SOUTHERN AFRICA

OLD TREACHERIES AND NEW DECEITS

STEPHEN CHAN

SOUTHERN AFRICA

OLD TREACHERIES AND NEW DECEITS

STEPHEN CHAN

YALE UNIVERSITY PRESS
NEW HAVEN AND LONDON

For information about this and other Yale University Press publications, please contact:
U.S. Office: sales.press@yale.edu www.yalebooks.com
Europe Office: sales @yaleup.co.uk www.yalebooks.co.uk

Set in Adobe Caslon Pro by IDSUK (DataConnection) Ltd
Printed in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Chan, Stephen, 1949
Southern Africa: old treacheries and new deceits/Stephen Chan.
p.cm.
ISBN 978–0–300–15405–4 (cl:alk. paper)
1. Africa, Southern—Politics and government—1994–2. South Africa—Politics and government—1989–1994. 3. South Africa—Politics and government—1994–4. Zimbabwe—Politics and government—1980–5. Zambia—Politics and government—1991–6. Mandela, Nelson, 1918–7. Mugabe, Robert Gabriel, 1924–8. Mbeki, Thabo. 9. Zuma, Jacob. I. Title
DT1182.C43 2011
968.0009'0511—dc22

2010045379

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

For Ali, Steve, Angelo and Justin – who became refugees from it all; for Ranka who was the older sister to them all; and for Sydney – who tried to put it all back together.

ACRONYMS

ANC	African National Congress (South Africa)
BBBEE	Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment
BEE	Black Economic Empowerment
COPE	Congress of the People (South Africa)
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DA	Democratic Alliance (South Africa)
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
FRELIMO	Frente de Liberacao de Mocambique
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution Programme
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change (Zimbabwe)
MPLA	Movimento Popular de Liberacao de Angola
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly (Zimbabwe)
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress (South Africa)
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RENAMO	Resistencia Nacional Mocambicana (Mozambique)
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SADCC	Southern African Development Coordination Conference
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organization
UNITA	Unicao Nacional para a Independencia Total de Angola
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front

INTRODUCTION

Johannesburg 2008

'Sold into slavery, but he rose to become the right-hand man of Pharaoh.' Joseph was thinking about his biblical namesake. The great Pyramids must have seemed like the towers of Johannesburg to him. He trudged among the towers as he had done every day for weeks, pleading for work, not rising to become the right-hand man of anyone. He would have to lower his sights and try in the suburbs and then, like everyone said he would, scavenge a job in the outlying townships. He had his heart set on not having to steal, but he had a family to support back in Zimbabwe and he knew that, if push came to shove, he could always find odd jobs as an enforcer, a debt collector and muscular repayer of debts. A deserter from the Zimbabwean military, he knew a thing or two about how to repay those who forgot their obligations.

If it was as an enforcer then at least he wouldn't have to work in the townships long minibus rides away. The collection industry was hardest at work in the inner city suburbs, where tens of thousands of people like

Joseph looked for jobs and borrowed funds to finance their search. You move in groups of three, kick down a door, rough the guy up, issue last warnings, and take whatever's of value in the grubby room. It wasn't exactly a noble profession, thought Joseph, but he wouldn't have to move from the edge of Hillbrow – where thousands of Zimbabweans had 'settled', mostly without papers, and had somehow established both a community of their own and stilted relations with the locals. The Mozambicans nearby were not always so successful, and were more conspicuous when they chatted to one another in Portuguese.

Joseph had deserted his military unit in the southern provinces of Democratic Republic of Congo. He had fought in the battles for Kinshasa as the new millennium began, when the Zimbabweans helped Laurent Kabila consolidate his power as Congolese President – providing the throne for him that even the legendary Che Guevara, in his ill-fated African adventure of 1963, could not. Before Kabila had been assassinated he had effectively ceded control of much of his country's southern mineral wealth to the Zimbabweans. Joseph had stood guard as the senior Generals and henchmen of Robert Mugabe helped themselves to the spoils. It was designed to reinforce their loyalty to Mugabe. Disgusted, not willing to risk his life for such people, Joseph deserted and now watched the daily newspapers in Johannesburg for signs that Thabo Mbeki might persuade Mugabe to give up at least some of his power. All the while Mugabe resisted, and his Generals backed him up – men who, on television, appeared even more self-satisfied than when Joseph had seen them, behaving furtively before they became self-confident in their plundering of southern Congo. 'I would not want to be the right-hand man of such a Pharaoh,' thought Joseph. But, as he watched the limousines cruise by in Johannesburg, read in the newspapers about corruption charges brought against Jacob Zuma, he realised how merciless even South African politics could be and thought, in a no-smoke-without-fire sort of way, that corruption was laying down its foundations amidst the tall buildings. 'We can teach them a thing or two about that,' Joseph muttered as he knocked on another office door.

This was a one-man show. It was a fellow Zimbabwean and, yes, he had a job for Joseph – a choice of two jobs, in fact. He could be part of a small Zimbabwean labour gang that provided hod-carrying on the cheap for one of the fly-by-night South African construction companies that were throwing up housing units, quickly and badly, so that the ANC could honour its election pledges to poor communities. The company had been swiftly formed to take advantage of the empowerment regulations that privileged black businesses, and its bosses knew very little about the building trade. They knew enough to pay very low rates for illegal Zimbabwean labour. The other job was better, his countryman said, eyeing Joseph's physique. It was to provide protection for these same labour gangs. 'The local workmen have been undercut by us,' he said, 'and there are some areas where we are helping to build houses which have the rumblings of a lot of anger building up.'

Joseph got a uniform with green and red epaulettes (he had to buy his own boots), a PR24 – the standard issue police swing baton – a construction-site helmet, and a car ride to his immediate assignment. He couldn't believe his luck, but he also knew that what his new boss had told him was true. Away from the mix of Hillbrow, anti-Zimbabwean sentiments had been increasing for some time and Joseph had to run the risk of its exploding in his own face. Even the South African workers performing the more skilled tasks would look down critically upon their Zimbabwean labourers. And he knew that the security guard had to be him, had to be a Zimbabwean. A South African would think twice in the current climate before standing between a Zimbabwean labour gang and a crowd of angry unemployed fellow citizens. The Egyptians, thought Joseph, were going to turn upon the Israelites.

I begin with that story from 2008. It is reminiscent of an earlier story from 1941 when the young Nelson Mandela, fleeing the restraints of the countryside and a small university, arrived in Johannesburg – anxious for the bright lights and opportunities, but penniless and proud – and

had to take a first job as a security guard, being thankful for the opportunity. The growing intimacy and integration of the Southern African region has meant that what was once a saga in one country is now a repeated saga in a connected network of countries. And, just as South Africa then was a country of vast inequalities, there are today vast differences in wealth and opportunity among the different parts of Southern Africa. There have also been vast increases in complexity since the days of the young Mandela. It is not simply a case of white despots in Pretoria having a modern counterpart in black despots in Harare. Economies, politics and expectations have grown larger and more sophisticated – and so have the way they partake in the world outside Southern Africa. This has posed certain problems in how to write this book. In particular: how to write an intelligent book for the non-specialist reader who has a newspaper and television knowledge of Southern Africa built around a small number of political leaders – whose personalities and motivations are often trivialised or turned into caricatures of good and evil?

I have concentrated precisely on a small number of countries from the region, and on a small number of their political personalities, but have tried to give them their full range of complexities and contradictions. I wanted to suggest by this that the entire region and the way its parts interact is full of complexities and contradictions. So that Nelson Mandela is not a saint, but a skiving, jazz-freak student radical, lately given to wearing stupid shirts; so that Thabo Mbeki did not fail by simple lack of effort in his 'quiet diplomacy' with Robert Mugabe, but was driven by complex and highly learned patterns of reasoning; so that Robert Mugabe himself did not become a tyrant because of a love of tyranny, but lost himself in the contradictions of his convictions, until his stubbornness became malignant and finally malevolent; so that Jacob Zuma did not gain the leadership of the ANC by sheer vulgar populism, but by harnessing an unlikely alliance of brilliant political and business minds who helped him for the sake of their own revenge. The ambition of this book is to endow what the Western media has turned into black caricatures with the same sort of life we

would automatically assume was inherent in Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Nick Clegg, George Bush, Barack Obama and Nicolas Sarkozy.

It is also to repay some debt to a region that helped form me. Some of my own experiences weave in and out of this book. The intention was to help further humanise the region – for it is clear I made many mistakes as a young man high on diplomatic and political adventures – but I hope I do not intrude too much on the personalities and themes of the book, particularly as they become more complex in their own right as the book develops.

Having said that, I set out to tell a story: one that links many stories, and some of these have had full-length books written about them. The industry of Southern African biography is huge, and I have contributed to it myself. But the aim here is not to recount the life of Thabo Mbeki as comprehensively as Mark Gevisser[1] or as critically as William Gumede,[2] or to give a blow by blow account of the formation of Robert Mugabe.[3] The aim is to show how, in a linked and intimate region, lives and political decisions weave in and out of one another. Agendas clash, sometimes they dovetail, and sometimes they dovetail in unexpected and perverse ways.

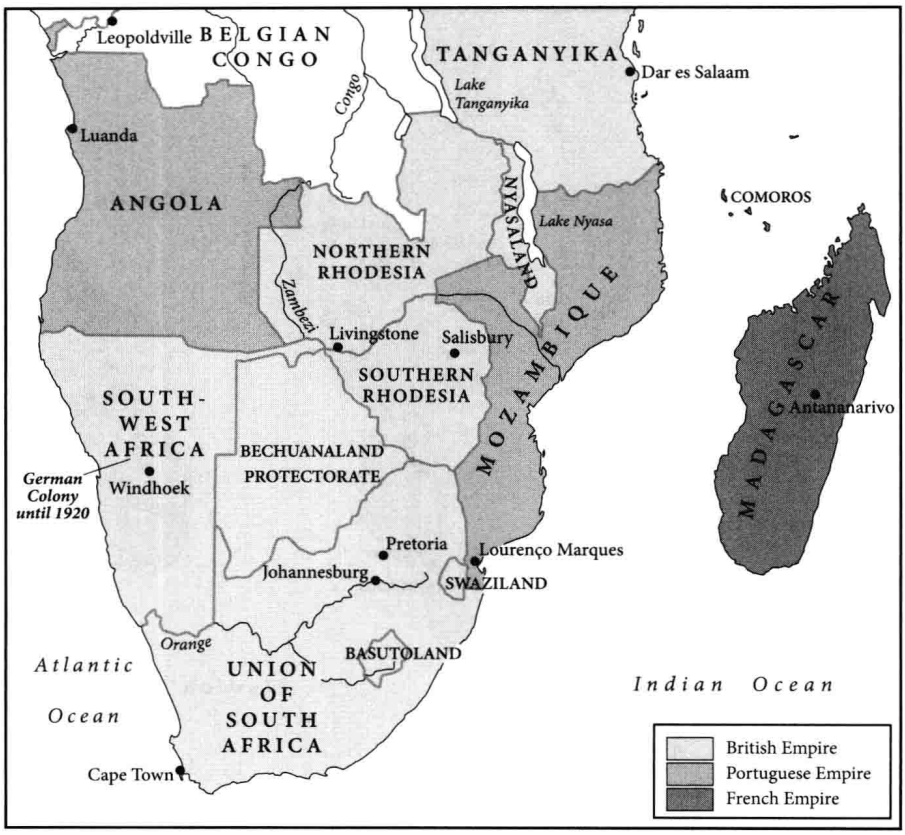
That explains the writing methodology I have chosen for this book. I have tried to write it as a weaving tapestry, overlapping many strands and threads in a colourful though, hopefully, still intellectually honest fashion.

It will be clear in my accounts of South African mediation in the Zimbabwean tragedy, and in the plunging of knives into backs within South African politics, that I have been informed by close participants in those events. Very often such accounts differ markedly from reported wisdom – although not always from the 'diplomatic cables' which Western governments frequently choose to ignore for their own political reasons. I cannot reveal my informants, but I hope there have been enough of them for me to make judicious choices in sometimes conflicting stories. I hope that these accounts, when tallied with agreed knowledge, can provide new ways to understand the

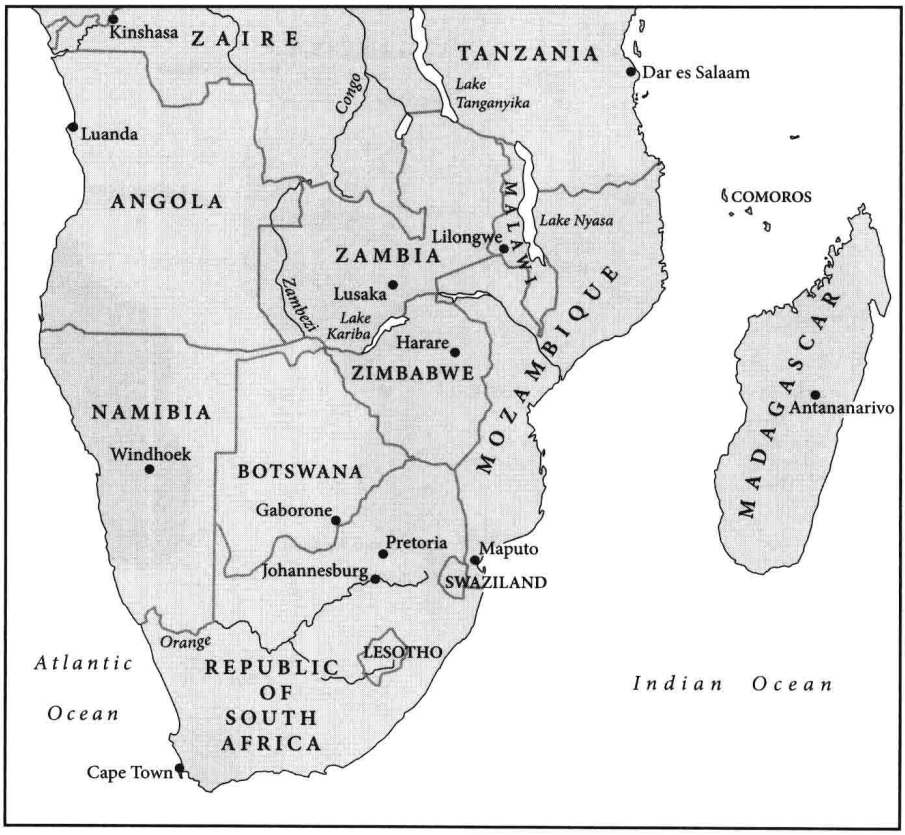
region. I am indebted to those who have taken me into their trust and must find ways to repay their kind confidences.

The book begins with a brief historical account but, thereafter, concentrates on the 1990s and 2000s. Although Southern Africa is a vast region with ten countries in it – excluding Democratic Republic of Congo and Tanzania which are often associated with the region, and the island territories of the Southern Indian Ocean – I have concentrated on the relationships between South Africa, Zimbabwe and, to an extent, Zambia. They were the three territories most associated with Cecil Rhodes. South Africa and Zimbabwe (as Rhodesia) were the key bastions of white minority rule until decades after the rest of Africa attained majority rule. Zambia, once called Northern Rhodesia, became the exile headquarters of liberation movements struggling against minority rule, including South Africa's ANC. The patterns of interaction established over the years have never been erased – although they have changed in character and motivation. They have also changed in terms of the personalities of presidents who have driven interaction onwards.

Of those people I am able to name, I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to many who, over the years, helped me understand the region. Some are now dead, but I include them to honour their memory. In no particular order, Dan Karobia, Muna Ndulo, Gatian Lungu, Lloyd Chingambo, Kwaku Osei-Hwedie, Chaloka Beyani, Walter Mazzuki, Kebby Musokotwane, Ngande Mwanajiti, Ibbo Mandaza, Jimmy Mavenge, Hasu Patel, Brian Raftopoulos, Johnson Ndlovu, Morgan Tsvangirai, H.W. Van Der Merwe, Andre du Pisani, Greg Mills, Mervyn Frost, Sandy Johnson, Adam Habib, William Gumede, Raphael de Kadt, Sydney Mufamadi, Henry Paulse, Renee Horne and Ranka Primorac all helped me. Diplomats posted to several embassies over the years were very helpful. Of course no one is to blame for any shortcomings in this book but myself.



Map 1: Colonial Southern Africa



Map 2: Independent Southern Africa

CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1

THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

Cecil Rhodes wanted to link Africa, south to north. He wanted a through road to facilitate his expansionism. The road he began ran through South Africa and what is today Zimbabwe and Zambia. Transport links have always bound these three nations together. But South Africa and Zimbabwe, still called Rhodesia until 1980, were bound together as well by the stubborn retention of white minority rule. Although liberation movements from both countries were headquartered in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia, it was military victory for nationalist groups in the surrounding Portuguese territories, particularly in Angola, that sparked a wave of battle and struggle, with the active involvement of many non-African countries including the superpowers of the day, that culminated in the diplomatic manoeuvres that gave independence to Zimbabwe. After that, Apartheid South Africa was isolated in the region – but far from defeated. With the independence of Zimbabwe, the Apartheid machine prepared to uncoil for one last great offensive against its black neighbours. This conflict defined the political relationships and personalities of much of what was to come, well into the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Cecil Rhodes wanted to build a road from Cape Town to Cairo. It didn't even get halfway but, even now, a Great North Road still snakes out of Lusaka, Zambia – promising much and petering out in the Congolese wilderness. It was the old fox, Henry Kissinger, who realised that Africa was too big to be encompassed by a single vision. In the 1970s he thought he could anchor US interests in three, possibly four, major states: South Africa and Egypt were there, so the Cape and Cairo still featured, only without the road; so did Nigeria in the west and, as an afterthought, Nairobi in the east. Nothing in the centre. Everything petered out in the centre. That was the heart of darkness, albeit with a dictatorial ruler friendly to the US. President Mobutu of what was then called Zaire was indulged and left alone.

The US needed rulers and regimes that were friendly. In 1976 the Cold War had become spectacularly hot, but far enough away from the West for it to be fought by proxies. Apartheid South Africa acted as the US proxy in the swathe of the continent that took in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean seaboards from the Cape to the northern tips of Angola and Mozambique, and everything in between. There was talk in Pretoria, London and Washington of forming a SATO, a South Atlantic Treaty Organisation. This never happened but South African warships began to use NATO naval doctrine, signals and contingency planning formulas.[1]

The advent of Cuban troops in Angola in 1976 had alarmed Washington. The South African military, responding to a new Angolan government with Communist leanings, had been driven back by the Cubans. Suddenly, Africa was no longer the continent of low-intensity guerrilla wars but a place where tank columns manoeuvred for position and where air superiority determined strategic planning. As the South Africans fell back, the US prepared to support its Apartheid ally in long wars.

But Kissinger realised that a tide of majority rule, of black rule, was rolling towards South Africa, where the white minority stubbornly clung to power – even as it was being steadily surrounded by black states. What he wanted to avoid was majority rule accomplished by military victory; especially Communist-assisted military victory, as had

just occurred in Angola. A military fightback was, in his and Pretoria's view, unavoidable. But Kissinger also wanted a buy-out. Military might would keep Communist-aided states at bay and destabilised. Economic might would buy peaceful settlements in troublesome areas – such as Rhodesia. The Kissinger plan, highly generalised but striking the centre of the problem, was to compensate white Rhodesian farmers for giving up their land to a black majority. With a key grievance addressed, the black nationalists would negotiate a future rather than go to war for it, and not seek Communist help as they did so. The moderate government that ensued would cooperate with the huge economic might of South Africa.[2]

The South Africans had long dreamed of the surrounding states becoming part of an economic zone. It was a little like the Japanese dream of a Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere in the years before World War II – seeking to benefit economically from the surrounding region while dominating it politically and, if need be, militarily. It was naïve of the Japanese to imagine that their dream would not create resistance. Likewise, the South African dream was never going to work as long as Pretoria was the capital of white racism in a continent casting off the chains of discrimination.

This was a time of tangled history in Southern Africa, as racial divides at home were made into chess-pieces on an international board. West and East clashed over Southern Africa while, within the region, black sought to emancipate itself from white.

Today, giant rainbow-coloured lizards dance on Cecil Rhodes' grave in the Matopos Hills in Zimbabwe. It is an eerie place, rocks balance precariously on top of one another in natural columns, and local people say that ancestral spirits dance and weave in and out of the rocks. The view seems to stretch on for ever and, in the vegetation below, rhinos still roam.

It has been hard to get away from Rhodes. Born in 1853 he lived, by any standards, a great if pernicious life until his death in 1902.[3] He had an unreserved belief in the 'civilising' capacity and destiny of the white