalist phenomenon. "Multicultural" theorists also afford some theoretical

recognition to nationalist sentiment, but these too are liberals seeking to extend the principle of tolerance to “sub-nationalities” within state borders.

Indeed all varieties of theorists that is Marxists, democrats, conservatives, and feminists have had to confront the nationalist phenomenon in their own way, but full-throated defenders of normative nationalism are very rare. It is against this background that *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* should not only be viewed as a mere publication, but should also be viewed as the rebirth of erudite nationalist scholarship. As well, it should also be understood as an ideological turning point for Zimbabwe where scholarship will again be refrained by parameters of the nationalist project particularly in attempting to respond to the national question(s).

### **The autobiography reflects the “nationalist”**

Political autobiographies are a window to a previous world of political practice. From this window, we see politics through the eyes and experiences of an individual subject. We follow their actions and inactions, see their behaviour and experience their world from afar. Often we are treated to “insider” stories, their observations, reflections, understandings, and motivations. We read events from their vantage point or interpretations.

Autobiographies generally provide an alternative point of analysis to the workings of social groups, situations and events, which is the normal frame of reference for scientific research. Unlike many other nationalist autobiographies which have a deliberate focus on how colonialism reconstructed the margins of the nationalist journey, Mpfu’s autobiography goes further to illustrate how contradictions in liberation movements could have shaped the nationalist trajectory and the present-day affairs of power in Zimbabwe. He offers a unique way of writing, which exhausts all the units of analysis, namely class, ethnicity, regional identity, sex, race and even some ideological pluralities within the nationalist discourse.

Mpfu’s autobiography right from the first chapter and the last chapter

reflecting on Operation Restore Legacy fills that literature vacuum, which is an outcome of the absent nationalist in the conversations about Zimbabwe. What is striking about the absent nationalist in the authorship of Zimbabwe is that the nationalist has been the subject of discussion not the conversant. It is against this background that neoliberal academics have propagated monolithic narratives that seek to assert neoliberal hegemony from the backdoor. The attempt to counter this onslaught is resurgent throughout the book as the author challenges the nationalist to be an active agent of nationalist literature:

Mpofu also argues that the past creates the present. In the present, our business is to create memories for the future. As such, any constructive delineation of the contemporary political-economic question must be premised on a historical lens of analysis. Africa's contemporary problems are directly linked to Western triumphalism and its exploitative tradition. To understand the modern-day relations of the formerly colonised and the colonisers, the history of colonialism and the ideologies it served must be engaged. This way we can pinpoint the destructive effects of colonialism we are experiencing today. In the same vein, the motivations of the anti-colonial movement should be brought to the fore to evaluate how our post-colonial relationship with the colonial empire has not eroded the very essence of our agenda to restore our socio-economic and political dignity (Mpofu 2020 p. 109)

Mpofu's account also reaches out to the proletariat of the liberation struggle who have been victims of neo-liberal speculations. He particularly defines himself as being part of the generation of anti-colonial radicalised African teenagers who rebelliously dropped out of formal education to join the liberation struggle (Mpofu 2020 p. 47). Mpofu represents the ordinary war veteran who has been labeled a violent land invader and a figment of the trumped up political violence charges against nationalist movements. In his autobiography, Mpofu also nurses those bruises that have been induced by neo-liberal scholars who have bastardised nationalist characters to legitimise the view that Zimbabwe has a leadership crisis.

The intelligence in Mpofu's autobiography is that it does not deny that Zimbabwe like any other country has its unique challenges. Instead,

Mpfu buttresses a majority of the country's problems are rooted in colonial genealogy. As a result, Mpfu quizzes the reader on why he/she should forget how the liberation struggle was waged as a direct response to the reckless colonial leadership. He further posits that it is dangerous for the Zimbabwean reader to forget how the liberation struggle was imbued in discipline and the zeal for a just society manned by a responsible leadership. In essence, the autobiography exposes the logic of being a nationalist and how the struggle against colonialism formed the basis of Zimbabwean democracy.

In chapter 8, Mpfu suggests that it is malicious for anyone particularly the neo-liberal inclined, to exploit nationalist contradictions as a resource to legitimise and ground the liberal ideology as a universal and trans-historical alternative for framing modern political thought. In page 97, Mpfu uses the *Gukurahundi* phenomena to expose the hypocrisy neoliberal human-rights advocacy, he argues that *Gukurahundi* like other Zimbabwe's problems have been appropriated to fuel the anti-establishment locomotive. These polarised narratives are normally bent on disintegrating current efforts to unite the people of Zimbabwe.

### **Can the National Question be discussed Outside the Nationalist Project?**

Mpfu asserts that any dissuasion from the ethos of the liberation struggle presents a clear danger to the possibility of the continued agenda of decolonisation in Africa. He further indicates that at an epistemological level, deterrence from anti-colonial consciousness produces knowledge which is detached from the aspirations of the erstwhile colonised. Without doubt, Mpfu's self-account ignites a fresh debate in the corridors of post-colonial theory, history, economics and other disciplines whose thematic constructs reaffirm the existence of the African as a decolonial being.

In bringing this out, this Afrocentred self-narration is a game-changer to the art of auto-biography writing in Zimbabwe. What makes it even more interesting is that unlike many who have written autobiographies, they have done so out of "power", while even those who have biographically profiled our politicians have done so out of "power" as a means of



challenging the status quo. Therefore, it becomes more refreshing to have a “political insider” interrogating the status-quo through self-writing. To this end, Mpfu must be credited for being a symbol of ZANU PF re-examining its philosophical grounding and unpacking its centrality to what has been theoretically coined as “The Pitfalls of National Consciousness” in the Fanonian reading of the post-colony. Every chapter is punctuated by profound political theory underpinnings which unmask the academic side of a man largely viewed as a “political animal”

### **Reconfiguring the making of history**

Within our colonial context of knowledge production, especially in nationalist historiography terms, there have been protracted contestations on who should write history and who should not. This has seen the proliferation of the new normal of discrediting history by those in power. In Terence Ranger’s historiography which is even subscribed to by our African academics, the commitment to revive nationalist memory is problematised as ZANU PF propaganda. To this end, Ranger’s protégés of the colonial-centred historiography monopoly have arrogated the making of history as the only legitimate sources of national re-membering.

Due to their proximity to the colonially sponsored knowledge market economy, they endorse what they perceive as authentic history. In the process, any other narrative which is not benchmarked in terms of their prejudice does not constitute historical authenticity.

I am certain that one of the major critical injuries of this book will be facilitated by those academics who find partisan propaganda in anything written from a pro-nationalist/ZANU PF perspective. However, it needs to be reiterated from the outset that such polarised deconstructions of memory are governed by various limitations, particularly the desire by our academics to be incessantly recognized and endorsed by colonial institutions.

Mpfu’s publication transcends the manipulation of literature as an instrument to settle political scores, instead, the publication is grounded on the need to define the abstract aspects of Zimbabwe’s political-economy. The book goes further to deconstruct the now fashionable

notion that Zimbabwe's nationalist history has been narrowed by ZANU PF to offer monolithic narratives aimed at maintaining state power. What this school of thought omits is that in realist terms, history is a commodity for asserting hegemonic interests.

ZANU PF has authored itself through national memory in a manner which threatens the contemporary neo-liberal aspirations for regime-change in Zimbabwe. At the same time, history as a unit of political reflection reframes national identity. As such, this memoir picks up a new position for ZANU PF to ideologically self-introspect through Mpfu's lived experiences as a senior member of the ruling party.

In his introductory chapter, the author regards himself as one belonging to the margins of the early nationalist history. As a result, his memoir is reflective of those peculiar events and experiences of ordinary cadres who bore the brunt of the real combat operations against the vicious enemy. This approach serves as a clarion call for Mpfu's contemporaries in both ZPRA and ZANLA to start putting together the many tales of our national story for the benefit of those his generation is leaving behind.

### **The border as a margin for thought**

The possible functions of literature and its relevance to society are better understood in the context of the writer's position and historical period. However, before understanding the writer's position it is essential to understand the location of the writer. So our question today is who is the Zimbabwean writer? Is a Zimbabwean writer any traveler who marvels at the beauty of our flora and fauna and writes about it? Is it anyone in Oxford or Harvard who is fascinated with anything about Zimbabwe and writes about it? I argue that the Zimbabwean writer is that writer who is not only located in Zimbabwe physically but is also obliged to remain within the parameters of Zimbabwe's meta-physical empire. Mpfu's publication which is imbued in excessive references to Zimbabwe's territorial boundaries, therefore, call for an unfettered critique to his geographic positionality and how it affects his writing.

It is in this context that greater emphasis on epistemic correctness should be situated in the positionality of the author. But the puzzle that then

emerges is, does writing in Zimbabwe confer truthfulness to one's works or does writing outside Zimbabwe confer false fullness to one's work? The response to this paradox does not lie in either of the variables, instead, it lies in the broader agenda to create all-encompassing knowledge ecosystems. Interesting enough, the concept of border thinking as both method and epistemology remains underdeveloped despite its central role for both decolonial historical analysis and decolonial epistemic transformations from the borders of modernity.

Without excessively relying on the enemy and friend dictum it should still be logical to assert that no nation can rely on a knowledge ecosystem which derives legitimacy from external borders compounding its epistemic traditions. It is in this context that Mpfu's publication becomes unique in that the geographical residence of the author and how he perceives issues, offers the academia an opportunity to see Zimbabwe's affairs through the lens of an insider. It is essentially beneficial to recommence the post-colonial contribution for the discussion between subject and difference or, more precisely, for providing a basis to a micro-sociology of the cultural articulations. Mpfu's choice to contextualise the historical narrative through the personal body located in Zimbabwe offers a new meaning to Zimbabwe's history.

Beyond its comparative advantage to existing texts which perceive national memory from a structural position, Mpfu's memoir launches a new debate on the legitimacy of knowledge particularly with regards to how the border as a structure influences the conclusions and findings thereof. The publication also challenges the post-colonised to pick up arms (the pen) and construct national memory beyond ideological forums which are designed to observe specific elements of the past, present and the future. Mpfu's publication, therefore, constructs an analytical framework that permits Zimbabwe to study the relationship between subject and discourse and, at the same time, to identify the space of creativity of the subject. Such a contribution of the post-colonial studies remains unique and, surely, helps the social sciences to finally meet again their creative vigor.

# The Future of Anti-colonial Memory Generation in Zimbabwe

Prolific S. Mataruse

## Introduction: Writing the Nation

The Zimbabwean politician is a non-writing politician. As rightfully noted in the editorial introduction of Obert Mpofu's book by Richard Mahomva, Robert Mugabe did not leave an autobiography despite his monumental footprint in Zimbabwean politics. In the preface to *The Struggle for Zimbabwe* by Phyllis Johnson and David Martin (1981), Mugabe had argued that the works of outsiders would be superseded by that of local writers and actors in Zimbabwean history- little was produced to affirm Mugabe's word and there is still a great need to canonise political subjectivities and experience as part of national thought heritage- especially the experience of vital persons who possess rare knowledge by virtue of certain offices held, events participated, decisions held and things observed.

This makes the work by Obert Mpofu an important step in growing a culture of penning ideas and experiences in Zimbabwe. The book by Mpofu is full of information that only an 'insider,' construed as someone close to political events, could know.

## Internal Contradictions and Rare Information

Indeed, the historical narrative is contextualised within the personal narrative woven into a complex story with startling anecdotes with multifaceted meanings in as much as the major protagonist takes certain decisions. Mpofu (2020 p. 1) states that the book is written as part of "those of us who were ZPRA and ZAPU to tell versions of our story apart from the common nationalist history." Historians and academics on Zimbabwe like Norma Krieger, Terence Ranger, Timothy Scarnecchia, Gerald Mazarire and Brian Raftoupoulos amongst many others, have long advised for a much more nuanced history composing of various views. This is one view of Zimbabwean 'patriotic history'. But as with

many personal things, there is bound to be convergence and divergence between the reader, the characters in the book and the author. The ideas and events presented in the book are open to contestation thereby enriching the discourse, especially as more voices continue to become part of the conversation.

The book by Mpfu touches on politics, economics with an emphasis on decolonisation over a long period. He writes from when he joins the liberation struggle at the age of 16 partly inspired by the memory of his father and uncles who were radicalised liberation activists. But he found a way of centering the book on Zimbabwe's past and present economic trajectory- and how all this economics and politics created a political economy that eventually results in the need for the military to intervene to facilitate Mugabe's. Indeed, the work is a chronicle of one's career in Zimbabwean politics- rising through the ranks until he became Secretary for Administration of ZANU PF.

Touching on so many important and complex issues (colonial and contemporary) one feels that some issues could have been pursued further separately or could form aspects of future work. One such issue relates to the Sipolilo Battle where there is a dearth of information around the planning and execution. Another issue relates to Mpfu's time in Zambia on the liberation front which autobiographers like Fay Chung's *Reliving the Struggle for Zimbabwe* define differently from her vantage point as an academic at the University of Zambia. Another area that history is yet to fully explore is the nature of ZPRA and the African National Congress (ANC) joint military cooperation. On page 25 of the book it is briefly noted, but never fully explained, that:

I was among the ZPRA and Umkhonto weSizwe reconnaissance teams along the Jambezi-Victoria Falls, Lupane and Tsholotsho routes. The 1967 famous Wankie Battle was a culmination of these reconnaissance initiatives. Through reconnaissance, we coordinated the movement of the armed troops who waged a war that wobbled the entire Rhodesian and South African security forces. This mission was an outgrowth of joint political and military synergy between the two movements. Oliver Tambo of the ANC and James Chikerema of ZAPU chaired the political coordination of this pact. At a military operational level, Akim

Ndhlovu (ZPRA commander) and Joe Modise (MK Commander) were all at the leading front. The late Dumiso Dabengwa of ZAPU was the Chief of Intelligence. Among some Umkhonto weSizwe military gurus there was Archie Sbeko (Chief of Operations), Eric Tshali (Chief of Staff), Walter Mavuso Msimang (MK Chief of Communications) and Chris Hani (Political Commissar).

Also, there has been less attention on the co-operation between Zimbabwean liberation movements and the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) which Mpfu (2020 p. 23) touches on. Generally, there is need for more research and writing on military cooperation touched in the book between ZPRA and ZANLA with other countries like Russia, China, Cuba, and Algeria. This work could extend to humanitarian assistance from Norway, Sweden etc. through the Organisation for African Unity (OAU) Liberation Committee. An example could be the collection of interviews by Sellström (1999). These military collaborations should form part of the canon for what are strategic areas for Zimbabwe's foreign policy and military defence and development.

Certain themes like the supremacy of the party over government, much discussed in the book, are revealing but may still require further work. From a ZANU PF perspective, questions will continue to arise on the operationalisation of the idea of the supremacy of the party. It is probably one section, among many that shows that the book is also written for ZANU PF's political education. This is not necessarily a bad idea, although understandably, one who holds a different political opinion will have qualms with it and may see this as potential for friction between party and government- considering that the party now houses former strong men in the previous Mugabe government and government is trying to define a new political trajectory. After reading the book, one observes that political parties like ZANU PF or the MDC need to invest in this direction of knowledge production. Countries like the UK, Russia, China and the USA are well known for important works that go on to benefit the professional development of their armies, technocrats, and general citizens. An old example is Winston Churchill's six-volume collection titled *The Second World War*, or a later example is the 2020

work by former US Secretary for Defense, John Bolton titled *The Room where it All Happened*. These works also help to build a national literary reference body, scholars and citizens can draw upon.

### **Epistemic Reconstruction of Sovereignty**

These themes are important to pursue further if the book is to achieve its aim of countering efforts to decenter African national liberation movements and their ideas (Mpofu 2020 p. 11). The book is said to be written on the higher moral ground of creating a philosophical base against neoliberal discourses which seek to dismantle emancipatory causes. In other words, a rights/civil society organizations/neoliberal discourse and its emphasis on the market is juxtaposed and condemned against the use of redistributionist economics and politics as a democratizing tool. The contest is pitted between the deconstruction of sovereignty and the need to reconstruct sovereignty.

The counter-hegemonic theme is noted to be important to counter the attrition of elderly African liberation movement activists like Robert Mugabe. The book calls for epistemic ‘re-remembering’ of the liberation philosophy. This is an important idea in tune with ‘confronting the colonial library’ (Matthews 2018), and dealing with the ideas behind the ‘invention of Africa’ (Mudimbe 1998). However, when discussed within the context of Mbembe’s (2002 p. 239) description of African modes of self-writing, the work certainly confers ‘authority on certain symbolic elements integrated into the African collective imaginaire.’ The work overcomes the weaknesses of narrow nativism in some instances, but if we say the work is a work in Afro-radicalism then the weaknesses of instrumentalism and political opportunism are evident.

As part of reconstructing sovereignty, the book is also targeted at the youth or the younger generation. This is a noble cause, although the interpretation of youths as turning against liberators oversimplifies the intergenerational debate. In the foreword of the book, written by Artwell Nhemachena, it is noted that there is need to reorient youths to the African liberation agenda because western countries have not just been looting African resources but also African minds and histories. In this regard, African intellectuals are criticized for abetting imperial designs. Mpofu (2020 p. 7) states that: “I write to liberate our nationalist history from

imperial capture and narration.” Although the book attacks the West and opponents of the government as being essentialist in their critique of the government, it is not clear if it’s possible in Zimbabwe for one to carry out politics legitimately outside ZANU PF politics. In a way, the book does little to defuse the political polarization that afflicts the country. Is it that, you are either inside ZANU PF and therefore a revolutionary, or outside it and therefore an enemy of the national revolution? The insider and outsider dichotomy can easily be toxic.

### **Obert Mpfu’s Career and the Birthing of Zimbabwe**

Passing on a certain version of memory to correct distortions and revisionism of the past is a key motivation in this presentation of party-state ideology, the military and political practice in Zimbabwe. Though analytical the book does not abandon its major political premises and uses. Competing ideas are confronted and unpacked- many at times with important new information. When Mpfu narrates his education in India, marriage, employment in government, the shift to the private sector, building of business empire (farming, retail, construction, transport, recreational etc.) and the political office he presents important information about what it was to exist as a middle class, bureaucrat and businessman immediately after independence in a country whose economy was dominated by whites and how the decolonization project would hit snags- most of which had historical precedence. The treatment of ethnic strife in Zimbabwe and the structural adjustment program and its effects are placed within real-life events- although told from the experience of one who was on the better end of the processes. He offers lessons to young politicians on marriage, business, avoiding regional/ethnic politics and narrowmindedness, and encourages loyalty and discipline to the party leadership and code.

Through tracing his post-1980 life, Mpfu is able to take the reader through the journey of the Zimbabwean ‘crises.’ What’s important about this is that the reader sees that the challenges in Zimbabwe do not just emanate from the fast track land reform but have a long history evident at the birth of Zimbabwean independence in 1980, in which western countries and the black ruling elite commit serious mistakes. The western countries create hurdles for the land reform, while the black rulers fail to institute



a system of moral probity with public resources. The firsthand accounts at Tregers company offer rare insights into the anatomy of Zimbabwean national scandals and the role of key individuals pre-1990- in what turns out to be a systemic problem once neoliberal policies are adopted from the late 1980s. 1980 to 1990 is a period almost missing in many analysis of Zimbabwean politics and Mpfu brings it back to life beyond common *Gukurahundi* narratives and ethnic uses of this memory.

### **Conclusion: ZANU PF under Transformation**

In reading the book one understands where ZANU PF is politically after the 2017 political transition from Mugabe. It is firmly believed that the party's ideological grounding had weakened creating the need for "nationalist legacy rejuvenation" and "thought renewal" (Mpfu 2020 p. 66). The party is in a programme of professionalising itself- including staffing itself with experienced people and experts in some fields. Political self-writing would help in creating what Mpfu (2020 p. 16) calls 'the scholar combatant.' Indeed, ZANU PF is undergoing transformation- how deep that transformation is and what it will produce are issues to keep an eye on.

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# **Obert Mpfu Conversing with National Healing and Reconciliation: Politics of Sustained Peace**

Tawanda Zinyama

## **Introduction**

Obert Mpfu's book *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is a timely intervention in the discourse of Zimbabwe in both intellectual and the practical sense. Taking a critical look at some of the historical struggles that have given birth to Zimbabwe of today, Obert Mpfu has endeavoured to dissect many of the challenges that engulf Zimbabwe and succeeded in a large measure in projecting a possible future.

The book formulates a number of ontological arguments demonstrating the importance of understanding the liberation struggle, *Gukurahundi* conflict, the land question and economic liberation, military role in Zimbabwean politics, characterology and personalogy of the author. The heterodoxical nature of Zimbabwean challenges are expounded clearly. This is an important contribution to debates on how to achieve sustained peace, writes Obert Mpfu, positioning let bygones be bygones as integral to this process.

## **Confronting the Matebeleland-Midlands Crisis**

Zimbabweans need to be able to learn from history not hide behind it, forever cleaning their wounds. To heal, we need to use history to act on present in order to change our future. History is at its best when used as a tool of emancipation. Franz Fanon said the oppressor is not just after the past, but after the future as well. How many times have we heard that the oppressed deserved to be oppressed because they had no sense of the past or the future?

The Second Republic's willingness to take tough stands, bring up the undiscussables and, therefore, bring out risky issues the nation or its communities avoided discussing, and therefore, openly deal with difficult relational problems is highly commendable. This is courageous

authenticity. This is the context in which *Gukurahundi* was proficiently conversed by Obert Mpofu.

The starting point must be a thorough self-examination. Although not under conditions of its own choice, Zimbabwe must continue to write its own history. Even under the current relentless drive of capitalist fundamentalism, Zimbabwe must seize back its agency. Not to do so would be to surrender to the fatalism inherent in neo-colonialism and a major dishonour to Zimbabwe's collective memory of resistance in all the previous phases of imperialism and colonialism. Obert Mpofu (2020 p. 94) observes that:

It may be noted that although *Gukurahundi* occurred, the timing of this conversation points towards a deliberate attempt to: discredit the legitimacy of the government, question its sincerity towards inclusive development, criminalise the government, seek International Criminal Court (ICC) prosecution of government officials, and finally, give opposition parties an opportunity to retain relevance in Zimbabwe's political arena by manipulating this narrative.

Obert Mpofu also argues that the discussion on *Gukurahundi* should focus on identifying the victims and help them to access basic social services such as identification documents. Obert Mpofu advises that:

Like any other disaster, a crisis of this sort is bound to create victims who have lost economic and social livelihoods. Some of these things can never be fully restored; instead, the government can recognise these people as victims and try to establish centres where they can be assisted. Finally, let bygones be bygones. Government should not be coerced into making reactionary subjective 'apologies' for *Gukurahundi* by forces pursuing a neo-colonial polarising agenda (p. 95).

In my opinion, both backward-looking and forward-looking reconciliation dimensions are needed. The former requires that personal healing of survivors, the reparation of past injustices and the acceptance by both parties to a conflict of common vision, future that is collectively owned and mutually beneficial and understanding of the past. The latter requires capacitation of victims and perpetrators to get on with their lives and the establishment of a civilised political dialogue. This is predicated on the

inescapable reality that once the conflict has ended and the past organised and placed where it belongs, both sides need each other to survive and live a fuller life henceforward.

### **Past Efforts to Heal the Nation**

State-led institutions such as the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) are important in addressing the challenges of conflict management and post-conflict reconciliation facing the country. Most importantly, NPRC emphasises unity and cohesion as fundamental ingredients to healing and reconciliation. The inward-looking nature of the NPRC and its strong focus on the grassroots reflects a more holistic and comprehensive approach to reconciliation.

In my view, societies and communities affected by large-scale violence of the magnitude of *Gukurahundi*, Operation Restore Order (*Murambatsvina*), land seizures (*Jambanja*) and the election violence of June 2008 need to own the healing and reconciliation process. This is something that cannot be imposed from outside or in a top-down approach. Huyse et al. (2003) notes that “lasting reconciliation must be home-grown” – because, in the end, it is the survivors who assign meaning to the terms and the processes.

What is creative about the model adopted by the NPRC is that it transfers ownership of the reconciliation process to local communities and encourages them to become the primary actors (Mhandara, 2020). For example, one of the NPRC’s key functions is to “develop procedures and institutions to facilitate dialogue between communities, political parties and other groups”.

Obert Mpfu believes that reconciliation involves dealing with the past, taking responsibility and acknowledging wrongdoing. He aptly notes that “the security dilemma which erupted as a result of the dissent factor cannot be overemphasised in as much as the excessive use of force by the state needs equal acknowledgment” (p. 97).

This is consistent with Jeong (2005) who notes that guilt must be recognised with the acceptance for conflicts and the burden of socio-political intolerance. It may be argued that the NPRC represents the first major attempt by Zimbabweans to confront their painful past and build a brighter and more prosperous future for all citizens.

## Sustained Dialogue

Obert Mpfu argues that dialogue is an indispensable condition for the genuine resolution of conflict and the establishment of lasting peace between people and communities divided by misunderstandings, animosities or even deep hatred. Reconciliation must confront the past as well as find a vision for mutually shared future. The depth required of processes leading to reconciliation mandates meaningful economic and political reform and attempts to create social harmony. These are the issues that Obert Mpfu tried to present and discuss to ensure effective nation-building.

Historical legacies of abuse and violence dating from pre-colonial times; challenges arising from incomplete decolonisation; the interpretation of nationalism and liberation; issues of inclusion and exclusion; the national question which comprises nation-building and state-building; inter-and intra-party tensions and contestations; issues of race, ethnicity and finally the role of external interference, that is, coloniality are adequately handled by Obert Mpfu. With all these burdens still unresolved Zimbabwe will inevitably remain a politically volatile country. Peace is an investment; the peace of today not only allows for production and consumption today, but also creates expectations and culture of peace for tomorrow.

## Addressing Economic Roots of Conflict

Obert Mpfu observes that *Gukurahundi* conflicts had their roots predominantly in competition over resources and governance. Therefore, this requires interventions which seek to resolve the underlying resource-driven tensions. There is no doubt in my mind that conflicts are resource-based. At pages 85-90, Obert Mpfu outlines comprehensively the causes of *Gukurahundi* inter alia economic and social hardships as a result of marginalisation. He goes on to commend the Second Republic, under the leadership of President Emmerson Mnangagwa for sustained implementation of devolution agenda and framework to realise “true nation-building, unity and equality” (Obert Mpfu, p. 90). The devolution policy has dealt with governance related conflicts, demonstrating strong political will to foster reconciliation and thereby healing the nation. This exposition of factors underlying the *Gukurahundi* issues by Obert Mpfu is

critical in as far as diminishing inflammatory actions and utterances based on misinformation and rumour.

Obert Mpfu must know that for reconciliation activities to have any meaning, structural issues leading to conflict must also be addressed. There must be a harmonisation of objectives between economic, political and social interventions. I for one, what is important to assist in the dismantling of the social structures that perpetuate marginalisation, oppression, victimisation, dehumanisation and demonisation of one region by another is mutual trust and open dialogue. This is in line with Obert Mpfu (p. 104) call for lasting home-grown models of peace, healing and reconciliation to achieve the Zimbabwe we want.

### **Intelligentsia in Socio-Political-Economic Management**

At page 101, Obert Mpfu describes the Zimbabwean intellectuals as “a neo-liberal captured academia ...focused on anti-establishment manoeuvres to the significance of the nationalist discourse.” Neo-colonialism is colonialism’s metamorphosis. Obert Mpfu further argues that “the country’s unresolved past is manipulated for the benefit of political opportunism at the expense of the bigger ambition of nation-building”. These observations by Obert Mpfu show that Zimbabwe needs intellectual stoutness that demands a certain texturing of the mind, a certain resolve and discipline so that academics can contribute to the structuring of Zimbabwe’s politics and economics required for sustained national development. The academics must unearth, create and erect paradigms that speak of the injustices in pre-colonial Zimbabwe, that speak to our common history of oppression and that build on our culture of resistance, a culture of resistance that has been at times weak, at other times strong but always present.

### **Macro-economic Neo-liberal Policy**

Obert Mpfu acknowledges that the adoption of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991 by Zimbabwe was a bad policy decision. The neo-liberal inspired ESAP brought about policy changes that led to rapid deterioration of social services, education, public health and sanitation because it ignored issues of socio-economic justice and fairness. What kind of ethical system can be derived from a neo-liberal

economic foundation? Obert Mpofu clearly shows that neo-liberalism can only lead to a moral breakdown of society and the dehumanisation of persons. It is not defensible and cannot be a sustainable model worth copying. However, Obert Mpofu was supposed to give a brief comparative analysis of ESAP and the current Transitional Stabilisation Programme (TSP) that Second Republic crafted and executed for two years.

### **Conclusion: Some Reflections**

One take-home contribution from Obert Mpofu is the decolonisation agenda from the Zimbabwean lens. Perhaps the greatest contribution this book has to make is that, if read carefully enough, it forces the reader to make decolonisation a 'personal journey', recognising the elements of colonial and neo-colonial thinking that they may have inadvertently internalised and reproduced.

Like most conversations centred on decolonising epistemologies, the nature of the arguments presented by Obert Mpofu are explicitly focused on praxis. In my view, Obert Mpofu's book serves as an important contributor to debates concerned with how to decolonise socio-economic-political spaces in Zimbabwe, achieve sustained peace and comprehend the role of the military in Zimbabwean politics.

While there is little to contest when it comes to this book, it would be interesting and useful to relate opposition politics' focus on destabilising the country and championing re-colonisation of Zimbabwe. The opposition toxic leadership causes political predation on the citizens' political psychology. Nevertheless, the book will be of great interest to a wide range of scholars and practitioners, and it is likely to influence important debates on the decolonisation agenda, conflict management and peace-building interventions, economic management and military role in politics. Regarding *Gukurahundi*, Obert Mpofu offers a creative discussion on what can be done and how to not only handle the past but also build peace. So, is Zimbabwean unity possible? I say it is not only possible but necessary. It is possible because we are learning from past struggles and necessary because we simply have to survive. This is an important work which no student of Zimbabwe politics, the process of decolonisation and conflict management can afford to ignore.



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# The Second-Republic and Struggle for National Healing: Coming Face to Face with the Legacy of Violence in Zimbabwe

Torque Mude

The term *Gukurahundi* has since the 1980s dominated Zimbabwe's political lexicons owing to the emotive political feelings it invokes. This is largely attributable to the existence of a lacuna in terms of what really transpired which culminated in the *Gukurahundi* disturbances in Midlands and Matabeleland provinces as well as shortcomings characterising the redress thereof. Furthermore, there has been a grey area about the absence of *Gukurahundi* accounts from the perspective of political insiders. As a political insider with firsthand, undistorted and unfabricated experiences regarding the dynamics of the *Gukurahundi* disturbances, Obert Moses Mpfu's book provides inimitable insights that satisfactorily explain the trajectory of *Gukurahundi* as well as the subsequent post-*Gukurahundi* reconciliation efforts. The idiosyncratic quality of the book is illuminated in the manner in which Mpfu aptly unpacks *Gukurahundi* as an imperialist constructed Cold War strategy. Undoubtedly, such framing of the Midlands-Matabeleland disturbances does not only defy the politicised, ethnicised and conventional *Gukurahundi* narrative but also offers a missing piece of the *Gukurahundi* jigsaw puzzle.

While divisive, imperialistic and less analytical accounts of *Gukurahundi* are ahistorical, Mpfu's comprehensive insights expose the selective reality and neo-colonial machinations attached to *Gukurahundi* literature and reportage. In this endeavour, Section 7 on *Gukurahundi* begins by providing a succinct historical background of the politicisation of ethnicity as a neo-colonial divided and rule strategy aimed at suffocating independence in Africa. Indeed, these dynamics explain the totality of *Gukurahundi* as a Euro-North American political and economic disenfranchisement machination reminiscent to ethnic conflicts which neo-colonist forces orchestrated in Rwanda, Nigeria and Sudan among other Africa states.

Apart from politicising ethnicity, neo-colonial forces also orchestrated resource-based conflicts in Africa as a strategy to destabilise independent African states and scuttle their efforts for post-colonial transformation. Such has also been the experience in the Great Lakes Region and Manoé River Union conflicts in which resource abundance generated conflicts at the instigation of imperialist forces.

Section 7 of the book proceeds to explore some of the factors that sparked the *Gukurahundi* disturbances. It is indicated that what triggered the deployment of North Korean-trained Fifth Brigade was the emergence of “dissidents” in the country and the concomitant implications this posed for national security and threat of the country sliding into the failed state mode. Moreover, the aspect of *Gukurahundi* is well articulated regarding latent struggles within the freedom fighters’ holding camps which generated serious tensions escalating into confrontations between the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) and Zimbabwe African Liberation Army (ZANLA) forces. At this juncture, it suffices to pose with a critical reflection on the existence of the struggles between ZIPRA and ZANLA forces within the armed struggle against the Rhodesian forces. History has it that there were deeply rooted political tensions between Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), with spillover effects into their military wings. Hence, the culmination in the post-war tensions in holding camps was a manifestation of the deep and complex relations, power struggles and divisions between among freedom fighters from across the politico-military divide.

As clearly articulated in Obert Mpfu’s explanation of *Gukurahundi*, one of the key factors accounting for the ZIPRA-ZANLA conflict was suspicion among the ZANU and ZAPU freedom fighters camps. The key driving force behind this state of affairs was competition for power. To this end, the 1963 ZANU-ZAPU split, disagreements and divisions at the Lancaster House Conference became antecedents to the *Gukurahundi* disturbances. The legacy of colonial rule is another endogenous factor cited by Mpfu as having laid the foundation of the *Gukurahundi* disturbances. It is also well articulated how colonialism left a trail of destruction of social relations between indigenous groups through a variety of strategies including setting

the Ndebele and Shona people against each other, reliance on ‘lawfare’ through draconian legislation which triggered ‘lawphobia’ among the black community and divide-and-rule tactics among others.

More so, Obert Mpofu satisfactorily explores the exogenous factors that triggered the *Gukurahundi* disturbances. In this regard, he unpacks how Apartheid South Africa unleashed a scorched Frontline States destabilisation policy and how it manifested as *Gukurahundi* disturbances in the Zimbabwean context. Reminiscent of similar covert operations in Angola, Mozambique and Lesotho among other states, it can be argued that Apartheid South African instigated destabilisation policy capitalised on the already existing internal power cleavages in independent Frontline States member countries. By playing ZAPU and ZANU against each other, there is no doubt that the objective was to cause carnage resonant of the Mozambican and Angolan experiences. The section also aptly captures the contribution to *Gukurahundi* disturbances of independent Zimbabwe’s unsuccessful attempts to integrate ZIPRA and ZANLA into one army. Issues of post-war integration of combatants into the conventional army play a crucial role in reconciliation.

Having provided insights on the factors that triggered the *Gukurahundi* disturbances, the section proceeds to engage the trajectory of post-*Gukurahundi* politics in Zimbabwe. In accounting for the reasons explaining Matabeleland and Midlands provinces being ZANU PF strongholds despite the 1980s political skirmishes, Obert Mpofu attributes this political reality as an indication of the extent to which post-colonial national building overrides internal differences and challenges. On the socio-economic front, Mpofu sanitised the misguided and divisive narrative that the social and economic quagmire bedevilling Matabeleland provinces emanate from a deliberate ploy to sideline and undermine development in the region. While explaining that these dynamics are not peculiar to Matabeleland alone, he attributes the challenges to the sinister colonial policy of bureaucratic centralisation that perpetrated the systematic marginalisation of many regions in Zimbabwe.

Above all else, the section must be commended for juxtaposing the past with prospects for national healing and reconciliation thirty-eight

years after the unfortunate events that characterised *Gukurahundi*. After acknowledging the unprecedented recycling of memories of violence in the post-colonial era, he offers a piece of statesmanship advice by underscoring the need for a holistic approach to national healing aimed at remedying all the historical chapters of violence in the country to heal the psychological and physiological injuries sustained. The contributions of civil society organisations particularly the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP), their coalitions particularly Matabeleland Collective (MC) and the Second republic's utmost drive towards national healing and reconciliation are fittingly highlighted in this section of the book. Divergent views and influence of pressure groups such as Ibhetshu Likazulu Pressure Group, political parties such as Mthwakazi Republic Party and traditional leaders in *Gukurahundi* policy-making have also been maturely recognised in the book. The section should also be commended for concluding with recommendations on the best ways to deal with the *Gukurahundi* past. For instance, a victim-oriented approach of identifying the victims of this violent past and assist them in accessing basic economic and social services as well as information is recommended.

Nevertheless, the recommendations on the idea of letting bygones be bygones is arguably problematic. While such a strategy could materialise in facilitating a top to bottom reconciliation matrix, it carries the connotations of co-opting national healing and reconciliation with the intent to exonerate the perpetrators of the violence. Such has been one of the setbacks of transitology in the Zimbabwean context. It suffices therefore to indicate that there will never be genuine peace and reconciliation in the country if letting bygones be bygones is imposed as the primary premise of peace and reconciliation. Hence, unless the interests of the victims of the past violence are not only acknowledged but also satisfied, through truth and apology as many victims have suggested, achieving sustainable peace and reconciliation will remain a phantom on the horizons.

In continuation of the above, the reasons for the omission in Section 8 of the book of explanations on why the findings of the Dumbutshena and Chihambakwe Commissions have been swept under the carpet more

than three decades after their conclusion warrant interrogation. It would have been satisfying to learn from a political insider about the findings or rather why there have been shelved. The omission of such invaluable *Gukurahundi* information raises questions about the dynamics of quasi-judicial institutions for peace and reconciliation in Zimbabwe. While the country has since independence witnessed the establishment of the Dumbutshena Commission of Inquiry, the Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry, Organisation for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONRI), the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC) and the Monthlante Commission of Inquiry in August 2018 Post-election Violence, there remain more questions than answers as to why truth, unity, transitional justice and reconciliation deficit still haunt the country. Obert Mpofu's reference to the absence of peace and reconciliation as a byproduct of weak institutional frameworks partly proffers an explanation to the above inquiry.

By expressing optimism on the prospects of peace and reconciliation in the new dispensation, section 8 illustrates the level of leadership and direction inherent in Obert Mpofu. While it is too early to provide a sufficient evaluation of the contributions of the NPRC on peace, healing and reconciliation in the country, the mere signing into law of the quasi-judicial institution in 2018 speak volumes of the new dispensation's commitment to deal with violent pasts. With this said, the book warrants applause for insistence on Pan Africanist answers to Zimbabwean problems. As mentioned in the last parts of section 8, it is indeed imprudent to rely on reactionary and Western-imposed notions of justice given the traction of neo-colonialist forms, tendencies and designs for pursuing regime change in Zimbabwe. In a capsule, the book is a millennium milestone in the telling of Zimbabwean political dynamics from a political insider.

# Exploring the Contradiction of the Sacrifice for Freedom and Zimbabwe's Freedom in Waiting

Sharon Lindelwa Dube

*Technically, I lost my father to colonial apparatuses and from then my anger towards the colonial system became relentless. It was from this position that I sympathized with the many nationalist who were detained for Zimbabwe's freedom... As my father had lost his life in the hands of colonial brutality, I had no reason to fear for my own life.*

*Mpofu 2020 p. 17*

## Initiation into Self-sacrifice

The prefacing extract from Chapter 2 of Mpofu's book under review exposes the emotive centre of the anti-colonial struggle. Lives were lost, human dignity disparaged and families disintegrated. Such was the price of bravery to confront the colonial regime. The author directly experienced the lethargy of the colonial system following the gruesome murder of his father Mswelangubo Ginyilitshe Mjembe Moses Mpofu. He grows up bearing the psychological scars of being an orphan and a colonial subject. Like many others dehumanized to being subjects, the boy Obert is oriented by circumstances to hate the colonial establishment. His hate for the colonial regime grooms him to be a fearless young man who finds himself conscripted into the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA). Alongside others, young Obert Mpofu sacrificed his teenage life to the struggle for liberation.

Therefore, the tragic death of his father at the hands of imperialist repression and later his involvement in military activity as a reconnaissance cadre epitomizes the macrocosm of the tenets of self-sacrifice which sustained the course of our path to freedom. The will to join the armed struggle became a generational virtue across the entire populace of the Black majority in Southern-Rhodesia. In the process, countless lives were lost.

Some of Mpofu's contemporaries could not avoid the fate of death at a tender age. They feared not for their lives, they were firmly convinced that it was better for their lives to be lost for the gain of freedom. Even after uhuru the tremor of their sacrifice hasn't left their minds:

War was ugly, no question about that. Some returned to derelict homesteads. At the same time, they could not be harmonised to civilian life. Many of my relatives were lost in the war. Others had endured imprisonment. Those of us who came from the war alive suffered the reality of its innumerable effects. We had to deal with its haunting memories and the countless tragic losses of our loved ones. In the trenches, we became brothers and sisters. At independence, we were never to see some whom we had established strong emotive bonds with. To their great memory, some left orphans of the war. Those of us who survived did so because some comrades sacrificed their lives to protect ours. Such was the depth of loyal sacrifice to the armed struggle (Mpofu 2020 p. 55-56).

Mpofu's narrative is submerged in the principle of sacrifice which loosely translates to unequivocal loyalty to the country and passion for freedom. Mpofu represents a generation which understood the mission of liberation was worth much more than living under colonial bondage.

Mpofu's narration situates the institution of the African family at the apex the logic of self-sacrifice. In writing about the forced relocation of his family, Mpofu indicates that the colonial administrative displacement of African to unproductive agricultural land provided the foundation for "peasant consciousness". However, at a more personal level, his political consciousness is aggravated by the death of his father which awakens him to the reality of the brutish character of the colonial regime. His other immediate family members who take an active role in the struggle become his inspiration to sacrifice the comfort of his civilian life to join the armed struggle.

Apart from its centrality in shaping radical political consciousness as observed in the book, the family provides emotional comforts to all its members who were systematic victims of colonial violence. The author



states that his wife whom he marries after the independence of Zimbabwe has always been his political advisor and business partner. That on its own depicts the continued and interchanging role of the family in grounding his political journey and engagement in business. To him, his wife is not only a soulmate, but she is a partner and an advisor in all facets of life. The reader is drawn to understand that the family represents the core and the backbone of commitment to national interest. The family is of pivotal influence to Mpofu's life through out his political and business endeavours.

Based on Mpofu's account, without the family the national agenda has no human capital. So the family provides primary grooming for its members because homes are the first institution of education for any mind. In other words, the threat to destabilize family life is an equal threat to the community and the nation at large. Consequently, the agitation of African families by colonial rule became the cause for widespread resistance to imperialism. African families became the hub of resistance and sacrifice to sustain the fight against colonialism. Likewise the colonised African nations symbolized typical African family set-ups which were unified by the hate for oppression and driven by the collective virtue of sacrifice and resistance. This analogy is befitting when assessed in close relation to this biography imbued in the idea of pan-Africanism.

### **Pan-Africanism**

The theme of African unity is boldly emphasised throughout the book. Colonialism was a wide spread phenomenon in Africa. This explains why liberation movements were founded to challenge colonial supremacy across the entire African continent. The fight and victory of a nation for independence starting from Ghana to South-Africa was a collective effort of several African liberation parties. Together they were able to fight and defeat imperialism in Africa. With that in mind, in the second colonization the white man couldn't deal with a united Africa. Thus bending backwards to make sure that Africa is divided. Our Berlin determined boundaries continue to be the premise of our divisions, xenophobia and civil wars. In Europe one can work in a different country without a visa or a permit. However, it's a different case with Africa, the

unfettered movement of goods, services and human capital continues to be a dream. Mpofu rightly argues that this substantiates the crisis of a freedom in waiting. Mpofu problematises the abandonment of the fraternal relations of liberation movements on the altar of neo-colonial capital is a total undermine to the dignity bestowed on the continent by pan-Africanism. Therefore, now than never before African nationalist movements must find common ground and reinforce mutual relations to push the agenda of Africa's unity.

### **Sacrifice versus the Betrayal of National Consciousness**

The abundant level of sacrifice by Mpofu's generation fast-tracked the pace of the armed struggle which gave birth to our independence. Many aspects of our political culture are indebted to this generation. Mpofu's autobiography underscores cardinal attributes of the sacrifice of the liberation generation. As Mpofu argues, our political identity continues to struggle between colonial hangovers and the quest for true total freedom. As a result, there is need for us to return to the source and the foundation discovered by the liberation generation. At the centre of this position, Mpofu unpacks how the Lancaster Conference and later its constitution compromised many values of the liberation struggle especially concerning the land issue. The adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) further substantiates how a colonial determined transition to independence undermined the protracted sacrifices of our people. The elitist inclined discussion on the distribution of power of the then envisaged independent state became the push-factor to the alienation of the aspirations of the masses for freedom. The compromised transition to independence through systematic repression of Zimbabwe's economic growth facilitated the subjugation of our independence to the erstwhile coloniser. Mpofu discusses the issue of liberating the economy in the book and lobbies for the institutional dismantling of colonial values in our political-economy as part of guarding the sacrifices of the living and departed loyalists of the nationalist struggle in Zimbabwe.

The continued reference to the presence of colonialism in Zimbabwe's post-independence politics, economy and social moral space captures the reality of our delayed arrival to true freedom. Mpofu also extensively

unpacks the colonial influence in the debate about human rights and the call for regime-change focused democracy discourses in Zimbabwe's mainstream politics. The narrative's constant disengagement from detail about the writer also exposes how the self is forgotten within the autobiographic story-line. Reading this autobiography takes one on a tour of introspection about the level of our attained independence against the measure of sacrifices made by our people throughout the struggle. A question arises; have our people forgotten that the freedom of our country came with many sacrifices? This book comes at a critical point, when we need a reminder of what it took for us to have the freedom that we possess today. A reminder that there is a tittle to defend and a legacy to preserve for generations to come.

### **The Current National Assignment**

The duty that we bare on our shoulders as the next generation of leaders is bigger than what we had initially preconceived. Mpfu's reflections encourage the need for the continued preservation of the enduring values of independence. The gains of the nationalist generation which the writer belongs to must be institutionally enshrined in our governance culture. Our economy must be determined by values of hard work over corruption; innovation instead of continued dependence on other nations' technological supremacy. At the same time, true independence must be reflected in our educational system which should be at the centre of promoting indigenous knowledge systems which protect the cultural and scientific wealth we inherited from our ancestors.

The need to promote and reinvent the achievements of the nationalist generation should relevantly challenge efforts by imperialist powers' strong determination to influence how we must run our governments. Yesterday's scramble for Africa's gold, diamond and good climate among other God-given gifts still continues. The liberation struggle was a starting point in our fight against colonial rule, to even think for a moment that we have conquered leaves us exposed and vulnerable. As Mpfu reiterates, the struggle continues!

## The Role of the Nationalist Political Party

While the book assumes an Afrocentred-nationalist and broad-based pan-Africanist theoretical position, its primary philosophy is located in Mpfu's loyalty to ZANU PF. In addressing the neo-colonial plight of Zimbabwean politics he urges that the party's functions should transcend "... servicing its power consolidation interests. To Mpfu, ZANU PF is a custodian of anti-colonial principle and a defender of an endless fight with colonial forces (...our revolution). Considering Mpfu's preconceived view of his party's organic mandate, his autobiography is instructive of the need for ZANU PF to be the epicenter of "economic democratization" and delivering modern living standards for the people of Zimbabwe. This justifies why Mpfu is radically aligned to the preservation of the ideas of Zimbabwe's land reform programme. To Mpfu, the distribution of land to its rightful owners, -the indigenous Zimbabweans must be a continued and irreversible process led by ZANU PF in its mandate to safeguard the continuity of the "revolution". According to Mpfu, ZANU PF is in a continued process of implementing action plans which transform the colonially instituted marginalisation of the people of Zimbabwe.

To this end, ZANU PF's role is emphasised in Mpfu's recollection on Operation Restore Legacy. Mpfu highlights that role of ZANU PF in assisting in the execution of the 2017 November transition was in the best interest of the country and its entire populace. Mpfu argues that the "success" of the 2017 November transition must consolidated through a total uprooting of corruption and structural inequalities which conflict with the core values of the liberation legacy.

# **Inherited Pitfalls of National Consciousness and the Idea to Reinvent the Future in Obert Mpfu's Autobiography**

Mongiwabesuthu Ngwenya

## **Introduction**

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is one of the moving literary works that have ever been produced in the post-independence Zimbabwe about the liberation struggle. The book is premised on Obert Mpfu's experiences, lessons and observations during a protracted liberation struggle for independence and as a leader in the government and the party (Zimbabwe African National Union, Patriotic Front), in the process casting an eye into the future. Writing history into the future, the book unravels several liberation war events and how they have been, are or will be used either by both the enemies and enablers of the state to further their respective counter-interest political agendas. An autobiography written by an active and direct political participant reflects the direct experiences and connections of the author to the changing political landscape in Zimbabwe. This buttresses the authorship motive which is moored on anti-imperialism and decolonisation philosophies. Thus contributing extensively to the present Global-South decolonial discourse.

True to his determination to shift the logic of decolonisation, the account is steeped in adamantly challenging Western liberal and neoliberal political interpretations of the Zimbabwean political space. Through his ideologically reinforced remembering of the self, Mpfu is reclaiming the liberation legacy grounded definitions of the Zimbabwean political identity. Mpfu's life history is replete with anti-imperialist thought, counter-neoliberalism and the quest for sovereign equality defined by the equality of nations and the spirit of non-interference into the domestic affairs of other states. Mpfu, notes with concern the unfair treatment and the unbalanced analysis and interpretation of the Zimbabwean political

developments, by the West, neoliberal institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) and the Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) aligned to them. This kind of uneven treatment of events and political developments by the West is well captured in this book. At the centre of this articulation of the sources of Africa's victimization, Mpfu discusses the mistake of a negotiated independence and calls for the total fall of International Financial Institutions (IFIs) hegemony.

### **Decolonising Knowledge Development in the Post-Colonial World**

Mpfu reveals that since independence Zimbabwe has produced anti-establishment scholars who are supported by the imperialist forces. Writing against the state has been equated to high intellectual standards and brilliance. Such scholars have been given a high academic locus of authority on Zimbabwean politics. Mpfu lambasts this veneration of anti-establishment thought as part of a bigger regime-change strategy to disconnect the people of Zimbabwe from the anti-colonial struggle and eventually creating a systematic dissuasion from supporting ZANU PF. Mpfu posits ZANU PF's entitlement to the people's support as he argues that his party serves the values of the liberation struggle to which every Zimbabwean is indebted. On the other hand, the author notes that those thinkers, scholars and academics who have attempted to write objectively about the state have never enjoyed the same treatment as their counterparts. This group of scholars have, in most instances, been called names, labelled as regime enablers, evil, retrogressive and custodians of the state. Therefore, Mpfu suggests the revamping of the academic system that will see the proliferation of critical scholars who are not influenced by the neoliberal ideologies and imperialist forces. Scholars that will write Zimbabwe into its rightful place in the community of nations. To some extent, Mpfu can be viewed as an advocate of the clarion call to decolonise knowledge in the post-colonial world.

## **Revealing the Western Evilness and Quest for a Homegrown Democratisation Process.**

Furthermore, the book presents itself as an anti-thesis of western self-arrogated political righteousness and its selective application of the law. Such is found in the author's account of *Gukurahundi* and other political developments that took place after the diplomatic fallout between the West and Zimbabwe. Mpfu objectively acknowledges that indeed *Gukurahundi* is a regrettable event in Zimbabwe's political discourse. However, of fundamental importance is the author's concern about the treatment of *Gukurahundi* atrocities vis a vis other human rights issues in the post Land Reform period. The author argues that the imperialist and former colonisers have tended to manipulate the *Gukurahundi* issue to further their political agendas. It is worrisome that at a time when *Gukurahundi* atrocities were perpetrated the West never raised any concerns about the gross human rights abuses, only to do so after the diplomatic fallout between the Government of Zimbabwe and the West. Also, the author notes that the post land reform human rights issues have generated ZANU PF demonisation by the same powers who were silent about *Gukurahundi* in the 1980s. As such, the Western-sponsored anti-land reform debates reflect the selective amnesia of Western powers who have continued to meddle in Zimbabwean politics. The author argues that our erstwhile colonisers are using the human rights issues to further their sectoral polarisation interests under the guise of promoting genuine democratization. As such, the book is doubtful of any genuine democratization process coming from the former colonisers and suggests that democracy must be homegrown and not be imported from the very same people who deprived our forefathers of these freedoms and rights they are advocating for, today.

## **Patriotising the Nation**

The book advocates for unwavering patriotism among Zimbabweans, anchored on revolutionary ethos to protect the gains of the liberation struggle. Having joined the liberation struggle at a very young age, Dr Obert Mpfu is strongly attached to the liberation struggle and its guiding principles, objectives, purposes and the dreams of all the liberation

fighters, the departed and the living. The author is seemingly dedicated to the protection of the gains of the liberation struggle and wishes that such thinking be inculcated to every Zimbabwean.

### **Tracing the roots of contradictions in the nationalist movement**

Mpfu's self-recollection autobiography discusses the multifaceted dimensions of Zimbabwe's continued struggle and the internal contradictions which ZANU PF has endured in the process. In articulating continuity and also confronting its internal setbacks Mpfu also provides a futuristic re-angling of Zimbabwean politics. Mpfu traces the recently experienced factionalism in ZANU PF to inherent internal contradictions experienced by the party since its formation in 1963. Since then the two nationalist movements fought on different fronts, with different military wings. ZAPU had its Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), whereas ZANU had its Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). Thus, at independence when Mugabe assumed power he was mindful of the capabilities and military prowess of ZIPRA, that's why he saw Nkomo as a viable political threat, considering the support he commanded from the Matabeleland and Midlands regions.

Of particular importance also about this book, is its account and explanation of why Nkomo failed to lead independent Zimbabwe, despite being the leading figure of Zimbabwe's liberation struggle and being at the fore of the nationalist movements since its inception. Mpfu gives a comprehensive explanation of the contributing forces to Nkomo's political demise. Firstly, the author postulates that Nkomo was a victim of the upsurge of anti-communism that was currently underway at the time. Considering that Nkomo and his ZAPU were supported and funded by the communist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), his assumption of power in independent Zimbabwe was viewed as the spread of communism into Southern Africa, and as such Nkomo became a threat to the interests of the West, hence the preference of Mugabe over Nkomo as the leader of independent Zimbabwe. Secondly, Mpfu notes correctly that, Apartheid South Africa was afraid of Nkomo and ZIPRA due to the close relations ZIPRA had with uMkhonto weSizwe (MK). Apartheid South Africa was well aware of the successful joint



operations of ZIPRA and MK at the Wankie and Sipolilo battles and sought to block the MK's support and military bases in the North. Lastly, the book holds that Nkomo did not listen to the advice from the ZIPRA military commanders in the eve of the Lancaster negotiations. Mpfu argues that the military wing of ZAPU advised Nkomo not to take part in the negotiations at Lancaster as they believed that ZIPRA had already suffocated the regime and that war should continue as it was the only option for the attainment of independence. Regardless of these pieces of advice Nkomo went on to participate in the negotiations, leading to his political demise. Thus, this book is powerful in explaining the Lancaster House politics and the road to a negotiated settlement and its outcomes.

### **Effects of Neocolonialism on Zimbabwe's Political Landscape and Recommendations**

The neoliberal ideological methodology that is being peddled by the West through its CSOs and opposition political parties has nurtured far-reaching political, social, cultural and economic implications on the Zimbabwe's political arena. The neoliberal ideas that seek to reinforce the residues of colonialism have heavily divided our nation thereby compromising social cohesion. In the process, the liberation legacy continues to suffer systematic decapitation. The divide and conquer strategy is being perpetuated by neoliberalist and imperialists from the Global West.. Mpfu captures all these problems in many sections of his autobiography.

Our people should be taught the importance of unity in as far as social progress and national development in concerned. In that very same note, I also recommend conflict resolution that puts national interests at the fore and not to have our conflicts be interpreted and solved by our erstwhile colonisers. The Western interpretation of our conflicts has not done any good for our nation, but rather it has created so much political instability. Furthermore, from the understanding that the imperialists invest in spreading their neoliberal ideologies, I do hereby recommend that the government should also invest in robust mainstreaming counter-imperialist ideas. That is, those scholars who are writing against imperialism and neoliberalism must be funded by the government to

improve research and the generation of knowledge that will give the imperialists a formidable challenge.

## **Conclusion**

The book is a powerful account of the liberation and post-independence Zimbabwe. The book offers an antithesis to the western liberal ideologies and their proxies who have worked hard in infiltrating nationalist historical truth with their colonial memory. The thrust of the book is anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism and anti-neoliberalism in our lifetime. It is a strong historical book with some futuristic connotations. The objectivity in the book makes it a quasi-academic account and an autobiography.

# Rethinking Democracy Beyond Imperialist Conditionalities

Teddy Ncube and Brian Maregedze

In his autobiography, *On the Shoulders of Struggle, Memoirs of a Political Insider*, Mpfu posits that the template of democracy needs to be decolonised. In this call to decolonise the template of democracy, Mpfu distinguishes himself from the conventional decolonial scholars who write from a position of agitation and disempowerment. As an insider of a successful revolutionary movement, Mpfu rationally argues that, decolonizing democracy should not be mistaken for the denouncing edits democracy, instead it should be viewed as a humanising exercise which seeks to locate the role of the African in the historical, contemporary and future discourses of democracy. Mpfu suggests that the best way to re-invent Africa is to firstly dismantle the West's privilege over the discourse of democracy, he alludes that what generally forced him to pen his autobiography is the need for someone to take up a stand and challenge Western hegemonic narratives that have abused the discourse of democracy to fence neo-colonial interests. Therefore, Mpfu's autobiography offers a refreshing submission which locates the Africa in all the historical dimensions of democracy and human rights.

## Decolonising Democracy

The humanistic prose of Western democracy reflects the social struggles of the Western citizen. But given the domination of the West over the rest of the world through such repressive historical moments as the slave trade and slavery, colonialism and currently neo-colonialism, this very same literature tends to opt for silence or ambivalence or downright collaboration when talking about struggles of previously disenfranchised communities. Despite the few liberal Western writers who show great sensitivity to the social evils perpetrated against other peoples, if taken as a whole Western literature still cannot avoid being affected by the Eurocentric basis of its worldview or global vision, and most of it even when sympathetic, cannot altogether escape from the racism inherent

in Western epistemologies. Against this background, the framing of democracy has been a cocktail of struggles affecting citizens of the Global North and deliberate speculations about the struggles affecting the Global-South citizen. To this end, the African struggle has been interpreted using a very western body and mind. It is this western body and mind that has imposed itself on the actual identity of the African giving birth to a whole range of bastardised identities in Africa. It is on this context that Mpofu's views expressed in the book assert the missing African thought alternative whose bric-a-brac can be used to construct the real African identity.

This book becomes relevant as it prescribes the form and content of democracy in contemporary Zimbabwe. Chapter 11 outlines the pitfalls of adopting a model of democracy which is governed by specific western historical conditions and then later "exported to the Global South as a handed down robe to fit all" (p. 141)

According to Mpofu, if Africa is to rethink the idea of democracy beyond its Euro-North American designs the continent must refuse to be reduced into a perennial student of what the Global-North perceives to be good for the continent. It has been the pattern throughout history that whosoever brings the new order knows it best and is a perpetual teacher. As such, the advent of colonialism as the teacher for political decorum in Africa must be challenged. This calls for Africa to revisit historical references for democracy particularly how the African story has not been framed to emphasise that democracy has always been there in Africa.

This will catalyse a new reason on how modern political systems should be calculated on the basis of genuine historical pluralities rather than this universally-linear western perspective. Through Mpofu's narrative, the African nationalist is a democratic being who has always cherished the idea of an open political space as espoused by the cardinal values of the liberation struggle. As a result, the book points to the existence of democracy way before the birth of these rehearsed neo-liberal postures prevalent in the Zimbabwean political space. Mpofu's account lays a foundation for public policy scholars to navigate the prospects and challenges of democracy in Zimbabwe beyond and across the Euro-North-American framework.

## Reconfiguring the nexus between democracy and development

There is a symbiotic relationship between democracy and development, in the absence of development it is justified to cite the absence of democracy as a causal factor. Whilst it is true that a democratic state is not necessarily a developmental state, a case exists that such a state has the necessary ingredients for development. This contribution is indeed refreshing and joins other luminaries within nationalist memory to self-introspect some challenging bedeviling Zimbabwe. Mpfu's contribution is not full of celebratory tone nor all condemnation in narrating Zimbabwe's past. Rather, unsettling experiences under the leadership of ZANU PF in the past are also explored. Auto/biographies in the recent past on the liberation struggle have previously faced vehement criticism for pointing out ZANU PF's pitfalls. Fay Chang (2006) wrote an autobiography which had some unsettling accounts, memories to official narratives of the time. More importantly, *On the Shoulders of Struggle, Memoirs of a Political Insider* falls within such narratives which contests a monolithic self-celebratory discourse on the successes of the ruling ZANU PF.

Dialoging Zimbabwe's post independent narratives can only be progressive if Mpfu's memoir is shared among all and sundry in Zimbabwe's body-politic. Using the inconsistencies of the Lancaster House Conference of 1979, the failure by party cadres to adhere to the leadership code of the 1980s and the Economic Structural Adjustment Programmes (ESAPs) of the early 1990s, the memoir exposes the still birth independence of Zimbabwe. Economic policy dependency on the former colonisers did not end with the attainment of political independence. Mpfu (2020 p. 114) acknowledges that:

The adoption of ESAP saw a rise in unemployment and hyperinflation. As a public administrator at the time, I experienced the first-hand impoverishing effects of ESAP because my work entailed direct interaction with the people in the grassroots. Contemporaneously, there were no more subsidies for local governance operations. To even make matters worse, Umguza District had not yet recovered from the effects of colonial marginalisation. Ten years after independence, the people of Umguza and the rest of other Zimbabweans faced the severity of ESAP's austerity measures.

As such, Zimbabwe is emerging from snares of colonial matrices of power. From a decolonial stand point, the concept of coloniality of power speaks directly to the entanglement and entrapment of Africa and other ex-colonised parts of the world in the ever-present colonial matrix of power on the modern/colonial world. Mpfu is historical in tracing the various challenges facing independent Zimbabwe. Hence, a unitary approach to the survival of Zimbabwe is necessary.

More importantly, Mpfu writes back to the neo-colonial prejudice confronting Zimbabwe and the rest of African. In his keynote address, he argues for the need to revisit the past and find inspiration from the first generation of nationalists such as the late Julius Nyerere, Augustino Neto, Samora Machel, Oliver Tambo and Sir Seretse Khama. In the quest to localise democracy, Former Liberation Movements (FLMs) must uphold the legacy of the Father Founders by dismantling any threats from Western sponsored reactionary forces with a regime change personality across Southern Africa. It is in this light that Mpfu affirms, "...I ride on the shoulders of the successive merits of critical African thought to invite a reasoning amongst ourselves which is imbedded in 'African Solutions for African Problems.'" It is this same pivotal narrative well-articulated by dependency theorists particularly the late Walter Rodney. Neo-colonialism as articulated by the late Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah also favoured practical thought systems beyond nationalism and capitalist systems. *On the Shoulders of the Struggle, Memoir of a Political Insider* speaks directly to these pertinent issues haunting not only Zimbabwe but Africa at large.

Rather than to understand neo-colonial analysis from internationalist position, Obert Mpfu articulates a critical historiographic distinction which points to intranationalist phases. Internationalist narratives have conventionally focused on neo-colonial analysis with the former colonisers playing their various roles in nurturing the newly independent countries, while intra-nationalist pays attention to civil society organisations (CSOs) with a quest to push for the agenda of the former colonisers. International Relations scholars, students, policy makers and researchers with avid research interests on Africa, auto/biographies will unequivocally and positively benefit from Obert Mpfu's work.

# **Ideological Consistency, Posterity of Nationalist Principles and Black Economic Empowerment.**

Philip Chiyangwa

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* has broadened my horizon of appreciating the function of literature. Besides, the creative outline of the themes of the book, I realised that autobiographies have an empowerment effect on their audiences. As such, Dr Mpfu's engagement in self-writing hypnotises the ordinary reader to appreciate the prolific and less emphasised side of his profile rooted in Zimbabwe's armed struggle and in post-independence politics. His overlapping relevance in Zimbabwean politics characterised by his transition from the Zimbabwean African People's Union (ZAPU) to being a member of ZANU in the early 80s heralding the path to the Unity Accord proves how he has always mastered the art of being strategically positioned in shaping his political career.

To political students and participants, Mpfu's autobiography is an inspiring masterpiece. In the Second-Republic under the leadership of President Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, the author is serving the ruling ZANU PF as the Secretary for Administration in the Politburo. His consolidated ascendancy to power leaves many footnotes of excellence in the mind of the reader. In this regard, Obert Mpfu's life story is in itself empowering as it explores the relationship between discipline and ideological consistency. The tips on discipline and consistency discussed in the book serve as the major reason for ZANU PF's continued survival which the book exhaustively engages.

At the same time, Mpfu's life history grounded on the nationalist liberation trajectory is symbolic of auditable adherence to discipline and ideological consistency at an individual level. Mpfu's self-reflections profoundly contest the neo-liberal assertions of Zimbabwe and indeed Africa's dispossession misconstrued as a Western civilising mission. In discussing the issue of economic indigenisation, the writer is demonstrating the need for Africa to reimagine economic policy-making

outside Eurocentric (looting and plunder) terms which have sustained our continued dispossession as a race.

### **Discipline and Loyalty to Principle**

As Mpfu writes the story of his life in Zimbabwean politics, he is reasserting his place in the mind of the reader as a mentor and a point of reference to credentials of ZANU PF's tradition of rewarding discipline and total subscription to the party-line. His rise through the party structures from the cell to national leadership demonstrates his devotion to ZANU PF. In no unequivocal terms, Mpfu attributes his stay in the politics to discipline and declares that he takes a leaf from the wisdom of the late former President Robert Mugabe (quoted in Mpfu 2020 p. 61) who once said:

I have described discipline as having two dimensions – the external and the internal – emphasising that the internal kind of discipline was the more important of the two. Internal discipline is a state of order within a person that propels him to do the right things. It is a stage of individual development that resolves the contradictions within an individual. The pull to be selfish is counterbalanced by a greater pull to be selfless, the pull to drunkenness is countered by one to moderation, the pull to disobedience is negated by that to obedience, and the pull to sexual givenness yields to sexual restraint, deviationism is corrected by compliance and individualism by collectivism. The individual must comply with the order laid down by the group. Our group is the Party called ZANU.

In his own words, Mpfu indicates that his political survival has been predicated on his subscription to discipline. In buttressing this point, Mpfu (2020 p. 61) recalls:

I was entrusted with very crucial ministries during my tenure in the cabinet. I have successfully executed my duties with the diligence and honour of a determined patriot. I am grateful for my current elevation as the ZANU PF Secretary for Administration. My current assignment has been made smoother by a robust atmosphere of collegiality from highly experienced former cabinet ministers and diplomats deployed as full-time heads of departments at the party headquarters.



In the same manner, while reading Mpofu's book one would be analytical unconscious not to associate a higher attribute of the principle of discipline to the political person of the First Secretary and President of the ruling ZANU PF, Dr Emmerson Mnangagwa. The mention of President Mnangagwa in this respect stimulates the nostalgia of a generation which discovered its mission to liberate Zimbabwe from colonial bondage. Therefore, when Mpofu writes not only as a member of this generation but as any active current political player in Zimbabwe, he is reminding us of the journey we have travelled as a nation. His writing gives hope to the continuity of the liberation values espoused by his generation in delivering an independent Zimbabwe.

### **The Second-Republic: A Pursuit of Ideological Consistency**

As one reads the life story of veteran politician Obert Mpofu from the current pinnacle of his reflection since the age of 16. This is a narrative pointed towards an intergenerational baton passing rite. This diverts the thematic bias of the book from personal memories to a re-centred focus on the national identity. What one sees here is history being narrated to re-live the past in a bid to guide Zimbabwe towards unity, prosperity and reconciliation. At the same time, Cde Mpofu has successfully curated the ideological scene from a historical dimension to motivate an absolute understanding of the past and the present. In the same vein, Mpofu's read facilitates the need for a defined ideological standpoint for Zimbabwe to decide the future based on enduring traditions of the nation's liberation. In drawing ideology to the fore of his life story, the author buttressed his fervent loyalty to nationalist values. This is a man who has seen it all from his ZAPU membership right up to his current place in ZANU PF.

He is also best qualified to discuss the ideological contradictions which have traversed the survival path of the nationalist movement in Zimbabwe. Mpofu concedes to the fact that ZANU PF's long stay in power has also been entrenched in a plethora of internal and external power struggles. He does not conceal that ZANU PF was born out of the contradictions experienced as early as 1963 within the nationalist movement. His narrative's revisit to the contradictions within the liberation movement; now from a ZANU PF entry-point is symbolic of the continued need for self-introspection within political parties. At the same time, this calls

for celebration as ZANU PF has been able to survive internal rifts and incessantly reproduce itself to continue as the party of choice for the majority of Zimbabweans.

President Mnangagwa as a symbol of the ZANU PF's rejuvenation in the post-Mugabe era as well articulated in Mpfu's book embodies the tenets of institutional memory which gives direction to the future of the party. At a national level, ZANU PF under the leadership of President Mnangagwa becomes an important vehicle to a good governance transitional experience which reinvigorates political and economic reform in Zimbabwe. As I write, it is even hard to ignore the amount of transformation which Zimbabwe has undergone courtesy of President Mnangagwa's administration. However, this position does not exclude the challenges which the country has since experienced since November 2017 after the exit of the former President from office. Chapters 14 and 15 of Mpfu's autobiography prove beyond doubt that the continuation of the liberation agenda has always been defined through the institution of constitutionalism and cardinal terms of the anti-colonial ideology. Mpfu (2020 p. 230) gives merit to this principle by stating that "...ZANU PF's posterity is guaranteed by consistent and unequivocal adherence to the core values of the liberation". The discussion around the issue of peace and reconciliation also demonstrates clear efforts by the current administration in asserting inclusive nationalism. Mpfu does not shy away from asserting that nation-making past mistakes must be revisited to ascertain the future of peace, reconciliation and national healing. In all fairness, the book articulates a clear objective promoting a nation-building agenda in as much as it calls for the ideological repositioning of Zimbabwe in challenging imperialism.

### **Indigenisation of the Economy**

Part of Mpfu's call for an ideological renaissance in his autobiography is anchored on the need for Africa to continue the trajectory of economic indigenisation guided by Zimbabwe's land reform programme –a master blueprint for economic democratisation. Mpfu insists that economic empowerment policies remain the source of ZANU PF's powerbase and emphasises the need for the party to innovatively protect the Black economic empowerment policy. As a mass-line party, the indigenisation

of the economy was and remains part of the organic characteristics of consolidating its relevance to the erstwhile marginalised Black majority. Therefore, it can be safely argued that Mpfu's book is written with the economically disadvantaged African populace in mind. At the same time, Mpfu writes against colonial capital. He reiterates how much the government's economic indigenisation policy offended imperialist interests. The intensification of land redistribution and its irreversible position facilitated Zimbabwe's international isolation. The idea of returning land to the marginalised majority agitated international capital –which Mpfu lambasts in his book for being instrumental in causing Africa's problems. Mpfu points to the cause of economic indigenisation in explaining the roots of the international pressure which has been exerted on our domestic political processes.

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*, exposes the magnitude of efforts by erstwhile colonial forces to challenge Zimbabwe's economic self-determination through demonising economic empowerment policies. With the increase in neoliberal politics, any idea tilted towards economic empowerment is criminalised. The West's illegal sanctions regime imposed on Zimbabwe prove the high level of hostility endangering our sovereignty. With all these insights into how our politics is being ambushed by colonial interests, the writing of our national story becomes pivotal. Due to that Mpfu's autobiography must be celebrated for reclaiming the nationalist ideological space.

# Politics must lead the Gun? Unmasking the Omnipotence of the “Gun” in Zimbabwean Politics.

Richard Runyararo Mahomva

*Our votes must go together with our guns. After all, any vote 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.*

*Robert Mugabe, 1976*

## Introduction

The military (Herein referred to as the gun) in Zimbabwe is an organic revolutionary motif of our struggle. The gun as the facilitator of Zimbabwe’s liberation from colonialism is the embodiment of all ideas which should encourage us to stand against imperialism. As an emblem of territorial integrity preservation, the gun is the rallying point for reminiscing those we lost in the fight to be a free species from colonial wrath. The gun interacted with our communities in the heart of the liberation struggle as our brave combatants confronted the enemy. On the contrary, the imperialist establishment also used the gun to frustrate the pace and effort of the anti-colonial fight. The counter-ideological constructions and deconstructions of the revolutionary imagination of the gun in Zimbabwe’s struggle for liberation have since manifested through varying academic and journalistic thoughts. This explains the existential contrast between progressive anti-colonial nationalist aspirations which are under attack from the neoliberal foothold of the regime change project in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the anti-colonial and neo-colonial warfare continues.

In this conversation, I discuss the role of the military (the gun) as an ideological entry point to remembering the innumerable sacrifices which gave birth to the independence of Zimbabwe. This is influenced by

the emergence of normative obsession to deconstruct and dismiss the significance of the military in Zimbabwean historiography by neoliberal proponents. Even within ZANU PF, the dictum of ‘politics leading the gun’, has produced notions of stigmatising the military as a peripheral entity from mainstream politics. Through this submission, I posit that in the Zimbabwean context the ‘gun and politics’ are a homogenous and historically indissoluble institution. The chapter asserts that the ‘gun and politics’ embody Zimbabwe’s anti-colonial political-culture genes.

This chapter explores the varying illustrations of the gun (military) throughout Zimbabwe’s history in Obert Mpofu’s text *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*. The chapter discusses Mpofu’s military political genesis based on his credentials as a ZPRA trained cadre and his post-combatant life in statecraft shaped by his military orientation. The second objective of this submission is to situate Mpofu’s attempt to remind Zimbabweans of the contribution by the army in delivering the nation’s second liberation in November 2017 under the auspices of Operation Restore Legacy. Mpofu argues that it was this second liberation which gave birth to the Second-Republic.

## **Writing the Struggle**

The title of Mpofu’s book exalts the essence of the armed liberation and its value. This explains why Mpofu claims that the philosophy of his writing is “On the Shoulders of Struggle”. This title depicts one who sees himself and his ideas fortified on the imagined shoulders of a political consciousness which informs the liberation of his country from colonialism at the same time propelling his ideological standpoint. This makes the thematic thrust of his memoir more militant. The struggle becomes his philosophical enabler to self-remembering. The epitaph of the “struggle” in African philosophy is critical in addressing Africa’s war against imperialism. Therefore, when the idea, notion and legend of the ‘struggle’ is deployed in any creative or philosophical space one is quick to align the rationality of that particular piece of work to liberation memory.

The emphasis on the struggle in Mpofu’s book finds lodgement in other

political autobiographic texts written by Zimbabwean politicians whose history is closely located in the Second-Chimurenga such as Morris Nyagumbo (1980), Joshua Nkomo (1984), Fay Chung (2007), Cephas Msipa (2015) and recently Tshinga Dube (2019). Through their writings all these luminaries of the Zimbabwean armed liberation struggle predominantly underscore their outstanding roles in the fight against colonialism. Put together, this pro-nationalist collage of self-writings is centred on articulating the objectives of the armed liberation and why it was important for self-sacrifices to be made in the quest to defeat the enemy.

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*, is rooted in that legacy framing of displaying the virtues of the militant uprisings of our people. In the process, Mpofu like the rest of the other African nationalist writers situated within the Zimbabwean liberation discursive terrain exalts the image of the gun. In the process, he is inviting the reader to reimagine the place of the gun in Zimbabwe's national memory as redemptive symbol. Without doubt, Mpofu's reflections on the armed struggle and its influence in shaping nationalist politics in Zimbabwe is illustrated in Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Homecoming* (1972). Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1973: 26) posits that 'Violence in order to change an intolerable, unjust social order is not savagery: it purifies man. Violence to protect and preserve an unjust, oppressive social order is criminal and diminishes man.' The mutual assertions in Mpofu (2020) and Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1973) on the permanent significance of African revolutionary resistances and their socio-genetic make-up resonates with the Fanon (1963) paradigm of liberating violence which buttresses the urgency for aggressive displacements of institutions of injustice. As such, African revolutionary movements –ZPRA and ZANLA included carried the mandate of unsettling the hegemony of colonial powers and in the process existed to dismantle the order of colonialism and replace it with decolonisation. As such, the waged wars against colonial establishments by African nationalist revolutionary organs epitomise the significance of redemptive violence underscored in Fanon's thesis. In Mpofu's perspective, the imagined future of the nation is underpinned on the tenets of the armed struggle. Based on this stance, the autobiography buttresses the important role of the institution of the

military institution in articulating and positioning of the national question in its varying and intermingling directions. The book deploys a highly creative and philosophical delineation of some events, cardinal principles of the liberation struggle and the continuous fight against neo-colonialism. With all its thematic merits and demerits, this is a timely submission by an ex-combatant and a towering contemporary political figure acutely challenging imperialist logic through his tutelage as a foot soldier in the fight for independence:

In essence, this contribution explores compelling ideological force and strategic military inputs which made the armed liberation struggle a success. A key intention of the memoir is to also discuss the major political processes that our country has undergone from 1980 to date. In this self-account, I intend to transcend the sensational with a strong inclination towards the analytical. Beyond the historical, attempts are made to also tackle the philosophical dimension because politics is played out on the foundation of competing ideas (Mpfu 2020 p. 2).

In taking up this commitment to write the struggle, Mpfu argues that future generations must be able to retrace our national history rooted in the armed struggle. The motive to his writing is to create a never-aging story of our national triumph to consolidate a lasting impression of the centrality of the armed liberation war in shaping the conscience of our country's political culture.

### **ZPRA and Mpfu's Formative Political Orientation**

Apart from his immediate family members who inspire his active participation in politics in the early 60s, young Obert is drawn to politics by the combatant commissariat facility of the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA). By 1964 he was already a ZPRA collaborator while pursuing his studies at the Sacred Heart Mission. On several occasions, he found himself crossing to Zambia to smuggle a pro-ZAPU publication called *The Zimbabwe Times* into Southern-Rhodesia. *The Zimbabwe Times* was widely disseminated to party loyalists and this was viewed as an act of sabotage to the colonial regime. Consequently, this had punitive implications, but young Obert and his peers remained consistent in this exercise. His allegiance to the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZPRA) influenced his recruitment into ZPRA's reconnaissance

teams in 1967. His operations in the West and Eastern Front respectively are discussed in Chapter 3. His life in Zambia and Tanzania is also explained in the book. Cast into perspective, Mpfu's reflections about his combatant side depicts that most of our politicians –especially those of Mpfu's generation were politically groomed through military training. This is also highlighted Chapter 2 of the book which explores the author's "... Initiation into Struggle" as he states that:

I have never been reprimanded or punished for indiscipline since the time I joined politics. Even during the struggle, I was never subjected to corporal punishment. Never have I indulged in any political mischief which invited any disciplinary action from the party. My first training was in the military. In the military discipline constitutes one's initial grounding. Self-restraint is another major character which makes one a solid leader. So I was taught loyalty and discipline in the formative years of my training (Mpfu 2020 p. 19).

Basically, Mpfu traces his current political position to the severity of his training in the military and how the gruesome combatant exercise instilled discipline and loyalty in his adherence to party orders and principles. This is further confirmed by Mazariri (2011) in his analysis of the use of disciplinary mechanisms to guard the conduct of the members of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA). ZANLA as a military wing established on the disciplinary code of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). As such, ZANLA members were expected to conform to the values and the ideals of ZANU as far as discipline was concerned. Therefore, the tradition of discipline underscored in Mpfu's autobiography and Mazarire (2011)'s analogy substantiate the political leadership grooming role of the military in Zimbabwe. In a way, Mpfu (2020) and Mazarire (2011) challenge the view that the military in Zimbabwe has been a conduit of anarchy. Therefore, the institution of the gun must be credited for supplying Zimbabwe's political space with vibrant leaders such as Obert Mpfu who stands as a highly decorated depiction of actualisation in the area of leadership and governance.

### **The Military in Zimbabwe's Succession Politics and Operation Restore Legacy**

The centrality of the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (ZDF) in the march



towards Zimbabwe's second freedom is well articulated in Dr Obert Mpofu's autobiography, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*. Mpofu's book defies the normalcy of the anti-military rhetoric by a certain section of the academia which believes that the military must never have a place in the running of the country's political affairs. This group of academics and activists is famous for its blueprint statement "... the military must stay in the barracks". This comes from the view that the military's involvement in mainstream politics is immoral and must not be tolerated in a modern democracy. According to this school of romanticism modernity and the notion of democracy are foregrounded on the neoliberal urge which is disengaged –and is even at war with the anti-colonial construct of our politics. This position tilted towards dislocating the role of the military in our politics is misguidedly neoliberal and is opposed to the very soul of our nationalist revolution. The biological nexus between the military and politics in Zimbabwe defines the revolutionary character of our statecraft, national values, identity and aspirations. Our unique history in the liberation struggle justifies the firmly tangled connection of our politics with the gun. This position is clearly articulated in Chapter 14 of *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* as the author prefaces the chapter with remarks Retired General Zivinashe (quoted in Mpofu 2020 p. 205) on the allegiances of the military to the nation and its liberation legacy:

We wish to make it very clear to all Zimbabwean citizens that the security organisations will only stand in support of those political leaders that will pursue Zimbabwean values, traditions and beliefs for which thousands of lives were lost in the pursuit of Zimbabwe's hard-won independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and national interests. To this end, let it be known that the highest office in the land is a straitjacket whose occupant is expected to observe the objectives of the liberation struggle. We will therefore not accept, let alone support or salute, anyone with a different agenda that threatens the very existence of our sovereignty.

It was in this spirit of allegiance to the perennial legacy of the struggle that the crossover from the reigns of the late African icon Robert Gabriel Mugabe into the New Dispensation was ushered by the military. The

role of the ordinary citizen cannot be ignored considering that this was a civil and military brokered process. To this end, Mpfu (2020 p. 212) states that this revealed the complementary facet of the gun with popular interest embodied in politics:

The omnipresence of the military in Zimbabwean politics nullifies the narrow dictum of “politics leading the gun.” The fraternal relationship between “politics and the gun” was symbolically expressed through the land reform which was initiated by war-veterans towards the new millennium. The resurgence of the economic decolonisation agenda led by war-veterans corrected a long-neglected injustice. With the politically negotiated terms of power, political independence was born, but it took a further militant step for economic equality to be realised. The war-veterans rescinded post-colonial policy compromises and defied the bureaucratic orders which secured interests of White monopoly capital.

From the above submission, the interchanging role of the institution of the gun is fluid and is not narrowed to conservative parameters. This is evidenced by the ZDF and the war-veterans’ continued shared role in defining the course of Zimbabwe’s post-colonial ideological reconstruction. The war-veterans are not only active in the agrarian reform, they are also seen taking a central role in ushering the transition into the post-Mugabe era. To this end, characters such as Ambassador Christopher Mutsvangwa, Douglas Mahiya, Victor Matemadanda, Tshinga Dube and Zenzo Ncube come to mind. Their contribution as liberation stalwarts in challenging the late former President Robert Mugabe to resolve the succession question substantiates the pivotal stake of the institution of the gun in setting the pace for the birth of a new political order in Zimbabwe as highlighted in Mpfu’s autobiography.

Beyond the events of November 2017 which culminated in the transitional order of Operation Restore Legacy, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* hits the memory nerve by taking the reader back to the role of ZDF commanders in mapping the succession issue. According to Mpfu, after the retirement of General Solomon Mujuru, General Zvinvashe was instrumental in advocating for a power-sharing arrangement with the opposition. As Mpfu narrates, Zvinvashe’s call for the late former

President to retire was dismissed as ZANU PF was not ready to take up a pact arrangement with the opposition. Around the time he initiated his succession campaign national tempers were still high considering that the land reform was at its peak and Robert Mugabe was the face of that revolution. Therefore, any attempt to push him to the terraces at the time was tantamount to fighting the path of remarrying the land with its people. Mpfu (2020) further argues that Zvinvashe's endorsement of Mugabe's 2002 election candidature was influenced by the failure of his succession campaign. His allegiance declaration to Mugabe was meant to protect his interest as his appointment was at the mercy of the ex-President. Zvinvashe's failure to seek a consultative transitional bargain resulted in the disgruntlement of senior cadres in the party leading to Mugabe's increased power security. Mpfu's account asserts that Zvinvashe's agenda also suffered sabotage from his predecessor who still had strong political influence and continued to infiltrate every sphere of power to position his interests.

In Mpfu's account, Vitalis Zvinvashe was replaced by the current Vice President, Dr Constantine Chiwenga. The author observes that Retired General Chiwenga's allegiance to the late former President was unequivocal. Mpfu (2020) posits that Dr Chiwenga's elevation as the ZDF commander deactivated the failed military-driven transitional course which was initiated Retired Generals Mujuru and Zvinvashe. To this end, the author reflects: "Chiwenga's tenure in the ZDF was characterised by the enhanced military-backed confidence in the Mugabe's leadership. With Chiwenga at the helm, Mujuru's continued proposition for Mugabe's removal from power was robustly pacified" (p. 215).

Mpfu's historical trace of the military's political role reflects the magnitude of the moral obligation of the "gun" in ascertaining the direction of power continuities and discontinuities in Zimbabwe. The events of November 2017 as observed in Mpfu's account suggest the significance of the military in leading the path of influencing political change. This contests the neoliberal misrepresentation of the organic function of the military in Zimbabwean politics. Instead, Mpfu's autobiography situates the military at the centre of Zimbabwe's democracy which was born out of the principles of the armed struggle.

As one reads *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*, a rethinking of the role of the military in Zimbabwe is facilitated. Outside the neoliberal generic and narrow ‘coup’ analysis of November 2017, Mpfu introduces an alternative perspective which articulates the importance of Operation Restore Legacy. Mpfu argues that ZANU PF and the entire currency of democracy in Zimbabwe needed cleansing from the “one centre of power” syndrome which manifested during the Mugabe era under the then ZANU PF G40 faction. As a template of reasserting principles of the armed struggle, Operation Restore Legacy remains key in reminding politicians that they have a mandate to align their objectives of service to the founding values of the liberation struggle.

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# Obert Mpfu and Africa's Burden to Reclaim Her Voice in History

Nkanyiso Sibanda

In a 1994 interview with *The Paris Review* conducted by Jerome Brooks, respected and prominent Nigerian novelist, the late Professor Chinua Achebe remarked that “Until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” This is a striking African proverb which dramatizes, amongst other things, the importance of hearing a narrative from a primary source, one who was privy to the “hunting confrontation” as opposed to one-sided and oftentimes secondary narratives.

For a long time, accounts of the war against colonialism in Zimbabwe, her independence, transition to the first democratic government up until the advent of the Second Republic, have been fed to us in the most by outsiders who gave peripheral, selective, superficial and non-personal accounts of what transpired. It is for this reason that reading such narratives from an individual who has been close to and privy to the development of Zimbabwe from Zimbabwe's second liberation war times to the present Second Republic is a breath of fresh air. Obert Mpfu's book provides a personal, organic, dynamic and “insider” account of the developments of Zimbabwe. It is an important contribution which corrals the primary strands of historical as well as contemporary events which resulted in the creation of modern day Zimbabwe. It sets out the trajectory of state power of Zimbabwe's liberation war groups in the name of ZANU and ZANU PF exploring their immense contribution to the liberation of Zimbabwe from its erstwhile colonial masters.

Starting with an account of his birth and upbringing in Matabeleland's Jambezi area, Mpfu's narrative is a wholly absorbing account of how he came into a Zimbabwe where indigenous black people were systematically excluded from the means of production on racial grounds, and turned into pariahs in the land of their birth. It is this economic subjugation and exclusion from mainstream means of production that inspired a desire

to liberate Zimbabwe and her people and compelled Mpfu to join the war against colonial domination in 1967. As an active participant in the war against colonial rule in Zimbabwe, Mpfu's account is therefore authentic, informative, intriguing as well as quite captivating. His account details how he left his home as a young man to join the war and details the challenges faced by fellow liberation war participants.

### **Urgency of the Black Narrative in Zimbabwean Historiography**

Whether founded or unfounded, the criminalization of colonial hegemony for the poverty of our liberation memory raises the need for our story to be written by none, but ourselves. Mpfu has taken a bold step to enter into this zone of commitment to document our history and give practical meaning to the struggle to remember of our past. As already indicated in the editorial introduction of this book, one of the remedies to the trauma of dismemberment is putting together the disjointed past to make sense of the present. In attempting to understand Africa's current problems we need to explore how we got to be where we are today. Mpfu's approach of connecting his life to the early constructions of the independent Zimbabwean nation-state is aligned to the attempt to re-member the nation whose early development was sabotaged by negotiated independence. The negotiated path to political transition under a shadow coalition government structure made up of Rhodesians and African bureaucrats substantiates the depth of colonial hegemony entrenched in post-independence politics.

To Mpfu, such transitional modalities deradicalised the anti-colonial approach initiated by the nationalist movement. The author also questions the tenets and the values of the idea of reconciliation which he criticizes for subjecting Zimbabwe's total liberation to the brink of compromise. In building his case further, Mpfu also discusses how such compromises affected early policy-making in Zimbabwe to the point of the adoption of neoliberal policies such as the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP).

In articulating the evolution of the independent Zimbabwean state, Mpfu has done exceptionally well in giving an Afrocentred dimension to some of the origins of Zimbabwe's economic challenges. In writing the past from an African view, Mpfu challenges the 'absolute' truths of the

African situation by non-Africans and their anti-African liberation ideas. This explains why the land issue forms a thematic bedrock of Mpfu's reason and his attempt to articulate his mission in Zimbabwean politics. The unapologetic emphasis on the policy merits of the land reform programme are an attempt to address the missing African perspective on Zimbabwe's imperialist demonised agrarian revolution.

### **The Role of the Nationalist Generation**

Those who had a direct experience with colonialism and were close witnesses to the early independence political developments owe the younger generation similar books like Mpfu's autobiography. War veterans like Mpfu also have a task to account for their various contributions to the liberation of Zimbabwe. As already argued by Mpfu –who was among ZPRA's reconnaissance teams; there is need for more accounts to be produced by every participant in our armed struggle for independence. As pointed out by Mpfu, the authoritative confinement of memory to those who were in high ranks of command limits various narratives about our struggle from coming to the fore. A determined route in this respect should also see women who took an active part in the struggle for Zimbabwe situating themselves in the nation's memory.

### **Conclusion**

*On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* is a crucial account of Zimbabwe's past based on the lived experiences of a freedom fighter; one of Zimbabwe's longest serving former cabinet ministers and a current senior member of the ruling ZANU PF. The insidership of his account is very strategic in giving an authoritative instinct to Zimbabwe's political events before and after independence. Mpfu's autobiography is a very important ideological handbook for those with a strong ideological predisposition to decolonizing knowledge. I found the pan-Africanist ideological enunciation of Mpfu's account worth constant revisiting as Africa continues to struggle between freedom and the vestiges of colonialism. Beyond the borders of Zimbabwean historiography, this is a book worth the attention of followers of African-focused philosophical thought.



# Dancing to the Beat of our Own Drum: The Philosophical Motive to Self-writing

Mabasa Sasa

Without indulging in hyperbole, in 1975, Charles Mungoshi bequeathed to humanity one of the greatest – and perhaps one of the most under-appreciated – literary works in history: *Waiting for the Rain*. It is a fictional work that bravely and realistically attempts to traverse, in a more localised way than Ayi Kwei Armah's *2000 Seasons* (1975), the physical and psychological experience of the “native” over a period encompassing the pre-colonial and colonial, and almost prophetic glimpse into the post-colonial. One of the greatest moments in a literary work replete with great moments is the exchange between the characters the Old Man and his son Garabha on pages 115-116 of *Waiting for the Rain*.

For purposes of context, the Old Man is the proverbial keeper of memory in a society hurtling headlong into a modernism that sits uneasily with its struggle against British colonialism. His grandson Garabha is the embodiment of the young “native” who increasingly finds it difficult to fit into the new world that is being born around him, but can only grasp at the smoky wisps of a dying world that the Old Man represents. Garabha is talking to the Old Man after another grandson, John, has sought advice on how the nationalist fighters can best beat the white colonialist on the battle field. Garabha too needs advice from the Old Man; he is hoping for directions that will give him a firmer hold on both the passing world and the next.

The Old Man had not been interested in giving much to the headstrong John. And to Garabha, he can give anything more tangible than philosophical signposts towards self-discovery, self-definition and self-determination. Referencing the First Chimurenga in counterpoint to the ongoing Second Chimurenga, the Old Man says:

Now we – we were defeated but ours was a clean fight. We still had our own gods of whom we were proud. And because these gods meant the same thing to all of us, we rose like one man to fight the white

man. And we didn't fight them just for the sake of fighting – no. They misunderstood our hospitality for stupidity. We received them with food and they thanked us with guns...

Today we ask: Where are we? Who are we? What wrong did we do? How many stories do we hear of the white man humiliating our people? Again and again and again. We hear it, but do we see it? We might be blind. We hear it, but do we listen? We might be deaf.

And why? Playing the enemy's drum, that's why. Making so much noise with the enemy's drum that we can't even hear the beating of our own gullible little miserable hearts. Each time you drink that tea, to whose god do you give praise? Each time you listen to that talking box, on whose altar are you making the sacrifices?

These are the questions John and his friends should ask themselves before they come to me. This is what they don't know, and because they don't know it they are going to lose the battle before it's even started. They fight for what they don't know. We fought for what we knew. We cut off their genitals and threw them into Munyati River because they shouldn't have been called men with that woman's greed of theirs. We said: build there, the land is the Earth's, there is enough for everyone. But their greed reduced them to something less than men. We couldn't understand this desire of theirs to call everything mine mine mine... That is why I won't listen to anyone who speaks the way John does, fighting the white men and yet praying to the white men's gods (Mungoshi 1975 p. 115-116)

For the Old Man, there can be no victory for as long as the “native” beats the enemy's drum to the detriment of his own song. It is a philosophy that is at the heart of Dr Obert Moses Mpofu's *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*.

The publication of Mpofu's memoirs has, as it they should, elicited variegated responses. Most of these responses have been interpreted within the continuing and inadequate narrative of a “polarised society”. The polarisation, as the Old Man tried to tell the yet to be born nation of Zimbabwe in 1975, is merely a symptom, an outcome, a consequence of

beating drums that drown our own song.

The so-called polarised viewpoints on Mpfu's *Memoirs of a Political Insider* are but the pseudo-intellectual knee-jerks expected of a people who have written little but read much about themselves in the historical-contemporary-future continuum of identity. Simply put, we have not learnt how to tell our story. We have not grasped the practicalities of defining our present as part of a self-determining continuum. We do not trust ourselves to chart our own future.

It is in this context that Mpfu's biographical intervention is crucial, especially so at a point in the adolescence of a nation that is trying to find its political hormonal balance a few short decades after Independence. His interpolation, in his own words:

The whole idea is to guard against memory loss and the distortion of our treasured past. In essence this contribution explores compelling ideological force and strategic military inputs which made the armed liberation struggle a success. A key intention of the memoir is to also discuss the major political processes that our country has undergone from 1980 to date. In this self-account, I intend to transcend the sensational with a strong inclination towards the analytical. Beyond the historical, attempts are made to also tackle the philosophical dimension because politics is played out on the foundation of competing ideas. About the Zimbabwean political question, all the ideas which have characterised the juxtaposed contestations of power are confronted and unpacked. If this memoir works as I intend, it will leave the reader with a more intimate understanding of the Zimbabwean national question from 1980 to date. (Mpfu 2020 p. 2)

In that regard, Mpfu's self-writing is more than about self: it is more of what one could grandiloquently term "writing the nation". Further, it takes the biography beyond ego and places it firmly within the realm of lived history with a philosophical underpinning that spans the Second Chimurenga, Independence, Operation Restore Legacy and our present and forward-looking adolescent steps into meaningful socio-economic transformation.

Mpfu locates himself and his journey within the national pilgrimage.

And he is excellently positioned for such a literary undertaking when one takes into account his role in the Second Chimurenga, his time in the civil service at the dawn of Independence, his rise as a private sector actor and businessman with a national profile, his political career, and his central role in Operation Restore Legacy. What is particularly pivotal about the writing of *Memoirs of a Political Insider* is the foundational premise of Mpfu as a Zimbabwean, plain and simple (Chapter 2: “Childhood and Initiation into Struggle”). It is that premise that behoves him to make a contribution to “writing the nation”. It is that lack of appreciation of that premise that has stopped many Zimbabweans – whether occupying national office or making a humble contribution in their own spheres – from contributing to the collective body of self-knowledge.

Which takes us to another key aspect of Mpfu’s welcome foray into self-writing. For all of Mpfu’s acknowledgement of Robert Gabriel Mugabe’s personal and national importance, he perhaps does not do enough by way of directly exhorting his mentors and peers to make their contribution to “writing the nation”. In that sense, Mpfu becomes a voice in the wilderness. And should his mentors and peers go the Robert Mugabe way of being buried with their stories, *Memoirs of a Political Insider* could well become a lonely alternative whisper in the maelstrom of anti-nationalist historiography. Mpfu notes as much when he says:

This four-decade reflection of Zimbabwe’s Independence comes against a backdrop of innumerable biographies written by key actors in the nationalist movement. On the other hand, most nationalist biographical work has been the reproduction of colonially invented history. This has seen little historiographical input coming from those of us who were in the trenches fighting the same colonial system which now wants to claim a monopoly in telling our story. It is even unfortunate that the late former President, Cde Robert Mugabe, is mainly remembered from the perspective of imperialist scholars, his political opponents and a few of his nationalist counterparts. As such, I write to liberate our nationalist history from imperial capture and narration. Moreover, I write to engage those rarely articulated truths of our political evolution against a backdrop of a highly polarised knowledge ecosystem. (Mpfu 2020 p. 7)

Of course, it is not Mpfu's fault if those who should "write the nation" do not do so. If anything, Mpfu's autobiography is a bold breaking of the mould, indeed, a redefinition of the mould. With that in mind, it matters not if one agrees or disagrees with Mpfu's philosophical musings, his interpretive forays or his futuristic hypotheses on what follows Operation Restore Legacy. What matters is that Mpfu has refused to continue "Making so much noise with the enemy's drum that we can't even hear the beating of our own gullible little miserable hearts".

## Postscript: A *dariro* on Obert Mpofu's reflection

To create this original book, Richard Runyararo Mahomva and Tawanda Zinyama bring together a *dariro* of nineteen reader-reviewers to critique Dr Obert Mpofu's *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider*. In terms of the African *dariro* or *pungwe* as models of education and conscientization and – to the youth who are the intended audience – five of the reader-reviewers can be classified as elders while the rest, fourteen, are mentors or aspiring mentors, altogether a *dariro* of five women and fourteen men.

Whether by design or coincidence, all the contributors are profoundly struck by the positioning of the author and his story within the drama and rendition of the Zimbabwean national question and history in the context of the wider pan-African struggle for liberation and self-definition. The title of the book being read is originally and organically about positioning as a critical anchorage for the enlargement and sustenance of African memory.

From C.A. Akrofi's *Twi Mmembusem: Twi Proverbs with English Translations and Comments* (from Ghana), we get the ancient African context of the title of Dr Mpofu's book. "One can see the inside of the assembly by standing on someone else's shoulders." One gets to understand the teachings of the African revolutionary Dare reChimurenga through the assistance of those ancestors, elders and mentors who got involved in the movement ahead of oneself. The inner precinct of the *dariro* or *dare* is the epicentre of collective memory, and one gets to partake of it through strategic positioning signifying his or her desire for knowledge.

The fascination of these nineteen reader-reviewers can be appreciated fully by understanding the difference between a great personality and a burdensome ego in African philosophy and memory construction. The *dariro* is a structure for preventing the ego from flooding the personality. A great personality is celebrated for its unique contribution (within the *dariro*) to collective memory construction and leadership of the people's popular movement for liberation. In contrast, the gross ego of the narcissist

seeks celebrity at the expense of the collective. Contribution by the great personality is controlled and assured through transparent and humble self-revelation controlled via the structure of the *darivo*:

- › First, the writer uses his totem Mpofu as a surname. The totem in African philosophy and ecology signifies unique positioning and contribution within the *darivo* as the universe. The perspective of the hare is different from that of the elephant, just as that of the lion is distinct from that of the crocodile; to assume a totem is to assume a perspective in the universe. This perspective is further modified by whether one is facing East, West, South or North, while in the circle.
- › Second, one's humility is determined by the fact of “*kuonesana*”, which means the individual in the *darivo* depends on the others to know what comes after him from behind; he or she cannot be all-knowing;
- › Third, Dr Mpofu identifies himself as an African youth growing up in colonial Rhodesia in the intellectual and political milieu of the 1960s;
- › Fourth, he reveals himself as a recruit of the Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU) after the banning of the African National Congress (ANC) and the United Democratic Party (UNDP);
- › Fifth, he moves from ZAPU to the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) for ideological and strategic reasons; and
- › Sixth, he offers, and dwells at length upon, his view of the causes of division and conflict within the Zimbabwean movement and how they can be overcome using the intellectual, cultural, ideological and material resources found within the Zimbabwean African *darivo*.

This unique positioning explains the wide appeal of his story to all the nineteen reader-reviewers and the rest of us.

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