

The Sun That Never Rose: A Rhetorical Analysis of the July 2006 'Sunrise of Currency Reform' Monetary Policy Review Statement issued by the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe¹

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Abstract

This paper analyses the rhetoric that Dr Gideon Gono, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, used in his (in) famous 'Sunrise of Currency Reform' Monetary Policy Review Statement to make people believe that once the three zeros were removed from the currency, all economic problems would be a thing of the past. The paper argues that by largely using rhetoric that espoused the common ownership of the economic crisis, Gono attempted to create a common bond among the people. This analysis shows that Gono's speech was fraught with buzz words and phrases such as 'from zero to hero' which, despite their fuzziness, were aimed at short-circuiting the audience's reasoning and persuading them to think that removing three zeros from the currency was a noble thing to do. Posing as a pious citizen, Gono attempted to make his speech turn the occasion into an epic moment by purporting collectivity in the exercise. It is concluded that although Gono's speech contains a mixture of deliberative, forensic and deictic elements of a speech, the proverbial sun did not rise for the people of Zimbabwe, and that Gono's Monetary Statement was one of his worst illusions.

Introduction

On Monday 31 July 2006, the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Dr Gideon Gono, issued a Monetary Policy Review Statement (henceforth Monetary Statement) that resulted in the slashing of three zeros in the Zimbabwean currency. Dubbing the Monetary Statement "Sunrise: A New Beginning/Zuva Rabuda (Shona)/ Ilanga Seliphumile (Ndebele²)", a phrase which was reconfigured in chains of equivalence throughout the Monetary Statement, Gono gave the impression that the Monetary Statement was a panacea to all the economic woes bedevilling Zimbabwe. He solicited the support of the public, commerce and industry by suggesting that it was a collective effort "to bring back light, not just at the end of the tunnel, but right into the tunnel for all Zimbabweans to see their potential as a people and to rekindle hope and belief in ourselves" (Monetary Statement, p.1). Ironically, there was literal darkness in Zimbabwe as the government introduced regular power cuts as the cash strapped Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) could not

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supply enough power for the nation. This was sarcastically dubbed 'the power of darkness' by some of the most creative people of Zimbabwe. The purpose of this paper is to critique the rhetorical strategies that Gono used to enunciate his 'visionary' goal in the Monetary Statement which gave the impression that once the three zeros were removed from the currency, everything would work smoothly again in the country as suggested by the catchphrase "from zero to hero". Urban dwellers and non-state media sarcastically turned the phrase into "from hero to zero", implying that what the Governor doing would come to naught. I argue that the Monetary Statement promised a utopian ideal in which the runaway inflation, at more than 7000 % at the time of writing this article, would be a thing of the past. I treat this Monetary Statement as an extravagant promise. According to Hirschman (1967:31), an "extravagance in promising future benefits is a necessary art of what makes ... development tick." Contrary to Hirschman's assertion, the opposite is true in the case of Zimbabwe. No development took place since the pronouncement of the supposedly historic Monetary Statement. I also demonstrate that the Monetary Statement resonated with buzzwords of the economic turnaround discourse that was characteristic of speeches in government circles in Zimbabwe. In addition, I identify and analyse some of the linguistic items (feel-good words) that gave the Monetary Statement its rhetoric appeal.

The conclusion I make is that, for all intents and purposes, the metaphorical sun did not rise for Zimbabweans, more than a year after the issue of the Monetary Statement. The stark reality was not what the rhetoric in Gono's Monetary Statement espoused. This argument is taken in the view of the fact that the majority of the people in Zimbabwe, at the time of writing, could not afford to buy basic commodities in order to lead a decent life. The Monetary Statement can be aptly described as Gono's famous last words. *The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines the term 'famous last words' as follows: "famous last words – used when someone has said too confidently that they can do something or that something will happen" (2001:499). Gono delivered his Monetary Statement with so much gusto and verve that you thought the economic crisis would end with the adoption of his proposals.

Together words

Together words were used in the speech to give a sense of common ownership of the problem at hand. Words like "united", "we", "us", "common", "Zimbabweans", "consensus", "ourselves" and "our" are among many that Gono used in his omnibus approach where everyone was made to feel responsible for the new change or dispensation. For instance, he pointed out:

We owe it to ourselves, more than anybody outside our borders, to go back to work as a country, and to regain our confidence as a people (p. 1).

Zimbabweans must be ...authors of the new economic development for a change instead of following what others penned already (p.3).

These together words were meant to uphold the ontological view that people have over government institutions which are supposed to serve their interests. Gono created a common bond with his audience, something similar to Aristotle's common ground and Burke's identification created by referring to sub-stances (Larson 2007).

According to Burke, 'sub' means 'beneath' and 'stances' means 'grounding' or 'places'. Identification depends on the beliefs, values, experiences and views that people share in society. Gono further appealed to the intellectual and emotional participation of his audience by the consistent use of "your central Bank" and "your Governor" throughout his speech. In other words, the people owned the Reserve Bank and him. He cunningly submitted himself to the people, portraying himself as a servant of the people, thus identifying with them.

Emotive call

Gono referred to the hardships faced by the people and mentioned the various categories of people - workers, students, women, the elderly and the frail "who cannot make ends meet on basics, let alone simple luxuries" (p.1). The mere mention of these groups of people made them feel that his Monetary Statement was going to make a major difference in their lives. He attributed the plight of these people to a number of factors some of which were what he called "severe challenges on the inflation front, limited foreign exchange availability, rising unemployment, and company closures, declining productivity declining company viability, very low industrial capacity utilisation, diminishing economic patriotism, reduced dignity and growing selfishness in our midst..." He also said: "I am of the particular opinion that ordinary Zimbabweans must be commended for their incredible resilience through the challenges we all face" (p.42).

By using the euphemism "challenges" Gono created the impression that the problems could be easily solved by the implementation of the proposals contained in his Monetary Statement, thereby making people believe that all hope was not lost. Gono did not, however, refer directly to the skewed government policies as the root causes of the suffering of the people, preferring to use the mild terms "growing selfishness among our midst..." Related to this, by using the term "diminishing economic patriotism", Gono suggested that what people needed was devotion and loyalty to their country in order to conquer the challenges. The use of the word 'patriotism' was meant to make people have feelings of guilt. But it remained unclear as to how this economic patriotism would bring economic development and joy to millions of starving masses of Zimbabwe. No wonder why many people remarked that they did not eat 'patriotism'.

Failure not a viable option?

Gono's policy statements were characterised by the phrase "failure is not an option", but the reality was that not one of them scored meaningful success since his entry into office in 2003. "Failure is not just a viable option for this governor and my team at the bank" (p.1) smacked of pretentiousness or posturing that failed to identify the real cause of the economic problem. To buttress the point that the Monetary Statement would yield positive results, Gono went on to say that no matter how difficult the challenges were, "...surrender, self-pity, suicide or running away into foreign lands is neither the solution nor an option" (p. 1). This was said in the backdrop of Zimbabweans flocking to foreign lands in droves, running away from the political and economic meltdown in the country

Appeal to authority

In my Critical Thinking course, one of the topics that we deal with is 'Arguments

and Fallacies'. In simple terms, a fallacy is a flawed or defective argument. Despite having bad reasoning, fallacious arguments can convince people. For example, the use of a person of high standing in society or reference to a book in an argument may make people believe what one is saying, regardless of whether it has something to do with the argument being presented or not. To authenticate his Monetary Statement, Gono made reference to two books: *Macroeconomics in the Global Economy* by renowned Economists and Econsultants Jeffrey D. Sachs and Lorraine B. Filipe published by Prentice Hall (1993) and *A portrait of An economy Under Sanctions, 1965-1975* by John Handford (year of publication and publishers not given). In the former book Gono cited some measures that were taken to arrest inflation by a number of countries in the world, including the United States of America, in their various phases of development. The latter book was used to show how the Rhodesians survived under sanctions imposed on the Ian Smith segregationist regime after the illegal Unilateral Declaration of Independence in 1965. The picture Gono created by reference to these books was that the Zimbabwean situation was not unique as other countries had similar experiences. If other countries came out of their difficult situations, Gono said, "[w]e too as Zimbabweans can do it. And we must do it without any further delays" (p.4). The foregoing citation tended to rely much on the appeal to common practice and overgeneralization as no situations cited, although similar to some extent, would have been treated in exactly the same way. Citing these erudite authorities had a rhetorical appeal to the elite section of the audience. It cannot also be an overstatement to suggest that Gono also wanted to sound educated by citing these authorities. In addition, by going back to times mentioned in the books, the speaker was using what in rhetorical terms is called *kairos* or spatio-temporal elements to make his audience believe that the economic slump was not peculiar to Zimbabwe alone.

Gono also appealed to the authority of President Mugabe and then Finance Minister Herbert Murerwa saying: "His Excellency the President, Cde R. G. Mugabe and the Hon. Minister of Finance Dr H. M. Murerwa have been very clear and inspirational about some of the key action plans and policies that we ought to take when they delivered their respective Statements to the Nation last week" (p.2). Gono gave the impression that whatever he was suggesting in his Monetary Statement had the full backing and blessing of the President and the Finance Minister. This confirmed the suggestion that Mugabe and Murerwa's Statements to the Nation were meant to psych people up ahead of Gono's Monetary Statement, thereby giving it the credibility it deserved.

Gono courted his listeners not to see "gloom and doom everywhere", but to believe in his prophesy that the Monetary Statement was "the beginning of the end of the proverbial seven years of famine ... and this prophesy is real for some of us." Gono's allusion to moral authority was also characteristic of this Monetary Statement as evidenced in "God willing" (p. 2); "...only God knows..." (p.2); "God's Supremacy" (p.4); "But with God, all things are possible"; (p.4) and "The Bible is very clear about the Vision issues in Proverbs 29:18". At this juncture let me liken Gono to Shylock, the shrewd moneylender in William Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice*. In one scene, Shylock justifies his charge of interest on the money (three thousand ducats) that Antonio is borrowing for his friend Bassanio by referring to how Jacob earned interest when he was looking after Laban's sheep. In an *aside* to Bassanio, Antonio says:

Mark you this Bassanio,
The devil can cite scripture for his purpose,
An evil soul producing holy witness,
Is like a villain with a smiling cheek, A goodly apple rotten at the heart.
O, what a goodly outside falsehood hath!
(Act 1, Scene 3: 227)

By citing scripture, Gono, like Shylock, meant to give credence and demeanour to his Monetary Statement. Ironically, more than a year at the time of writing this article, after the launch of the much celebrated Monetary Statement, Gono's prophesy did not come "true", the sun did not rise for the people of Zimbabwe and there were no indications that it would rise in the near future unless a miracle happened. There was "gloom" and "doom" everywhere and Zimbabweans continued "running away into foreign lands" in droves as a solution to get basics for survival. Adapting Gono's own words, one can simply say, "...this prophesy (Gono's) [was not] true for [the nation]." Gono's prophetic rhetoric proved a failure. In other words, his rhetoric of economic deliverance and development yielded nothing.

Buzzwords are fuzzwords

Development discourses rely on buzzwords such as "eradication of poverty", "health for all...", "the marginalized", "housing for all by ...", "economic powerhouse" – the list is long. According to Sanding (2001:13),

Nobody trying to be influential can afford to neglect the fine art of buzzwords...Images conveyed by simple terms are taken as reality, and words are increasingly loaded with ideological symbolism and political correctness. It may seem innocuous. It is surely not. Why make a fuss? The reason is that the terms we use help to shape the policy agenda... The linguistic crisis is real, and is not going to go away.

Buzzwords are useful in policy statements because they are fuzzwords. Gono used a seductive mix of buzzwords that solicited participation from his audience. Some of the buzzwords that he used in his feel good rhetoric include: "a new sunrise", "*Zuva rabuda*", "stability", "convenience", "from Zero to Hero", "Say no to zero and hello to hero" and "send them [zeros] off". These fine sounding words, despite their fuzziness, promised a golden future, where people's suffering would be a thing of the past. Wood (1985) views this promise necessary: "The part policy statements play in development discourses is, in many respects, performative: their extravagance in promising future benefits is coupled with modelling the very controllability that they wish to bring about." Gono gave his audience hope by saying: "Today is a new sunrise: *Zuva rabuda*. All of us would like the sun to set on the dark, speculative world of trading; cash hoarding and skyrocketing inflation ..." (p. 42). But, as this paper argues, the sun did not rise; instead, economic hardships increased day by day for the suffering people of Zimbabwe.

Scare tactics

Gono also used scare tactics in a bid to induce cooperation from his audience. By threatening people with arrest for not adhering to the rules of his Monetary Statement, Gono made people feel guilt of a crime they had not committed. At times his rhetoric turned dictatorial. The following citations speak volumes:

The Reserve Bank, together with other Law Enforcement Arms of Government, will be stationed at all points of entry into the country, and anyone caught importing local currency volumes in excess of the stipulated export limits will be prosecuted, with the underlying cash forfeited under the Anti-money laundering laws, and exchange Control Regulations of the country (p. 44)

...the Reserve bank will work round the clock in partnership with the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) and the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) to ensure that all those delinquent individuals and corporate citizens who have illegally externalised our currency will not be allowed to simply bring it back without being brought to book in accordance with the law of the land (p.44).

There is no wonder why some sectors of the population concluded that Gono was the *de facto* Prime Minister of Zimbabwe as he was running the show, overshadowing most cabinet ministers. Ironically, but not surprisingly, the chaotic currency change over enriched many law enforcement agents as they looted people's money in the process.

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and the rhetoric of development

Putting Gono's rhetoric of optimism into a broader context, and relating it to the tenets of international development, one can conclude that the Governor was daydreaming when he issued his Statement of the 31st of July 2006. According to Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopaedia,

International development is a concept that lacks a universally accepted definition, but it is most used in a holistic and multi-disciplinary context of human development - the development of livelihoods and greater quality of life for humans. It therefore encompasses governance, healthcare, education, disaster preparedness, infrastructure, economics, human rights, environment, and issues associated with these. International development is by definition a process undertaken by countries and communities with assistance from other nations' governments and communities, from international Non-Governmental Organisations, or from intergovernmental organisations (such as the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank). (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_development)

Related to International development is the role of foreign direct investment (FDI). FDI is the lifeblood of the economic development in developing countries. According to Moosa (2002), "foreign direct investment is a process whereby residents of one country (the source country) acquire ownership of assets for the purpose of controlling the production, distribution, and other activities of a firm in another country (the host country)."

Literature on Foreign Direct Investment Policy in Africa identifies the following ten most important factors that promote investment:

- Political stability;
- Markets, domestic and export;

- Sound macro-economic policies;
- Efficient and equitable application of these policies, i.e. positive and welcoming attitude by the government administration;
- Specific government policies (investment guarantees, tax incentives, etc.);
- Adequate infrastructure;
- Appropriate labour policies;
- Banking and finance structure;
- Size and quality of local business community; and
- Quality of life, including personal safety.

At the time Gono made his Monetary Statement, and long before that, it was apparent that most of the above mentioned factors that promote investment did not exist in Zimbabwe. Was it not, therefore, mere rhetoric for Gono to continue giving his audience hope by saying: "We hope too, by December 2008 to have positively contributed to a sound and friendly investment climate in which all current investor concerns are addressed, making Zimbabwe the most attractive foreign direct investment destination in Africa" (p.7)?

Conclusion

The paper has shown that Gono's ornate language in the Monetary Statement was intended to solicit interest, support and commitment of his audience. It was also intended to induce feelings of guilt among the people as it would appear unpatriotic not to support the proposals contained in the Monetary Statement. But the economic development and better future he promised or prophesied did not materialize. Gono failed to take cognisance of the rhetorical situation before, during and after delivering his Monetary Statement. Without fostering an environment that has all the ten factors that promote investment, Gono's sun will never rise for the suffering people of Zimbabwe. Since taking office at the Central Bank in 2003, and turning it into a rhetorical governorship, his Monetary Policy Statements brought more suffering to the people of Zimbabwe who queued for their money at banking institutions and basic commodities that were not there. Therefore it was fallacious for Gono to use the phrase "Sunrise: A New Beginning/Zuva Rabuda (Shona)/Ilanga Seliphumile (Ndebele) for he should have realised that his promise would soon turn into a mirage.

Notes

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² Shona and Ndebele are official indigenous languages of Zimbabwe. The translation of "Sunrise: A New Beginning" into these two languages is in itself a rhetorical strategy that the speaker uses to appeal to the speakers of these languages who form the majority of the population.

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