The Power of Mysticism –

Understanding Political Support for President Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe

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by

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Abstract

Significant debate exists within Zimbabwean studies about the basis for which people support on an ongoing basis the ruling Zimbabweans African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. In academic literature, the party and state president (Mugabe) is typically seen as an oppressor such that any support for Mugabe is understood based on compulsion rather than consent. Genuine support for the ruling party though implies that Mugabe is a liberator. In drawing upon Zimbabwean academic literature which seeks to understand why Mugabe might be understood as a liberator, this thesis seeks to provide an innovative sociological analysis focusing on the mysticism surrounding the person and ruler-ship of Mugabe. The mysticism portrays Mugabe as being blessed by the ancestors and spirits, as having divine and sage-like qualities, as speaking for the bones of the dead heroes, and as acting as a modern day national chief who cares for his national subjects and defends his chiefdom against enemies from within or without. This portrait of Mugabe resonates with many Zimbabweans as it speaks to their everyday experiences and their longings for nation-building and national belonging. Hence, it should not be strictly understood as a ruling party ideology foisted upon citizens as a means of political deception. This is explored through interviews with a small number of ZANU-PF supporters.

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Above all, my highest praises and gratitude go to the Lord Almighty for His tender mercies and blessings. With Him nothing is impossible.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This thesis provides a critical analysis of the political leadership of Robert Mugabe, as both president of the ruling party and state in Zimbabwe, from 1980 to November 2017. It does so by focusing in particular on the legitimising discourses surrounding his rule which have tended to glorify and romanticise his person and power in a manner which often resonates with the ruling party's support base. In this introductory chapter, the problem statement underpinning the reasoning behind the thesis is outlined, along with the thesis objective and research methods.

1.2 Problem Statement

In Zimbabwe since independence in 1980, political developments around nation-building, state-craft, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party and the President of the country (Robert Mugabe) have been "inextricably intertwined" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 2, Mlambo, 2015). It is simply impossible to speak about the nation, state and party without referring to the President (of both the state and ruling party) and vice versa. For the past 37 years, not only has ZANU-PF ruled almost unchallenged, but Mugabe has remained as head of both party and state (until November 2017). A crucial question which arises in this context is the basis on which Mugabe continues to rule[1], and this relates in part to Zimbabwean understandings of what constitutes leadership and specifically political leadership (Bhebhe, 2016: 80).

There are two broad narratives about Mugabe as a leader. One narrative posits him as a tyrannical leader (Mugabe as an oppressor) bent on maintaining power by any means necessary (including violence) (Moyo, 2015). The other narrative portrays him as the quintessential African leader (Mugabe as a liberator) (Scarnecchia, 2015) who represents and serves the needs of the Zimbabwean people on the basis of consensual rule. These narratives are based on an analytical distinction such that, in everyday understandings of Mugabe as leader, they may be combined in diverse and at times contradictory ways. In terms of scholarly literature, the first

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[1] This thesis was conceptualised prior to the downfall of Mugabe in November, and the research for the thesis was also undertaken before then. Unless indicated otherwise, the discussion in the thesis relates to the pre-November 2017 period and typically I refer to Mugabe's ruler-ship in the present tense.

narrative is by far the hegemonic one. Without seeking to ignore the relevance of this narrative, the main objective of the thesis is to explore the second narrative as it relates to popular support for Mugabe. In this regard, the thesis is not focused on why Mugabe remains at the helm of ZANU-PF (despite intense internal struggles within the party), but is concerned with discursive images of Mugabe (Ogenga, 2011) and, in particular, the one which tends to romanticise and glorify him.

The main narrative claims that Mugabe has no legitimacy as a leader and maintains power by force, coercion and violence; and thus people 'construct' him as an oppressor. Numerous examples are given of this. A crucial one is the *Gukurahundi* in the mid-1980s involving the state-sanctioned killing of an estimated 35,000 Ndebele people in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces and which laid the ground for a "political tradition of violence" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Mpofu, 2015:127). This tradition though is often seen as extending back to the violent war of liberation waged by Mugabe-linked guerrillas (Matereke and El Moghazy, 2015: 255). Nevertheless, since 1980, Mugabe at times has invoked ethnicity and used the ethnic card, or tribalism, as a means of crushing dissent, or what Moore (2012:4) describes as a "pernicious blend of nativism and Stalinism or a reinvented version of tribalism". A more recent example of state-organised violence condoned by Mugabe is the nation-wide land occupation movement led by ex-guerrillas in the year 2000 (Moyo, 2004). Such violence became a political tactic used not only against ruling party enemies but even as a weapon of intimidation against ZANU-PF supporters to maintain party discipline and solidify party support (Moore, 2005; Kriger, 2012:18). In the end, violence is a mechanism for defining the nation, as those in the main subjected to violence are ultimately seen as not belonging to the nation.

Beyond unbridled violence, support for President Mugabe (and ZANU-PF) is linked to a patronage system in which the dispensing of state resources (or promises thereof) are used almost as a campaign strategy. Hence, the government provides agricultural subsidies to its key rural support base ('the peasantry') while also using state power to support businesses that are aligned to ZANU-PF (Dawson and Kelsall, 2012). The state's fast track land reform programme is seen as a good example of this, as are more recent indigenisation policies within a range of urban economic sectors (such as mining and banking) (Thebe, 2012). This involved "directives to financial institutions to finance black owned businesses" and "preferential allocation of government contracts and markets to blacks and anti-trust legislation to control the monopoly position of white capital" (Mlambo, 2015: 54; Magure, 2012). The role of the

state (and Mugabe) in this is seen cynically by the hegemonic narrative as an attempt to prop up an illegitimate political regime. Overall, then, this narrative sees violence and manipulation as the source of Mugabe's retention of power so that, even if people are not coerced, they comply in fear of acting 'outside' the nation and suffering the consequences.

The second narrative speaks about Mugabe as a liberator and as the embodiment of the ongoing liberation struggle. Intriguingly, it is at times infused with 'traditional' symbolisms focusing on customary, charismatic and divine power which translates into a notion of legitimate power beyond reproach (Makhosini, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:16), or seemingly a power of mysticism. This power draws upon deeply-ingrained memories held by Zimbabwean people but is sometimes invoked by Mugabe in providing justification for his ongoing rule. In this light, Mugabe is a liberator who rules on a consensual basis, and he becomes endowed with divine power inherited from ancestors and bestowed upon him by God (Siziba and Ncube, 2015: 520-522). Writers such as Machingura (2012), Bhebhe (2016) and Nyanda (2015) thus draw parallels between President Mugabe's contemporary rule on the one hand, and historical, cultural, religious and traditional understandings of leadership on the other, with this leading to Mugabe's rule being laced with mysticism. The question of land, as crucial to Zimbabwe's past and politics (Moyo, 2004), is important in this regard.

It might be countered that this mystical dimension to Mugabe's rule is meant to dupe Zimbabwean people as some kind of ruling ideology. But Bhebhe (2016) suggests that it might be embedded in – and resonate with – the everyday lives of many Zimbabweans. He argues that mystical elements of leadership exist for example in the relationship between parents and children. Traditionally in Zimbabwe, it is taboo to raise a hand or lash out verbally against your father or mother. Parents are not only providers, but are believed to hold the keys to either curse or bless their children, and hence the common statement today: *amai havatukwe, unopara ngozi* (you cannot shout at your mother because you will invite the wrath of the spirits upon yourself) (Bhebhe, 2012: 85). Likewise, to speak out against President Mugabe is tantamount to angering the ancestors who, it is said, effectively appointed Mugabe.

In terms of theoretical framing, the thesis draws upon literature which considers the relationship between political leadership, legitimacy and mysticism. Squarcini (2002) for example examines the multi-dimensional character of the power of mysticism, and the ways in which a follower of a mystic leader becomes a devotee and is "fixed in the instructions received

from the spiritual master[s]"; further, "because his senses are controlled [meaning, shaped] he is determined" (Squarcini 2002: 343) or acquires an identity. This notion of a devotee implies an intimate connection between mystical leader and followers, and the wide sharing of a belief-system amongst a community of believers which has arisen culturally and historically. By this means, systems of power are legitimised and reproduced (Jakarasi and Nyakudya, 2015). The political leader with mystical powers ultimately is favoured by the Highest Being as, it is argued, is the case with Mugabe's rise to the 'throne' of presidency and his continued presence on it.

There is extensive literature on the political power of President Mugabe (as cited above). However, the mystical dimension to his power, drawing in many ways upon indigenous or 'traditional' conceptualisations of power, has not received sustained focus. The thesis seeks to contribute to filling this knowledge gap, with Gwaravanda (n.d.:51) arguing for the need to consider the relevance of indigenous/religious conceptions to understanding contemporary political arrangements in Africa. Despite the various studies that have been carried out on Mugabe, most have not addressed this narrative of understanding Mugabe's hold on power specifically within the party and his supporters.

This understanding in turn supports the notion of the "power of mysticism" which seeks to not only highlight the fact that there is significant value to indigenous systems of knowledge, but also to indicate (as discussed later) that symbolic power is "a transformed, i.e. misrecognisable, transfigured and legitimated form of the other forms of power" (Bourdieu, 1991: 170). This entails an "invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it" (Bourdieu, 1991: 164). Bourdieu sees this power as culturally constructed, reproduced and re-legitimised over time through an interplay of agency and structure.

1.3 Thesis Objectives
The main objective of this thesis is to examine the power of mysticism with reference to the political support for President Mugabe of Zimbabwe. To achieve this goal, the following secondary objectives are pursued:
   a) to identify the dimensions of the power of mysticism historically (or 'traditionally') in pre-colonial Zimbabwe;

b) to examine the dimensions of the power of mysticism as linked specifically to President Mugabe; and

c) to understand the ways in which Zimbabweans conceptualise and support Mugabe by way of notions of mysticism.

1.4 Research Methods

Methodology refers to the ways in which knowledge can be gained about, for sociologists, the social world (Babbie, 2010:4). There are different methodologies within sociology, based on differing understandings of what can be said to exist in the world and how best the world can be grasped sociologically. This thesis is concerned about people's conceptions of political leadership with particular reference to Robert Mugabe. Because of this, it fits into an interpretive sociology which seeks to identify and understand the meanings people give to the world around them. In this sense, the leadership of Robert Mugabe is socially constructed, with differing opinions of his leadership based on the liberator-oppressor dichotomy.

This study adopted a qualitative research design. Babbie and Mouton (2001:74) define a research design as a plan or blueprint about how a social researcher intends to conduct his or her research, with the design outlining the strategies and approaches used to address the research objective(s). A research design utilises a qualitative, quantitative or mixed-method research approach. For this thesis, I adopted a qualitative design as it is consistent with an interpretive sociology (Woods, 2005:2). Broadly speaking, then, qualitative research involves "studying things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (Biggam, 2008: 86). Qualitative research involves a range of possible research methods (or techniques) such as case study, life history, biography, documents, observation, focus group discussions and interviews. Qualitative research methods involve the use of structured or semi-structured in-depth interviews, which involves field research on a way of life or understanding of events (Woods, 2005:2).

To pursue the fieldwork for the thesis, sampling had to be done. Sampling refers to a process of selecting units or people for study (Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 164). It is a process conducted for "securing participants in the study" and particularly "subjects capable of answering the research question", that is, allowing the researcher to address the research objective(s) (Devers and Frankel, 2000: 264). There are two standard categories of sampling methods, that is, random and non-random sampling, or probability sampling and non-probability sampling

respectively. The main strategy used for selecting people to be studied in qualitative inquiries is non-probability sampling (Latham, 2007:6). This study relied up on a non-probability sampling procedure and specifically purposeful sampling, which can be understood as a type of sampling where the researcher selects a sample in such a way that the selected research participants are able to express views which are directly relevant to the research topic, focus and objective. (Babbie, 1993: 201). It is referred to purposive sampling because the researcher selects a sample "on the basis of your own knowledge of the population, its elements and the nature of your research aims" (Babbie, 2010: 97; Latham, 2007: 8). In this sense, purposive non-probability sampling is also known as judgement sampling (Babbie 2010: 97; Latham, 2007: 9; Palinkas et al., 2015: 534). Based on particular characteristics of research subjects required, I purposely sampled ZANU-PF party members, war veterans and ordinary supporters of the party.

In addition to purposive non-probability sampling, technique, the research also adopted convenience sampling. Convenience sampling means incorporating participants who are readily available and agree to participate in a study (Latham, 2000; Fink, 1993, Henry, 1990). Furthermore, convenience sampling relates to the resources required in locating interviewees, and means identifying people who are willing and able to become research participants (Battaglia, 2011: 525) given the resources (for example, time and money) available to the researcher.

A sample is "the segment of a population that is selected for investigation" (Bryman, 2012: 187). It refers to the portion of a population or group that is selected to assist researchers in investigating some facets of the population. In the case of a random sample, it is possible to generalise from the sample to the wider population. This is not the case with the sampling procedures used for this thesis, such that I make no claim that the findings emanating from this study are generalisable to a wider population such as ZANU-PF members and supporters. In this study, the sample consisted of ZANU-PF members and supporters over the age of 25. Seven individuals were interviewed, consisting of five males and two females. The interviews took place during the months of August and September 2017.

Interviews were used during the fieldwork as the key research method or technique for data collection (Babbie, 2010:193; Hoepfl, 1997:52), notably semi-structured, informal interviews These kind of interviews allow for the interviewer to typically ask a number of structured

questions "in a systematic and consistent order, but [still being] allowed freedom to digress and probe far beyond the given answers" (Berg, 1998:61), while also giving the participant freedom to digress from the question. Given the political sensitivity of the research topic, this enabled the researcher to ask questions in a way that was not confrontational. It also meant that it was possible to pick up on emotional cues like hesitations and other non-verbal expressions which could not be assessed if formal structured interviews were administered. O'Leary (2004:164) thus notes that this type of unstructured interviews starts with a schedule of questions but may pursue a more "conversational style of interview that may see questions answered in an order more natural to the flow of the conversational". The researcher also used either an audio digital recorder or simply took notes, depending on the preference of the interviewee. The language used during the interviews was English. In Appendix A, I attach the interview schedule.

Through interviews, it was hoped that the images of Robert Mugabe's leadership, and the perceptual basis for his leadership, would be articulated by the research subjects. This would allow me to discover the everyday subjective meanings and interpretations of Mugabe's leadership independent of any so-called objective analysis of Mugabe as provided by a detached observer. As best as possible, I sought to bracket my own thoughts about Mugabe (including based on the academic literature) so that a more inductive understanding of the research subjects' perceptions of Mugabe would come out clearly. Bryman (2012: 280) describes this type of research process as inductive in the sense that theory (for example, of Mugabe's ruler-ship) is not imposed on the evidence collected, but that the evidence is somehow allowed to breathe so that it gives life to a richer understanding of the social phenomenon studied. In doing so, there must be sensitivity by the researcher to the cultural and historical milieu or context within which the research subjects exist. Thus, as Wood (2006:5) puts it, the researcher tries "to appreciate the culture" of the subjects and "capture the meaning that permeates the culture", including political culture. This often allows the researcher to consider how meanings (for instance, about leadership) are formed, as well as negotiated and contested. Overall, then, a qualitative methodology and research design (including by way of interviews) facilitated an understanding of people's conceptions of Mugabe's leadership with reference to their historical background and lived experiences.

The evidence collected was analysed using qualitative, and mainly thematic, data analysis. This refers to the process of "working with data, organising it, breaking it into manageable units, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned and deciding

what you will tell others" (Hoepfl, 1997:54). The interview material was transcribed. I went through the interview evidence repeatedly in order to identify key themes and to identify evidence relevant to each theme. Each theme was reworked and refined as I went through the evidence each time. This involved for instance developing a framework for analysis by grouping similar words, phrases or events that appear in each interview into the same thematic category. There is some overlap between the final themes but this is to be expected. The discussion of the interviews, appearing later in the thesis, is structured according to these themes. I also sought to ensure that the themes were somehow relevant to the thesis objectives and secondary objectives.

To ensure that the research did not cause any risk or harm to the research subjects, I observed researcher the ethical protocols stipulated by the Department of Sociology at Rhodes University. In order to gain access to the participants and conduct the interviews, I first obtained informed consent from the participating subjects. Participants were informed of the focus and aims of the research in a manner which did not deceive them in any way. As well, they were notified of the freedom to withdraw from the research at any time, if they felt like doing so. They were provided with a consent form which they were required to sign (see Appendix B for consent form). In the thesis, pseudonyms are used for the interviewees, i.e. participant 1 through to 7.

Despite the ethical measures taken throughout the process of the interviews and data collection, there were some challenges encountered. Some of the participants who were willing to be interviewed in the beginning rescinded their consent at the last minute for fear of being reprimanded by ZANU-PF officials. A majority of these participants were women and thus the research had mainly male interviewees. However, gender was not an explicit focus of the thesis. For those men and women actually interviewed, some scepticism was seen as the questions became more targeted at Mugabe for a deeper understanding.

1.5 Thesis Outline

The following chapter (chapter two) provides the theoretical framing for the thesis as well as a review of literature focusing on themes pertinent to Mugabe as a leader, based on the liberator/oppressor dichotomy which often prevails in Zimbabwean studies with regard to Mugabe. The third chapter pursues certain of these themes about Mugabe based on the

fieldwork for the thesis. The final chapter (chapter four) provides a systematic conclusion to the arguments in the thesis.

CHAPTER TWO – SETTING THE THEORETICAL, THEMATIC AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on current and past literature on Mugabe from the time he began his leadership of independent Zimbabwe in 1980. The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate and examine literature related to the complexities of support for President Robert Mugabe. This includes: support consolidated by means of violence and coercion; support garnered through consent by way of Mugabe's liberation efforts and credentials (including the historical emotions evoked on this basis): and support gained through benefiting from the rampant corruption and accumulation of a state controlled and manipulated by Mugabe's party.

The chapter is divided into four main sections. Section 2.2 introduces the background to the political set-up of Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF. The focus is on the notion of Zimbabwe as a de facto one-party state, the failed Government of National Unity (GNU) and the current political climate under the leadership of Mugabe. Section 2.3 outlines the mainstream discourse on Mugabe, which focuses on the phenomenon coined as Mugabeism by Zimbabwean scholar Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni. This entails a discussion detailing Mugabe's consolidation of power and the different ways in which he manages to retain power. In section 2.4, under the title "Mugabe: embodying and beyond the nation", I consider different themes which seek to show the possible consensual foundations for Mugabe's rule, including questions around mysticism and power, charismatic leadership symbolism and patriotic history and the politics of the dead. The final section (section 2.5) offers the theoretical framing for the thesis.

2.2 Political Background of Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe since independence in 1980, political developments around nation-building, state-craft, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party and the President of the country (Robert Mugabe) are all "inextricably intertwined" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 2, Mlambo, 2015). It is simply impossible to speak about nation, state and party without referring to the President, and vice versa. For the past 37 years, not only has ZANU-PF ruled almost unchallenged, but Mugabe (until November 2017) remained as head of both party and state. A crucial question which arises in this context is the basis on which

Mugabe continues to rule, and this relates in part to Zimbabwean understandings of what constitutes leadership and specifically political leadership (Bhebhe, 2016: 80).

2.2.1 A De Facto One-Party Hegemonic State (to 2008)

Since independence in 1980 the state has been ruled by the ZANU-PF party making the state a de facto one-party state (or a one-party hegemonic state), though the party was in alliance for a few years with two Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) parties during the Government of National Unity. According to Moyo (1991) and Mandaza (1991), the Unity Accord between ZANU and Zimbabwean African People's Union (ZAPU) in December 1987 was a move committed to the establishment of a one-party state. This was underpinned by the "dialectical relationship between national unity and democracy", which is key to the understanding of the political framework of Zimbabwe's search for political order between 1980 and 1990 (Moyo, 1991: 84). The notion of national unity was expressed through the context of the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, such that the original case for a one-party state system in Zimbabwe was based on the need to promote national unity and to create a national identity that reflects the virtues of liberation and revolution (Mandaza and Sachikonye, 1991). However, in doing so, ZANU-PF exerts its authority through a range of socially, economically and politically constructed and reconstructed ethos and values. The system of rule, as constructed by the party, allows it to have dominance over state institutions, with the party and state becoming almost indistinct (the party-state).

The party-state has monopoly over politically symbolic notions of liberation against a common enemy (i.e. neo-colonialism), which has led to economic empowerment initiatives undertaken to redress colonial injustices such as the fast-track land reform programme. This common enemy though has led to forms of internal exclusion and a narrowing of the notion of the nation, with some areas of the country seen as hostile to the ruling party and thus acting again nation-building (Tendi, 2010). Many communal lands in Mashonaland East Province for example provide cases of "how names of individuals working within and outside the state organised violence in 2008" against MDC supporters and "benefited from patronage" (Kriger, 2012:18). State resources are reserved for ZANU-PF supporters and those who fall outside the party (MDC mainly) are essentially seen as being in the zone of non-being and thus unworthy of the status of full citizenship or subject-hood. In fact, as Kriger (2012) notes, MDC supporters were not allowed to buy grain from local shops and any shop owners who did sell them grain were punished by the party militia in these rural areas.

The historical prowess of ZANU-PF from the liberation war perspective, and the ongoing propagation of the continued importance of its contribution to the struggle within dominant pro-ZANU-PF mainstream ideology, has created a stage in which ZANU-PF continues to assume that the Zimbabwean nation is its own inheritance (for ZANU-PF leaders, officials, activists and patriots). Furthermore, the fact that socio-economic progress is severely underpinned by the activities of ZANU-PF, party elites and their local support structures means that the fate of the nation entirely rests in the hands of the ruling party and the state machinery that it wields. This has been combined with the militarisation of the Zimbabwean state and state violence, as a legacy of the militarised character of the liberation struggle against the Rhodesian regime during the 1970s. Militarisation of the state denotes a key aspect of the de facto one-party hegemonic state in Zimbabwe, with threats to the ruler-ship of ZANU-PF (as an ex-nationalist/liberation movement) often being suppressed in a violent manner (Magure, 2012).

Kriger (2012) focuses on understanding ZANU-PF's domination in terms of both formal and informal institutions. In other words, its mode of domination is multi-faceted and transcends the state-society divide, as it controls (and also creates) diverse spaces which act as bulwarks for its ongoing rule. These include youth militia, unemployed youth, national entrepreneurs, traditional leaders, Members of Parliament, local councillors, and the military and police. Both formal and formal spaces, and the practices taking place within them, are largely considered to be based on networks of patrons and clients who mediate the allocation of scarce state resources (Dawson and Kelsall, 2012; Magure, 2012). There is also a fusion between political and economic elites, in which certain policies (such as indigenisation policies) are formulated and implemented in a manner that provides private wealth accumulation in exchange for political support. Thus, beyond unbridled violence, support for President Mugabe (and ZANU-PF) is linked to a patronage system in which the dispensing of state resources (or promises thereof) are used almost as a campaign strategy. Hence, the government provides agricultural subsidies to its key rural support base ('the peasantry') while also using state power to support businesses that are aligned to ZANU-PF (Dawson and Kelsall, 2012). The state's fast track land reform programme is seen as a good example of this, as are more recent indigenisation policies within a range of economic sectors (such as mining and banking) (Thebe, 2012).

A marked attribute of the one-party state system has been the suppression of other contending parties, such as MDC and Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), with ZUM formed by ex-ZANU leader Edgar Tekere as a breakaway from ZANU-PF in the late 1980s. The significance

of ZUM was that it represented the first real political alternative to ZANU-PF and the latter's quest to become a de jure one-party system after the 1987 Unity Accord (Sachikonye, 1991). The rise of MDC would later on contribute to this challenge and its eventual success in establishing the Government of National Unity was an important step in implementing a shift towards a more formal if not more substantive democracy.

2.2.2 Government of National Unity (2009 to 2013)

The Government of National Unity was a coalition government formed in the context of the 2008 national parliamentary and presidential elections in which there was a political deadlock between Movement for Democratic Change-Tsvangarai (MDC-T), MDC-M (Movement for Democratic Change-Mutambara) and ZANU-PF. It subsequently resulted in the signing of the Global Political Agreement (GPA), an agreement between the three parties (Tumbare, 2014:23 Onslow, 2012). It was born in February 2009 out of mediations by Thabo Mbeki, the then South African President. The full and immediate implementation of the GPA was, for ZANU-PF, a markedly difficult endeavour compared to its past exclusive rule, as it meant that ZANU-PF would have to relinquish – at least officially – key levers of power over the state, i.e. the "battle for the state" (Kriger, 2012).

The coalition-based Inclusive government (IG) implemented under the GPA was deeply problematic, and it was an important moment in the ongoing failed character of democratic transition and consolidation in Zimbabwe. During the inclusive government, democracy took on in large part an aesthetic form in which MDC leaders were given the impression of power, while Mugabe retained almost all his executive authority (Kriger, 2012: 14). Furthermore, the GPA failed to thoroughly address the problems that led to the political polarisation in the first place, including questions around democratic reform and reinvigorating the national economy. The government functioned as two competing entities, as opposed to an authentic government of national unity. The power-sharing agreement required the President (Mugabe) to consult with the Prime Minister (Tsvangirai) on important state decisions but Mugabe retained the absolute executive powers as a ruler (Tumbare, 2014:26). For instance, the fragility of the GNU was exposed by Mugabe's decision to appoint governors, judges and ambassadors without informing the prime minister or seeking his consent. The two MDC parties also had minimal control over key state portfolios/ministries. This was a great source of contention within the GNU because only five of the ministries given to MDC were of any significance (i.e. Finance, Health, Labour, Energy and Water) while ZANU-PF retained the key state ministries (such as

Defence, Justice, Home Affairs and Mining) which protected national security and resource extraction-accumulation. According to Bratton (2011), this meant that the MDC opposition had to concentrate on reviving a battered economy and shoring up social services, while ZANU-PF could focus on retaining and consolidating national political power in alliance with the military sector.

2.2.3 The Post-GNU Period

The current political climate, post the GNU in which ZANU-PF has returned as the sole ruling party, is marked by factionalism in ZANU-PF. Factionalism has been central to internal party politics in the past but it has grown in intensity over the past few years. Mugabe's old age and health has exposed ongoing fissures in the ZANU-PF party leading to two main factions, namely, the G40 led by Grace Mugabe and Lacoste led to Emmerson Mnangagwa. This led to opportunities for those who have interests in succeeding Mugabe to strategically position themselves for the post of state President and First Secretary of the Party. According to Nyanda (2015:40) this resulted in two centres of power "whose survival depends on their loyalty to Mugabe or rebelling against him". However, the politics of succession came with many risks, with Mnangagwa ousted from his position as vice-President and the seeming ascendency of Grace Mugabe in the building of a 'Mugabe Dynasty'.

Earlier, the possibility of a Mugabe dynasty became clear with Grace Mugabe's rise to the forefront of politics in October 2014 through her presidency of the ruling party's Women's League. She played a central role in the dismissal of Joyce Mujuru as vice-president in December 2014. Nyanda thus argues that Grace Mugabe "used the valour of her tongue to tear all the vice president's aspirations", leading afterwards to the same tactic in undermining the position of Mnangagwa two years later in late 2017. The (then) First Lady "dared to do what other men even Robert Mugabe has failed to do in the past – speak openly (albeit selectively) about corruption and succession" (Nyanda, 2015). Grace Mugabe's influence was pervasive and became publicly evident when she sent a note to her husband during a public speech, ordering him off the podium, to which he responded: *"Mukadzi anyora uyu, hanzi mave kutaurisa. Ndizvo zvandinoitwa kana kumba, Saka ndinofanira kuteerera* [It's my wife who has written this note, she says I am now talking too much. This is how I am treated even at home and so I must listen]" (Nyanda, 2015:46).

Grace Mugabe was wielding power and positioning herself as the possible successor of the President. Her call for the President to select a successor was an important intervention to establish the legitimacy of succession as a viable option for the selection of the next party President as opposed to an open democratic election. Endorsements of this from the multiple rallies held across the provinces in the country, and the solidarity gathering held by the then party's Youth League leader served as a way to convince people more broadly that her ascension to the vice-presidency and subsequently to the presidency was wholly justifiable. She indeed remarked at one of her infamous rallies, "They say I want to be president. Why not? Am I not a Zimbabwean?".

According to Onslow (2011:9), the predictable nature of the politics in Zimbabwe meant that "[t]he most pessimistic of knowledgeable Zimbabwe journalists and observers in London predict a civil war within ZANU-PF following Mugabe's inevitable death, and that the army will step in." In the meantime, the sudden and final attack on Mnangagwa and the subsequent "bloodless coup" led by the army resulted in the removal of Robert Mugabe as the President and First Secretary of ZANU-PF and then his resignation as state President, thus ending the 37-year rule of Mugabe. Undoubtedly, the activities of Grace Mugabe and the G40 sped up this process with their continued alienation of those who had once been allies to the state president, including Mnangagwa, the military elite and the war veterans.

The increasing divide between those in favour of Mnangagwa to ascend to power and those who were allies of Grace Mugabe was seen even in the activities of the state's security organs (with the police and army on opposing sides), with state ministers also on opposing sides in the face of increasing factionalism within the party. Grace Mugabe – in a conniving way – blamed all this on Mnangagwa at every rally she had the opportunity to do so. The main motivation for the military 'coup' on the 15th of November 2017 was the continued growth in political ambitions of Grace Mugabe (in alliance with the G40) and she increasingly came across as in control of both party and state politics. After nearly four decades of Mugabe ruling, the army with war veteran support saw an unprecedented threat to national security and its own interests. Despite Mnangagwa's historical record, including his alleged involvement in the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland and Midlands during the 1980s, and other activities as "Mugabe's enforcer", he has been ushered in as a possible agent in changing Zimbabwe's relationship with the international community and in rebuilding the Zimbabwean economy. Whether there will be significant changes under his leadership is yet to be seen.

2.3 Mugabe and Mugabeism: The Man vs The Myth

After 37 years of being in power, Robert Mugabe's leadership had resulted in the establishment of many myths and an aura of invincibility that continuously surround him as a leader. These myths tend to focus on many attributes of his leadership and relate to many avenues of understanding and writing about the man. Therefore, the difference between the man and the myth becomes conflated and this makes his real-life characteristics more difficult to ascertain. For example, myths of perceived enemies surrounding his leadership have often been an important part of the president's leadership. Those immediately around him constantly remind him that he is under threat from someone from within and this makes his exercise of power more justifiable and actions against his enemies more necessary. The mystification of Mugabe has been one of the most important features of his rule and one of the key attributes that has kept him in power over so many years.

The mysticism of Mugabe's power, and attempts to demystify Mugabe, relate to many broader narratives. These narratives extend from Mugabe the liberator who has been faithful to the liberation struggle by forever fighting against neo-colonial machinations, to Mugabe the oppressor who has had a long hold on power through violence and coercion (and has violated human rights of Zimbabwean citizens in doing so). One of the most important features of his rule is the question as to how he has seemingly managed to retain power with some measure of legitimacy and consent amongst Zimbabweans (as a liberator), with ideology, rhetoric and populist stances and actions combining to play some role in this. Thus, despite Mugabe as the oppressor, the man has emerged for many as a liberator with impeccable qualities.

The term 'Mugabeism' has been coined to capture the complexities of Mugabe as both myth and man, and as part of a broader political trend in Zimbabwean politics. In making use of this notion of Mugabeism, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and others, in a book called *Mugabeism* and edited by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) have delved into depictions of Mugabe as a simultaneous colonial and post-colonial subject. Through the use of de-colonial theory as the modus operandi, these authors articulate and explore the basis of the difference behind Mugabe as the man and Mugabe as the myth (both of which form part of Mugabeism). In the context of Mugabeism, the myth is presented by many of these scholars as the personified image of the man as uncompromised, charismatic and the ultimate undefiled liberator.

Key moments in the rise of the myth of Mugabe include his principled leadership of the guerrilla and nationalist struggles (based in Mozambique) in the late 1970s and his championing of compulsory land redistribution at the beginning of the 21st century, with fast track land reform leading to significant support for Mugabe amongst black elites, war veterans and landless people. These and other historical actions by Mugabe as the man place great emphasis on the all-encompassing liberating effects of a leader to the extent that his "biography and hagiography is inseparable from a post-colonial analysis of Zimbabwe" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015: 11). Thus, his exploits as a man (dating back to the 1970s) provide the empirical basis around which myths have arisen about Mugabe. In the end, the concept of Mugabeism integrates the diverging narratives or representations of Mugabe (as liberator and oppressor) to make sense of his leadership within the context of "colonial, nationalist, post-colonial and even pre-colonial history that Mugabe has deployed to sustain and support his political view" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015:9).

Mugabe as a nationalist, party and state leader has been given many titles. As a leader during the war of liberation (the 2nd Chimurenga) and as post-1980 state and party leader, his identity has assumed what Ndlovu-Gatsheni calls "a complex 'polyglot' character" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009:1141). In this regard, he has been adorned with many titles that are often contradictory, as great nationalist revolutionary, genuine liberator and father of the nation on the one hand, and ultimate tyrant, dictator and undertaker of the nation on the other hand. Because of these competing narratives, it is difficult to make sense of Mugabe in any coherent manner. Mugabeism interrogates the contradictions embedded within the political rule of Mugabe, raising questions of liberation, peace and war, reconciliation and retribution, empowerment and dispossession, victimhood and heroism, and social justice and injustice (Tafira, 2015; Tendi, 2010; Ranger, 2003).

Mugabeism is described as a political phenomenon, not ideological, particularly because of the idea that Mugabe has managed to incorporate and consolidate diverse political tendencies, including namely Marxism, Stalinism, Maoism, Nkrumahism, Nyerereism, Garveyism, Negritude, Pan-Africanism, African neo-traditionalism, Nativism and other 'isms' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009: 1141). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009: 1141) argues that the articulation of these different ideals into processes of national liberation and revolution leads to ideological simplicity, vagueness and imprecision as well as to a "nest of contradictions". They thus end up giving legitimacy to political actions that are empty of meaning, though they may garner

political support. Support in particular has been acquired through populist strategies, particularly the land question (Sithole, 2015) that was

> Sacralised and elevated to a totality of all the popular longings and demands that provoked the African participation in the liberation war. Most of the support for Mugabe comes from war veterans, peasants and workers and black middle class, described as populist subjects, simply because they are most likely to find an emotive force behind the issue of land, which is then constantly brought up as a way to maintain Mugabe's hold over this particular group of people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009:1140).

The more critical literature on Mugabeism focuses on how the national question is reduced to the party and state, has very exclusive connotations and is intertwined with race and ethnicity. In this light, it is said that Mugabe as a man is haunted by his past. This is because the context of Mugabe's rise to power, like many African leaders, relates to "a generation of nationalists that lived through a traumatic colonial period whose pain and scars they seek to assuage by hitting back at everything they regard as the source of previous suffering" (Mlambo, 2015:46; Sithole, 2015).

Despite Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2015:5) summation that there is "lack of biographies on Mugabe who is the oldest and longest serving post-independence African statesman", there have been many attempts at writing about the life history of the man. One of the most important points about his leadership is the understanding of the many narratives that have circulated about his ability to come to power in the first place. In their book *Mugabe*, Smith et al. write:

> Robert Mugabe has been typecast as an extremist: colourless Marxist-Leninist ideologue and fanatical guerrilla leader. Mugabe was the last person the British, the Americans and even the Russians, either expected – or -wanted to be Prime Minister of Zimbabwe. His Victory in that country's first democratic elections came as a surprise to, and terrified his opponents. And yet Mugabe's moderation, pragmatism and apparent sympathy for his opponents, have utterly mystified them (Smith et al., 1981:13).

The connotations in the work by Smith et al. signal a sense of support for Mugabe after 1980. But it also signals that the broader narrative about Mugabe consistently shifted between understanding him as either good or evil. During the liberation struggle, Mugabe was considered to be "a radical Marxist guerrilla leader who was dedicated to the establishment of socialist state in Zimbabwe once settler colonialism was defeated" (Smith et al., 1981:13). With his announcement in 1980 for pursuing national reconciliation, he received admiration from even white Rhodesians who had felt threatened by possible retribution for the wrongs perpetrated against the black majority under Rhodesian rule. This admiration came from those

who would become his critics in the future, notably after the land occupations from the year 2000. Likewise, scholars sympathetic to Mugabe dating back to the 1970s also turned later against him because of his perceived authoritarian character.

Mugabe's fluctuating political support can be considered as resulting from his pragmatic political strategies employed to sustain and consolidate his support wherever he needs it. The master strategist, as Chan describes him, "has established himself by being able to construct the political through articulation of various people's longings, demands and claims" (Chan, 2003: 130). The ideological basis of his leadership is rhetorical and empty in meaning, and this has managed to allow him to remain in power for 37 years. This populist strategy is articulated through Mugabe's speeches delivered in the most charismatic and eloquent ways. He has used these qualities to effectively deliver speeches to sway the masses and the world to his side, particularly those speeches focusing on the notions of culture, race, memory and territorial integrity (Tendi, 1979; Zimunya, 1991; Chitando, 2005; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2015). Mugabe as Mugabeism then keeps shifting for political reasons and does not seem to know any strict ideological boundaries.

Mugabe as the eloquent speaker has managed throughout time to amass support for most of his political actions. Historically this has been one of Mugabe's strongest characteristics in his style of leadership. Dating as far back as the liberation war, Mugabe gained the admiration and support of his fellow revolutionaries (such as guerrilla leader Tongogara), including after Mugabe's outspoken condemnation of Kenneth Kaunda for his apparent lack of contribution to the advancement of the Zimbabwean revolution. His fellow revolutionaries effectively argued that "despite [being] thousands of miles and months of separation [apart] we still found ourselves operating on the same wavelength. Actually, none [besides Mugabe] could have presented our case better" (Martin and Johnson: 2012: 2010). Mugabe uses populist language for political gain, such as during the controversies around fast track land reform when he declared: "So Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe", which managed to generate and invoke a feeling of patriotism and pride for many Zimbabwean (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

Critical discussions about Mugabe often focus on the difference between what Mugabe says he is and what exactly he is (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Moore, 2015:31). The assumption is that he is not what he claims to be: he thus claims to be a liberator but in fact he is an oppressor. In

this way, the myths around Mugabe are simply dismissed rather than understood. But the myths around Mugabe need to be considered seriously as an object of inquiry, so as to understand the full complexities of Mugabeism. Despite the often conflicting accounts of Mugabe as man and leader (both oppressor and liberator), there is often a tendency to oversimplify the understanding of Mugabe through a series of binaries that establish him as either good or bad. The myth is either accepted or rejected. However, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015: 2) argues, "Mugabe cannot be un-problematically praised or simplistically dismissed". Mugabe's leadership is not without its points of meaning and also its points of madness (Moore, 2015), but the myths about Mugabe are not reducible to mere mystification as they are intrinsically intertwined with the history of the Zimbabwean nation and resonate with it.

2.4 Mugabe: Embodying and Beyond the Nation

A discursive interrogation of Mugabe's credentials as a pan-African (liberation) leader have increasingly come under scrutiny. Moyo (2015) for instance juxtaposes pan-Africanism with neo-sultanism as a point of contention, and considers the difference between the promises of pan-Africanism as an ideology and the material reality in Zimbabwe. The most positive outlook on Mugabe as a pan-Africanist is based on his liberation war credentials, ideals of land reform, and indigenisation and empowerment policies. In this respect, the underpinning of pan-Africanism is that "political freedom would facilitate rapid economic development and that would enhance the living standards of the people" (Moyo, 2015:64). However, the present economic conditions of the country do not reflect such developments. In argument, Moyo posits that Mugabe's political actions point to a neo-sultanist way or ruling which is defined as a:

> Generic form of leadership where the private and political are fused, strong tendency towards family power and dynastic succession, there is no distinction between a state career and personal services to the ruler, there is a lack of rationalised impersonal ideology, economic success depends on the ruler and most of all, the ruler acts only according to his own unchecked discretion with no-longer impersonal goals for the state (Moyo: 2015:70).

Moyo points to key attributes in Mugabe's rule which have played themselves out in recent years, with Mugabe and the first Lady Grace Mugabe increasingly seeking to establish what many would have perceived as family-based dynasty. As with the fall of Mujuru, the main architect of the removal of Mnangagwa was Grace Mugabe in order to create space for herself to eventually succeed Mugabe as the president of Zimbabwe, thus turning Zimbabwe into a Mugabe dynasty.

The neo-sultanist tendencies extend to the endorsing of Mugabe by the council of chiefs, lauding him as the (divinely) king of kings. This in essence, creates a messianic image of Mugabe which increases his hold on the state, and in which the political survival of those around him depends on an unwavering loyalty to him (Nyanda, 2015; Machingura, 2012). The impact of this is the conflation of the state and nation with one man, Mugabe, so that he becomes the 'be all' of politics in Zimbabwe. This is evident with the failure for anyone to succeed him without his "blessing". An example of this is the end of the political career of Joyce Mujuru who was not only removed from the party but became perceived as a traitor to the cause of liberation. In 2017, the firing of vice-president Emmerson Mnangagwa under the guise that he was considered to be of paramount threat to Mugabe's legitimacy and his presidency entails reducing the politics of the nation to Mugabe the man.

In this way, Mugabe takes on an above-human quality, as a "superhuman who has remained unscathed by the ravages of age" (Siziba and Ncube, 2015:525) and presumably unscathed by all the weaknesses of the human condition (Tendi, 2010). This is consistent with the mythology of Mugabe based on a Mugabe centric narrative of the history of the nation, including that he is the leading figure in the liberation of Zimbabwe and has been heroic in the face of human detractors and distractions. Siziba and Ncube (2015:520) thus state that "Mugabe has been transformed from his humanly form and elevated to a god, a messiah and spiritual figure destined to rule until the end of time". The perpetuation of this is dependent on the ability of the leader to captivate his audience in a series of events that "often mimic or are taken as reality" (Siziba and Ncube, 2015: 520). More broadly, this discursive portrayal involves "accentuating certain matters and concealing others" (Squarcini, 2002: 345).

This is particularly seen in the case of the state media, which only shows certain attributes of Mugabe's life and being. An example of this is the extent to which questions about his health and well-being are often presented as nothing but rumours as he is portrayed as "fit as a fiddle". According to Siziba and Ncube (2015), the deluge of memes of Mugabe falling in February of 2015, "should not be viewed as mere mockery of the figure and person of Mugabe". These sought to deconstruct and challenge the very notion of Mugabe (and his dynasty) as ruling forever due to his immortal qualities, hence questioning his hold on absolute power over the nation. The sanctity and holiness of Mugabe is contingent thus on portraying him as without human faults. The erasure of any images of Mugabe that go contrary to his divine liberating

mission maintains the myth of Mugabe, so that it becomes crucial to avoid any situations in which Mugabe can be interpreted as stumbling (literally or figuratively) as a human.

2.4.1 Mysticism and Power

A number of authors have attempted to interrogate the effects of culture, tradition and religion on African leadership styles in Zimbabwe and elsewhere (Machingura, 2010; Bhebhe, 2016 Chitando, 2005; Lan, 1985). This involves an analysis of some of the particular attributes of culture and religion that leaders tend to depend upon (or manipulate) when attempting to garner the support of people (Lord et al., 1999; Lord and Brown, 2001). This relates to some of the features which Squarcini (2002) identifies as part of the notion of mysticism.

The "mystic path" is identified as an important asset for many radical (including liberation) movements and it often overlaps with "an attempt to solve tensions between humans and the world, between life and death and between the individual and society" (Squarcini, 2002:344) This is pertinent in the case of Zimbabwe given the centrality of ancestors and spirit mediums in assisting guerrillas during the struggle for liberation during the 1970s. According to Lan (1985), this notion of the ancestral link to power was seen by state ministers and senior members of ZANU-PF in the post-colonial era as crucial to their legitimacy, and they often justified their practices by highlighting their supposed link to (and blessing from) ancestors and prominent past spirit mediums. However, to some extent, this has now been replaced by the role of mainstream churches (organised religion). Yet, this still entails the embodiment of spirituality in constructing political leadership. Analysis of the "theology of land" with reference to both the second Chimurenga, (i.e. guerrilla war) and third Chimurenga (i.e. land occupations from the year 2000) indicate that "African spirituality and its vision of land as communally owned and biblical ideas on lands' gift to humanity can formulate a radical theology of land" (Chitando, 2005:223).

The question of land, so central to Zimbabwe's history and politics (Moyo, 2004), brings out the relationship between Mugabe and land as this relationship can be understood through the lens of Mugabe fulfilling a divine purpose, often expressed as a chiefly duty. Machingura (2012:138) for example invokes the tradition of *Zunde RaMambo* (the chief's granary), a 'traditional' practice in which a community's farming produce falls under the chief – it is the chief's role and duty, with the support of the ancestors as expressed through spirit mediums, to provide land and food to the people (Chitando, 2005). The chief is the custodian of the past and

embodies mystical/spiritual/divine authority, power and wisdom to lead, as given to him by ancestral spirits (Gwaravanda, n.d.; Mtetwa, n.d.). As well, the chief is required to protect his people from enemies (Smith, 2003: 250) and to represent his people's values and identities (Lord et al., 1999; Lord and Brown, 2001). Hence, chiefs are the "living incarnations of the totality of society" (Machingura, 2012:167).

Religious and political discourses in Zimbabwe have often been intertwined culturally. In their analyses of the influences on politics and political leadership, several authors (Bhebhe, 2015: Chitando, 2002/2005: Machingura, 2012: Mtetwa, 2017) have integrated spiritual and mystic elements. In fact, a broader "theology of land" emerged around fast track in which land, ancestors and Mugabe became symbolically linked (Chitando, 2005:224). As well, Mugabe invoked the symbolic importance of land and ancestors, along with his central role to carrying out the mission of recovering lost ancestral lands; as if the ancestors instructed him to do so (Chitando, 2002b:5). More broadly, the endorsement of Mugabe by the President of the Council of Chiefs creates the impression that he has been anointed by the spirit mediums to rule Zimbabwe, and become the ultimate or absolute Chief (Nyanda, 2015:41).

It might be countered that this mystical dimension to Mugabe's rule is meant to dupe Zimbabwean people as some kind of ruling ideology. But Bhebhe (2016) suggests that it might be embedded in – and resonate with – the everyday lives of many Zimbabweans. He argues that mystical elements of leadership exist for example in the relationship between parents and children. Traditionally in Zimbabwe, it is taboo to raise a hand or lash out verbally against your father or mother. Parents are not only providers, but are believed to hold the keys to either curse or bless their children, and hence the common statement today: *amai havatukwe, unopara ngozi* (you cannot shout at your mother because you will invite the wrath of the spirits upon yourself) (Bhebhe, 2012: 85). Likewise, to speak out against President Mugabe is tantamount to angering the ancestors who, it is said, effectively appointed Mugabe. The suggestion that the nation is metaphorically equivalent to fatherhood/parenthood, and that political leaders are equivalent to fathers in a family and that citizens are equivalent to their children, has often been perpetrated by those close to Mugabe within ZANU-PF. The then Secretary of the ruling party's Women's League, Joyce Mujuru, in a demonstration against the formation of the opposition party Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), said:

> In African custom, the father was the head of a house. If anything went wrong a child would not complain to the father, but would seek other ways of doing so…You will never get a child telling

his father to step down because he has failed to run the affairs of the house, but there are always ways of dealing with their problems. Even in a marriage there is not family without its problems but there are ways to solve them" (quoted in Moyo, 1991: 85).

The role of churches in solidifying the notion that Mugabe is not only a God-sent leader but is anointed to be the only leader of Zimbabwe (who can complete the mission of the ancestors to liberate the nation), has led to a significant level of support for his ruler-ship. The notion of leadership itself in Shona culture is manifested in what Bhebhe (2016) refers to as the religio-culture. Aspects of this religio-culture include fear of displeasing leaders, a communitarianism ethics and an Afro-centred understanding of what the leader-follower relationship entails. The use of biblical analogies is often used to describe Mugabe and his power of influence over the masses in what Machingura (2012) calls the "messianic feeding of the masses" in which religious symbolism is appropriated to expand on issues such as land reform and a ZANU-PF romanticised patriotic history.

This discourse focuses on support for Mugabe and his actions as a translation of the will of God into the Zimbabwean nation. Because power rests in the founding values of a society (Mtetwa, n.d), this form of influence depends on a socially shaped discursive construction of the Zimbabwean past of what leadership entails in such a context (Hays, 1994:64). According to Bhebhe, this involves an inherent fear of those in leadership positions. The appropriation of religious themes into political discourse plays a central role in making sense of not only the political actions of leaders such as Mugabe as it also allows for a deeper understanding of the motivating factors of his support structure. One point of contention in this respect is the ability of African leaders to exist within two seemingly contrasting paradigms of leadership. Gordon (2002: 169) thus notes that "African leaders seem to be operating with two souls, an African soul and the other, their European colonial and neo-colonial soul". Therefore, leadership is approached with a double mandate, in which the use of modern religious or spiritual connections to God (Eurocentric ideal) is combined with spiritual connections (in a more Afro-centric understanding of the connections to ancestors). These though may be utilised at different time periods or with different goals in mind (Bhebhe, 2016; Zimunya, 1991). An example of this is the notion that chiefs only leave 'office' when they die: this might be favourable for a leader like Mugabe whose existence has been endorsed as a life president on numerous occasions by ZANU-PF. In this sense, the 'old' and the 'new' have an almost symbiotic relationship.

According to Squarcini (2002:345), mysticism carries with it certain practices that reoccur continuously to the extent that "routinisation" takes place and this leads to the tying together of the sacred and the secular world of politics. This may lead to the institutionalisation of power which springs from "the mystical background of the charismatic leader" (Squarcini, 2002: 346). In this respect, there has often been a strong emphasis by a number of authors in tracing the history of Mugabe back to his childhood, which is often made up of stories of prophecies and predictions by powerful religious figures of his destiny to occupy the throne of power. These narratives have had a positive impact on his role as the sole and chosen leader of Zimbabwe (Nyakudya and Jakarasi, 2015; Smith, 1981). Furthermore, the veneration of ancestors and spirit mediums (in particular Mbuya Nehanda dating back to the original struggle against colonialism in the late 1880s) has been a particularly attractive notion for Mugabe. According to Tendi (2010:94) her execution by the emerging colonial state led to the "construction and enhancement of an ongoing tradition of meaning, of the symbolisation of a cause in a single person… the martyr tradition generating myth, an ongoing memorial, a story with its own in built moral imperative for people to come".

The symbolisation of one person being the ultimate person who holds power has been a continuous attribute of Zimbabwean politics. This is what Moore (2005:120) articulates as the "Big man syndrome" which Zimbabwe has not transcended. The author further states that this is symptomatic of a more general trend in which African leaders continue to rule for extended periods of time. The big man syndrome maintains the focus on the "man of the moment" while emphasising simultaneously the big man's rootedness in the social relations of his people. In both religious and political discourses in Zimbabwe, the reverence for (and fear of) a single individual has been an important dimension of leadership (Chitando, 2005). This incorporates the fear of chiefs and religious leaders to parental figures and even the state president (Bhebe 2016).

Another dimension of the element of mysticism and power that Lilford articulates is based on an abstract "psychic stage of mysticism" in which "the visionary perceives the secret thoughts and sins of others" (Squarcini, 2002: 347). This has been evident in the interaction that President Mugabe has had with perceived enemies. Those who are perceived as wanting to take over power are exposed to this "psychic" perception of things taking place that are not in the open. Grace Mugabe at a church rally in 2017 is quoted as saying, for instance: "The Vice-President looks at the president with an intent eye full of hate". This is further seen in the

labelling of those who are in opposition to ZANU-PF as automatically sell-outs. Grace Mugabe in fact appears to have 'inherited' the mystic leadership of the state president. She portrays herself as righteous beyond reproach and as the only person who is now able to expose the hidden machinations of the enemies within the ruling party, including Mnangagwa.

2.4.2 Charismatic Leadership

At times, the literature on Zimbabwe has noted the perception of Mugabe as a charismatic leader (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Nyanda, 2015; Bhebhe, 2016). Weber (1980: 196) describes the concept of charisma (or the gift of grace) as a base of the legitimacy of authority in that it is largely related to the leader's personal appeal and performance. Furthermore: "The charismatic leader possesses a certain quality of personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural power or qualities" (Weber, 1980: 196).

Weber posits that some of the characteristics of the leader can be seen to represent the "ego ideal" or super-ego of the followers or an identification with what Lord and Brown (1999) call the self-concept (identify and values) of the followers. Therefore, the notion of a charismatic leader is based on how the leader best represents the self-concept or self-identity of society. Weber (1980:197) further claims that the success of a charismatic leader depends upon the match between their own personal characteristics and the "historically conditioned characteristics of the potential followers" (leader-follower match) (Weber, 1980: 196). This can be seen with regard to Mugabe including by considering his public speeches, in which he regularly invokes a common identity with the masses of the people in a highly flamboyant and evocative manner. This is evident in the following well-cited comment by Mugabe in the context of fast track restructuring: "we have fought for our independence and we are prepared to shed our blood… so Blair, keep your England and let me keep my Zimbabwe". In doing so, Mugabe spoke (as 'we') about historical redress and the post-colonial longing for land. As Bhebhe (2016:94) argues: "Mugabe was in a way publicly wrestling with Zimbabwe's former colonial masters so that the nation can become free indeed…And by calling Zimbabwe his own he put himself up for unconditional obedience and following in virtue of his mission".

Thus, support for charismatic authority is premised on the basic argument among Zimbabweans that is, "if Mugabe still has the valour and means to protect those whom he saved earlier it is then logical to assume that the followers owe him complete loyalty" (Bhebhe, 2016:94). This

is often the case even in cases where 'the masses' remain deprived or marginalised. In this way, Mamdani (2009:3) suggests that "the preoccupation" by critics with "his [Mugabe's] character does little to illuminate the socio-historical issues involved". Despite the harsh criticisms of Mugabe as an authoritarian and oppressive ruler, the point is that Mugabe's clarion call against ongoing colonialism resonated with the 'socio-historical issues' faced by a significant part of the Zimbabwean population, particularly those in communal areas. The land reform measures, however harsh, won him significant popularity not only in Zimbabwe but in Southern-Africa.

The context of his action presented him with an opportunity to exercise his authority. Mugabe managed to project himself as a champion of mass justice and successfully rallied those to who justice had been denied by the colonial system. Mamdani's position compares to Weber's leader-follower match, in which the content and character of a charismatic leader's pronouncements varies across situations if they are to appeal to the situation-on-the ground. Mamdani (2008) notes, therefore, that Mugabe's position on the land reform programme spoke to the ongoing situation of rural people, that is to say their socio-economic status in the face of the newly independent state. Thus, for a charismatic leader, political pronouncements and actions sway over time to fit the prevailing situation, such that there is no fixed ideological position propagated on a continuous basis. Because of this, one could argue that Mugabe's form of leadership is charismatic because of his ability to "shine in a situation", and also because he is a "masterful tactician" in addressing the demands arising from the prevailing situation (Chan, 2003). ZANU-PF discourse hence shifts. At the beginning of Mugabe's rule, reconciliation was an important position to adopt in order to ensure a transition of power to black people. However, this would soon shift in importance as deeper issues of social injustice took the centre stage as war veterans, peasants and black elites demanded compensation for their sacrifices (Chan, 2003; Chan, 2007).

One constant feature of Mugabe which has maintained his charisma as a leader is his supposed credentials as the one and only authentic revolutionary leader (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009; Tendi, 2010; Ranger, 2003). This presents an important component of charismatic authority in that there is a constant reference to historical struggle and the celebration of revolutionary history. This involves the re-articulation of key historical moments and the re-inscribing of these in the present. This forms a significant part of Mugabe's support as it creates a space in which followers are constantly in a state of gratitude to historical gains and sacrifices made by the leader. In doing so, Mugabe's appeal and successes become centre stage, along with the notion

that he is capable of further successes: that there are still further achievements to come created the notion that: "If Mugabe can still deliver, why would anyone think of replacing him" (Bhebhe, 2016:903).

In the end, charismatic authority requires a "matching" between "the context and the leadership elements" so as to ensure successful leadership (Bhebhe, 2016:93). In the case of Mugabe, his personality, image and style of ruling has contributed to his particular form of charismatic authority. The intrinsic danger of charismatic leadership though often results from a pronounced level of leader self-confidence and independence from the everyday realities of 'the masses'. The charismatic leader charms himself into believing that he is the absolute ruler who acts invariably in the interests of the downtrodden, but this ultimately entails some degree of self-deception. The amount of support for a charismatic leader often masks the reality of increasingly unpopular actions. This is particular evident at the ZANU-PF rallies that are usually filled with people, and this often gives the leader (Mugabe) the perception that he is still highly favoured despite the dire socio-economic conditions existing across the country.

2.4.3 Symbols and Patriotic History

The power of Mugabe as the president of Zimbabwe has been maintained using many symbolisms that are often central in the defining of 'Zimbabweaness' or what it means to be Zimbabwean (Tendi, 2010). These often centre mainly on land, race and patriotic history. This form of symbolic power that is wielded by Mugabe and more broadly ZANU-PF has allowed for a monopoly of power to be existent within the leadership of the president. The "revived nationalist project" under the banner of the third Chimurenga put forward several symbolic claims about unfilled past struggles. But it also placed a modern twist on the mythology of Mugabe's role as the God-given ruler integral to the divine plan to ensure black dignity (Melber, 1991; Ranger, 2003; Ranger, 2005; Tendi, 2010). This regularly involves the discursive creation of a treacherous enemy that is juxtaposed to the revolutionary integrity of Mugabe.

The term sell-out has a long history in the politics of Zimbabwe from the time of the liberation struggle in the decades prior to independence and since independence. However, there is a distinction in the way in which the term was used during the liberation war period and post-1980 (Ranger, 2003; Ranger, 2005 Tendi, 2010). During the liberation struggle, particularly the second Chimurenga, the term was used to distinguish between black people who were

fighting against the colonial forces and those who sided with the Rhodesian government. Since 1980, even those who fought against the colonial state, such as members of ZAPU, are labelled as sell-outs as is any other party which in any way exists in opposition to ZANU-PF (such as MDC). Tendi (2010:146-152) thus argues that those identified as sell-outs is fluid and subject to change but, at the same time, the distinction between revolutionaries and counter-revolutionaries is a standard part of the ZANU-PF discourse. Ultimately, those considered as sell-outs are labelled as counter-revolutionaries and as unfit to be part of the Zimbabwean nation. Hence, it is a particularly powerful symbol in delegitimising political opponents and legitimising those who hold the title of Zimbabwean patriot (Lan, 1985).

Many ZANU-PF stalwarts, such as Edgar Tekere (of ZUM) and former vice-president Joyce Mujuru, have been labelled as sell-outs subsequent to leaving the one and only revolutionary party, namely, ZANU-PF. It seems that the only major political figure who has managed to avoid being so designated is Robert Mugabe, who is the very embodiment of the revolutionary cause. The sell-out label carries with it very grave consequences for those in particular who go on to speak out against Mugabe, as they are not only seen as against the revolution but against Zimbabwe itself. In this regard, Mugabe becomes the ultimate symbol of the patriot of what it means to be Zimbabwean. According to Ranger (2005:13), "Mugabe has been owning patriotic history since the inception of his rule". In this context, the idea that people exist who are anti-Mugabe implies that they are seeking to bring back colonialism, and hence the need to keep alive the idea of the unfinished war of liberation, as manifested for instance most recently in the third Chimurenga.

Mugabe as man and ruler is the custodian of the liberation struggle and it is through his life's work and commitment to revolutionary struggle that patriotic history can be imagined and spoken. Patriotic history then becomes crucial to the maintenance of the legitimate power centred on Mugabe. Again, ancestors are important in this light as Mugabe's ruler-ship can be traced back historically to the proud and independent kingdoms and chiefdoms of pre-colonial Zimbabwe. The territory of modern Zimbabwe is considered to "correspond to some ancient polity over which the ancestors ruled long ago" (Lan, 1985:218). The ancestors were the original and legitimate owners of the country and are presently believed to be guiding the country against re-colonisation, with Mugabe in particular protecting the historical legacy. Mugabe thus not only rules over Zimbabwe as, in an almost mystical way, he also embodies its past and is the gate-keeper in telling its history (Lan, 1985; Kriger, 1992). This flattened and

simple image of the past and present, as mediated through Mugabe, legitimises Mugabe's power. Ancestors along with powerful spirit mediums (such as Nehanda) have passed on their power and wisdom to Mugabe and have blessed his complete and absolute control over the country. As Lan (1985) explains:

> All nationalisms make use of metaphors of land, of soil and earth, of territory and boundary, of monuments and graves, of heroes of the past who are the ancestors of the nation. The symbolism of the *mhondoro* [spirit medium] gains its extraordinary effectiveness as an expression of the struggle for Zimbabwe from its ability to combine the economic and political aspects of this struggle in a single unforgettable image: the chiefs of the past, independent and prosperous, benign and generous to their followers in sole possession and control of their bountiful, fertile lands (Lan, 1985:220).

Today, the single unforgettable image is Mugabe. The political leadership of Mugabe is presented as the ultimate representation of the will of the ancestors. The image of Nehanda is incorporated into a design printed on banners and clothes, with Mbuya Nehanda's head and shoulders hovering above those of Mugabe, making her the "the warrior of the past guiding, supporting and recommending this triumphant warrior of the present" (Lan, 1985:218). Just as, according to patriotic history, Mbuya Nehanda took the whole of Zimbabwe under her care, so too does Mugabe. The articulation of ancestral authority and trans-local spirit mediums, which was used to legitimise the war of liberation during the 1970s, is used under Mugabe to restructure post-colonial Zimbabwe as he deems fit. According to Lan (1985) at least, Zimbabwe was regarded as a single spirit province, such that the supposed blessing of Nehanda remains a campaign strategy for ZANU-PF and Mugabe on a country-wide basis. The title of *mhondoro*, as the powerful mystical protector of the whole nation, is somehow seamlessly bestowed and transferred onto the shoulders of Mugabe, with Mugabe taking over the duties of the *mhondoro* and protecting the modern nation-state against sell-outs and counter-revolutionaries (Kriger, 1992; Kriger, 2003).

The land issue is of paramount importance to Mugabe the ruler and patriotic history because it is the main signifier or symbol of colonial loss. The symbolism of land includes issues around race, culture, history, territory and belonging, all of which have been articulated in anti-colonial struggles in Zimbabwe. In this light, Tendi (2010:94) states that "Mugabe was the most articulate framer of patriotic history's land theme… He was the fountain from which ZANU-PF's position on land derived". This of course relates to Mugabe's chiefly location and status,

and it became embodied in the land occupations in the year 2000 when Mugabe publicly declared that the land-invaders should not be removed from the occupied farms. The war rhetoric of the occupations was vividly displayed in Mugabe's public pronouncements and facilitated a connection to the blood and violence of the guerrilla war. This rhetoric was also deeply masculinised with Mugabe as the Big man shepherding and protecting his flock of followers.

In the case of ex-liberation movement parties such as ZANU-PF, maintaining the liberation struggle alive in historical memory becomes critical in legitimising the post-colonial ruling party and state as well as the necessity of political violence (Kriger, 2003; Ranger, 2003). In this way, the ruling party becomes central to post-colonial politics as the organisational embodiment of the liberation struggle. History, as understood as patriotic history, is crystallised in ZANU-PF. Furthermore, the Zimbabwean nation and state are articulated through the ruling party. In the end, because Mugabe is synonymous with the liberation struggle and the ruling party, the history of Zimbabwe (based on patriotic history) is read through the man, life and ruler-ship of Mugabe. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015:9) puts it, "the national question is reduced to party and party leader, the father of the nation". This is a crucial part of the phenomenon of Mugabeism.

2.4.4 The Politics of the Dead

The politics of the dead also represents an important aspect of not only power in Zimbabwe, but the very legitimacy of the ruling party. This plays an important part in the sheer influence of the past on the present and it also connects the present to the past in a singular historical narrative of national liberation and post-colonial restructuring which keeps the heritage of the past remembered and re-inscribed in the present (Fontein, 2009).

One of the most important issues that have surrounded the existence of war veterans and liberation war heroes is the legacies that they leave behind after the sacrifice of going to war (Kriger, 2003; Tafira, 2015). The politics of the dead facilitates this legacy, specifically in relation to the legacy of Robert Mugabe as the standard-bearer of what a liberation hero entails, and because of the need to keep Mugabe's life and works alive after his death. Thus the importance of the symbolism of the dead is powerfully illustrated by the examples of war veterans, nationalist leaders and, in the end, the president himself (Magadzike, 2011). In addition, Mugabe epitomises the eternal link with the past and the fallen heroes, comrades,

nationalists and even spirit mediums. Fontein (2009, 2010) speaks of an emotive materiality in which the dead have an "affective presence as dead persons, [or] spirit subjects which continue to make demands upon society" (Fontein, 2010:433). The unfulfilled missions of the dead heroes still need to be realised, and this places demands on the present in structuring present and future courses of actions. These demands are seen as being channelled first and foremost through Mugabe as he is the very embodiment of the restless spirits of the past and keeps this past alive. The president in this regard takes it upon himself to fulfil the demands of the spirits.

Again, land takes an important seat at the table of politics of the dead in Zimbabwe as it serves as the missing link between the bones of the dead or the spirits of the ancestors on the one hand, and the material world on the other. The land represents the missing material link between the people and their legacy and destiny. The land itself is personified in the sense that the bones dispersed throughout the land have a certain level of agency: "In this way, bones in Zimbabwe have an ambivalent agency, both as extensions of the dead themselves, as restless and demanding spirit subject/persons but also as unconscious objects/things that provoke responses from the living" (Fontein, 2010:432). This agency conferred onto bones is not typical human agency but an emotive material agency which reflects the restless spirits demanding that the present remain faithful to the past, to the bones and spirit of the dead scattered about (Fontein, 2009, 2010). It is for this reason that past and present heroes are referred to as sons of the soil.

Mugabe encapsulates all this and he is said to be haunted by the dead fallen heroes, particularly those (like Herbert Chitepo and Josiah Tongogara) who died before 1980. In being haunted by the past, Mugabe must wrestle with the spirits of the dead and come to terms with them by ensuring that there is fidelity to the unfinished business of the national liberation struggle. The emotive force of the restless bones and spirits thus gives rise to the notion of an incomplete Chimurenga. The notion of the never-ending Chimurenga demands that Mugabe remain in power and be party and state president for life. Mugabe dying in office as many did on the battlefield during the 1970s means that Mugabe's ongoing presence on the political stage ensures the continuation of the revolutionary fervour embodied in the bones and spirits of the fallen.

The National Heroes Acre and National Heroes Day commemoration is an acknowledgement of the politics of the dead. This brings to the fore the importance of the unsettled bones, and it seeks to justify and normalise the role that heroes played in the liberation of Zimbabwe. Mugabe as the main figure overseeing the Heroes Day commemoration speaks to and for the dead, and his articulations – in response to the turbulent spirits – set out what is necessary to finish the work of the dead as well as galvanising the nation around the speaking dead. Therefore, would stepping down from power be a consideration that Mugabe could not fathom, as he believes that he can only finish the work either when in office or when he is dead? This question is particularly important because Zimbabwe's politics of the dead does not only revolve around the dead of the colonial struggle but those on the post-colonial stage. Retirement is something Mugabe would presumably find difficult to contemplate as both the dead and living need him. In this respect, Mubuso Chinguno (chairperson of the ruling party's Manicaland Province) articulated this by stating that "there is no vacancy in the presidium", adding that they (the youth) "expect the president to die in office like his late deputies Joshua Nkomo, Simon Muzenda and John Nkomo" (quoted in *The Herald*, 25 October 2017).

The politics of the dead, with its emotive agency, is linked to the sell-out discourse and can be used to de-legitimise those who are said to fall outside of the revolutionary struggle. Certain bones and spirits, even if once revolutionary, are literally dead in terms of speaking to the present insofar as the deceased (before death) turned their backs on ZANU-PF and Mugabe, and therefore on the nation itself. These dead are thus portrayed as not having a link with the ancestors and they are cut from the present and future. This point clearly also links to patriotic history as, again, these dead are not considered as authentic patriots. Patriotic history not only posits that there are rightful heirs to the liberation war but that there remain living enemies including enemies within the ruling party which at times need to be weeded out. As current president Mnangagwa once said, "ZANU-PF would not hand over power to MDC in an election as it would be tantamount to failing the departed comrades of the 1970s war of independence" (Onslow, 2011:10) The liberation ideals continue to be celebrated and revived in what Fontein (2010:425) calls – critically – "the post-colonial fiction" of ZANU-PF. Mugabe crystallises these ideals in his life and remains true to them. For this reason, the person and politics of Mugabe need to respected, honoured and emulated to keep the liberation flame alive.

2.5 Theoretical Underpinnings of Power

Central to this study of Mugabe is the notion of power. The notion of power within African societies is regularly understood in a Eurocentric manner drawing upon European theory rooted for instance in Weberian or Marxist sociology. Authors such as Gwaravanda (n.d.) and Mtetwa (n.d.), among others, have sought to establish an alternative, Afro-centric understanding or at least one which is sensitive to the historical and cultural specificities across Africa. This entails foregrounding the importance of culturally/socially engrained arrangements such as Ubuntu/ communitarianism and spirituality (including the intimate connections between nature and society as mediated through spirituality). These foundational values and ideals are often articulated in the pursuit and maintenance of power and are crucial to the legitimacy of power and its exercise. Furthermore, these values are constantly re-invented and re-integrated into political discourse (Eze, n.d.) such that the failure to recognise their importance may limit or distort sociological analyses of power in Africa, including the power of Mugabe. This however does not entail a wholesale rejection of European theory. But the power of Mugabe, as intimated and shown already, needs to be understood in the context of the founding values of a society in line with historical, spiritual and cultural values.

Dobratz et al. (2014:2) define politics as "the generalised process by which the struggle over power in society is resolved". However, as indicated, it is critical to have a culturally-specific understanding of power, as power (and legitimate power more specifically) should be understood within the context of the society in which it is being exercised. In most African communities, the notion of legitimate power at times divergences from the European standard of liberal democratic values. Certain Zimbabwean notions of power (and the power of Mugabe) are for example premised on a chiefly/divine form of power that can only be exercised by the leader who has been placed by God, ancestors and spirit mediums in the rightful position. A contemporary example within the context of African leadership is the representation of the late President of Malawi Kamuzu Banda, who would always be seen in a three-piece suit and a homburg hat and gave all his speeches in English. But he held onto cultural traditions, such as the lions tail fly whisk he carried with him everywhere, which is a symbol of a traditional healer – this led to Banda seeking to perceive himself (and have others perceive him) as the ultimate healer of the nation (Zvomuya, 2011). Joshua Nkomo, the former leader of ZAPU, presented himself in a similar way.

This claim is not necessarily inconsistent with claims made by European theorists but, in speaking about such spiritual and cultural ideas, they often spoke about the situation as it existed before the rise of modern capitalism. In this respect, Weber argued that "a leader possesses a certain quality of personality which is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural or at least specifically exceptional powers of qualities" (Winter, 1987). This expression of an almost immortal leader who stands above the frailties of the human condition implies a spiritual dimension to power in that the leader can even achieve feats considered to be humanly impossible. Mugabe, despite his aging body, seems to manage to transcend age and time and has staying power as a result (Bhebhe, 2016), and a power which needs to be respected and honoured.

Legitimate power, like all forms of power, entails a relationship between political leadership and followers (Lord and Brown, 2001; Lord et al., 1999), who may or may not see themselves (and be seen by leaders) strictly in terms of a liberal notion of citizenship in the case of African societies. This is particularly so in the case in which a chief holds the mantle of executive, judiciary and legislative powers, as I have suggested can be illustrated with reference to Mugabe's presidency. Perceptions of such a President are not only that he guides the country but like a chief he encompasses all that society values. His followers as such are not citizens in any strict liberal sense but are subjects of his ruler-ship and legitimate power derives from this rather than necessarily from regular liberal democratic national elections.

The leader-follower relationship, from a cultural perspective, might also entail questions around historical-political social identities and senses of belonging which go against the grain of atomised individual citizenship, including belonging to a historical process of change focused on national liberation. In this respect, as Mamdani (1999) argues, there is a link between power and group-based political identities, so that identifying the linkages becomes crucial to understanding how it becomes institutionally embedded in power relationships. In this way, power reproduces certain identities and excludes or erodes others, including identities seen as inconsistent with historical narratives around the liberation struggle in Zimbabwe and elsewhere (Mamdani, 1999).

Mugabe's rule, in addition to aspects of coercion and violence as argued by critics of Mugabe as an oppressor, has an additional cultural element in which there is a manipulation of history and its symbols through the articulation and use of post-colonial imaginations. Though the

thesis does not suggest that supporters of Mugabe are simply duped by the historical and contemporary discourses emanating from the ruling party, the more culturally-based consensual rule of Mugabe does relate to the notion of symbolic power. Symbolic power is defined as "that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it" (Bourdieu, 1991: 164; Casey, 2006; Bourdieu, 2000; Navarro, 2006; Hays, 1994).The effectiveness of symbols is that they transcend the concepts of time and spaces, as is the case of land which is understood in Zimbabwe as linked to the spiritual realm; thus, the significance of land can be drawn upon as a symbolic marker under varying circumstances. When such symbols become central to politics and power, they constitute "transcendental values for people within that community" (Chitando, 2005:225) which are grounded within an understanding of their daily lives. This is seen in the connection drawn between land and colonisation, and land reform and de-colonisation, and the historical narrative in which this is embedded. History-telling in Zimbabwe is rich in symbolic references, including the notion that anyone seeking to take power from Mugabe should be considered as seeking to re-colonise Zimbabwe. This solidifies Mugabe's position as the "Knight of African decolonisation" (Eze, n.d.:2) but also as the very symbol of the history of Zimbabwe; this is indeed one meaning of Mugabeism.

Symbolic power, with its cultural and spiritual connotations, is a key part of Zimbabwean politics with the rise of even oppositional political figures. The imagery of Pastor Evan Mawarire, however short-lived, as a Messiah is similar to the prolonged image that Mugabe has been given throughout his rule. This power eventually transcends the "sowing, reproduction and preservation stage to the stage of re-utilisation", as Mugabe does, in the face of any danger to the leader's power or influence (Squarcini, 2002:345). Symbolic power resonates with many other perceptions of Mugabe's power as representing more than just a normal leader. Former Vice-President Mujuru was quoted as saying: "People are wasting their time by opposing President Mugabe. It was prophesied way back in 1934 (when he was only 10 years) that he was going to lead this country. How can a normal person challenge such a leader?" (*News Zimbabwe* 2013: quoted in Siziba and Ncube: 2015).

Political support in this case is based on a notion of power as primarily based on cultural, spiritual and charismatic attributes, such that support for the leader should come naturally as if expressing loyalty to a deity. The 'deification of Mugabe' has played a central role in garnering support for Mugabe throughout the years. This includes a list of "Zimbabweans taboos" which

include speaking out of turn about the president and his family. In the end, a 'cult of personality' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009) has emerged around Mugabe, leading to continuous endorsements of Mugabe by ZANU-PF's provinces including the Women's League and the Youth League. He has been continuously endorsed since 1980 in all elections as their presidential candidate, and any questioning of this results in the counter-revolutionary label being propagated against the internal opposition. Mugabe has been referred to as the centre of power for ZANU-PF and all-party positions are open for political contestation except for the post of presidency.

2.6 Conclusion

The phenomenon of symbolic power and mysticism demonstrates the uses and implications for power when people become attached to certain ideas which serve to legitimise positions of power; in this case, the position of Mugabe as ruler of both ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwean state. Though Mugabe's ruler-ship is often portrayed as based purely on acts of violence and coercion, this chapter has sought to show the ways in which the power of Mugabe has an element of consensual rule. This is not to deny the importance of coercion. Rather, the more consensual component of Mugabe's power is normally belittled in the academic literature, with the mystic ideas around Mugabe being seen as pure ideology meant to deceive those who support him and the ruling party. It is important, as an analytical and empirical corrective, to at least explore the possibility that the consensual component of Mugabe's power in fact resonates with many of the ruling party's supporters. It is for this reason that this thesis, as evidenced from this chapter, focuses on matters such as charismatic leadership, the politics of land, the politics of the dead, renditions of the liberation struggle and Mugabe as the modern-day chief. This is further developed in the next chapter which considers the thoughts of ZANU-PF supporters based on the fieldwork for this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE – ZANU-PF SUPPORTERS AND UNDERSTANDING MUGABE

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the fieldwork for the thesis by considering the interviewees' perspectives on Mugabe as man and ruler. Thus, the chapter considers their main reasons for supporting Mugabe's hold on political power over an extended period. In doing so, it draws upon some of the themes pertaining to the mysticism of Mugabe as discussed in the preceding chapter. In Section 3.2, brief profiles of the interviewees are provided. The next section (Section 3.3) details the interviewees' understandings of Mugabe on a thematic basis, including culture/tradition, empowerment through teaching, land reform, and the symbols of history. The themes covered in this chapter do not map in a complete way onto the many themes around mysticism and Mugabe in chapter two, but they do speak to the aura of mysticism surrounding the image of Mugabe.

3.2 ZANU-PF Interviewee Profiles

In this section, I briefly outline the profiles of the interviewed ZANU-PF supporters, including gender, age, reasons for affiliation to the ruling party, current or previous positions in the party and other details such as employment status and education. To protect the privacy of the interviewees, the interviewees are numbered from one to eight, and thus are referred to by their number. The interviewees are numbered simply according to the sequence in which they were interviewed in the field.

Interviewee number 1 is a 27-year-old male. The participant is a university student and unemployed. He is affiliated to the party through his family and primarily through his father who is both an ex-combatant/war veteran and a diplomat in the government. He is attached to the ideology of ZANU-PF and in particular Mugabe's position on matters as articulated by the latter in many speeches, including speeches which speak to the need for land for black people in the context of the revolutionary ideas of the Chimurengas. He contrasts support for ZANU-PF against that of the MDC, with the latter representing the working class whereas the former focuses on the needs of mostly unemployed youths.

Interviewee number 2 is a 34-year-old male. He is employed as a barber and is also involved in other side-jobs in order to sustain his livelihood. The participant described his affiliation with ZANU-PF as highly influenced by the fact that his place of residence (Epworth), a high-density suburb in Harare has experienced high volumes of coercion as a means of gaining ruling party support. He expressed in detail his fear of ZANU-PF as a motivator for seemingly aligning himself with the party and supporting Mugabe, including providing accounts of numerous raids in Epworth by ZANU-PF youth groups and police officers. He also revealed his inability to fully open up in the interview process based on the fact that he was afraid to express his opinions for fear of reprimand.

Interviewee number 3 is a 29-year-old male. The participant is currently unemployed and a university student. His affiliation with the party is based on his family, with his father being a war veteran and member of the party. The interviewee previously held a minor role as a chairperson of the ZANU-PF youth league in the Harare district and outlines this as another basis for his support of Mugabe.

Interviewee number 4 is a 55-year old male. The participant is a war veteran and works for the government and has previously held the position of a diplomat. He outlines his current position in the party as an aspiring Member of Parliament who will be running in the 2018 elections for the ZANU-PF party. He indicates that his reasons for supporting Mugabe are primarily based on the notion that the latter is a principled and consistent man and a man of the people. He emphasised Mugabe's important role in fast track land reform and Mugabe's policies on education as key reasons for why Mugabe remains such a central figure for both the party and the state.

Interviewee number 5 is 65-year-old male who is a war veteran and a retired Major General in the Zimbabwe Defence Forces. His affiliation to the party dates back to the liberation struggle in the 1970s, with his support for Mugabe being based in large part on the latter's immense contribution to the liberation struggle.

Interviewee number 6 is a 59-year-old female. She is currently employed in the government and states that her affiliation with ZANU-PF goes all the way back to the days of the liberation struggle based on the ideology of the nationalist movement led by Mugabe. She highlights that

her rise in social status post-1980 can be attributed to the fact that Mugabe put great emphasis on education and employment creation from the early independence years.

Interviewee number 7 is a 40-year-old male. He is currently a street vendor in Harare who attributes his support for Mugabe to the fact that he has been allocated a space to continue his informal business venture. Additionally, he attributes his affiliation to the party to his family and also his personal values which are likewise espoused by Mugabe.

3.3 Understanding Mugabe

This section focuses the interviewees' understanding of Mugabe as man and ruler and the reasons for their expressions of support for the ruling party and specifically Mugabe. This is done thematically, by focusing on the key themes raised by the interviewees in relation to their general understanding of leadership and the understanding of leadership within the context of Mugabe's rule. These will include discussions around cultural values (i.e. certain ethos that are expected of a leader), land reform, and Mugabe as a teacher as well as Mugabe as symbol of history.

3.3.1 Mugabe and Culture/Tradition

The notion of leadership in Zimbabwe, as discussed earlier, encompasses a wide range of notions and ideals. The interviewees signalled the importance of cultural values in this regard. Whether based on his speeches or actions, most of the respondents noted that there was a certain resonance with Mugabe as a leader with which they could identify on a cultural basis. This is what Lord et al. (1999) would call a follower's self-concept (involving his or her values, representations and understanding of history and society) which would be considered to be in line with the what the leader stands for. Knowing how leadership is understood within the context of certain cultural (including so-called traditional) values is useful in making sense of support for Mugabe. Certain values such as reconciliation and a sense of community could explain some of the perceptions people have towards a leader like Mugabe. One participant indicated that the post-colonial reconciliation policy adopted by Mugabe in 1980 resonated with her at the time, and thus she recalls that, *"He taught us equality of the races but more importantly after the liberation struggle he said let us reconcile which is also one of my values. He values the culture of the black people"* (Interview 6). This is despite the fact that critical scholars of Mugabe see the step to reconciliation as "nothing but the petit-bourgeois leadership's abandonment of workers and peasants and a sign of accommodation of foreign

and local capital." (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009:1142). Ibbo Mandaza (quoted in Ndlovu-Gatehsni, 2009:1142) in a similar manner described reconciliation as "largely a political function facilitating the necessary compromise between the rulers of yesterday and the inheritors of state power, within the context of incomplete decolonisation."

Bhebhe (2016:80) states that "based on the premise that the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe", a leader often has to represent the strongly-held and beliefs of the people he wishes to lead. The findings reveal that this was an important aspect of understanding what motivates and demotivates people to support Mugabe. One participant explains this by referring to the cultural values of gender equality which go against traditional ways of doing things:

> *In Zimbabwe, we have certain segments of values that we begin to appreciate, values beginning with adhering to the principles of ZANU-PF that has certain values. Political parties have values, gender equality, we are beginning to take gender equality seriously. It is a value that we are bringing to the forefront… Men should not be in the lead all the time. You don't have to uphold very old traditions that do not uphold to date for example that the first-born son should inherit and the mother is deprived. But we are taking this into law i.e. it is the surviving spouse that should preside or should own everything that she worked together for with the husband. These are the actual values that we have upgraded* (Interview 4).

One of the values that is significantly important not only to a Zimbabwean understanding of leadership but is broadly relevant in Africa is the idea of communitarianism or *munhu munhu pamusana pevanhu* [A person is a person because of other people]. However, according to Bhebhe (2016:80-81), this sense of communitarianism inherently denotes the need for people to always "work and play with some form of formal or informal leadership" i.e. it does not undercut the need for some kind of leadership. Bhebhe surmises that communitarianism facilitates the inevitable rise of charismatic authority especially in times of crisis when a leader may rise up to give vision and direction to the people. Therefore, inherent in the culture of communitarianism is also a culture that requires leadership which seemingly transcends each and every individual within that community. An example of this is the importance of chiefs during pre-colonial times. The idea of charismatic leadership becomes a social value that people have become accustomed to and thus a value to look for in a leader.

Mugabe seems to represent the very essence of a charismatic leader. A majority of the interviewees admirably outlined his ability to be a master tactician, as one participant stated:

> *He says what the people want to hear, he picks his opportunities, he knows when to say something, when not to say something. He knows how to use his enemies, his opponents. A good example of this was during the unity government period. Even though there was a unity government with MDC he would go on to say that MDC will never rule Zimbabwe and we will never accept it. After going into the GNU he embraced his enemy, found out the enemy's weaknesses and used them against the enemy in 2012/2013. That is how MDC lost, MDC got comfortable. When MDC got comfortable he was busy studying them better, understanding them more; then he started using their weaknesses against them* (Interview 1).

Though this might come across as crass manipulation by Mugabe, it was based on his capacity to woo people through charm offenses, with the MDC leaders in the GNU often being seduced by the personality of Mugabe. Some of the failures of the MDC leaders in the GNU to bring about meaningful change during the GNU period was based on the seductive characteristic qualities of Mugabe's leadership.

3.3.2 Mugabe, Empowering through Teaching

Bourdieu (1991:14, 24-5) describes cultural capital as knowledge, skills and other cultural acquisitions as exemplified by educational or technical qualifications. One of the overarching themes in the interviews was the important of education in a leader, and how this is one of the most importance attributes of Mugabe's leadership. Thus, one of the features of Mugabe's leadership, apart from his proven liberation credentials, is his take on education. Education for Mugabe is seen not only as a post-colonial mechanism for the empowerment of black people but a matter which he emphasised during the liberation struggle and which resonated within the nationalist movement. One of the respondents stated that *"Before people were permitted to train for the liberation forces, the philosophy of ZANLA was that before you fight you have to know why you are fighting, so that they know that after the war, these are the goals and aspirations for the future"* (Interview 5) Mugabe has been described in fact by many as having been more of a teacher than a fighter during the liberation struggle, as his stress on education is seen by supporters as a founding value of the independent nation of Zimbabwe. One of the participants recalls Mugabe's sentiments about Marxism and socialism as a major contribution to the liberation struggle as such concepts became central to the struggle:

Education was a great part of the liberation struggle, as new recruits did not go to the battle field for up to 3 months every day, as we taught them. First of all, we taught them about the grievances of our oppression, all the transgressions of the colonial powers… Furthermore, because ZANLA was a socialist party, we would extract Marx, Mao Tso Tung and others and we would make this simplified and relevant to the context of Zimbabwe and because the communitarian way of life of black Zimbabweans was similar to socialism it was not difficult to teach people this (Interview 5).*

Many of the respondents not only understood the notion of leadership as a person who is supposed to be educated but also that Mugabe represents these values to which they subscribe, that is, the importance of education as a Zimbabwean value. An important feature of this is that Mugabe emerges almost as a nationalist historian who teaches about the restoration of land to its rightful owners and about Zimbabwe's heritage and the fight against the forces of neo-colonialism. As the ultimate teacher, he practices what he preaches and should be respected as he sought to place education as centre stage in building Zimbabwe as part of a broader Pan-Africanist vision. The pinnacle of Mugabe's insistence on the importance of education was premised on the notion that black people had to be better educated in order to not only be worthy of positions of employment but to be at equal level in status with white people.

For one interviewee, like many of the other participants, Mugabe became the symbol of this important factor as education is seen as important in empowering black people. This interviewee revealed that:

Even though he is often shouting at white people he is simply angry about the injustices during the colonial period whereby the white people used to oppress us: that is, the evil deeds that white colonial settlers used to do. So, his anti-white speeches are not about hating the skin of the person but about hating the evil deeds perpetrated during the colonial times, for example denying us land, denying us employment and education. The gateway to employment within the dynamic of the colonial period was limited for black people because they lacked education which was denied to them (Interview 6).

For many of the participants, Mugabe's symbolises this fight and this signals a sense of loyalty to him for things achieved in the past and present. Despite the obvious concerns for the faltering economy and the lack of employment, the credit to Mugabe is simply a sense of devotion to the values that Mugabe as a teacher and liberator represents and the way in which this educational empowerment was experienced in the lives of individuals. Some of the older respondents in particular brought to the fore the importance of the values of education as a

basis for progression because, during the time when the liberation war was being fought, education of the masses in the rural areas was developed as a mechanism of enlightenment by Mugabe as a mechanism for overcoming injustices. Education is an important factor not only for leadership but it was an effective tool for introducing an understanding as to the fundamental basis of the struggle. Interviewee 5 stated that in response to the education they received as a prerequisite for fighting in the war often combatants after training *" gave their full support and recruitment would have taken longer but it didn't because people understood what they were fighting for, people were coming in their thousands because the teaching was everywhere"* (Interview 5)

One of the participants argued that the concept of leadership in Zimbabwe requires someone who is educated as opposed to "*somebody who has no idea, no formal education and is just blank and does not understand our social values*" (Interview 4). One of the most useful comparisons that has been made between Mugabe and other opposition members, particularly MDC leader Tsvangirai, has been the idea that the latter leader cannot be considered suitable to lead the country because he is not as educated as Mugabe. The ability of Mugabe to study and acquire high levels of educational qualifications has established him as a quintessential leader above the rest. Formal education generally in Zimbabwe has been constructed and legitimised as a key attribute of leadership in Zimbabwe, and Mugabe is seen as symbolic of the quest for education. This explains in part why other political leaders in ZANU-PF, such as Joyce Mujuru and Grace Mugabe, have gone out of their way to obtain PhDs, even if by hook or crook.

The position of party and state president has therefore been labelled as worthy of only the most educated of men, with Grace Mugabe setting herself up to be central to any president succession because of her PhD. In reflecting on Robert Mugabe, one of the participants stated that "*he is intelligent, intelligence helps. I don't know why but nobody seems to want an uneducated leader in Zimbabwe. It's a big problem, to us leaders are made, they are not born, it's usually the other way around but for us we have to make the leaders* (Interview 1). This participant's perspective is based on the notion that leaders are not inherently considered leaders until they have been shaped through education into the fundamental image of leadership. One of the major concerns for the participants was that education as a symbol of leadership meant that anyone who wanted to be a leader had to be awarded with a certain level of qualification, and

preferably a PhD. This is particularly evident with the awarding of an honorary PhD to Mnangagwa when he became the president of Zimbabwe late in 2017.

In this regard, then, education (or cultural capital) becomes a manifestation of leadership that is required for a leader. Mugabe indeed normalised this idea that leadership would be reserved for those of outstanding educational qualifications to the extent that any rival or successor would have to be considered as outdoing Mugabe in this regard. But Mugabe is seen as reaching the pinnacle of the educational hierarchy so that, short of death, he simply could not be replaced on this basis. In a sense, Mugabe has been posited as the school-master (ruling over the entire school or nation) whose work thus was to build the shared consciousness of the nation. The older generation of participants, as indicated, particularly favoured this understanding, as these participants reflected upon the relevance of the liberation struggle for post-colonial nation-building. In an opposing view, one of the younger participants took a dissenting point of view on the importance of education:

> *People perceive it to be the best but then we have become so reliant on people with educational backgrounds. Common sense is no longer common in government (that's what I personally think). You don't need a degree to know that you shouldn't be spending this much money on luxury vehicles because we are going through this.* (Interview 1).

At the same time, though, the cultural capital of education is in effect a form of symbolic capital simply meant to legitimise the existence of the prevailing leadership and to act as a mechanism for exclusion from leadership.

3.3.3 Mugabe and Land Reform

When the second Chimurenga (war of liberation) had ended, it was considered a victory over the political structures imposed by generations of settler governments and culture. The land issue though was "unfinished business" which needed to be addressed in post-colonial Zimbabwe. Only minimal land redistribution took place in the first two decades of independence because of the market-led land reform programme, and there were never any funds to purchase large amounts of white-held agricultural land. Hence, victory in 1980 seemingly only took place on the political front and, in terms of land, there seemed no change for 'peasants' and war veterans who demanded and required land for agricultural purposes. The land issue would become fundamental to Mugabe's leadership and particularly relevant in terms of the perceptions of the people to whom Mugabe had promised land at independence. However, the land invasions in the year 2000 would prove to be a great 'path of discomfort'

initially for Mugabe, who was under pressure from the war veterans and the people to bring about radical land reform.

The main narrative that has established as a basis for political support for Mugabe has been the land reform programme. Initially perpetrated by the war veterans and peasants, it increasingly took on a certain legitimacy when it was endorsed by Mugabe and ZANU-PF as their main aim towards redressing the wrongs of the colonial past. The land reform programme was an important strategy in the mobilisation of legitimate power for Mugabe. Most people, including the interviewees, who have great allegiance to the president do so because they believe that he managed to return the land to the people who were wronged during the past. Thus, the interviewees revealed that they had attributed their understanding of Mugabe's contribution to Zimbabwean history as the major figure in the land reform programme. The importance of initiating fast track land reform was based on the fact that it had been a serious point of contention during the liberation struggle and Mugabe's role in it was primarily emphasised in most of the interviews as his greatest achievement. Participants, particularly those who were war veterans, bore a strong historical attachment to the land question and its importance in the entire liberation struggle.

One of the respondents recalls that during the liberation struggle

> *When we were in school and the war was being fought, we were told that when we were free everything would be good again. We had very small spaces of land that was infertile and did not produce any significant produce even for sustenance. So, we were taught that the war that is being led by Mugabe we would gain fertile land and good jobs* (Interview 6).

Many of those who resided in the rural areas during the liberation struggle were often reminded by nationalists and guerrillas of the significance of land as a means to a better life. Thus, the ZANU-PF supporters interviewed outlined the importance that the land reform programme has played in sustaining support for Mugabe's leadership. Mugabe's addressing of the land question through fast track reform provided a platform for ensuring his continued importance in the history of building the Zimbabwean nation-state.

The issue of land therefore played an important part in the unveiling of the uncompromising side of Mugabe as the pressure from the war veterans was mounting in the late 1990s, and Mugabe's position hardened in the face of Britain's reluctance to fund compensation for the seized land (Chan, 2003). His lack of action during the period between the second and third

Chimurengas (from 1980 to 1999) in effect led to some withdrawal of support for Mugabe, and this exacerbated the need to increase the pace of land reform after the occupations emerged in early 2000. The interviewees though seemed to indicate that they knew that Mugabe would eventually pull through for them. As Chan (2003) states, despite some wavering in practice, Mugabe had always been consistent on the issue of land. This attribute made his lack of compromise even in the face of human right violations less of a concern of regional powers and sympathisers in his political strategy around land.

Presently, the majority of support for Mugabe comes from those who reside in the rural areas and those who received land during fast track. In the past, in securing victory over the Rhodesian regime during the second Chimurenga, the support of those who resided in the rural areas was mostly needed by the guerrillas. This is an important factor in assessing the interplay between land and legitimate power, and why addressing the land question would play such a crucial role in garnering support for Mugabe. At the beginning of the farm invasions in 2000, it is well known that the ZANU-PF government was not an avid supporter of the occupations, with pronouncements by the acting state president (when Mugabe was out of the country) that the invaders needed to be removed from the occupied farms. Mugabe's first public statement on the matter was quite the opposite, even arguing that the police should not remove the occupiers as they were simply acting out the post-colonial implications of the anti-colonial struggle which focused on land. While this might be interpreted as a cold political calculation to ensure support for ZANU-PF for the national elections taking place in June of 2000, it also fits into the narrative of Mugabe as liberator – as a man and leader who ultimately seeks to ensure post-colonial justice.

In one interview, the participant said:

> *For most people, we don't have a continuous graph of the president's leadership. I think we have divided it into periods. Like we go from 1980 to 1990. 1980 he wasn't (he was in charge I suppose) but that period was one of transition. He incorporated the whites, he was a darling of the West, an example for African leaders. Then we have that period from 1990 to 1997 Zimbabwe was doing amazing. He was doing amazing on the world stage but then in the first 13 or so years (this is my opinion) ZANU-PF did not deliver on its pre-independence promises. It promised people land, it promised people wealth but that was not the case. The whites still controlled the majority of the land which didn't make sense and at the same time most of the wealth was still in the hands of white people. Then we have that period from 1997 to present day. He buckled down*

to people's pressures, which makes sense, it's the only thing he could do. We got land (Interview 1).

There was a difficulty for Mugabe in maintaining power given that Chenjerai Hunzvi, the leader of the Zimbabwe Liberation War Veterans Association, had managed to mobilise the war veterans in the late 1880s to demand compensation they had been promised at independence in 1980 for their service and sacrifice (Chan 2003:149). In a meeting between Mugabe and Hunzvi, Hunzvi stated that he would "unleash anarchy and not only divide the nation but divide it by depriving Mugabe of his spiritual heritage" (Chan, 2003:150). This statement is important as it could be taken to mean that Hunzvi was reminding Mugabe that not only did his power come from the war veterans but from the ancestors who had placed him in power. It is an important point in realising that the supposed blessing of the ancestors was needed politically by ZANU-PF and Mugabe. Though Hunzvi was questioning Mugabe's moral authority, he was not questioning the fact that Mugabe had been appointed and anointed by the ancestors to be at the forefront of the ongoing liberation struggle.

Though Mugabe may have "buckled down to people's pressure" (including the pressure of Hunzvi and the war veterans), war veterans were simply reminding Mugabe of his ancestral-backed moral and political obligations, as if Mugabe had simply lost his way and needed to be put back on the straight and narrow. To condemn Mugabe outright and call for his oustering would be to deny the very legitimacy of the ancestors (and spirit mediums). This would have been more treacherous than ousting Mugabe, as it was believed that the spirit mediums had not only played a great part in the liberation war but in putting Mugabe in place as the great chief and representative of the people. Cutting off Mugabe spiritually would be tantamount to robbing Mugabe of his historical identity, but this would also amount to cutting off the people from their past and future as guided by the ancestors. The idea that Mugabe had gone astray, but that this did not amount to the undercutting of the blessing of Mugabe by the ancestors, has been seen in the post November 2017 period in which the new president (Mnangagwa) has indicated that Mugabe did nothing wrong and that all blame must be placed on those surrounding him (i.e. those without any direct relationship to the ancestors). The legacy of his historical and spiritual legitimacy has remained intact amongst ZANU-PF supporters.

In an extract from a speech, Mugabe made himself brought the connection between land and power. In linking land to the ancestors, Mugabe was in effect speaking for the nation on behalf of the ancestors as only he himself could legitimately do:

The Prime Minister, Mr Mugabe, swearing by the name of the legendary anti-British spirit medium Mbuya Nehanda, vowed that his government would confiscate white-owned land for peasant resettlement if Mrs. Thatcher suspends promised British compensation… "If they do that we will say 'Well and good, you British gave us back the land because you never paid for it in the first place. The land belongs to use. It is ours in inheritance from our forefathers'" (Lan, 1985: 219)

In highlighting that 'the land belongs to us' as the nation's inheritance from the ancestors, Mugabe was seeking to highlight the symbolism of land and the legitimacy of his power, a legitimacy which came through in the main amongst the interviewees. Just as the ancestors and spirit mediums guided the guerrillas during the struggle in the 1970s, protecting them from the ill-will of the enemy, Mugabe continued to guide and protect the nation against the ill-will of neo-colonial powers.

3.3.4 Mugabe as the Symbol of History

Some of the interviewees acknowledged that their understanding of leadership and their support for ZANU-PF and Mugabe was based on their understanding of the significance of the liberation war struggle. Mugabe's use of the liberation struggle, including his contribution to it, to garner support has often been amplified as a resounding reason for his significance and importance as a leader. One of the participants states that her understanding of what she requires in a leader in Zimbabwe is that "*a leader must be black and have contributed to the liberation of Zimbabwe. This is the type of leader that I respect because he* [Mugabe] *has enabled me to be where I am today, free and able to work and contribute to society* (Interview 6).

The participants who were either involved in the liberation struggle or lived through it understand leadership within this context, whereby the person who leads Zimbabwe must have a deep and abiding appreciation of the struggle and the changes it brought about for black people in particular. Without this appreciation, any leader would be considered ill-suited for the post-colonial tasks. This is not strictly a ZANU-PF or Zimbabwean phenomenon, as it refers to the supposed necessity of ex-liberation movements in southern Africa to rule the post-colonial state as the only legitimate basis for ensuring that a neo-colonial betrayal does not take place. The major assumption underpinning this notion is that overthrowing the ex-liberation movements now in power would not only be considered counter-revolutionary and lead to a

restoration of the colonial period, but it would represent a major step backwards in the history of the nation.

Mugabe emerges as the ultimate symbol for the conception of the post-colonial nation, as an uncompromised (and uncompromising) leader of the struggle. He personifies what it means to defend Africans against any and all threats that might undermine the newly found freedom and gains of the liberation war. Sentiments expressed by Mugabe during election time, such as 'defending our heritage' and recognising the liberation struggle as a 'guiding spirit', conjure up the image amongst many ZANU-PF supporters that the liberation struggle, the nation and Mugabe are invariably intertwined. Because of this, according to Chan (2003), voting in Zimbabwe is not simply the task of exercising one's democratic right. It is rather the much grander effort at maintaining and sustaining the fight against neo-colonialism and the threat of imperialist intervention. Not to vote for Mugabe is to register one's status as a sell-out who seeks to undercut the gains of the liberation struggle. To vote for Mugabe is to say 'yes' to the Zimbabwean nation. In this light, the interviewees tended to have a resounding loyalty to the nation as mediated by their support for Mugabe.

The support for Mugabe in this instance could be argued to be incidental to the loyalty for ZANU-PF. One participant declared *"I was born in ZANU-PF"* (Interview 4) in response to the question about his affiliation with ZANU-PF, signalling a deeper awareness of the social, economic and political values embedded in the liberation war. With Mugabe being labelled as the very representation of party ethos and values, it could be argued that support for him was borne out of a loyalty to ZANU-PF and a loyalty that Mugabe came to symbolise, i.e. as the founding father of ZANU-PF and of the Zimbabwean nation itself. Additionally, another participant related to this by saying that "*my support is not necessarily for Mugabe; it's for ZANU the party that gave us independence but as the leader of ZANU we are obviously going to vote for him, wrong or right. If someone else came in and took his place, we would support that person as the leader of the party*" (Interview 3).

Be that as it may, ZANU-PF for most of the interviewees is almost unimaginable without Mugabe at the helm. This sentiment is expressed by another participant in this way:

> *When everyone else depended on their past accolades he knew he had to rely on post-independence achievements to get to the top, so 1987 he's on top. I don't think he started with the party but his death will probably mark the end of the party. Beyond the president there's no*

future for ZANU-PF; that's what I personally think, because he hasn't allowed it. You can't see
any future (Interview 1).

The fact that Mugabe has been at the centre of the party for nearly four decades means that he has been recognised as ZANU-PF himself. Any decision apart from supporting ZANU-PF and/or Mugabe seems to constitute not only a betrayal of the nation but also a self-betrayal. Again, this was particularly prevalent amongst those interviewees who were witnesses to the liberation struggle in the 1970s or were participants in it. One of the respondents expressed this by saying:

When Chitepo died in March (and you know at this time I am working for white people but still
politically conscious), the way white people were happy, they bought alcohol which they never
normally did on the job and stayed there drinking after we had left. They said statements like 'a
person who lives by the gun died by the gun', so issues like this made me question if this is how
all white people act (Interview 5).

The interviewee expressed that these were some of the moments that later made him appreciate what the lofty sentiments expressed by the liberation forces at the time were aiming towards. Incidents such as these affected many of the liberation war veterans and their support for ZANU-PF. Mugabe's sentiments around race and the strong emotive forces which permeate questions of race were an important factor for his leadership, but also as a key point of departure in talking about the role of his leadership and ZANU-PF not only in the past but in the present. The importance of Mugabe more broadly to the liberation struggle, and the interviewee's attachment to the goals of the struggle, mean that Mugabe's authoritative position in power resonates with the lived experiences of the interviewee.

Further ideals that led to some kind of emotional connection between Mugabe and ZANU-PF supporters was the former's use of spirituality in talking about leadership. The imagery of ancestors particularly resonated with some of the older interviewees. In this regard, the role and blessing of spirit mediums remains central in politics. In the months prior to the downfall of the Mugabe's in November 2017, Grace Mugabe reiterated the significance of spirit mediums and particularly the medium of Mbuya Nehanda in justifying the ongoing ruler-ship of her husband. At a rally in the capital of Mashonaland Central Province (Bindura) in September, she stated that:

So when I am working here I see myself representing Mbuya Nehanda…As the wife of the president being allowed to work here I see it fit that I am representing Mbuya Nehanda…if you come to my office there is a statue of her… When we had the president's birthday here he was

presented with the statue of Mbuya Nehanda and I declared it would not be allowed to be moved (*Grace Mugabe Speech, ZANU-PF rally - Bindura. 9 September 2017*).

Through this spiritual symbolism, Robert Mugabe was seen as being guided by the aspirations of Nehanda and, because of this, he could do no wrong. Only his wife, it seems, could possibly be the next reincarnation of Nehanda. The image of Nehanda on ZANU-PF regalia alongside Mugabe's was worn religiously to every rally by political elites, ministers and supporters. What makes this symbolism particularly effective is the notion that there is only one liberator of the nation and one representation of the state, nation and party. State, nation and party are fused in the persona of Mugabe. Ancestors represented a guiding force in the leadership of the country during the liberation struggle. For one of the respondents, the power of Mugabe was seemingly premised on the notion that Mugabe would forever be a spiritual leader, even if he were to retire. The respondent stated that:

> *Nobody can be said to fear Mugabe. I don't see the element of fear.... However, the old man has done his part, is there any justification for his continued stay? Or should he just stay at home and provide a guiding spirit and provide guidance, where it is needed for the younger generation* (Interview 4).

With the rise to power of president Mnangagwa, the same use of symbolism is articulated with the use of his face on all ZANU-PF party regalia as a means of articulating his rise to power as the new liberator of the state and the party. Not to provide Mnangagwa with some kind of ancestral authority, as if the statue of Nehanda remained within the office of Grace Mugabe, would undermine his right to speak for, and as, the nation.

According to Lan (1985), as indicated earlier, Zimbabwe was regarded as a single spirit province, and the implications of this remain evident today as the supposed blessing of Nehanda remains a campaign strategy for ZANU-PF and Mugabe. The *mhondoro* who protects the whole nation becomes an important force in the campaign strategy of ZANU-PF and by bestowing this power on Mugabe he essentially becomes the one who takes over the duty of protecting the state and taking over the duties of the *mhondoro*. One of the participants explained that the use of Mbuya Nehanda in particular and more broadly of the spirit mediums was a large part of the party mobilisation of people as she states: *"She* [Mbuya Nehanda] *said her bones would rise and they did. Students left school from grade 7 to Form 6, they left for the liberation struggle because of the liberation struggle songs around Mbuya Nehanda, without being sent/coerced by anyone"* (Interview 6). She attributes the support garnered from the symbolism of Nehanda as based on the idea of a fight that was greater than the individual.

This could explain why the imagery of Mbuya Nehanda is so easily invoked by Mugabe and ZANU-PF in campaigns because it signifies a "call to mobilise" and fight for liberation regardless of whether or not the Chimurengas have ended.

The fact that symbols of history live on after death has been a particularly important feature of politics in Zimbabwe. The politics of the dead denotes an understanding that bones that live on do so even in terms of their influence of the politics of the nation. One of the respondents stated that *"What Mugabe said about land is exactly what Chitepo said about land … it is exactly the same. So he* [Mugabe] *says if I die today and were to meet Chitepo, what would I say to him about the land issue, when I am the one who made it to independence"* (Interview 5). The interviewee was referring to Herbert Chitepo's focus on land as foundational to the liberation struggle. In one of the speeches Chitepo made on a trip to Australia in 1973, he stated that: "To us the essence of exploitation, the essence of white domination, is domination over land. That is the real issue…the deprivation that they have done by taking the land away from us".

For one of the interviewees, this focus on the politics of the dead was primarily evident in the symbolism and importance attached to the National Heroes Acre. This monument acts as an important aspect of the politics of Zimbabwe as a place where the dead are not only remembered but live on. That Mugabe cannot transcend material mortality is an important factor in considering the use of history or the politics of the dead. The interviewee in particular touched on the importance of the Heroes Acre in this regard and with specific reference to Mugabe. For this interviewee, the importance of the Heroes Acre was not only its use for remembering history but for the maintenance of great symbols in history. The participant states: *"His* [Mugabe's] *legacy will continue after his death through the National Shrine…should we write him out of our history? I think not. He is an empowering figure, he still is. I would be ignorant if I said he has played no part in putting Zimbabwe where it is"* (Interview 1). Mugabe has not only been established as the ultimate symbol of history but as the ultimate patriot within Zimbabwean history. Though mortal materially, he seems to have reached the status of the immortal soul watching over and guiding the nation long after he is buried in the Heroes Acre.

Mugabe's authoritative power was built up on the ideology of anti-colonialism and the images that it accompanied it in the form of the powerful theme of black self-determination. Although this theme has not been able to address the growing economic and political regress of the country over two decades now, it manages to occupy a symbolic force and a compelling case

for Mugabe and ZANU-PF to remain in power. One participant highlighted this in the broader context of Africa, as if Mugabe was making a last stand for all of Africa in taking a strong anti-imperialist stance which derives from his intimate link to the Zimbabwean nation and its defence. As the interviewee put, Mugabe *"now sees himself as a Pan-Africanist. He's more into that image of the last African leader who can stand up to white people. He wants to leave a legacy as an African leader not a Zimbabwean leader"* (Interview 3). The fact that Mugabe holds to, and embodies, the spirit of Nehanda makes him a strong candidate for this, as Nehanda stood up to the ravages of early British imperialism in southern Africa.

The land issue invariably comes to the fore in this respect, as land reform notably under fast track is widely understood by ZANU-PF supporters as the key moment that made Mugabe a hero, and indeed this has been articulated countless times in the rallying of support for the Mugabe. Tendi (2010:75) states that "Mugabe was the most articulate framer of Patriotic history's land theme… He was the fountain from which ZANU-PF'S position on land derived". Mugabe became known not only as recovering lost lands in Zimbabwe but as highlighting the significance of the recovery of lands in, in particular, the former white settler colonies of southern Africa (such as South Africa). This bore resemblance to Kwame Nkrumah's 1965 speech about 'Neo-colonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism' and Thabo Mbeki's "I am an African" speech (among many other pro-African symbolisms), such that Mugabe became recognised not only as a Zimbabwean patriot but as an African patriot. Susan Booysen notes:

> The sentiments of Africanism and resistance to western and often former colonial actions – the latter being indicative of disdain for national sovereignty and hypocrisy about western world's responsibility for much of Africa's contemporary woes – are widely shared in …Africa. They find resonance in both past and present experiences (Booysen, 2002 quoted in Tendi, 2010:180).

3.3.5 Mugabe as Uncompromising and Intransigent

One of the key attributes of Mugabe that has sustained his continued rule in Zimbabwe has been his ability to be uncompromising or to be perceived as being so. Amongst his most revered qualities amongst his many supporters thus is his intransigent attitude that is seen as setting him above his opponents and counterparts. Scarnecchia (2015:78) states that "Mugabe's and ZANU-PF's popularity at the time of the 1980 transition to majority rule is beyond question, and a large part of that popularity arose from Mugabe's consistent employment of an intransigency in negotiations with his rivals, with Ian Smith and with international brokers".

Nearly all of the interviewees defined Mugabe as "a principled man". This characteristic of his personality is manifested in his unwillingness to compromise with many of his rivals. One participant stated that he identified with Mugabe because he *"is a principled leader; that is one attribute that we cannot take away from him… and he is consistent whether he is right or wrong…He does not compromise and challenges other leaders on issues he believes in"* (Interview 4). Furthermore, the respondent stated that "*he is still liked because he is an icon and because of his unwavering principles and people have benefited from these principles and generally the country has benefited in a great way*" (Interview 4) This is consistent with keeping supposedly to the revolutionary course and not selling-out the hard won gains of the liberation struggle of the 1970s. The term sell-out was a dreaded accusation during the war of liberation, and guerrilla justice could be somewhat less than transparent and brutal for people. Mugabe in effect is seen as being beyond any prospects of being labelled as a sell-out because he is the ultimate uncompromised leader in acting out the will of the nation under the guidance of the ancestors and spirit mediums.

Mugabe has always sought to avoid consorting with the proverbial enemy as he might be seen as thus compromising the liberation struggle and its goals and aims. According to Scarnecchia (2015:77): "The ability of Mugabe to manoeuvre beyond his rivals… during and after the 1980 elections makes it clear that Mugabe was the more skilled politician in terms of portraying himself as the least compromised among the possible leaders of Zimbabwe". In this respect, Mugabe always presented himself as different than his main rival, Joshua Nkomo, who was said to be constantly seeking to negotiate and compromise with the Rhodesian regime during the 1970s.

Furthermore, this is exemplified by the way in which the land issue would become the most important aspect he would not compromise on. Mugabe put forward that the commitment to land reform through fast track was not predicated on any effort to nationalise farms based on ideology as it was a sheer act of patriotism consistent with the promise to restore lost lands as articulated during the liberation struggle. His lack of compromise on the land issue would lead the detractors of Mugabe to conceptualise him as evil personified but, for his supporters (including the interviewees), this was nothing other than the logical conclusion to the liberation struggle and to nation-building under a sovereign state. What Tendi (2010) describes as patriotic history's sovereignty discourse, or the emphasis on Zimbabwe as a sovereign state in the ruling party's rendition of history, functions as a crucial reminder of the real sacrifice of

the ancestors and war veterans to free the country, accompanied by an imagery of neo-colonial attempts (by Britain and others) to retain Zimbabwe under its hegemonic control.

For example, images are often presented (whether it is on the eve of Heroes Day or Independence) on multiple programmes on the local television station (ZTV) which highlight the "ghost of Chimurengas past" such as Mbuya Nehanda for the first Chimurenga and Josiah Tongogara (guerrilla commander) for the second Chimurenga, whose sacrifices are evoked in the "nationalism of land". This imagery maintains the need to be uncompromising with regard to the repossession and recovery of land in the face of those who are perceived as a ever-existent threat to the revolution and in turn hinder progressive change. The threat to progressive change becomes the threat of neo-colonialism, thus consolidating the need to keep the only person in power who can challenge this threat, Mugabe.

With Mugabe emerging as the only one who is unable to be compromised, his hold on power seemed inevitable for his supporters. They could entrust him at all times, and under all circumstances, to show fidelity to the liberation struggle. This is despite gruelling economic challenges facing the nation. One participant stated: *"My personal opinion is that if he really wanted to go he would simply leave. No one can force you to be president. So, we can all see that he still wants his horns, his power"* (Interview 2). Though this notion of Mugabe's presence in power being his choice and his choice alone, the thought of being without Mugabe in power to guide the nation also appears unimaginable and as a risky venture. The fact that he never chose a successor to take over the presidency of the party, thereby not ensuring that the next president would have the blessings of the ancestors, also causes anxiety amongst ZANU-PF supporters. As the former Minister of Information (Jonathan Moyo) sought to put it in 2002, as fast track land reform was taking place: "Zimbabweans have come of age that they do not believe in change from something to nothing. They do not believe in moving from independence and sovereignty to new colonialism" (*The Herald*, Harare, 12 March 2002). Mugabe of course, as the intransigent patriot with blessings from the past, would and could protect the nation against all evil.

3.4 Conclusion

The participants in the study presented in this thesis are all affiliated with ZANU-PF. The research with the ZANU-PF interviewees revealed that many of the symbolisms that are attached to Mugabe's rule and more broadly ZANU-PF resonate with not only an emotive force

but an important aspect of the interviewees lived experiences. From the notion of land (and the liberation struggle) to many values such as education, these symbolic references are strongly linked to the relevance of history in narratives around Mugabe's mystic character. The study revealed that most of the respondents bore a sense of loyalty to the past achievements of Mugabe which they documented regardless of whether or not he was still a viable leader for Zimbabwe. The respondents' age or status in society did not strongly affect these perceptions; they only varied to the extent that they were important, as land for example was a constant point in highlighting Mugabe's contribution to the country and the history of the nation. The respondents' perceptions of Mugabe were based primarily on some of the qualities that have been posited as being his greatest achievements. The individual experiences and understanding of these experiences solidified these perceptions, such as participation in the liberation struggle or the fact that some of the younger respondents had parents that were war veterans. Overall, the responses of the respondents understood leadership in a way which authorised Mugabe's ongoing position of power in Zimbabwean society and politics.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONCLUSION

4.1 Introduction

For 37 years, Robert Mugabe ruled as both the President of Zimbabwe and the President and First-Secretary of ZANU-PF. Though his ruler-ship ended in November 2017, the thesis focuses on the period prior to his resignation. In this short conclusion, I first consider (Section 4.2) the results of the fieldwork findings in relation to themes in the Zimbabwean literature about the power of Mugabe. In Section 4.3, I reflect upon the theoretical implications for my study. In these two sections, I also address the main objective of the thesis.

4.2 The Power of Mugabe

Leadership in the context of my thesis encompasses the ability for African leaders like Mugabe to transcend temporal and spatial boundaries. Mugabe occupies the seat of power in a modern liberal state but the legitimacy of his power draws upon African history, symbols and values, dating back to the pre-colonial period and into the liberation struggle against colonial rule. It is Mugabe's ability to position himself in such a manner that seems to garner political support for the ruling party as the history, symbolism and values surrounding the mystique of Mugabe resonates with the Zimbabwean past and present from the experiences and perspectives of many ordinary Zimbabweans. Mugabe the man and ruler is no mere invention emanating a-historically as he embodies the concerns and aspirations of ordinary Zimbabweans.

In this respect, Mugabe's style of rule may have a lasting effect on the practice of politics within ZANU-PF, involving as it has the deification/hero worshipping of leadership more broadly within the party. Under 'Operation Restore Legacy', Emmerson Mnangagwa has become the new president of both the ruling party and state. Some of the Mugabe mystique has rubbed off on Mnangagwa or at least he has sought to incorporate it into his mode of ruler-ship. Already, the idolisation of Mnangagwa, with his images on t-shirts and ZANU-PF regalia, presents imagery similar to that of the leadership of Mugabe in which one person is made the centre of the party, the state and nation. Whether or not Mnangagwa can rightfully take on this grand mission will be seen in the months if not years to come. The fact that so many committed ZANU-PF members and supporters turned so quickly against Mugabe immediately after the military intervention in November 2017 does not imply that the mystical conception of Mugabe

was only skin-deep. Again, in the months to come, it might prove to be that the quick turn-about is superficial, and that the public admiration of Mugabe the man and ruler becomes suppressed emotionally.

In returning though to the days of Mugabe (pre November 2017), the use and adoption of symbols has been an important attribute of ZANU-PF under Mugabe's leadership. The symbols of traditional religion (i.e., beliefs and practices rooted in ancestral and spirit medium powers) had proven to be valuable and almost unquestionable during the liberation struggle (Chitando, 2003; Chan, 2003) but also under conditions of post-colonial nation-building. However, the maintenance of power for Mugabe in the modern post-colonial world is not only animated by seizing upon past spiritual values, as it has also involved the selective use of the mystic imagery of mainstream Christianity. Post-independence Christianity became and remains a form of spirituality which has been appropriated as well to enhance the dignified presence of Mugabe in power, as some authors have argued in relation to Independence celebrations and the marking of Heroes Day (Chitando, 2005; Fontein, 2009). In this regard, the 'blessing' emanates from the Most-High godly power that cannot, or should not, be challenged. Just as much as Mugabe is blessed by the ancestors and spirit mediums as the grand Chief, he is often presented (and presents himself) as doing God's will on earth, if not the second coming of Jesus Christ. His source of spiritual blessing cuts across time and space, thus appearing as standing above the Zimbabwean nation and guiding it from above.

The divine Mugabe as man and ruler is not mere invention emanating a-historically as Mugabe (for instance as the grand Chief) speaks to and embodies the concerns and aspirations of ordinary Zimbabweans. At the same time, it must be admitted that this symbolic and mystical construction of Mugabe as man and ruler is, at least in part, undertaken with some intention by ZANU-PF ideologues and public intellectuals, as this narrative about Mugabe has certain tactical advantages in maintaining support for the ruling party. After all, who would not want to vote for a political leader who has divine blessing? Once constructed, though, it seemed to have acquired a life of its own and almost became self-reproducing as a "methodology of thought" (Chan, 2007:134) despite the deepening economic crisis nationally which, after all, was the fault of the enemies without (according to the Mugabe narrative). Fast track land reform undoubtedly served to authenticate the spirituality surrounding Mugabe as it led to the recovery of land dispossessed by colonial invaders, who continue to harass the Zimbabwean nation through their neo-colonial descendants. Thus, the grand Chief accolade for Mugabe became

literally grounded, that is, manifested in material form in and through land repossession and access.

The fieldwork for this thesis, involving ZANU-PF supporters with diverse historical and contemporary lives and different forms and degrees of engagement with the party, tended to show evidence of the existence of this grounded vision of Mugabe. Age and liberation struggle status were of some significance though in any differences of perspective amongst interviewees. It was revealed that the liberation history of Zimbabwe, in which the image of Mugabe is deeply embedded, resonated with many of the respondents. This was especially significant in the interviews with war veterans and those who are old enough to remember the liberation struggle. Those with high levels of education (including a university degree) also spoke about liberation and empowerment in the context of Mugabe prioritising post-colonial education and his status almost as a national sage with profound insights into what is best for the nation. Mugabe's uncompromising stance in the face of challenges or perceived threats to the integrity and future of the Zimbabwean nation resonated with many of the interviewees as well. Again, this is rooted in Mugabe's apparently unflinching stance on the necessity of guerrilla struggle and the need to force the hand of the Rhodesian state. The continuation of threats to Zimbabwean independence deep into post-colonialism, espoused constantly in the language of Mugabe during his rule, made him a desirable (or perhaps necessary) leader for the interviewees because of his principle stand against recolonialisation. For some of the interviewees, these understandings of Mugabe seemed to be every-day common sense understandings of the world around them.

Certainly, the interviewees had reservations about Mugabe and, quite likely, they were unwilling to engage in any extensive critique of Mugabe as a ruler prior to his downfall in November 2017. But the purpose of this thesis was not to claim that Mugabe was being supported on a strictly consensual basis. Rather, it sought to investigate the possibility that the story about the mystical qualities of Mugabe resonated in some way with ZANU-PF supporters, as indeed chapter three did show. Ultimately, those in power rule through a shifting combination of coercion and consent. Thus, the interviewees expressed some loyalty to the idea of Mugabe as a benefactor with significant past and present accomplishments, and someone worth of a degree of devotion. The relevance of history, dating back to both the first and second Chimurengas, was particularly important, especially amongst those interviewees who were directly engaged in the war of liberation in the 1970s. Though it is often argued that

patriotic history is simply an electoral tool designed to maintain power, this underplays the fact that the memories of Zimbabweans run deep and they can often recount in detail events and experiences pertaining to relationships with the colonial state and its local apparatuses – experiences often of deprivation and oppression which were still etched on the minds and hearts of many. The linkages between patriotic history and historical memories are not seamless, but they do exist.

This all of course goes contrary to the hegemonic depiction in the academic literature which understands Mugabe's rule in a highly cynical and conspiratorial way, which sees the mystical narrative of Mugabe as a crude attempt to prop up an illegitimate political regime which maintains power through coercion. In this regard, the political cronies in ZANU-PF simply use a romanticised image of Mugabe as a smokescreen to camouflage the underhand dealings focusing on capturing state resources, including by "directives to financial institutions to finance black owned businesses" and "preferential allocation of government contracts and markets to blacks and anti-trust legislation to control the monopoly position of white capital" (Mlambo, 2015:54; Magure, 2012). Overall, this hegemonic narrative sees outright violence and skilful manipulation as the source of Mugabe's retention of power so that, even if people are not coerced, they comply in fear of acting 'outside' the nation and suffering the consequences. Any possibility of a consensual dimension to Mugabe's role is almost *a priori* ruled out.

4.3 Theoretical Reflections

While this claim makes for good political rhetoric, it is not make for solid sociological analysis, Political power is enacted in diverse, multiple and fluid ways and, as sociologists, we need to capture empirically and analytically the complexities of political power. Without denying the prevalence of coercion, the research for this thesis offers insights into other modes of power at work when unpacking Mugabe's overall power regime. Considering symbolic power facilitates a recognition and interrogation of the "power of mysticism" as one mode of power exercised through and by Mugabe, in which history, culture and spiritually all play their own intertwined part. As Bourdieu (1991:163) puts it: "[W]ithout turning power into a circle whose centre is everywhere and nowhere which could be to dissolve it in yet another way, we have to be able to discover it in places where it is least visible, where it is most completely misrecognized and thus in fact recognised" (Bourdieu, 1991:163). In this case, the Mugabe mystical narrative is

misrecognised as pure ideological imposition and thus its pronounced consensual underpinnings are left invisible, something which this thesis has sought to make visible.

The material effects of symbolic power often become ingrained in socialised norms or tendencies that guide thinking and practices. As part of the cultural milieu, its effects thus become embedded in systems of meaning (Hays, 1993: 65), including the use of language, forms of knowledge and ritual. One might go as far as to say that the effects of symbolic power are an important basis for the dispositions that ordinary people in their ordinary lives display and which structure the way they act out their lives (Bourdieu, 1991). As Bourdieu argues when highlighting his notion of habitus: "It is the way in which society becomes deposited in persons, in capacities and structured propensities to think, feel and act in determinant ways, which then guide them" (Bourdieu, 1999:77). In the case of the ruler-ship of Mugabe and any consensual basis for this ruler-ship, it may be that the power of mysticism – in resonating with the past and present – becomes so inculcated and embedded in the consciousness of ZANU-PF supporters that it literally becomes common sense and they act out their political lives in a manner consistent with this.

Even if there ever was a deep consensual basis to Mugabe's rule, this does not take away the fact that this consensual rule entails political domination. After all, political ruler-ship under ZANU-PF has been marked by significant modes of authoritarian rule. This is what Bourdieu (1991:172) describes as "instruments of domination" involving "the monopoly of legitimate ideological productions", such as the sainthood of Mugabe as a hegemonic narrative. Such ideological products offered by the ruling political class, whether deliberately so or not, are necessary for expressing the social differentiation which exists within a nation and for justifying this differentiation, including establishing the idea that some people are fit and meant to lead (for example, because of liberation struggle credentials) while others must follow. Bourdieu goes on to argue that this "limits the universe of the politically thinkable to finite space of discourses" (Bourdieu, 1991:172) Zimunya (1991: 62-63) describes this as the inability of African leaders to differentiate between a citizen giving voice to legitimate concerns and a traitor bent on undermining the power structure: "In most cases they [the political rulers] see no difference between a civilian intellectual speaking… and a rabid political opponent".

In this context, the overall theme of this thesis in relation to power, symbolic power and Mugabe derives its importance from the understanding that the "founder's mystical-charismatic experience" – as propagated – provides a certain persuasive force as to how past and present events are experienced and interpreted by ordinary citizens (Squarcini, 2002:357). The persuasiveness of this force though depends quite fundamentally on the citizens themselves, such they may become complicit in their own domination. Bourdieu puts this eloquently in this discussion of symbolic power, arguing that it should be as "an invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it even that they themselves exercise it" (Bourdieu, 1991: 164). While I am in agreement with this statement, it leaves one important question unanswered, which this thesis sought to address: what are the mechanisms and processes by which people become subjected to power unknowingly? Ultimately, the answer to this question is an empirical one, and requires detailed study wherever symbolic power exists, which is everywhere. Hopefully, this thesis has contributed in some small way to addressing this question.

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Appendix A: Interview Schedule

Age

Occupation

Whether participant is a member/follower/cadre of ZANU-PF party.

Are you or have you been affiliated with ZANU-PF (i.e do you hold any position/ interest in the party)?

How long have you been affiliated with this party and how would you describe your experience?

What circumstances i.e. family, perceptions, values, personal, led to your decision to join the party?

General questions in relation to leadership in Zimbabwe

1. What forms of knowledge or understanding based on your age, race, education, class and religion have informed your understanding of what it means to be a leader?
2. What is your understanding of how power/ control is meant to be wielded by a leader?

Specific questions in relation to the Mugabe:

1. President R.G. Mugabe has been the leader of the party since independence what do you attribute as the main reason as to why he has managed to maintain his rule over both party and state?
2. Can you tell me to what extent your choice aligning yourself with the President has been affected by your particular views on your surroundings i.e. values and beliefs?
3. What do you attribute as the main reason why President R.G Mugabe has been encouraged or endorsed to continuously run for office?
4. The President throughout his rule has often been endorsed by a number of groups that include the church and the council of chiefs. What do you attribute as the main reason for this?
5. The land reform and anti-white domination have been two keys attributes of the leadership of the President. What is your personal opinion on these two keys pillars of his leadership?
6. What are some of the other features of the Presidents leadership that hold importance to you as a cadre/member/follower?

7. A leader can be said to be a representation of society, would you say that President R.G. Mugabe as a public figure embodies your values and beliefs and represents you as a cadre/member/follower?

8. The President is often said to be ordained by our ancestors and God. How would you say this is positioned or expressed in his rule of the state through his ascension and continued rule in Zimbabwe?

9. One of the widely held perceptions is that the President R.G. Mugabe is not a formidable opponent but that there is not any powerful opposition to talk about effectively leaving in power i.e. by default. How would you respond to this position?

Appendix B: Consent Form

Rhodes University — Department of Sociology

<u>Participant Consent form (Interviews)</u>

Name of researcher:

Brief description of the research topic:

Declaration

1. I confirm that the purpose of the research and the nature of my participation have been explained to me verbally or in writing.
2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason - however I commit myself to full participation unless some unusual circumstances occur, or I have concerns about my participation which I did not originally anticipate.
3. I understand that data collected during the study, will be used by the researcher and that my personal details gathered during this research, especially my name or identity, will be kept private.
4. I agree to be interviewed and to allow audio or video recordings and transcriptions to be made of the interview.
5. I have been informed by the researcher that the tape recordings will be erased once the report is written. OR
6. I give permission for the tape recordings to be retained after the study and for them to be utilised for academic purposes only.

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

Name of Researcher   Date   Signature