

The Nativist Revolution and Development Conundrums in Zimbabwe

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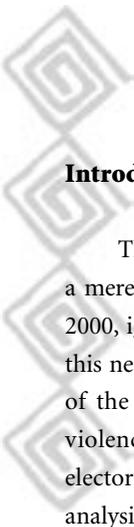
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Introduction

The neo-liberal perspective wrongly reduces the crisis in Zimbabwe to a mere problem of governance and traces the genesis of that crisis to the year 2000, ignoring earlier antecedents that are equally significant. The fatal flaw in this neo-liberal definition of the Zimbabwe crisis is its focus on the symptoms of the problem, such as increased militarisation of domestic politics, party violence, shrinking democratic spaces, executive lawlessness, questionable electoral conduct and overall economic collapse. There is a need for a deeper analysis going beyond these symptoms of the Zimbabwean crisis. Indeed, the Zimbabwean crisis is a reflection of the risks involved in any African attempt to defy the ‘disciplining’ forces of globalisation and neo-liberalism and is located within the broader context of African responses to globalisation, neo-liberalism and cosmopolitanism.

Taking into account all the risks and polemics involved in any analysis of contemporary economic, political and ideological history, this paper situates the Zimbabwe crisis within the current global environment, which is characterised by triumphant neo-liberalism and its concern with maintaining the status quo through aggressive ‘disciplining’ of any alternative way of imagining the world. Any form of radicalism is quickly perceived as profoundly anti-systemic and anti-status quo, including those radical transformations that are ‘pro-people’.

The Zimbabwean crisis was provoked by a nationalist attempt to resolve a delayed national question involving land restitution in a former settler colony. Zimbabwe was trying to solve the intractable question of land at a time dominated by the aggressive and ‘disciplining’ forces of neo-liberalism and globalisation. Such forces have no sympathy for any form of radical defiance of the post-Cold War neo-liberalist ideology. However, this paper should not be mistaken for an apologia for the contribution of the Harare government to plunging Zimbabwe into a crisis.

Background

Neo-liberalism has taken the form of fundamentalism and is imposing its economic, social and political will successfully on the rest of the world while at the same time provoking an equally combative spirit of localism, concretely taking the form of a resurgence of nationalism in Africa and other parts of the world that are at the peripheries and margins of the global village. This paper locates the Zimbabwean crisis at the interface between marginalisation and localism on the one hand, and globalisation and cosmopolitanism and its fundamentalist forces, on the other.¹ Fundamentalism is used here to refer to an unrelenting force that is fanatically pervading human space. Fundamentalism is sweeping in its claims and annihilatory in its rejection. Zimbabwe is caught up in the snares of competing fundamentalisms. Contributing to the debate on the duality between globalisation and localism, Issa Shivji has argued that the African nationalist inspired project has been defeated and that the imperialist project of globalisation is on the offensive, provoking a backlash that is today being witnessed in Latin America.² Indeed, one of the main responses of Africans to globalisation, neo-liberalism and cosmopolitanism is the resurgence of nationalism, pan-Africanism, African Renaissance – all predicated on the renewed search for African self-definition in defiance of neo-liberal economic and political thought.

The beginning of the new millennium saw Zimbabwe plunging into an unprecedented crisis that clouded its developmental trajectory. The crisis happened in tandem with the metamorphosis of African nationalism into Afro-radicalism and nativism predicated on an aggressive indigenisation discourse built around land restitution. This had the impact of catching the whole national situation up in controversy and taking it beyond the current crisis discourses emanating from the neo-liberal concerns with violence, human rights, rule of law, constitutionalism and democracy. This paper employs recent theoretical concepts such as Afro-radicalism, nativism, indigenisation and the limits of both nationalism and neo-liberalism as entry points into a conceptual re-definition of the Zimbabwean development conundrum that continues to elicit debate locally, regionally and internationally.

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Despite the spate of analyses on the Zimbabwe crisis that has emerged since 2000, a crisis that continues to puzzle academics, policy makers and politicians alike is still continuing. This “mutating millennial crisis” is today symbolised by a fluctuating currency, sky-rocketing inflation and the Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono’s constant interference with monetary policies as fire-fighting strategies including the knocking off of “three zeros off all banknotes to help consumers with inflation of nearly 1 200 percent”.³ Zimbabwe is indeed a country on the brink of conflict. The looming conflict has more to do with consumer rights rather than civil and political rights, as the neo-liberals would have us believe. As noted by Jonathan Moyo, the crisis in Zimbabwe is hurting both consumers and businesses, making “consumer demonstrations ... inevitable because basic commodities, especially foodstuffs, have now become either unavailable or unaffordable”.⁴ What is, indeed, predictable is the danger of spontaneous demonstrations and violence not related to the fight for civil rights, but rather for food, access to health care, affordable education, public transport and other related human livelihood issues.

The Zimbabwe crisis is unique in the continued attempts by the nationalist leadership in Harare to defy the triumphant and global neo-liberal norms thus provoking the wrath of the Northern industrialised nations. This neo-liberal anger has taken the form of support for the local civil society, non-governmental organisations and the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as champions of a post-nationalist alternative consonant with neo-liberal norms and values. It has also provoked numerous critiques that reduce the crisis in Zimbabwe to the long presidential incumbency of Robert Mugabe. While it is true that his long incumbency is part of the crisis in Zimbabwe, it does not warrant the reduction of the crisis to a single individual, reminiscent of the old ‘big-man’ theory that interpreted complex socio-economic and political processes in terms of the activities and actions of an individual. The teleology of the hagiographic and biographic analyses is ‘regime change’, a discourse that has pervaded MDC politics to the extent of adopting the mantra of change of government as the only solution to Zimbabwe’s crisis. When this change failed to materialise in 2000, 2002, and again in 2005 through electoral defeats or electoral cheating by the incumbent Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic

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Front (ZANU-PF), the MDC fell into crisis. The crisis engulfing the MDC is so deep that it has culminated in the split of the party into two factions. While the MDC was busy toying with 'exotic' neo-liberal ideologies of change, ZANU-PF had the opportunity to appropriate history, heroes, historical figures, ritual sites, land and everything else of value to political survival; it thus proclaimed the "continuation of the history of emancipation" against the MDC's Fukuyama-ite "end of history".⁵

Zimbabwe's development conundrums cannot be understood outside the broad contending frameworks of Afro-radicalism and post-modern neo-liberal cosmopolitanism. There is a need therefore to re-conceptualise the Zimbabwe crisis, taking into account the broader debates on the African crisis in general. This is necessary because the Zimbabwean crisis is just a microcosm of the global schisms rooted in globalisation's contradictory manifestations and nationalism's mutations.

The starting point is to note that the Zimbabwean state, like other former settler colonies, has not been successful in transcending the 'hostage status' created by settler colonialism working in tandem with global neo-liberal forces. The leading colonial ideologue, Lord Frederick Lugard, clearly articulated the captivity of African societies to colonial discourse when he said, "When I went out [to Nigeria] there was no currency. I instituted a currency."⁶ Since the time that the colonialists "instituted currency", Africa fell into the snares and orbit of global capitalism and global economic governance where the African voice is just hostage. As noted by Jeffrey Herbst, the politics of currency is an important window to understanding how African countries have become more, or less, integrated into the world economy.⁷ At birth, the Zimbabwean state was caught up between the imperatives of former white settlers who continued to wield economic power as well as influencing political decisions, and the current capitalist global phase that does not afford African leaders the needed space to determine the destiny of their states and the leverage with which to launch an autonomous national agenda that includes autonomous development.⁸ The white settler had "instituted a currency" for Zimbabwe and then took control of the economy. The problem of the continued domination of the economy by the white settler combined with the failures of the post-colonial state to deliver

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on promises of complete decolonisation plunged the country into crisis at the beginning of the new millennium as the African constituencies, including the emergent African *petit bourgeoisie*, reached the highest level of impatience about the slow pace of the process of *embourgeoisement*.⁹ The nationalist ruling elite that continued to peddle nationalist rhetoric at Heroes Acre, Independence Day and political rallies was pushed into taking a number of drastic actions that were not well planned to avoid being pushed out of power.

Thus, besides transcending biographic approaches that focus on the long presidential incumbency of Robert Mugabe and over-emphasise regime change as a solution to the Zimbabwe crisis, this paper employs political economy theoretical tools to delve deeper into the complexities of the evolution of the state, power configuration, limits on the civic definition of citizenship and the politics of resource ownership as crucial contested issues in today's post-colonial crises. Presenting the Zimbabwe crisis as simply a leadership crisis revolving around President Mugabe is just too limited.¹⁰ The hagiographical approach to the Zimbabwe crisis has taken the form of a blind celebration of the neo-liberal discourse, reducing the crisis to a mere governance crisis. This is a paradigm that is projected by Western nations, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations as well as the opposition forces in Zimbabwe. The leader of the opposition, Morgan Tsvangirai, who is pandering to the neo-liberal dispensation is prematurely and positively evaluated as the "citizen of Africa", "face of courage" and a messiah to save Zimbabwe from tyranny, violence and chaos.¹¹ While it is true that Zimbabwe has suffered prolonged spates of violence, contested electoral results, abuses of human rights, shrinking democratic spaces as well as increased militarisation of its politics, that in itself is a symptom of a bigger wave that needs to be properly conceptualised and historicised. It cannot be reduced to Robert Mugabe as symbol of African dictatorship.

On top of individuals like Mugabe contributing to the plunge of Zimbabwe into crisis, there is also the structural terrain that gave birth to a particular type of state devoid of any capacity to chart an autonomous development trajectory. The attempt by the ZANU-PF leadership to transform a liberation movement into a Marxist vanguard party with a mandate to create a socialist state in Zimbabwe

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was the first experiment in charting an autonomous development trajectory for Zimbabwe. This experiment was quickly halted by the formidable forces of neo-liberalism that engaged the African nationalists at the Lancaster House Conference in 1979. At the end of the day, the Lancaster House Agreement was a neo-liberal power transfer document and the Lancaster House Constitution was a neo-liberal constitution. There was no pretence that Zimbabwe was to be a neo-colonial state just like other post-colonial African states.

Unlike Achille Mbembe, Kwame Anthony Appiah and other “post-modern cosmopolitanists”, who are quick to dismiss any form of resistance to globalisation in Africa including nativism as “fake philosophies”, I argue that we need a proper historicisation and conceptualisation of such African efforts at indigenising the economy as a carry over from the emancipatory nationalist agenda in the direction of economic independence and as a promising sign that eventually Africa will free itself from neo-colonialism and chart its own autonomous development trajectory and join the global village with dignity.¹² This writer has argued that “development can never be given by one civilisation to another civilisation. It is always fought for rather than negotiated for. It involves sacrifices and clear planning not false celebrations of the limited fruits of globalisation that accrue only to elites, while the poor remain poor.”¹³ Thus, the Third *Chimurenga* in Zimbabwe, while attended by some negative political issues like violence, press censorship, and farm invasions, returned the land to the landless people and in the context of a post-settler society, it was a great achievement notwithstanding the economic crisis it generated. It is indeed worth studying as a pointer to autonomous development. Though at the moment Zimbabwe is still mired in a crisis situation, there is no doubt that it has now reached its climax and what is left is for it to normalise.

The Nationalist Project vis-à-vis Neo-Liberal Fundamentalism

The political and economic evolution of Zimbabwe from a settler colony to a sovereign state miscarried as it found itself caught up between the contending discourses of nationalist liberation and neo-liberal fundamentalism. The

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Lancaster House Conference was a culmination of a series of negotiations, including the Geneva and Malta conferences, where the forces of national liberation and the forces of neo-liberal fundamentalism grappled with each other with a view to shaping post-settler Zimbabwe. The nationalist liberation movement was itself fragmented into pro-socialist (ZANU and Zimbabwe African Peoples Union (ZAPU)/Patriotic Front) and pro-West and moderate forces represented by Bishop Abel Muzorewa and Reverend Ndabandingi Sithole, to the extent that it reflected the double spirits of Marxism and liberalism.¹⁴ After the signing of the Lancaster Agreement the emancipatory traditions of the liberation movement as well as the African nationalist project were saddled with the heavy weight of the formidable forces of liberalism to the extent that the African nationalist project presided over a neo-colonial state with black faces at the political helm and whites at the economic helm. The liberal discourses represented by such personalities as Henry Kissinger of the United States, and that were working actively throughout the time of the liberation war to shape the new post-colonial dispensation in Zimbabwe towards a neo-colonial direction, won the day at the Lancaster House Conference. They were further boosted and galvanised into fundamentalist proportions by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War to the extent of confidently proclaiming a post-nationalist project in Africa and an end to history. This post-nationalist project emphasised the exhaustion of African nationalism and the bankruptcy of the nationalist emancipatory project. The MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai proclaimed the death of African nationalism and called for a post-nationalist alternative in these words:

In many ways we are moving away from the nationalist paradigm to politics grounded in civil society and social movements. MDC politics are not nationalist inspired, because they focus more on empowerment and participation of people. ZANU's thinking has always been top-down, centralised, always trapped in a time warp. Nationalism was an end in itself instead of a means to an end. One of ZANU's constant claims is that everyone in Zimbabwe owes the nationalist movement our freedom. It's therefore also become a nationalism based on patronage and cronyism.¹⁵

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In conceptual and theoretical terms the Zimbabwe development conundrum reflects double limitations. The crisis reflects the limits of the orthodox African nationalist project that needed renewal as well as the limits of neo-liberalism in the context of post-settler societies where justice-related issues and the national question remain unsolved. Steven Robins has added credence to this argument, pointing out that in the developing South, the disempowering realities of liberal democracy are considerably more devastating. He notes that relatively little has been written about the growing tensions between the liberal democratic language of rights, democracy, and the rule of law and the rhetoric of 'culture' in developing countries.¹⁶ In Zimbabwe, the nationalist project has not only taken the 'rhetoric of culture' as an arsenal against neo-liberal fundamentalism, but nationalism has mutated into Afro-radicalism and exclusivist nativism. The exclusive nativist conception of the state, power, citizenship and property ownership was quickly rationalised into a powerful nationalist discourse of indigenisation of the economy and propelled into a quest to complete the decolonisation agenda that started in 1960s. What took place in Zimbabwe was an exclusive nativist revolution attended by spates of violence and human rights violations.

Contours of the Nativist Revolution in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean nativist revolution christened as the Third *Chimurenga* was watered from three springs: Marxist, nationalist and African indigenous thought. As noted by Achille Mbembe, its ideology was predicated on Afro-radicalism and valorisation of African cultures and history. It pandered to an idea of culture and politics that was constantly permeated by the tension between voluntarism and victimisation.¹⁷ The Afro-radical ideology relies on a troika of rhetorical rituals that involve refutation of Western definitions of Africa; denunciation of what the West had done and continues to do in Africa; and frantic efforts to provide ostensible proofs disqualifying the West's fictional representations of Africa and refuting its claim to have a monopoly on the

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expression of the human in general and in that way opening up a space in which Africans can finally narrate their own fables without imitation of the West.¹⁸

Self-determination and the post-First World War idea of national sovereignty is elevated to a religion by Afro-radicals and is part of what Mbembe describes as voluntarism. On the other hand, there is the spirit of victimisation that forms part of the present state of Africa. Africans and Africa's realities are said to be proceeding directly from the legacy of a long history of subjugation and cultural imperialism characterised by the triple sins of slavery, colonialism and apartheid. Therefore, nativist struggles for autonomy must not only involve economic emancipation but consistent and systematic refutations of Western definitions of Africa predicated on anti-neo-liberalism, anti-globalisation, and anti-cosmopolitanism.¹⁹ Indeed, it is important to understand the three sets of meanings attributed by Afro-radicals to slavery, colonialism, apartheid and globalisation. At the level of individual subjectivities is the idea that through the processes of slavery, colonialism and apartheid, the African self became alienated from itself resulting in vague identities that require restoration. In terms of property relations, slavery, colonialism and apartheid led to dispossession hence the current struggles for land restitution. At the level of historical degradation, slavery, colonisation and apartheid plunged the African subject into humiliation, debasement, and nameless suffering and social death characterised by the denial of dignity, hence the need for an African Renaissance.²⁰

Mbembe correctly notes that the African attempt to transcend these degrading and denigrating historical forces and events gave birth to African solidarity and nationalism and served "as a unifying centre of Africans' desire to know themselves, to recapture their destiny (*sovereignty*), and to belong to themselves in the world (*autonomy*)".²¹

However, Mbembe spoils his strong line of argument by trying to dismiss the Afro-radical position as "fake philosophies" and to dismiss the African forces that continue to seek to break away from imperialism and dependence as closed in an ossified shell of an African ghetto.²² Pruned of his dismissal of nativist struggles and of nationalist-inspired analyses of the African condition, Mbembe's analysis is very useful in understanding Zimbabwe's development conundrum.

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By 2000, Zimbabwean nationalism entered the age of Afro-radicalism and took a new nativist slant crystallising around reclamation of land from white settlers. Zimbabwean nationalism at its nativist stage refuted civic conceptions of citizenship and renounced the earlier policy of national reconciliation. The rural peasants, the liberation war veterans and the disillusioned emerging black bourgeois formed the backbone of the Third *Chimurenga*, as were the unemployed youth. In broad terms, the nativist camp became a bizarre mixture of academics, ZANU-PF leaders, war veterans, ex-detainees and former *mujibhas* (young men who were the messengers of the guerrilla fighters) and *chimbwidos* (young girls who cooked for the guerrilla fighters).²³ A broad nativist vision of Zimbabwe involved a hegemonic programme that included appropriation of history, traditions, liberation songs, departed heroes, pan-Africanism, ideas of African authenticity, and music. A cultural renewal of the nation was embarked on through nationalist bashing of colonial history, nationalist valorisation of liberation war history, promulgation of annual commemorations of departed nationalist heroes, re-definition and re-configuration of the nation and citizenship, and restoration of land to its original native owners.²⁴ The other key feature of Zimbabwe's nativist revolution has been the attempt to create what is known as a "patriotic citizenry" through National Youth Service Training. The nationalist articulation of the history of the country has gone in tandem with a cultural renewal crusade typical of nativist discourses of resistance to globalisation and cosmopolitanism.²⁵ Mbembe has defined nativism as a culturalist response of Africans to the fact of denial of their humanity:

Nativism is a discourse of rehabilitation. It is a defence of the humanity of Africans that is almost always accompanied by the claim that their race, traditions, and customs confer to them a peculiar self irreducible to that of any other human group.²⁶

Nativism is a discourse that places an emphasis on establishing an authentic African interpretation of things, including African science, African discourses of development, African democracy and African language. It is at the centre of the broader Afro-radicalism that ZANU-PF has appropriated in the face of

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the forces of globalisation and cosmopolitanism. President Robert Mugabe has emerged as the leading articulator of the Afro-radical position and its nativist slant calling for land restoration to its native owners. At the beginning of the mutation of Zimbabwean nationalism into nativism in 1997, President Mugabe began to describe the unequal pattern of land ownership as “colonial settler robbery”. Legitimising the nativist claims to land, Mugabe stated that:

We are now talking of the conquest of conquest, the prevailing sovereignty of the people of Zimbabwe over settler minority rule and all it stood for including the possession of our land ... Power to the people must now be followed by land to the people.²⁷

One of the major weaknesses of the existing analysis of the Afro-radical and nativist position in Zimbabwe is its attempt to dismiss it as a desperate act of a government besieged by both an economic crisis and a decline in popularity, and, therefore, sees it as a mere expedient measure taken by ZANU-PF seeking to restore its waning legitimacy and wounded nationalist image in the face of a young but well-organised MDC that directly panders to the neo-liberal alternative in Zimbabwe. This dismissive approach *à la* Mbembe of Afro-radicalism and nativism misses the analysis of the content of the Zimbabwean revolution and what it stands for in the current debate on developmental states. There is a need to understand the contours of Afro-radicalism and nativism as it unfolded in Zimbabwe as a reflection of the limits of both orthodox nationalism and neo-liberalism in societies on the margin of the global village.

In the existing literature on the Zimbabwe crisis a number of crucial issues are not clearly identified. First, the very fact that the crisis is commonly traced to the year 2000 as a time when the ruling ZANU-PF party was losing its legitimacy as a liberation movement under the challenge of the young but neo-liberal oriented MDC partially encapsulates the broader context of the development conundrum in Zimbabwe. By 2000, the long-burning embers of trying to balance the interests of settlers with those of the natives reached a breaking point, exposing the post-colonial state's incapacity to carry the dual burden of democratisation and economic development. Populist rhetoric also

reached its logistical limits. African patience reached its limit. Orthodox nationalism could no longer hold the centre together. The situation was compounded by the pressure on the state from neo-liberal global forces to let market forces have free rein in Zimbabwe. The ZANU-PF leadership found itself between a rock and a hard place. The hard place was occupied by the frustrated African constituencies that call for more state intervention into economic management, particularly to ensure justice and the equitable distribution of land, and the rock was the abode of triumphant neo-liberal constituencies that clamoured for democracy, human rights, privatisation and liberalisation of the economy.

Therefore, the Afro-radical and nativist position that was chosen by ZANU-PF as its salvation crystallised around three key issues of economic emancipation, namely land restitution, state consolidation and the redefinition of citizenship. Zimbabwe was taken back to the drawing board where it had to quickly sort out the distorted and unequal economic structures and perverse economic and social distribution policies created by colonial racism and settler colonialism. To sort out an economy lacuna fashioned by settler racism, ZANU-PF used nativist racism that first of all denied the white settler Zimbabwean citizenship in order to take the land from him. The white settlers, many of them born in Zimbabwe, found themselves described as *amabhunu* – (Boers, a reference to white settlers in South Africa) rather than citizens. Citizenship was forcefully defined in nativist terms that excluded white races. All these issues fed into the broader agenda of resolution of the national question.²⁸ The national question embodied racial issues, settler-native binaries, the definition of citizenship, ownership of resources particularly land, and control of the national discourse. These issues were at the root of the prosecution of the liberation war that culminated in the short-changing if not defeat of the nationalist emancipatory project at the Lancaster House Conference. Robert Mugabe as a signatory to the Lancaster House Agreement soon expressed disquiet and anxiety at the neo-colonial interests that pervaded the whole affair:

Yes, even as I signed the document I was not a happy man at all. I felt we had been cheated to some extent ... that we had agreed to a deal which

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would to some extent rob us of the victory that we had hoped to have achieved in the field.²⁹

By 1997, ZANU-PF and its allies in the Afro-radical and nativist camp were drumming up support for indigenisation of the economy and toying with what Sam Moyo terms the “go it alone” approach without international support.³⁰ Zimbabwe was suffering from the direct consequences of the crisis of incomplete decolonisation that manifested itself in the delayed resolution of its various national questions. The unresolved questions manifested themselves in calls from various sections of Zimbabwean society including the emergent African *petit bourgeoisie* that wanted the process of embourgeoisement hastened through take-over of every sector dominated by the whites, peasants who wanted land to be given back to them, war veterans who demanded to be paid for their liberation war sacrifices, youth who wanted employment and women who wanted empowerment. These various unresolved national questions were identified by Amanda Hammar and Brian Raftopolous as the politics of land and resource distribution, reconstructions of nation and citizenship, and the re-making of the state and modes of rule.³¹

ZANU-PF decided to defy the neo-liberal rules of the political and economic game in order to use the state to intervene in these processes that in reality reflected concerns over development, and in so doing immediately provoked the anger of neo-liberals across the world. Besides the negative issue of violence that has clouded the Zimbabwean development discourse as defined by ZANU-PF, one can easily see the nativist direction it was taking and the issues involved. The broad framework is one of indigenisation of institutions and resources. This has involved reforming the judiciary system that had remained manned by whites at the top who were considered to be opposed to the re-distribution of land; strengthening of state capacity to make it more interventionist into the structures of the economy for the benefit of the native African; creation of a powerful indigenous black middle-class with a nativist mandate owning the means of production as a patriotic citizen; re-definition of citizenship in more nativist terms as a solution to the enduring problem of native-settler binaries created

by colonialism and perpetuated by the Lancaster House Agreement; completing indigenisation of the economy through a fast-track land reform programme; vigorous social and cultural engineering in the form of promotion of patriotism and a national ethos as a bulwark against the corrosive forces of globalisation and cosmopolitanism; and adopting a deliberate and full-fledged nativist drive as an alternative development paradigm.

This agenda was found to be too radical for a post-Cold War dispensation dominated by neo-liberalism. Despite its 'pro-people' orientation in the Zimbabwean discourse of land restitution, the neo-liberals were adamant that the Third *Chimurenga* was profoundly anti-systemic and anti-global status quo. The main challenge that confronted the Zimbabwean indigenisation revolution was that it took place at the wrong time, a time dominated by a concern with *saving what exists, rather than changing*. The Zimbabwean struggle to chart an alternative development trajectory predicated on radical indigenisation came at a time when radicalism had "been reduced to the fight for status quo".³²

The 'Disciplining' Ethos of Neo-Liberal Fundamentalism

One of the issues that needs to be noted is that the birth of the nationalist agenda for decolonisation contended with an equally powerful liberal agenda that was born within the colonial edifice but feeding on metropolitan and global imperatives. The nationalist agenda was shot through with neo-liberal languages and practices that watered down African politics to a 'transfer of power' from the white minority to the black majority without the logical smashing of the colonial state structures that were underpinned by exploitative settler-native binaries.³³ What prevailed at the Lancaster House Conference was the neo-liberal perspective, to the extent of driving a wedge between the so-called 'internal nationalists' who were said to be moderate and liberal in thinking, led by Bishop Abel Muzorewa, and the 'external nationalists' who were said to be radical and Marxist in orientation, co-led by Joshua Nkomo and Robert Mugabe.³⁴ The strength of the neo-liberal spirit was underestimated by the nationalists who were optimistic about defeating the few white settlers in Rhodesia without a clear strategy for engaging the global liberal framework that was not amenable to complete decolonisation.

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The watchful eye of the British and Americans made sure that a neo-colonial dispensation was to be the order for post-colonial Zimbabwe. With a neo-colonial framework in place, Zimbabwe became a mere successor to the exploitative settler colonial state with no stamina to redefine the state, resource ownership patterns and citizenship. Both the native (African) and the settler (former white Rhodesians) were theoretically ushered into a common citizenship as equals at independence. The reality was that the settler entered into Zimbabwe with all the privileges deriving from the settler colonial establishment including protection of their often illegally acquired land. The native entered independent Zimbabwe with the reality of racial-induced poverty but hopeful that the situation was going to change for the better under a black nationalist government.

Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja describes the post-colonial state in Africa in general as a “regulator” or “social gendarme” that endeavoured to moderate and contain the very contradictions of which it is a product, so as to maintain order and social cohesion. In doing so, the post-colonial state upheld the interests of the classes that dominated the social order and acquired its character in the process.³⁵ This is, indeed, an insightful analysis of the nature of the post-colonial state in Africa. It tallies with Rukudzo Murapa’s predictions of the ruptures that would emerge within the nationalist movement at independence, pitting the ambitious petit-bourgeois leadership against the dependent and desperate proletariat as well as a brutally exploited peasantry. Murapa argued that:

After national liberation, the petit-bourgeois leadership can abandon its alliance with the workers and peasants and emerge as the new ruling class by gaining certain concessions from both foreign and local capital, in fact forming a new alliance with these forces which they will need to stay in power. Of course, lip service commitment, *a la* Kenya, to the masses, will be made.³⁶

The nationalist petit-bourgeois who dominated the national liberation movement were indeed created by colonialism and were not to be trusted with the delicate task of creating anything different from the colonial state that produced them. Even Robert Mugabe with his polished Marxist rhetoric was not

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an exception to being an embodiment of the colonial discourse he was fighting against. His reconciliation speech was a classical example of abandonment of the African worker and peasant and embracing the powerful white settler. In his independence speech he went straight to compromise with the former settler colonialists. He proclaimed that:

Henceforth you and I must strive to adapt ourselves, intellectually and spiritually to the reality of our political change and relate to each other as brothers bound one to the other by bond of comradeship. If yesterday I fought you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interests, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. Is it not folly, therefore, that in these circumstances anybody should seek to revive the wounds and grievances of the past? The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten.³⁷

He proceeded to elaborate his compromise with the former whites in specific black and white terms:

It could never be correct justification that because the Whites oppressed us yesterday when they had power, the Blacks must oppress them today because they have power. An evil remains an evil whether practiced by whites against black or black against white. Our majority rule would easily turn into inhuman rule if we oppressed, persecuted or harassed those who do not look or think like the majority of us.³⁸

As noted by Ibbo Mandaza, reconciliation was “the mourn of weak, even when pronounced from positions of apparent moral and political superiority over oppressors and exploiters of yesterday”.³⁹ Mandaza added: “The reconciliation exercise, therefore, serves largely a political function, facilitating the necessary compromise between the rulers of yesterday and the inheritors of state power, within the context of incomplete decolonisation.”⁴⁰ These class compromises did not take place in Zimbabwe alone but in many other countries

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where the petit-bourgeois led the nationalist liberation movements, including South Africa that had the benefit of learning from others who had achieved independence earlier in the century. Under the guise of the delicate exigencies of nation-building nationalist leaders indeed abandoned the peasants and workers and accommodated themselves within the structures of the former colonial capitalist state. Secondly, by the time Robert Mugabe proclaimed the policy of reconciliation, his options regarding the former white settlers were very limited. His power was unstable. He had to build a nation within a political environment full of suspicion and military threats.

Thus, Mugabe had to compromise the radical demands of African nationalism, and renege on the noble promises of the liberation struggle, for the purposes of nation-building and power consolidation. Zimbabwe's considerable economic dependence on world markets and on external capital reinforced Mugabe's compromise with white capital through his national reconciliation policy. The consequences of this politics of compromise were that the white settlers were allowed to maintain control of the larger portion of the national economy. Secondly, the ZANU-PF government was forced to try to implement a welfare programme predicated on a neo-liberal policy of maintaining high levels of economic growth, of increased social expenditure and of promoting rural development. The long-awaited restructuring of the former colonial economy was thus postponed if not reduced to the province of nationalist political rhetoric.

What is even more important is the nature of the state that emerged from this situation. It was the nation-state-in-the-making that was weak, lacking essence and suffering from being a hostage and dependent political entity. It had poor political and economic foundations, fragile and given to conflict.⁴¹ The Zimbabwean state as *post-colonial* or *post-liberation* state "has no life of its own, it has no essence; it is a state modelled on the (European) bourgeois state but without a national bourgeoisie that would otherwise provide it an anchor and even a semblance of independence."⁴² Such a state does not have control of its destiny. It was highly compromised by its circumstances of emergence from within the neo-colonial Lancaster House Agreement and Lancaster House Constitution that were forced on the nationalists by the British and Americans. Added to this is the fact that "Zimbabwe like many African states, is not yet a

nation-state” and suffers low-level tensions reminiscent of all countries with a kaleidoscope of cultural, ethnic, racial, religious and societal identities.⁴³

From the time of colonial occupation that began in September 1890, the country emerged as a bifurcated society shot through with racial and ethnic differentiation. Neither settler colonialism nor African nationalism could liquidate the racial and ethnic binaries. As argued by Mahmood Mamdani, colonialism divided colonial societies into ‘subjects’ and ‘citizens’ who rarely co-existed peacefully because of racialised exploitative realities that mediated the relationship.⁴⁴ This created a problem, which Mamdani characterised as “the native-settler question”, which in reality is permeated by differential ownership of property particularly land in post-colonial societies.⁴⁵ In Zimbabwe, the related but different processes of nation-building and state-building had stood in competition since independence and remained as unfinished projects lying in paralysis within the minimalist agenda that did not seek to liquidate the racial and ethnic differences but to manage them. Soon the more complex process of nation-building was superseded by the process of state-building reduced to the imperative of ZANU-PF regime security. The Lancaster House Agreement had only solved the dispute relating to who was to control the state between the white settlers and black nationalists. Later, Robert Mugabe sought to solve the native-settler question through reconciliation. Masunungure has identified some key problems in the Zimbabwean nation-building project. First, the state-building project proceeded as if the nation already existed, without being anchored on national sentiment, identity, or consciousness. Secondly, Zimbabwe has a functional state without a functional nation. Finally, Zimbabwe is by all definitions a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-religious and multi-racial country that has never sought or implemented a multi-partite solution.⁴⁶

The crisis of the Zimbabwean state was compounded by its being a product of two major legacies. First, it was a direct successor to the brutal and authoritarian settler colonial state. Secondly, it was a product of a protracted nationalist liberation struggle. Both legacies were schools of violence, intolerance and militarism rather than democratisation and respect for human rights. As noted by Terence Ranger, colonial brute force had to be met with an equally brutal and intolerant nationalist strength.⁴⁷ All this combined to give birth to a violent,

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militaristic, intolerant and hegemonic state. People expected a break with settler colonial violence as well as a break with the tradition of nationalist and guerrilla violence. They expected the emergence of expanded democratic spaces, protection of human rights and fulfilment of basic, tangible benefits once majority rule was achieved.⁴⁸ The reverse was true:

The post-colonial Zimbabwean state under ZANU-PF failed dismally to make a break with the tradition of nationalist authoritarianism and guerrilla violence as well as colonial settler repression. The ruling party itself, having been a militarised liberation movement, failed to de-militarise itself, not only in practice, but also in attitude and style of management of civil institutions and the state at large.⁴⁹

Norma Kriger notes that from the beginning, Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF were concerned with the consolidation of power and regime security to the extent of imagining a “party-state” and a “party-nation” where they deliberately conflated government, state and party into one fearsome Leviathan that survived on frontal assault politics on perceived enemies.⁵⁰ From the outset, the people’s keen concern for democracy, economic development and human security, clashed and contended with the now combined authoritarian legacies from the Rhodesian counter-insurgency tactics, nationalist mobilisation and violent liberation war. The ZANU-PF government thwarted the chances of the formation of new civil structures outside party and government patronage. ZANU-PF sought to be the umbrella family, representing different voices in civil society, which resurfaced with the end of the liberation war. The assumption and assertion of an autonomous position by workers, peasants, women and youth was perceived as a threat to the young Zimbabwe state. The strikes by workers in the 1980s were termed “wild cat strikes” and perceived as counter-revolutionary.

Throughout the 1980s, the Zimbabwean state projected a false impression that it was very capable to the extent that some scholars termed the 1980s “the successful eighties”.⁵¹ The economic development of the country was located within the party, state and government, which were intertwined under the leadership of Robert Mugabe. The first economic policy document of the new

government was *Growth with Equity*, which was permeated by the nationalist populist spirit of redressing colonial imbalances and the socialist rhetoric of normalising class difference. According to this policy:

economic exploitation of the majority by the few, the grossly uneven infrastructure and productive development of the rural and urban distribution sectors, the imbalanced levels of development within and among sectors and the consequent grossly inequitable pattern of income distribution and of benefits to the overwhelming majority of this country, stand as a serious indictment of our society.⁵²

Within the structural neo-colonial constraints imposed by the Lancaster House Constitution, the ZANU-PF government of the 1980s took some steps towards addressing the severely unequal and intolerable differences between the economically privileged white minority and the impoverished black majority without effecting real change. The government invested heavily in education, health and other social services. Free and compulsory primary education was introduced, massive expansion in secondary schools and teacher training was undertaken, community primary health care was developed, and large investments were made in rural hospitals and clinics. The public service was reformed and 'Africanised' through a deliberate acceleration and advancement of Africans.⁵³ These were cosmetic reforms that did not touch on the core of settler ownership of the economy.

As noted by Richard Saunders even these positive developments were carried out in an authoritarian manner feeding on top-down strategies and politics needed to win a liberation war. There was no popular participation of the citizens; the state and the ruling party decided what was good for the people.⁵⁴ Rural assertions of collective rights to land, tradition and local economy soon conflicted with state-led, state-determined, state-formulated and confident interventions in people's lives. Workers' attempts to assert their rights and their demands for a solution to their long-standing grievances dating back to the colonial period, soon conflicted with the authoritarian and hegemonic desire of the ruling party to subordinate trade unions and others civics and the tendency

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to speak on their behalf. The vocal women's advocacy movements inevitably came to clash not only with the essential patriarchy of African nationalism but also with the government's desire to de-politicise and re-domesticate women.⁵⁵

The first five years of independence witnessed dominant state intervention in labour relations with a visible bias to the immediate interests of the bourgeoisie.⁵⁶ The state abused its broad consensus deriving from the liberation war and co-opted trade unions within the party political system. The authoritarian interventionist *modus operandi* was aided by the fact that the authority of the ruling party was not questioned as the majority of Shona-speaking people and the majority of the country's organisations aligned themselves to the state's nationalist-inspired developmentalist discourse and the message of national unity.⁵⁷ There were indeed glaring disparities between the respect of rights enshrined in the constitution and the *de facto* rules that the state used to intervene in every aspect of life in the country.

While the politicians mounted a strong socialist propaganda and rhetoric, the state was accepting the neo-liberal mantra of growth and redistribution. This was clearly revealed in the 1982 *Transitional National Development Plan*. The idea was that it was only the state ownership of productive capacity that would guarantee the removal of growth constraints and direct growth benefits towards national and collective objectives.⁵⁸ The role of the private sector was not clearly spelt out in this developmental trajectory save for the fact that its control and power needed to be reduced. A number of interventions were made by the state, which included limiting the hiring of skilled expatriates; investing in local skills development; establishing tripartite institutions; and introducing a national minimum wage.⁵⁹ Thus, between 1980 and 2002, the ZANU-PF-led government of Zimbabwe toyed with ambitious development agendas that encapsulated the contradictory environment in which the state found itself. The agenda included a consistent nationalist rhetoric on land reform as the lodestar of Zimbabwean development, income and wealth redistribution as an aspect of fulfilment of liberation war promises, socialist transformation as a strategy to reduce poverty (1980-1990), an economic structural adjustment programme involving liberalisation of the economy (1991-1995), and the current nativist-inspired indigenisation of economic strategy marked by violence, chaos

and crisis. All these contradictory and ambiguous agendas are symptomatic of the trials and tribulations of a state caught up between the weak nationalist-inspired agenda and the globalist and triumphant neo-liberal political bent of maintaining the neo-colonial status quo.

Not surprisingly, in the 1980s and 1990s, ZANU-PF as the ruling party was pursuing a moderate ideological position in the midst of record-breaking economic growth of 26% in the period 1980-1981 that created the idea of Zimbabwe as a successful democratic developmental state. This record was partly due to the end of the war and removal of sanctions. The drought of 1982 reversed all this and the government entered the path of borrowing more and more from the Bretton Woods agencies. Thus, like all other post-colonial African states, Zimbabwe built a debt burden from as early as 1980 and its situation was worsened by the fact that it also inherited the colonial state's debt.⁶⁰ By this time Zimbabwe did not pursue radical nativist aspirations because it could still receive the needed international financial aid. Secondly, the ruling elite was still comfortable with the consolidation of its economic position through kleptocratic tendencies and corruption. Ideologically, Zimbabwe was peddling socialist rhetoric while the ruling elite was busy with the primitive-style accumulation of wealth.

Beneath all this the clouds of chaos were hanging in the sky during the so-called 'successful eighties'. Rob Davies critiqued the so-called 'successful eighties' in these revealing words: "However, the gains were easily reversible, since they were based primarily on redistribution rather than growth, and the redistribution was of income rather than assets."⁶¹ He pointed out that the expanded education system was predicated upon the ability of the budgetary process to continue to finance it, while the healthy gains depended on the support of the donors. These measures did not create their own sustainability; hence they carried the dangerous seeds of their own destruction. They were "central gifts to the poor."⁶² In other words, the celebrated 'successful eighties' failed dismally to empower recipients to continue to receive and expand the benefits in a sustained way. The land reform of the 1980s, which was planned and based on 'willing-seller, willing-buyer', only resulted in accessing the land without getting title deeds. According to Davies, this perpetuated a system of

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clientelism, in which beneficiaries remained beholden to the state and local power structures.⁶³

Alongside the façade of democracy lay deep-rooted authoritarianism feeding on both the colonial and nationalist legacies that were equally imperious to democracy and respect for pluralism. The ruling ZANU-PF party failed to transform itself from a liberation movement that previously operated on quasi-military and commandist lines to a civil-political party responsible for governing a civic multi-ethnic and multi-racial nation. While multi-party politics was enshrined in the constitution of Zimbabwe, in practice the ruling party did not tolerate any challenge. PF-ZAPU led by Dr Joshua Nkomo carried the brunt of ZANU-PF intolerance and an estimated 20 000 supporters of PF-ZAPU were killed on the orders of ZANU-PF in the period 1980-1987 as part and parcel of the conflictual and violent nation-building and state consolidation.⁶⁴

The hallmark of Zimbabwean politics was an attempt to legitimise the tyranny of the majority as long as it served the regime security of the ruling party. Secondly, there were concerted efforts to make politics the preserve of those who participated in the liberation war on the side of ZANU-PF. Others were to be de-legitimised. ZANU-PF operated as a hegemonic institution that intervened and extended its tentacles into every sphere of life. A one-party-state mentality pervaded the Zimbabwean political landscape, with Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF openly driving for it in the late 1980s following the swallowing of PF-ZAPU.⁶⁵

The argument of the ruling elite was that a strong state was an essential prerequisite for national development. So consolidation of state power was a constant preoccupation of the Zimbabwean ruling elite in the 1980s. The problem is of course that consolidation of state power in Africa and elsewhere in practice means consolidation of the personal power of those at its helm. By the late 1980s, following the swallowing of PF-ZAPU as the only credible opposition, Robert Mugabe and ZANU-PF focused on power consolidation. By the end of the first decade of independence the ruling elite shifted its focus from socialist rhetoric to politics as a means of acquiring personal wealth. The Willovale car scandal provided the most poignant example.⁶⁶ Following this scandal, corruption within government became entrenched. The state, instead of

carrying out the task of economic development and democracy, became a site of acquisition of wealth by a few politically connected people.

By the late 1980s cries of unfulfilled liberation war promises were reaching a crescendo. Signs of an economic crisis were beginning to be evident amidst grandiose elite corruption, drought and shrinking democratic space. The 1990s saw the country adopting an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) that was accompanied by massive retrenchment of workers and removal of subsidies on basic commodities. The poor were hard hit by this programme while the politically connected reaped the dividends. The move towards the adoption of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe was noticeable in the government's policy statements throughout the 1980s including an inconsistent blend of populist wish-lists and control-oriented thinking with the orthodox macro-economics founded on ESAP. ZANU-PF's socialist rhetoric was coupled with undercurrents of neo-liberalism from the outset of political independence.⁶⁷ Adoption of the ESAP was the first indication that economic development had stalled and the ruling elite was worried about raising the rate of economic growth and secure the desperately needed foreign currency. The limits of the state as a site for personal wealth acquisition were being reached by 1990, revealing the crisis to come.⁶⁸ According to Sam Moyo, "the conflict cycle starts with the precipitation of the economic conflict over the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) into a political rupture between 1996 and 1999. It then 'exploded' between 2000 and 2002 over two elections and struggles over land repossession."⁶⁹ At another level, the adoption of the ESAP was a desperate search for a sustainable development trajectory for the country in the face of the global failure of socialism in the 1990s.⁷⁰ When the ESAP generated a deeper crisis and precipitated resistance from students and workers without any recognisable economic growth, the Zimbabwean government began to look for a way out of the mess, and the Afro-radical and nativist paradigm came in handy to ZANU-PF which was desperately looking for an ideological guide to re-mobilise society behind the state.

It was during the implementation of the ESAP that an indigenous speculative entrepreneurial class emerged, particularly in the financial sector following its liberalisation. Indigenous banks mushroomed, owned by those with political

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connections to ZANU-PF. The scourge of corruption expanded with liberalisation and indigenisation. One must note that the adoption of the ESAP more than any other development in the country sealed the divorce between the workers and the state. Retrenchments and the removal of subsidies on basic commodities buried the worker alive. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) began to challenge the government for abandoning the workers, and the road to the transformation of this labour movement into the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 started in earnest from the strikes of the 1990s. After 1990, Zimbabwe was never the same again.⁷¹ Suzanne Dansereau encapsulated Zimbabwe's double failure by 1990 in these words:

The failure of two independence strategies – an inward-oriented one and an externally driven one – left government in an economic policy vacuum with higher debt problems and heavier loan conditionalities and especially unable to curb inflation and address problems of growing poverty, unemployment and land hunger. The government now faced increasingly vociferous labour groups who continued to face deteriorating real wages. Government's lack of response to their problems eventually turned their dissatisfaction to resistance and then opposition.⁷²

What need to be factored in here as other crucial factors responsible for Zimbabwe's plunge into crisis are the state's involvement in conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the unbudgeted payment of gratuities and life pensions to war veterans. Norma Kriger has dealt exhaustively with war veteran political issues in her book, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987*, though she ignored the economic impact of the war veteran issue on Zimbabwe.⁷³ Even in the epilogue dealing with the post-1987 war veteran issue Kriger remained focused on the politics rather than the economics of this issue. It is on this issue and the DRC intervention that Zimbabwe shot itself in the foot to the extent that many analysts agree that 1997 was a watershed year. They identify four shocking events that marked the period 1997-1998:

- Unbudgeted war veterans' payout of August 1997;

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- Ill-thought-out and ill-timed announcement of a compulsory and accelerated land take-over programme;
- Intervention into the DRC war in mid-1998 without a clear calculation of the economic costs;
- Impact of the Asian financial crisis in 1998.

The combination of the payment of large sums of money to an estimated 50 000 war veterans and the high spending on the DRC war broke the economic spine of the country. As though these ill-thought decisions were not enough, ZANU-PF further plunged the country into crisis by announcing the beginning of the controversial fast-track land reform programme on the basis of the Land Designation Act.⁷⁴ In 1999, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) broke economic ties with Zimbabwe over the DRC adventure.

These 'shock' events were indeed the immediate causes of Zimbabwe's plunge into crisis at the beginning of the new millennium. By 2000 the floodgates to disaster had opened wide. At the political level, the crisis took the form of an intense and violent competition for power between the newly formed MDC and the ruling ZANU-PF. Pressure for change on the ruling ZANU-PF was reaching a crescendo, with critical voices coming from both the neo-liberal desk and the former allies of Robert Mugabe like the war veterans. The difference was only that the neo-liberal train was pushing for more and more neo-liberal reforms in line with global changes whereas the war veterans and peasants were crying out for full indigenisation of the economy. In panic, the nationalist leadership in Harare responded by taking critical steps that were not well-thought-out and well-planned but that derived their legitimacy from the liberation war promises though tempered with authoritarianism and militarism. The first critical reaction was to solve the national question once and for all through the fast-track land reform process. When the neo-liberal forces including the white farmers re-grouped around the MDC in an effort to remove ZANU-PF from power, the ruling party resorted to re-mobilisation of peasants, war veterans and the youth into fighting forces of the Third *Chimurenga*. The third step was the monitoring and regulation of civil society and political parties opposed to the Afro-radical indigenisation process revolving around violent land claims and

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invasions. It was the state's response to the robust opposition from neo-liberal forces that earned it pariah status in international circles and plunged it into further crisis.

The rate of collapse of the economy and deepening conflictual situation led Zimbabwe to fall victim to what Paul Tiyambe Zeleza describes as “scholarship by epithets”, whereby different scholars competed to coin different descriptions of African politics as basically nasty, brutish and bestial and the African state as “cronyist”, “collapsed”, “corporatist”, “ceremonial”, “non-developmental”, “kleptocratic”, “greedy”, “decadent”, “hollow”, “lecherous”, “predatory”, “leviathan”, “prebendal”, “parasitic”, “precarious”, “patrimonial”, “neo-patrimonial”, “swollen”, “unreal”, “venal”, and like a “vampire”.⁷⁵ With particular reference to Zimbabwe, the crisis is variously described as exhibiting “executive lawlessness,” the “exhaustion of patriarchal model of liberation,” “exhausted nationalism,” “constitutional collapse,” “governance crisis,” “unfinished business,” “mal-governance,” “land crisis” “economic collapse,” and “mutating millennial crisis.”⁷⁶ At the end of the day many analyses failed to see anything positive in what was happening in Zimbabwe.

The Current Crisis in Zimbabwe

The competition to describe the situation in Zimbabwe reached fever pitch after the 2000 and 2002 general and presidential elections, which the liberal camp had hoped to win against ZANU-PF which had now taken an entrenched Afro-radical and nativist position permeated by an anti-imperial, anti-neo-liberalism and anti-globalisation rhetoric. This Afro-radical and nativist position utilised the pan-African, neo-Marxist and African nationalist ideological resources to justify critical interventions into the economy including land reform predicated on fast-track ethos. On the other hand, the neo-liberal forces increased their activism utilising the newly formed MDC and various civil society organisations such as the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA), Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), Zimbabwe Human Rights Forum, Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights as well as Zimbabwe Crisis Coalition. These neo-liberal

organisations were galvanised into action by the triumphant forces of liberal democracy sweeping across the globe after the end of the Cold War. Unlike the Afro-radical and nativist position occupied by ZANU-PF and its allies, the neo-liberal camp utilises such post-Cold War ideological resources as human rights, pluralism, constitutionalism, market forces, liberalisation, transparency, accountability, predictability and good governance in their so-called democratic struggles.

Looked at from a structuralist perspective, the crisis involved a number of issues. The first issue to consider is that of the muddled economic structures mediated by contradictory primitive accumulation transitions that left the emergent national black bourgeoisie very impatient. These black bourgeois, defined in terms of the radical wing of the bourgeois revolutionaries of France after 1789, pushed harder for the use of the post-colonial state as a vehicle of social and economic transformation towards full indigenisation of the major sector of the economy.⁷⁷ Their action reflected clearly the key problem of delayed resolution of the national question involving land redistribution and other long-awaited economic reforms. Together with the war veterans, the black bourgeois put pressure on ZANU-PF and Robert Mugabe to explain why the land issue was still unresolved. The black bourgeois used such organisations as the Affirmative Action Group (AAG), Indigenous Business Development Corporation, Indigenous Commercial Farmers Union (ICFU) and other formations to vigorously fight for indigenisation of major economic sectors.

Those black bourgeois working from within the state and ZANU-PF party apparatus vigorously argued for the smashing of the neo-colonial state that took the ideological form of anti-imperialism. The Zimbabwean state was re-imagined in terms of sovereignty and patriotism, slanting more and more into nativism. This spirit was well captured in the political slogans of ZANU-PF that included 'Zimbabwe will never be a colony again', 'Land is the economy', 'People first: our land is our prosperity', and 'Work the land, reap prosperity, build the nation'. Through these slogans the Afro-radical camp managed to win the hearts and minds of the rural peasants who were desperate for land.

On the other hand, the neo-liberal camp and its civil society allies wanted the democratic space to be expanded in line with the global developments of

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the triumphalism of liberal democracy and neo-liberalism in general. This camp tended to reduce the politics of land to ZANU-PF electioneering. The neo-liberal camp was enthusiastically supported by the Western liberal community that was the author of neo-liberalism, globalisation and cosmopolitanism. The external intervention of the Western powers including former colonisers in the form of funding the opposition MDC and civil society further complicated an already polarised situation and opened the room for it to escalate into low-intensity conflict. ZANU-PF and its allies in the indigenisation drive soon defined the crisis as bordering on resistance to the re-colonisation of Zimbabwe. Even more seriously was ZANU-PF's response to the issue of external intervention through narrowing the political space by way of legal restrictions on the media that were said to be the mouthpieces of the West, while NGOs were said to be harbingers of latter-day Western imperialists, culminating in the increased use of violence against those considered to be 'fronting' for external intervention in Zimbabwe.⁷⁸

The Western governments, the NGOs and the opposition MDC responded by taking an equally hardened and uncompromising if not fundamentalist position highlighting a plethora of deficits in the governance process. Zimbabwe is indeed suffering from a serious democratic deficit due to the complex clashes between the nationalist-inspired and neo-liberal forces fighting for dominance in Zimbabwe. This has resulted in the shrinkage of democratic spaces, the almost perennial presidential incumbency of Robert Mugabe, executive lawlessness that developed into a lack of accountability and transparency, the questionable conduct of elections and failure to fulfil Southern African Development Community (SADC) electoral principles on democratic elections, complete intolerance of alternative political thought, criminalisation of opposition politics, invasion of every sphere of life by ZANU-PF including the family unit, exclusion of foreign-based citizens from voting, closure of media outlets, and general governance by crisis and force.

After 2000, rule of law became a sham under the heavy weight of executive lawlessness that included attacking judges, state-sanctioned violence involving military forces, militias, and war veterans carrying out such bizarre executive orders as the fast-track land reform programme and urban clean-up,

code-named Operation Murambatsvina, a compromised and patronised judiciary, and the use of draconian legislation such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) that have combined to make Zimbabwe assume some features of a fascist state. At the economic and social level, the order of the day was a shrinking formal economy, informalisation of the economy, stagnation of the economy, worthlessness of the Zimbabwean dollar, high indebtedness, negligible domestic capital formation, hyper-inflation, a high unemployment rate, collapsed foreign direct investment, and an unprecedented brain-drain.

This dovetailed into a serious humanitarian crisis indicated by unprecedented poverty, lack of basic commodities, collapsing medical facilities and a high proportion of people suffering from HIV/AIDS. Looked at from a broader perspective, Zimbabwe is suffering from what must be described as a development deficit marked by a lack of economic growth and the absence of a clear trajectory towards recovery and a better future as well as uncertainty among people.⁷⁹

At the international level, Zimbabwe assumed pariah status and the ZANU-PF top leadership was slapped with travel bans. Under the shadow of international isolation and condemnation, the ZANU-PF government did not relent on its path of indigenising the 'sick economy' particularly through land redistribution. It is these negative developments that have blinded many analysts to the extent that they cannot make sense of the development conundrum in Zimbabwe. What they see is a post-colonial absurdity. This has led Zimbabwe to be studied from the crisis discourse fashioned by neo-liberal fundamentalism.

Conclusion

The Zimbabwean crisis is indeed a clear reflection of the risks involved in any attempt by a weak African state to defy neo-liberal fundamentalism in an endeavour to take control of its destiny and to chart an autonomous development trajectory in a time of triumphant neo-liberalism and globalisation. Zimbabwe is today suffering from the disciplinary consequences of fundamentalist neo-liberalism. This is not to ignore the negative consequences of the leadership

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of President Robert Mugabe and his ZANU-PF party, who in panic over their continued power, took measures that eroded democracy and human rights and plunged the country further and further into crisis. However, neo-liberal fundamentalism is heavily responsible for the polarisation of Zimbabwean society, taking it to the brink of violence and authoritarianism. The Zimbabwean crisis is at the interface of neo-liberal globalisation and its discontents in the South.

The violent nativist position occupied by ZANU-PF is a response to the fierce and sweeping neo-liberal globalisation that is taking the whole globe by storm. The violence, human rights violations, ‘democracides’ (killing of democracy), and humanitarian and economic crisis are symptoms of a vicious clash between the nationalist project and the neo-liberal global project. The two projects have taken on fundamentalist proportions that are propelling everything towards ideological zealotry and fanaticism. What is needed in Zimbabwe is an exorcism of the ghosts of fundamentalism that have destroyed the chance of dialogue. Zimbabwe is suffering from monologues that could lead to death.

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