

Lessons of Zimbabwe: Mugabe in Context*

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It is hard to think of a figure more reviled in the West than Robert Mugabe. Liberal and conservative commentators alike portray him as a brutal dictator, and blame him for Zimbabwe's descent into hyperinflation and poverty. The seizure of white-owned farms by his black supporters has been depicted as a form of thuggery, and as a cause of the country's declining production, as if these lands were doomed by black ownership. Sanctions have been imposed, and opposition groups funded with the explicit aim of unseating him.

There is no denying Mugabe's authoritarianism, or his willingness to tolerate and even encourage the violent behaviour of his supporters. His policies have helped lay waste the country's economy, though sanctions have played no small part, while his refusal to share power with the country's growing opposition movement, much of it based in the trade unions, has led to a bitter impasse. This view of Zimbabwe's crisis can be found everywhere, from the *Economist* and the *Financial Times* to the *Guardian* and the *New Statesman*, but it gives us little sense of how Mugabe has managed to survive. For he has ruled not only by coercion but by consent, and his land reform measures, however harsh, have won him considerable popularity, not just in Zimbabwe but throughout southern Africa. In any case, the preoccupation with his character does little to illuminate the socio-historical issues involved.

Many have compared Mugabe to Idi Amin and the land expropriation in Zimbabwe to the Asian expulsion in Uganda. The comparison isn't entirely

off the mark. I was one of the 70,000 people of South Asian descent booted out by Idi Amin in 1972; I returned to Uganda in 1979. My abiding recollection of my first few months back is that no one I met opposed Amin's expulsion of 'Asians'. Most merely said: 'It was bad the way he did it.' The same is likely to be said of the land transfers in Zimbabwe.

What distinguishes Mugabe and Amin from other authoritarian rulers is not their demagoguery but the fact that they projected themselves as champions of mass justice and successfully rallied those to whom justice had been denied by the colonial system. Not surprisingly, the justice dispensed by these demagogues mirrored the racialised injustice of the colonial system. In 1979 I began to realise that whatever they made of Amin's brutality, the Ugandan people experienced the Asian expulsion of 1972 — and not the formal handover in 1962 — as the dawn of true independence. The people of Zimbabwe are likely to remember 2000-3 as the end of the settler colonial era. Any assessment of contemporary Zimbabwe needs to begin with this sobering fact.

Though widespread grievance over the theft of land — a process begun in 1889 and completed in the 1950s — fuelled the guerrilla struggle against the regime of Ian Smith, whose Rhodesian Front opposed black majority rule, the matter was never properly addressed when Britain came back into the picture to effect a constitutional transition to independence under majority rule. Southern Rhodesia became Zimbabwe in 1980, but the social realities of the newly independent state remained embedded in an earlier historical period: some six thousand white farmers owned 15.5 million hectares of prime land, 39 per cent of the land in the country, while about 4.5 million farmers (a million households) in 'communal areas' were left to subsist on 16.4 million hectares of the most arid land, to which they'd been removed or confined by a century of colonial rule. In the middle were 8500 small-scale black farmers on about 1.4 million hectares of land.

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This was not a sustainable arrangement in a country whose independence had been secured at the end of a long armed struggle supported by a land-hungry population. But the agreement that Britain drafted at Lancaster House in 1979 — and that the settlers eagerly backed — didn't seem to take into account the kind of transition that would be necessary to secure a stable social order. Two of its provisions, one economic and the other political, reflected this short-termism: one called for land transfers on a 'willing buyer, willing seller' basis, with the British funding the scheme; the other reserved 20 per cent of seats in the House of Assembly for whites — 3 per cent of the population — giving the settler community an effective veto over any amendment to the Lancaster House terms. This was qualified majority rule at best. Both provisions had a time limit: 1990 for land transfers based on the market principle, and 1987 for the settler minority to set limits on majority rule. The deal sustained illusions among the settlers that what they had failed to achieve by UDI — Smith's 1965 declaration of independence from the UK — and force of arms, they could now achieve through support from a government of 'kith and kin' (as Smith called it) in Britain. In reality, however, the agreement drew a line under settler privilege.

The inadequacy of the Lancaster House provisions for the decolonisation of land ensured that it remained the focus of politics in independent Zimbabwe. The course of land relations and land reform in Zimbabwe has over the years been meticulously documented by Sam Moyo, a professor who directs the African Institute of Agrarian Studies in Harare. Transfers during the first decade of independence were so minimal that they increased rather than appeased land hunger. The new regime in Harare, installed in 1980 and led by Mugabe and his party, Zanu, called for the purchase of eight million hectares to resettle 162,000 land-poor farming households from communal areas. But the ban on compulsory purchase drove up land prices and encouraged white farmers to sell only the worst land. As the decade

drew to a close, only 58,000 families had been resettled on three million hectares of land. No more than 19 per cent of the land acquired between 1980 and 1992 was of prime agricultural value.

As the 1980s wore on, land transfers actually declined, dropping from 430,000 hectares per annum during the first half of the decade to 75,000 hectares during the second. The greater land hunger became, the more often invasions were mounted; in response, Mugabe created local 'squatter control' units in 1985, and they were soon evicting squatters in droves. At this point Zimbabwean law still defined a squatter in racial terms, as 'an African whose house happens to be situated in an area which has been declared European or is set apart for some other reason'. By 1990, 40 per cent of the rural population was said to be landless or affected by the landlessness of dependent relations.

When the Lancaster House Agreement's rules on land transfer expired in 1990, the pressure to take direct action was intensified by two very different developments: an IMF Structural Adjustment Programme and recurrent drought. Peasant production, which had been a meagre 8 per cent of marketed output at independence in 1980, and had shot up to 45 per cent by 1985, declined as a result of the programme. Trade-union analysts pointed out that employment growth also fell from 2.4 per cent in the late 1980s to 1.55 per cent in the period 1991-97. The percentage of households living in poverty throughout the country increased by 14 per cent in five years. There was now widespread squatting on all types of land, from communal areas to state land, commercial farms (mainly growing tobacco), resettlement areas and urban sites.

The demand for land reform came from two powerful groups at extreme ends of the social spectrum yet both firmly in Mugabe's camp: the veterans of the liberation war and the small but growing number of indigenous businesses, hitherto the main beneficiaries of independence under majority rule. At the end of the liberation war in 1980, 20,000 guerrillas had been incorporated into

the national army and other state organisations, and the rest — about 45,000 — had had to fend for themselves. They found it difficult to survive without land or a job, which is why land occupations began in the countryside soon after independence.

Mugabe and the Zanu leaders tended at first to dismiss complaints from veterans as expressions of resentment on the part of the rival liberation movement, Joshua Nkomo's Zapu, which had been marginalised in 1980. But after Zanu and Zapu signed a unity accord in 1987, former fighters from both groups became involved in land agitation. Their most significant joint initiative was to form a welfare organisation, the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association (ZNLWVA) in 1988, which called for pensions to be paid and land redistributed. It soon gained a large membership drawn from most sections of Zimbabwean society and from the two ethnic groups — the Shona majority and the Ndebele — which had defined Zanu and Zapu respectively. Its members, about 200,000 of them, came from a variety of classes, employed and unemployed, urban and rural, with positions in different branches of the state and party and the private sector. Although their strength lay in the countryside, the war vets formed the only alliance that was both independent of Mugabe and Zanu-PF, and could claim to have national support, giving them a decisive advantage over the better organised but urban-based trade-union federation in the power struggle that would shortly tear the country apart.

War vets were among the first targets of Structural Adjustment, when its effects began to be felt in 1991. Entire departments and ministries that had been heavily staffed by ex-combatants were disbanded and the stage set for a series of high-profile confrontations between veterans and government. Mugabe accused the vets of being 'armchair critics' at the inaugural conference of the ZNLWVA in April 1992; they went on to organise street demonstrations, lock top government and party officials in their offices, interrupt Mugabe's

Heroes' Day speech in 1997, intervene in court sessions and besiege the State House.

After the Lancaster House Agreement had expired, the government tried to occupy the middle ground by shifting from the 'willing buyer, willing seller' formula with a new law, the Land Acquisition Act of 1992, which gave the state powers of compulsory purchase, though landowners retained the right to challenge the price set and to receive prompt compensation. By the late 1990s, market-led land transfers had dwindled to a trickle. So had British contributions to the fund set up to pay landowners, with a mere £44 million paid out between 1980 and 1992, much less than anticipated at Lancaster House. When New Labour took over in 1997, Clare Short, the minister for international development, claimed that since neither she nor her colleagues came from the landed class in Britain — 'my own origins are Irish and as you know we were colonised not colonisers,' she wrote to the Zimbabwean minister of agriculture and land — they could not be held responsible for what Britain had done in colonial Rhodesia.

This effective default coincided with a rise inside Zimbabwe of demands for compulsory acquisition. Veterans led land occupations at Svosve and Goromonzi in 1997, clashing with Mugabe and Zanu-PF. They were joined by local chiefs and party leaders, peasants and spirit mediums (who had played a key role in the liberation war against Ian Smith). The next year, a wave of co-ordinated land occupations swept across the country, with veterans receiving critical support from the Indigenous Business Development Centre (IBDC), an affirmative action lobby set up in 1988 by members of the new black bourgeoisie. From now on, two very different elements huddled under the war vets' banner: the landless victims of settler colonialism and the elite beneficiaries of the end of settler rule.

It was largely for his own purposes, but also as a response to pressure from squatters, occupiers and their local leaders, as well as from sections of the new black elite, that in 1999 Mugabe decided to

revise the constitution drafted at Lancaster House. Two major changes were envisaged: one would allow him to stay in power for two more terms and would ensure immunity from prosecution for political and military leaders accused of committing crimes while in office; the other would empower the government to seize land from white farmers without compensation, which was held to be the responsibility of Britain. The proposals were put to a referendum in February 2000 and defeated: 45.3 per cent of voters were in favour. But only a little more than 20 per cent of the electorate had cast a vote. The urban centres of Harare and Bulawayo were three to one against adoption; voting in the countryside was marked by large-scale abstentions. Post-colonial Zimbabwe had reached a turning point.

Very early on, the colonial bureaucracy had translated the ethnic mosaic of the country into an administrative map in such a way as to allow minimum co-operation and maximum competition between different ethnic groups and areas, ensuring among other things that labour for mining, manufacture and service was not recruited from areas where peasants were needed on large farms or plantations. These areas, as it happened, were mainly Shona and so, unsurprisingly, when the trade-union movement developed in Rhodesia, its leaders were mostly Ndebele, and had few links with the Shona leadership of the peasant-based liberation movement (Mugabe belongs to the Shona majority). I remember listening to the minister of labour in Harare in 1981 complain that workers had failed to support the nationalist movement. When I suggested that it might be useful to turn the proposition around and ask why the nationalist movement had failed to organise support among workers, there was silence.

The Shona-Ndebele divide so conspicuous in the two guerrilla movements produced great tension after independence between the mainly Shona government and the mainly Ndebele labour movement, with Mugabe's ferocious repression in Ndebele areas in 1986 remaining the bloodiest

phase in post-independence Zimbabwean history. The slaughter in Matabeleland was followed by a 'reconciliation' that paved the way for a unity government in 1987, but Zanu-PF leaders thereafter suspected all protest — from whatever source — of concealing an Ndebele agenda.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions, formed in 1981 with the blessing of the government, had by the end of the decade distanced itself from its Zanu patrons, purged internal corruption and elected an independent leadership. In the 1990s it spearheaded the national agitation against Structural Adjustment and the one-party state that acquiesced in it. Yet its organisation in the countryside was confined to workers on commercial farms. The ZCTU had at first been an umbrella body for private sector unions. The spectacular growth of ZCTU, its organisation of public sector workers, has been written about by two Zimbabwean social historians, Brian Raftapolous and Ian Phimister. After independence, workers in the rapidly Africanised public sector had retained close links to the government. But this began to change when the Structural Adjustment Programme led to public sector job losses and many African workers — especially veterans — were dismissed. When government workers came out on strike in 1996, the ZCTU was able to establish a base in the public sector. A general strike in 1997 and mass stay-aways the following year set the trade unions against the government. Civil servants — including teachers and health workers — who had declared allegiance to the ruling party and the state now began to affiliate to the ZCTU. In 1998, it organised a National Constituent Assembly, with the participation of civic, NGO and church groups.

By the time Mugabe put forward amendments to the Lancaster House constitution, an impressive alliance of forces — not only trade unions, churches, civic and NGO groups, but white farmers and Western governments — was arrayed for battle. The Movement for Democratic Change was formed a few months before the 2000 referendum, to campaign for a 'no' vote. The coalition was diverse,

containing, on the one hand, public sector workers trying to roll back the tide of Structural Adjustment; on the other, uncompromising free-marketeers such as Eddie Cross, the MDC secretary of economic affairs and a senior figure in the Confederation of Zimbabwe Industries, who was intent on privatising almost everything, including education.

The veterans reacted to the defeat of the constitutional proposals by launching land occupations in Masvingo province. This prompted a split in the ruling party. With Mugabe out of the country, the acting president, Joseph Msika, told the police to torch the new squatter shacks. This was consistent with Zanu-PF policy: in the early days, Mugabe had been praised as a ‘conciliator’ by the international community for ensuring the security and property of those whites who remained in Zimbabwe, and evicting black squatters. Two decades later the position had changed: the support of the whites was no longer so important to Mugabe, and he was under enormous pressure from the veterans. With much to gain from casting his lot in with the rural insurgency, he returned from his trip and announced that there would be no government evictions. As land occupations spread to every province — 800 farms were occupied at the height of the protests — the split in the government and party hierarchy deepened. Inevitable tension between the executive and the judiciary undermined the rule of law; the executive sacked a number of judges, replacing them with others more sympathetic to land reform, and enacted pro-squatter legislation.

‘Fast-track’ land reform was now underway. The types of land that would be acquired compulsorily were specified by the government: unused or underutilised land, land owned by absentees or people with several farms; land above a certain area (determined by region) and land contiguous with communal areas. The white owners of around 2900 commercial farms listed for compulsory acquisition and redistribution were given 90 days to move out. Government directives specified that ‘owners of farms marked for redistribution will be

compensated for improvements made on the land, but not for the land itself, as this land was stolen from the original owners in the colonial era.’

The closing date for ‘fast-track’ land acquisition — August 2002 — came and went, but occupations continued unimpeded until mid-2003, and on a diminished scale for a year or so after that. Chiefs fought for land for their constituents and for themselves, and so did their counterparts in the state bureaucracy and the private sector. In Matabeleland, a minority of pro-MDC chiefs were sceptical of land reform, but later submitted claims. The black elite made a brazen land grab in direct contravention of the ‘one person, one farm’ policy, provoking a hue and cry in society at large and within the ruling party; the government set up a presidential commission to determine the facts. Crucially, in 2005 the government passed an amendment declaring all agricultural land to be state land. Land was seized from nearly 4000 white farmers and redistributed: 72,000 large farmers received 2.19 million hectares and 127,000 smallholders received 4.23 million hectares.

What land reform has meant or may come to mean for Zimbabwe’s economy is still hotly disputed. Recently there have been signs that scholarly opinion is shifting. A study by Ian Scoones of Sussex University’s Institute of Development Studies — in collaboration with the Programme for Land and Agrarian Studies (PLAAS) at the University of the Western Cape — challenges some of the conventional wisdom in media and academic circles within and beyond Zimbabwe. The problem with this wisdom is that certain highly destructive aspects of reform — coercion; corruption and incompetence; cronyism in the redistribution of land; lack of funds and an absence of agricultural activity — have come to stand for the whole process. In particular, Scoones identifies five myths: that land reform has been a total failure; that its beneficiaries have been largely political cronies; that there is no new investment in the new settlements; that agriculture is in ruins; and that the rural economy has collapsed. Researchers at

PLAAS have been quick to point out that over the past eight years small-scale farmers ‘have been particularly robust in weathering Zimbabwe’s political and economic turmoil, as well as drought’. Ben Cousins, the director of PLAAS and one of the most astute South African analysts of agrarian change — who had previously argued that the land reform would destroy agricultural production — now says that the future of Zimbabwe lies in providing small farmers with subsidies so that food security can be achieved. According to researchers at the African Institute for Agrarian Studies in Harare, new farms need to receive subsidised maize seed and fertiliser for a few seasons before achieving full production. Some might give up during this period, but not many — partly because the land tenure system doesn’t allow land sales; only land permits or leases can be acquired.

Zimbabwe has seen the greatest transfer of property in southern Africa since colonisation and it has all happened extremely rapidly. Eighty per cent of the 4000 white farmers were expropriated; most of them stayed in Zimbabwe. Redistribution revolutionised property-holding, adding more than a hundred thousand small owners to the base of the property pyramid. In social and economic — if not political — terms, this was a democratic revolution. But there was a heavy price to pay.

The first casualty was the rule of law, already tenuous by 1986. When international donors pressured the regime in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2000 by suspending aid and loans — a boycott favoured by the MDC and the unions — the government simply fixed the result in its favour. In the violence that followed, more than a hundred people died, including six white farmers and 11 black farm labourers. Some of the violence was government-sponsored and most of it state-sanctioned. The judiciary was reshaped, local institutions in rural areas narrowly politicised, and laws were passed which granted local agencies the powers necessary to crush opponents of land reform. Denouncing his adversaries in the trade unions and NGOs as servants of the old white ruling

class, Mugabe authorised the militias and state security agencies to hound down opposition, as repression and reform went hand in hand. In 2003, the leading independent newspaper, the Daily News, was shut down. While jubilant government supporters applauded the sweep of the revolution in agrarian areas, the opposition denounced the repression that accompanied it. Land reform had been ruthless, but in 2004, the violence began to abate. There was noticeably less violence surrounding the parliamentary elections of 2005.

In retrospect, it is striking how little turmoil accompanied this massive social change. The explanation lies in the participation of key rural figures in ad hoc but officially sanctioned land committees. When first introduced in 1996, these committees had mixed fortunes, some not functioning at all, others becoming instruments of this or that group of squatters. But a radical change occurred in 2000, when the committees were expanded to include centrally appointed security officials, ruling party representatives and local government personnel, as well as local veterans and traditional leaders. Charged with implementing fast-track land reform, these committees sidelined the old local administrative structures. They also had a national impact, since they reported to similarly constituted provincial committees, which in turn reported to the Ministry of Local Government. It was the infusion of veterans that gave the new semi-bureaucratic committees the edge over their wholly bureaucratic counterparts. Local committees usually comprised between 15 and 30 members. The veterans formed ‘base camps’ represented by ‘committees of seven’ which took the lead in identifying land for acquisition as well as finding prospective beneficiaries (mostly from veterans’ waiting lists and rosters in former ‘communal areas’). They also judged disputes, punished petty criminals and allocated farm equipment, seeds and so on. In a word, the committees co-ordinated everything, thus constituting new centres of power.

The second casualty of the reform was farm labourers. There were about 300,000 in all, around

half of them part-time. Fast-track reform resulted in a massive displacement of these workers, who were traditionally drawn from migrant labour. Nearly a fifth came from neighbouring states and were regarded with suspicion by peasants in communal areas; even if they'd been born locally, they were often seen as foreigners and denied citizenship rights. Migrants and women (many employed as casual labour) were the weakest links in the rural mobilisation for land reform. Many were thought to have been encouraged by landowners to vote against the government's constitutional proposals, and the anti-land-reform lobby certainly tried to organise farm workers, ostensibly to protect their jobs, but really to protect the white ownership of farms. When the workers rallied by the MDC, civil society activists and white farmers clashed with veteran-led occupiers, they came off badly. Occupiers held meetings to explain to workers what was at stake and eventually came themselves to distinguish between white farms, not only on the basis of size, proximity to communal areas, and the amount of unused land, but also on the basis of the farmer's attitudes, particularly on race and towards his workers, and whether he had participated in the counter-insurgency during the independence struggle.

Some of the 150,000 full-time farm workers threw in their lot with the occupiers, though usually not on the farms where they had been employed. About 90,000 kept their jobs on sugar and tea estates, and on new or already established tobacco and horticulture farms. About 8000 were granted land, but most were denied it on the grounds that they or their elders had come from foreign countries, though some were given citizenship. Many went from steady employment to contract or casual work; many others were forced to supplement their meagre incomes through fishing, petty trading, theft and prostitution.

The best publicised casualties of the land reform movement were the urban poor who hoped to benefit from extending land invasions to urban areas. The veterans spearheaded occupations of

urban residential land in 2000-1. Housing co-operatives and other associations followed their lead and set up 'illegal' residential or business sites. But the state feared that it would lose control over towns to the MDC if the land reform movement was allowed to spread and met these occupations with stiff repression, including Operation Restore Order/Murambatsvina, a surprise military-style intervention in 2005 in which tens of thousands of families were evicted. Not surprisingly, those who opposed land reform in rural areas were the strongest critics of government efforts to stifle occupations in urban areas.

The final casualty was food production: Zimbabwe, once a food surplus country, is today deficient in both foreign exchange and food. In 2002-3, half the population depended on food aid: this was a drought year and the figures improved in 2004-5. The UN now estimates that nearly half the country's 13.3 million inhabitants will once again be dependent on food aid in 2009, after another drought year. A million of these are poor, urban residents who can't afford imported food. The rest are peasants, most of them hit by drought. Climate change is clearly a factor here, its role most obvious in marginal land: the communal areas worked by millions of small farmers. A 2002 World Food Programme study noted that there had been three droughts in Zimbabwe since 1982 and that the 2002 drought, which also affected several neighbouring countries in Southern Africa, was the worst in 20 years. The WFP estimated that 12.8 million people in the region would require assistance as a result of that drought and that in Zimbabwe alone, overall production would decline by 25 per cent, with cereal production down 57 per cent and maize, the staple in the diet of ordinary Zimbabweans, down by a devastating two-thirds.

To separate out the effect of drought and that of reform — and thus to understand how land reform has hit production — one needs first to distinguish between three groups of agricultural producer: local white farmers, who were the target of the land reform; peasants with farms in communal areas; and

foreign corporations, whose large farms (except for small tracts of unused land) remain intact. Harry Oppenheimer, for example, lost most of his private land, but his firm, Anglo American, kept its sugar estates, which it then sold to Tongaat Hulett, a South African firm with 15,000 hectares in Zimbabwe. In a nutshell, white commercial farmers focused on export crops, whereas communal farmers were the major source of food security. The production of tobacco, hitherto the main source of foreign exchange, is concentrated in large-scale commercial farms; it has seen the most severe decline, almost entirely as a result of land reform. Maize and cotton are peasant crops and have not really been directly affected by land reform, but have suffered badly from prolonged drought — maize production was down by 90 per cent between 2000 and 2003. In contrast, the production of crops — sugar, tea, coffee — grown mainly by the large corporate plantations has remained steady.

Besides drought and reform, there is a third cause of declining production: the targeted donor boycott. Zimbabwe has been the target of Western sanctions twice in the last 50 years: once after UDI in 1965 (very ‘soft’ sanctions, which did not stop the country becoming the second most industrialised in sub-Saharan Africa by the mid-1970s) and again after Zimbabwe’s entry into the Congo war in August 1998. Zimbabwe’s involvement in the war was not well received in the West. Participants in the donor conference for Zimbabwe that year were decidedly lukewarm about committing funds. Britain announced a review of arms sales to Zimbabwe and, after the conference, again disclaimed any responsibility for funding land reform. The following year the IMF suspended lending to Zimbabwe, while the US and the UK decided to fund the labour movement, led by the ZCTU, first to oppose constitutional change and then to launch the MDC as a full-fledged opposition party. Its enemies have claimed that, by the late 1990s, the ZCTU was dependent on foreign sources for two-thirds of its income. Once ‘fast-track’ land reform began in 2000, the Western donor community shut the door on Zimbabwe.

The sanctions regime, led by the US and Britain, was elaborate, tested during the first Iraq war and then against Iran. In 2001 Jesse Helms, previously a supporter of UDI, sponsored the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery bill (another sponsor was Hillary Clinton) and it became law in December that year. Part of the act was a formal injunction on US officials in international financial institutions to ‘oppose and vote against any extension by the respective institution of any loan, credit or guarantee to the government of Zimbabwe’. In autumn 2001 the IMF had declared Zimbabwe ‘ineligible to use the general resources of the IMF’ and removed it from the list of countries that could borrow from its Poverty and Growth Facility. In 2002, it issued a formal declaration of non-co-operation with Zimbabwe and suspended all technical assistance. The US legislation also authorised Bush to fund ‘an independent and free press and electronic media in Zimbabwe’ and to allocate six million dollars for ‘democracy and governance programmes’. This was fighting talk, Cold War vintage. The normative language of sanctions focuses less on the issues that prompted them in the first place — Zimbabwe’s intervention in the Congo war and the introduction of fast-track reform — than on the need for ‘good governance’. In citing the absence of this as a reason for its imposition of sanctions in 2002, the EU violated Article 98 of the Cotonou Agreement, which requires that disputes between African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the EU be resolved by the joint EU-ACP Council of Ministers.

Clearly, the old paradigm of sanctions — isolation — has given way to a more interventionist model, which combines punishment of the regime with subsidies for the opposition. So-called ‘smart’ sanctions are intended to target the government and its key supporters. In 2002, the US, Britain and the EU began freezing the assets of state officials and imposing travel bans. Only four days after the EU imposed sanctions, the US expanded the list of targeted individuals to include prominent

businessmen and even church leaders, such as the pro-regime Anglican bishop, Nolbert Kunonga.

Nonetheless, sanctions mainly affect the lives of ordinary people. Gideon Gono, governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, wrote recently that the country's foreign exchange reserves had declined from \$830 million, representing three months' import cover in 1996, to less than one month's cover by 2006. Total foreign payments arrears increased from \$109 million at the end of 1999 to \$2.5 billion at the end of 2006. Foreign direct investment had shrunk from \$444.3 million in 1998 to \$50 million in 2006. Donor support, even to sectors vital to popular welfare, such as health and education, was at an all-time low. Danish support for the health sector, \$29.7 million in 2000, was suspended. Swedish support for education was also suspended. The US issued travel warnings, blocked food aid during the heyday of land reform and opposed Zimbabwe's application to the Global Fund to Fight Aids — the country has the fourth highest infection rate in the world. Though it was renewed in 2005, the Zimbabwe grant is meagre. Agriculture has been affected too: scale matters, but no one disputes that subsidies are vital for agriculture to be sustainable, and sanctions have made it more difficult to put a proper credit regime in place.

Despite the EU's imposition of sanctions in the run-up to the parliamentary elections of 2002, Mugabe polled 56.2 per cent of the vote against Morgan Tsvangirai of the MDC's 42 per cent. There were widespread allegations of Zanu-PF violence and last-minute gerrymandering, with polling stations in urban areas — Tsvangirai's electoral base — closing early and extra stations being set up in rural areas, where Mugabe's support was assured. Nonetheless, it was clear that support for Zanu-PF was higher than in the pre-fast-track elections of 2000. Bush and Blair refused to recognise the outcome, but Namibia, Nigeria and the South African observer team, which had monitored the elections, concluded that the result was legitimate. Whatever the truth of the matter, the Africans could

do little in the face of mounting Western pressure, from Britain especially: a three-member panel of Commonwealth countries — Australia, Nigeria and South Africa — was convened to consider the question of Zimbabwe. There were reports of intense pressure from Tony Blair on Thabo Mbeki. The panel suspended Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth for a year. Zimbabwe withdrew from the organisation.

The experience of land reform in Zimbabwe has set alarm bells ringing in South Africa and all the former settler colonies where land shortage is still an issue. In South Africa especially, the upheaval and bitterness felt in Zimbabwe seems to suggest that the 'Malaysian path' to peaceful redistribution and development is not inevitable. An anxious South Africa and less powerful members of the Southern Africa Development Community tend to feel that sanctions, along with other destabilising policies pursued by the West against Zimbabwe, have only made matters worse. SADC states have long tried to reconcile the need to resist Western influence with the fact that they serve as a bridge between Africa and the wealthy Western economies, but South Africa's non-confrontational policy vis-à-vis Mugabe — which Mbeki pursued despite mounting criticism from the ANC and the unions in South Africa — along with its provision of fuel and electricity to its northern neighbour, set it at odds with Western governments. South Africa and the SADC states describe their approach as one of 'non-interference', 'stabilisation' and 'quiet diplomacy', but the West sees it as a deliberate effort to undermine sanctions, and critics in South Africa — most recently Mandela — have found the Mbeki line much too conciliatory.

In 2007, SADC called for an end to sanctions against Zimbabwe and international support for a post-land-reform recovery programme, but earlier this year Western countries brought their influence to bear on key SADC members — Botswana and Zambia — to split the organisation. Ian Khama, the president of Botswana, went so far as to announce publicly that he would not recognise the results of

the 2008 elections. The pressure on SADC came not only from Western countries, but from trade-union movements in the region, in particular Cosatu of South Africa, which has strong links with the ZCTU. Here is another striking aspect of the current Zimbabwe crisis: it is not just Western and pro-Western governments that have joined the sanctions regime, but many activists and intellectuals, for the most part progressives, have aligned themselves with distant or long-standing enemies in an effort to dislodge an authoritarian government clinging to power on the basis of historic grievances about the colonial theft of land. Symbolic of this was the refusal by Cosatu-affiliated unions to unload a cargo of Chinese arms destined for Zimbabwe when the An Yue Jiang sailed into Durban in April.

The arguments, which are not new, turn on questions of nationalism and democracy, pitting champions of national sovereignty and state nationalism against advocates of civil society and internationalism. One group accuses the other of authoritarianism and self-righteous intolerance; it replies that its critics are wallowing in donor largesse. Nationalists speak of a historical racism that has merely migrated from government to civil society with the end of colonial rule, while civil society activists speak of an 'exhausted' nationalism, determined to feed on old injustices. This fierce disagreement is symptomatic of the deep divide between urban and rural Zimbabwe. Nationalists have been able to withstand civil society-based opposition, reinforced by Western sanctions, because they are supported by large numbers of peasants. The tussle between these groups has even greater poignancy in former settler colonies than it had a generation earlier in former colonies north of the Limpopo, for the simple reason that the central legacy of settler colonialism — the land question — remained unresolved and explosive after independence. Southern African leaders have tried, with some success, to put out the fires in Zimbabwe before they spread beyond its borders. It is worth noting that the agreement between Zanu-PF and the MDC signed in September and brokered by Mbeki accepts land

redistribution as irreversible and registers disagreement only over how it was carried out; it also holds Britain responsible for compensating white farmers. In the wake of Mbeki's resignation as president of South Africa it is vital that this agreement remains in place. Few doubt that this is the hour of reckoning for former settler colonies. The increasing number of land invasions in KwaZulu Natal, and the violence that has accompanied them, indicate that the clock is ticking.

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