The Struggle for Democracy in Zimbabwe: Confronting the Long Economic Crisis

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When did Zimbabwe’s apparently endless economic downturn actually begin?

- February 2000 when Robert Mugabe began authorising land invasions?
- November 1997 when ‘Black Friday’ decimated the currency’s value (by 74% in four hours)?
- The prior months when war vets were given pensions and Zimbabwe put troops into the Democratic Republic of the Congo to back the Kabila regime and secure investment sites?
- September 1991 when the stock market crashed once interest rates were raised to high real levels at the outset of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (Esap)?
- The early 1980s, not long after Mugabe took power?
- Or around 1974, when per capita Gross Domestic Product (GDP) began a fall which has not yet reversed itself?

As an example of conventional elite wisdom, consider Harvard academic and Pulitzer Prize-winner Samantha Power: ‘The country’s economy in 1997 was the fastest growing in all of Africa; now it is the fastest shrinking… How could the breadbasket of Africa have deteriorated so quickly into the continent’s basket case? The answer is Robert Mugabe.’


2. Power, S (2003), ‘How to Kill a Country’, Atlantic Monthly, December,
A somewhat deeper summary position was offered by the US State Department’s lead Africa official in 2001:

The current crisis in Zimbabwe has its roots in many areas. Broadly speaking, poor fiscal policies and rampant government spending - including the cost of Zimbabwe’s military involvement in the Congo - set the stage for the present economic meltdown. Due in large part to an illegal and chaotic ‘fast track’ land reform program pursued by the government, the agricultural sector has been badly disrupted.3

Others – like local economist Rob Davies – may put the date of crisis in 1997 but turn immediately to blame wealth accumulation – ‘a peculiarly rampant form of absolute extraction’ - by the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZanuPF),4 in contrast to some like Sam Moyo who posits the post-2000 land invasions take forward the ‘national democratic revolution’.5 For David Moore, the Marxist notion of ‘primitive accumulation’ better captures that particular process,6 although Davies is correct to point out that a bourgeoisie is not being created, rather accumulated wealth is being destroyed.

Like Power, many others simply blame Mugabe, often for his allegedly socialist orientation. For the US Agency for International Development, ‘the country’s deep economic crisis is the result of the government’s flawed economic and public management policies’.7 The most extreme logic of the neoliberal argument, as Eddie Cross of the Movement for Democratic Change put it in immediate the wake of the opposition’s early 2000 constitutional referendum victory, is post-Mugabe liberalisation:

We believe in the free market. We do not support price control. We do not support government interfering in the way in which people manage their lives. We are in favour of reduced levels of taxation. We are in favour of introducing Value Added Tax and we will do so quickly, within six months. We are in favour of a National Revenue Authority. These things are things which the government has been talking about for years. We believe they are

sound developments. We would like to cap tax levels, both for individuals and for companies. We would like to reduce the levels of border duties ... The tax burden is simply not sustainable. It is negative in terms of the way it impacts on our society. Now that means we have got to reduce the size of government and not just talk about it... We are going to fast track privatisation. All fifty government parastatals will be privatised within a two-year time frame, but we are going far beyond that. We are going to privatise many of the functions of government. We are going to privatise the Central Statistical Office. We are going to privatise virtually the entire school delivery system. And you know, we have looked at the numbers and we think we can get government employment down from about 300,000 at the present time to about 75,000 in five years.8

For those who instead would seek a more just Zimbabwe, the introduction of Esap is often the preferred starting point of critique. To be sure, such analysis also emanates from the ruling party. Information officer and former minister Nathan Shamuyarira once remarked of Esap, ‘I’m glad that it failed... it was a capitalist project’.9 At the same time, vice president Simon Muzenda and then state information minister Jonathan Moyo strongly condemned Esap, and Mugabe vowed never to return to structural adjustment in October 2001. The Zimbabwe government typically blames the crisis upon Western states and institutions angry about land reform, or mythical ‘sanctions’ (there are only minor smart sanctions against a few dozen individuals in operation), or ‘the country’s detractors’ for causing shortages ‘every time the country comes out of elections’,10 or even the US and UK governments for allegedly controlling weather patterns to cause droughts.11

The regime’s self-serving analysis aside, it is true that Zimbabwe’s major advances in education and health of the early 1980s were in part reversed by Esap user fees, and the solid growth rates of the mid/late-1980s under a more controlled economic regime look excellent in retrospect. As articulated by Keynesian economists such as Godfrey Kinyenze in the major civil society analysis of the Zimbabwe economy, the Structural Adjustment Participatory Review Initiative,

The Zimbabwean economy is in crisis. Economic growth remains erratic and below targets. The balance-of-payments problems that have plagued the economy since the last quarter of 1997 persist. The failure of Esap to

redress the inequalities inherent in the Zimbabwean economy means the majority of the people cannot take advantage of the opportunities that are offered. This is a major impediment to the success of reforms. Forum participants said that the highly dualistic nature of Zimbabwe’s economy (in which the white minority dominates formal-sector economic activity and owns two-thirds of high-potential land and the black majority is concentrated in rural, communal areas and urban informal sectors) was never adequately addressed when planning economic reform. By focusing exclusively on the formal sector for economic growth, Esap neglected the sectors with the greatest potential for employment creation: the informal, small and medium-sized enterprises.12

Indeed in recent years there has been a tremendous outpouring of oppositional analyses about what ails Zimbabwe, especially from independent intellectuals.13

These are primarily and overtly contemporary political analyses of the problems, which are certainly welcomed. But might political-economic arguments originating several decades ago matter to contemporary strategy and discourses?

I think so, in no small part because while the specific form of the current crisis is obviously very much based upon President Robert Mugabe’s desperation to hold onto power at all costs, there is also a much deeper problem that transcends the rise of the new Zimbabwe elite. For Jonathan Moyo, who during the early 2000s acted as Mugabe’s main spindoctor, that rise could be captured in a presidential election slogan: ‘the land is the economy and the economy is the land’. Trivial at one level and substantively incorrect, still, the slogan calls forth what Terence Ranger terms ‘patriotic history’:

This condensed resistance history could be communicated at various levels, from the relatively sophisticated to the crudely racist. The essential message was spelt out by Godfrey Chikowore in an article in the Herald of 16 February 2002 entitled ‘Defending our Heritage. Armed Struggle should serve as Guiding Spirit’. Each presidential candidate, said Chikowore, ‘should produce manifestos which spell out clearly that they are going to uphold Zimbabwean values and heritage and restore a sense of patriotism...
among Zimbabweans’.\textsuperscript{14}

Party manifestos and advertisements for subsequent elections, especially the parliamentary campaign of 2005, were far less based upon interpretations of political and historical processes than earlier (perhaps because of Moyo’s departure from ZanuPF), and far more upon economics: whether there was a genuine recovery thanks to Reserve Bank governor Gideon Gono’s temporary accessing of foreign exchange and proto-Keynesian monetary stimulation; whether improved access to international markets and finance – in turn contingent upon removing Mugabe - would save Zimbabwe; and whether ordinary people would gain access to market mechanisms which were often beyond the constraints of affordability.

Today, in the wake of Gono’s failed August 2006 ‘zero to hero’ anti-inflation gimmickry aimed at rejigging the currency, as Gono himself comes under fire for corruption from disgruntled elements in the ruling party, it may be useful to revive an historical perspective on the economy. There are several reasons to do so, including the historian’s search for insights about the present. In his own recent revival of structuralist history, Colin Bundy quoted John Iliffe on the long-term effects of economic conquest:

\begin{quote}
As each colony became a specialised producer for the world market, it acquired an economic structure which often survived throughout the twentieth century … most colonies retained throughout their history the economic trajectory acquired before the First World War.\textsuperscript{15}
\end{quote}

For Bundy, this raised the question of whether ‘scholars pay as much attention as they might to the persistence of structures, or the constraints of the \textit{longue durée}… [by indentifying] patterns of accumulation and dispossession over the decades, and the economic structures and social relations that these generated and reproduced’.\textsuperscript{16}

There are indeed scholars working on these issues in Zimbabwe, including Brian Raftopoulos and Ian Phimister:

\begin{quote}
Broadly speaking, the crisis has three overlapping dimensions: that of Pan-African and Third World solidarity in the face of renewed imperialist aggression; the break-down of the liberation struggle consensus; and the
\end{quote}


limitations of post-colonial development in the context of globalization.\textsuperscript{17}

Because those three dimensions are so well analysed by Raftopoulos and Phimister, I will use the pages below to revisit a different explanation of Zimbabwe’s long-term economic crisis, which really set in around 1974 (when imperialism, globalization and post-colonial politics were not factors operating with the same intensity as they are today). I argue that Zimbabwe – like South Africa and indeed the entire world – faced a durable problem that can best be termed the ‘overaccumulation of capital’. This refers, simply, to a situation in which excessive investment has occurred and hence goods cannot be brought to market profitably, leaving capital to pile up in sectoral bottlenecks or speculative outlets without being put back into new productive investment.\textsuperscript{18} In different ways, leading political economists - Simon Clarke, Ernest Mandel, Harry Shutt, Robert Biel, David Harvey - have argued that the roots of the global capitalist slow-down since the 1970s lie in the classical problem of overaccumulation, even if the displacement of overaccumulation does not make the crisis as evident as it was in, say, October 1929.\textsuperscript{19}

Is there any basis for using this framework in a highly-regulated siege economy on the periphery of the world economy, especially during a time of intensifying war? I think so, and would further posit that by avoiding the problem of the organic nature of overaccumulation processes and associated class structure in Zimbabwe, virtually all strategists of social change have missed an opportunity to weaken the Mugabe dictatorship. Dating to the 1970s, the manufacturing sector witnessed immense increases in accumulated stocks and inventories, and then an extraordinary decline in capacity utilization. By all accounts, the resulting drought of industrial investment has remained the single major constraint on the economy’s growth. Efforts to displace the economic problems in various ways have come to naught, in part because the diagnosis of the underlying problem is incorrect.

Indeed, economic devastation in the contemporary period could be the basis for a long treatise. What I have tried to do instead, by resurrecting the prior period of overaccumulation, stagnation and financial chaos, is set the stage for a

different discourse. The fear is that crucial oppositional actors - especially in civil society - have become distracted from the long history of economic decline by the exigencies of broad-based political mobilization. By reviewing the structural features of Zimbabwe’s decline, it may be feasible to rejuvenate critical discourses about capitalist development in the African periphery at a time when Mugabe’s hot leftish rhetoric confuses and disorients the classical debates.

Thus let me sum up the argument so far. A deep-seated economic crisis, dating to the mid-1970s, was not resolved by 1980s developmentalism or 1990s structural adjustment. The dirigiste economic zig-zags since are one logical outcome (though not the only one; in most African countries state bureaucrats maintained austerity notwithstanding serious political opposition). After all, the obvious objective of Mugabe’s unbudgeted 1997 gratuities to the war veterans was to buy off their protest movement, shortly after corruption revelations concerning the looting of veterans’ health and compensation funds (one of the beneficiaries was Mugabe’s vice-president Joyce Majuru). Weeks later, plans were announced to seize 1500 commercial farms for redistribution, at once unsettling local financial markets and raising popular expectations. Periodic IMF Riots against worsening economic conditions continued, and the 2000 constitutional referendum defeat pushed Mugabe further over the edge. Challenges from the base were regularly met with intense state repression.

The intervening years of full-blown socio-political and economic crisis do not require detailed commentary here, in part because of exceptionally rich analysis provided recently by Brian Raftopoulos. As a central strategic challenge presented by the current conjuncture, Raftopoulos argues that the kind of political economic argument offered above is fraught with ‘tensions’, particularly when moving between broad structural analysis to more concrete levels of political analysis, which also lays these studies open to accusations of reductionism. As Hall has pointed out, drawing strongly of the work of Gramsci, Marx’s central concepts such as ‘primitive accumulation’ were pitched at high levels of abstraction and were ‘epochal in their range and reference.’ Setting out the Gramscian challenge Hall argues that ‘until one has shown how “objective economic crises” actually develop, via the changing relations in the balance of forces, into crisis in the state and society, and germinate in the form of ethical-political struggles and formed political ideologies, influencing the conception of the world of the masses, one has not conducted a proper kind of analysis, rooted in the decisive and irreversible “passage” from structure to superstructure.’


21. Raftopoulos, B. (2005), ‘The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Challenges for the Left’, Public Lecture at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, 23 June, p.11; Raftopoulos cites Hall, S.
A full book is required for this ‘proper’ analysis, to be sure – especially when in Zimbabwe there are multiple modes of ongoing primitive accumulation at stake. But instead of completing the argument that would take us from objective economic crisis to the present balance of forces via the intermediate steps Hall suggests, it might be instructive to risk the charge of reductionism and jump ahead to address a few of the main implications. The ‘audiences’ for political economic reasoning are those Raftopoulos cites as having emerged during the second decade of liberation, particularly through

the struggles of civil society against the post-colonial state, initially from the activism of students and workers in the late 1980’s, and then with the more general mobilisation of civil society against state authoritarianism from the late 1990’s. As students, workers and some intellectuals developed a growing critique of the post-colonial state, more critical attention was paid to rethinking the legacies of the liberation struggles, and placing more central attention on the struggles for human and civic rights. It was in particular the issue of human rights that marked the critical debates from the late 1990’s, and the central role of lawyers in leading these debates. A growing awareness of the human rights abuses of the Gukurahundi massacres of the mid 1980’s in Matabeleland was combined with increasing criticisms of the corruption and undemocratic structures of the ZanuPF state, to produce both a plethora of human rights NGOs and a strong commitment to human rights concerns. Thus the brief period of political liberalisation in the 1990’s was characterised by a combination of liberal democratic critique, with its emphases on correcting the deformities of the electoral system and addressing human rights issues, trade union struggles, and a peripheral Trotskyite Marxism. The latter emanated from the student politics of the University of Zimbabwe in the aftermath of the post-1989 demise of existing socialist models. The amalgam of these trends coalesced in the broad politics of the constitutional movement, the formation of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change and the more recent anti-globalisation politics of the Zimbabwe Social Forum.22

Consider an emblematic incident in which international power relations overdetermined local political economy. The moment was one of civil society paralysis in the wake of the state’s Murambatsvina evictions of an estimated 700,000 urban residents in mid-2005. Mugabe’s irrational decision to repay the IMF vast sums of hard currency - $120 million in the first tranche in September 2005 and several tens of millions of dollars since – unveiled shortcomings in

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22. Raftopoulos, ‘The Zimbabwean Crisis and the Challenges for the Left’, p.??.
political analysis and strategy. Regrettably, there was silence from the two key
civil society agencies with active ‘economic justice’ campaigns: the Zimbabwe
Social Forum and the Zimbabwe Debt and Development Coalition (Zimcodd).
These groups were the two main hosts for the Southern African Social Forum in
October 2005, and kept a low profile in order to gain permission for 3,000 local
and regional activists to visit Harare municipal gardens.

The Movement for Democratic Change issued a statement which suggested
that a major bloc of opposition politicians desired a Pretoria-mediated elite
transition (notwithstanding the overwhelming lack of evidence of Thabo Mbeki’s
*bona fides*):

As the Mugabe regime gets more and more desperate, its economic and
political positions get increasingly incoherent. Having in the past been
brazenly disdainful of the IMF, it is now suddenly desperate to remain a
respectable fee-paying member. This objective could have been facilitated
by accepting the economic lifeline on offer from South Africa, but that
would have required political compromises to be made. The regime’s
desperation is greatest in the political realm, as evidenced by its spurning
outside assistance and opting instead to squander the country’s extremely
scarce foreign currency resources to repay a large chunk of the arrears
owed to the IMF.23

Ironically it was to Eddie Cross that we turned for a much more sensible
perspective:

The government paid off its outstanding arrears to one of the funds of the
IMF. In doing so they spent US$209 million, enough money to pay for our
essential food imports for 9 months, or our fuel imports for 10 months and
our electricity imports for two years or our requirements for all essential
drugs for 4 years. What did we get for this effort? Absolutely nothing! The
IMF issued a statement last week saying that while the payments meant that
we were no longer a candidate for expulsion we still owed the fund many
millions of dollars against other obligations and would still be suspended in
terms of our voting and access rights at the IMF. They would not even re-
open their office in Harare. As a direct consequence of this act by the
Zimbabwe regime, we have had virtually no maize meal in our shops for
over a month. The World Food Programme is feeding about 5 million
people every day now, but this still leaves 6 million people without their
basic staple food. This is a catastrophe in any sense of the word. The
Presidents remark that Zimbabweans can eat potatoes or rice is just an
insult, both are three times as expensive as maize meal and not nearly as

satisfying to the Zimbabwean palate. We also now have to sit in the dark for several hours every second day or so as we suffer ‘load shedding’. Fuel now costs nearly Z$200 000 a litre and is in short supply everywhere. As for essential drugs - just try and find these in our pharmacies and hospitals. We owe external creditors US$5 000 million. Paying US$209 million to the IMF is 0.04 percent of our liabilities. By paying the IMF we avoided expulsion - but so what? It changes nothing on the ground and just exacerbates our humanitarian and economic crisis. If we were expelled we would have been only the second country in the history of the IMF to be so, but if we then put our house in order and brought back the policies we need to implement to get back on our feet, they would have come back in within months and our membership would have been restored - together with all our rights as a member. Then we found out that to make the last payment to the Fund the Reserve Bank simply printed local currency and bought hard currency on the street and from exporters. In doing so they pushed the parallel market up to $220 000 to one US dollar at one stage last week with it falling back to 200 000 to 1 now. That is it lost half its value in about 10 days.24

As for Mbeki, evidence of his own commitment to political democracy in Zimbabwe is scanty, especially compared to the goal of getting the IMF back into Harare. Addressing a forum of African editors in mid-October, he explained:

We had indeed said that we were ready to assist, and the reason we wanted to assist was because we understood the implications of Zimbabwe’s expulsion from the IMF. What it would mean, among other things, is that everybody who is owed something by Zimbabwe would demand immediately to be paid. You would even get to a situation where they would seize anything that was being exported out of Zimbabwe because of that debt.25

In reality, the IMF has never acquired much less used such power, but the hyperbole is telling.26 What it represents is a South African schizophrenia in relation to Zimbabwe which has several features, based on a worrying trajectory not uncommon in Africa, which Simba Manyanya and I worked through with Zimcodd during the early 2000s:

• a liberation movement which won repeated elections against a terribly weak opposition, but under circumstances of worsening abstentionism by, and

26. Private-sector creditors presently dealing with Zimbabwe typically arrange various forms of security with corporate debtors, because the government’s likelihood of nonpayment was demonstrated since 1999.
depoliticisation of the masses;
• concomitantly, that movement’s undeniable failure to deliver a better life for most of the country’s low-income people, while material inequality soared;
• rising popular alienation from, and cynicism about, nationalist politicians, as the gulf between rulers and the ruled widened inexorably and as more numerous cases of corruption and malgovernance were brought to public attention;
• growing economic misery as neoliberal policies were tried and failed; and
• the sudden rise of an opposition movement based in the trade unions, quickly backed by most of civil society, the liberal petit-bourgeoisie and the independent media - potentially leading to the election of a new, post-nationalist government.

This was the case in Zambia from 1964-91, in Zimbabwe from 1980-1999, and in South Africa from 1994 until – no one knows when the last bullet will be loaded. Looking at Zimbabwe from African National Congress headquarters at Albert Luthuli House in Johannesburg, one option was to hunker down and defend the ZanuPF government against its critics; another was to move into ‘constructive-engagement’ mode that might serve as the basis for an ‘honest-broker’ role on some future deal-making occasion; while the third - actively support Zimbabwe’s democratic movement, perhaps through sanctions or other pressure techniques, so as to ensure the government held free and fair elections - presumably did not warrant attention, for fear that it might inspire South African trade unionists to do the same, in the near future.

But without a strong analysis of the underlying causes of the crisis and an inability to think outside neoliberal precepts, the opposition did not take advantage of the crisis circumstances. Typical was this comment by one of the MDC faction leaders, Arthur Mutambara, in mid-2006:

Under globalization there is no country that can thrive without dealing with the international community including the multilateral institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. We know that historically, these two specific institutions have espoused anti-African and anti-poor people policies. What is critical is to engage these institutions with the view to extract favourable arrangements for our country. In the current global economy, the IMF is ostensibly a gatekeeper. If they are not involved with your country, there is no investment and trade that will occur there. We cannot go it alone.  

A few weeks earlier, Mutambara had remarked,

As we are refocusing the MDC, we are saying no to puppetry. We will no

longer be driven by white farmers, Blair or Bush... We are now making sense to Mbeki... We are also anti-imperialist and against the colonisation of Africa. We are an African patriotic opposition party, a people that know their history. The Zimbabwe issue is too big for Zimbabweans to solve alone - what are our friends doing to help us. South Africa, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, we also need help from other players?

In reality, according to Mark Weisbrot, more cases were appearing of ‘going it alone’ without IMF influence, including Brazil, Indonesia, Turkey and Argentina:

Argentina suffered through a terrible four-year depression, beginning in 1998. A country that had recently ranked among the highest for living standards in Latin America soon had the majority of the country falling below the poverty line. Many Argentines blamed the IMF, which had played a major role in designing the policies that led to the collapse, and seemed to prescribe just the wrong medicine during the crisis: high interest rates, budget tightening and maintaining the Argentine peso’s unsustainable link to the US dollar. In December 2001, the government defaulted on $100 billion of debt, the largest sovereign debt default in history. The currency and the banking system collapsed, and the country sank further into depression - but only for about three more months.

Then, to most people’s surprise, the economy began to recover. The recovery began and continued without any help from the IMF. On the contrary: In 2002, the fund and other official creditors (including the World Bank), actually took a net $4.1 billion - more than 4 percent of gross domestic product - out of Argentina. But the government was able to chart more of its own economic course, rejecting IMF demands for higher interest rates, increased budget austerity and utility price increases. Argentina also took a hard line with foreign creditors holding defaulted debt, despite repeated threats from the fund.

When push came to shove in September 2003, Argentina did the unthinkable: a temporary default to the IMF itself, until the fund backed down. The result was a rapid and robust recovery, with a remarkable 8.8 percent growth in gross domestic product for 2003 and 9 percent for 2004. With a projected 7.3 percent gross domestic product gain for 2005, Argentina is still the fastest growing economy in Latin America...

Argentina showed that a country could stand up to the IMF, and not only live to tell about it but even launch a solid economic recovery. This changed the world. Although the IMF still carries a lot of weight in poorer countries, its influence in the middle-income countries has plummeted.

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fund is now a shadow of its former self. 29

To take the Argentine path, based upon rejecting the logic of the IMF, would entail Zimbabwe following advice, surprisingly, found in the country’s 2000 Human Development Report, sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme but involving both officials and leading civil-society intellectuals. The report makes six recommendations for government economic development policy, that are antithetical to neoliberal policies. They are:

(1) Overall objective: restore confidence by creating conditions of fulfillment of basic human material and social needs, and by opening up democratic space for dialogue in all sectors of life ...

(2) The hitherto neglected responsibility of ensuring conditions for the reproduction of labor and ensuring a life of dignity must form the core of the new strategy ...

(3) Better integration of gender concerns ...

(4) A well-focused land reform and agricultural regulation policy framework...

(5) Restore production and safeguard the domestic market from external competition in respect of essential commodities and services, as a basic complement to fiscal and monetary tools. Probably considered subsidies and tariff protection might be necessary.

(6) Carry out an audit of imports and introduce measures to cut down all inessential imports and luxury products. Carry out a similar audit of debt, retire illegitimate debts, and negotiate with the creditors for the payment of the legitimately incurred debts on the principle of joint responsibility. Put in place capital controls, regulate the banking sector, and review financial liberalization measures to develop an indigenously led banking sector. 30

The potential for further ‘inward industrialization’ was substantial. For example, housing can be produced with very minor import costs in Zimbabwe. Had there been a more equal distribution of income and strategic targeting of government subsidies after independence, housing could easily have been the basis for a successful Keynesian ‘kick-start’ and antidote to stagnation. And thorough-going land reform (as well as proactive intervention in financial markets and industrial organization) had been a key element of some East Asian industrializing countries’ strategy for developing an internal class base for consumption of basic manufactured goods, and was occasionally suggested as the basis for inward-oriented capital accumulation.

Such approaches would not have solved the deep-rooted industrial overaccumulation crisis, but would probably have delayed and dampened the crisis by combining the best tendencies of manufacturing growth in the early UDI period - the broadening of production, the closer articulation with local markets, the localization of decision-making, and the control of financial markets that would make all the above feasible - with the post-independence ‘Growth with Equity’ rhetoric of meeting democratically-determined basic needs.

That rhetoric, in addition to some measure of welfarist (often patronage-related) spending, did have the impact of altering consciousness over a quarter century or so. On the one hand an explicitly socialist consciousness has been destroyed by Mugabe’s rhetorical gimmickry (notwithstanding efforts of a small Trotskyist group, the International Socialists of Zimbabwe, to reverse that). On the other hand, as of 2004, there was an exceptionally strong sense in Zimbabwe of the need for stronger state social policies to compensate economic failure – a sense which could generate the political support for the sort of program the UNDP suggested. According to an Afrobarometer poll, 68% of Zimbabwean respondents agreed that ‘The government should bear the main responsibility for the well being of people’, double the percentage of those in Lesotho and – aside from Uganda – far higher than any other country in the region. The alternative suggestion – ‘People should look after themselves and be responsible for their own success in life’ – received 31% support. 31

In 2005, Zimbabwean trade union intellectual Godfrey Kinyenze offered a critical line of argument that corresponds to such aspirations:

The political-economic crisis is emanating from the failure of neoliberal policies, and yet it has been reduced in liberal interpretations merely to human rights. That is very dangerous, because we might end up in the Chiluba mode [the anti-worker post-nationalist experience in Zambia]. It’s very easy [for liberals] to sell the idea that the only problem with structural adjustment was bad implementation by Mugabe, and that the World Bank will save us. Our job is to be more ideologically clear. We are organizing economic literacy programmes across the country, and especially through the Zimbabwe Social Forum. That way we can all act together as a countervailing force against neoliberalism. 32

It is a hopeful final thought, one that may – if economic analysis deepens – become more relevant as a force against capitalism, through whose long-term crisis both Esap neoliberalism and Mugabe’s dirigisme have logically emerged.

32. Interview, 13 May 2005.