Zimbabwe is considered a classic case of a state led to ruin by a dictator desperately clinging to power. In the literature on state failure, the country is deemed to be “on the brink” of failure, in a “downward spiral” or descending “into chaos.” However, there is little by way of extended analysis. In this literature, Zimbabwe is addressed cursorily, as a quick example or warning of what can happen when rulers behave badly. These accounts tend to be agent-centric, focused on the failings of Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe.

Scholarly and policy works which frame Zimbabwe’s political and economic crises as a recent wrong turn are atheoretical and ignore the long-term dynamics of state-society relations. Rather, what emerges is a more complex picture of a regime attempting to manage economic crises in conjunction with claims made on the state by politically

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organized groups—such as business associations, labor unions, and war veterans—and their challenges in response to the regime’s failure to meet their demands.

I argue that Zimbabwe’s current political instability arises from the structure of the state itself. To understand that structure, it is necessary to examine two key political and economic transitions that have strained its capacity to manage crises effectively. The first—the transition from war to peace with Zimbabwe’s independence from white rule in 1979—was incomplete and set the stage for conflicts to arise throughout the 1980s. The second, overlaying the first, was Zimbabwe’s transition from a developmental to a neoliberal state, producing intense social hardships for the population. These two transitions created a set of political struggles to which the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union-Political Front (ZANU-PF), responded, either by pursuing a strategy of incorporation or repression. This chapter argues that Zimbabwe’s political crisis can be better understood by examining the ways in which the ruling party has reacted to perceived challenges, how it has sought to incorporate these groups, and how it has responded to groups who remained unincorporated. I will discuss three types of organized mobilization—business elites, war veterans, and labor—and one case of semi- or unorganized mobilization, land occupations. The shifting dynamics over time between the ZANU-PF regime and these different groups does not reveal a failing state, but a strong state which has consistently employed a strategy of incorporation or cooptation of rivals and perceived threats since it came to power.
Failure of the Concept of State Failure

The literature on state failure or state collapse in Africa tends to focus mostly on case studies of civil war in Central and West Africa, implying that the ultimate endpoint of state failure is civil war. William Zartman, in his widely-cited book on state failure in Africa, defines state collapse as a “long-term degenerative process” at the end of which the state is no longer able to carry out fundamental functions such as security provision, political authority, and institutional decision-making capacity.³ Thus, state collapse is a more intense version of “governance problems” or extreme burdens on state capacity to govern. The regime can no longer satisfy social demands, relying on greater repression to counter increased dissatisfaction among the population. For Zartman, the ultimate consequence of state collapse is the takeover of local state authority by warlords or gang leaders.

William Reno focuses his attention on rulers rather than institutions, pointing out the weakness of the literature on African states for its overemphasis on the internal challenges to state authority rather than the ways in which rulers respond to these threats, provoking particular political outcomes.⁴ Basing his analysis of warlord politics on in-depth case studies in the central and western African countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Nigeria, Reno defines weak states as the condition in which “a spectrum of conventional bureaucratic state capabilities…exists alongside (generally very strong) informal political networks.”⁵ While Reno views

⁵ Ibid., 2.
warlord politics as an outcome of weak states, he sees state collapse as a consequence rather than a cause of warlord politics.

Given the emphasis in the literature on violent challenges to a state’s monopoly on the use of legitimate force as the defining characteristic of state failure, it is curious that a number of scholars have included Zimbabwe as a case of a failing state since there have not been any serious internal challenges to its authority. Many analyses provide little space for in-depth, case-study research: Zimbabwe is merely listed as a commonsense example of a failed state. Stuart Eizenstat, John Porter, and Jeremy Weinstein, for example, include Zimbabwe within broad statements linking Zimbabwe with Afghanistan, or the regime of Robert Mugabe with the “military junta in Myanmar.”6 Such generalizations are unhelpful in specifying what it is about the comparison between Zimbabwe and Afghanistan or Zimbabwe and Myanmar that clarifies either the causes or concept of state failure.

Robert Rotberg, for instance, classifies Zimbabwe as a failing state, which he defines as a subcategory of weak states. These states are, he argues,

inherently weak because of geographical, physical, or fundamental economic constraints; basically strong, but temporarily or situationally weak because of internal antagonisms, management flaws, greed, despotism, or external attacks; and a mixture of the two. Weak states typically harbor ethnic, religious, linguistic, or other intercommunal tensions that have not yet, or not yet thoroughly, become overtly violent.7

For Rotberg, Zimbabwe’s failure is understood as a sudden drop from a “once unquestionably strong African state” to the “edge of the abyss of failure,” brought on by

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Zimbabwean president Robert Mugabe, who “personally led Zimbabwe from strength to the precipice of failure, his high-handed and seriously corrupt rule having bled the resources of the state into his own pockets, squandered foreign exchange, discouraged domestic and international investment, subverted the courts, and driven his country to the very brink of starvation.”

According to Rotberg, all Zimbabwe needs in order to plunge into the abyss is a violent challenge to the ZANU-PF regime in the form of an internal insurgency. The unlikely conditions for this, however, remain unexplored.

Applying the concept of state failure to Zimbabwe implies that the solutions are, at least in large part, external. This can be seen most clearly in the policy literature where characterizations of Zimbabwe as a failed state are plentiful. In a 2005 Center for Global Development working paper, the authors argue that Zimbabwe has been so traumatized that once Mugabe is gone, international agencies should approach Zimbabwe as a post-conflict case. They advocate that the international community begin planning early for a post-Mugabe Zimbabwe, as the United States has done for Cuba in the wake of Fidel Castro’s death.

The concept of state failure is vague, especially as it is applied to Zimbabwe, because it does not specify what it is about the state that is supposedly failing, or why. This approach also tends to confuse causes and outcomes. In the language of state failure, is Zimbabwe weak because of “management flaws” and despotism, or is the regime’s increasing authoritarianism a result of existing structural weaknesses that have

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8 Ibid., 15, 23.
9 Ibid, 15.
been exacerbated over time? As this chapter will show, these are not independent explanations. To understand the disastrous choices made by Mugabe and other political actors it is necessary to examine the actual relationship between the state and society that framed these choices.

Zimbabwe specialists avoid the term failed or failing state. Brian Raftopolous and Amanda Hammar explicitly disavow the term, pointing out that Zimbabwe is not just another case of an African “failed state.”12 This literature instead focuses on what has come to be known as the “Zimbabwe crisis,” referring to the worsening political and economic instability in Zimbabwe, especially since 2000.13 Indicators include hyperinflation, which peaked at over 100,000 percent in January 2008; 80 percent unemployment; widespread shortages in food, fuel, and consumer goods; and a crumbling infrastructure leading to roads in disrepair, rolling blackouts in urban areas, water shortages and sewage leakages.14 However, attempts to understand “the crisis” tend to be more like historical narratives than causal explanations. Thus, such accounts are more empirical than analytical, cataloging the defining moments in Zimbabwean politics since the end of the 1990s, the generally agreed-upon beginning of the crisis. The key events include popular protests in 1996, anti-government protests in 1997 by war veterans demanding benefits, and in 1998 over rising food and oil prices. In 2000, the government lost a referendum on its version of a new constitution it drafted in response

13 There is now a very large literature—both academic and popular—on the crisis. See, for example, Hammar, Raftopolous and Jensen, Zimbabwe’s Unfinished Business, Patrick Bond and Simba Manyanya, Zimbabwe’s Plunge: Exhausted Nationalism, Neoliberalism and the Search for Social Justice (London, Merlin Press, 2002); David Harold-Barry, ed. Zimbabwe: the Past is the Future (Harare: Weaver Press, 2004).
to the one drawn up by a key civil society group, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA). The year also marked the near electoral victory of the newly created opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), in the parliamentary elections. Elections since 2000 have been characterized by increasing violence and intimidation, mainly perpetrated by ZANU-PF, but also MDC.

Disagreements abound, however, over locating the roots of the crisis. Some scholars frame the current political turmoil mainly as a response to a threatened regime facing a serious opposition for the first time, while for some, the main culprit is the Lancaster House constitution and its failure to allow for land reform after independence. Others locate the breakdown as resulting from the economic crises of the mid- to late 1990s, following the stringent implementation of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). In response to the resulting social hardships and growing political discontent, the government made a series of flawed economic and political decisions, intending to gain support in the short-run, while contributing to long-run instability. Another approach examines the legacies of the liberation war in immediate postwar and contemporary politics, arguing that the Lancaster House agreement established the terrain for post-war politics because it created an important place for ex-combatants, who were able to leverage their political strength within a new regime whose legitimacy was based on the liberation struggle.

16 Sam Moyo
This chapter approaches the current conflicts in Zimbabwe as an outcome of the structure of the postwar state. While substantial transitions have taken place, linkages with previous eras remain important. In singling out recent political violence around elections, the state failure view does not adequately recognize the legacies of violence throughout Zimbabwean history. Two main periods of transition will be analyzed in this paper, followed by the “land issue,” which overlaps with both. The first is the transition from war to peace with the Lancaster House agreements which ended the liberation struggle in 1979. The “Zimbabwe crisis” begins not just with the structure of the state created by the Lancaster House peace agreements, but in the struggles between the two nationalist guerrilla armies—the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) associated with the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) associated with the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU). ZANU, led by Ndabaningi Sithole, formed in 1963 after it split from ZAPU, the older African nationalist party led by Joshua Nkomo. Indeed, these struggles continued after independence, throughout the period from 1980-87, while the new ZANU-PF regime consolidated power.

**Structural Transitions in Zimbabwe: A Historical View**

During the liberation struggle both nationalist parties and their armies pursued distinct wartime strategies and received support from different sponsor states (the Soviet Union for ZIPRA and China for ZANLA). In addition, they operated out of different base countries, with ZIPRA in Zambia and ZANLA in Mozambique, leading them to recruit from different regions within Zimbabwe. ZIPRA operated mainly in the
southwest recruiting largely Ndebele and Kalanga speakers, while ZANLA recruited from the east drawing primarily Shona speakers. Though many accounts frame the ZANU and ZAPU split in ethnic terms, this was not the case, as neither group had an ethnic base. Instead, the rift was primarily the result of differing political and strategic choices about the best strategy for achieving liberation from Rhodesian rule. Strains also existed within each of the parties, manifested through internal challenges to the party leadership and regular episodes of guerrilla fighters disregarding commanders’ orders.

Not only were both guerilla armies unable to win a military victory over the Rhodesian Front (RF), but neither was able to assert military dominance over the other. Regular clashes in the countryside failed to produce the supremacy of one group, and both continued to maintain control over their separate territories and different population bases. Jeremy Weinstein—in questioning the wisdom of intervention as a blanket solution to all conflicts—points out that the process of successfully waging war can generate strong institutions. Drawing upon Charles Tilly’s framework in his analysis of European state formation, he argues that intervention by outsiders may actually cause more harm than good by inhibiting the mechanisms which stimulate institutional creation and change through the process of war-making. Strong leaders who are able to achieve a decisive victory are able to effectively mobilize material, social, and political resources. Weinstein provides the example of resistance councils in Uganda, which organized people in villages in support of the guerillas and were then later used to coordinate local politics through the management of elections. On the contrary, guerrilla forces in

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19 Kriger, *Guerilla Veterans in Post-war Zimbabwe*, 29
20 Ibid.
22 Ibid., 5.
Zimbabwe never developed this kind of organizational capacity among rural civilians. Political linkages were not created between Zimbabwean villagers, guerrilla fighters, and the nationalist political elite, who were in exile outside of Zimbabwe. Although villagers were used for their logistical support, they were not treated as political actors in their own right. Indeed, the relationship between peasants and guerrillas was based on coercion rather than cooperation.\textsuperscript{23} Guerrillas made demands for resources such as food, alcohol, and shelter, and perpetrated violence in the form of beatings, torture, rape, and killings as punishment for dissent.\textsuperscript{24}

Moreover, while both ZANU and ZAPU were striving for the same aims—an end to white-rule in Rhodesia—they were also fighting with each other over the means through which this should be accomplished and the best strategies to employ. The fact that control over the state was decided at the negotiating table—rather than through decisive military victory—laid the groundwork for the conflicts that took place between ZANU and ZAPU after the conclusion of the peace agreement. In addition, the initial independence period saw increasing disputes between central and local governments, as well as local-level rivalries over the distribution of resources. The Lancaster House agreements both created a new alliance between ZANU and ZAPU, the Patriotic Front (PF)—which was formed in order to increase their bargaining power at the peace settlement negotiations—and also exacerbated the rivalry between the two parties which split after the settlement was signed. It also failed to significantly change the structure of the Rhodesian state inherited by Zimbabwe by leaving intact the police, the army, the


\textsuperscript{24} Alexander, 179.
Supreme Court, and the civil service. It reserved twenty of one hundred parliamentary seats for whites for seven years, and precluded land reform by protecting existing property arrangements. Essentially, the process of transition from war to peace created the terrain on which contemporary politics are played out.

The second important transition in Zimbabwe’s history is that from a developmentalist to a neoliberal state. Edward Brett traces Zimbabwe’s trajectory from a successful state to a “crisis state in serious danger of collapse,” arguing that the shift to neoliberalism created not just economic but political instability due to the failure of both internal and external technocrats to take into account the deleterious social consequences of structural adjustment. As the neoliberal transition put intense strains on the population (also at the same time that drought hit southern Africa), people became politically organized in new ways, in the form of social movement organizations, labor unions, and in particular the mobilization of civil service workers who had previously been supportive of the regime. ZANU-PF responded to this new opposition through a populist turn in an attempt to shore up support it lost from these groups.\(^{25}\) The reforms it implemented led to the mobilization of political actors along both old and new cleavages.

**Transition from war to peace: Legacies of violence**

Intense political struggles and high levels of mistrust between ZANU/ZANLA and ZAPU/ZIPRA characterized the initial post-independence years. During the 1980s, ZANU-PF—who won the 1980 elections—argued that ZIPRA was an undisciplined force

without legitimate claims to the new nation or political rights guaranteed by the state.\textsuperscript{26} Political violence continued throughout the 1980s, culminating in the 1983 Gukurahundi\textsuperscript{27} massacres in Matabeleland. In fact, as Norma Kriger argues, though observers deemed the Lancaster House agreements successful, they do not represent a clear rupture between war and peace in Zimbabwe.\textsuperscript{28} From 1983-1985, ZANU-PF sent the Fifth Brigade—an elite unit of the Zimbabwean army composed of former ZANLA fighters—into Matabeleland, the home region of most ZIPRA members to root out what ZANU-PF government officials called “ZAPU/ZIPRA dissidents.” Despite the inclusion of both RF and ZAPU members in its cabinet, ZANU-PF initially remained wary of the allegiances of both ZAPU and the RF.\textsuperscript{29} While relations with the RF improved, conflicts between ZANU-PF and ZAPU increased. Kriger argues that between 1980-1981, levels of violence between the two guerilla groups, and against civilians—including “robberies, shootings (often in tiffs at bars after drinking), and carrying arms illegally”—were fairly high. Government infrastructure was targeted by ZIPRA dissidents in Matabeleland and the Midlands, and the police were targeted by ZANLA in the east and northeast. However, ZIPRA violence was the main focus of the regime at this time.\textsuperscript{30} Rhodesian-era emergency powers thus remained in place until 1990, primarily used by state security forces against former ZIPRA fighters.


\textsuperscript{27} Gukurahundi is a Shona word meaning the first rains of the wet season which wash away the chaff from threshing. During the liberation war, Mugabe began using Gukurahundi to refer to the “people’s storm,” the year nationalist struggle would prevail. However, to some in Matebeleland, Gukurahundi meant “the sweeping away of rubbish,” see Richard Werbner, Tears of the Dead: the social biography of an African family, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1991), 161-2.

\textsuperscript{28} Kriger, Guerrilla Veterans, 6.

\textsuperscript{29} Kriger, Ibid. 29.

\textsuperscript{30} Ibid.
When ZANU-PF made the announcement that it discovered a number of ZIPRA arms caches in February 1982, ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo and ZAPU members Josiah Chinamano, Joseph Msika, and Jini Ntuta were all dismissed from Mugabe’s cabinet. In March of that year, the former intelligence chief and former deputy commander of ZIPRA, along with four others, were arrested and charged with high treason. While five were later acquitted, they nonetheless remained in detention under emergency regulations left in place from the Rhodesian government. These and other repressive government actions helped to trigger ZIPRA dissident activity.\(^{31}\) However, while the dissidents never numbered more than 400 and lacked both popular and ZAPU leadership support, the government’s response was disproportionately brutal, killing thousands of civilians and committing rapes, mass detentions, torture, beatings, disappearances, and widespread destruction of property.\(^{32}\) Such high levels of violence indicate that rather than only responding to a small splinter group, the regime’s targeting of ZAPU’s social bases of support was part of a broader consolidation of ZANU power and a demonstration of its full control of the instruments of state violence. At the end of 1985, amid increases in dissident violence, and the closing of ZAPU offices in 1986, ZAPU leaders began negotiations with ZANU to merge the two parties into ZANU-PF. In December 1987 Mugabe and Nkomo signed the Unity Accord, which accomplished this task. It was not until 1988, when amnesty was declared for all dissidents, that 122 surrendered and the violence ended.

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\(^{31}\) Ibid.

Elections themselves were another cause of political violence in the 1980s. The violence and intimidation which took place during the elections of 2000, 2002, and 2005 were not entirely remarkable in Zimbabwean history, but rather illustrate parallels between immediate post-war and contemporary conflicts over contested elections and opposition to ZANU-PF. During the run-up to the 1980 elections, the focus of each ZANU and ZAPU campaign efforts was on its own rural base as the source of electoral strength. As Kriger illustrates,

Both [parties] used guerillas to campaign but ZANU(PF) deployed ZANLA political commissars in the rural areas on an incomparably greater scale. Thousands of ZANLA guerillas were deliberately kept out of assembly camps in violation of the settlement to ensure their party won the election. The party and its commissars threatened to return to war if people did not vote for it and used the provocative and intimidatory image of guns in its campaign slogans, implying the war would continue if Mugabe lost the election.

According to the report written by British election monitors, one-third of rural voters were intimidated by ZANU/ZANLA violence, including “disciplinary murders,” “generalized threats of retribution or a continuance or resumption of the war,” “psychological pressure,” and “claims to the possession of machines which would reveal how individuals had voted.”

As the violence of the Gukurahundi campaign and 1980 elections illustrate, political violence in the context of contests over state power by close rivals is not new in Zimbabwean history. Moreover, since regime transitions represent moments in which power dynamics are fluid because the question of who controls state power is in flux, these struggles should be attributed to political struggle rather than state failure. The

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34 Norma Kriger, Guerilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe, 191.
liberation struggle represented a time of violent contest over the state, not just between
the African liberation movements and the Rhodesian Front, but between different
liberation movements. The Lancaster House settlements created a new opening in which,
with the RF sidelined, conflicts between ZANU and ZAPU intensified. While some
struggles were carried out in the electoral arena, high levels of violence suggest that
control over the state was not to be decided by elections alone.

Colonial Legacies: Political Authority and Administration at the National and Local
Levels

In addition to the national level conflicts, other important political struggles in the
initial post-independence era are evident in the kind of competition that took place in
rural post-war Zimbabwe over the administrative structure of the state and the
relationship between the central state, local state authorities, and citizens. Reform of the
local state was crucial in this period as it represented a central colonial institution used to
exercise control over rural populations.36 Reform—which was intended to make the
local state more democratic and participatory—provoked struggles within different parts
of the state over the control of how land was allocated and who made the decisions.

Jocelyn Alexander documents local responses to the failure of the central
government to deliver on wartime promises of the redistribution of land and political
power after independence in the Chimanimani region of Manyikaland in the east and the
Insiza district in Matabeleland in the south (see map in Appendix 1).37 She explains that

37 Jocelyn Alexander, “Things Fall Apart, The Centre Can Hold: Processes of Post-War Political Change in
Zimbabwe’s Rural Areas,” in Bhebe, Ngwabi and Terence Ranger, eds., Society in Zimbabwe’s Liberation
War (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1996).
the continued existence of a strong and heavily centralized state was ensured by the terms of independence negotiations. New political rights guaranteed for the majority were undermined by the modernizing, authoritarian legacies of the Rhodesian state, along with the failure to significantly transform the structure of the economy. Thus, the same policymaking apparatus remained in place after independence, and was able to weaken local-level party organizations created during the war. Alexander argues that:

The government quickly undermined the autonomy of the local political party by co-opting key groups, maintaining central control over development resources, and, in Matabeleland, by military and political repression. People in Zimbabwe’s rural areas were largely unable to influence policy-making processes; instead, patronage, squatting and opposition by traditional leaders dominated rural politics. Far from empowering the disadvantaged through democratic bodies, policies reinforced patriarchal authority within communities, thus helping to marginalize women, the young and the poor.38

Changes in the structure of power in rural communities, in which women and youth took a much more active role in their communities during the war, were lost when traditional elites—elder men, chiefs, and headmen—reasserted their power and authority after the war, challenging the new social and political arrangements created in their absence.39 Similar to other British-ruled colonies, indirect rule was also used as a method of asserting control in the rural areas in Rhodesia. Traditional rulers and district commissioners (in Mamdani’s words, the “white chiefs of colonial Africa”)40 were responsible for local governance. While the purpose of local government during colonialism was to increase white-ruled central government authority over Africans in the rural areas and to stifle resistance, post-independence local government reforms actually

38 Ibid., 180.
39 Ibid., 179.
40 Mamdani, 115.
achieved a similar purpose, albeit for a different regime. Conflicts arose between traditional rulers and new local government institutions—district councils, village development committees (vidcos) and ward development committees (wadcos)—created in 1981 and 1983 when the power over land allocation shifted from chiefs, headmen, and village heads to district councils.

Even as traditional rulers were stripped of local government authority after independence, they eventually regained their powerful roles—including a salary and control over the local courts—as a means of incorporating a potentially destabilizing force that could also strengthen ZANU-PF control over local regions. Alexander describes efforts in the eastern district of Chimanimani (bordering Mozambique) to challenge the pace of land redistribution through land occupations, and resist top-down centralized government control through the re-emergence of traditional leaders as powerful actors in rural politics. The increase in levels of local conflicts which took place between members of ZANU-PF, government officials and traditional leaders about control over land, courts, revenue, local government, and the reassertion of traditional structures of power was an outcome of the failure of Zimbabwe to achieve a significant break from the Rhodesian state.

Agrarian and development policies were implemented through the same Rhodesian-era centralized, authoritarian-leaning bureaucracy—and the result was the

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42 Pius Shungudzapera Nyambara, “The Politics of Land Acquisition and Struggles over Land in the ‘Communal’ Areas of Zimbabwe: The Gokwe Region in the 1980s and 1990s,” *Africa* 71, no. 2 (2001), 259. A video “is the lowest unit of local administration in Zimbabwe….Six vidcos make up a ward, the next level of local government administration.”
creation of resistance to state authority at the local level by residents in rural areas. Local government, far from encouraging participation and decision-making in policy issues, instead took the role of manager, accomplished through “bureaucratic control” and linkages between local government elites and central government politicians.45 Traditional leaders, in turn, attempted to mobilize people through a “populist revival of ‘tradition’ (or neo-tradition)” where local rulers were able to establish a new constituency among those who felt threatened by the top-down imposition of new government development policies which usurped their control over their livelihood.46 The central government responded by granting increased autonomy to chiefs and headmen to exercise their authority over matters such as land allocation and control of the courts. Local challenges to state authority were managed in different ways, however, in other districts, as the case of the Insiza District in Matabeleland illustrates. Because there were not many abandoned farms in this district, squatting was not as widespread as in Chimanimani, in which it was the primary means of forcing the government to increase its resettlement efforts just after independence.47 Here, rather than attempts to build alliances with local actors, military repression was the chosen strategy, due to both the structure of land ownership and violent conflicts in the region between ZANU and ZAPU.48

**Neoliberal Transition**

Zimbabwe’s adoption of neoliberal policies was a crucial step in creating the conditions for contemporary political struggles. Popular mobilization as a result of the

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45 Ibid., 184
46 Ibid, 187.
47 Ibid., 189-190.
48 Ibid., 190.
adverse social consequences of the reforms led to a series of governmental responses that privileged certain groups over others while it worsened the effects of the economic shocks. The Economic Structural Adjustment Policy (ESAP) created a set of distinct challenges to which ZANU-PF could not effectively respond with its usual strategy of incorporation.

From 1980 to 1991 Zimbabwe was a developmentalist state, with a high level of state involvement in the economy and followed a policy of “growth with equity.” The new Zimbabwean government retained the economic policies of the previous Rhodesian government, including price controls for consumer goods, foreign-exchange controls, and state-directed identification of strategic economic sectors for investment, such as mining. After gradual liberalization throughout the 1980s, the government adopted ESAP in 1991, which included typical neoliberal reforms such as the reduction of barriers to capital flows, export promotion, the removal of state-guaranteed worker protections, reduction of public sector jobs, and the elimination of subsidies for consumer goods and social services.

While Zimbabwe experienced a 12 percent economic growth rate between 1980 and 1981, the economy began to falter soon afterwards, when in 1983 drought and falling mineral prices on the world market triggered an economic downturn of 4.2 percent, and a shortage in foreign currency. At the same time, unemployment was growing due to continued retrenchments throughout 1982-4, while only 10,000 new jobs were created

50 Edward Brett, “From Corporatism to Liberalization in Zimbabwe,” 96; Dansereau 176.
annually, failing to satisfy the increasing demand from the 300,000 new school graduates seeking work each year.52

The government began taking loans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1983, increasing its debt-service ratio from 2 percent in 1980 to 30 percent in 1983 and slowly changing its development direction until full-scale liberalization with ESAP in 1991.53 According to Edward Brett, liberalization was “carried out in an exemplary way,” with minimal corruption and maximum compliance with the structure of the program.54 However, the short-term economic consequences of ESAP were largely negative. “Drought, deteriorating terms of trade, errors of sequencing, and failure to control the fiscal deficit produced lower growth rates, higher unemployment and declining access to social services.”55 As Hevina Dashwood argues, the change in the government’s development strategy can be explained by shifts in the relationship between the state and its key constituencies. According to Dashwood, “[t]he alliance between the ruling elite and the peasantry and working class that underpinned the original development strategy had eroded,” and was replaced by a new unity between ruling party members, business leaders, and landed elites, including the cooptation of the former opposition PF-ZAPU leaders after the Unity Accords in 1997.56

Brett argues that ESAP would most likely have led to economic growth eventually but that “the technocrats behind the programme ignored its disruptive social, and therefore political effects, with devastating consequences.”57 Indeed, ESAP created

52 Dansereau, 178.
53 Ibid, 179.
55 Ibid.
tremendous social hardships for the majority of the population and significantly contributed to a decrease in the legitimacy of the ZANU-PF regime. Post independence gains in socioeconomic indicators were lost. Between 1980 and 1990, life expectancy had risen from 56 to 64 years, infant mortality fell from 86 to 49 per 1,000 live births, and primary school enrollment rose from 83 to 117 percent. These same indicators fell during the 1990s after the introduction of ESAP. In 1994, life expectancy was 51 years and down to 46 by 1996. The infant mortality rate increased slightly to 50 per 1000 live births by 1995. According to the United Nations International Emergency Children’s Fund (UNICEF), by 1990 the primary school completion rates in Zimbabwe had peaked at 83 percent (among the highest in Southern Africa), however by 2003 they had dropped to 63 percent. In addition, real wages fell from an index of 122 in 1982 to 88 in 1997, and employment growth fell from 2.4 percent between 1985-1990 to 1.55 percent between 1991 and 1997. Between 1990 and 1995, food prices rose 516 percent, medical care, transport, and education by 300 percent, and by 1995, 62 percent of households could no longer afford all the minimal basic necessities of food, clothing, shelter, and transportation.

However, not all Zimbabweans suffered during ESAP. As Patrick Bond points out, “leading businesspeople benefited from luxury goods imports, declining real wages, their new-found ability to move money out of the country, and commercial deregulation.”64 In addition, black business leaders began to organize during the early 1990s, forming groups such as the Indigenous Business Development Center (IBDC) and the Affirmative Action Group (AAG), due to the ESAP policy of encouraging private capital accumulation.65 While marginalized during the 1980s, this new group was increasingly brought into the fold in the 1990s. As Raftopolous tells us, the IBDC and the AAG lobbied for more state-allocated benefits such as easy access to land and capital for black entrepreneurs. “As these groups developed their programmes and demands, their relationship with the ruling party became intertwined, and membership of either

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64 Bond and Manyanya, *Zimbabwe’s Plunge.*
65 Raftopolous and Phimister, 360.
organization became an important launching pad for aspiring ruling-party politicians.”

According to Raftopolous, they exercised pressure for a land redistribution programme, seeking a means to gain ownership to land. This kind of “economic nationalism,” as Sam Moyo refers to it, was reflected in ZANU-PF’s market-oriented land policies during the 1990s, which privileged financial assistance for the entry of black commercial farmers into agricultural production over peasant farmers. This group encouraged a market-oriented approach to land reform which privileged “productive” and “capable” farmers over the provision of land to the poor.

**Forms of Popular Mobilization**

*The Labor Movement*

The public response to the sharp drops in standards of living after ESAP was popular protest. National mass mobilization around social effects of ESAP began in 1996, but social protests erupted as early as 1993, including spontaneous demonstrations, strikes, and planned anti-ESAP protests. Food riots took place in the high-density suburbs in Harare in 1993, and in 1995 a large unplanned protest gathered in Harare’s financial district. A survey by Lloyd Sachikonye on the effects of ESAP on labor showed that almost nine of ten trade union member respondents had a negative perception of ESAP. He points out, however, that workers’ opposition to ESAP remained largely

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66 Ibid.
ineffective because their criticisms were based mainly on its impact on their daily lives rather than its underlying purposes. Moreover, in the early 1990s workers were loosely organized and remained vulnerable to state pressure. The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), which has been consistently treated as an antagonist of the regime, is actually the creation of ZANU-PF. The ZCTU was formed shortly after independence as a way to integrate five different fragmented union federations under one body, with Robert Mugabe’s brother, Albert Mugabe, as the general secretary. Over time, however, ZCTU evolved into its own politically independent body.

As labor became more organized, its effectiveness as a significant political actor grew. In 1996, a nearly two-week-long national strike of public sector workers (who before the mid 1990s were viewed as a key government ally) illustrated massive discontent with ESAP policies and also won workers a 36 percent wage increase. After the strike, the public sector workers’ association joined the ZCTU, adding an important group of both urban and rural workers to the organization. The growing strength of labor was further demonstrated during the 1997 general strike and the mass stay-aways in 1998, marking the formation of a significant, national social movement. As Raftopolous and Phimister point out, workers proved to be a powerful political force with mass mobilizing power, voicing concerns which resonated with many Zimbabweans.

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70 Ibid.
71 Dansereau, 177.
73 Raftopolous and Phimister, 358.
January 1998, food riots also broke out in Harare, ending in eight deaths, many injuries, and thousands of arrests, after the army was called in to contain the protesters.\textsuperscript{74}

By the end of the 1990s, these strikes were clearly politically motivated. They targeted not just ZANU-PF’s economic policies but argued for political change as well.\textsuperscript{75} The ZCTU emerged as a key participant in the establishment of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA)—an amalgamation of organizations and individuals mobilized in support of a new constitution in Zimbabwe—in 1998. Since the late 1990s, the ZCTU has also played an important role in the formation of the main opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Morgan Tsvangirai, the former leader of ZCTU, became the MDC presidential candidate who ran against Mugabe in the 2002 and 2008 presidential elections.

\textit{The Opposition Movement}

The opposition movement grew largely out of the activities of the NCA. The founders of this organization argued that the Constitution of Zimbabwe was undemocratic and unrepresentative of the needs of the Zimbabwean population, as it was the product of the Lancaster House negotiations, with future revisions that made it increasingly less democratic. They argued that formal electoral democracy was not sufficient to truly bring about political change, and thus a broad-based constitution-making process was the only way to significantly transform Zimbabwean politics. In response, ZANU-PF organized its own constitution-making body in March 1999. Each

\textsuperscript{75} Raftopolous and Phimister, 359.
group campaigned widely in attempts to gain popular support for its own draft and argued that the other was less inclusive and more distant from “the people.”\textsuperscript{76} The government draft was scheduled for a “yes” or “no” vote in a referendum set for February 2000. Since the NCA draft was not included in the vote, they were campaigning not just for support of their own draft, but also for a rejection of the government draft. In February 2000, with 26 percent turnout, voters rejected the government draft 54 to 46 percent. This electoral defeat—ZANU-PF’s first—came as a shock to the party. Later, in June 2000, ZANU-PF suffered a second defeat when MDC succeeded in winning 58 of 120 seats (ZANU won 61) in the parliamentary elections, marking the first time an opposition party has been electorally viable.

\textit{War Veteran Mobilization}

In addition to labor and the MDC, other social groups—war veterans in particular—were politically mobilized in the late-1990s, with their own set of demands, which were nonetheless related to economic hardships. Ex-combatants have a unique and close relationship to the regime because ZANU-PF came out of the liberation struggle and thus is a party made up of veterans, and has traditionally considered them important constituents. ZANU-PF’s liberation struggle credentials are central to its legitimacy, and the war veteran protests and subsequent government concessions marked the beginning of veterans’ reincorporation as close allies of the ZANU-PF regime, eventually serving as legitimation for the regime’s continued political dominance. In response to the mobilization of war veterans in the 1997 protests, ZANU-PF did much

more than just provide them with material benefits, but began to build the “war veteran” political identity into their legitimation strategy.

While allied with ZANU-PF in one way or another since independence, ex-combatants have nonetheless had a contradictory relationship with the ruling party, divided in part along class lines between veteran elites (those with top positions within ZANU-PF and the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veteran’s Association (ZNLWVA)) and rank-and-file veterans. While often in close collaboration with ZANU-PF during the 1980s (although also with competing agendas at times) the rhetoric of many in the government and the media began to change after the Unity Accords in 1987, arguing that the plight of ex-combatants was no different than the many unemployed civilians. One article in a government-affiliated newspaper stated the following: “Eight years ago, Zimbabwe’s mighty young freedom fighters brought down the fall of the colonial regime. But today some of them are still basking in that glory and refusing to come to terms with the present realities of Zimbabwe.” Government officials and MPs began making similar arguments, that nearly a decade after the war, ex-combatants should not continue to receive special benefits since they faced the same problems as other civilians. John Nkomo, Minister of Labour, Manpower Planning and Social Welfare stated the following:

I think in the eight years we have gone through too many things have been evened out between the ex-combatant and the non ex-combatant. We should now be addressing unemployment as a national problem that faces both the veterans of the war and those who were young during the war, but who have now attained the age of majority.

77 Kriger, Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe.
Ex-combatants responded with strong criticism of demobilization programmes and government benefits, which were inadequate and left most veterans unemployed and struggling to survive. They argued that they were more disadvantaged than civilians who were able to attend school or find jobs during the war.\textsuperscript{80} Even as they fell out of favor somewhat with ZANU-PF, veterans still managed to win some benefits, including the inclusion of years in service during the war for state pensions and the formation of the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veteran’s Association (ZNLWVA) in 1992.

However, as Kriger points out, “[b]etween 1993 and 1997, top party and government officials (many themselves ex-combatants) colluded with the ZNLWVA in looting the War Victims Compensation Fund, which was supposed to pay war disability pensions to ex-guerillas and civilians.”\textsuperscript{81} The scandal was publicized in early 1997 provoking public outrage and prompting President Mugabe to organize the Commission to Investigate Abuses of the War Victims Compensation Fund. In July, veterans protested in front of the State House, threatening to stay all night, though access to that street is blocked after 6pm. They chanted: “We are tired of lies. We want to ask our patron where our money is. We don’t want to talk to anybody else because they have been lying to us. They have all lied to us and so we want to hear what Mugabe has to say.”\textsuperscript{82}

By the end of 1997, the growing adversarial relationship between war veterans and ZANU-PF culminated in a large ZNLWVA-organized protest in Harare demanding that ZANU-PF keep earlier promises about the provision of social service benefits and a pension for veterans. After this demonstration, in which members of the ZNLWVA

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid., 210-214.
\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 214.
\textsuperscript{82} “Rage of Mugabe’s Old Soldiers,” Mail & Guardian July 22, 1997.
marched to the Office of the President and then to the State House, they gained a lump sum payment of Z$50,000 each and a pension of Z$5,000 per month, as well as promises of 20 percent of a fast-track land redistribution programme to veterans. 83

**Land occupations**

At the same time the NCA and MDC were in the process of gaining strength in the cities, land occupations were taking place in rural areas throughout the country. In September 1997, “community-led” occupations began sporadically. According to Moyo, “they came in waves, starting with just about thirty cases in 1997, mostly on farms, which had been identified for compulsory acquisition. The squatters later ‘agreed’ to ‘wait’ for their orderly resettlement and in some cases were evicted by the government in 1998.”84

Soon after the voters rejected the draft constitution, a group of war veterans occupied farms in Masvingo. These actions were supported by the ZNLWVA, which encouraged increased occupations as a way of expressing opposition to the defeat of the constitution which included a clause for fast-track land redistribution. 85 Beginning in 2000, ex-combatants became key actors in the invasion of commercial farms listed for government acquisition which was fully supported by the regime. As asserted by Mugabe on April 8, 2000, “We were told to arrest them [war veterans] and remove them from farms. We refused because the occupations were justified. We said there would be no policemen who will go there. If the British want police to evict the war veterans then

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85 Ibid., 318.
they must send their police.” In addition to this, ex-combatants and the liberation struggle were used as part of the symbolic legitimation strategy on the part of ZANU-PF. Similar to the 1980s, supporters of the opposition party were threatened with a return to war if the opposition were to win. ZANU-PF consistently reiterated its participation in the liberation struggle, while disparaging MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai for his lack of war credentials.

The Politics of the Land

The categorization of Zimbabwe as a failing state relies in large part on land-related conflicts over farm occupations and the subsequent compulsory acquisition and reallocation of white-owned commercial farms. However, the way in which this approach understand conflicts over land is ahistorical and only tell part of the story. The “land issue” has figured prominently in Zimbabwean political life since well before independence. The contradictions and tensions raised by the “land question” were already inscribed in the structure of the post-independence state itself, and later exasperated by neoliberal reforms. While often framed as its own discrete phenomenon—a racial conflict, a corrupt desperate attempt to buy support, or as a flagrant violation of the rule of law—conflicts over land in Zimbabwe are fundamentally intertwined with other struggles over access to resources since independence.

As Sara Berry points out, during a time of significant challenges to ZANU-PF, while the land occupations bolstered the popularity of the regime by forcing the hand of the government to engage in the kind of land programme it had been sidestepping

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86 Cited in Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe*, 190
throughout the 1990s, “the land question” remained unanswered.\textsuperscript{87} In other words, the fundamental concerns of land redistribution—addressing social and economic inequalities, poverty, and how to create a viable redistribution program—were still not addressed. Moreover, “the indignation of landowners, the courts and the international media over the lawlessness of the land occupations tended to gloss over the much more difficult questions of who would benefit from land redistribution, and how to build political consensus on a process for carrying it out.”\textsuperscript{88} While international condemnation focused on the violation of private property rights and land redistribution as a ploy by Mugabe to bolster popularity, it ignored the fact that “the land question,” including all relevant actors involved, could not be reduced simply to the tactics of only one of these many actors. Similar to other forms of mobilization, the government responded to land occupations in contradictory and, in the end, damaging ways.

Reclaiming the land taken by whites during colonial rule was a central rallying cry during the liberation struggle. The unequal racial division of land was particularly striking in Zimbabwe, where large numbers of Africans were displaced and moved to the “communal lands” to make way for white settlers and large-scale commercial farming on the most arable land. After independence, the Lancaster House Constitution precluded the possibility of significant land reform for ten years, until 1989, through a clause allowing land redistribution only on a willing-seller, willing-buyer basis. In addition, this policy was accompanied by the informal ZANU-PF strategy of reconciliation with whites, and agreement to protect their economic status.

\textsuperscript{87} Sara Berry, “Debating the Land Question in Africa,” \textit{Comparative Studies in Society and History} 44, no. 4 (October 2002), 661.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
Land occupations—a primary focus of international attention since the announcement by ZANU-PF of compulsory government land acquisition in 1997—have actually been recurring since independence. Despite the lack of popular participation in early land reform programs, squatting and occupations took place throughout the 1980s in response to both rural poverty and the availability of land in certain areas due to the abandonment of farmland during the war. In addition, former guerrillas engaged in land occupations in the early 1980s, but ceased to participate in significant numbers after fighter demobilization and integration of the army occurred. While some of these invasions were supported by local government—especially in areas in which there was a surplus of unoccupied land—the central government eventually began issuing and enforcing more eviction notices in the mid to late-1980s. Between 1980-85—the period of what Moyo calls “low profile, high intensity” land occupations—actions took place across Zimbabwe. At the same time,

a parallel process of ‘accelerated’ land resettlement, financed mainly by British funds, was initiated to formalize some of the occupations, and to assuage parallel land pressures. These early land occupations were led by landless communities led by war veterans, the ZANU (PF), ‘dissidents’ (especially in Matebeleland), and by other traditional leaders, such as spirit mediums. They were tacitly supported by ZANU (PF) and (PF) ZAPU structures.

As Alexander argues, these squatter movements represented an attempt to reshape state-society relations away from colonial-era land policies of “exerting central state control

89 See Alexander, “Squatters, Veterans and the State,” and Moyo “The Land Occupation Movement and Democratisation in Zimbabwe.”
91 Alexander, “Squatters, Veterans and the State,” 88. See also Moyo 1998 and “The Land Occupation Movement and Democratisation in Zimbabwe.”
over how and where people lived and farmed” to a new, more democratic relationship based on a state that was responsive to the needs of its people.  

Squatting was reinvigorated in the 1990s, but within a different context, often used as a survival strategy in difficult times after ESAP, where access to land provided a buffer against unemployment and rapidly increasing costs for basic necessities. However, official ESAP land policies clearly benefited large commercial farmers over smallholders due to “incentives from currency depreciation, agricultural market liberalization, agricultural export market promotion subsidies, trade liberalization benefits on lowered tariffs for imports of inputs and equipment, and labor deregulation” under ESAP. As Moyo points out, these policies meant that large-scale farmers who focused on exports profited, creating greater demand and competition for land among black commercial farmers’ interest groups who helped to increase pressures for access to land.

Moreover, in the post-ESAP 1990s, “illegal” occupations and “natural resource poaching” increased on all types of land—urban, rural, state, private, and communally-owned. State responses were mixed, sometimes ignoring, and at other times evicting squatters. Conflict and competition over control of land allocation grew in the rural areas between local government officials, traditional rulers, and local elites as the enforcement capacity of local governments weakened, due to declining state

96 Ibid. Groups include the Smallholder Ostrich Corporation, the Zimbabwe Ostrich Producers’ Association, and the Indigenous Commercial Farmers’ Union.
98 Ibid., 322.
expenditures, and decreased central state grants to district councils under ESAP constraints. 99 Local government capacity eroded in the 1990s due to revenue shortages, while the legitimacy of these bodies suffered both because they were perceived to be corrupt and undemocratic, and because their ability to evict squatters diminished, failing to address the needs of both the landowners requesting (but not receiving) government protection and landless people trying to gain access to land. 100

In the late 1990s, land occupations throughout Zimbabwe intensified. In November 1997, after occupations had spiked in the rural areas in September of that year, the government published a list of 1,471 farms designated for compulsory acquisition, based on attributes such as under-utilization of farmland, oversized farm, ownership by an absent farmer, and ownership of multiple farms. 101 Since the government could no longer guarantee social benefits such as education, healthcare and employment, due to the constraints of ESAP and the faltering economy, land was one remaining good it could still deliver. 102 The listing of farms had the effect of intensified land occupations, which took place mostly on designated farms. 103 The fast-track resettlement created a great deal of confusion over how land was allocated, which farms were being designated, and uncertainty over the location and existence of titles. The farm designations “tended to be marred by the increasingly provincialised political pressures which can be characterized

103 Moyo, “The Land Occupation Movement and Democratisation in Zimbabwe.”
as parochial and elitist.” In addition, legal battles ensued over which farms would be listed for compulsory acquisition. Indeed, many of the listings were successfully challenged in court and thus de-listed. In June 1998, the government came out with a new land policy strategy which included not just land for large-scale commercial farmers but the acquisition of five million hectares for smallholders, in an attempt to gain support from donors. Despite a donor conference held in September 1998—which included twenty donor countries, the World Bank, the United Nations Development Programme, the IMF, and the European Union—little progress was made on funds for official resettlement. Selby explains:

[The Zimbabwean] Government sent moderate delegates - the technocrats and diplomats; and whilst debate within the conference was constructive, less than $US1 million of guaranteed funding materialised, most of which was from Zimbabwean financial institutions. The Farmer noted that larger donors promised support on condition of a “calm, orderly, fair and transparent program”. Unprecedented donor caution had recently been fuelled by the collapse of Boka’s Bank, government’s involvement in the war in the Congo, and the increasing lack of transparency in the land program.

Between June and August 1998, land occupations extended throughout the country. In one case that received much attention, occupiers received visits from government officials, including then-Vice President Simon Muzenda, who agreed to provide government resettlement assistance. After this incident, thousands occupied farms in the provinces of Mashonaland Central, East, West, Manicaland, and Matabeleland North. The occupations included largely people from nearby rural areas and resettlement areas, and also unemployed workers and ex-combatants. According to

107 Ibid., 97.
Alexander, “[o]ccupiers generally justified their actions in terms of their exclusion from resettlement, and their historical claims to land, i.e., in terms of restitution and broken nationalist promises.”

Occupations continued throughout 1999 despite new government resettlement policies, and notably included the land of some high-ranking government officials. There is evidence that these occupations by peasant farmers, war veterans, and traditional leaders represented both a popular movement as well as state-encouraged mobilization.

After the February 2000 constitutional referendum, large-scale farm occupations by war veterans began, followed by other non-veteran groups. In their justification of the occupations, veterans explicitly cited the loss of the referendum, with its clause on compulsory land redistribution, and were largely responsible for the initiation and leadership of farm occupations. There is evidence that beginning in 2000 there were important changes in the mobilization and organization of the occupation movements and the role of the state in both encouraging them and using them not only to justify the implementation “Fast Track,” or accelerated land reform, but also to justify, in increasingly nationalist and exclusive terms, the continued legitimacy of ZANU-PF rule. Land reform was characterized by war veterans leaders, Mugabe, and other ZANU-PF elites as a “Third Chimurenga” (the Second Chimurenga was the liberation struggle), in rhetoric that became increasingly polarizing. Fast track land reform,

108 Ibid.
109 Ibid. 98.
110 Moyo “The Land Occupation Movement and Democratisation in Zimbabwe.”
launched in July 2000, had an initial target of 5 million hectares of land listed for
collection, which expanded to 9 million hectares by the end of 2001. Provincial and
local-level land committees, which were set up to identify farms for acquisition and
determine land recipients, were highly politicized. Alexander points out that the
programme sparked multiple conflicts over how land allocation was decided and who
gained access. “Authority over the land and the kaleidoscope of alliances that shaped
access to land was far from stable, a reflection of the long history of contested claims
within and between differently defined communities, and with and against the shifting
demands of state and party.” By 2003, land ownership in the commercial farming
sector was significantly altered. Approximately six million hectares of land was
redistributed, and white commercial farmers fell in numbers from 4500 in the late 1990s,
to under 500; around 200,000 farm workers lost their jobs.


After the elections in 2000, polarization between ZANU-PF and the opposition
MDC intensified, and the run-up to the 2002 presidential election—won by Mugabe—
was characterized by state-sponsored violence against MDC members or those suspected
to support the opposition, along with irregularities in electoral rolls and voter registration.
In response, Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth in March 2002, donors
increasingly withdrew funding, and the U.S. and E.U. implemented targeted sanctions
against ZANU-PF elites and their families. As violence against MDC members
increased, the party moved away from formal party structures “to more amorphous,

113 Alexander, *The Unsettled Land*, 188.
114 Ibid., 189
115 Ibid., 191.
socially embedded networks,” and began creating informal structures for mobilization.\textsuperscript{116} As LeBas points out, the “new structures, also known as action committees, were seen to be superior to official party structures precisely because they were less democratic, required less explanation of party motivations or strategy, and were composed of more militant party followers.”\textsuperscript{117} Consequently, this shift is associated with the increased use of violence on the part of MDC.

As difficulties for much of the population continued to intensify, both political parties faced internal conflicts. Divisions within ZANU-PF surfaced during a disagreement in 2004 over who should be nominated vice-president after the death of Mugabe’s former vice-president Simon Muzenda. Six provincial chairpersons were suspended after secretly attending a meeting in support of then speaker of parliament Emmerson Mnangagwa. In addition, Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo, who organized the meeting, was ousted from ZANU-PF’s Central Committee. Mugabe chose to appoint close ally Joyce Mujuru, an ex-liberation fighter and wife of Solomon Mujuru, deputy commander-in-chief of ZANU-PF’s former guerrilla army. Sharp divisions then arose within MDC over whether to participate in the elections in November 2005 for the newly created senate. This institution, originally abolished in 1990, was reinstated through a constitutional amendment passed shortly after ZANU-PF regained a sizeable majority in the March 2005 parliamentary elections. MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai argued for a boycott of the elections because the senate was seen as just another anti-democratic extension of ZANU-PF power. A breakaway faction, led by MDC vice-president Gibson Sibanda, argued that the party should participate in the elections if it

\textsuperscript{116} Adrienne LeBas, “Polarization as Craft: Party Formation and State Violence in Zimbabwe,” \textit{Comparative Politics} 38, no. 4 (July 2006), 432.
\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., 434.
were to remain a viable political force. This group then officially split from MDC, leaving both factions of the party much weaker with a loss of legitimacy among many Zimbabweans, due to the bitter disputes as well as violence between the two.

**The Role of Robert Mugabe**

Although much of the policy literature, and certainly the media coverage of Zimbabwe, has assigned the bulk of the blame for political violence and economic decline to Robert Mugabe, this chapter has argued that this position is misguided. Using the concept of state failure to frame the “Zimbabwe crisis” focuses attention on personality as the primary explanation for the crisis because it ignores other arguments, such as those advanced in this paper, that the ways in which the structure of the postcolonial state and the implementation of neoliberal reforms have framed state-society relations in Zimbabwe and conditioned the options available to Mugabe for staying in power. Personality as an explanatory variable is contingent and speculative because it is nearly impossible to test empirically. Without understanding the conditions that constitute and limit the choices available to rulers, personalities explain little.118

Mugabe clearly played an important role in Zimbabwe’s political and economic crises. First, as the head of state and party, as well as liberation war hero, his rhetoric in public speeches about nationalism, land, and what counts as legitimate politics in Zimbabwe contributed to a cycle of increasingly violent polarization between ZANU-PF and MDC.119 In addition he played a central role in equating post-2000 land reform with a “Third Chimurenga” and continually evoking war, liberation, and nationalism in

118 Thanks to Ian Zuckerman for helping to clarify this point.
119 See Adrienne LeBas, “Polarization as Craft: Party Formation and State Violence in Zimbabwe,” *Comparative Politics* 38, no. 4 (July 2006).
justifying land occupiers’ violence against white commercial farmers and black farm workers. He has also consistently suppressed internal ZANU-PF dissent and manipulated party cleavages to his advantage. However, shining the spotlight on Mugabe alone precludes a thorough understanding of the nature of the state in Zimbabwe and the role it has played in generating political outcomes that are labeled as state failure. While Mugabe is certainly the most visible figure, the role of a single leader alone cannot determine the fate of a country.\textsuperscript{120} As this chapter has tried to illustrate, the transition from war to peace, the post-war struggles over control of the local state and the terms of its relationship to the center, and the implementation of neoliberal reforms cannot be explained by Mugabe’s actions alone. Likewise, while it has pointed to some of ways in which Mugabe’s agency has mattered, other structural and institutional variables—such as the structure of state power, the politics of party organization, and state-society relations—have constrained his actions, limited his choices and led him to choose particular strategies over others.

\section*{Conclusion}

While the state failure literature focuses on Robert Mugabe’s individual role in creating turmoil in Zimbabwe, the historical evidence presented in this chapter shows that while agency may be important in contemporary Zimbabwean politics, structure also remains a critical piece of the explanation for Zimbabwe’s political crisis. In fact, this downfall turns out to be more of an exacerbation of the cracks and fissures that have existed for decades, combined with a series of shortsighted policy decisions. The new

\footnote{Jason Brownlee makes this point in his argument about the importance of ruling party politics in explaining authoritarian endurance in single party states, \textit{Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization} (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).}
Zimbabwean state was significantly shaped by both the structure of the Rhodesian state that preceded it and the nature of the liberation struggle, in which the relationship between ZANU and ZAPU was characterized by intense rivalry and a lack of strong connections to the population. The conflicts throughout the 1980s suggest that the transition from war to peace was incomplete in many ways. While the Lancaster House agreements addressed the conflict between the nationalist parties and the Rhodesian regime, it did nothing to provide a system for managing conflicts within ZANU and ZAPU. The negotiated settlement worked out at the Lancaster House talks failed to sufficiently settle the fundamental question which persisted throughout the war—the balance of power within the Zimbabwean state.

The violence in the 1980s—while not democratic or conciliatory—was primarily about settling the distribution of power. ZANU-PF succeeded in consolidating its authority through force after ZAPU and ZANU merged into a single party with the 1987 Unity Accords. At the same time, the strategy of incorporation included power struggles at the local level, conflicts over land and squatting, and its relationship with war veterans and labor. The transition to neoliberalism created new challenges that ZANU-PF could not resolve through its usual strategy of incorporation. After independence, the majority of the population gained full citizenship rights, and with them, access to public goods such as education, healthcare, and for some, employment in the state bureaucracy. However, these social benefits were lost after neoliberal reforms, creating substantial popular discontent. The resulting opposition—eventually formalized as a political party—has pushed both the regime and the opposition to forge alliances and define enemies in ways that have polarized political discourse and action.
To suggest that such politics represent Zimbabwe’s trajectory along a linear path towards state failure misreads continuing struggles to come to terms with post-independence conditions, in which social and political life is overwhelmingly shaped by the liberation struggle and the structure of alliances that followed. While ZANU-PF’s use of the liberation struggle and land reform to justify its continued legitimacy are certainly part of a strategy to remain in power, it is a misreading to assume that they represent nothing more than Mugabe’s dying gasps.

The concept of state failure does not capture these structural sources of political instability in Zimbabwe. It obscures the feedback effects between structural transitions in Zimbabwe, the weakening of state capacity due to neoliberal reforms, and the actions of the regime. As demonstrated with the ruling party’s response to the mobilization of labor, the NCA and MDC, war veterans and land occupations, the reaction cannot simply be written off as the personal shortcomings of Robert Mugabe. Rather, the transition from war to peace, the politics of party organization, and the outcome of economic crisis all play a crucial role. Chalking it up to “state failure” tells us nothing meaningful about these processes.
Appendix 1

Source: United Nations, Map No. 4210 Rev. 1, January 2004