

BEYOND THE COLONIAL HANGOVER:



**REIMAGINING ZIMBABWE'S
POLITICAL FUTURE**

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I. Introduction

Central to Afrofuturism is the agency of Black people to control their own destinies, founded upon autonomy and self-rule, emphasizing resilience and the reclamation of the past to build a better future (Toussaint, 2025). As a political lens, Afrofuturism seeks to recover futures that have been stolen, foreclosed, or rendered unimaginable by colonialism and its afterlives, including racial hierarchies, economic dependency, political authoritarianism, and epistemic domination. It insists that Black and African communities have always been future-makers, adapting, resisting, and building. Thus, Afrofuturism is inseparable from decolonial imagination, rooted in radical hope and the design of new futures (Hill-Jarret, 2023). Within this framework, the *longue durée* of Zimbabwe's resistance to colonialism and authoritarianism emerges as a compelling case study for the politics of foreclosed futures and Black liberation, resistance, and empowerment.

From 1890-1980, Zimbabwe was under British settler-colonial control, during which colonial governance systematically de-traditionalized and de-Africanized the population, generating cultural dissonance, uprootedness, and social alienation (Wuta, 2025). Although independence in 1980 promised demo-

cratic governance, land restitution, and pan-African sovereignty, these aspirations were gradually eroded by factionalism, power struggles, and recurrent political violence. Zimbabwe has thus been characterized as a postcolony, in which “the violent ghosts of colonialism are refusing to be put to burial,” allowing colonial systems of exclusion and violence to be reproduced (Mbembe, 1992 as cited in Mpofo, 2021, p. 3). The Mugabe-era was characterized by startling human rights abuses, dysfunctional economic policies, and nearly four decades of uninterrupted single-party rule, providing an opportunity to analyze the challenges of decolonial transitions and the cascading of power within nationalist echo-chambers. Zimbabwe's trajectory captures a paradox observable across many postcolonial contexts: a liberation movement forged in anti-colonial resistance gradually adopted and intensified the very techniques of coercion and conclusion it once sought to dismantle. This transformation reflects the enduring material and ideational legacies of colonial rule. These legacies continue to constrain postcolonial sovereignty within a global order structured by racial capitalism and geopolitical hierarchies.

Therefore, this paper adopts decolonial and critical theoretical frameworks to foreground the often under-theorised

forces of neocolonialism in Zimbabwe's political milieu. It treats authoritarianism not only as a mode of rule, but as an outcome of historically produced constraints on future-building. It argues that Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn after 2000 emerged not from an inevitable failure of African political culture, but from the interaction between colonial state continuity, Cold War and post-Cold War geopolitical interventions, liberation-movement political culture, and structural economic crisis. Together, these forces entrenched a militarized and exclusionary political order in which violent authoritarian consolidation became both possible and politically rational for ZANU-PF. Without accounting for exogenous geopolitics, analyses risk neglecting the colonial infrastructures and epistemic conditions that foreclose genuine decolonisation, suppress indigenous, community-centered governance traditions, and constrain post-liberation governments. Finally, by centering moments of interrupted possibility, especially the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA) experiment and community-informed political ethics, this paper approaches Zimbabwe not as a closed story of failed transition, but as a site for possibility and building futures on Zimbabweans' terms.

II. A brief review of related literature

Existing literature offers a detailed portrait of Zimbabwe's internal dynamics, but tends to understate how colonial state continuity and international hierarchies structured the field in which authoritarianism unfolded. Political economy and historical accounts emphasize that Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn was deeply rooted in internal political culture, liberation war legacies, and the breakdown of state institutions under mounting socio-economic pressures. While these explanations provide important insights into regime formation, they frequently overlook the ways colonial legacies and global power structures constrained Zimbabwe's political transition and narrowed the range of post-independence political possibilities.

Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger (2000) challenge regime narratives surrounding the so-called dissident conflict of the 1980s, demonstrating that violence in Matabeleland was not the result of a coordinated ZAPU rebellion but rather emerged from mistrust within the newly formed Zimbabwe National Army and the marginalization of ZIPRA combatants. Drawing on interviews with former fighters, they show that many ZIPRA "dissidents" acted out of fear and survival rather than insurgent

intent. Their work reveals how failures of demobilization, unequal treatment within state security institutions, and early reliance on coercion normalized violence as a tool of governance, foreshadowing later authoritarian practices. Political economy analyses situate Zimbabwe's authoritarian consolidation within the structural crises of the 1990s. Olukoshi (1998) argues that structural adjustment programs across Africa undermined state legitimacy by reducing social spending and intensifying popular hardship, often provoking state repression in response to protest. In the Zimbabwean context, Bond (2005) and Bracking (2005) document how the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) produced deindustrialization, unemployment, and fiscal collapse, eroding the regime's capacity to govern through consent. As economic legitimacy declined, the state increasingly relied on coercion and patronage, particularly through preferential treatment of war veterans and security elites, reinforcing authoritarian tendencies. Complementary institutional analyses by Hulec (2019) and Sachikonye (2000) trace the emergence of a militarized party-state, where the Joint Operations Command functioned as the *de facto* center of political authority. These authors document how the opaqueness of the executive, hollowing out of judicial and parliamentary branches, rise of se-

curocrats, and the politicization of the civil service created an architecture of rule that subordinated democratic processes to security imperatives. (Hulec, 2019; Sachikonye, 2009). This literature convincingly demonstrates how institutional decay enabled authoritarian consolidation, but it often treats these developments as primarily domestic pathologies rather than products of inherited colonial state structures.

Parallel scholarship focuses on ideology, nationalism and discursive power. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) conceptualizes Mugabeism as a populist and nationalist ideological creature that mobilized anti-imperialist sentiment, patriotic history, and exclusionary autochthony. Mugabe's discourses framed politics around martyrdom and the legacy of the liberation struggle, legitimizing repression and exclusion. Mugabe would also strategically deploy anti-imperialist discourse to reframe economic failure and political dissent as external sabotage (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004). Mpfu (2021) extends this analysis through a postcolonial philosophical lens, arguing that Mugabe fused liberation ideology with a Nietzschean will to power, reproducing colonial technologies of domination while claiming revolutionary legitimacy.

Liberation-movement theory further contextualizes these dynamics. Neocosmos (1998) distinguishes between peo-

ple's politics and state politics. The former being horizontal, mass-based, and participatory, and the latter being centralized, hierarchical, and exclusionary. He argues that liberation movements often drift toward authoritarianism because they inherit centralized organizational cultures and treat dissent as treasonous. This framework illuminates ZANU-PF's conflation of party and nation, hostility to pluralism, and its normalization of coercion.

Despite the richness of this scholarship, one critical dimension remains underdeveloped: the role of Cold War geopolitics and international power relations in shaping Zimbabwe's political trajectory. Olukoshi (1998) notes that during the Cold War, both Western and Eastern bloc powers routinely overlooked domestic repression in allied states, prioritizing geopolitical stability over democratic accountability. Moore (2014) deepens this insight by demonstrating that the destruction of the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA), a socialist-leaning, potentially democratic alternative within the liberation movement, was not merely a ZANU oppression project, but the outcome of coordinated regional and international interventions. Here, Western governments pulled strings to project their grand strategies. Locating Zimbabwe's independence in the Cold War context challenges assumptions that authoritarianism was inevitable or

purely endogenous (Moore, 2014).

By foregrounding external and historical forces, this paper contributes to the literature by situating Zimbabwe's post-2000 authoritarianism within a broader matrix of coloniality, Cold War intervention, and postcolonial constraint, offering a more holistic account of the country's democratic deficit. The next section outlines the decolonial framework used to analyze this case, chosen because it takes into account the forces of colonialism that are overlooked by the dominant literature.

III. Theoretical framework

Scholarship on democratic consolidation efforts and post-liberation governance offers valuable insights into regime formation in postcolonial contexts. Yet the Zimbabwe case demands an analytical framework that goes beyond institutional decline or liberation-movement excesses and instead interrogates the deeper structures that govern what kind of futures become politically possible.

Therefore, a decolonial framework, particularly a focus on the coloniality of power and the postcolony, is essential to understand the hierarchical world system that continues to constrain developmental autonomy and political stability. The violence inherent to imposing a colonial order leaves a deep imprint on

the political culture of newly independent states (Fanon, 1963). This indoctrination into a culture of violence is internalized by the postcolonial elite and bolstered by their newfound social and material capital (Cabral, 1974; Fanon, 1963). Indulgence is at the core of the new national bourgeoisie who have been conditioned and socialized by the Western bourgeoisie (Fanon, 1963).

Similarly, cultural domination is a foundational component of imperialism (Cabral, 1974). Through the repression and distortion of indigenous cultural systems, colonialism produces a population alienated from its own cultural values and inclined to assimilation into and reverence of the colonizer's worldview. This paper also draws on the notion of the coloniality of power, which posits that global modernity is structured by racial, economic, and epistemic hierarchies forged through European imperial expansion (Quijano, 2000). Despite formal independence, the hegemonic influence of Western capitalism and political norms continues to limit the sovereignty of states in the Global South. Zimbabwe's postcolonial trajectory cannot be separated from this global matrix: the consolidation of centralized power, the securitization of politics, and the capturing of colonial political technologies reflect the enduring grip of colonialism.

Integrating African philosophy fur-

ther grounds this paper's analytical approach. In particular, the Southern African concept of ubuntu, which conceives of personhood as fundamentally relational and community-based, counters essentialist claims about African political culture (Wuta, 2025). Rather, ubuntu represents a radically different political ethic of consensus building, communal accountability, and relational governance that colonial rule sought to suppress (Wuta, 2025). The epistemicide of uniquely African and traditional modes of thinking and the pressures of an ever-modernizing global system based on capitalism rendered post-colonial Africa debilitated to pursue authentic decolonization and return to original political functions. Taken together, these theories allow Zimbabwe to be digested not as the inevitable outcome of African political culture or liberation movement governance, but as the product of deeply entrenched colonial legacies and global hierarchies.

IV. Historical context

The political landscape that produced Zimbabwe's post-2000 crisis was rooted in political and economic fragmentation that began long before independence. The colonial state entrenched racial, regional, and ethnic divisions that structured both governance and

resistance. These divisions shaped the emergence of the two dominant nationalist movements, ZANU and ZAPU, whose rivalry would continue to influence post-independence politics (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000). ZANU drew its primary support from Shona-speaking regions and developed its armed wing, ZANLA, with backing from China and Tanzania, while ZAPU, rooted largely in Ndebele-speaking constituencies, formed ZIPRA with Soviet support (Moore, 2014). These divergent ideological orientations and external alliances produced competing visions of political order even within the shared objective of liberation.

These differing visions for national order produced military and political rivalry during the liberation movement. Yet, beneath the binaries of this rivalry was another fomenting faction of dissatisfaction with the old guard style politics. Thus, the ZIPA coalition of young combatants from ZIPRA and ZANLA united to challenge the older nationalist leadership with a youthful spirit (Moore, 2014). ZIPA posited potential for successful democratic transition, but its strength was quickly decapitated by the West, the Frontline States, and South Africa (Moore, 2014). This episode underscored how international and regional power dynamics intersected with internal factionalism to shape Zimbabwe's political future. In

this sense, ZIPA represents more than a historical footnote. It embodies what Afrofuturism might label a suppressed future. Its brief existence reveals that Zimbabwe's postcolonial state was not inherently destined for authoritarian oppression and inequity. Rather, alternative configurations of political authority; specifically, youth-led ideologically reformative, were imaginable and temporarily within reach.

Zimbabwe's transition from war to independence would crystallize many of these unresolved colonial-era tensions (Mpofu, 2025). The Lancaster House Agreement of 1979 ended the liberation war but entrenched a strong executive branch, protected settler property relations, and preserved much of the colonial state apparatus (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). While the settlement enabled a relatively peaceful transition, it constrained redistributive reform and embedded centralized authority within the new state. Following ZANU's electoral victory in 1980, efforts to integrate former ZIPRA and ZANLA combatants into the Zimbabwe National Army were plagued by mistrust, uneven treatment, and lingering Rhodesian influence within security institutions (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000).

These tensions escalated in the early 1980s. Allegations of arms caches discovered on ZAPU properties in 1982,

followed by the arrest and dismissal of senior ZIPRA commanders, deepened divisions and marginalized ZAPU politically and militarily (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000). The subsequent Gukurahundi campaign in Matabeleland, carried out by the Fifth Brigade under direct executive control, marked a decisive moment in the consolidation of authoritarian rule. Violence was deployed not merely as a response to insurgency, but as a strategy to eliminate political opposition and discipline perceived internal enemies, institutionalizing coercion as a legitimate tool of governance (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000).

The 1987 Unity Accord formally merged ZANU and ZAPU into ZANU-PF, consolidating a dominant-party system. While the accord ended large-scale violence, it did so by neutralizing opposition rather than fostering pluralism. The 1990s introduced new pressures that further destabilized Zimbabwe's political order. Economic liberalization under ESAP, combined with declining state capacity and the costly 1997 war veterans' payouts, eroded the regime's economic legitimacy (Bond, 2005; Bracking, 2005). These crises intensified reliance on patronage, securitization, and coercive control.

The emergence of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 represented the first credible electoral

challenge to ZANU-PF since independence (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004). By the turn of the millennium, Zimbabwe had a centralized ruling party, a militarized state architecture inherited from the colonial era, and growing social and economic instability, fortifying its authoritarianism and political violence.

V. Discussion

Zimbabwe's authoritarian consolidation after 2000 did not emerge from a single causal rupture, nor can it be reduced to leadership pathology or institutional decay alone. Rather, Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn was produced through interacting structural, ideological, and geopolitical forces that rendered violent authoritarianism both feasible and politically rational for ZANU-PF.

Building on this argument, four inter-related dynamics are particularly salient: 1) the militarized political culture inherited from the liberation struggle, 2) the structural and economic crises of the 1990s, 3) the continuity of colonial state architectures, and 4) and shifting international alignments that reshaped the regime's incentives and discursive strategies.

By the late 1990s, these dynamics crystallized into a political environment in which ZANU-PF's hold on power depended increasingly on coercion,

militarization, and the mobilization of anti-imperialist nationalism, culminating in the authoritarian extremism of 2000 and onwards. These forces were co-constructed and mutually operative under a global system structured by colonialism. From an Afrofuturist perspective, these dynamics did more than consolidate authoritarian rule; they systematically narrowed the horizon of political imagination by rendering alternative modes of government, rooted in pluralism, community authority, and radical redistribution, politically unviable. Authoritarianism and foreign intervention thus functioned not only as mechanisms of coercion, but as structural constraints that foreclosed the emergence of alternative postcolonial futures that had briefly surfaced during the liberation struggle.

VI. On the political culture of liberation movements and the militarization of the state

The origins of authoritarian political practice in Zimbabwe lie partly in the liberation struggle itself. The very characteristics that are necessary for a united and successful liberation front, including centralized-decision making, demand for absolute loyalty, secrecy, and militarization, are inherent to authoritarianism (Gumede, 2017). Draw-

ing on Neocosmos' (1998) distinction between "people's politics" and "state politics," ZANU-PF increasingly equated political authority with liberation credentials, framing dissent as betrayal rather than democratic contestation. This logic normalized coercion as a legitimate instrument of rule and fused party, state, and nation into a singular political identity. This fusion process made authoritarian governance appear not as a deviation from liberation ideals, but as their continuation, thereby narrowing the political space for democratic contestation.

At the heart of liberal theories on democracy is the entitlement to vote in or out the highest officials of government, with options of distinct and autonomous opposition (Olukoshim, 1998). However, the phenomenon of developing a one-party state and crushing opposition state has been rich across Africa, with cases including Mozambique, Tanzania, Angola, among others. This is often rooted in the desire to resolve ethnic tensions but ultimately drives further fractionalism that has been already established by the colonial regime (Gumede, 2017; Olukoshu, 1998).

The weaponization of patriotic history, repression of civil society, policing of identity, and justifications of violence mirror Cabral's (1974) warnings about liberation elites who substitute

domination for popular empowerment. More so, the excessive violence and militarization that was necessitated by ZANU during the liberation war indoctrinated the idea that the military should be guarantor of political order (Mpofu, 2021). The hard-fought win against the colonial regime endowed ZANU-PF with a superiority complex, convincing itself of its exclusive right to rule and classifying any opposition as treasonous.

Early tensions emerged after Zimbabwe's independence which was formally established with a ceasefire in December 1979. The ceasefire required guerilla fighters to report to Assembly Points for demobilization and integration in the new ZNA. This period was marked by suspicious and traumatized guerillas suddenly expected to submit to the state, long-clandestine political cadres emerging into public view, and a need to stabilize the country and prepare for national elections (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger, 2000). The escalation of violence, later exposed to be a deliberate machination of the regime, hardened ethnic polarization in the country and demonized an internal other, reminiscent of colonial tactics of division. The Fifth Brigade, a faction of North Korean combatants that answered directly to the executive, launched Operation Gukurahundi, a genocide campaign

in Matebeland against ZAPU/ZIPRA members and supporters and its Ndebele ethno-linguistic base. This period institutionalized the idea that opposition, real or imagined, was an existential threat that required coercive elimination (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger 2000). In summary, the 1970s featured a won struggle against colonialism and racism, but quickly the 1980s would feature a racialized and tribalized conflict (Alexander, McGregor, & Ranger 2000).

These tendencies resurfaced in the 2000s. By this time, the Joint Operations Command had become the central node of political authority, subordinating electoral processes, civil administration, and the judiciary to a militarized political order (Hulec, 2019; Sachikoyne, 2009). Mugabe fused liberation-war ideology, anti-imperialist discourse, and a rigid conception of sovereignty into a political philosophy in which legitimacy flowed not from democratic consent but from the liberation struggle itself (Mpofu, 2021). Through his personal political philosophy, ZANU-PF's rule was deemed permanent and sacrosanct.

In this way, the liberation movement's internal logics did not simply persist in the post-independence period, they structured a political order in which authoritarian rule was both legitimate and

necessary, while simultaneously foreclosing the emergence of pluralist or participatory alternatives to ZANU-PF dominance.

V.II. On structural economic crises and coercion

While a repressive and exclusive political culture was being curated, Zimbabwe's authoritarianism was intensified by the acute economic crises of the 1990s. The failures of the ESAP reshaped the political economy of the state (Bond, 2005; Bracking, 2005). ESAP would produce deindustrialization, rising poverty, and massive urban unemployment. Pressurized by the government's 1997 veterans payout, which awarded an unbudgeted payout of Z\$4.2 billion, the economy would descend into failure from 1997-1998, marked by collapsed currency, withdrawal of international financial institution's support, and fiscal crisis (Bracking, 2005). This episode demonstrates ZANU-PF's survivalist political logic allocating state resources and preferential treatment among key constituencies, particularly war veterans, making coercive redistribution and authoritarian consolidation both politically rational and materially necessary for regime survival. Importantly, the payouts empowered war veterans as a political constituency, which would incite the later state-organized land inva-

sions from 2000-2002 (Bracking, 2005; Raftopolous & Phimister, 2004).

The chronic economic crisis destroyed ZANU-PF's legitimacy and capacities, shifting the party toward survivalist authoritarianism. The state increasingly relied on coercion to manage urban dissent, culminating in the extreme tactics like Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, which forcibly cleared slum areas of the country with an unstated motivation to punish the urban poor

for voting for the opposition during the March parliamentary elections (Bracking, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Phimister, 2005). The operation also sought to reassert territorial control of the regions sympathetic and privy to MDC leadership. The retreat from democratic norms ensued. Across the early 2000s, elections showed escalating manipulation relying on gerrymandering, fear, coercion, and food withholding punishments (Bracking, 2005). As the ruling party's social base eroded, ZANU-PF repackaged economic grievances as political instruments, mobilizing youth militias and veterans to violently reclaim land and discipline dissent.

The rise of the MDC in 1999 fundamentally threatened the ruling party's monopoly on power. ZANU-PF responded by mobilizing liberation war symbolism, anti-Western rhetoric, and patriotic nationalism (Raftopoulos & Phimister, 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). The

regime relied on propaganda to claim the MDC was a British puppet, again weaving in various layers of national grievances and trauma to legitimize repression (Bracking, 2005; Phimister & Raftopolous, 2004). Any semblance of opposition to the party state was re-framed as foreign subversion, morally justifying repression in the name of sovereignty.

As economic crises eroded the regime's legitimacy, authoritarianism emerged not as an aberration but as a strategic response to declining consent, further narrowing the political field and obviating democratic capacities of the population.

V.III. On colonial state continuity and Cold War geopolitics

A third crucial dimension is the role of colonial institutional continuities and Cold War engineerings in shaping Zimbabwe's political landscape. Although the origins of Zimbabwean frictions were and continue to be internally exacerbated, it would be narrow to not assess its politics as inextricably tied to regional and international tensions, most notably the Cold War (Moore, 2015). Accordingly, it is also necessary to accept that the coloniality of power transcends temporal borders of *de jure* colonial rule and pervades all geographic boundaries. This underscores the

conduits through which postcolonial states inherit centralized, racialized, and militarized governance structures designed for control, not democratic participation. Zimbabwe's post-1980 state did not dismantle the Rhodesian apparatus; it repurposed it. An Afrofuturist lens seeks to ask what could have ensued if governance structures were redesigned through indigenous epistemologies and communitarian political ethics. The long legacy of the colonial state is not only material, but also epistemic, including the colonization of the imagination, which limits the scope and terms through which political liberation via indigenous or communal political traditions could be conceived (Hill-Jarrett, 2023).

Foreign eyes were on southern Africa as decolonial liberation movements swept the region in the 1960s and 1970s, signalling a shake-up of the current world order and ushering in the potential for sovereign statehood for those historically marginalized and oppressed. Akin to many other flashpoints across the Global South, Zimbabwe was the recipient of concerted superpower observation and involvement. In the early 1960s, ZAPU began developing relations with the Soviet Union, encouraging the US to enter and counterbalance Soviet influence. Concurrently, Angola and Mozambique were flirting with the possibility of establishing new Marx-

ist-Leninist regimes, which accentuated the strategic importance of Zimbabwe in not being the next domino to fall toward the East (Moore, 2015).

The ideological location of Zimbabwe in the world system was contentious following the rise of ZIPA, a short-lived, socialist-leaning coalition of young, frustrated ZANLA and ZIPRA fighters. This democratic experiment was characterized as a third force, with the means to usurp the old brand of Zimbabwean nationalists (Moore, 2015). Though often treated as a mere footnote in Zimbabwean political history, the covert and intersecting efforts by the West, the Frontline States, South Africa, and Mugabe to deal with ZIPA affirm the sincerity of its threat to the elite leadership and Western foreign policymakers (Moore, 2015).

To elaborate, in 1977, just two years after ZIPA was formed, key leaders were imprisoned in Mozambique, a Frontline State under Samora Machel's leadership. They were detained until Zimbabwe's first democratic election in 1980. Despite Machel's key commitment to the cause of the Frontline States, which sought to liberate their neighbours from apartheid and white minority rule, he was characteristically pragmatic and unideological, making ZIPA threaten his vision of predictable, controlled transition across the region,

encouraging his support of its multilateral suppression (Moore, 2015).

On the part of Western powers, ZIPA's radicalism was a threat to their hasty efforts to find moderate leaders in the Global South who would be capable of restraining revolutionary sprouts and Soviet influence. In fact, a Special National Intelligence Estimate by American intelligence services developed that the prospect for a moderate Zimbabwe government was inversely proportional to ZIPA's strength (Moore, 2015). South Africa also viewed ZIPA's radicalism as a possible existential threat to apartheid, fearing the movement would energize the liberation movements brewing at home. The West subsumed a regional coalition against ZIPA by wielding financial and material incentives. British interest-free loans of 15 million pounds to Machel and a large shipment of grain from the USA to Mozambique are speculated to have been the West's coercive tools to influence Mozambican resistance against ZIPA (Moore, 2015).

Aside from finding common grounds to deal with the radical ZIPA problem, the West bolstered Mugabe's rise to power in other ways. Britain ensured it cultivated early diplomatic relations with Mugabe, working closely with him under the Lancaster House Agreement, which developed the new constitution for independent Zimbabwe and baked

in ZANU supremacy and ZAPU marginalization (Phimister & Raftoploulos, 2004). Continually, Western financial institutions poured money into Zimbabwe, with Mugabe's regime characterized as a "successful protégé of Washington financiers" (Bond, p. 609 2005). As established at Lancaster House, Britain would provide substantial funding and assistance for land reform through a willing buyer, willing seller framework (Phimister & Raftoploulos, 2004). This design ensured security over white property rights and protected settler economic interests. During this era, international financial institutions gladly turned a blind eye to Mugabe's peaking authoritarianism and human rights abuses, asserting that Zimbabwe was a neoliberal exemplar (Bond, 2005). In effect, Western governments overlooked or downplayed escalating authoritarian behaviour so long as Zimbabwe remained compliant with geopolitical and economic expectations.

Overall, the suppression of leadership alternatives such as ZIPA demonstrates that both domestic elites and international actors actively constrained more radical political possibilities, ensuring that Zimbabwe's transition unfolded within a narrow scope of acceptable futures compatible with extant global power hierarchies.

V.IV. On the anti-Mugabe turn in the West and more foreign meddling

Mugabe quickly moved from being the desired moderate who would champion Western hegemony in Southern Africa to a rogue-nationalist dictator. The rupture after 2000 must not be understood as the beginning of authoritarianism but as the moment when Mugabe stopped serving Western strategic interests and the fomenting internal and external variables swelled. Following these external pressures, Zimbabwe's existing authoritarian tendencies were rearticulated within a shifting geopolitical context that made coercion, nationalist mobilization, and anti-imperialist discourse increasingly necessary for regime survival.

Corporations began to fray in the 1990s as the ESAP produced protracted economic decline, deindustrialization, and mass unemployment (Bond, 2005; Bracking, 2005). The rupture provided fertile ground for London to reassess its relationship with Harare as the nation's position within the global system began to erode. As Zimbabwe was increasingly cast as fiscally irresponsible and politically unstable by international financial institutions, external pressure intensified, narrowing the regime's available policy options (Bracking, 2005).

The fracture came to a head in 1997

when Britain's Labour Party government, under Tony Blair, announced it would no longer support Zimbabwe's land redistribution program. Mugabe asserted that the British had reneged on the agreement reached at Lancaster House and the compensation they agreed to pay to enable the land to be bought back from their 'kith and kin,' or rather the extant white settlers (Ndllovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

Britain classified Zimbabwe as a country in crisis, accusing ZANU-PF of human rights violations, electoral manipulation, and violent repression of the opposition (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). In turn, Mugabe intensified anti-colonial rhetoric, framing Britain as a neo-imperial force attempting to restore settler domination via the MDC and international sanctions (Phimister & Raftopoulos, 2004). This discursive shift became central to Mugabeism. The retreat of the West empowered Mugabe's anti-imperialist discourse as political weaponry through which repression could be reframed as sovereignty and political opposition could be reframed as sovereign subversion: Britain was relentlessly portrayed as the enemy and the historic importance of African land was re-invoked as the symbolic terrain of anti-imperialism.

Diplomatic ruptures were followed by targeted sanctions, visa bans, and the withdrawal of development assistance

from the UK, EU, and the U.S justified by the undercut of violence in the 2000 and 2002 elections (Hulec, 2019; Phimister, 2005). Mugabe exploited this rupture to cast the MDC as Western puppets, delegitimize pluralism, and justify militarization of elections. Britain's critical shift against the regime provided an ideological and political reservoir for ZANU-PF to mobilize around, pulling the emotive strings of Africans that still felt the oppressive pressure of neocolonial and neoimperial projects.

This paper argues that Zimbabwe's historical arc should be approached through frameworks of coloniality of power (Quijano, 2000) and postcolonial political psychology (Cabral, 1974; Fanon, 1963). Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn unfolded within a global system shaped by colonial hierarchies that reward compliant elites and suppress radical decolonial alternatives. From a decolonial and Afrofuturist perspective, these dynamics reveal how global power structures actively shape state behavior and the horizon of popular political imagination. The confrontation between Zimbabwe and Western powers reinforced a binary political field in which the only viable options appeared to be authoritarian nationalism or externally dictated liberal reform.

Zimbabwe's political fate must therefore be understood as co-produced by internal liberation-movement log-

ics and external geopolitical interventions. Using a decolonial lens to locate the motivations for a democratic deficit in the country asserts that Zimbabwe's authoritarian consolidation was not simply the triumph of one political project over another; it was the containment of a more radical reimagining of sovereignty that threatened domestic elites and international power brokers. This analysis shows that authoritarianism was not an isolated outcome, but a structurally conditioned and politically rational response within a global order shaped by colonial hierarchies. Zimbabwe's trajectory reveals that authoritarianism did not merely suppress opposition, it actively narrowed the space in which alternative postcolonial futures could emerge.

VI. Conclusion

Zimbabwe's authoritarian turn after 2000 was not an abrupt deviation from an otherwise predictable democratic trajectory. Rather, it was a culminating set of forces across the liberation struggle, the early post-independence era, and the structural crises of the 1990s weaved through the changing landscape of global politics.

This paper does not attempt to diminish the internal causal factors of the country's turn to authoritarianism or deliberate fascist state practices, rather, this

paper emphasizes that Zimbabwe's crisis unfolded within an international and historical system shaped by coloniality. Liberation movement political culture, economic collapse, and militarized governance were central, yet they evolved within a hypocritical world-system that first empowered ZANU-PF as the preferred custodian of Western interests and later condemned it when those interests diverged.

Afrofuturism insists that critique is incomplete without imagination. This means confronting the coloniality of power not only as a material project, but as an epistemic order that defines what governance is supposed to look like, who counts as legitimate political actors, and what ideologies are deemed unmodern or invalid. In this vein, Zimbabwe's crisis is also a crisis of political imagination, for the colonization of the imagination enforced a narrowing of futures. At its core, this paper sees Zimbabwe's post-2000 authoritarianism as a colonial hangover, with political order haunted by inherited debts and structures, internalized divisions, and reliance on violence, which constrained possibilities of genuine decolonization. The governing logics of Rhodesia have remained so deeply inscribed in the national psyche and state apparatus that purging the body politic of coloniality has proved exceedingly difficult, but nevertheless, not impossible.

ZIPA's attempt at promising a genuine long-run alternative to the post-liberation demise of Zimbabwe and its people should not remain relegated to the sidelines of history (Saul, 2016). ZIPA must be regarded as an immensely promising innovation, positing another chance for radicalization and an emergence of a new kind of Zimbabwean leadership less anchored in elite command, and more oriented toward collective participation.

This paper seeks to resist fatalist attitudes toward Zimbabwe's future. Drawing from ubuntu philosophy, authoritarianism must not be assumed as intrinsic to African political culture, nor the inevitable fate of liberation movements. In bringing this edge to the conversation, the purpose of this paper is to restore historical significance and theoretical nuance to the Zimbabwe case, inviting a balance of condemnation against deliberate authoritarian tendencies with a more humane understanding of how states marred by colonialism struggle to imagine and build political futures beyond a vacuum of domination. Through civic networks, youth movements, and diasporic communities that refuse the foreclosure of their possibilities, there is hope for a new and fully liberated Zimbabwe as defined by their own terms, not Westernized, standardized metrics of development. To imagine Zimbabwe

beyond coloniality is to understand that liberation was not a punctuated event in 1980, but is an ongoing praxis of living and orientation to building a different world.

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