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The Anti-Authoritarian Populisms: Ideologies of Democratic Struggle in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and Worldwide

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Abstract

Many opposition parties in electoral-authoritarian regimes identify as democracy movements. I ask: what ideologies do they publicly express? The first-glance answer is ‘democratic ones’, but there are many theories of liberal democracy, and they say little about living under or indeed confronting authoritarian regimes. I analyse the public messages of two such democracy movements: Chadema (Tanzania) and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC, in Zimbabwe). I argue that they each articulate a homegrown vision of democracy in which they adapt democratic theory to make sense of their electoral-authoritarian circumstances. They do so by articulating that theory through the ‘populist logic’ conceptualized in the discourse-theoretic perspective. I call them anti-authoritarian (and democratic) populisms. Previous research has overlooked the distinctiveness of these ideologies because it has adopted concept configurations which invisibilize them. I argue that there are reasons to expect there to be a wider body of anti-authoritarian populisms articulated by democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes in Africa, and indeed, worldwide.

Keywords: populism; anti-authoritarianism; electoral authoritarianism; democracy; Africa

Across the world today, 56 countries are ruled by electoral-authoritarian regimes (Natsika et al. 2023). In many of these regimes, opposition parties self-identify as democracy movements. Studying these (party) movements is important. A small but growing body of research analyses their organization and strategy (Tomini et al. 2023). However, until now it has neglected what they communicate. I ask: what ideologies – what systems of meaning fixed in concepts – do these democracy movements express in their public messages? I argue that to understand some (and perhaps many) of their ideologies, one needs to analyse them as populist.

Despite the voluminous research on populism in recent years, the possibility that democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes might articulate

populisms has been overlooked. For many, populism is authoritarian. It contains a critique of liberal democracy and an electoral-authoritarian vision of government. This has guided where past research has looked for, and indeed seen, populisms. It has rarely seen them in opposition in electoral-authoritarian regimes, least of all in democracy movements whose liberal democratic ideals are antithetical to electoral-authoritarian ones.

However, this is not the only way to conceptualize populism. In the discourse-theoretic (de Cleen et al. 2018) and discourse-performative conceptions (Moffitt 2020), populism is a logic of articulation through which a system of meaning is constructed, in which ‘the people’ are locked in a popular struggle against ‘the elite’. I argue that a body of democracy movements make systems of meanings through precisely this logic of articulation. I also argue that the meanings which they fix through it are distinctive, as follows.

The democracy movements in question portray the actions of ‘the elite’ as the source of popular hardships. In this regard, they are much like other populisms. However, unlike other populisms, each of these democracy movements simultaneously constructs ‘the elite’ as ‘the regime’, and each also claims that this corruption was enabled by a system of government which it calls ‘authoritarian’. It assembles ‘the people’ by connecting their hardships and joining their demands in unity against ‘the elite’/‘the regime’ and ‘authoritarianism’ alike. It constructs ‘the people’s’ demands as ‘democracy’. It presents a democratic system as an alternative to the existing authoritarian one, and therefore as the means to relieve popular hardships. Altogether, these democracy movements articulate systems of meaning which are populist, but which are not *only* populist. Instead, they are simultaneously original and homegrown ideologies of democratic struggle. They are original in that they embrace established democratic theory, but tailor it to the electoral-authoritarian contexts which they read as their own. To capture how constructed electoral-authoritarian context, democratic theory and populist logic combine in these ideologies, I call them anti-authoritarian and democratic populisms, or anti-authoritarian populisms for short.

To develop and advance this argument, I turn to the continent with the greatest concentration of electoral-authoritarian regimes, and perhaps democracy movements, worldwide: Africa (Natsika et al. 2023). Studies of African opposition messages, including self-identifying democracy movements, conclude that few of them are populist (on such populisms, see Fölscher et al. 2021; Fraser 2017; Melchiorre 2023). Instead, they determine that most carry valence appeals about democracy (Bleck and van de Walle 2018).

This research is interpretive (Taylor 1994). I revisit the messages of these democracy movements, and I challenge these prior interpretations. I argue that the recognition of them as anti-authoritarian populisms has been occluded by three configurations of concepts in Africanist studies. First, populism has been conceptualized as a mobilization strategy which prioritizes socioeconomic redistribution, not democracy. Second, valence appeals have been defined so loosely that studies have (mis)categorized advocacy of a democratic system in opposition to an authoritarian one as a democratic *valence* appeal instead of a programmatic one. Third, populism has been conceptualized as antithetical to ideology, including democratic ideologies. Once these concepts are reconfigured, it becomes possible to recognize

that anti-authoritarian populisms are articulated by at least some of these movements.

To make this argument, I begin by studying the message of Tanzania's leading opposition party: Chama cha Demokrasia na Maendeleo (Party of Democracy and Development – Chadema). Tanzania was widely characterized as a competitive electoral-authoritarian regime (Morse 2018) until 2020, when a further authoritarian turn made it, at least fleetingly, a hegemonic electoral-authoritarian regime (Paget 2021b: 68). Chadema has long defined its cause as a struggle for democracy. However, past analyses have placed Chadema's message near the central tendency of African opposition messages in electoral-authoritarian regimes; they have concluded that its message principally carried democratic valence issues and was *not* populist (Mmuya and Chaligha 1994; Paget 2017). I reinterpret Chadema's public message. I argue that it articulated an anti-authoritarian populism.

This study of democracy movement ideology in Africa's fifth-largest country is significant in its own right. Yet Chadema's ideology also has a wider significance. If past analyses of Chadema's message determined that it consisted of democratic valence issues, when in fact it contained an anti-authoritarian populism, might the same not be true of other African democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes similarly analysed? To explore the viability of this idea, I turned to another such case. In accordance with principles of interpretivist case comparison (Simmons and Smith 2019), I explore the similarities and differences between them. This second case is that of Zimbabwe's democracy movement. Even in its institutional form, this movement is heterogeneous. Since its foundation as the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, it has split and reformed repeatedly. I study it under the founding leadership of Morgan Tsvangirai from 2008, when records of his speeches become readily available, until 2018, and under the leadership of Nelson Chamisa from 2018 onwards. I study it in its institutional forms as MDC-Tsvangirai (2005–2017), MDC Alliance (2017–2021) and the Citizens Coalition for Change (CCC, 2021 onwards). Zimbabwe went from a competitive to a hegemonic electoral-authoritarian regime in 2008 (Raftopoulos and Eppel 2008). I argue that the messages of the CCC and its predecessors also contain an anti-authoritarian populism.

This shows that the case of Chadema is not anomalous, and indicates that other democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes in Africa and perhaps beyond may also have been similarly misinterpreted. In failing to designate these struggles as anti-authoritarian populist, past research has left unrecognized this, to paraphrase Achille Mbembe (2001), distinctive mode of African self-writing. In this article, I begin the work of correcting that omission.

Of course, the proponents of such anti-authoritarian populisms, in Tanzania, Zimbabwe and elsewhere, are more than capable of self-expression. This raises a question about the ethics of speaking for others. These ethical questions are amplified by the position of privilege from which I write. However, I do not write this article only about these movements; I address it to them, in what I hope will be an open and ongoing conversation. I write it to share with them and others like them another perspective on their political thought. I write in full recognition that in that conversation, my words will neither be the last, nor have the only form of authority.

In this analysis of first Chadema and then CCC ideology, I principally analysed texts in which their public-facing ideology is encoded. I began by analysing the systems of meanings fixed in these texts and the concepts through which they were fixed. I identified themes that ran across the meanings in the texts in an iterative and theory-generating coding process (Gee 2004). Thereafter, I followed an abductive approach (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). I embarked on a curiosity-guided re-exploration of the texts and theory in tandem, as I looked heuristically for and crafted concepts which would enable me to distil the meanings fixed in those texts.

For my analysis of Chadema, I collected and analysed a series of Chadema documents dated from 2006 to 2020. I further analysed transcripts of seven Chadema speeches from 2014 and 2015, one available on YouTube, four which I attended and recorded and two transcribed by a third party. These speeches are listed in the appendix in the Supplementary Material. I offer a reconstruction of those meanings in the text below. I draw on nine years of sustained research about Chadema, including eight months of ethnographic fieldwork in 2015. I interviewed 12 members of Chadema's Central Committee and a further six high-level officials; 15 of its MPs and its nominated parliamentary candidates (of which six were Central Committee members); 86 of its active members and officials, spread across 35 party organs at the zonal, district, ward, branch and foundation levels. Finally, I have developed correspondence with several senior Chadema members and associated activists named in the acknowledgements, and developed this article in dialogue with them. Documents in Swahili were professionally translated.

For the study of the CCC and its predecessors, I principally analyse a body of 11 major addresses given by Tsvangirai and five given by Chamisa during their leaderships over this period, selected for prominence and relevance. These speeches are listed in the Supplementary Material. I conducted an equivalent analysis of these texts. I have not done field research in Zimbabwe; this affects my ability to interpret these texts in context. However, I interpret them in the context of other texts (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2012). These include nine MDC policy documents and manifestos as well as one party constitution (at the time of writing, no equivalent CCC documents were available). They include four further Tsvangirai addresses, six further Chamisa addresses, ten further party press statements, eight further press conferences and four television interviews by Chamisa. More widely, they include news coverage of Zimbabwean politics, and elite dialogue on social media.

In the first section, I develop a theory of anti-authoritarian populism. In the second, I reconfigure concepts in use in African studies to make anti-authoritarian populism both conceivable and recognizable. In the third, I demonstrate that Chadema articulated an anti-authoritarian populism. In the fourth, I show that Chadema was not alone; the CCC also articulated one. Finally, I consider the possibility that these are emblematic cases of a wider current of anti-authoritarian populisms in Africa and beyond.

Another perspective on democracy

At first sight, it might seem self-evident what ideologies democracy movements articulate, whether in electoral-authoritarian regimes, or elsewhere: democratic

ones. Of course, the corpus of liberal democratic theory is diverse and incorporates many distinctive and often contradictory visions of democracy (Manin 1997; Urbinati 2006; Young 2000). As such, to specify that an ideology is democratic leaves much yet unspecified. However, even if one puts aside this complication, another remains. Democratic theory is principally concerned with what democracy is, what it does, how it ought to be designed and how one ought to act in one. Yet the democracy movements in question are emphatically not *in* liberal democracies. Democratic theory leaves even less specified how one should make sense of non-democratic circumstances and indeed how one should act in them. Therefore, in electoral-authoritarian regimes, democracy movements have little choice but to improvise intellectually. In such circumstances, a democracy activist must have, as Stephen Chan puts it, ‘his own intellectual agenda, his own thought base, a political philosophy’ (Chan 2005).

To make sense of what ideologies such movements articulate, I turn to the concept of populism. Of course, there are numerous conceptions of populism. Some of them, such as conceptions of populism as strategy (Barr 2009; Weyland 2021) and conceptions of populist organization (Roberts 2006), are of little relevance to the study of ideology. They are crafted for the analysis of subjects such as how politicians (and parties) rule, mobilize and organize, which are distinct from the fixation of meanings and concepts with which ideology studies are concerned. Of those conceptions which *are* relevant to the study of ideology, many see populism as authoritarian. Among them are the much-adopted ideational conception, but also a number of prominent and idiosyncratic theorizations of populisms offered by Nadia Urbinati (2019), Jan-Werner Müller (2017) and Paul Blokker (2019). All these works, albeit through different frameworks and terminologies, analyse how populisms articulate visions which are ostensibly democratic but in actuality ‘disfigure’ it (Urbinati 2019).

As theorized in the ideational perspective articulated, most famously, by Cas Mudde (2004), advocacy of this (so-called) illiberal democracy springs from populists’ claims about duality, morality and sovereignty. Populists construct ‘the people’ as homogenous and moral, and ‘the elite’ as immoral. Accordingly, Mudde theorizes, populists envisage only one legitimate opinion: a ‘people’s will’, which is infallible, sovereign and expressed by the leader. They see contradiction, obstruction and compromise of the leader’s will as illegitimate. They see the eradication of alternative opinion-forming bodies and the dismantling of checks on the power of the leader as legitimate.

Of course, such authoritarian conceptions of populism are of little use in the analysis of the ideologies of democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes. They suggest that populisms have an animating critique of liberal democracy. At the extreme, some even theorize that populisms necessarily emerge as a pathology of or in reaction to liberal democracy (Taggart 2004; Urbinati 2019). Even among those that do not thus fix populisms’ place of origin, the vision of electoral-authoritarian government which they contain is at odds with the animating critiques of electoral-authoritarianism which democracy movements articulate. They suggest that when populisms *are* found in electoral-authoritarian regimes, it will be at the helm of governments which are instituting and embedding those regimes. Indeed, empirical studies of such authoritarian populists in power find

that they endeavour in office to enact such authoritarian programmes. These ideas are echoed in recent Africanist studies of populism in discourse (Fölscher et al. 2021: 542–545) and practice (Melber 2018).

Instead of adopting these conceptions of populism as authoritarian, I turn to the discourse-theoretic conception of populism. This perspective has been refined and developed from the ideas of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). In it, discourses are (necessarily incomplete) systems of subjective meanings. They are fixed through key signifiers which express collective identities. Proponents of the discourse-theoretic perspective analyse how seemingly disparate systems of meanings are assembled through the same pair of logics of articulation. In the first, many actors' demands are presented as equivalent. A political identity – an 'us' – is built out of these demands. Whatever separates the actors that hold them, they are united in that they hold them. In the second, those against whom the demands are made are hemmed together and constructed as a 'them'. Thereby, the political landscape is reduced to an 'us' and a 'them' separated by a frontier of demands. In this discourse-theoretic perspective, populism is a particular sort of meaning system in which the social is thus divided into an 'us' and a 'them': one in which their meanings are fixed through the signifiers 'the people' and 'the elite', respectively. This also closely resembles the discourse-performative conception (Moffitt 2020). Thus defined, a populist imaginary is one of a simplified popular struggle of low against high (de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017).

I analyse the ideologies of opposition which identify themselves as democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes through this lens. I argue that a body of them are populist in that they make systems of meaning through this logic of articulation. I do not claim that they articulate authoritarian populist ideologies as defined above. Nor do I claim that they necessarily resemble, in some other respects, populism strategy (Barr 2009; Weyland 2021), or indeed any other conception of populism.

I do not analyse these ideologies as *only* populist. Instead, I see the meaning systems which these democracy movements articulate as simultaneously populist *and* carriers of other ideologies. At first glance, this might seem to involve a contradiction in terms. I adopt and apply the discourse-theoretic conception of populism *over* the ideational one, in which populisms are theorized as thin-centred ideologies which appear in combination with others, but nevertheless, I analyse combinations of populisms and other ideologies. However, this apparent contradiction lies in a conflation of concept specification and theoretical framework specification. I do not adopt the ideational conception of populism, complete with its specification of populism as authoritarian. Nevertheless, I do adopt Michael Freeden's theory of ideology (1996), in which the ideational concept of populism is suspended. Like the discourse-theoretic perspective, this theory takes as its subject matter the fixation of meaning. Also like the discourse-theoretic perspective, it focuses on how meanings are made through the fixation (or 'de-contestation') of key signifiers or concepts. For Freeden, instantiations of ideologies consist of specific arrangements of such concepts, through which systems of meaning are fixed. Ideologies themselves consist of the field of possible such instantiations in which those concepts are arranged in different ways, or a morphology. Therefore, no matter what deeper philosophical differences remain between the discourse-theoretic

perspective and Freedman's theory of ideology, both offer largely compatible and potentially complementary analytical lenses onto how systems of meaning are fixed, as many have remarked (for example, see de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017; Moffitt 2020).

The body of democracy movements which I study combines the populist logic of articulation with bodies of established democratic theory. Among them, as I describe below, are republican theories of democracy (Allen 2023; Vergara 2020) and liberal conceptions of responsible government and human rights (Freedman 1996). The democracy movements which I study also creatively rework these theories of democracy. They articulate them through a populist logic. They do so while taking the surrounding electoral-authoritarian regimes as their contexts. Of course, from the standpoint of the analyst, the democracy movements which I study unambiguously *were* situated in such electoral-authoritarian contexts. Yet they were simultaneously located in any number of other such contexts. The democracy movements in question chose to construct their contexts principally as electoral-authoritarian. They combined these three elements – constructed context, democratic theory and populist mode of articulation – in the following imaginary.

In it, popular hardships are caused by 'the regime', which is simultaneously constructed as 'the elite'. They are caused, in particular, by the corruption, oppression and/or misrule of that regime. The movement assembles 'the people' below in reference to their common hardships and by uniting their demands in opposition to 'the elite'/'the regime' above. In these respects, the movement's meaning system resembles other populisms, as conceived in the discourse-theoretic perspective. However, the movement also sees the action of this 'elite'/'regime' as underpinned by an 'authoritarian' system of government. It sees 'the regime'/'elite' continually defending and developing that 'authoritarian' system. It constructs the demands of 'the people' as follows: the overhaul of the 'authoritarian' system and the instatement of a 'democratic' one in its place. It does not use the term 'democracy' only as a signifier; it specifies the content of a democratic system of government in accordance with those theories of democracy. It envisages this 'democratic system' as *the* means to arrest the misdeeds of 'the elite'/'the regime' and thereby alleviate 'the people's' hardships. Therefore, in this populist ideology, 'authoritarian-' stem terms appear not only as modifiers for 'the elite' or its synonyms (i.e. 'the authoritarian elite') but as a distinct signifier for a system which is envisaged as the root underpinning of popular hardships.

It may seem as though, in an electoral-authoritarian regime, a 'people'/'regime' divide is not constructed but is something which cannot be seen any other way. However, consider that various authoritarian imaginaries construct things differently. Not only do they not fix the demands of 'the people' as democracy, they do not construct 'people'/'regime' divides at all. Instead, they incorporate regimes and peoples into united bodies, portraying one as the guardian or representative of another, and pit them against enemies within and without. Equally, consider that authoritarian regimes, just like democratic ones, are connected to various societal actors and social categories through formal and informal institutions and the material policies they enact, all of which cut across any (constructed) 'people'/'regime' divide.

These anti-authoritarian populisms constitute an original and homegrown body of democratic ideologies. They draw on an established body of democratic theory. They render these ideas relevant to the (constructed) electoral-authoritarian contexts which they take as their own by articulating them in accordance with a populist logic which incorporates that context. In showing that there is a body of democracy movements which articulate these anti-authoritarian populisms, I show that there is a current of populist ideologies which has hitherto been overlooked. In fact, I show that they are articulated precisely where past research has not looked for or seen it: in opposition in electoral-authoritarian regimes.

Seeing anti-authoritarian populisms in Africa

I show, in particular, that anti-authoritarian populisms are articulated by democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes in Africa. There are certainly many places in Africa where they could be articulated. By V-Dem's count, in 2022, 29 of the world's 56 electoral autocracies (or electoral-authoritarian regimes (Levitsky and Way 2002) could be found among Africa's 56 states (Natsika et al. 2023). Oppositional movements which identify as democracy movements can be found in many of them. Nevertheless, few populisms of any ideological persuasion have been identified in opposition in Africa, and fewer still in opposition in electoral-authoritarian regimes. Parenthetically, another current of liberation ideologies have, disputedly (Fraser 2017; Paget 2021a), been designated as populists in power (Melber 2018). Most populisms which *have* been recognized in opposition fall into the ideological canon of the radical left. Its contemporary exemplar is the Economic Freedom Fighters in South Africa (Fölscher et al. 2021), which is among the most liberal democratic of African regimes. Other instances include Kenneth Komba in Botswana circa 1984–1999 (Resnick 2013: 190) and Michael Sata in Zambia circa 2006–2011 (Cheeseman and Larmer 2015; Fraser 2017; Larmer and Fraser 2007). This leaves a remainder of four recognized populisms in opposition: Raila Odinga's ethnopopulism in Kenya, 2004–2008 (Cheeseman and Larmer 2015); William Ruto's 'hustler populism' from 2021 onwards (Lockwood 2023); Abdoulaye Wade's '*alternance*' populism in Senegal, circa 2000 (Resnick 2013) and Bobi Wine's generational populism in Uganda from 2017 onwards (Melchiorre 2023). Of these, only the last two are located in electoral-authoritarian regimes (on which, more in the conclusion).

As few studies of opposition messages designate them as populist, logically, most such studies, at least implicitly, designate them as non-populist. Instead, they analyse them as carriers of valence issues (Bleck and van de Walle 2018). Valence appeals are a type of programmatic appeal about public policies. In programmatic *positional* appeals, a party claims that it will deliver policies which, as it constructs them, stand in contrast to those of rival parties. In programmatic *valence* appeals, parties claim that they are better able to deliver on some issue than rival parties can. They make appeals by claiming superior competence. In a cross-national study, Jamie Bleck and Nicolas van de Walle (2018) conclude that apart from 'development', African opposition parties (including those in electoral-authoritarian regimes) mention one valence issue more than other issues, and they mention it far more than ruling parties do: constitutionalism and democracy.

This literature is ready for revision. I argue that a subset of African opposition messages which have been analysed as carriers of democratic valence appeals instead and/or simultaneously express anti-authoritarian populisms which have hitherto been overlooked. Their recognition as such has been occluded by the ill-configuration of three sets of concepts.

The first arises from a distinctive Africanist conception of populism as a strategy of mobilization (Rakner and van de Walle 2009). Danielle Resnick (2013) conceives of populist mobilization strategy as a bundle of clientelist, charismatic and programmatic appeals which mobilizes the intersection of young, urban and poor. This conception of populist mobilization strategy contains an implicit distinct theory of populist ideology which prioritizes the material. It specifies properties of the meaning systems which populists express and the programmatic policies which they adopt. The implication of Resnick's conception, and others, is that populisms construct worldviews that privilege socioeconomic inequality. They construct the 'poor' against 'the political and economic elite' (Resnick 2013: 42–43, emphasis added) or 'the subaltern "poor" or economically excluded' against the 'wealthy' (Cheeseman and Larmer 2015: 23). They advocate, Resnick specifies, 'a program of social inclusion' (Resnick 2013: 42). This programme is 'oriented around providing goods, services, and recognition to those who have been excluded' (Resnick 2013: 42). In the words of others, it focuses on 'unsung ... economic grievances' (Cheeseman and Paget 2014: 79–83).

This specification of populism as mobilization strategy makes anti-authoritarian populism as defined above unthinkable; if populisms must put socioeconomic redistribution first, meaning systems which put anti-authoritarianism or indeed democracy first do not qualify. However, a discourse-theoretic conception (and, in fact, most conceptions) of populism permits wider discursive range than this. Populists *can* construct redistribution and social inclusion as 'the people's' principal demands, but they need not. Equally, populists may construct 'people' versus 'elite' as 'poor' versus 'wealthy', but need not make these material identities their only or their principal ones. They can simultaneously, or alternatively, construct them as powerless versus powerful or common versus cultured, for instance (de Cleen and Stavrakakis 2017).

Thus reconceived, ideologies that combine anti-authoritarian and democratic causes and populist imaginaries *are* conceptually possible. Nevertheless, the ideologies of democracy movements would go misinterpreted in Africa due to a second concept configuration. As I defined it above, anti-authoritarian populism contains a programmatic positional appeal. Its proponents advocate a democratic system as an alternative to the current, authoritarian one. In Africanist studies, such a message would be miscategorized as a valence appeal. Bleck and van de Walle (2018) inadvertently fix a definition of democratic valence issues which is overly broad. They offer many textbook examples of valence politics. For example, they describe how parties 'leverage their relative position to champion democratic values' and extol 'their historic role' in delivering democracy; these are appeals to competence and credibility (Bleck and van de Walle 2018: 196). However, they also describe the following as democratic valence appeals: 'opposition actors frame themselves as defenders of democracy and criticize incumbents for actions perceived to limit freedoms or consolidate their own power' (Bleck and van de Walle 2018: 196). Such claims

are emphatically *not* valence appeals. They amount to claims of the form that they, the opposition, are fighting *for* democracy, while the incumbent is acting *against* it. In other words, they put themselves and their opponents on *different sides* on the issue. They are better interpreted as positional appeals, which may be part of anti-authoritarian populisms.

Even if democracy movements were recognized as the proponents of democratic policy programmes, some Africanist studies might still refuse to recognize democracy movements as simultaneously the purveyors of anti-authoritarian populist ideologies. In a third Africanist concept configuration, populisms are conceptualized as inherently non-ideological. In it, as a populism knits together an incoherent set of unrelated demands into a chain of equivalence, it is incompatible with the internally coherent policy programmes and analytic frameworks of ideologies. This position is never articulated explicitly, but it is certainly in the water in African studies of populism, and some may have read it into Alastair Fraser's work (Fraser 2017: 461; Larmer and Fraser 2007: 637). However, such a position would be based on a misconception of the ideological, at least as Freedon theorizes it (1996). As described above, ideologies do not necessarily consist in logically founded or connected sets of truth claims. Instead, they consist in systems of meaning fixed through the ultimately arbitrary decontestation of what essentially contestable concepts mean (Freedon 1996). They can encompass fixations of meaning which are, in the perspective of the analyst, untruthful, or indeed, incoherent. Therefore, there is no contradiction between a system of meaning being articulated through a populist logic and its containing, an instantiation of an ideology, including a democratic one.

Therefore, it may be that democracy movements in electoral-authoritarian regimes in Africa articulate anti-authoritarian populisms, and indeed around the world, which have gone overlooked hitherto, shrouded by those configurations of concepts. With these concepts thus reconfigured, anti-authoritarian populisms become both conceivable and recognizable in practice.

Tanzania: 'A relentless fight for a people-centred constitution'

I explore this possibility by studying the message of Tanzania's leading opposition party: Chadema. Chadema was founded by a network of businesspeople at the moment of Tanzania's reintroduction of multiparty politics in 1992. It acquired electoral strength through a long process of activist recruitment and party-building (Morse 2014; Paget 2019; Weghorst 2022). Chadema's ideology has been analysed as liberal (Mmuya and Chaligha 1994: 61), meaning neoliberal. Its founder-leaders advocated competitive markets and fiscal conservatism. The election of Freeman Mbowe as chairman in 2004 marked a discursive shift which was taking shape by 2006. Chadema did not disavow its market liberalism (Mbowe 2014). Past analyses judge that Chadema's altered message in this period gave prominence to valence issues: anti-corruption, democracy and resource nationalism (Paget 2017: 160–161) alongside municipal service delivery (McLellan 2020). In Bleck and van de Walle's categories (2018), the latter would qualify as a 'sovereignty and international relations' issue. The former two would qualify as 'democracy and constitutionalism' issues.

I am aware of two analysts that connect populism to Chadema. First, in passing, Sabatho Nyamsenda (2020) describes Chadema's 2010 presidential candidate – Wilbroad Slaa – as populist. Second, Maria Sarungi Tsehali (2016) writes that Chadema's 2015 run would have been anti-establishment, but for its choice of presidential candidate. These exceptions aside, research leaves unrecognized the notion that Chadema expressed a populist discourse, or indeed a distinctive vision of democracy.

Chadema's revised message merits reinterpretation. I argue that Chadema articulated an anti-authoritarian populism in which, in particular, it articulated a republican theory of democracy. These theories are animated by the anticipation of oligarchic domination by the few or tyrannical domination by an individual (Allen 2023; Pettit 1997; Vergara 2020). They see domination as the source of systemic corruption. They conceptualize freedom as the absence of domination. They envisage democracy as the means to dismantle that domination, arrest corruption and free the people. The republicanisms being revived and articulated in contemporary political theory take as their projects the defence and/or reform of established liberal democracies. The democracy movements which I study adopt but also creatively rework these republican visions of democracy.

Between 2006 and 2014, a succession of mega-corruption scandals broke in Tanzania. Chadema belaboured the origins of these corrupt practices at the top. It called the instigators *mafisadi* (the high corrupt). Chadema characterized these instances as not independent, but connected through the ruling party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (Party of the Revolution – CCM). Slaa (2014) imagined 'a CCM corruption syndicate' which stood atop the party and state. He named 11 of its members, including two presidents and one premier, in a 'List of Shame'. Chadema portrayed corruption as emanating from this elite nexus. In this vein, Chadema parliamentary candidate Jesca Kishoa (2015) said that CCM leaders 'cut deals to enrich themselves and their families'. Therefore, consistent with populism, Chadema constructed an 'elite' above.

Chadema also constructed a popular actor below: *wananchi*, literally 'the citizens' but equivalent to English uses of 'the people'. Slaa said that 'all of us are experiencing a very difficult life that has more than doubled for the ordinary person. The cost of living and specifically on basic needs: beans, charcoal and cooking gas are beyond the common man's reach' (2014). 'Citizens' were thus joined in reference to their common deprivation. Chadema placed this popular suffering in contrast to the luxurious lifestyles of the CCM elite. For example, Kishoa vividly described the CCM's MP offering people 0.30 USD beer, while themselves drinking 10 USD whisky (Kishoa 2015: currencies converted).

The unity of 'the citizens' was also constructed in reference to the common perpetrator: the CCM elite. Chadema blamed CCM corruption for lacklustre government services, high taxes and even high prices. David Silinde, then MP for Chadema, said, 'Everything is expensive, a pair of shorts, kanga, everything; these are results of voting for CCM' (Silinde 2015a). Silinde also exemplified this logic of construction in his speech almost perfectly in dialogue with a rally audience: 'Who is injured here? (Audience: CITIZENS!) We are the ones that suffer ... and Chama cha Mapinduzi is what destroys this country' (Silinde 2015b). Therefore, contrary to prior analyses, Chadema's message *was* populist in the

sense conceptualized in the discourse-theoretic perspective. Mwesiga Baregu, then Chadema Central Committee member, seems to have recognized this in substance if not in nomenclature. ‘Chadema’, he said, ‘has positioned itself to be home of all of these forces demanding change’ (Baregu 2015).

In 2015, Chadema temporarily relegated corruption in its message. That August, it nominated CCM-defector and List of Shame member Edward Lowassa as its presidential candidate. Months later, CCM candidate John Pombe Magufuli was elected president and began a performative anti-corruption war. The same year, CCM initiated an authoritarian turn, of which Magufuli became the face and engine (Paget 2017). In that context, Chadema’s critique shifted focus from corruption to oppression. This regime, it alleged, was increasingly violent and arbitrary. Increasingly, Chadema united ‘citizens’ in reference to their common status as victims of Magufuli’s dictatorship. Chadema’s 2020 presidential candidate Tundu Lissu (2020) wrote that ‘Tanzania has become a land of people crippled – physically and psychologically – by the violence of the Magufuli government’ (2020). Therefore, Chadema’s message remained populist throughout, but its critical portrayal of the CCM elite changed over time.

Chadema envisaged the ultimate source of this corruption and tyranny as domination. In fact, it saw domination as the theme which ran through the nation’s history (Chadema 2014, 2018). Chadema’s constitution states that ‘the “people” of Tanzania have never had a voice, power and authority over decisions on the fate of people’s life ... from the colonial era to date’ (Chadema 2019). It saw contemporary domination as embedded in the authoritarian structure of the regime. Its constitution also states that ‘the [existing] systems and structures of governance in the country do not exist for the benefit of the people, but rather [for] the ... few people’ (Chadema 2019: 15). In particular, the nation’s ‘constitution has remained a monopoly of the government’ (Chadema 2019: 15). Chadema argued that the CCM was a proponent of that authoritarian system. In the context of the authoritarian turn initiated in 2015 in particular, it claimed that the CCM wished to advance these anti-democratic aspects of the existing system and extinguish democracy altogether. Baregu wrote that Magufuli had ‘launched an open, unapologetic and unrelenting onslaught on democracy’ (2018).

Chadema set itself against that system. It proclaimed that its vision was for ‘Tanzania to be a *truly* democratic country’ (Slaa 2014, emphasis added). ‘Truly’ implied, in this context, that Tanzania’s ostensibly democratic system was not truly democratic. Chadema specified what it meant by ‘democracy’ through the national constitutional process convened in 2012. A Constitutional Review Commission wrote two drafts. The second became known as the ‘Warioba Draft’ for its lead author, long-serving CCM politician Joseph Warioba. Its contents reduced and checked presidential powers, empowered parliament, gave autonomy to the archipelago state of Zanzibar, and enshrined various freedoms, among other things. Chadema (and other opposition parties) embraced the contents of this draft as their platform, wholesale. Therefore, Chadema not only used the term ‘democracy’ to signify its cause, it advocated a programme that was consistent with the institutions and principles of liberal democracy. It argued that the instatement of this constitution would break domination forever and constitute a ‘second liberation’ (Slaa 2014).

In the post-2015 context, Chadema increasingly defined its cause as not only for democracy, but *against* authoritarianism. In 2016, it re-presented its cause as the Alliance against Dictatorship in Tanzania (Umoja wa Kupunga Udikteta Tanzania). Altogether, Chadema did not claim to have superior competence to deliver democracy. It portrayed its advocacy of ‘democracy’ as an alternative, both to the authoritarian status quo and the CCM regime’s direction of travel. Therefore, Chadema constructed ‘democracy’ not as a valence issue, but as a programmatic positional issue, which it placed at the heart of an antagonistic ‘struggle to liberate our nation’ (Mbowe 2014).

When the CCM-dominated Constitutional Assembly heavily revised the Warioba Draft in 2013, Chadema presented this action as the denial of ‘the people’s’ express wishes. This was far from clear. The Warioba Draft was written *after* public consultations, but *by* an expert committee. Nevertheless, Mbowe said that ‘the CCM and its government were not ready to respect people’s views contained in the second [Warioba] draft constitution’ (Mbowe 2014). Indeed, Chadema and three other opposition parties formed a fleeting alliance, the Umoja wa Katiba ya Wananchi (Coalition for the People’s Constitution – UKAWA). Slaa described UKAWA as engaged in a ‘relentless fight for a people’s centred constitution’ (2014). Therefore, Chadema constructed its democratic cause as the fight against the CCM elite to realize the people’s will. This made the CCM ‘enemies of the people’ (Mbowe 2014).

In sum, Chadema constructed an anti-authoritarian populism, infused, in particular, with a republican conception of democracy. ‘Democracy’, it claimed, was a side-taking issue between democratic and authoritarian systems, in which the former was the will of ‘the citizens’. It advocated this cause with and for them against the ‘CCM syndicate’.

Zimbabwe: ‘The unfinished business of the liberation struggle’

Analyses of the CCC and its predecessors offer very different perspectives on their public messages. Some see in those messages a ‘liberal’ ideology (Gallagher and Chan 2017: 52). Others see in it the construction of a struggle for democracy and human rights and against dictatorship (Marongwe et al. 2022), which became a constituent part of party political polarization (LeBas 2011: chapter 7). Indeed, complementary studies recognize that such constructions of struggle were articulated through historical texts (Barure and Manase 2020), in autobiography (Nyanda 2017) and by citizen activists (Dendere 2019). Others judge that the much-studied message of the MDC-T in 2013 was ‘[valence]-issue based’ (Zamchiya 2013: 956). It principally claimed a superior ability to deliver on issues of material well-being such as jobs, economic management and public service delivery in 2013 (Zamchiya 2013) and since (Beardsworth et al. 2019: 589–590). One study concurs that it was issue-based, but concludes that the MDC-T’s issue message about democracy and human rights was heard more than its messages about such material issues (Gallagher and Chan 2017: 64–66). In each of these readings, the messages in question are not populist. Indeed, implicitly, the emphasis on its ‘abstract’ (Gallagher and Chan 2017: 64) and ‘technocratic language’ (Zamchiya 2013: 957) might be read as a connotation that there is distance between its message

and any populism. Gift Mwonzora and Obert Hodzi (2021) analyse Chamisa's 2018 'narrative' as populist. So do some commentators (Hofisi 2019; Melusi 2018). However, they do so principally in pejorative reference to his mode of intra-party politicking and his evangelicalism (Mwonzora and Hodzi 2021). Relatedly, some have questioned Chamisa's commitment to democratic procedures, especially within the CCC. Many of these perspectives on the messages of the CCC and its predecessors may be right, simultaneously.

Nevertheless, there is more to their messages than all that these perspectives recognize. Amidst those appeals and policies, a set of meanings can be traced through their speech over time. There are many differences in the contexts in which they speak in Zimbabwe and those in which Chadema speaks in Tanzania. Nevertheless, I argue that, like Chadema, the CCC and its predecessors articulated an anti-authoritarian and democratic populism. In doing so, I seek to build on the portrait of Morgan Tsvangirai's thought elucidated by Chan (2005).

The CCC and its predecessors consistently portrayed Zimbabweans as suffering from an omnibus of hardships. For instance, Tsvangirai said, 'The people are hungry. The people are hungry for jobs. We are hungry for education. We are hungry for justice. We are hungry for change. We are hungry for hope. We are hungry for land. We are hungry' (Tsvangirai 2008). Chamisa spoke in similar terms: 'I know that you are suffering. I know that you have no grants, you have no fuel, you have no power, no food, there is no money, we have no jobs' (Chamisa 2022). By juxtaposing these deprivations, they each implicitly connected those that bore them in a close likeness of the equivalence-rendering mode of articulation theorized by Laclau and Mouffe (2001). They also assembled identity groups in a similar way. For instance, Chamisa said, 'Businesses have suffered ... workers have been retrenched. For years, youth and war veterans have received empty promises' (Chamisa 2022). Implicit in this speech is that the hardships of business, workers and youth were connected. Thereby, the CCC and its predecessors constructed a popular actor below (which they refer to as 'the citizens' and 'the people' synonymously) in reference to their material hardships, as Chadema did and in accordance with the populist logic of articulation. That said, their constructions of 'the people' were also distinctive. Among other things, in their imaginary, popular suffering was located in a near-continual 'national crisis where ordinary Zimbabweans are struggling to make ends meet and to put food on the table' (Tsvangirai 2015).

The CCC and its predecessors consistently singled out a body of actors as the source of this suffering: 'the regime'. Tsvangirai said that 'we are not the cause of our poverty. The dictatorship is the cause' (Tsvangirai 2008). Similarly, Chamisa said that 'not one single citizen is not a victim of our government' (Chamisa 2021). As these quotes illustrate, the CCC and its predecessors referred to this body of actors through both the signifiers 'the government' and 'the dictatorship'. Indeed, they also referred to them through the signifiers 'the [ruling] ZANU-PF', the persons of President Robert Mugabe and President Emmerson Mnangagwa, and others besides, each of which reflexes where or with whom power in the regime lay. They connected popular hardships to 'the regime' in three ways. In each, they reconstructed not only the character of that suffering, but the character of the regime as well.

First, like Chadema, the CCC and its predecessors claimed that the regime had enriched itself while the people remained impoverished. ‘We are all’, Chamisa said, ‘in extreme poverty, but we have a minority that is enjoying the cream of our country’ (2022). They portrayed this self-enrichment not only as unjust, but as the cause of popular hardships. ‘Corruption is killing you. Corruption is killing us all’, Chamisa said (2021). They were clear where this ‘minority’ was located; ‘corruption’, Chamisa said, ‘starts at the top’ (2021). He described a ‘rotten pinnacle’ of the state which had been captured by ‘*parasitic elites* who are bent on rent-seeking, racketeering, and ... exploiting the poor’ (2022: emphasis added). This elite enjoyed the luxury and privilege of ‘5-star hotels, [and] five-star hospitals’ (Chamisa 2019). Chamisa particularly honed this characterization of the regime, but it also runs through Tsvangirai’s speech. Land reform, he said, for example, was truly ‘the looting and plunder of national resources by a small, parasitic elite’ (Tsvangirai 2011b). Therefore, further consistent with the populist logic of articulation, the CCC and its predecessors constructed ‘the regime’ simultaneously as ‘the elite’.

Second, also like Chadema, the CCC and its predecessors simultaneously constructed the regime as authoritarian. ‘For ZANU-PF, politics has no single rule and their game is based on the need to retain power at all costs’ (Tsvangirai 2011a). They endlessly constructed how, to that end, the regime committed countless authoritarian acts, in particular ‘shameful acts of violence and the unbridled violation of the people’s rights’ (Tsvangirai 2010). They constructed the victims of this oppression as ‘the people’. ‘Everyone has been arrested’, Chamisa said. ‘There is not a single Zimbabwean without a charge sheet against this regime’ (Chamisa 2019).

Third, and most distinctively, the CCC and its predecessors located causes of popular hardship in a recurrent crisis of legitimacy of the government’s own making. Tsvangirai said that ‘all the other facets of the national crisis stem from the crisis of legitimacy because this government has no mandate from the people’ (Tsvangirai 2013b). Chamisa described, similarly, how ‘the oppressors suffer from the legitimacy deficit’ (Chamisa 2021). Therefore, in the imaginary of the CCC and its predecessors, the regime was not only elitist and authoritarian, but in the throes of a permanent struggle to survive. This created a ‘broken, failed and fragile state paralyzed by a crisis of leadership’ (MDC Alliance 2018a). In this context, the CCC and its predecessors asserted that the regime had ceased to ‘care a hoot about the direction the country is taking and the hardships ordinary Zimbabweans are experiencing every day’ (Tsvangirai 2013a). This, in their eyes, resulted in ‘the government’s gross failure and incompetence’ (MDC Alliance 2018a).

The CCC and its predecessors demanded that this status quo be changed. They expressed these demands in numerous ways. They articulated it in the MDC’s founding Shona and Ndebele slogans *chinja maitiro!* and *guqula izenzo!*, respectively (‘change your behaviour’). They used the term ‘hunger’ to refer to both literal malnutrition and all that for which Zimbabweans yearned. ‘Are you hungry for jobs? Are you hungry for justice? Are you hungry for change? ARE YOU HUNGRY?’ (Tsvangirai 2013b). However, they fixed the principal meaning of their demands as a change in the system of government. They located the regime’s grand corruption, its oppression and the permanent crisis of legitimacy in the

authoritarian mode of government on which the regime was founded. Consider the following passage:

Electoral authoritarianism has resulted in continuously disputed election results, thereby creating enduring legitimacy deficits for successive governments.

These legitimacy deficits have been accompanied by the following traits:

- The dominance of an unpopular and minority ZANU PF political elite ...
- The increasing political role of sections of the Zimbabwean army, military intelligence, civilian intelligence (CIO), police, air-force and prison services.
- Systematic corruption and state capture by a minority ZANU PF elite.
- Systemic economic decline.
- Acceleration of poverty and impoverishment of the Zimbabwean people.
- Disregard for the rule of law, the constitution and constitutionalism. (MDC Alliance 2018b)

The CCC and its predecessors defined their demands as the replacement of this authoritarianism with constitutional democracy. In the period through to 2013, they made these demands principally as the instatement of ‘a new constitution’ (Tsvangirai 2008). After they oversaw the instatement of a new constitution in 2013, they claimed that the ‘constitution has not been fully implemented’ (MDC Alliance 2018a). Instead, the authoritarian system persisted through a set of laws and practices which were incompatible with the new constitution, and through subsequent constitutional amendments and laws. Therefore, the CCC and its predecessor organizations redefined their cause as the ‘immediate implementation of the Constitution’ (Tsvangirai 2015). To this end they advocated the introduction of ‘a raft of political reforms’ (Chamisa 2021) which they had already defined in successive documents (for example, MDC Alliance 2018b).

They claimed that if they could ‘dismantle autocracy, achieve democratic change’ (Chamisa 2021), it would relieve the people’s hardships. However, the ways that the CCC and its predecessors envisaged that democracy would alleviate the hardships of ‘the people’ differed from the ways envisaged by Chadema in emphasis. They, like Chadema, had a republican, domination-focused critique of the ‘abuse of power at the hands of a few’ (MDC-T 2013) and the ‘disintegration’ of the government–people relationship ‘into one of predator and victim’ (MDC-T 2013). Also like Chadema, the CCC and its predecessors envisaged the enactment and implementation of the constitution as the antidote to this oligarchic and tyrannical domination, even if it was a *neo*-republican vision of constraining governmental power (Pettit 1997) rather than a *radical* republican vision of popular counter-power (Vergara 2020). In their imaginary, ‘the constitution will provide for the separation of powers with all appropriate checks and balances to ensure accountability, responsiveness and openness’ (Tsvangirai 2008), in particular by constitutionally enshrining and protecting human rights.

However, these ideas sat alongside, and at times in the periphery of, a liberal focus on how constitutional democracy would yield governmental function. Chamisa said that ‘it is important to have free and fair credible elections because they provide the basis for legitimacy. Without legitimacy, there’s no accountability. Without legitimacy, there’s no performance’ (Chamisa 2021).¹ Therefore, it saw constitutional democracy as the solution to Zimbabwe’s crisis. Tsvangirai said, ‘These [democratic] demands will be the solution to the crisis we face; which crisis is grounded on illegitimacy of government as a result of a disputed election. Once we implement these far-reaching reforms ... this country would be good to go’ (Tsvangirai 2015).

The CCC and its predecessors’ vision of their struggle was, in Chan’s terms (2005), inclusive. They envisaged the ‘democratic struggle’ as ‘a people’s struggle’ (Chamisa 2021). There was, they said, an ‘emerging national consensus’ (Tsvangirai 2015) or a ‘citizen consensus’ (Chamisa 2021) for democracy and against authoritarianism. As such, Tsvangirai said, ‘we are the true repository of the people’s aspirations’ (Tsvangirai 2010). Accordingly, they constructed ‘the people’ in a chain of equivalence not only by connecting their shared hardships in reference to a shared body of antagonists, as described above. They also did so by joining their demands. Chamisa said, ‘it’s about you, the citizens. Are you a professional? Do something. Are you a builder? Do something. Are you a worker? Do something. Are you a student? Do something’ (Chamisa 2022). By summoning all these categories of person to participate in the struggle, they implicitly constructed them as united in their struggle, or in ‘a new convergence of all citizens’ (Chamisa 2021).

The CCC and its predecessors, like Chadema, claimed that the regime stood in opposition to their democratic demands, and therefore to ‘the people’ and their will (Tsvangirai 2014). ‘The regime and the oppressors’, Chamisa said, ‘have embarked on a relentless assault and onslaught upon democracy and upon the people’s party’ (2021). They claimed in particular that successive elections were rigged or otherwise manipulated against them, and that each time, those actions constituted a ‘coup against the *will of the people*’ intended to ‘advantage a *particular elite*’ (Chamisa 2018: emphasis added). In other words, they constructed a struggle between ‘the party of the people’ and ‘the party of the dictatorship’ (Tsvangirai 2008).

Like Chadema, the CCC and its predecessors portrayed this struggle of ‘the people’ for democracy as simultaneously a struggle for liberation.² ‘The liberation ethos’, Chamisa claimed, had always been ‘one man, one vote’ (2018). Therefore, ‘the liberation struggle was a democratic project’ (Chamisa 2020). Similarly, Tsvangirai said, ‘I will lead the collective national effort to complete the unfinished business of the liberation struggle’ (Tsvangirai 2011b). The emphasis which the CCC and its predecessors gave to these claims should be read in the context of how central ZANU-PF had made its liberation credentials to its unrivalled authority to rule (on which, see Dorman 2016; Tendi 2013). Therefore, for all their idiosyncrasies, the CCC and its predecessors articulated an anti-authoritarian populism much like Chadema’s.

Across Africa, and the world?

I have shown that Chadema and the CCC did not simply make democratic valence appeals, nor did they merely articulate ‘democratic’ ideologies. Instead, each of

these democracy movements expressed a distinctive and original democratic imaginary. Both of their imaginaries combine the construction of an electoral-authoritarian context, a body of liberal democratic ideas, and a populist logic of articulation. Through them, they each fixed a critique of (electoral-)authoritarianism and a vision of a democratic alternative. They were democratic ideologies tailored to opposition in and to electoral-authoritarianism.

In Africa, there are many other opposition parties in electoral-authoritarian regimes which identify as democracy movements. Many of these parties, too, have been interpreted in past research as the proponents of democratic valence appeals. This raises the possibility that Chadema and the CCC are exemplars of a third, hitherto overlooked, ideological current of populism in Africa, alongside radical-left ideologies in opposition, and, disputedly (Paget 2023), liberation ideologies in power (Melber 2018).

The question remains how wide this current of anti-authoritarian populisms is. Future research should take up this question. It should begin with the African opposition party messages in electoral-authoritarian regimes analysed as democratic valence issues. However, it should not be bound to one continent. The anti-authoritarian populism which I have distilled from the political thought of Chadema and the CCC offers a critique which has *prima facie* resonance in electoral-authoritarian regimes further afield. In fact, it bears at least partial resemblances to anti-authoritarian democracy movements as far flung as El Salvador, Venezuela, Hungary and Turkey. These resemblances make this research particularly timely. We live in an era of electoral-authoritarianism (Morse 2012), but also one of resistance to it by democracy movements. If these movements develop homegrown visions of democracy, in which they imagine popular struggles against a regime elite for ‘democracy’ and against ‘authoritarianism’, we should recognize that they do so.

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Notes

- 1 For earlier articulations of these ideas in the liberal canon, see Mill (2015).
- 2 For a study of prior contestations of Zimbabwean liberation discourses, see Dorman (2016: chapter 5).

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