

**Paddington Mutekwe**

P Mutekwe, Department  
of Sociology, University  
of Johannesburg,  
Johannesburg,  
South Africa.

**E-mail:**

pmutekwe@yahoo.com

**Kudzaiiše Peter  
Vanyoro**

KP Vanyoro, Wits  
Centre for Diversity  
Studies, University of  
the Witwatersrand,  
Johannesburg.

**E-mail:**

kudzaiiše.vanyoro@wits.  
ac.za

First submission: 28 Feb 2021

Acceptance: 23 Nov 2021

Published: 14 Dec 2021

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa53i2/2>

ISSN: 0587-2405

e-ISSN: 2415-0479

Acta Academica •  
2021 53(2): 12-37

© Creative Commons  
With Attribution (CC-BY)



# *Politicising ‘COVID-19’: an analysis of selected ZANU-PF officials’ 2020-2021 media statements on the pandemic in Zimbabwe*

This paper examines the politicisation of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe through discourse analysis of selected media statements released by Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) officials on the COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and February 2021. Theoretically, the paper employs Foucault’s theory of biopower to interpret the state-citizen power relations that surfaced in the Zimbabwean government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It argues that the ZANU-PF-led government used COVID-19 as an excuse to pursue its political interests. This is politics that protected ZANU-PF’s social, political and economic interests by using COVID-19 as an excuse to pulverise various forms of opposition. The argument advanced herein is that while the implementation of the lockdown in Zimbabwe was necessary to save lives, one of its consequences was the protection of self-interests through selective application of lockdown regulations and the passing of laws to silence critics. This resulted in the prohibition of political gatherings, arbitrary arrests, labelling and name-calling of the opposition and the West by ZANU-PF officials who were safeguarding their party’s waning support resulting from their mismanagement of the pandemic.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; biopolitics; Zimbabwe; ZANU-PF; lockdown

## Introduction

The purpose of this article is not to justify lockdown or to take up any judgment on the ethics and morals of lockdowns across the globe. Rather, this article looks at how the COVID-19 pandemic was politicised through statements by selected Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) officials in Zimbabwe. Discourse analysis was used to analyse selected ZANU-PF members' 2020-2021 political statements on the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe. The article argues that responses to COVID-19 by the ZANU-PF government were not only meant to save lives as the government claimed. Instead, ZANU-PF officials used the COVID-19 pandemic to advance their political interests and ideology. By viewing this advancement of political interests and ideology as the deployment of biopower, the article shows that the COVID-19 pandemic in Zimbabwe is evidence of how easily biological and health issues can be turned into political issues.

COVID-19 is a contagious disease caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome Coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2). The first case of COVID-19 was identified in Wuhan, China in December 2019 (El Maarouf, Belghazi and El Maarouf 2021). Fever, cough, loss of smell and taste, fatigue and breathing difficulties are some of the common symptoms of COVID-19 among others. Symptoms begin one to 14 days after exposure to the virus (CDC 2021). The World Health Organization (WHO) declared the outbreak of the novel 2019 coronavirus disease a global pandemic on 11 March 2020. According to Matthewman and Huppertz (2020: 675), "the COVID-19 pandemic presents the most profound public health and economic crisis of our times". In this article, we show how COVID-19 escalated the ongoing political crisis in Zimbabwe. Using a biopower theoretical lens, we show how medical and political ideologies became enmeshed during the pandemic.

The article departs from the observation that while prior research has been carried out on the politicisation of COVID-19 in the West (Craig 2020; Matthewman and Huppertz 2020; Peters 2020; Žižek 2020), in Asia (Peters 2020; Žižek 2020; Dey 2021), in Zimbabwe (Dube 2020; Dzobo, Chitungo and Dzinamarira 2020; Mhiripiri and Midzi 2020; Mhlanga and Ndhlovu 2020; Toyana 2020), there has been little research investigating the relationship between COVID-19, ZANU-PF and biopolitics in Zimbabwe. However, research has been done elsewhere on the biopolitical nature of COVID-19 (Demetri 2020; Denisenko and Trikoz 2020; Sylvia IV 2020). Other research on COVID-19 in Zimbabwe is from a predominantly medical tradition (Makurumidze 2020; Matsungu and Chopera 2020; Mukwenha et al. 2020; Murewanhema and Makurumidze 2020; Dandara, Dzobo and

Chirikure 2021; Dzinamarira et al. 2021). This article therefore adds a biopolitical interpretation of selected ZANU-PF statements on COVID-19 in Zimbabwe. While Dube (2020) posits that COVID-19 in Zimbabwe is being used as an excuse to trample on democracy and disregard human rights, we go further to argue that this trampling of democracy and human rights is a biopolitical form of regulation.

The article begins with a discussion on the importance of reading politics and COVID-19 in Zimbabwe through the theoretical lens of biopower. This is followed by a brief outline of the politics of the Zimbabwean lockdown as seen in literature and the media. Next, we provide an account of the political climate in Zimbabwe prior to the beginning of the lockdown. From there, we outline the methodology, discuss the findings and conclude the article.

## Theoretical framework: biopolitics and Zimbabwe's COVID-19 lockdown

The mechanisms of control declared by the Zimbabwean state during the pandemic can be viewed as an example of biopolitical power – the interaction of sovereign and regulatory power. Coined by Michel Foucault, the term 'biopower' refers to the supervision of "biological processes: propagation, births and mortality, the level of health, life expectancy and longevity, with all the conditions that can cause these to vary" (Foucault 1984: 44). These regulatory controls inform the biopolitics of the population. Biopower is therefore, a modern nation state's exercise of citizen regulation via "an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations" (Foucault 1990: 140). In this regard, pandemic lockdowns are part and parcel of biopolitical approaches meant to save lives, while at the same time preserving the essence of the nation-state.

Because COVID-19 is a highly contagious disease, its spread across the world led to state-imposed lockdowns, with those who have either tested positive or have symptoms of the virus encouraged to go into isolation. "The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic caused most governments to adopt a state of emergency to contain the virus" (El Maarouf, Belghazi & El Maarouf 2021: 78). The declaration of national states of disaster led to lockdowns that were characterised by high police and military enforcement and curfews as well as travel and trade restrictions. Lockdown and isolation are not new phenomena, yet they represent the epitome of the biopolitical control of people. This article views the Zimbabwean government's response to COVID-19 as a despotic administration of biopower. This is because of the manner through which the Zimbabwean lockdown was administered not only to save lives but also to control political gatherings, manage citizen protests and facilitate political-ideological wars with the West and domestic opposition.

When the COVID-19 disaster spread all over the world, the rhetoric about the disease employed by journalists and politicians recalled that of prior sicknesses and pandemics (Craig 2020). In the exercise of biopower, people are viewed as species to be managed and not humans with agency. For instance, Michel Foucault described the measures implemented during a 17th century epidemic in the French town of Vincennes, explaining how plagues, understood as a form of disorder, were used to legitimise the penetration of regulations (Foucault 1979; van den Berge 2020). The argument Foucault forwarded here is that pandemics can be used as excuses for surveillance and discipline. Hence, an emergency can be used as a scapegoat by authorities to centralise and consolidate their power (Matthewman & Huppatz 2020).

During a lockdown, already existing dynamics of bordering classes, parties and ethnicities are further perpetuated through the ideas of isolation and social distancing. In other words, a lockdown such as the one implemented in Zimbabwe, shows how sovereign power is reinforced by regulatory power (biopower). Biopower can be mobilised to protect certain class interests. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 379) opines that "lockdowns are part of re-bordering of an extreme type whereby a home/house becomes the boundary/border". Lockdowns have the potential to define a social group's residence in a particular ghetto as "fixed". Lockdowns present a suspension of temporality itself (Gumpert 2012). In other words, lockdowns may be used to limit the agency of citizens, and this increases the vulnerability of the poor. As Vanyoro (2020) has argued elsewhere, in Zimbabwe, access to, and deprivation of, certain economic benefits are shaped by space, class and partisanship. In this case, what should otherwise be a biological issue of health is transposed into economic issues in an exercise of power that is not only about the body, but also about politics and the economy at large. As will be shown in the article, the Zimbabwean lockdown was a carnival for the playing out of partisan and class politics.

This is a phenomenon not limited to Zimbabwe. Dey (2020), for example, shows the different ways through which COVID-19 is being employed as a weapon to re-justify and re-configure the racial dynamics in contemporary India. This is also apparent in a country like Zimbabwe where repressive state machinery serves the interests of a few well-connected bureaucrats, military and paramilitary leaders (Bond 2002) in what is termed a neo-racist "racism without race" (Balibar 2007). Vanyoro (2020) argues that in Zimbabwe, "the term 'black' no longer signifies only the experiences of the race but also implies the experience of being poor, oppressed or marginalised". The biopolitical view of COVID-19 as a re-justification and re-configuration of racial, ethnic (Dey 2020) and class dynamics is seen in the Zimbabwean government's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was

that of “containment” and “control” of the virus and people, and it is important to analyse whose political interests these measures sought to serve.

## The politics behind the Zimbabwean hard lockdown

It is not a secret that in Zimbabwe, the COVID-19 pandemic took place in the context of a pre-existing despotic political climate (LeBas 2006; Howard-Hassmann 2010; Moyo 2011; Ncube 2013; Dube 2020). When the COVID-19 lockdown in Zimbabwe was implemented, the country was facing daily water shortages with many parts of the country receiving running water only once or twice a week. The situation was worsened by the existing international sanctions on Zimbabwean individuals and institutions that are obstacles to accessing loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Moyo & Kingsley 2020). Therefore, it is no surprise that as the pandemic gained traction, the economic conditions in Zimbabwe worsened (see Dube 2020).

In June 2020, Zimbabwe’s annual inflation rate was more than 700 percent, devaluing workers’ stagnant salaries and making common household goods beyond the reach of many citizens. The cost of a loaf of bread had risen nearly 70-fold since President Emmerson Mnangagwa took office, turning bread from a staple into a luxury commodity (Moyo and Kingsley 2020). The government’s response to the pandemic offered little reassurance to a large number of Zimbabwean citizens and was coupled with the public hospitals’ lack of sufficient drugs, and a shortage of ventilators, personal protection equipment and staff. The country had also been faced with numerous strikes by nurses and doctors in the public health sector (Chima 2020; Makoni 2020; Truscott 2020).

The Zimbabwean government declared a state of national disaster in response to the COVID-19 pandemic on Friday 27 March 2020. This was followed by a nationwide lockdown on 30 March 2020. At the time of writing, Zimbabwe was grappling with more than 31 000 COVID-19 cases and had over 1 000 deaths (Moyo and Kingsley 2020). The deaths included four government ministers. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2020: 366) critiques the lockdowns in Africa as knee-jerk reactions “since they are not sustainable, and they impinge on life, security, freedom and economy in fragile African environments”. During a pandemic, civil liberties may be curtailed for a while. Indeed, before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Zimbabwean state had been a repressive entity (LeBas 2006; Howard-Hassmann 2010; Moyo 2011; Ncube 2013; Dube 2020). The Zimbabwean government has cracked down on resistance through the enactment of draconian laws, in some cases using violence, that seek to stop citizens from striking (Mutekwe 2019).

Even though lockdowns violate basic human rights, they are permissible for public health reasons. As such, governments are bound to put in place reasonable measures to contain the spread of diseases such as the coronavirus (CSC 2020). Yet we identified several instances where containment of the coronavirus in Zimbabwe was used as an excuse to implement political repression. Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR) (2020) noted that police officers in Zimbabwe have used COVID-19 restrictions as a pretext to arrest the government's political opponents. The lockdown served the interests of the ruling elites and as a justification for stifling all dissenting voices in Zimbabwe. Against this backdrop, we show how statements by ZANU-PF politicians in the media sought to vindicate the further curtailing of citizen rights during the pandemic so it is useful to analyse the media that quoted Zimbabwean leaders' opinions of the virus and the lockdown that followed.

## Methodology

The study used a qualitative research approach in which data were collected from online media sources. The researchers used selected COVID-19-related statements issued by prominent ZANU-PF leaders in various media outlets between March 2020 and February 2021. These media outlets include Twitter, ANA, PaZimbabwe, Anadulo Agency, New Zimbabwe, Techzim, The Herald, IOL, Newsday, Zimbabwe Situation and VOA News. Data was collected through a general google search using the keywords "COVID-19 in Zimbabwe". Twenty-four media sources containing ZANU-PF politicians' comments on COVID-19 were purposively selected for coding and analysis. According to Campbell et al. (2020: 653), "the reason for purposive sampling is the better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigor of the study and trustworthiness of the data and results".

While the researchers could have selected a specific media source, such as one particular newspaper, we realised the limitations of this approach, such as how the study of just one online newspaper would not sufficiently capture the convergent nature of popular news online. As Jenkins (2004) argues, media companies are adapting to spread media content across delivery channels to expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets and reinforce viewer commitments. On the other hand, consumers are also learning how to use these different media technologies to control the flow of media and to control their interaction on certain topics with other users (Jenkins 2004). Convergence captures how media platforms complement one another. For example, if a politician speaks on live television, that statement can be captured in newspaper reports, tweets and individual Facebook posts. So focusing on media texts from various online media sources

was better suited for analysing prominent ZANU-PF political statements online about COVID-19.

These media texts were analysed using discourse analysis. Discourse is any form of language or text that carries any form of knowledge rendered legitimate during a specific epoch (Foucault 1980). According to Van Dijk (1996: 110) “the study of news reports in the press is one of the major tasks of discourse-analytical media research”. Discourse analysis allowed the researchers to read texts with the social, economic and political contexts within which they are produced. This involves acknowledging that any property of discourse that “expresses, establishes, confirms or emphasizes a self-interested group opinion, perspective or position, especially in a broader socio-political context of social struggle” (Van Dijk 1995: 23) should be scrutinised. This is because such discourses usually serve to legitimate dominance or to justify concrete actions of power abuse by the elites (Van Dijk 1995). Therefore, this article highlights how ZANU-PF political texts related to COVID-19 sought to consolidate the party’s dominance.

## Presentation, discussion, and analysis of findings

In this section we present, discuss and analyse the research findings. Overall, the article identified five key themes for analysis. The following themes emerged from the data analysis: COVID-19 infections, competing ideologies and the use of COVID-19 as an excuse to detain the opposition; a blessing in disguise: alternating views on the selective application of COVID-19 rules; COVID-19 and ZANU-PF nationalist rhetoric; COVID-19 media censorship and the COVID-19 vaccine roll out as a site of ZANU-PF patronage and elitism.

### COVID-19 infections, competing ideologies and the use of the pandemic as an excuse to detain the opposition

Findings show that lockdown regulations were used as an excuse to detain opposition members. The arrest in May 2020 of three Movement for Democratic Change-Alliance (MDC-A) female activists, Cecilia Chimhiri, Joana Mamombe and Netsai Marova, for holding a demonstration in breach of lockdown rules is one of the incidents that marked the government’s use of the lockdown to punish its perceived enemies. The three MDC-A activists claimed that they were abducted, beaten, forced to drink each other’s urine and sexually assaulted by suspected government agents (Moyo & Kingsley 2020). The government denied involvement and the women were accused of faking their abductions and were charged with making false accusations (Moyo & Kingsley 2020). This incident showed ZANU-PF’s denial of the violence it was imposing on the country’s citizens. As of 19

July 2020, a total of 105 000 citizens had been arrested for lockdown-related crimes, but only 101 375 of the citizens had been tested for the coronavirus (Kademaunga & Saki 2020). These statistics show that the regime had deployed at least equal, if not more, resources to arrest and intimidate citizens than to funding the public healthcare system and containing the spread of COVID-19. After President Emmerson Mnangagwa imposed something akin to a state of emergency under the guise of coronavirus lockdown measures, there was a mass deployment of soldiers (Ndoma 2020) to police townships and this helped the regime's autocratic consolidation. Civil society made efforts to organise despite this limiting environment, but these were met with intimidation and harassment of citizens who were opposed to the government's position (Kademaunga & Saki 2020). When the management of a disease intersects with the marginalisation of certain groups, this is an exercise of biopower. Biopower is, therefore, an important heuristic to reading the management of the pandemic in Zimbabwe.

The abductions, economic difficulties and how the government handled the COVID-19 pandemic gave rise to the 31st July movement in Zimbabwe. This movement consisted of activists from different counter-hegemonic organisations such as political parties, trade unions, social movements and civil society organisations. An immediate cause of protests by this movement was the revelation by journalists and activists that the then Zimbabwean health minister, Obadiah Moyo, had awarded a \$60 million contract to Drax International LLC, a company that sold COVID-19 supplies to the government at inflated prices without going to public tender. The movement intended to hold protests on 31 July 2020 to air grievances over President Emmerson Mnangagwa's handling of the COVID-19 crisis. Before 31 July 2020, the police had engaged in a serious crackdown on human rights defenders. Many opposition politicians, activists and union leaders went into hiding after being put on a police wanted list. On 31 July, the government deployed soldiers on the streets to prevent citizens from exercising their constitutional right to protest. The Zimbabwe Peace Project July (2020) recorded that 48 people had been unlawfully detained, 168 harassed, 15 abducted or tortured and 58 assaulted for organising or participating in the protest. This massive crackdown prompted Robson Chere, a union leader and one of those who went into hiding, to comment that while in President Robert Mugabe's era there had been serious gross human rights violations, the current "new dispensation" had gone several gears up (Moyo & Kingsley 2020). Within this context, the COVID-19 lockdown was used as a regulatory scapegoat to discipline and punish (Foucault 1979) those who protested against government corruption. This pre-emptive repression was meant to stop the momentum of the movement. It also served to stop the public from questioning the COVID-19 corruption issues. Thus, the government was protecting its corruption scandals from public debate



and possible protests by claiming that those involved were encouraging public violence and that those who gathered to protest were breaching lockdown rules.

Findings suggest that the Zimbabwean government used COVID-19 to turn the opposition and the 31st July 2020 protest into “illegal” entities and potential sites of infection. Here, biopolitical practice masqueraded as an act of regulation in the best interest of the citizens as ZANU-PF and government officials publicly discouraged citizens from taking part in the protests. For instance, Mary Mliswa-Chikoka, provincial affairs minister for Mashonaland West, said that the protests would be used by COVID-19 positive individuals as an opportunity to spread the virus. She added that protests had been banned the world over and assumed that people would not risk their lives by participating in demonstrations that had the risk of infected people joining them to spread the virus (TechZim 2020). Here, Mliswa-Chikoka used the discourse of “infection” to suggest that the protests were a potential hub for the spread of the virus. Indeed, her use of this infection discourse sought to represent the protesters (and the protests themselves) as infected. This is a classic example of what scholars have referred to elsewhere as the weaponisation of COVID-19 in Zimbabwe (Moyo and Phulu 2021). Following Golikov’s (2020) position on biopolitics, we note that biopolitics goes beyond the narrow definition of an individual as a producer, entrepreneur, teacher, student or employee, into a new category of “potential carrier” or “potential victim”, raising important sociological questions about trust, compatibility, collectivity, responsibility, rights, openness and closeness, etc. Once someone is categorised as infected or infectious, they can be stigmatised or subjected to regulation.

Therefore, the 31st July movement leaders were viewed as unpatriotic individuals who intended to expose citizens to the deadly virus and ZANU-PF officials were to be seen as loving and caring leaders who did not want citizens to be harmed. This is in keeping up with biopower’s tendency to be “‘pastoral’ in the sense that it seems positive and constructive; it even might feel like love and care” (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014: 119). This was the basis for subjecting the movement leaders to arrest and torture to instil a sense of fear that would stop dissenting voices from challenging and questioning corruption. As Lilja and Vinthagen (2014: 119) argue, “biopower is a gardening and cultivating form of power; one that uses surveillance but is able to only react when some behaviour gets out of hand”.

In international political rhetoric, Patrick Chinamasa blamed the West for the 31st July protests saying that “none of it is coming from Zimbabweans”. He added that the US ambassador, Brian A Nichols, should be expelled from Zimbabwe after the US Embassy criticised on Twitter the arrests of the July 31st movement activists. Chinamasa also threatened that if Nichols continued to fund disturbances, organise violence, and train fighters (all speculative) their leadership would not

hesitate to give him marching orders (Moyo and Kingsley 2020). His point shows up the ZANU-PF government's denialism of the existence of homegrown anger about human rights abuses, the poor healthcare system, waning living conditions and corruption in the country. His statement also rides on a pre-existing ZANU-PF nationalist discourse that seeks to blame any form of opposition on the West. As argued by Vanyoro (2020) in his research on the "denaturalisation" of protest in Zimbabwe, "it was former president Robert Mugabe's mantra that any form of "mayhem" in the country was fueled by the west and that MDC opposition members were but puppets of the west". Chinamasa here maintains the mantra. Therefore, during the pandemic, medical and political arguments overlapped in ZANU-PF's war of words with the West. This war of words conflated protest with pandemic.

To add insult to injury, Vice President Constantino Chiwenga echoed Chinamasa's sentiments when public service nurses and doctors went on strike during the pandemic in March 2020. They downed tools over the lack of proper personal protective equipment (PPE) from the Department of Health (Chima 2020; Makoni 2020; Truscott 2020). Chiwenga's press statement perpetuated the idea that the protesting nurses and doctors were funded by the West. In a move to try to reduce dissent in the medical trade, Chiwenga announced that "doctors will now be conscripted into the army soon after graduating" (Newsday 2020). Using discourse analysis, we argue that if social cognition about different social groups and social events is similar, it is being monitored by the same ideology.

The framing of most of the government's failures as an outcome of sabotage by the West is a constant ZANU-PF discourse of ignorance. Such ignorance of matters on the ground is not a lack of knowledge but, rather, it holds strategic value (Steyn 2012) for ZANU-PF's hegemonic project. "Such an ideology features the basic norms, values and other principles which are geared towards the realization of the interests and goals of the group, as well as towards the reproduction and legitimation of its power" (Van Dijk 1996: 118). This explains why most ZANU-PF officials' interpretation of these events evoke the idea that all opposition is Western-sponsored. Once the opposition is accepted as Western sponsored, it can easily be perceived by readers as a form of alien culture. From a biopolitical perspective, both the virus and protest actions are delegitimised by being constructed as foreign to Zimbabwean culture, biology, and politics. If one were to consider ZANU-PF's hegemonic mantra of "sovereignty" as a basic principle of its rule, it becomes apparent that biopower coexists with sovereignty (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014) and disciplinary power as a triangle of power. Therefore, during the pandemic in Zimbabwe we saw how medical and political ideologies are entangled in complex ways.

ZANU-PF national commissar and war veterans minister Victor Matemadanda averred that the 31st July protest was a Western project to accelerate the spread of Coronavirus in a country that had lower infections rates than Western territories:

We know that they (opposition) have been given more than US\$300 000 to sustain the planned demonstration and obviously they are being encouraged to break the law against COVID regulations. Zimbabweans should know that those who are funding these demonstrations are worried about why COVID has not killed people in Zimbabwe. And the information that we have got is that they are trying to get firing of tear gas and we are reliably informed that they also have some canisters containing COVID-19 active material they hope to spread COVID to the Zimbabweans. We are reliably informed that they have got a mechanism of spreading Coronavirus which has been brought in by those funding the protests. So maybe what is important is to tell the Zimbabweans that it is up to their safety this time around to see how an experiment can succeed. So, this is what they are trying to do, to spread coronavirus and then blame the government for not being proactive (New Zimbabwe 2020).

These claims were aimed at instilling fear in citizens so that they would not attend the protests. Victor Matemadanda's statement also blamed the opposition and the West for Zimbabwe's problems, making ZANU-PF appear to be the victim. He did this by suggesting that the opposition and the West were agents of "infection", and they had peculiar mechanisms to spread the virus during protests in Zimbabwe. This blends well with Lilja and Vinthagen's (2014) position that biopower masquerades like love and care, yet it aims to dominate. Infection, therefore, became a medical discourse that held currency in claiming both political glory and victimhood. It was also used to peddle conspiracy theories and fear among the population. It was yet another classic case of the weaponisation of COVID-19. This follows Agamben's observation that during the COVID-19 pandemic the fear of losing one's life served as the foundation of tyranny, "of the monstrous Leviathan with his unsheathed sword" (2020: online).

The government's position that the 31st July protests were a Western project led to the deployment of the police and soldiers across cities and the shutting down of major routes to prevent protesters from gathering. In justifying the banning of the 31st July demonstrations, the minister of home affairs Kazembe said that the protests were not about corruption or anything progressive but were an unconstitutional attempt to seize power (TechZim 2020). Denis Chengeto, a 55-year-old unemployed teacher, speaking ahead of the 31st July protests, said he was afraid to protest because nobody would hear his voice on the day and that

soldiers would not hesitate to shoot at anyone on the streets (Moyo and Kingsley 2020). Politicians wanted people to believe that they should fear catching the virus during the protests but Chengeto's main fear was the possibility of death by gunshot. This demonstrates the interchange of fears between citizens and politicians: while the politicians said they feared the transmission of the virus among protestors, some citizens feared that the government's wrath presented an even greater threat. Therefore, in this arena of COVID-19-driven biopolitics, the threat of infection and state violence slid fantastically across space and bodies.

In a move to discourage protesters during the build-up to the July demonstrations, the police arrested Jacob Ngarivume, an opposition leader and one of the 31st July movement organisers, as well as Hopewell Chin'ono, an investigative journalist who had exposed the Drax corruption scheme implicating former health minister Obadiah Moyo<sup>1</sup>. These arrests frightened many people who then decided not to attend the protests. In addition, other activists who tried to assemble on 31 July were detained, including Tsitsi Dangarembga<sup>2</sup>. Such arrests of high-profile individuals resulted in a low protest turnout on 31 July 2020. However, Tafadzwa Mugwadi, ZANU-PF's director of information, said Zimbabweans knew the realities of COVID-19 and that is why they refused to participate in the protests (TechZim 2020). Mugwadi was discursively "infecting" the protests by conflating them with COVID-19 transmission. Assuming the medical performance of "diagnosing", Mugwadi conveniently used the low turnout of protestors on 31 July as evidence that the protests were a site of potential danger and infection. Mugwadi was also intentionally disregarding the citizens' fear of being arrested after witnessing the arrests made before 31 July. As a result, instead of being seen as action to address the Zimbabwean government's stance towards the pandemic, the 31st July protest became a "discursive pandemic". In other words, the 31st July protests were a carnival for nuanced understandings of what to fear between COVID-19 infection and state violence. The government, instead of identifying a single intruder, regarded protestor bodies as intruders, along with the pandemic. Biopower, therefore, slid across polarised entities to meet different political needs and understandings of the nation.

After 31 July 2020, Zimbabweans continued to voice their displeasure on Twitter through the hashtag #ZimbabweanLivesMatter (TechZim 2020). As of 21 August 2020, the #ZimbabweanLivesMatter hashtag had 695 000 tweets,

- 
- 1 Obadiah Moyo was fired in July and he faced trial for buying coronavirus supplies at inflated prices through a contract with an obscure foreign firm without the approval of the relevant state authorities (Moyo and Kingsley 2020).
  - 2 Tsitsi Dangarembga is the author of the novel *This Mournable Body* that was shortlisted for a prestigious British literary award (Moyo and Kingsley 2020).

mostly from Zimbabweans speaking against corruption, bad governance, police brutality and the government's repression of journalists and activists. This online moment had topics such as #wecantbreathe, #prayforZimbabwe, #ZanuPFMustGo, #ZanuPFMustFall, #FreeZimbabweans, and #Blacklivesmatter trending alongside the main #ZimbabweanLivesMatter on social media networks (TechZim 2020). In response to the dissatisfaction that led to the 31st July and #ZimbabweanLivesMatter movements, President Emmerson Mnangagwa issued a statement acknowledging that the country was in a crisis. The President however blamed the crisis on his political opponents, sanctions, droughts and the COVID-19 pandemic (IOL 2020). Therefore, the COVID-19 pandemic did not only facilitate ZANU-PF's dominance over its perceived enemies, but it also provided the party with an opportunity to justify its failure to deliver basic services to the people. In a flash, COVID-19 was to blame for every one of ZANU-PF's political or economic failures.

In a television interview, the African National Congress (ANC) secretary-general Ace Magashule commented on the crackdown that followed the July 31st movement by saying that the ANC was engaging ZANU-PF over its widespread human rights abuses and repression. Ace Magashule is cited as saying:

We see what is happening in Zimbabwe. The President is interacting with the President of Zimbabwe, worried about what is taking place there. We have spoken to some people who are exiled, who have run away from Zimbabwe. That is why we are interacting party to party to raise some of the concerns they have raised about what is happening in Zimbabwe (IOL 2020).

Ace Magashule's sentiments attracted serious backlash from ZANU-PF spokesperson Patrick Chinamasa, who responded by saying, "we note that this is not the first time a senior ANC leader has sought to speak like Zimbabwe's prefect," citing previous remarks from South Africa's current minister of social development Lindiwe Zulu in 2013 (IOL 2020). Chinamasa added that Ace Magashule's words were completely out of order because there was no police brutality in Zimbabwe, but an application of lockdown rules in line with WHO recommendations (IOL 2020). Equally, Nick Mangwana, Zimbabwe's permanent secretary for information, said known activists, deluded persons and global actors were pushing these myths of brutality. Mangwana denied the existence of a crisis, an implosion, any abduction or war on citizens in Zimbabwe, reiterating that the country was merely enforcing COVID-19 lockdown regulations to safeguard people's lives. Mangwana also insisted that "the deliberate attempt to smear the image of the country is betrayed by the use of doctored images, old video clips and highly exaggerated claims on social media all intended to paint a picture of a burning Zimbabwe" (IOL 2020). One sees here the evidence of political

scapegoating. Pivotal to this scapegoating was the discrediting of other regional political leaders whose views were contrary to those of the ZANU-PF leaders. All this goes to show the extent to which ZANU-PF used the COVID-19 lockdown to silence multiple politically dissenting voices.

## A blessing in disguise: alternating views on the selective application of COVID-19 rules

Findings also suggest that there was selective application of COVID-19 regulations in favour of ZANU-PF politicians as COVID-19 became a carnival for the playing out of partisan and class-based political interests. When COVID-19 struck closer to home by killing prominent ZANU-PF leaders, such as former army generals Perence Shiri and Sibusiso Moyo (Anadolu Agency 2021), their funerals breached COVID-19 regulations. While these deaths symbolised the consequences of the failing health care system, they also demonstrated the gross inequalities in the country. Because ZANU-PF has consistently used the deaths of "liberation heroes" to maintain its hegemony through a "Chimurenga"<sup>3</sup>(revolutionary struggle) narrative (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2012; Masiya and Maringira 2017; Mpofu 2017), the deaths of these perceived "heroes" presented opportunities that could not be missed even in the midst of a pandemic. The government, therefore, allowed a high number of people to attend these funerals. While opposition leaders and activists were arrested for having similar gatherings in breach of lockdown rules, ZANU-PF leaders were not arrested for breaching those same rules. All this points to the idea that the application of the lockdown rules was not mainly aimed at preserving lives, but was used as a tool to either promote ZANU-PF nationalism or to silence dissenting voices. This politics by medical means is biopolitical.

Towards the end of 2020, Zimbabwe's information minister Monica Mutsvangwa publicly celebrated her 60th birthday with other senior government officials during a government-imposed lockdown to curb the spread of COVID-19. This attracted serious criticism from activists who saw the lockdown rules as only applicable to the general public. Anadolu Agency (2021) cited Claris Madhuku, a government critic and leader of the Platform for Youth Development, who said, "The same government leaders enact rules to fight Coronavirus, but the same leaders preside over the infringement of the same rules, holding parties during a lockdown. The government leaders thought they were immune to the respiratory disease." His statement served to remind ZANU-PF leaders that they

---

3 The Chimurenga narrative is premised on the two wars of resistance levelled against British imperialism during the colonial era, and they also culminated into a 3rd Chimurenga involving the fast-track land reform programme in 2000.

were also susceptible to COVID-19. Madhuku's statement also facilitated the "reverse weaponisation" of COVID-19, in which opposition and activists viewed the succumbing of politicians to COVID-19 as a blessing in disguise. Indeed, the selective application of COVID-19 regulations was to some extent a blessing for opposition members because it allowed for the infection of some ZANU-PF leaders, and consequently their death. The political opposition, therefore, engaged in a discursive resistance to the government's biopolitical model of governance. By stating that government officials were not immune to COVID-19, people like Claris Madhuku formed part of a resistance population that offered discursive resistance to biopower (Lilja and Vinthagen 2014). Whether such resistance actually resulted in any change is a topic beyond the scope of this article.

Following the COVID-19 deaths of high-profile government officials, Nick Mangwana went public on Twitter on 24 January 2021 claiming that "medical assassins" were out to kill government officials who were falling sick due to COVID-19. Mangwana alleged that political players were being eliminated in hospitals by political activists hiding behind medical qualifications. However, in less than 24 hours, under pressure from social media activists who rebuked him, Mangwana apologised and withdrew his allegations (Anadolu Agency 2021). In another case during the early days of the pandemic, Oppah Muchinguri, the Zimbabwean defence minister and head of Zimbabwe's cabinet task force on COVID-19, acted as if she had the power to select who got infected by the virus. Muchinguri politicised COVID-19 for point-scoring against the government's perceived enemies including the West, claiming that Coronavirus was brought by God to punish the then US President Donald Trump and other Western countries that imposed economic sanctions on Zimbabwe. Muchinguri was cited at a rally in Chinhoyi in 2020 saying, "Coronavirus is the work of God, punishing countries that imposed sanctions on us. They are now keeping indoors. Their economies are screaming just like they did to ours. Trump should know that he is not God." (Times Live 2020) It can be argued that the selective application of COVID-19 protocols among ZANU-PF members was based on the initial belief that they were not a target of COVID-19. In thinking COVID-19 was a divine weapon sent to destroy the West, Muchinguri also constructed it as a blessing in disguise. Against this backdrop, the pandemic was placed at the centre of political debates in Zimbabwe, with elite ZANU-PF members defining themselves as untouchable by the virus. At the same time, the political opposition sought to prove the contrary, and had also embraced the infection of ZANU-PF officials by the virus as a blessing. From a biopolitical perspective, COVID-19 was used by the ruling and opposition parties to ridicule the other as well as to humiliate or eliminate opposition. The ruling party however did so with more violence than the opposition.

The high number of deaths among ZANU–PF leaders was also attributed to the famous Christmas party thrown by Kudakwashe Regimond Tagwirei<sup>4</sup> in December 2020. Also known as “Queen Bee,” Tagwirei hosted a luxurious party attended by numerous elite ZANU–PF members; it was regarded by numerous critics as a super COVID–19 spreader event. This party was held at the same time as an end-of-year party held by Zimdancehall artists in Matapi Hostels in Mbare, Harare. The Mbare party resulted in the arrest of Dj Fantan (Arnold Kamudyariwa), Levels (Rodger Tafadzwa Kadzimwe), and Dammer (Simbarashe Chanachimwe) for contravening section 5(3) of the Statutory Instrument 77 2020 through participation in a gathering that violated COVID–19 regulations (PaZimbabwe 2021). The Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) was also believed to have swooped on 200 teenagers who were hosting another party in Westgate. The arrest of these ordinary citizens for hosting end-of-year parties brought criticism from some Zimbabwean citizens on social media, who felt that the government officials should have also been arrested as they had hosted similar gatherings in contravention of the lockdown rules. The fact that politically connected individuals like Monica Mutsvagwa and Kudakwashe Regimond Tagwirei got away with hosting parties while ordinary people like the above-mentioned organisers of the Mbare and Westgate end-of-year parties were arrested demonstrated the selective application of the lockdown rules. It also sent the message that the COVID–19 rules were meant for ordinary citizens and not the political and economic elite.

## COVID–19 and ZANU–PF nationalist rhetoric

We also observed how COVID–19 was used to forge a false sense of ZANU–PF nationalism among Zimbabweans through political comments captured in the media. Oppah Muchinguri accused China’s botched experiments of being responsible for the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic ravaging the world. VOA (2021) cited Muchinguri saying, “Isn’t it that there is another serious upsurge of COVID–19 cases in China? It’s them who had botched experiments. Now that’s killing us. They can’t reverse it anymore. Look at where the people we call friends have taken us to.” In a response aimed at avoiding a diplomatic fall-out with China, Zimbabwe’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs distanced itself from Muchinguri’s sinophobic remarks. Constance Chemwayi, spokesperson for the ministry of foreign affairs, said Muchinguri’s sentiments did not reflect the

---

4 Kudakwashe Regimond Tagwirei is a Zimbabwean commodities business person with extensive interests in the energy sector. In October 2018 it was reported by the *NewsDay* that Kudakwashe Tagwirei had bought luxury cars worth millions of dollars for Emmerson Mnangagwa, Constantino Chiwenga and Kembo Mohadi as well as for their wives and other top government officials ([https://www.pindula.co.zw/Kudakwashe\\_Tagwirei](https://www.pindula.co.zw/Kudakwashe_Tagwirei))



position of the government of Zimbabwe (VOA 2021). However, Muchinguri's stance demonstrated the potential of biological or medical statements to alter international political relations. Muchinguri also said, "We have no vaccine here [yet]. I am not going to take other nations' vaccines. Why should we not have ours? We are trying ours here (in Zimbabwe) with the Chinese. Maybe it will be successful." (VOA, 2021) Muchinguri's statements revealed her desire to produce a local vaccine of Zimbabwean origin. This is not a new mantra among ZANU-PF members. Since 2000, the call for indigenisation and local content has been used to promote the idea that Zimbabwe is self-sufficient and does not require external assistance. In Zimbabwe, the medical sector has been at the forefront of debates on nationalism, death, life, and belonging. These are all themes in line with biopolitics and how biopower intersects with nationalism in Zimbabwe.

In addition, the death of government ministers prompted Zimbabwe President Emmerson Mnangagwa to admit the veracity of the pandemic in his January 2021 televised address to the nation. He said: "The pandemic has been indiscriminate; there are no spectators, adjudicators, no holier than thou, no supermen or superwomen, we are all exposed" (Anadolu Agency 2021). His statement ironically exposed the ruling party's initial assumption that COVID-19 was selective in who it infected, and can be taken as an admission of a shift from the initial belief that ZANU-PF leaders cannot be infected. President Mnangagwa's phrase that "we are all exposed" in his statement leaves a lot to be desired. For example, one may ask who is "we" here? We argue that "we" is a word that creates an imagined sense of solidarity. Therefore, it is a word that seeks to organise people as belonging to one group. Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) posit that biopower is seen in the modern state that in some sense governs individuals and organises them as members of a population in the same way as a shepherd cares for his flock. By creating an illusion of uniformity, using the collective "we", the president forgot to mention the disparate social and economic conditions that Zimbabweans across the board experience. If anything, the president was not as exposed to infection as a person who stays in Mbare, a high-density residential area in Harare. In trying to forge a sense of false solidarity, the president sought to mobilise an imagined sense of nationalism (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009), which is at the centre of ZANU-PF's populist mantras. Indeed such "discourses [...] function to persuasively help construct new and confirm already present ideologies" (Van Dijk 1995: 22).

Resisting this address, Elvis Mugari, a MDC-A activist, criticised the president's national address as clear testimony that he had no plan to beat COVID-19. Obey Sithole, the MDC-A Youth Assembly national chairperson, also criticised the president when he pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic needed not only press statements and promises but leadership and action (Anadolu Agency 2021). Sithole's suspicion and rebuttal of "promises" was a political position meant to

denounce any reception of the fantasy of “oneness” or nationalism. It was a political statement originating from biopolitical debates - of refusing to allow a political leader to use a medical crisis to garner political support.

## COVID-19 and media censorship

COVID-19 also presented ZANU-PF with an opportunity to enforce media censorship. This is consistent with evidence from previous research (Dube 2020; Mutsaka 2020). In March 2020, weeks after the first COVID-19 infection was recorded in Zimbabwe, the government passed a new law, Statutory Instrument 83 of 2020, that could see people spending up to 20 years in prison for spreading “fake news” about the coronavirus (Toyana 2020). The harsh law was part of the Zimbabwean state’s response to public criticism of its pandemic measures and was the latest iteration of the government’s long-standing attempts to limit media freedom and public opposition, especially information disseminated through digital platforms (Toyana 2020). The enactment of a law to regulate news on public matters shows the legalisation of repression, criminalisation of dissent, and a violation of the public’s right to access information in the name of pandemic management. This repression of freedom of expression is not new to Zimbabwe as it has existed before with the backing of Acts like the 2002 Public Order and Security Act and the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (Mutekwe 2019; LeBas 2006; Howard-Hassmann 2010; Moyo 2011). Like most nationalist party-led governments in Southern Africa that have a sense of entitlement over media narratives, the Zimbabwean government intended to safeguard its narrative on its pandemic response to regulate public opinion of ZANU-PF (in)efficacy.

It is, therefore, no surprise that in a Human Rights Watch (HRW) 2020 report chronicling more than 20 African governments using the COVID-19 pandemic to clamp down on freedom of the media, the Zimbabwean government was named as one of the worst offenders. The report highlighted that some officials in Zimbabwe were cracking down on journalists, political opponents, health workers, and others who criticised the government’s response to the COVID-19 crisis. Gerry Simpson, an associate director for crisis and conflict division at HRW, reported that in 2020 they documented an incident in which a journalist was beaten up at a checkpoint near a lockdown area. HRW also documented how a journalist was detained for nine weeks for his COVID-19 reporting between July and November 2020, noting that Zimbabwe introduced the Public Health Order Act (PHOA) in March 2020, which threatened up to 20 years in prison for fake news on public health matters (VOA 2021). Media Alliance Zimbabwe chairperson Patience Zirima said 28 journalists were arrested in 2020 (Moyo and Kingsley (2020). All this

illuminates how COVID-19 provided the ruling party with a platform to enforce a form of biopolitical-oriented dictatorship. Acts like the PHOA were meant to scare people away from publishing news while at the same time serving to justify the arrest, detention and possible sentencing of innocent journalists and citizens who might have shared information that exposed the government's handling of COVID-19. In such moments, the government's response to COVID-19 became more than a health matter. Instead, it became a political matter.

### **The COVID-19 vaccine roll out as a site of ZANU-PF patronage and elitism**

Lastly, the COVID-19 vaccine roll out was a site for ZANU-PF patronage and elitism, with ZANU-PF politicians given priority access to the vaccine. On 8 February 2021 the Zimbabwe government announced that the COVID-19 vaccine would be made available to government ministers, legislators, health workers, and other top government officials first (News24 2021). This decision, a cause for much concern, was made by the head of monitoring and evaluation in the Ministry of Health, Robert Mudyiradima, while appearing before the parliamentary portfolio on health (New Zimbabwe 2021). Mudyiradima explained that the vaccines might not be enough and there would be a prioritised group that included frontline workers, ministers, MPs, and members of the security sector. These statements attracted the ire of human rights, civic society, and political activists. The Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition (CiZC) said the government official's announcement was "shocking" considering ordinary Zimbabweans were the most affected by the pandemic (New Zimbabwe 2021). This initial roll out plan demonstrated the politicisation of lives that matter more during a pandemic. This forms part of a larger existing biopolitical body of knowledge on mournable lives, lives worth saving and zones on (non)being (de Sousa Santos 2007, 2017; Grosfoguel, Oso and Christou 2015).

CiZC spokesperson Marvellous Kumalo noted that the move to sideline ordinary Zimbabweans, who could not access medical care considering the economic rot in the country, amounted to a silent genocide. He added that the COVID-19 pandemic, which had claimed more than 1 000 lives (at the time of writing), had largely affected ordinary Zimbabweans, most of whom live far below the poverty datum line and cannot afford medical care. For him, "it is a known fact that over the years, Zimbabwe's health sector has been in the intensive care unit and ordinary Zimbabweans have had to bear the brunt of a failed health care system" (New Zimbabwe 2021). In the same vein, MDC-A treasurer David Coltart said he was not surprised by the decision taken by the government. Coltart said that "cabinet ministers will get the COVID-19 vaccine first in Zimbabwe. No

mention of the elderly or vulnerable. No mention of teachers so that children can get back to school. If true it doesn't surprise me. ZANU-PF is only interested in self-preservation." (New Zimbabwe 2021). These fears and suspicions rode on the existing culture of patronage politics in ZANU-PF in which party members receive preference as a part of buying and rewarding their loyalty. Therefore, critics feared that the vaccine would present ZANU-PF with an opportunity to punish its opponents by denying them access to the vaccine while favouring its loyal members. This shows how biopower was retained and administered by ZANU-PF during the pandemic.

## Concluding remarks

In this article, we have demonstrated how the ZANU-PF government used the COVID-19 lockdown to pursue politics by other means. This was done through enacting laws like PHOA that criminalised journalism and the sharing of fake news on COVID-19, leading to the intimidation and arrest of journalists such as Hopewell Chinóno. In pursuing politics and denying responsibility for a shrinking economy, COVID-19 served as a timely scapegoat for the Zimbabwean president and ZANU-PF on which to blame their failures. The usual rhetoric of blaming the West for failures also reared its ugly head with some ZANU-PF officials using COVID-19 as an excuse to peddle conspiracy theories in an attempt to forge nationalism. The article also showed the interaction of biopower with both disciplinary and sovereign power. This power trinity held together ZANU-PF despotism during the pandemic, therefore, COVID-19 was simply an opportunity for ZANU-PF to strengthen its biopolitical power axe. COVID-19 thus became a carnival for the playing out of ZANU-PF scapegoating.

The Zimbabwean case is a good example of the use of biopower for the attainment of political goals. There are wider biopolitical engagements that were explored in this article. One of these involves the discursive resistance to biopolitical narratives by some activists and opposition parties. This example confirms Foucault's argument that power is not fixed on to one body or space. Rather, power is fluid, and anybody can retain it through different means. The last biopolitical engagement covered in this article involves the issue of bare life, lives worth saving and zones of (non)being during the Zimbabwean pandemic. ZANU-PF's priorities during the vaccine roll out demonstrated the fact that biopower can decide which lives are worth saving. Since little work has been carried out in the field of COVID-19 and biopolitics in Zimbabwe, this article recommends further enquiry into biopolitics and COVID-19 in Zimbabwe.

## Bibliography

- AFRO BAROMETER. 2020. *Zimbabweans trust police and military, but not enough to criticize them*. Available at: <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad375-zimbabweans-trust-police-and-military-not-enough-criticize-them> [accessed on 22 November 2021].
- ANADULO AFRICA. 2021. *Africa: COVID-19 targets politicians in droves*. Available at: <https://www.aa.com.tr/en/africa/africa-covid-19-targets-politicians-in-droves/2124194> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- AGAMBEN G. 2020. Riflessioni sulla peste. *Quodlibet* 27(03).
- BALIBAR E. 2007. Is there a “neo-racism”? In: Das Gupta, T (ed). *Race and racialization: essential readings*. Toronto: Canadian Scholars.
- DUBE B. 2020. COVID-19 and #ZimbabweLivesMatter: rethinking the need for social justice and respect for human rights in Zimbabwe. *Gender & Behaviour* 18(4): 16827-16838.
- VAN DEN BERGE L. 2020. Biopolitics and the coronavirus: Foucault, Agamben, Žižek. *Netherlands Journal of Legal Philosophy* [Preprint] (1). <https://doi.org/10.5553/NJLP.000097>
- BOND P. 2002. Zimbabwe, South Africa, and the power politics of bourgeois democracy. *Monthly Review* 54(1): 32. [https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-054-01-2002-05\\_3](https://doi.org/10.14452/MR-054-01-2002-05_3)
- CAMPBELL S, GREENWOOD M AND PRIOR S. 2020. Purposive sampling: complex or simple? Research case examples. *Journal of Research in Nursing* (25(8): 652-661. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1744987120927206>
- CENTER FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC). 2021. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) – symptoms. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/symptoms-testing/symptoms.html> [accessed on 22 November 2021].
- CHIMA SC. 2020. Doctor and healthcare workers strike: are they ethical or morally justifiable: another view. *Current Opinion in Anesthesiology* 33(2): 203-210. <https://doi.org/10.1097/ACO.0000000000000831>
- CONSORTIUM FOR STREET CHILDREN. 2020. COVID-19: Public spaces and how orders to self-isolate affect street children. Available at: <https://www.streetchildren.org/news-and-updates/covid-19-and-street-connected-childrens-rights/> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- CRAIG D. 2020. Pandemic and its metaphors: Sontag revisited in the COVID-19 era. *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23(6): 1025-1032. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549420938403>
- DANDARA C, DZOBO K AND CHIRIKURE S. 2021. COVID-19 pandemic and Africa: from the situation in Zimbabwe to a case for precision herbal medicine. *OMICS*:

- A Journal of Integrative Biology* 25(4): 209-212. <https://doi.org/10.1089/omi.2020.0099>
- DE SOUSA SANTOS B. 2007. Beyond abyssal thinking: From global lines to ecologies of knowledges. *Review* (Fernand Braudel Center) 30(1): 45-89.
- DE SOUSA SANTOS B. 2017. The resilience of abyssal exclusions in our societies: toward a post-abysal law. *Tilburg Law Review* 22(1-2): 237-258. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22112596-02201011>
- DEMETRI F. 2020. Biopolitics and coronavirus, or don't forget Foucault. *Naked Punch* 21: 1-4.
- DENISENKO V AND TRIKOZ E. 2020. Biopolitics and legal issues of emergency situations in the context of coronavirus pandemic. *E3S Web of Conferences, EDP Sciences* 175(14013): 1-7. <https://doi.org/10.1051/e3sconf/202017514013>
- DEY S. 2020. "Corona-logy": a re-configuration of racial dynamics in contemporary India. *Mizoram University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* 6(2): 46-58.
- DZINAMARIRA T, NACHIPO B, PHIRI B AND MUSUKA G. 2021. COVID-19 vaccine roll-out in South Africa and Zimbabwe: urgent need to address community preparedness, fears and hesitancy. *Vaccines*, 9(3): 250. <https://doi.org/10.3390/vaccines9030250>
- DZOBO M, CHITUNGO I AND DZINAMARIRA T. 2020. COVID-19: a perspective for lifting lockdown in Zimbabwe. *The Pan African Medical Journal* 35 (Suppl 2): 1-3. <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.2020.35.2.23059>
- EL MAAROUF MD, BELGHAZI T AND EL MAAROUF F. 2021. COVID-19: a critical ontology of the present. *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 53(1): 71-89. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1757426>
- FOUCAULT M. 1980. *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Transl Colin Gordon. New York: Vintage.
- FOUCAULT M. 1984. *Right of death and power over life. The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction*. Transl Robert Hurley. In: Rabinow P (ed). *The Foucault reader*. New York: Pantheon.
- FOUCAULT M. 1990. *The history of sexuality: an introduction*. Transl Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.
- FOUCAULT M. 1979. *Discipline and punish*. Transl Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage
- GOLIKOV A. 2020. The (re-) birth of biopolitics. Autonomy, biopower, coronavirus, discourse, emergency, fear, globalization, health, I... *Ukrainian society* 2(73): 9-28. <https://doi.org/10.15407/socium2020.02.009>
- GROSFOGUEL R, OSO L AND CHRISTOU A. 2015. "Racism", intersectionality and migration studies: framing some theoretical reflections. *Identities* 22(6): 635-652. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2014.950974>

- GUMPERT M. 2012. *The end of meaning: studies in catastrophe*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- HOWARD-HASSMANN RE. 2010. Mugabe's Zimbabwe, 2000–2009: massive human rights violations and the failure to protect. *Human Rights Quarterly* 32: 898. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hrq.2010.0030>
- IOL. 2020. Emmerson Mnangagwa accuses 'rogue' citizens of destabilising Zimbabwe. *IOL*. 4 August. Available at: <https://www.iol.co.za/news/africa/emmerson-mnangagwa-accuses-rogue-citizens-of-destabilising-zimbabwe-32d40438-d88d-4648-b20f-94f0504c3053> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- JENKINS H. 2004. The cultural logic of media convergence. *International Journal of Cultural Studies* 7(1): 33–43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367877904040603>
- LEBAS A. 2006. Polarization as craft: party formation and state violence in Zimbabwe. *Comparative Politics* 38(4): 419–438. <https://doi.org/10.2307/20434010>
- LILJA M AND VINTHAGEN S. 2014. Sovereign power, disciplinary power and biopower: resisting what power with what resistance? *Journal of Political Power* 7(1): 107–126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2158379X.2014.889403>
- MAKONI M. 2020. COVID-19 worsens Zimbabwe's health crisis. *The Lancet* 396 (10249): 457. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(20\)31751-7](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)31751-7)
- MAKURUMIDZE R. 2020. Coronavirus-19 disease (COVID-19): a case series of early suspected cases reported and the implications towards the response to the pandemic in Zimbabwe. *Journal of Microbiology, Immunology and Infection* 53(3): 493–498. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jmii.2020.04.002>
- MASIYA T AND MARINGIRA G. 2017. The use of heroism in the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (Zanu–PF) intra-party factional dynamics. *Strategic review for Southern Africa* 39(92): 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.35293/srsa.v39i2.278>
- MATSUNGO TM AND CHOPERA P. 2020. Effect of the COVID-19-induced lockdown on nutrition, health and lifestyle patterns among adults in Zimbabwe. *BMJ Nutrition, Prevention & Health* 3(2): 205. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjnph-2020-000124>
- MATTHEWMAN S AND HUPPATZ K. 2020. A sociology of COVID-19. *Journal of Sociology* 56(4): 675–683. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1440783320939416>
- MHIRIPIRI NA AND MIDZI R. 2020. Fighting for survival: persons with disabilities' activism for the mediatisation of COVID-19 information. *Media International Australia* 178(1): 151–167. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1329878X20967712>
- MHLANGA D AND NDHLOVU E. 2020. Socio-economic implications of the COVID-19 pandemic on smallholder livelihoods in Zimbabwe. Preprints. 2020040219. <https://doi.org/10.20944/preprints202004.0219.v1>

- MOYO G AND PHULU KI. 2021. The weaponisation of the coronavirus crisis in Zimbabwe: legal and extra-legal instruments. *iBusiness* 13(01): 48-66. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ib.2021.131004>
- MOYO J AND KINGSLEY P. 2020. Zimbabwe locks down capital, thwarting planned protests. *The New York Times*. 31 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/31/world/africa/zimbabwe-coronavirus-protest.html> [accessed on 19 February 2021]. <https://doi.org/10.47348/AJCL/2020/a2>
- MOYO L. 2011. Blogging down a dictatorship: human rights, citizen journalists and the right to communicate in Zimbabwe. *Journalism* 12(6): 745-760. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884911405469>
- MPOFU S. 2017. Making heroes, (un)making the nation? ZANU-PF's imaginations of the Heroes' Acre, heroes and construction of identity in Zimbabwe from 2000 to 2015. *African Identities* 15(1): 62-78. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14725843.2016.1175920>
- MUKWENHAS, DZINAMARIRA T, MUGURUNGI O AND MUSUKA G. 2020. Maintaining robust HIV and tuberculosis services in the COVID-19 era: a public health dilemma in Zimbabwe. *International Journal of Infectious Diseases* 100: 394-395. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijid.2020.09.1425>
- MUREWANHEMA G AND MAKURUMIDZE R. 2020. Essential health services delivery in Zimbabwe during the COVID-19 pandemic: perspectives and recommendations. *The Pan African Medical Journal* 35 (Suppl 2): 1-6. <https://doi.org/10.11604/pamj.suppl.2020.35.2.25367>
- MUTEKWE P. 2019. Resistance and repression in Zimbabwe: a case study of Zimplats mine workers. *Review of African Political Economy* 46(160): 246-260. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056244.2018.1557041>
- MUTSAKA F. 2020. Zimbabwe's health minister fired over COVID-19 graft scandal. *Washington Post*. 7 July. Available at: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/zimbabwes-health-minister-fired-over-covid-19-graft-scandal/2020/07/07/9ff98c1c-c07f-11ea-8908-68a2b9eae9e0\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/africa/zimbabwes-health-minister-fired-over-covid-19-graft-scandal/2020/07/07/9ff98c1c-c07f-11ea-8908-68a2b9eae9e0_story.html) [accessed on 22 November 2020].
- NCUBE C. 2013. The 2013 elections in Zimbabwe: end of an era for human rights discourse? *Africa Spectrum* 48(3): 99-110. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000203971304800305>
- NDLOVU-GATSHENI S.J. 2009. Do 'Zimbabweans' exist?: Trajectories of nationalism, national identity formation and crisis in a postcolonial state. *Africa in development, Volume 3*. Oxford: Peter Lang. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-0353-0253-0>
- NDLOVU-GATSHENI S.J. 2012. Rethinking Chimurenga and Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: a critique of partisan national history. *African Studies Review* 55(3): 1-26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0002020600007186>



- NDLOVU-GATSHENI SJ. 2020. Geopolitics of power and knowledge in the COVID-19 pandemic: decolonial reflections on a global crisis. *Journal of Developing Societies* 36(4): 366-389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0169796X20963252>
- NEWS24. 2020. *Zimbabwe pledges to start COVID-19 vaccination campaign next week*. News24. 13 February. Available at: <https://www.news24.com/news24/africa/news/zimbabwe-pledges-to-start-covid-19-vaccination-campaign-next-week-20210213> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- NEWSDAY. 2020. Army conscripts junior doctors. *NewsDay Zimbabwe*. 2 October. Available at: <https://www.newsday.co.zw/2020/10/army-conscript-junior-doctors/> [accessed on 14 February 2021].
- NEWZIMBABWE.COM. 2020. Matemadanda: July 31 anti-govt protest sponsored by West to spread COVID-19. *NewZimbabwe*. 9 July 2020. Available at: <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/matemadanda-july-31-anti-govt-protest-sponsored-by-west-to-spread-covid-19/> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- NEWZIMBABWE.COM. 2021. Govt conducting trials on ivermectin for COVID-19 treatment. *NewZimbabwe*. 26 January. Available at: <https://www.newzimbabwe.com/govt-conducting-trials-on-ivermectin-for-covid-19-treatment/> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- PETERS MA. 2020. Žižek on China and COVID-19: Wuhan, authoritarian capitalism, and empathetic socialism in NZ. *Educational Philosophy and Theory*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2020.1801122>
- PAZIMBABWE. 2021. JUST IN: Fantan, Levels, Dammar out on bail. *PaZimbabwe News*. 21 January 2021. Available at: <https://www.pazimbabwe.com/entertainment-70464-just-in-fantan-levels-dammar-out-on-bail.html> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- RELIEFWEB. 2020. *ZPP monthly monitoring report*. Available at: <https://reliefweb.int/report/zimbabwe/zpp-monthly-monitoring-report-july-2020> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- SAKI MK AND OTTO S. 2020. Reclaiming civil society legitimacy in Zimbabwe - coronavirus as a catalyst for global civil society. 7 December. *Carnegie Europe*. Available at: <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2020/12/07/reclaiming-civil-society-legitimacy-in-zimbabwe-pub-83148> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- STEYN M. 2012. The ignorance contract: recollections of apartheid childhoods and the construction of epistemologies of ignorance. *Identities* 19(1): 8-25. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2012.672840>
- SYLVIA IVJ. 2020. The biopolitics of social distancing. *Social Media + Society* 6(3): 1-4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305120947661>
- TECHZIM. 2020. #ZimbabweanLivesMatter trends on Twitter as Zimbabweans take their protest to social media. *TechZim*. 3 August. Available at: <https://www.techzim.co.zw/2020/08/>

- zimbabweanlivesmatter-trends-on-twitter-as-zimbabweans-take-their-protest-to-social-media/ [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- TIMESLIVE. 2020. *Zim minister's bizarre coronavirus claim: 'It's to punish the West for sanctions'*. *TimesLive*. 16 March. Available at: <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/africa/2020-03-16-zim-ministers-bizarre-coronavirus-claim-its-to-punish-the-west-for-sanctions/> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- TOYANA M. 2020. Hashtags and spectacles: Zimbabwe's feminist activists find online avenues to tackle government's COVID-19 clampdown. 18 December. *Africa Portal*. African Centre for the Study of the United States (ACSUS). Available at: <https://www.africaportal.org/publications/hashtags-and-spectacles-zimbabwes-feminist-activists-find-online-avenues-tackle-governments-covid-19-clampdown/> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- TRUSCOTT R. 2020. COVID-19: health worker strikes, limited testing, and clinic closures hamper Zimbabwe's response. *BMJ* 370: 3267. <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m3267>
- VAN DIJK TA. 1995. Discourse analysis as ideology analysis. *Language and peace* 10(47): 142.
- VAN DIJK TA. 1996. Editorial: discourse, cognition and society. *Discourse and Society: International Journal for the Study of Discourse and Communication in their Social, Political and Cultural Contexts* 7(1): 5-6. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926596007001001>
- VANYORO KP. 2020. The construction of "normative Zimbabweanness" through demonisation of rage, anger and emotion in select press coverage of the #ZimShutDown protests. *Anthropology Southern Africa* 43(3): 197-210. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23323256.2020.1808028>
- VOICE OF AMERICA. 2021. Zimbabwe among African countries using COVID-19 to crack down on journalists, report finds. Voice of America. *Voice of America*. 12 February. Available at: <https://www.voanews.com/africa/zimbabwe-among-african-countries-using-covid-19-crack-down-journalists-report-finds> [accessed on 19 February 2021].
- Žižek S. 2020. *Pandemic!: COVID-19 shakes the world*. New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv16t6n4q>