

# **Autocracy and Economic Crisis**

A case study of Zimbabwe

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## Introduction

In 1980 the world was full of hope when Zimbabwe gained independence from colonial rule. The parliamentary elections were a success and the first democratic government, led by Robert Mugabe, started working on empowerment of the neglected rural population, while cooperating with the white politicians that they had been at war with only months before. Progress, equality and reconciliation were the keywords of this young nation that would set an example for other countries in the region (Bossema 1990; Chan 2003).

28 years later the country was a mess. Hyperinflation, political violence and economic crisis prevailed (Makochekanwa 2008; Brett 2005) and the once admired president Mugabe was now the outcast of the international community. The international community was blaming the autocratic rule that Mugabe had maintained over the years<sup>1</sup>. In this thesis I will examine the question whether this autocratic rule was indeed to blame for the economic downfall by answering the following research question:

Which elements of autocratic rule in Zimbabwe have contributed to the economic crisis of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century?

There are a few elements here that need explanation. The most vital one is ‘elements of autocratic rule’, which will be dealt with extensively in chapter 1. Below I will briefly address the definition of economic crisis that I will employ and the autocratic rule in Zimbabwe.

### **Economic Crisis**

David Coltart places the start of the crisis in November 1997, when the Zimbabwean dollar collapsed (Coltart 2008). In this year the country entered recession (World Bank 2013) and political and economic unrest increased (Chan 2003; Richardson 2004). The crisis intensified at the start of the new century when the land reform started and provoked hyperinflation which continued until 2008. GDP continued dropping until 2008 as well (World Bank 2013).

The definition of crisis that I will use in this thesis refers to the period of recession from 1997 to 2008. Although this period was also characterised by the breaking down of social services and a decline of human development (UN 1995; UN 2010) I will focus on the economic elements of the crisis. These elements were the loss of production, decline of GDP and the high inflation (Richardson 2004). Since the crisis intensified after 2000, some of the most important causes of the crisis will lie after its start in 1997.

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<sup>1</sup> UN-Watch 2005; Vines 2012

## **Autocratic Rule in Zimbabwe**

In 2013 only some of the most stubborn members of ZANU-PF would still call Zimbabwe a democracy. During the first years after independence however, Zimbabwe was seen as a democratic example for the rest of Africa. In the next chapters I will further elaborate on why Zimbabwe should be defined as an autocratic regime. To start the analysis of the country though, it is important to define from which point on the characteristics of Zimbabwe's regime could be attributed to its autocratic nature.

ZANU-PF has never made a secret of its desire to turn Zimbabwe into a one-party state (Chan 2003). Although the fairness of the elections in those first years was never contested, the outline of an autocratic state did become clear shortly after independence. With the monopolisation of the media starting right after the first elections (Rønning and Kupe 2000) and the political violence and intimidation in the late 1980s (Chan 2003) it soon became clear that Zimbabwe was no liberal democracy<sup>2</sup>. The point from which autocratic elements can be ascribed to the regime is therefore 1980. The effect of these elements on the emergence of the crisis was not that strong in the first years though. The limited repression of the 1980s was not strong enough to deeply affect the country's economy.

The effect of the political system on a country's economic development has been a subject of fierce debate over the past decades. I will not attempt to settle this debate through this case-study of Zimbabwe. I will abstain from the debate between democracy and autocracy and try to define the elements of and circumstances under which an autocracy operates that can cause, in this case, negative economic development.

To do so I will start by defining the characteristic elements of any autocracy, whether thought of as positive or negative (chapter 1). Chapter 2 will describe the historical context of Zimbabwe and the main causes of the economic crisis. In chapter 3 I will discuss the cultural context of Zimbabwe's autocracy. The three chapters will mainly be of a descriptive nature to provide the information and context necessary for the explanatory chapters 4, 5 and 6. These last chapters will deal with effect of the autocratic elements on the emergence of Zimbabwe's economic crisis.

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<sup>2</sup> See chapter 6 for a more elaborate discussion of this subject.

## Chapter 1: Elements of Autocracy

*“He [Robert Mugabe] seems to have the need to hold elections and then distort the electoral process, as if even a stolen victory might be a validation. Something in him seems to require a validation.”*

(Chan 2000)

Zimbabwe holds general elections on a regular basis and has democratic institutions such as a parliament or representative bodies on a local level. Is it fair then, to use this country as an example of an autocratic regime? Fukuyama (1992) defines democracy as the people’s liberal right to a share of political power. “A country is democratic if it grants its people the right to choose their own government through periodic, secret-ballot, multi-party elections, on the basis of universal and equal adult suffrage.” (Fukuyama 1992) Furthermore, participation in these elections (either active or passive) has to be free of oppression by economic and social superiors (Neher and Marlay 1995). As do Magaloni and Kricheli (2010), I will consider all countries who do not meet the definition of democracy as autocratic. Although the elections in Zimbabwe are periodic, secret-ballot, multi-party and on the basis of universal and equal adult suffrage, it cannot be said that it are the votes of the people that put the regime in power. Neither are the elections free of oppression by the leaders. It is unthinkable that an opposition party would ever win the parliamentary or presidential elections (Chan 2003). In chapter 6 I will elaborate on why these elections do not make the country a democracy. But first I will explain the role of the party and other democratic institutions in autocratic regimes.

### **One-Party Rule**

Zimbabwe is known as a one-party state (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). One-party states differ from a regular dictatorship, such as North-Korea, because they do not have a single leader governing the country, but a party. This party often claims to have the (democratic) support of the people. Although this party is often ruled by the prominent president, it is the party that is central to the form of government. The powerful elite will only be withheld from challenging their rulers’ power when the continuation of the current regime is in their best interest. The party can function as a mechanism to distribute resources and central political positions to those who need to be appeased. By this mechanism (potential) opponents can be drawn into the direct circle of influence of the dictator, thus eliminating them as leaders of the opposition (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). An example of this method is the incorporation of the Zimbabwean opposition party ZAPU by the ruling ZANU-PF party (Chan 2003). The chapter on the Zimbabwean crisis will elaborate further on this example.

Finding and keeping the balance between ‘guns and votes’ is an important element in the reign of a one-party state. This dilemma refers to the two possible sources of support for the regime. They can either rely on the support from the masses or if they lose this support, make sure they have control

over the armed forces to keep the masses from posing a threat to their position (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). When the votes do not prove sufficient to win the elections, the party can use the guns to enforce the electoral fraud. While the regime is still popular enough to win the elections without foul play, the loyalty of the army is less important. Preferably the regime has support of both the guns and votes, so threats to the country's stability are limited. The regime thus needs to bestow its resources in such a way that it does not only please the elite of the ruling party, but also the majority of the voters and the army (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010).

### **Non-Accountability**

The main element that separates autocracies from democracies is the fact that cannot be held accountable for their policy by the people. Because of the absence of elections the people lack the power to exert control over the policies of the regime. This lack of power does not only establish itself once in every four years when the government fails to organize democratic elections; it is also visible throughout the years when the incentive for the government to listen to the voice of the people is lacking. As we have seen in the description of the one-party state, some autocrats have to distribute some power to the voters as well. However, this does not create a degree of accountability even remotely like the situation of a democracy.

This non-accountability shapes the borders within which a regime can form its policy to a considerable degree. Pressure groups are limited in their possibilities to influence the regime since they do not have the threat of voting for the opposition. Political scientists are divided on this subject. According to Przeworsky and Limongi (1995), this is beneficial to development, as pressure groups typically strive for short-term objectives, such as higher wages at the cost of lower investments. Olsen (1982) argues that the influence of pressure-groups limits the efficiency of democracies and that the most successful regimes are those that have only recently transformed to democracy.<sup>3</sup> Francis Fukuyama (2001), on the other hand, sees civil society as a vital element of any liberal democracy, without which a government would have to use more of his own resources to control and organise the population. Fukuyama also recognises though, that an abundance of civil society would lead to an unequal distribution of resources towards the represented social groups which could slow down economic progress. But whether the effect of this non-accountability is a positive or a negative one is not very relevant, what matters are the great implications for the regime when they are less influenced by popular opinions.

We do not need to look at faraway countries with shady regimes to see the examples of this effect. In the current Dutch political situation parties and the government are often accused of avoiding policies that would benefit the country, for fear of losing voters. Some parties are even praised if they

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<sup>3</sup> Although in his later work Olsen strongly argues that autocracies are inefficient and not suitable for economic development (Olsen 1993).

choose to ignore the polls and invest in the future of The Netherlands.<sup>4</sup> The limitation which popular vote puts on politicians could be seen as a perverse effect of democracy on the country's administration. On the other hand this limitation also affects the governments' freedom to impose repressive and inhumane regulations on their citizens and implement self-enriching policies. This explains the conflict amongst scholars whether the absence of accountability within an autocracy can stimulate an economy or not. Most likely there is no definite answer; the fact if a situation of non-accountability can spur development depends on the dictator, the socio-cultural context of its regime and the possibilities the people have to influence policy. How these aspects have influenced the development of Zimbabwe will be addressed in chapter 6.

### **Self-Interest**

Whether the prevalence of non-accountability has a positive effect or not, most scientist do agree that self-interest plays a certain role within every autocratic regime.<sup>5</sup> Olsen (1993) states that a dictator will always pursue a strategy that provides him with the highest personal income. Olsen uses the example of Chinese warlords in the 1920s. These warlords conquered a certain territory over which he started to exert authority, mainly the authority to collect taxes. In exchange for protection against the plundering of bandits the population would accept the tax-rates imposed by the warlord. This warlord would then have to find a tax-rate high enough to provide him with a comfortable source of income, but not so high that it would take away the incentive to produce and destroy the economy (Olsen 1993).

The incentive that the dictator has to keep the economy running to prevent his income from drying up seems to be a good argument in favour of autocratic rule. As anonymous Italian monarchist observes, "Monarchy is the best kind of government because the King is then owner of the country. Like the owner of a house, when the wiring is wrong, he fixes it" (Banfield 1958 in: Olsen 1993). The problem which Olsen addresses is that the owner of the house has no interest whatsoever in what happens to his house after he is gone. This is why dictatorships typically do not last longer than one generation. (Olsen 1993). Also, the portrayal of the dictator as a leader solely interested in his own personal gain makes that only problems affecting his tax revenue will be addressed by his regime.

Olsen's theory was based on the situation in China in the 1920s, if it would still hold today tax-rates in autocratic countries would have to be considerably higher than in democratic countries. A short review of Southern Africa shows that this is not the case.<sup>6</sup> There seems to be no correlation between tax-rates and the type of regime and if there is a correlation, this would be in favour of

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<sup>4</sup> For example the responses to the budget agreement in spring 2012. See NOS (2012), VARA (2012).

<sup>5</sup> See for example: Olsen (1993), Papaioannou and Van Zanden (2012), Magaloni and Kricheli (2010), Neher and Marlay (1995).

<sup>6</sup> Top-level tax rates for Southern African countries by Freedom House qualification: Free: South Africa (40%), Namibia (37%), Botswana (25%). Partly free: Zambia (35%), Mozambique (32%), Malawi (30%). Not Free: Zimbabwe (35%), Swaziland (30%), Angola (17%) (Freedom House 2012; Taxrates.cc 2012).

autocracies. This does not mean that his theory of self-interest has to go down the drain. In a world where the global economy is an important (potential) source of income for every country, income-tax might not be the most important means of self-enrichment for a dictator. But if not through higher taxes, then how does the aspect of self-interest express itself?

A recent study from Papaioannou and Van Zanden (2012) shows that the longer a dictator is in power, the stronger the urge is to enrich himself. Papaioannou and Van Zanden confirm Olsen's theory that the effectiveness of a dictator depends on the proximity of his death (the 'dictator effect'). According to their results the self-enriching element of an autocracy expresses itself most through the harvesting of power. This effect is shown by the negative correlation between the years a dictator is in power and the strength of democratic institutions. By eliminating these institutions dictators create an environment in which elections can easily be won and the decisions on, amongst others, fiscal policies are mostly in their hands. This enables them to stay in power. The control over fiscal policies furthermore enables them to print money for self-enrichment (Papaioannou and Van Zanden 2012).

Where Olson's dictators were limited in their power to raise taxes by the effect of higher taxes on economic productivity, Papaioannou and Van Zanden's dictators are limited by the inflationary effects of printing money. Printing too much money would affect the economy in such a way that the tax income and international trade would drop dramatically. Of course, towards the end of one's reign these effects grow less important and self-enrichment and inflation will rise.

A problem with both Olsen's and Papaioannou and Van Zanden's theories is that they cannot explain the developments in autocracies which are ruled by a dominant political party, rather than a single ruler supported by a party. In a personalistic regime the life expectancy of the dictator is an undeniable factor when reviewing its policies. Since Zimbabwe is ruled by a personalistic regime (Papaioannou and Van Zanden 2012) there is no problem in using the dictator effect as a part of my analysis, however this weakness should be taken into account when reviewing these theories.

### **Patronage**

In *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village 1860-1960*, Anton Blok describes how the mafia was able to control the access to government services. Since the possibilities to access public services were limited, it was relatively easy for the Mafiosi to monopolise the paths linking the local society of the village to the bureaucracy of the government. Through a constant threat of violence they managed to maintain this monopoly. This powerful position enabled the Mafiosi to exert power over the government as well as over society. This situation created a patron-client relationship in both directions in which the mafia, as a patron, provided services and the government and civilians had to repay (Blok, 1974). Boissevain (1974) describes this through the creation of an asymmetric relationship: if one party in a relation of exchange delivers goods or services which the other party is unable to reciprocate, an obligation between the parties is formed.



Boissevain (1974) notes how patronage can be used to gather political support for a dominant political party. The Nationalist Party of Malta has been in power for most of the time since their foundation and thus has had access to government resources to use in political exchanges. They have maintained their power over the years by gathering electoral support through giving “government jobs, contracts, licenses and other concessions” to their clients (Boissevain 1974). Since the establishment is so tied to patronage and their own positions in office they have a personal interest to prevent structural change and maintain the status quo. The opposition however, without any access to government resources and without the ability to harvest political support through the means of patronage, has an interest in changing the current division of power and political structures and will take on a more progressive stance (Boissevain 1974). So in any setting, if there is a dominant political party who uses patronage as a means to stay in power, they will prevent structural change.

As Magaloni and Kricheli (2010) showed for one-party systems, these regimes are highly influenced by patronage. The dominant party uses patronage as a means to stay in power and to please political stake-holders and powerful opposition leaders. This means that one-party regimes are typically conservative. Since at the same time the dominant party is using patronage to incorporate the opposition and give a voice to opposing forces, the emergence of a powerful progressive opposition can be prevented (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010).

## **Chapter 2: Zimbabwe and the Crisis**

When talking about the crisis in Zimbabwe I will be referring to the years after 2000 when the GDP started declining (World Bank 2013). In order to get a clear picture of the background of the crisis and Zimbabwe's political arena I will shortly describe the pre-independence history. Then I will go through the history of Zimbabwe after independence and pay special attention to the elements that contributed to the creation of the crisis.

### **Pre-Colonial Era**

Since roughly 400 A.D. agriculture and livestock breeding have been the most important economic activities in the area now known as Zimbabwe. The Shona peoples were the first to introduce these activities; their largest city was Great Zimbabwe which fell around the year 1500. They dominated the area for about fourteen centuries until the Ndebele, who were driven out of South Africa by the Zulu, settled in the South West of Zimbabwe (Bossema 1990). Initially, the Shona and Ndebele established a violent relationship with the Ndebele dominating the Shona. While both groups eventually managed to co-exist and set up a more equal trade partnership, the rivalry and hostility remained (Bossema 1990; Chan 2003). Starting in 1880 the British South Africa Company (BSAC) started to colonise Zimbabwe. Through a combination of war, diplomacy and trade they eventually controlled the entire area of Zimbabwe and Zambia which they named Rhodesia (after the leader of the BSAC, Cecil Rhodes) (Bossema 1990).

### **(Southern) Rhodesia**

Initially, the repression of the indigenous population of Zimbabwe was not that severe. A lot of property, such as land and cattle, was taken away by the British and taxes were claimed from the Shona and Ndebele. On the other hand a trade relationship was established with the British, creating the opportunity to earn money and buy food in times of drought (instead of storing food in times of surplus) (Bossema 1990). After the rebellion of the Shona and Ndebele in 1896 however, the regime tightened and the black population was forced to live in reserves. Those living outside of the reserves were forced to pay rent to the British land owners. Simultaneously white agriculture was stimulated with tax benefits while black farmers who struggled to pay their taxes were forced to work on white farms (Bossema 1990).

In 1923 the government was passed from the BSAC to the colonists (however still under British rule), what led to an even tighter regime. The reserves for the blacks became smaller, which made it impossible for the population to sustain themselves solely on agriculture. The higher prices for white farmers' maize were lay down by law (Bossema 1990). In 1962 the colonists, headed by Ian Douglas Smith and his Rhodesian Front, seceded from the United Kingdom who was pushing for

majority rule. The United Kingdom responded by imposing economic sanctions on Rhodesia, which could not prevent the economic success of Smith's government over the following two decades (Richardson 2004).

In 1975 the black population took up arms against the white oppressor. Initially the Shona and Ndebele joined forces to fight for independence, but soon ZIPRA (Ndebele; led by Joshua Nkome) and ZANLA (Shona; led by Robert Mugabe) parted ways and started fighting both the Rhodesian Front as each other. The independence war ended with the Lancaster House Agreement in 1979 (Chan 2003).

### **Independence**

The first elections after the Lancaster House Agreement were won by Robert Mugabe's ZANU (later ZANU-PF). This was mostly due to ZANLA's role in the independence war and the ethnically motivated support from the Shona majority (Chan 2003). In the first years after independence Zimbabwe grew out to be an example for other African countries. The democratic government exploit the agricultural potential of the land and continue the line of Ian Smith's government by being one of the few grain exporting countries in the region. This agricultural potential was mainly coming from the white farmers who still owned the majority of fertile land. Their use of modern agricultural techniques and large scale farms made it easier for them to produce on a commercial level, opposed to the black rural farmers who were mainly producing for their own consumption (Richardson 2004).

The Mugabe government initially pursued a fairer distribution of farmland, but where hindered by the Lancaster House Agreement, which did not allow any changes in property rights during the first decade. The British government had provided a budget for the Zimbabwean government to purchase farmland for redistribution, but this proved too small to have a significant effect (Moyo 2000). Apart from these legal and budgetary limitations there was also the economical limitation that the economy of Zimbabwe was too dependent on the production of the white farms to do anything to risk this source of income (Richardson 2004). In order to strengthen the position of black farmers the government did start awarding subsidies for small rural farmers. This had positive effects on their production, but also aided in the exodus of white farmers (Chan 2003).

Partly due to the limitations of the Lancaster House Agreement and the dependence on white farmers overall policy changes of the ZANU government were limited (Jenkins 1997). The 1980s did involve investment in the economic empowerment of the black population and expansion of government expenditure. Some of the most notable policy changes were the introduction of a minimum wage, increase of taxes, protection of workers' contracts and introduction of price-control to limit inflation (Richardson 2004). According to Richardson these changes fell in line with the government's long term objectives to consolidate state power, redistribute farmland and create a socialist state.

The pursuit of these goals would ultimately damage the institution of free markets and private property rights for Mugabe's subsequent five presidential terms. Nationalizing industries meant the government misses out on the multiplier effect that occurs through leveraging private property. Consolidating state power meant nationalizing industries made it difficult for citizens to challenge the government when property rights and freedoms were taken away. (Richardson 2004)

The long term effect of harming property rights will be addressed when discussing the outbreak of the crisis in the twenty-first century. The short term effect was that income from the expanding economy lagged behind the investments in social services and infrastructure (Brett 2005). Expenses on education and healthcare increased by 10% and in public administration employment increased by 60% while expenses on civil service increased by 12% (Brett 2005).

Despite the absence of foreign private investments Zimbabwe seemed to be doing quite well. By the end of the 1980s GDP was up 31,6% (Worldbank 2013) and the government started implementing new policies that promoted foreign private investment (Jenkins 1997). However the budget deficits that the government had consequently run throughout the decade were starting to pile up and would provide a challenge in the years to come (Makochekanwa 2008).

### **The 1990s**

In order to sort out the government budget and open up the economy to private investments the government, probably to some extent pushed by the World Bank and the IMF, started liberalising the economy through an Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP). This resulted in cuts on agriculture and mining and letting go of the price controls (Jenkins 1997). By doing so the government lost its control over the economy and thereby inflation, which rose to an annual average of 27,6% in the first half of the decade, versus 12,1% over the 1980s (World Bank 2013). Despite these cuts the government did not manage to eliminate the budget deficit, which made the foreign debt rise from 45% of GDP in 1990 to 67% in 1995; with a peak of 75% in 1994 (Jenkins 1997).

Despite the over-spending and mismanagement by Mugabe's government, Zimbabwe had still been performing quite well in economic terms up until the late twentieth century. Agricultural production was higher than it was in the surrounding countries (Brett 2005) and GDP had risen by an average of 3,76% annually between 1980 and 2000 (World Bank 2013). Fiscal problems did intensify though in the second half of the 1990s due to the unbudgeted expenses on veterans' pensions in 1997 and the Second Congo War in the years thereafter (Chan 2003). Zimbabwe's military spending was already at a level that harmed the economy (MacDonald 1997) and due to the Second Congo War even more money was being taken away from the economy and social services (Chan 2003). The increasing budget deficit resulted in higher inflation (an average of 37,3% annually) which passed the 50% mark

in 1999 (World Bank 2013). While the population was starting to feel the effect of the fiscal problems, Mugabe could feel his popularity decreasing and political opposition growing (Chan 2003).

### **The Twenty-First Century**

The twenty-first century started with Mugabe's first electoral defeat. In February 2000 a referendum regarding the new constitution resulted in a dismissal of the suggested changes (Chan 2003). These changes included amongst others presidential immunity, increase of press censorship and the possibility to redistribute agricultural land without compensation (GoZ 1999). The referendum ended in a 55% - 45% defeat for the government which was, surprisingly, accepted by Mugabe. He blamed the defeat on the small turnout (26%) from which he claimed 8% were white voters (Chan 2003). The dismissal of the new constitution meant that, once again, Mugabe could not live up to his 1980 election promise to take care of the land issue.

Only two weeks after the electoral defeat angry civilians and armed militia started taking over white-owned farms. These land expropriations seemed not to be staged by the government but were certainly condoned and even supported by Mugabe's and smaller ZANU-PF factions (Richardson 2004; Chan 2003). On March 2<sup>nd</sup> Mugabe proposed a constitutional amendment (confirmed by parliament in April) which created the right to repossess land for redistribution purposes without compensation. The responsibility for financial compensation was transferred to the British government, under whose authority the land was taken away from the indigenous farmers prior to independence (GoZ 2000). From 2000 to 2003 over 4000 farms were repossessed. In many cases the farms had been enlisted as available by the government in the newspapers (Richardson 2004).

According to Craig Richardson the land expropriations of the beginning of the twenty-first century were the main cause of the economic crisis in Zimbabwe (Richardson 2004). First of all the white commercial farmers were the backbone of the Zimbabwean economy (Richardson 2004; Chan 2003). Not just because they controlled most of the farmland, but also because they were using more modern farming methods than the black farmers, who were mostly rural and small commercial farmers. The communal farms that were set up on some of the occupied farmlands were far less equipped to manage the large areas (Richardson 2004). As a result agricultural production (measured in value added) dropped 24% in 2002 and 15% in 2003 and maintained a downward trend until 2008 (World Bank 2013).

Secondly and most importantly the land expropriations affected the entire economy by violating property rights. Many economic scholars, most notably Hernando De Soto and Adam Smith, view the property rights violated by the Zimbabwean government as the cornerstone of any market-based economy. According to Hernando De Soto (2001) the adequate protection of property rights allows property to be transformed into capital. The expression of the monetary value of any asset is nearly impossible when the property rights of this asset are not properly registered and protected. The reason is that the ownership of this asset cannot change hands as long as it is not clear in which hands

the ownership is to begin with (De Soto 2001). This also means that the owner of an asset, when this ownership is not defined, cannot sell his property, put a mortgage on it or monetise his asset in any other way. The potential capital that can be used to invest in the economy keeps locked away (Richardson 2004).

Furthermore, when the ownership of an asset is insecure, the person using this asset to produce value cannot be sure that he will ever be able to taste the fruits of his labour (De Soto 2001). In the case of Zimbabwe's land reform the large scale occupation of farms meant that nobody could be sure of the future of their property. Thus money and time invested in the farms might never benefit the investing farmer, when his farm would be occupied by war veterans at the time of harvest. This of course had a devastating effect on productivity and released a fear for the loss of property that quickly spread to other economic sectors (Richardson).

The decreased economic production led to decreased exports, which was harmful for Zimbabwe's stock of foreign currency. The insecurity of property rights scarred of foreign investment, further harming the economy and pushing up the budget deficit (Richardson 2004). To compensate for this situation Mugabe started printing money. About 95% of the budget deficits in the early twenty-first century was financed by having the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe printing more Zimbabwean dollars (Makochekanwa 2008). As a result inflation started going up and got out of control in 2001. In November 2001 the monthly inflation rate passed the 100% mark and in April 2006 it was up to 164.900,3% (Makochekanwa 2008). Hyperinflation did not halt until the Zimbabwean dollar was replaced by the American dollar in 2009 (Hanke 2013).

Despite aforementioned over-spending and mismanagement in the 1980s, after independence Zimbabwe started out as a prosperous nation that served as an example for other countries in the region. "Since 1994, the average life expectancy in Zimbabwe has fallen from 57 years to 34 years for women and from 54 years to 37 years for men. Some 3,500 Zimbabweans die every week from the combined effects of HIV/AIDS, poverty, and malnutrition. Half a million Zimbabweans may have died already" (Coltart 2008). In 1990 Zimbabwe was ranked as medium human development country on the United Nations' Human Development Index, occupying position 79 out of 130<sup>7</sup> (UN 1990). In 2010 they occupied last place (UN 2010).

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<sup>7</sup> In the first Human Development Reports the indices were inverted, listing the countries from low development up to high development. Zimbabwe's actual position was 52 out of 130 countries, corresponding to 79 out of 130 when following the current ordering of the Human Development Index starting with high development countries.

## Chapter 3: Zimbabwean Culture and Autocracy

*Many forms of Government have been tried and will be tried in this world of sin and woe. No one pretends that democracy is perfect or all-wise. Indeed, it has been said that democracy is the worst form of government except all those other forms that have been tried from time to time.*

- Winston Churchill

One of my professors in Nijmegen once asked himself and the class the question whether democracy was a European square which was tried to fit into an African circle. Maybe the democratic ideal we, Europeans, hold as a universal good which should be the ultimate objective of any self-respecting society, just isn't fit to be exported to other cultures. Although international organizations such as the United Nations consider democracy to be a universal good (UN 1948); over half the world's regimes were labelled as 'hybrid' or 'authoritarian' by the Democracy Index in 2011 (Economist Intelligence Unit 2011). The other countries were either 'full' or 'flawed' democracies. All of this despite 70 years of decolonisation and three waves of democratisation (Huntington 1991).

Given these facts it is logical and maybe even justified that some social scientists, like my professor, state democracy is not necessarily a type of regime that fits within every cultural context. I will not try to solve this dispute about the universality of democracy. However, in order to understand Mugabe's position in Zimbabwe it is vital to review how his rule is connected to the country's cultural background.

### **Pre-Colonial Society**

In order to judge whether the current autocratic regime is connected to Zimbabwe's cultural background we should take a look at the way in which the power of the rulers was connected to support of the people in pre-colonial times. The customs of appointing a chief in the years before 1863 and the developments in the political system since then could explain the relationship between government and the people in the current era.

The largest ethnic groups are the Shona (73% of the population) and the Ndebele (16%) (Bossema 1990). The ruling elite, including Robert Mugabe, consists of members of the Shona-tribe. In the pre-colonial period the area that is now Zimbabwe was inhabited by the Shona and Ndebele people. The Shona were ruled through a large number of chiefdoms (Bourdillon 1993). These chiefdoms were not based on democratic structures; the chief was often a religious figure which was believed to have inherited his authority and power from "the ancestral spirits that founded the chiefdom" (Bourdillon 1993). The position of the chief was largely unchallenged; only he had inherited authority from the ancestors, so only he could rule his chiefdom. Opposition was non-existent. His unchallenged position though, did not come with unlimited power. A chief had no army

to enforce his will, it was hard to control the sometimes large areas within his chiefdom and his citizens were free to move to the reign of a more desirable chief, would the current one not meet their needs (Bourdillon 1993). Furthermore the chief's nephew could publicly criticise his performance if he would not treat his people well. This *muzukuru* was an institutional check to the chief's power which could be used by others to complain about the way they were ruled. The Ndebele did not live in chiefdoms, but in one large kingdom. The king of this empire, unlike the Shona chiefs, did have an army to enforce his rule, so he did not depend on his people for his power (Bourdillon 1993).

### **Colonial Rule**

After colonisation a more European bureaucratic system was imposed by the colonial government. This system limited the powers of the traditional chiefs and tried to incorporate the aboriginal inhabitants into the bureaucracy (Bourdillon 1993). This mix of traditional and bureaucratic values was problematic as the people were still unlikely to personally challenge the authority of their superior, but there was no muzukuru they could turn to. If we take a leap forward to the present day post-colonial rule of Mugabe we could use this presence of pre-colonial values to explain the fact that Zimbabwe's head of state is a dictator. With the absence of a muzukuru, no one could voice their disapproval of the government in a way suitable to their cultural traditions. This caused an absence of criticism and feedback for the appointed chiefs, putting a stop to the democratic culture that was present in pre-colonial times.

The problem with this theory though is that Shona chiefs and Ndebele kings did depend on their people for their power, even though there wasn't an official democratic structure present. This structure of interdependence was diminished by colonial rule, where regional chiefs were put in power by the white colonisers. They were now depending on approval by their superiors, instead of the people (Makumbe 1998). Following this pre-colonial structure, political leaders should be receptive to public criticism and should be willing to stand down if their leadership isn't accepted by their subjects, whether or not the check to one's power is a muzukuru or not. The fact that this is not the case in current Zimbabwean politics could not be explained by referring to pre-colonial leadership structures. This falls in line with the statistical research of Przeworski, Cheibub and Limongi (2003) stating that there is no relationship between the culture or religion of a country and the likelihood of a democracy to last.

### **Ethnic Conflict**

Another possible explanation for the emergence of a one-party state in Zimbabwe is the ethnic rivalry between the Shona and the Ndebele. As of the migration of the Ndebele to Zimbabwe their relationship with the Shona majority has been violent (Bossemma 1990). There certainly have been periods of peace and cooperation, but up until the Gukurahundi massacres in the 1980's (civil) war has been an important element of their relationship (Chan 2003). Shortly after the 1980 elections Mugabe



and his ZANU party started expressing the desire to form a one-party state (Chan 2003). One of the reasons for this desire could have been the fact that at that point there was only one plausible coalition partner: ZAPU, the political party of the Ndebele. Entering a multi-party government with ZAPU was likely to be an unthinkable act for Mugabe: ZAPU-leader Joshua Nkomo supposedly said about Mugabe: "Mugabe and his Shona henchmen have always sought the extermination of the Ndebele."<sup>8</sup>

Following the Gukurahundi massacres Mugabe and Nkomo did join forces in ZANU-PF as a result of the Unity Accord in 1987. However Mugabe never made any real concessions to the Ndebele, nor could be spoken of a significant sharing of power between both groups (Chan 2003). Maintaining the one-party rule with Shona representatives at all crucial positions allowed Mugabe to consolidate power for the Shona majority.

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<sup>8</sup> Unconfirmed quote from Joshua Nkomo, appearing in several news articles such as Bulawayo24 (2012).

## **Chapter 4: Zimbabwe and Patronage**

The structure in which the Zimbabwean government operated demanded support from different groups and key-figures in society. Being an autocratic leader does not mean Mugabe can do whatever he pleases. To maintain power the support of either the army or the people, preferably both, is necessary (Magaloni and Kricheli 2010). Since Zimbabwe is governed by one-party rule and leading the country as a sole dictator is virtually impossible, support of party-officials is essential as well. Gathering all this support requires the handing out of gifts and brokering deals with key-figures within the party and in some cases the opposition. As we have seen in the first chapter this is handled through the creation of patron-client relationships in which government applies its resources to the benefit of its supporters. We have seen some examples when discussing the crisis in Zimbabwe, I will now elaborate further on these and explain how they influenced the economic and social breakdown.

### **The Military**

Coming from the ZANU guerrilla army himself, Mugabe's power has always been strongly linked to the military. He needed the military to maintain control over the people, the opposition and opposing factions within his own ZANU-PF (Chan 2003). The generals also needed Mugabe to provide them with land, bonuses and minerals as a repayment for their loyalty. This repayment was an important reason for Zimbabwe to join forces with Kabila in the second Congo War in 1998. Congo's land contained great mineral wealth which Zimbabwe's military leaders and their political friends were more than willing to collect (Chan 2003).

Despite the opposition against the expensive war Zimbabwe continued to be involved, pressured by the military leaders who were getting richer every day. The growing opposition back home made it impossible for Mugabe to withstand this military pressure (Chan 2003). He was starting to lose the votes that supported his presidency; he couldn't afford losing the guns as well.

The unbudgeted expenses on the war veterans' pensions in 1997 should be viewed in the perspective of buying the support of an influential group and maintaining patron-client relationships. As we have seen in chapter 2 these expenses on pensions and the Congo war and the following printing of money were the starting point of an era of inflation and crisis.

### **The Land Question**

After losing the constitutional referendum in 2000, war veterans and Mugabe's supporters started invading white-owned commercial farms. In the years to follow about four thousand farms were the subject of government-condoned, government-supported and government-ordered land expropriations. The land question had been an issue in Zimbabwean society and politics since independence. Under the colonial rule of the British South Africa Company the most fertile farm lands had been taken over

by white farmers (Richardson 2004). Restoring the land titles for black farmers had been a long standing election promise of Mugabe. So far however, only the black elite surrounding Mugabe had been able to profit from the few land redistributions that had actually taken place. Sam Moyo (2000) states that the “land distribution policy lobby increasingly served the narrow interest of some black elites in an orchestrated system of patronage.”

According to Stephen Chan (2003) the farm invasions were a product of the growing dissatisfaction over the absence of meaning full land reform for the smaller farmers and of the war veterans feeling disgruntled about the wealth gap between them and the political elite. Craig Richardson (2004) affirms this view and argues that the farm invasions were a display of Mugabe’s lack of power and his inability to control even his own supporters. Seeing as how he responded to the invasions and used the chaos and lawlessness to strengthen his own political position, while closely working together with Chenjerai Hunzvi, the leader of the veterans (Chan 2003), David Coltart’s theory seems more plausible. He suggests that the land invasions were the start of an elaborate plan to restore Mugabe’s popularity after the shock of the constitutional referendum (Coltart 2008).

Whatever the case, the government made no attempt to put a stop to the land expropriations (Chan 2003; Richardson 2004; Coltart 2008). Instead they made good use of the situation by first buying the war veterans’ support by giving them the farms, as they did in 1997 with the pensions, and later awarding the farmland to high officials of the party to keep them in line (Coltart 2008). It is very likely that, taking away the patronagic argument, the land reform would have been far less elaborate and disastrous or might not even have taken place at all.

## Chapter 5: Zimbabwe and Self-Interest

*“There are things one must do for oneself” – Robert Mugabe*

As described in the first chapter autocratic ruled countries typically have some degree of self-interest in their policies. The self-interest displayed by the government of Mugabe and ZANU-PF played an important role in shaping the pre-conditions for the economic crisis. I will outline below how this aspect of the autocratic regime led to the over-spending and inflation in the 1980s and the fatal hyperinflation in the twenty-first century.

The cuts made under structural adjustment in the 1990s are also an example of the self-interested proceedings of the government, but serve better as an example of non-accountability. Which is why the ESAP is covered in chapter 6.

### **Over-Spending**

After independence and the first elections of the Republic of Zimbabwe in 1980 the country seemed to be heading towards a multi-party democracy. Eleven parties competed in the elections and four of those won seats in parliament, with ZANU-PF winning 57 of the 80 common roll seats<sup>9</sup>. It was clear though that Mugabe was not aiming for a multi-party democracy. Behind the scenes he had stated more than once that his aim was a one-party state (Chan 2003). To prevent the sharing of power the needed to consolidate their own position within the government. One of the ways to do this was to secure the rural vote, which had been of vital importance to ZANU-PF during the election in 1980. Securing this rural vote was done through the earlier mentioned promises of land reform, but more importantly through spending on agricultural subsidies, education and healthcare (Chan 2003; Jenkins 1997).

Although the over-spending in the 1980s was still largely developmental<sup>10</sup>, a lot of money was spent on expanding the civil service with 12% each year (Brett 2005). The expansion of the bureaucracy, just as the expenses on the rural population, served mainly to securing ZANU PF's control over the country and its government. By getting their own people in the civil service the party gained control over the administration (Jenkins 1997).

As we have seen in chapter 2 the over-spending of the Mugabe government led to an average inflation of 12,1% over the 1980s (World Bank 2013) and a rise of government expenditure from 32,5% of GDP to 44,6% of GDP (Brett 2005). Although the inflation of the 1980s was still a long way

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<sup>9</sup> Following the Lancaster House Agreement which formed the basis of Zimbabwe's independence, 20 out of 100 seats were reserved for the 'white roll', elected by Zimbabwe's white population. The common roll was reserved for all voters not eligible for the white roll. (Chan 2003)

<sup>10</sup> Expenses on fixed capital, as opposed to non-developmental; consumption of the state (Makochekanwa 2008).

from the crisis of the twenty-first century, the self-interest of the Mugabe government planted the seed here for the larger budget problems in the following years.

### **Money Printing**

As of independence in 1980 Mugabe has consistently run his administration with a budget deficit. The fact that Zimbabwe choose to solve this deficit domestically, especially after 1997, by printing money and borrowing from its own banks made this deficit largely responsible for the hyper-inflation in the twenty-first century (Makochekanwa 2008). In the late nineties the printing presses were running to make for the expenses on the Congo war and the veterans' pensions. This has led to an annual inflation rate of 58,5% in 1999 (World Bank 2013). The budget deficit that needed to be compensated in the early twenty-first century was the result of the economic decline in the preceding years and the high, unbudgeted, expenses on land reform (Richardson 2004). As we have seen the inflation of the twentieth century could turn into the hyperinflation of the twenty-first century due to the switch to central banking. The Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe could run the presses without limitation and without clarifying where the money was going to. On their January 2008 balance sheet 25,2% of the assets represented 'other investments', while 65,6% was categorised as 'other' (Hanke 2008). According to Hanke "those assets most likely represent various forms of credit to the government and to state-owned enterprises" (2008). One thing the balance sheet does reveal is that "the RBZ is operating as the government's printing press" (Hanke 2008).

The elaborate government spending after 2000 seemed to serve mainly to protect the position of ZANU-PF as the dominant party and Mugabe as Zimbabwe's president (Coltart 2008). Losing the constitutional referendum in 2000 had shocked Mugabe and made him realise that he needed to increase his support from the people. The land reform and accompanying intimidation (and even murder) of opposition representatives served to win back the support from the small commercial farmers, the redistribution of the repossessed farms among the veterans served to win their support and support of the rural populations was won by selective food support in 2003 and 2004 (Coltart 2008). All this came at the cost of the Zimbabwean economy, the Zimbabwean dollar and ultimately the Zimbabwean people.

What separates these actions from the patronage applied earlier is that, except for the redistribution of land among the veterans, these actions were far less calculated than for instance the allocation of pensions to the veterans. The rash printing and spending of money on intimidation, land expropriation and food support were acts of a desperate man fearing to lose his position. Not just for the status and money that accompanied it, but also for what would wait him after falling from power. Coltart (2008) states that Mugabe was undoubtedly "fully aware that the moment he loses power and

with it his presidential immunity from prosecution, people will push to have him and the responsible military commanders and politicians indicted for crimes against humanity or genocide<sup>11</sup>”.

Mugabe’s fear for his own position, led him to lead to country, more so than before, out of self-interest. Combined with the opportunity provided by the system of central banking this was the mayor direct cause of the hyperinflation.

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<sup>11</sup> Referring to the Gukurahundi massacres in Matabeleland in the 1980’s.

## **Chapter 6: Zimbabwe and Non-Accountability**

Non-accountability is a characteristic of autocratic regimes relating to the fact that they do not have to have the popularity of their policies tested by the public every four years. The first election results (either parliamentary or presidentially) that were widely contested were those of 2000 (Chan 2003). Before that one could have said that non-accountability was a non-issue for Zimbabwe. However the government did rule their country in a way that eliminated the chance of a real test at the ballot box. Immediately after independence Mugabe started monopolising the media by setting up the Zimbabwe Mass Media Trust that was supposed to independently control the national news agency ZIANA and the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Company. In practice however, this Trust was strictly controlled by the Minister of Information (Rønning and Kupe 2000). This meant that the government controlled the vast majority of information distributed to the voters, including the vernacular radio which proved vital for influencing the opinion of the rural population (Chan 2003). Combined with the intimidation of voters and opposition around the elections and more widely through the Gukurahundi massacre, this made the elections all but a fair test to the popularity of government policies.

All this manipulation and propaganda did not mean that ZANU-PF could just get away with anything. There is a limit to the extent a government can trick its people into voting for them. The control of information did make it a lot easier for the party though to keep winning elections. It also made it a lot easier to enforce cover up corruption and enforce some new policies, most notably those in the early nineties.

### **Structural Adjustment**

In the early 1990s the government of Zimbabwe made a drastic shift from the building of, what was supposed to be, a socialist state to promoting an open market economy (Brett 2005). We have seen the effects of this drastic change in chapter 2; the question is if the government would have been able to make these same changes under an open democracy.

The government of Zimbabwe has always insisted that the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme was home-grown; a programme of Mugabe and his ministers. Edward Brett supports this statement and also calls the new policy regime “largely home-made” (Brett 2005). Coltart (2008) and Chan (2003) state though that the ESAP was imposed by the World Bank and IMF. Looking at the budget deficits of the 1980s at least some external pressure for economic reform from the World Bank and IMF would seem very plausible. Whether externally imposed or not, Sam Moyo states that terming the programme ‘home-grown’ is far-fetched: “Certainly, its adoption did not involve adequate consultations with the majority of workers, small farmers and small businesses” (Moyo 2000). In any case the implementation of the programme was a drastic shift from the policies of the 1980s and seemed more motivated by the personal interests of party officials than by an attempt to sort out the

government budget<sup>12</sup>, made possible by “the existence of a de facto one-party state up to 1996 [which] meant that the regime did not have to confront serious electoral threats, and therefore was guaranteed, at least a surrogate for, the “embedded autonomy” that is said to have been the precondition for East Asian economic success” (Brett 2005).

During the first decade after independence the government had employed a socialist agenda based on food support, education, health care and economic empowerment of the rural population. Apart from the propaganda and the influences of ethnicity and the liberation war on Zimbabwean politics, this socialist agenda was the source of ZANU-PF’s popularity and had established its main constituency among the rural population (Chan 2003). From an electoral point of view the switch to liberalisation was a very dangerous move, seeing that the cutting of subsidies harmed above all the rural voters of ZANU-PF (Chan 2003). However, during the 1980s a lot of party-officials and members of the ruling elite had started up their own businesses, trying to profit from the liberalisation of colonial rule. This group formed an important incentive to liberalise the country’s economy and thus promote foreign investment and improve the fiscal situation for the private sector (Brett 2005).

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<sup>12</sup> The continuation of budget deficits throughout the 1990’s supports this view (Makochekanwa 2008).



## Conclusion

Chapter 2 defined the main causes of the economic crisis as the continuous over-spending and budget deficits, the lack of control of the government over its economy, the unbudgeted spending and the violation of property rights. All of these could be linked back to the autocratic characteristics defined in the first chapter. It is too easy though to say that autocracy is completely responsible for Zimbabwe's crisis.

Linking the problems back to autocracy does not mean that these problems would not have occurred under democratic rule. Starting an expensive war over natural resources is not reserved for autocracies; neither is consistently running the administration with a budget deficit. What really defined the severity of the crisis though, was the land reform. Due to the violation of property rights a moderate crisis turned into hyperinflation and a deep recession. The main cause was Mugabe's fear to secede. After losing the first elections of his political career Mugabe knew that he could not sustain his position based on just the support of the votes, he needed to call in the guns. Where a democratic president might have, in a worst case scenario, embezzled a few million government dollars for his own campaign budget, Mugabe chose to fight his way out. This proved to be disastrous for the economy, but worked surprisingly well for the president. Without many concessions to the opposition he managed to maintain his position where he remains to this date.

The emergence of the crisis thus cannot be explained through the presence of an autocratic regime. Many a crisis has occurred through mismanagement of a regime and Mugabe's mismanagement was not of a nature that is unthinkable for a democracy. It is safe to say though that the crisis has been deepened by the autocratic reaction, fuelled by fear of a dictator losing his position. But even then one should be cautious in comparing autocracies and democracies. A democratic leader might have been better equipped to handle this situation, but it is impossible to say if the democrat would have made it through the international crisis of the 1980s.

The sole case of Zimbabwe does not prove that an autocrat under pressure would always cause or intensify a crisis. Further research would be necessary to determine the circumstances under which the autocratic regime becomes a threat to the economy. The case of Zimbabwe neither proves that autocracy will lead to such a crisis. In fact there are a number of countries which have performed well under autocratic rule. Case studies about these countries could provide the situation under which an autocracy prospers.

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