

**Operation Murambatsvina:  
Urban governance in post-colonial Zimbabwe**

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## **Abstract**

On May 19, 2005 the Government of Zimbabwe commenced what it described as an “urban clean up” campaign called Operation Murambatsvina. While the Operation could be dismissed as a desperate attempt to maintain power, to fully understand the root causes, one must examine the situation more deeply. Using Harare as a focus, I situate the event in the broader geopolitical context; examining such concepts as urban modernity, urban governance, urbanization, informalization, and development discourse. The origins and management of cities during the colonial era, the actions of the Mugabe government since independence, and the corresponding policies towards the economy and housing all played a role in the events leading up to the Operation. I argue that the political interference by the ZANU-PF central government in local government affairs, which increased sharply post-2000, further contributed to the volatile situation.

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## **Chapter 1 – Introduction**

### **Operation Murambatsvina**

On May 19, 2005<sup>1</sup> the Government of Zimbabwe (GoZ) commenced what it called an “urban clean up” campaign called Operation Murambatsvina (OM) which saw over 700,000 people in urban centres across Zimbabwe lose their homes, their livelihoods or both. Murambatsvina is a Shona word meaning ‘one who refuses dirt’ or ‘drive out the filth’. The ruling party, Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) or ZANU-PF, justified the program as a strategy to rid the cities of ‘illegal’ dwellings and to clamp down on illegal activities including informal traders and in particular those participating in foreign currency exchange on the black market. Commonly referred to as Operation Restore Order, the campaign began in the capital city, Harare, but evolved into a nationwide demolition and forced eviction campaign which eventually affected more than 2.4 million people. The Government of Zimbabwe breached national and international human rights law provisions guiding evictions through the indiscriminate manner and unjustified force used and received massive condemnation from the international community for its actions.

OM devastated Zimbabwe and its population of 12 million people, a country that was already experiencing acute economic and social decline. It took place at a time when the economy was experiencing triple digit inflation figures<sup>2</sup> and negative growth rates, as well as critical food, fuel and foreign currency shortages. Official unemployment rates within the formal sector were nearing 80% so people were seeking alternatives for earning a living in the informal economy. According to an International Labour

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<sup>1</sup> While the beginning of the Operation can be pinpointed, when it finally ended is much harder to ascertain. Reports of evictions in urban areas continued for months after.

<sup>2</sup> At the time of writing, inflation was reported to be over 100,000%.

Organization (ILO) report in June 2005, the informal economy in Zimbabwe employed three to four million people, on which an additional five million Zimbabweans relied, while the formal sector employed only 1.3 million people (cited in Tibaijuka 2005, 17). Meanwhile, the housing backlog in the country was estimated at over one million units<sup>3</sup> as acknowledged by the Government's own National Housing Delivery Policy of 2000 (Tibaijuka 2005, 24). Given the devastating effects of the campaign, it is not surprising that Zimbabweans took to calling OM 'Operation Murambavanhu' which means Operation Anti-People in Shona (Bratton and Masunungure et al. 2006a, 1).

The scale of displacement is unprecedented in Zimbabwean history. Even at the height of the forced relocation of civilians by Rhodesians into "protected villages" or "keeps" during the 1970s independence war, the highest number of those relocated was 43,000 people in one month (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 9). This is not the first time the Mugabe regime has forcibly evicted and destroyed the homes of urban residents. A clean up campaign to rid the City of Harare of "perceived unsightly dwellings" and squatter settlements was undertaken in advance of Queen Elizabeth II's visit in 1990 (Tibaijuka 2005, 61). A number of evictees, made up of ex-farm workers of foreign origin, the elderly, orphans and the really poor were moved to Porta Farm, 40 km southwest of the city. In another well-known incident, Churu Farm, on the outskirts of Harare, was originally acquired and subdivided by one of President Robert Mugabe's former political adversaries, Ndabaningi Sithole. By 1993, the 20,000 residents had made the community a home with a primary school and other amenities. In November of that year, approximately 300 armed police, acting on government orders, moved in and

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<sup>3</sup> There were a number of reports around the time of the Operation that put that number closer to two million (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2005b, 6).

evicted residents with one week's notice. The government resettled many of the families on Porta Farm.<sup>4</sup> As sad as these incidents were, none of these cases comes close to the number of people displaced within even the first month of the Operation.

### **Motivation behind the Operation**

It could be easy to dismiss OM as the disproportionate action of a desperate regime trying to maintain its control in the face of economic collapse. However, any event of this magnitude needs to be examined within its historical, socio-economic context. The overall purpose of this thesis is to go beyond the headlines of the Operation and to examine the much larger context within which it took place. Using a scholarly approach this event will be situated within its geopolitical framework. I will argue that Operation Murambatsvina was a tangible, violent representation of oppositional politics taken to the extreme. One of the main reasons that the Zimbabwean government gave for the Operation was health and hygiene; they were cleaning up the city for the residents' own good. The central government was dealing with sub-standard housing and illegal activities in the cities, an area that is typically left to the local level governments. Instead, it became high stakes politics where the central government used this Operation to maintain its grip on power and squash a potential uprising originating in the cities. A primary motivation behind the Operation was retribution on the urban electorate for the perceived abandonment of the ruling party in the 2000 referendum and subsequent elections. In addition to supporting the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) at the national level, the citizens of Harare, along with most urban centres, also elected the opposition party at the local level. As we will see, this gave rise to an acrimonious relationship between the two levels of government. This thesis will argue that the

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<sup>4</sup> Porta Farm was demolished in Operation Murambatsvina on June 28, 2005.

Operation was a desperate attempt by ZANU-PF to control the urban centres when its other attempts had failed. It was unable to win the councils outright and it was having a hard time controlling the electorate through interference in the operations of the local government.

In order to understand how this situation arose, one must examine the historical context in which it is set. The origins and management of the cities during the colonial era, the actions of the Mugabe government since independence, and the corresponding policies towards the economy and housing all have a role to play in the events leading up to the Operation. The political and economic legacies of early settler colonialism and the settler state are reflected in countries' economies, politics and social and urban systems (Rakodi 1995, 6) and Zimbabwe is no exception. In fact, the influence of the settler colonial legacy is exceptionally strong in this case because it left the new independent government with an established economic structure, based on a segregated pattern of land and business ownership, and a permanent European population (Ibid.). This legacy combined with external economic and political factors left the independent government with little room to move in terms of urban development. A fundamental feature of colonial cities was the separation between 'colonial quarters' and 'indigenous villages' (Mukoko 1996, 267). Physical planning was a hallmark of colonial cities and was an "important vehicle for social control" (Ibid.). The urban planning concepts adopted, and the administrative system put in place to ensure their implementation, were not only key to settler economic and political enterprise, but remained in place long after colonialism was supposed to have ended (Rakodi 1995, 7). They are still having an impact today in Zimbabwe, unlike other countries where cities and towns existed before colonialism and

where planned and controlled urban development is but a small part of overall urban development (Rakodi 1995, 8). Despite minor changes to urban planning regulations, the dualistic nature of colonial African cities has persisted (Mukoko 1996, 266). How a country is integrated into the larger world economy and polity, along with constraints or potential for policy change posed by domestic considerations, impacts how much continues and how much can change (Rakodi 1995, 8). All of these factors play themselves out within a particular geographical context and natural resource system (Ibid.). This thesis examines this legacy on Zimbabwe today and how these factors played themselves out in the years leading up to Operation Murambatsvina.

Harare, formerly Salisbury, became a city in 1935 and was renamed Harare in 1982, two years after independence, taking its name from a Shona chief, Neharawa, which means 'one who does not sleep'. With a population of approximately 1.6 million (2.8 million including the metropolitan area), Harare is Zimbabwe's largest city and its administrative, commercial, and communications centre. Until recently, Harare has had most of the amenities one would expect of a capital city and at its peak was the site of many cultural and sporting events in the region. The City of Harare lends itself well to being a focus of this paper as it is the capital of Zimbabwe, it originally was the centre of colonial government, and it is the location where much of the oppositional politics, and the resulting political crisis in recent years, has played itself out. The city is the product of a settler-colonial political economy. The latter's aim was to change existing African societies so that exports could be produced with minimal returns to the local labour population. This was done by means of restructuring peasant agriculture, introducing a new administrative system and establishing urban settlements where previously they had

not existed. Harare has subsequently been influenced by its geographical context, the historical evolution of a specific settler society and the nature of the post-independence Mugabe state. In addition, it has been characterized by inefficient land patterns combined with unequal access to housing, as well as standards and opportunities applied differently to different income groups (Rakodi 1995, 11).

I contend that in order to understand the roots of Operation Murambatsvina and its impact, one must examine the following issues: 1) the broader political economy of Harare; 2) the city's colonial history and the segregationist policies of its administrators; 3) housing policy and practices; and most importantly, 4) the impact of the relationship between the national and local governments. I suggest that while the impact may not be direct in all cases, each made a significant contribution to laying the groundwork for OM. By dividing the discussion into two parts - colonial era and post independence - I hope to make clear that while today's urban crisis has its roots in the colonial era, developments in the post-independence era have either done little to improve the situation or in some cases exacerbated the problems. Specifically, I argue that the political interference by the ZANU-PF national government in local government affairs, which increased sharply post-2000, further contributed to the volatile situation in urban Harare in 2005; that in fact, it was the threat that the central government felt to its grip on power that motivated this interference.

### **Methodology**

The thesis draws on a variety of secondary sources including books, journals, articles and reports by international and Zimbabwean organizations. In order to help illustrate my argument, I draw on the recent literature by a number of experts in the field,

including Stren, Kamete, and Potts, which are germane to my thesis. This thesis intends to contribute to this vast collection of information with its scholarly analysis of Operation Murambatsvina. Because of the current political situation in Zimbabwe, it was not possible to undertake primary research. While early on in the research process it may have been possible to access academic literature in the country, the socio-economic collapse in recent years has led to a mass exodus of professionals, including academics. Movement around the country has also been hindered by lack of fuel and restrictions placed on travel by foreign nationals. However, much of the information required for this thesis is available through secondary sources as the Operation itself has received much attention, and there is no shortage of discussion of Zimbabwe's broader challenges.

While there were many contributing factors to OM that are specific to Zimbabwe, there are many conditions that can be found in other African countries, and many other countries in the South. This discussion must be put into the larger context of urbanization in the South and in Africa specifically. There is general consensus that African cities are currently in crisis, due to failing services, inadequate local government structures, a shortage of housing and jobs, severe environmental problems, widespread poverty and increasing inequalities (Tostensen et al. 2001, 10). There are many who attribute the crisis to rapid urbanization and adverse economic conditions while others view it as a failure of governance (Ibid.). It is more likely a combination of both. Since independence, states have failed to provide institutional and legal frameworks for the overall development of cities and Zimbabwe is no exception.

## **Thesis Structure**

As Africa becomes increasingly urbanized, there are increased pressures on governments, both at the national and local level, to support basic services for the population. With this increased concentration of populations, we are seeing an urbanization of poverty. The cities' economies simply cannot support the increased population, leaving many to find alternative employment and housing in the informal sector. While the poor in rural areas tend to be poorer than their urban counterparts, being in proximity to services such as water, health and education does not necessarily equate to access. In many former colonial cities, there is a struggle underway between, on the one hand, the desire to build modern cities, usually in the model of developed countries, and on the other, the need to address the many relational systems and other characteristics unique to African cities. Many of the old rules and regulations continue to exist and limit innovative solutions to infrastructure provision and housing. In many cases, it is in the interest of the new urban elites to maintain the status quo and persist with many of the colonial structures. This often leaves the majority of citizens marginalized and under-represented in the urban governance system and also at the national level. In Zimbabwe, we will see that in Harare much of the colonial legislation that formed the segregated spatial structure of the city has remained. While the split between rich and poor during the colonial era was principally race-based, the socio-economic split continues with a more racially mixed urban elite. As another holdover of the colonial era, there are large populations marginalized on the fringes of the city, in townships and informal settlements, where much of the basic infrastructure is lacking.

It will be important to look at the trends surrounding governance including the players involved in the process and the relatively recent push for decentralization that we are now seeing in developing countries. While it is not uncommon these days to include civil society and other non-state actors in the governance process, it is still relatively recent that a closer look at what makes up the state has taken place. For the most part centre-local relations in matters of local governance have remained largely ignored in many analyses of governance (Kamete 2007, 40). As will be discussed, despite common perception that there is a unitary 'state' with which others relate, different levels of governments in the same country may not be united at all in their views or political persuasion. When there is a disjuncture between the two levels of government, or in Zimbabwe's case, when a strong central government detects the creation of a rival at the local level, it results in a "competition among centers of power" (Breton and Salmon cited in Kamete 2007, 41). It is important to examine Operation Murambatsvina in this context where this competition gave rise to conflict and even violence with the public bearing the brunt of the central state's wrath through Operation Murambatsvina.

There has been an increasing trend for a decentralization of power to lower levels of government in many developing countries. This has been further encouraged, if not mandated, by international donors who are increasingly using good governance as a barometer by which to evaluate whether to fund a recipient government. The sister to democratization, the idea is that decentralization would bring service delivery and government closer to the people and would improve representation in the governing process. While we are seeing some progress towards this in some countries, there is hesitation on the part of many national governments to fully embrace this. For some of

those governments, decentralization means potentially giving power to minority groups which, in the worst case, could then gain power and separate from the overall state. Many unitary states are hesitant to share power to lower levels of government. This becomes even more the case when oppositional politics enters the equation. As we will see in Zimbabwe, local governments had some authority already at independence and the ruling ZANU-PF did not see any problems with local authorities until the opposition party began to make advances. Another important point on the issue of decentralization is that as more countries embrace this concept, central governments will be forced to share power within their own countries. For those countries with a tradition of heavily centralized control, this transition may not go smoothly or at all.

The increase in the informal sector, including housing, is both a symptom of poverty and a potential solution. In the face of lack of opportunity and service provision, the urban poor have turned to the informal sector to earn a living and to find shelter. Depending on the perspective, the rise of the informal sector can be seen as highlighting the inability of developing cities to adequately provide for their citizens, or it can also be seen as showing the creativity or entrepreneurial spirit of the poor. To understand why the informal housing sector is so large in Zimbabwe and other parts of the world, some discussion of development discourse is necessary. International donors, especially the World Bank, have heavily influenced housing policy in developing countries through their funding policies. Yet, the problem of a shortage of adequate housing persists. Under current circumstances, the problem is not going to go away. Urban clearances of these informal structures will also continue, as cities struggle to 'develop' to the standards of First World cities. In the case of Zimbabwe, it was primarily the informal

sector that was targeted by the Operation although even those with legitimate businesses and formal housing were impacted. Despite the major destruction caused to the informal sector, it is tenacious and has continued with people returning to rebuild. The growth in the informal sector and informal housing settlements presents a playing field on which the conflict between local and central governments can play out.

As it is important to place Operation Murambatsvina in the broader context of Zimbabwean history and socio-economic development, so too, is it important to put the discussion of this broader impact into the larger context to understand why this event matters beyond the borders of Zimbabwe. To that end, Chapter 2 has been broken down into the following sub-sections in order to help explain the context and review these important concepts discussed briefly above: African urbanization and the urbanization of poverty; African urban modernity; Governance; Urban governance; Development Discourse; Decentralization; the Informal Sector; and Informal Housing.

The remainder of the thesis is divided into four chapters. In Chapter 3, I return to Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe's colonial past) and provide a broader political economic context through tracing its evolution from colony to country. I also explore the creation of its capital Salisbury, now called Harare, and the segregationist policies that continue to plague the city and inhibit the provision of adequate housing tenure and services for a major portion of the population. The intention of the founders of the city was to make it a comfortable home for Europeans,<sup>5</sup> with Africans viewed as temporary workers who would return to their homes in the rural areas when they were no longer needed in the

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<sup>5</sup> The terms "European" and "African" are often used in Zimbabwe when referring to what others call "whites" and "blacks" and highlight complicated colonial and post-colonial raced social arrangements.

cities. Thus, I outline the initial housing policies and provisions for both the white and black populations as well as explore early governance structures.

In Chapter 4, I examine the challenges faced by Zimbabwe's independent government and how its failed attempts to manage the economy and the state impacted on the urban population. While ZANU-PF was nominally a socialist regime in the 1980s, by the early 1990s it was facing tough economic times and brought in its economic structural adjustment program (ESAP) which eventually had a devastating effect on the urban population, particularly the poor. I will examine how the original layout of Harare made it difficult for the newly independent Zimbabwe authorities to address adequately the housing crisis that had begun during the colonial era. This housing crisis was exacerbated after independence by the removal of the racialized barriers to urban settlements and the increased urban migration of black families. Later, as the political crisis continued to intensify in the country, particularly following the parliamentary elections of 2000, and the so-called "fast track" land reform program, urban migration continued to intensify. The city's inability to provide housing and other services to its population gave rise to the plethora of informal settlements. Given the extent to which Zimbabwe is a highly centralized state, I argue that due to political interference from the national level, the municipal government of Harare eventually turned a blind eye to informal housing, in effect, creating the very problem OM was intended to solve. ZANU-PF's interference in local affairs increased sharply following the parliamentary elections in 2000 when ZANU-PF lost control of the parliamentary seats in Harare and Bulawayo to the opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The

governing party felt a need to regain its control somehow, and shifted its attention to controlling local government agencies instead.

In Chapter 5, I examine Operation Murambatsvina itself, exploring the chronology of events, impacts and repercussions. In addition, I reflect on some of the reasons given for the Operation, by both the Government of Zimbabwe and its critics. Of particular interest is the relationship between urbanites and the ZANU-PF government. As will have been presented in Chapter 4, ZANU-PF lost support in the city at all levels of government and I contend, like others do, that OM was, primarily, about retaliation against urbanites for abandoning the ruling party and an attempt to prevent an urban uprising.

Finally, I provide a summary of my conclusions and draw linkages to other African cities. This is not the first time that forced evictions have occurred in African cities and it is unlikely to be the last. Similar actions to those taken by the government of Zimbabwe have been undertaken by several other countries including Kenya and South Africa. These same countries have also seen the emergence of opposition parties at the local level of government and in recent years have seen major urban centres lost to these parties. As countries with relatively large settler communities, I explore what lessons could be learned by others and what conditions may create similar situations elsewhere. One thing is certain, that with the growing pressure of rapid urbanization on the continent, African governments are going to have to contend with a myriad of challenges that go along with it. I close the thesis by highlighting some areas for further research.

## **Chapter 2 Conceptual Framework**

What follows is a discussion of a number of inter-related concepts that are significant to my thesis. Their discussion lays the groundwork for fully understanding the context within which the developments in Zimbabwe can be situated. Recent trends in African urbanization and the urbanization of poverty present the spectre of growing pressure on already strapped local and central governments. While the number of people living in African cities continues to grow, city managers in many former colonial cities attempt to continue their quest for urban modernity, a concept worth exploring. This is one of many of the inherited characteristics of colonial cities that are not serving modern African cities today.

Germane to the thesis is the discussion of governance, and in the case of Harare, urban governance. Included in this examination will be what constitutes 'good' governance both generally and at the urban level. Furthermore, who the players involved in the governance process are, is rather important to understanding the break down of governance leading up to Operation Murambatsvina. Understanding the scalar relationships and the interplay between the two levels of government within the concept of 'state' is key to illustrating this link. The informality of African cities will be discussed in order to understand current trends in both informal settlements and the informal economy. How the informal sector is being integrated, or not, into urban centres is central to the situation in Zimbabwe in 2005. The occurrence of slums will be touched on in so much as to explain prevailing attitudes of middle-class individuals to the unwanted segments of African cities. Throughout these discussions, some international development discourse will be highlighted; in particular, a look at the decentralization of

state power to local levels of government and the influence of donor policies on housing practices of developing countries. These concepts will be highlighted throughout the thesis and I will return to them in the conclusion to emphasize their potential impact on similar circumstances elsewhere.

### **African urbanization and the urbanization of poverty**

Over the next three decades virtually all population growth in the world, in both developed and developing countries, will take place in urban areas (Stren 2003, 2). In fact, global urban population is set to double from 2.6 billion in 1995 to 5.1 billion by 2030, with three out of five people in the world living in cities by that time (cited in Beall et al. 2002, 11). In addition, it is expected that by 2030 79% of the world's urban population will be living in developing countries (Stren 2003, 2). This growth doesn't show any signs of stopping as, between 2000 and 2030, it is expected that urban areas in the developing world will average 2.3% growth per year compared to 0.1% growth in their rural areas (Stren 2003, 2). Africa has traditionally been one of the least urbanized regions of the world; however, its cities are now growing more rapidly than anywhere else. In 1995, the overall level of urbanization in Africa was estimated at 34% (Tostensen et al. 2001, 8). According to the Global Report on Human Settlements 1996, "from the early 1960s, when most African countries obtained formal independence, to the mid-1990s, African cities have changed in at least four major ways: their size, their spatial organization or morphology, the quality and distribution of public services and infrastructure, and their employment base" (cited in Tostensen et al. 2001, 9). Since the 1960s, most countries in sub-Saharan Africa have seen urban growth rates double the rate of natural population increase (Davis 2006, 58). African urbanization has been

increasing at an annual rate of 3.5 to 4% (Davis 2006, 14). Africa is now expected to have over 850 million people living in cities in 2030 compared to just 250 million in 1995 (Beall et al. 2002, 11). This increase in urbanization has been accompanied by a stagnation in terms of employment and agricultural production which has in turn contributed to the urbanization of poverty in the South. This phenomenon is characterized by an increase in informal settlements and a lack of basic urban services including water supply, sanitation, drainage, solid waste disposal, and roads and footpaths (Stevens et al. 2006, 1).

While Africa's urban populations are exploding, its slums are growing at twice the pace. For example, in Kenya, 85% of its population growth between 1989 and 1999 was absorbed by the slums of Nairobi and Mombasa (Davis 2006, 18). Cities in Cote d'Ivoire, Tanzania, DR Congo, Gabon and Angola have seen annual population growth of between four and eight per cent, while their economies have been shrinking by two to five per cent per year (Davis 2006, 14). In many cities, more than half the population lives and works in unhygienic, hazardous environments where they face a variety of threats to their health, well-being and security (Stevens et al. 2006, 2). While urban incomes are generally higher than those in rural areas, and urban facilities and services such as education and health are more accessible, the urban poor "typically housed in slums or squatter settlements, often have to contend with appalling overcrowding, bad sanitation, and contaminated water. The sites are often illegal and dangerous. Forcible eviction, floods and landslides, and chemical pollution are constant threats" (Stren 1995, 243).

The sheer numbers of people migrating to the cities has made it extremely difficult for already cash-strapped cities to provide adequate basic services such as sewer, water and housing (Stren 1995, 242). According to a United Nations Human Settlements Programme study using data that are comparable for 1993, the average per capita revenue received by municipal governments in Africa was a mere US\$15.20 compared to US\$248.60 in Asia, US\$252.20 in Latin America and the Caribbean and in the developed world it was US\$2,763.30 (Stren 2003, 3). This is a more representative figure of the crisis for comparison purposes with a ratio between the lowest to highest region in the order to 1:182. Comparing per capita incomes in sub-Saharan Africa with high-income countries is more in the order of 1:51 according to the 2001 World Bank *World Development Report* (cited in Stren 2003, 3). In an effort to survive in urban areas, the poor adapt economically, socially and personally. The rise of the informal economy (e.g. selling fruits and vegetables, creating goods from refuse, like pots and mugs, etc.) is an example, as are the informal settlements where homes are made out of whatever materials can be found or salvaged. These, however, are not new phenomena, as the urban poor in colonial-era Africa undertook similar measures to eke out a living (Stren 1995, 242) but the sheer volume of the problem has increased due to the level of urbanization. Many of these same cities are under the dual pressure to deliver basic infrastructure and urban services to their poorer citizens while being pushed to provide increasingly sophisticated infrastructure in order to compete on a global scale (McCarney 2003, 41).

Urbanization in Africa is so important to this discussion given that cities are hitting a crisis point and the problem shows no sign of abating anytime soon. The number of citizens is rising and local governments are increasingly unable to provide

basic services for a growing number of their constituents. As will be discussed further, many citizens are turning to the informal sector, for both housing and income, but as the informal sector reaches saturation, discontent among urban citizens is bound to increase. This situation offers opportunities for different levels of governments to leverage the discontent for their own political purposes. Also, given the 'illegality' of slums, their increase creates the battlefield for potential conflict between levels of government. In Zimbabwe, central and local governments fed on this discontent and used it to their advantage when it suited them, often to the detriment of the population.

### *African urban modernity*

Attempts to address the issues surrounding rapid urbanization have failed as a consequence of a variety of factors, no one or combination of which is easily 'fixed' by external solutions (Stren 1995, 244). Part of the problem could be the existence of a contradiction between images of what a modern urban centre should be compared with the cultural, political and economic contexts that shape urban modernity in Africa. Large sectors of the international community, while acknowledging that many Africans have become urban citizens, believe they are not truly 'urbanized'; that African cities represent a kind of truncated modernity (Simone 2005, 2). The concept of urban modernity is rooted in a European and American context and implies a simplistic linear conception of urban development. This has created a tension between, on the one hand, the tendency to rationalize, codify, and make transparent the functions of clearly delineated institutions and governance processes (such as those found in more developed cities) and, on the other, "the tendency to intensify highly idiosyncratic, often nonformalized, creolized, social orders and territories that make ambiguous any clear reading of what is going on"

(Swilling et al. 2003, 221). Contained within this concept of urban modernity, based in the developed world context, is an assumption that the economy is built on the premise that individuals sustain themselves and their families through a single dominant specific economic function (job), within an urban system that codifies roles and obligations in law, which is then backed by legitimate sanction, and where society is made homogenous through the process of socialization (Ibid.). Perhaps this can be argued not to truly exist, but urbanization in Africa has taken place without this economic individuation, where governance is often rooted in corrupt repression rather than legitimate codification, and where multiple modern and non-modern identities coexist within a variety of social systems (Ibid.). As a result, postcolonial relationships in African cities are fraught with tensions and disjunctions. For example, there are the efforts of the independent states to create modern cities modeled on prevailing forms of Western management, architecture, and urban production inspired by the tradition of Western modernity while, concurrently, there are the efforts of the urban majorities, frequently the disenfranchised and marginalized, to try to create modern African cities and compensate for the massive inadequacies in the state's ability to provide basic urban services (Evans cited in Swilling et al. 2003, 223).

A singular image of what a city should be emerged from the rise of modernity that was created by the industrial revolution and which has encouraged the drive to transform pre-modern cities into models of this urban modernity (McCarney 2003, 41). It is this dependence on an urban concept that does not fit that creates much of the problems for African urbanites. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitch, a French historian, suggests that urban planners should "investigate the logic of African urbanites...a creation of its own in the

making. The issue is no longer to ask Africans to adapt to Western norms, but to urge city planning to adapt to African needs, means and aspirations in a modern world” (cited in Stren 1995, 245). Yet, many urban administrations in postcolonial Africa continue to be modeled on this urban modernity model. There continues to be an attachment of urban elites and countless communities in southern African cities to this grand vision of urban modernity that most have only seen idealized in movies, textbooks, or magazines (Swilling et al. 2003, 239). In order to hold on to this façade of urban modernity, many of these elites ignore the majority of people who remain marginalized by this ideal and often ignore the brutalities, such as urban clearances, that are required in order for the few to remain wealthy (Swilling et al. 2003, 229). Urbanity in African cities is not a result of some kind of linear logic of a generic urban modernity but is instead various behaviours, dynamics, activities and processes whose own logics are explicable only in terms of the specific contexts of African cities themselves (Ibid.).

This disjunction between urban modernity and African urbanity can be seen quite clearly in post-colonial cities and Harare is no exception. As will be discussed, when the city was founded, it was modeled after European garden cities, with beautiful boulevards, adequate infrastructure, and the amenities necessary to make the European population happy. The African population was pushed to the outside, their needs ignored, their place in the city marginalized. As we will see, many of the marginalized population remained marginalized even after independence where the split between the haves and have-nots was no longer necessarily down race lines, but rather socio-economic ones. Instead of trying to create an African city, the same spatial structure, architecture, and administration remained and the authorities continued to attempt to maintain this façade

of urban modernity. It was this peaceful order that the government was trying to maintain, according to the official reason for the Operation.

### **Governance**

Governance relates to the whole spectrum of civil and political institutions, relationships and processes (Kamete 2003, 194). In 1994 the World Bank characterized 'good' governance as "epitomized by predictable, open, and enlightened policy making (that is, transparent processes); a bureaucracy imbued with a professional ethos; an executive arm of government accountable for its actions; and a strong civil society participating in public affairs; and all behaving under the rule of law" (cited in McCarney 2003, 34). While expanding the definition to include non-state actors, in this case civil society, the definition is actually quite state-centric, highlighting the slow shift from 'government' to the concept of 'governance'. According to the comprehensive United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) definition from 1997, governance is "the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country's affairs at all levels. It comprises the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and mediate their differences" (cited in Kamete 2003, 195; Devas 2004, 24). It is important to understand that governance involves more than just governments. A broader and more inclusive definition sees governance as referring to "the relationship between civil society and the state, between rulers and the ruled, the government and the governed" (McCarney et al. 1995, 95). Going further the more subjective concept of 'good governance' involves "legitimacy, accountability and transparency" on the one hand and "real participation, empowerment and access" on the

other (McCarney et al. 1995, 96). Civil society and private sector organizations are seen to have power, as are informal institutions. It is the relationships and processes between the stakeholders which are (or should be) the basis of decision-making. Governance “is about roles, rules and relationships” (Kamete 2003, 195). While the role of civil society in good governance is understood, its presence can add some complexity to the governing process. According to UN-Habitat:

today’s governance takes place in a more polycentric system of actors in which the state is less dominant than before. The multiplicity of actors complicates policy-making since no single actor is legitimate enough to direct societal change. Consensus is no longer given by virtue of legitimacy granted to the state’s actions but must be socially constructed. This requires alliances, coalitions and compromises (cited in Devas 2004, 24).

In most governance research there appears to be a preoccupation with state-society relations. It is not surprising that state-society relations dominate one of the best anthologies of urban governance compiled by Patricia McCarney and Richard Stren. As mentioned above, governance is about the relationship between civil society and the state; rulers and the ruled. There is some acknowledgement of the complexity of society where there are multiple players and where the role of the state is sometimes considered less dominant than in the past. Despite being a process of encounters and interactions between and within the interacting parties, there remains two distinctive categories, namely those who govern and those who are governed. According to most conventional perspectives, every stakeholder or actor belongs to only one of these two categories which are somehow internally coherent (Kamete 2007, 41). But when the term state is used, to what does it refer? While governance definitions have broadened over the years there is still the assumption that the ‘state’ is a unified entity in its relationship with the others (Kamete 2007, 39). State and society have become the norm in discussions of

governance, notwithstanding the fact that there are “multiple sites of...governance” on different societal and institutional scales (Lourenco-Lindell cited in Kamete 2007, 40). This fixation on state-society relations is a natural outcome of the change in perspective with respect to state-society relationships and dependencies. At a time when the state’s unrivalled position in society as the primary “locus of power and authority” is being questioned (even in authoritarian states in the South), it makes sense to examine how the state is doing in its relations with other societal actors in the transformation from government to governance (Kamete 2007, 40). Much has been written about civil society and its role in the area of urban governance, including a comprehensive anthology on associational life in African cities edited by Tostensen et al.; however, what these analyses overlook is what has been called “an intense and ongoing socio-spatial struggle” within which we see the reconfiguration of spatial scales of governance from the national to sub-national levels (Swyngedouw 2005, 64). With the increase in urbanization, and the advent of globalization, cities are becoming more important in terms of political-economic regulation and relationships. Cities have become key institutional sites in which there has been a major rescaling of national state power unfolding (Brenner 2004, 3). The long-entrenched primacy of the national scale of political-economic regulation, of the national scale being the ‘locus of power and authority’, is being destabilized as new scalar hierarchies of state institutional organization and state regulatory activity are being forged (Brenner 2004, 3).

While it is useful to focus on relations between the public sector and other non-state stakeholders, governance is as much about relations between these two broad categories as it is about relations between the actors within these categories, especially

the public sector at different levels of government (Clark 2000, 3). So while it is true that governance involves “cooperation between the public sector, the private sector, and civil society” who, among other things, “work together as partners in building a stronger economy and a better society”, it is just as important to focus on *intra*-governmental relations – such as those between the centre and the local – as critical factors in the building of the sought after ‘stronger economy’ and ‘better society’ (Kamete 2007, 40). For the most part, centre-local relations in matters of local governance have remained largely ignored in many analyses of governance. There is a misconception that where state-society relations are concerned, ‘the public sector’, even though it is made up of ‘governmental systems’ is a monolith, some kind of ‘unified, monistic, centralized organization opposed to society’ (Dunleavy and O’Leary cited in Kamete 2007, 40). As such these analysts assume the ‘state’ has one mind, a unified leadership, holds cohesive and common set of values, and is consistently engaged in a single pursuit. In this perception, the local is no more than a miniaturized reflection of the centre (Kamete 2007, 40); however, this often does not hold true. There are times, particularly in pluralist democracies, when there is a disjunction between central and local. A case can arise where the governing political party at the national level is not the same party in control of the local government or council. This is far more likely in more advanced democracies, but even in highly centralized states in Africa, this has been known to occur. Kenya’s national level party lost control of Nairobi, South Africa’s African National Congress (ANC) lost control of Cape Town, and Zimbabwe where, since 2000, ZANU-PF lost control of almost all urban centres, are examples of this situation.

Obviously in these cases, the state ceases to be a unified monolith. Governmental systems are no longer in harmony, at least in territorial and institutional terms. Governance, which is itself already “a messy reality” (UN-Habitat 2002, 15) because of the many competing interests and priorities the governed have at any one time, becomes even messier since the governors are themselves fragmented. Upon seeing the creation of a rival, a strong central government, especially one with authoritarian tendencies, is bound to make life difficult for the opposition stronghold. This acknowledgement of state power having scalar characteristics is at the crux of this thesis. The ensuing competition can be complex because the local government is a creation of central government. So even if a different political party controls the government structures the authorities are still answerable to the central government. The existence of oppositional politics at the local level in Zimbabwe was found to be intolerable by the central government, which went on a campaign to rid the urban councils of the opposition party by any means necessary.

### *Urban governance*

Urban local governments are created by central governments, partly to perform tasks that the national state, for reasons of efficiency or logistics, would find it difficult or impossible to perform from the centre (Kamete 2006, 256). City governments are typically responsible for things such as waste management, sanitation and local roads. Meanwhile, responsibility for services such as primary healthcare, education, electricity, security services, and often water, land and housing are held by central governments, the private sector or parastatal agencies (Devas 2004, 96). As with the various understandings of governance, urban governance is regarded as “the sum of the many

ways individuals and institutions, public and private, plan and manage the common affairs of the city” (UNCHS cited in Kamete 2003, 195). Given the mosaic dimension of most urban centres in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, urban governance often includes the resolution of conflicts and the accommodation of diverse interests in order to promote ‘cooperative action’ among citizens (Kamete 2003, 195). Recently the debate around urban governance has begun taking on normative overtones, similar to those around governance, with the search for ‘good’ urban governance (Ibid.). Good governance comes with attributes such as transparency, popular accountability, efficiency, participation, trust, reciprocity, legitimacy and representativeness in the conduct of public affairs, as well as respect for human rights and the rule of law. Other attributes imply the existence of democratic processes sustained by an electoral democratic system, attributes such as civic engagement, governability, accountability and participation (Kamete 2003, 196). It is here that the issue of citizenship becomes important as it can be used or abused by those in power to enhance or erode the principle of democratic governance, especially in the electoral processes (Ibid.). In Zimbabwe, narrowing the definition of citizenship was one way the central government attempted to further its own political ends and influence both local and national elections.

In many developing countries, local government is in a precarious position where the local government is “a creature of statute subject to the vagaries and predilections of central political administration” (Sullivan et al. cited in Kamete 2006, 256). The central government can create, redefine, or modify the rules governing its relations with, as well as the very existence and operations of, these ‘subordinate’ levels of government (Kamete 2006, 256). As will be explored further, Zimbabwe is a heavily centralized

state, where urban councils can still be regarded as nothing more than an extension of the central state and where that central state has redefined and modified the operations of its cities at will and with ulterior political motives (Kamete 2006, 256). Being, in effect, sandwiched between the electorate and the central government, there can be some question about the role of local government as either “an expression of the local community” or an “agency of the central state” (Kamete 2007, 42). When there is no love lost between the centre and local levels of government, and both are playing to the public for one-upmanship, conflicts between the two are inevitable. All too often these conflicts flare up with one trying to out-manoeuvre the other, which seldom leaves the local communities unscathed (Kamete 2007, 42). Evidence of this can be seen in Kenya and Zimbabwe. Local communities become the biggest losers as the two levels of government disregard their mandates and simply try to score victories against the other no matter how petty or costly.

It is interesting to note that equity is not mentioned in the above set of definitions of ‘good’ urban governance or even simply urban governance. That being said, it is equity that has often been lacking in many developing country cities. For example, in the area of taxation, urban elites and middle classes in developing countries have been successful in avoiding municipal taxation, while very few urban centres have fully capitalized on the potential revenue of real estate taxation (International Labour Organization cited in Davis 2006, 67). Existing taxation systems tend to suffer from poor assessment administration, erosion of tax base due to exemptions and poor tax collection (Ibid.). Davis actually accuses the urban rich in Africa of being “rampantly, even criminally undertaxed by local governments” which leaves cash-strapped cities to rely on

regressive sales tax and user fees, effectively shifting the fiscal burden to the poor (Davis 2006, 68). A comparative analysis of fiscal administration of ten Third World cities found a consistent regressive pattern of taxation with little evidence of any serious efforts to assess and collect property taxes from the affluent (Devas 2003, 6).

There is often conflicting opinion over what local government priorities should be with local authorities focusing on local economic development in terms of city beautification and image creation for attracting investment while many citizens would better benefit from policies geared towards the poor who are struggling to create local livelihoods (McCarney 2003, 40). Local government policies towards the informal sector (street hawkers, informal markets and settlements) are not viewed as advancing local livelihoods, but rather treat the informal sector as some sort of blight on what they consider to be a desirable city image (McCarney 2003, 40). While some urban governments have been found to, in effect, ignore the poor, others have been blatantly destructive towards income opportunities for the poor (Devas 2004, 51). Demolitions, re-settlement in remote locations outside the city's core, repressive regulation of informal sector trading, and poor quality of basic services all increase the vulnerability of the poor and undermine their ability to capitalize on local livelihood opportunities (Ibid.). Case studies show that it is far easier for municipal level governments to destroy jobs, livelihood and social capital by poor policies and actions than it is for them to actually create or rebuild them (Ibid.). In the case of Southern Africa, this quest for modernity is traced to a Eurocentric notion that is rooted in a colonial heritage, as discussed earlier.

Linking to the earlier discussion on urban modernity, it is interesting to note that while the developed world turns towards more relational ways of governing in response

to greater complexity and uncertainty in society, local governments in highly relational environments like southern Africa have a tendency to deny in the name of rationalist modernity what may be their greatest strength: the implicit conditions within urban communities for a relational approach to governance (Swilling et al. 2003, 244). African elites tend to exploit existing relational webs that exist in African cities to build resource bases for this contrived (and parasitical) urban modernity that they benefit from, rather than put the energy into creating a set of urban visions that could drive the emergence of a truly African urban modernity that takes seriously the voices, values and needs of the urban majority (Swilling et al. 2003, 244).

### **Development discourse**

I will turn now to a brief discussion of portions of popular development discourse over the last thirty years that have had an impact, and in some cases continues to have an impact, on both urban development and urban governance. Until recently, Third World cities were seen to consume a disproportionate share of national investment, exemplified by Lipton's 1977 'urban bias' thesis that became so popular with donor agencies and national governments at the time (Beall et al. 2002, 10). Along with this idea was that poverty was seen as a rural problem so subsequent development initiatives tended to focus on rural investment. Comparatively little attention was paid to the inequalities that existed in urban centres, with little recognition of the plight of urban poor. One of the reasons for this neglect was the widely held belief that urban poverty was temporary and would be resolved with modernization (Beall et al. 2002, 10). As we have already touched on, African cities have not developed in a rational linear way typical of 'modernization' of developed cities and so, visible symptoms of social disadvantage like

overcrowding, burgeoning informal settlements, and expanding informal economies continue to increase (Gilbert cited in Beall et al. 2002, 10).

National governments have often embraced the sometimes ill-founded warnings against 'urban bias' choosing to concentrate on rural development, occasionally at the expense of urban areas. Even when national governments perceive the high rates of growth in cities as a serious problem they struggle to formulate a comprehensive policy for urban development. Thus they have tacitly accepted a colonial legacy of urban containment, which has had negative repercussions on urban governance (Tostensen et al. 2001, 7). The 'development' industry, in its efforts to address the problems of rapid urbanization, has in the past focused on the idea of 'urban management' (Stren 1995, 247). This shift from 'local government' and 'urban administration' in previous decades was connected to a general ideological shift to neo-liberal economic policies within most international donor agencies (Stren 1995, 247). Development economics has only recently recognized the importance of urban centres for national economic development (Tostensen et al. 2001, 8). Since the mid-1980s, there has been an increasing interest in urbanization as an aspect of development, urban management or government, and urban governance on the part of researchers in various disciplines in urbanization. This is linked to the realization of a link between urbanization and development and the impact that urbanization has on a country's ability to 'develop' (Tostensen et al. 2001, 8). As a concept 'urban management' was intended to fix the woes of the urban crisis and was intended to develop, manage and coordinate urban resources in an effort to achieve urban development plans. It involved the promotion of economic growth so as to raise living standards and improve the delivery of basic services (Stren 1995, 247). The problem

with this concept can be linked to discussions above and to follow; that urban management had as its basis the experience found in developed countries' cities, and as we have noted, the experience of African urban centres is quite different. Also, its efforts to improve living standards often missed the majority of marginalized citizens who were involved in the informal sector of the urban economy. It could not adequately address the financial inability of cities "to provide adequate urban services, the lack of skilled administrative and technical personnel employed by the cities, or the lack of participation of many citizens in the decision-making process of the cities" (Stren 1995, 247). Future development strategies could build on local initiatives and leverage the diverse social groupings across the urban system as a whole in order to link together "increasingly complex patterns of survival, development and governance" into a larger more coherent urban form premised on its own African identity rather than on some contrived attempt to imitate urban modernities from other contexts (Swilling et al. 2003, 227).

### *Decentralization*

There has been a growing trend in the local governance sector in many developing countries. There was an attempt to change the distribution of power within the countries from centralized regimes (military juntas or one-party states) in the 1970s and 1980s, which in turn caused two important changes in the 1990s – decentralization and democratization (Stren 2003, 6). Of particular interest to urban governance and development discourse, decentralization is seen as a way of improving urban management by reducing the size and power of the central state and improving accountability and participation at the local level (cited in Tostensen et al. 2001, 128). In order for this concept to effectively do this, the local level of government should be

granted not just budgetary powers, but also the authority to take decisions, including those related to the allocation of resources by the central state (Kamete 2006, 256).

According to James Manor, the concept has broad appeal:

Decentralization has quietly become a fashion of our time. It is being considered or attempted in an astonishing diversity of developing and transitional countries, by solvent and insolvent regimes, by democracies (both mature and emergent) and autocracies, by regimes making the transition to democracy and by others seeking to avoid that transition, by regimes with various colonial inheritances and by those with none. It is being attempted where civil society is strong, and where it is weak. It appeals to people of the left, the center and the right, and to groups which disagree with each other on a number of other issues (cited in Stren 2003, 7).

In the past, the responsibility for many basic services that the poor relied on often did not lie with the city government (Devas 2004, 96). As local governments are being given increasing responsibilities, expectations of what they should deliver are rising, for example, providing infrastructure and local economic development. If they are to carry out their roles effectively and address the scale of need, they will need to adopt new ways of working with urban poor communities (Stevens et al. 2006, 2). Despite decentralization becoming a fashion of our time, the practical application is not as prevalent in many African countries. While this transformation has not really been applied in Zimbabwe to the extent that we are seeing it elsewhere, the continuing interest on the part of both donors and national governments to push in that direction could have repercussions in other countries going forward. With the decentralization of power, there comes a certain amount of democratic maturity and the more likely occurrence of political conflict between the central and local levels of governments.

## **Informal sector**

The term ‘informal sector’, also commonly referred to as the ‘informal economy’, is generally used to mean economic activities that operate, at least in part, outside the national and local legislative or regulatory context (Brown 2006, 5). To be clear, informal activities are outside the criminal economy but fall in a continuum between illegality and legal activities – a vast grey area of middle ground. The products themselves may be legal, but the processes through which they are prepared may not be fully legal, for example, where businesses do not pay taxes or are not registered (Brown 2006, 5). However it is defined, informal activities have been claiming increasing numbers of the urban workforce, and in many of the poorer parts of the world, an increased share of urban “value-added” as well (Stren 1995, 252). It is estimated that roughly 75% of basic needs are provided informally in the majority of African cities (Simone 2005, 3). In Africa, informal work is thought to account for around 60% of urban employment and over 90% of new jobs (Brown 2006, 7). The informal sector is often seen as urban Africans’ attempt to compensate for the hardships they confront, to forge an existence in cities that have high rates of unemployment and lack of opportunities. Despite political volatility, economic crises, and the precariousness of social cohesion and health that has come to characterize African cities, there is still a basic sense of functionality (Swilling et al. 2003, 224) thanks in large part to the informal sector. Yet there is an overwhelming sense of precariousness: a sense that things continue to work in some way but that the ability and opportunities to change how they work has narrowed to almost nothing and that future shifts are now outside anyone’s control (Swilling et al. 2003, 224).

Organizing survival, economy and politics outside formal institutions is often seen as either “compensation for inefficiency and exclusion, instruments for circumventing the ‘rules’ or necessary but ‘hidden’ domains so that formal institutions can ‘really’ function” (Peters-Berries cited in Simone 2001, 47). Unfortunately, the previously discussed concept of ‘urban management’ bypasses the informal nature of the cities, in effect, taking the people involved in the informal sector and their contribution to the city out of the equation entirely (Stren 1995, 260). There is no room for informal housing and an informal economy in the ‘development’ of these urban centres. Some of the most creative and important development possibilities are generated in the informal sector, yet a concept like ‘urban management’ cannot effectively integrate the fluid, indeterminate nature of the informalization of African cities into it (Stren 1995, 260). This informalization is rarely viewed as “historical outgrowths” in their own right, which defy formalization either because it is not in their interest or because existing formal institutions have largely served to repress them (Simone 2001, 48). There is a real sense of missed opportunities to engage social resourcefulness, which has instead been battered and its resilience significantly diminished (Swilling et al. 2003, 224). In fact, city planning designed to serve the interests of the formal sector makes it difficult for the poor in the informal sector to establish themselves and overzealous enforcement of regulations often displace the poor and diminish their economic opportunities (Devas 2004, 51).

Accepted design practice was narrowly focused on the concerns of northern city managers, which in turn influenced the prevailing ideology of municipality policy in the south (Brown 2006, 10). Concepts of aesthetics and public order led to a desire to ‘tidy’ public space, which completely ignored the reality of what was happening on the ground

in low and medium income cities and the importance of public space to the livelihoods of the poor (Brown 2006, 10). The contest over public space, which can result when the formal and informal segments of the cities compete, can be a consequence of a combination of a number of factors, for example, the protectionist approach of vested interests such as landowners and formal business, the desire of urban managers for orderliness and control, or the expression of political power and control (Brown 2006, 12). Various responses from city elites range from repression or eviction to more accommodating approaches associated with tolerance and clientalism. The exclusion of 'undesirable activities' is an integral part of modern city management (Brown 2006, 12).

### *(Informal) Housing*

A brief discussion of housing terminology is probably useful. In mainstream housing literature, 'squatter' settlements are defined as those with illegal tenure meaning residents do not have legal rights to the land they've built their houses on (Potts 2006b, 281). An informal settlement is usually one that is unplanned by either the municipal or town authorities. It is possible that people have obtained the right to settle on land from the owner of the land, thus aren't squatters, but still be in contravention of various urban zoning plans (Ibid.). Current housing standards and procedures in many developing countries are inappropriate in a context of rapid urban development and decreasing resources. Many argue that a certain minimum standard of housing is desirable to guarantee the health and safety of residents, but there is often disagreement about what that minimum level should be (Schilderman and Lowe 2006, 222). Nearly all former African colonies have inherited a complex set of regulations and by-laws pertaining to things like building materials, room size, distance between houses and from the edge of a

plot, the building of new structures on-plot and development of non-residential activities, and the availability of services such as water (Potts 2006b, 281). Regulations were often put in place by colonial powers, copied almost verbatim from those in force in the North and in many cases, including Zimbabwe, this legal legacy has not been amended. Many current housing standards and procedures are inappropriate for a number of reasons (Schilderman and Lowe 2006, 222). They are often not affordable either by individual households or even countries as a whole where one can find housing out of the reach of entire populations because of the level of current standards. The standards and procedures are often imported or imposed and are not in line with local conditions, culture or building tradition. For example, they often fail to recognize that for residents in developing countries, house building is often an incremental process rather than a one-off exercise. Building a house according to procedures tends to be complicated, lengthy and expensive which often facilitates corrupt practices. Standards and regulations are useless unless they can be enforced, which usually falls to local authorities who may or may not have the expertise necessary to do so. When housing is not constructed according to these rules and regulations, it becomes informal in nature.

### *Slums*

Housing is described as informal when it does not conform to the laws and regulatory frameworks set up in the city in which it occurs:

It can be informal on several levels: being built on land intended for another use (even though the building itself may conform to standards laid down in the regulations); not conforming to all of the standards laid down for that part of the city; not being subject to planning permission or building inspection (even though it may be eligible); or being built on land not owned by the occupier and without permission of the owner (UN Habitat 2003, 104).

Formal housing can become informal by users who add on or in some way alter it without permission or in ways that do not meet building standards. This is very common in government-built housing around the world.

Originally meaning “room in which low goings-on occurred”(Davis 2006, 21) today’s commonly accepted idea of a slum relates particularly to poor quality housing, inadequate access to residential infrastructure, and insecurity of tenure. The slum conjures up either a Dickensian vision of urban tenements, dire poverty and disease or a Calcutta or Jakarta, with endless vistas of makeshift shacks on the edge of town, filled with people in despair (UN Habitat 2003, 104). In each case, the image suggests that the deprived urban environment has caused the poverty, when the reverse is mostly the case; people in poverty have sought out the accessible housing that they can best afford. Not all informal housing is found in slums and slums do not only contain informal housing. The misconception of some planning systems of the modernist tradition is that inadequate housing somehow breeds inadequate incomes, and middle-class distaste for poor housing has led quite frequently to dangerously inept policies (UN Habitat 2003, 104). Outdated legislation often inhibits constructive engagement in informal housing areas (Devas 2004, 99). A number of countries have regulations against spending on ‘illegal’ or irregular settlements or areas that are not paying property tax (Ibid.). For many former colonies, including Zimbabwe, inherited planning bylaws and building standards are usually unsuited to the needs of the poor and their ability to pay (Ibid.).

The distaste of more affluent urban citizens for slums impacts on every level – through slum clearance, harassment of informal-sector workers, and the unavailability of urban public and private services, finance or affordable housing (UN Habitat 2003, 104).

The largest problem is the lack of recognition of slum dwellers as being urban citizens at all. When services are not provided, the poor provide for themselves (Ibid.). The poor are currently the largest producers of shelter and builders of cities in the world – in many cases, women are taking the lead in devising survival strategies that are, effectively, the governance structures of the developing world, when formal structures have failed them (Ibid.). The existence of informal settlements reflects a lack of formal provision of housing (whether by the state or private sector), unaffordable rents, inadequate formal access to land and the need for low-income people to live near sources of income and employment (Devas 2004, 169). As mentioned, in most developing countries including African ones, the formal market has failed to meet the increasing demand for housing. Estimates range between 30% and 70% of urban dwellers live in ‘irregular’ settlements (Berner 2002, 227). According to 1996 figures from the United Nations Centre for Housing Settlements (now UN-Habitat), 64% of housing stock in low-income countries and as much as 85% of new housing is unauthorized or informal (Berner 2002, 227). In many cases Third World governments have abdicated their role in the battle against informal settlements or slums, either due to lack of political will or simply the economic inability to fulfill the demand. The rise of informal settlements in Zimbabwe in recent years is no different. The lack of formal access to land, unaffordable options within urban centres, the need to be located near employment opportunities, and the government’s lack of political will and economic inability to provide housing for the poor are all present for those in Harare and other urban centres in Zimbabwe.

## **Conclusion**

The concepts discussed in this chapter lay the groundwork for further discussion on the Zimbabwe context. The developments within the country can only be fully understood when set against the larger African or global context. As we further explore the Zimbabwe context, we can see links between what has happened there to what is happening elsewhere. The rapid rise in urbanization and with it the urbanization of poverty has had substantial impacts on Zimbabwe and elsewhere. In several cities in former colonies, there is the continued conflict between the push to develop along the linear lines of urban modernity and the complex, and unique, characteristics of the cities as they are. In Harare, the settler community established a strong urban management tradition with tight housing rules and regulations which continued to carry over into post-colonial times. Current understanding of governance and urban governance are important to understanding what was taking place between the local and central government of Zimbabwe. The trend towards decentralization of powers to local levels of government, hand in hand with oppositional politics, is going to lead potentially to more conflicts between levels of government within states, not just between states. The important role the informal sector plays in African cities cannot be underplayed. It is crucial to the survival of many of African economies and in 2005 it was the basis of Zimbabwe's economy. These concepts and their application to the Zimbabwe context will be further explored in the following two chapters as I trace the history of Harare in the colonial era and following independence.

### **Chapter 3: Colonial Era**

In this chapter, I explore the origins of Harare, tracing the establishment of the early settlement of Salisbury through its political development to independence. In doing so, I present how the segregationist policies of the colonial government resulted in the spatial structure we still see in Harare today. These policies, and their related limits to African residency in the city, sparked the beginning of the uneven development between the low-density and high-density areas of the city; between the Europeans and Africans. Urban management under the colonial government is explained with a brief look at interactions between the central and local levels of government. All this is in an effort to illustrate the beginnings of Zimbabwe's approach to urban modernity, how the inherited political economy later affected the post-independence government, and the beginnings of the complicated interplay between levels of government.

#### **From Colony to Country**

The driving force behind the European economic penetration of Southern and Central Africa by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century was the search for gold and minerals for the European manufacturing industry. There were rumours of the supposed wealth of the gold-, copper- and iron-working Shona people which fueled expectations of a large find in the interior, similar to that found in South Africa. In 1890, Cecil Rhodes and the 'Pioneer Column' of white adventurers moved northwards from the British colonies in search of resources across the Limpopo to what is now Zimbabwe. The British South Africa Company (BSAC) set up administration but was met with violent opposition from the Ndebele and then the Shona people in 1896. The First Chimurenga,<sup>6</sup> as it would later be called, was finally put down the following year. While there was not quite the size of

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<sup>6</sup> Chimurenga is a Shona word meaning revolution.

deposits that were found in South Africa, small exploitable deposits included gold, asbestos, copper, chrome, nickel and tin. However, there were large tracts of land suitable for farming so many of the settlers opted to turn to agriculture.

By 1923, the settlers of Southern Rhodesia were given the choice between uniting with the Union of South Africa or exercising internal self-government. Rather than be dominated by the Afrikaaners to the south, they opted for self-government (Rakodi 1995, 12). A state developed whose primary purpose was to foster European settlement and advancement which included infrastructural development and support for mining and agriculture (Ibid.). In 1954, Southern Rhodesia joined together with Northern Rhodesia (Zambia) and Nyasaland (Malawi) to form the Central African Federation which had its capital in Salisbury. There was much opposition to the Federation in the other countries involved as many saw it as a means of prolonging white rule (Rakodi 1995, 14). Opponents in Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia were successful in bringing it to an end in 1963, and a year later Malawi and Zambia gained independence.

The colonial regime in Southern Rhodesia needed to rely on a series of repressive laws in order to permit the state to counter African demands for greater participation in government and society (Scarnecchia 2006, 232). Many of these laws, or ones like them, are still being used today against those who are asking to widen the definition of political participation. There had been African opposition to settler rule early on, but the 1950s saw the emergence of this opposition in the form of modern political parties. The *Subversive Activities Act of 1950* targeted African trade unionists and politicians, as well as many whites who were suspected of supporting African political and trade activities (Scarnecchia 2006, 231). The Act gave magistrates the right to ban public meetings and

the police the right to use firearms to break up any of these illegal meetings. In 1959, the *Preventive Detention Act* and the *Unlawful Organization Act* made it possible to ban African political parties and detain their leaders. The arrest of three nationalist leaders in July 1960 sparked the “Zhi Riots” which were also the result of discontent over the recession, rising unemployment and poor living conditions (Bond 1998, 102). In reaction to these riots, the colonial government passed a *Vagrancy Act* which prohibited unemployed Blacks from being in towns at all and led to hundreds of people being arrested and deported in the first few days of its implementation (Ibid.).

In the face of this, a number of African political groups emerged before they were banned and new ones took their place. Formed in 1934, the African National Congress (ANC) of Rhodesia was banned in 1957 and replaced by the National Democratic Party and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU). These parties were in turn banned in 1961 and 1962. Urban discontent grew in the wake of the introduction of school fees in 1963 resulting in urban protests which led to the permanent banning in 1964 of ZAPU and its more militant breakaway group, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) (Bond 1998, 102). The reactionary white political party, the Rhodesian Front, led by Ian Smith, was unwilling to accept a political system based on Black majority rule and announced Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965 and took up arms (Scarnecchia 2006, 232). At this time, ZAPU and ZANU leaders, including Robert Mugabe, were jailed with many other members in exile. Both ZANU and ZAPU had their own armies both launched a guerilla war against the Smith regime in the late 1960s. The Second Chimurenga, as the liberation struggle came to be called, took place primarily in the rural areas as the leaders took refuge in neighbouring countries. Much of

the independence war in the 1970s took place far away from the urban centres; nonetheless, many refugees fleeing the violence ended up in the townships of the cities, particularly in Salisbury.

The war was going badly for the Smith regime, and the Premier searched for some kind of 'internal settlement' that would exclude ZANU and ZAPU (Martin 2006, 245). In 1979, whites in Rhodesia were asked to approve a new constitution that saw the creation of a country called Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, headed by an African prime minister. In 1976, there had been a rapprochement between ZANU and ZAPU which led to a new grouping called the Patriotic Front. Despite his attempts at an internal settlement, Smith realized the war could no longer be continued. The Lancaster House Conference was convened in London and attended by the leaders of Zimbabwe-Rhodesia, the Patriotic Front, and a delegation from the UK. The Lancaster House Agreement in 1979 finally paved the way to the creation of the Republic of Zimbabwe in April 1980, with the first open elections held later that year.

### **Salisbury – Managing a White City**

Salisbury was founded as a fort by the Pioneer Column, a mercenary force largely comprised of Europeans organized by Cecil Rhodes, in 1890. The site had much to offer the settlers: an abundant supply of water from the Mukuvisi River; reliable rainfall; fertile land for cropping, grazing and hunting; an easily defensible site because of the large kopje (hill); and high altitude (about 1,500 m above sea level) which made it relatively free from malaria (Chikowore 1993, 3). Originally named Salisbury after the then British Prime Minister, it was the capital of the new colony of Southern Rhodesia and later the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland from 1953-1963.

The settlement of Salisbury was founded around the existing British South African Company fort with the first town plan created in 1891 along a generous grid-iron pattern in relation to the kopje. In many ways, the settlement reflects the spatial patterns and processes of urban development in most former British colonies in Southern Africa (Zinyama 1993, 7). In 1892, the Salisbury Sanitation Board was founded as the first administrative body of the new colony. In keeping with the goals of the early planners to improve the living conditions of the new settlers as well as minimize the occurrence of disease in the urban areas, its administrative focus was on the provision of water and sanitation to the settler community. The Salisbury Sanitation Board initiated and institutionalized racial segregation by establishing a 'native location' about one kilometre south of the kopje (Chikowore 1993, 3).

The political context in Salisbury has profoundly influenced the city's spatial structure and urban space. The politics of segregation has been imprinted on the urban fabric from the beginning (Brown 2002, 265). The colonial government was most concerned about designing a city for the comfort of the European settlers and one that was supportive of the manufacturing sector. They controlled the African population by making it illegal for them to live within the city borders unless they were living at their employers. The *Land Tenure Act* designated urban areas as 'white only' areas with the expectation that blacks were only there to provide labour. The substantive residence of an African worker was the rural areas. The understanding was that the urban space was a temporary place of work to be occupied only as long as labour functions were being performed, and at as little cost as possible to the central state or city council (Raftopolous and Yoshikuni 1999, 4). In 1897, the Salisbury Sanitation Board was replaced by the

Municipality of Salisbury. The new municipality brought in the Native Locations Ordinance, legislation that provided separate African residential areas (townships or locations) and made it compulsory that African workers not lodged with their employers must reside there. The municipality established the first African township of Harari (now Mbare) on about 20 hectares of land about 5 km from the centre of town. The practice of locating African townships away from European neighbourhoods was to become the norm as African housing was considered a 'bad neighbour' (Chikowore 1993, 4). The *Land Apportionment Act* in 1930 is probably one of the most significant pieces of colonial era legislation which still defines the politics and the economics today (Martin 2006, 243). The Act, in effect, split the land of Southern Rhodesia equally between the European minority and the African majority. The Act withdrew the right of all Blacks to acquire land outside the reserves and provision was made to set aside land for townships managed by adjacent councils. Later, to reinforce the idea that blacks did not 'belong' in urban areas, a Department of Native Affairs was set up within the central government to manage the townships set aside for housing blacks in the urban areas; they were not managed by their respective local urban land authorities (Kamete 2003, 197).

Figure 3.1 on the next page illustrates some of the land uses of Harare in the 1930s. Uses such as for police, government, and hospitals were located in White areas to the north, north-east of the downtown, while more industrial areas and the railway were located to the south, south-eastern part of the city, where Blacks tended to live. The future development of high-density and low-density areas tended to maintain this spatial trend.

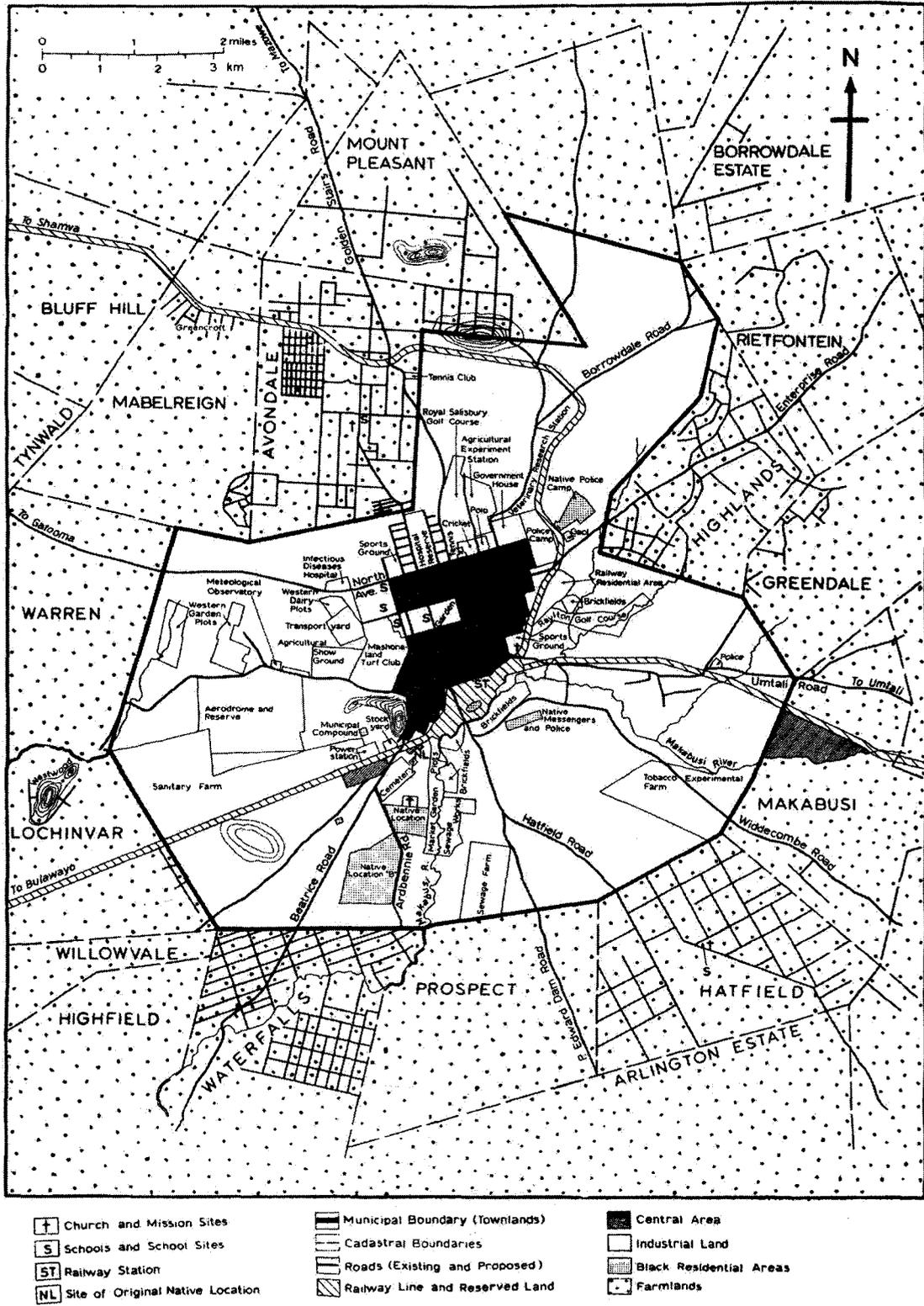


Fig. 3.1 Plan of the Harare Municipal Area and Surrounding Farmlands, 1930 (Zinyama et al. 1993, 13)

The city continued to develop along segregated lines, with the municipality area, or townlands, gradually developed for the settler community, while outlying private farms subdivided into large residential properties that presented an attractive rural environment but outside municipal controls and rates (Brown 2002, 266). The first major subdivision outside the municipal areas was Avondale, about six kilometres north of the city centre (which was eventually incorporated into the municipality in 1934). The town planning legislation that was introduced in 1933 and 1945 was modeled on the British planning system. With it came building standards that reflected imported engineering standards for roads and infrastructure design. Along with these imported plans and standards came the imported concept of “urban modernity” to the colonial city, where the settler community wanted to bring the comforts of home to Africa. These standards further reinforced the cultural divide (Brown 2002, 268). For example, there was a regulation that any plot where sewage disposal was by septic tank had to be a minimum 4000 m<sup>2</sup> and the subdivision of plots was prohibited. The spacious low-density lots in the European middle- and high-income residential areas raised the costs of providing services such as sewerage, water, public transport and street lighting (Zinyama 1993, 8). The pace of development in the white suburbs grew following World War II, with an influx of European settlers. Many of the peri-urban farms were subdivided to make way for the immigrants, with each new subdivision following the low-density ‘garden city’ design concepts already in existence (Brown 2002, 266). Even the Central Business District (CBD) was built with modern city characteristics. With its multi-storeyed office buildings and modern architectural style, visitors would often remark that Salisbury was

“essentially a modern city, and the CBD resembles that of many smaller American...cities (cited in Bond 1998, 86).

There were a number of administrative units responsible for the different areas of the settlement, including suburban Town Management Boards for the peri-urban farmlands that made way for white suburban settlements; a Rural Council; and a Town Council (Zinyama 1993, 14). Besides the ten administrative divisions for the suburban districts and the municipality, the Black residential areas, which were being created to the south and west of the city, were being managed, some by the municipal council, others by the central government. All this made for a plethora of administrative units, with much duplication, and little coherence in the way of planning and management of the city. It was not until 1971, following the recommendations of a government commission of inquiry, that Greater Salisbury was created under one local authority.

The first African Advisory Board was set up in Mbare in 1937, made up of six African members (four elected by occupiers<sup>7</sup>, two appointed by the Salisbury Council), and two nominated by European members (Rakodi 1995, 48). Its role was entirely consultative and had no decision-making powers whatsoever. The 1946 African (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act continued and expanded the Advisory Boards in other townships, though most Blacks disdained to serve on them (Rakodi 1995, 51). As in Mbare, the Boards had four elected and two appointed African members, two appointed European members, and an ex officio, the chairman of the council's Native Affairs and Finance Committees (Ibid.). In the late 1960s, similar to moves in South Africa at the time, an attempt was made to provide more autonomy for the Black residential areas and to develop skills in self-management so as to eliminate subsidies and

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<sup>7</sup> Since Blacks did not have land title, they were not residents per se, but occupiers.

establish a lower level of government with certain assigned responsibilities (Rakodi 1995, 34). The first Township Boards were established in 1971. They had some executive authority to operate minor services, and were empowered to prepare budget estimates and raise money through levies, but the budget was still approved by City Council and the Council retained control over the landlord-estate function and major services (Ibid.). The all-Black membership was partly elected and partly appointed by the Minister of Local Government and Housing. Attitudes towards the Boards ranged from strong opposition to resigned apathy (Rakodi 1995, 34). European critics thought Africans preferred paternalistic forms of government and African critics viewed the Boards as an attempt to entrench the “policy of separate and unequal development” (Rakodi 1995, 35).

The planning machinery of the Sanitation Board and subsequent municipalities worked through by-laws and public health ordinances. From 1933, proper consolidated town planning legislation started to appear (Kamete 1999, 140). The *Regional, Town and Country Planning Act* (RTCPA) was geared towards a control-oriented and regulatory land use planning system whose main aim was development control. Section 22 [1][b] enabled the local authority to control the use of land in any given area under its purview. By the 1970s, there were 29 identified use-groups for town planning purposes. For example, identified uses included flats, funeral parlors, service industries, offices, etc. (Ibid.). Local authorities would categorize uses as ‘permitted’, ‘prohibited’ or ‘special consent’, depending on the locale of the use. For the most part, residential areas were to be kept only residential, with no other uses allowed. Because white settlers were employed elsewhere in the economy, they could use the residential area for its prescribed use only (Kamete 1999, 137). This was not necessarily the case for blacks, but this

colonial era urban land use control was able to successfully keep the high-density areas as dormitory townships (Kamete 1999, 139), preventing blacks from working where they lived which contributed to limiting any kind of informal economy. The 'minority' administration was not sensitive to the demands by blacks to change the use status of these areas and repressive and biased law enforcement at both local and central government levels helped to maintain the residential status of these areas (Ibid.).

During the 1970s liberation war, the colonial government decided to pursue the urban management policies of South Africa's apartheid regime. Measures to control incoming Black populations would be tightened and residences for Blacks within the cities would be more restricted (Zinyama 1993, 26). The policy became that instead of continuing to build houses for Blacks within the municipal boundaries, the city and employers must build new developments on Tribal Trust Lands, now known as Communal Lands, outside, but near urban centres (Zinyama 1993, 27). "Blacks would be tolerated within these 'White cities' only during working hours" (Ibid.). When the original townships had been established at the turn of the century, they were located on the outskirts of town. However, growth in both Black and White residential areas meant that by the 1970s they had come closer to each other creating a perceived security issue for the White population. As the chair of the Salisbury City Council's Health, Housing and African Administration Committee explained in 1972:

We now have the situation where there are eight large African townships ringing Salisbury. What would happen if the residents become politically motivated? Salisbury could be caught in a stranglehold of strikes and mob violence (cited in Zinyama 1993, 27).

Indeed, before independence, many of the cities in Zimbabwe were the cradle of African nationalism. Harare, Bulawayo, Gweru and Mutare were sites of dissent, resentment and

instability with urban strikes, demonstrations and political violence (Kamete 2006, 258). This might be part of the reason that the colonial regime wanted to continue to have some control over urban African townships directly rather than leave them to be run strictly by local urban councils as they were seen as a potential threat to national security (Kamete 2006, 258).

### *Urban governance*

The *Municipal Law of 1897* gave the municipalities of Salisbury and Bulawayo increased powers to run the affairs of the towns (Kamete 2006, 258). The single most important qualifying criterion for urban electoral democracy during the colonial era was race. In the 1899 elections, the vote was open to only literate male British subjects, over the age of 21, who were economically independent in terms of property or income (Kamete 2003, 197). This meant that out of a population of over 500,000, less than 5,000 people could vote (*Ibid.*). Under the various colonial regimes there seemed to be little antagonism between the levels of governments. The central government was content to periodically modify the instruments and methods of regulating municipalities, redefining the relationship between central and local government from time to time, to the end of improving the management of the cities for the good of the white settlers (Kamete 2006, 258). However, it is useful to note that even in the colonial era, it is possible to desegregate various interest groups within the so-called 'colonial state' (Raftopolous & Yoshikuni 1999, 5). There were times when the central state was not the initiator of segregatory policies, or would resist calls for such policies while at other times it would pass segregatory legislation only to have the city level government fail to enforce it (*Ibid.*). For example, the existence of settlements on Private Locations outside of

Bulawayo was in contravention of the *Land Apportionment Act*, but the city did little to curtail their growth. This illustrated the potential tensions between central government plans and local level pressures (that of having cheap labour on hand) (Ibid.).

There was a brief time during the colonial era where party politics was attempted at the local level. This came during the 1960s and 1970s when the white supremacist ruling Rhodesian Front party attempted to introduce party politics into local governments by nominating candidates to stand against the independents (Kamete 2006, 258). The party failed to gain a majority in Salisbury.

### **Housing for the Urban Poor**

The conceptualization of housing determines how it will be treated in economic policy, legislation, urban planning, and city management. Extremes range from the narrow concept of housing that sees it as simply a physical structure meant only to provide shelter through to a broader concept of housing that includes other related necessities such as water, sanitation, electricity and local roads (Kamete 1999, 136). Some have even gone so far as to use the word 'housing' as a verb, not just a noun: "housing is not just shelter, it is a process, an activity" (Van der Linden as cited in Kamete 1999, 136). Still others would argue that the value of a house should not be restricted to its physical characteristics, but should extend to the meaning that it holds for its owners. In the case of colonial Zimbabwe, housing was seen in its narrowest sense, as shelter, and therefore only shelter-related uses were permitted (Kamete 1999, 137). This narrow concept was applied, as it was in most of Anglophone eastern and southern Africa, not only to the structure and the plot, but also to the neighbourhood (Ibid.). In this way, the urban planners could continue their plans for segregated, spacious cities

based on the European model. So fixed was this thinking that economists and planners created two broad sectors – the productive and reproductive – productive being commerce and industry, while housing, public utilities and social services constituted the reproductive sector. Urban planners and legislators institutionalized this dichotomy through various planning, public health and environmental sanitation laws and by-laws, and through an urban management system that ensured that violations of restrictions were dealt with through strict enforcement (Kamete 1999, 137).

How housing is perceived has planning, legislative and managerial implications especially at the local level of government (Kamete 1999, 137). In Zimbabwe, designs for African housing were intended to ensure the provision of adequate infrastructure at minimum cost (Brown 2002, 268). Local governments became involved in urban housing in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, around the same time that urbanization came to Zimbabwe (Kamete 2001b, 162). By the end of the 1930s, the central government was attempting to complement the efforts of the urban governments in addressing a growing urban housing crisis (Kamete 2001b, 162). Colonial-era racial discrimination under which blacks could not own property meant that low-income groups would continue to be in the minority with respect to property ownership (Kamete 2003, 199).

Since initially only economically active and gainfully employed Africans were allowed into the urban areas, publicly provided housing for Africans was geared towards bachelors, i.e. hostels.<sup>8</sup> Long working hours and strenuous work meant that black residents had little use for their dwelling beyond the officially prescribed one. Up until

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<sup>8</sup> Most black women in urban centres were employed as domestic help and therefore the assumption was that they lived with their employers.

the 1950s, all of the houses in the high-density<sup>9</sup> areas were rented public houses either owned by the municipal authorities or by the central state (Kamete 1999, 140). Even after home ownership was introduced, in the 1961 amendment to the *Land Apportionment Act*, the vast majority of houses continued to be publicly owned until after independence. Given the extremely low vacancy rates in the high-density areas, landlords were able to tightly enforce the leases, allowing for little or no inappropriate use of the dwelling beyond the legislated one. This meant that the high-density areas stayed primarily residential until independence.

At the time it was established in 1897, the high-density area of Harari was only able to house 2,238 people out of approximately 10,000 Africans that lived in the city, or 22 per cent of the population (Zinyama 1993, 21). As a result of the continued increase in the black population as more and more came to fill the growing number of jobs, there were more squatters on the farmlands outside the municipal area. In an effort to address both the housing shortage and the squatter issue, the colonial government in 1935 identified a second township area for 2,500 people, located on the state-owned Highfield Farm, about eight kilometres south-west of the city centre (Brown 2002, 265). This marked the beginning of the shared responsibility between central and local governments for the provision of urban Black housing in Salisbury (Zinyama 1993, 21).

During and after World War II there was an expansion in the manufacturing sector of the city and with it an unprecedented demand for Black labour. By the late

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<sup>9</sup> In Zimbabwe, urban housing types could be categorized simplistically by 'density'. Low Density Areas (LDAs) were generally the white areas with freehold tenure, large plots and good quality large houses. Medium Density Areas (MDAs) had smaller plots and houses but similar in servicing standards to LDAs. The low-income housing areas were termed High Density Areas (HDAs) and included the colonial-era 'townships' built by the government or municipality. This terminology is still used today.

1940s industrial development had reached the point where employers could no longer be expected to house workers on their premises (Bond 1998, 89). The number of Blacks employed in Salisbury, including the peri-urban areas, increased from 32,000 in 1941 to 75,500 in 1951 to 215,810 by 1962 (Zinyama 1993, 21). Once prevented from moving to urban areas by pass laws, more women and children were joining the men in the townships, forcing the government to begin orienting their housing developments towards female and married accommodation (Bond 1998, 89). This resulted in a critical housing shortage for the African population. While employers were required to provide accommodation for their workers and the local authorities built additional hostels, mostly for single men, and small family houses for rent in Harari and Highfield, more needed to be done beyond the existing Black residential areas. Whenever possible, African housing was put beyond city limits in new areas developed to the south and west of the city including Dzivarasekwa, Kambudzuma in the 1960s and Glen Norah and Glen View in the 1970s (Brown 2002, 266). Although, technically government policy was to discourage permanent Black residents in urban areas, the demand for industrial labour post-WWII created a strong counter-balance to this policy and out of necessity more permanent homes were created for the Black population (Zinyama 1993, 22). Because this need for additional labour was not part of official policy, there was a propensity for Black residents to find their own shelter, often in the form of informal settlements.

In line with the even more militant segregationist policy in the 1970s, new dormitory settlements were established on the outskirts of three of Zimbabwe's major centres: Salisbury, Bulawayo and Mutare. Chitungwiza was formally established in 1974 about 25 kilometres south of Salisbury beside two existing settlements that had been

established by the government for airport workers. It was to have its own semi-autonomous, partially elected council to manage its own affairs. The choice of the site, it should be noted, was opposed by the government's own Chief Planning Officer because, in his view, it was unnecessary given that existing townships could handle the numbers of African households forecast at least until the 1980s; the site was unviable; it was not integrated into Salisbury; and it would give rise to long commute times and problems with sewage (Rakodi 1995, 54). Overall, only about 60% of the area was considered to be suitable for building (Ibid.). By 1982, Chitungwiza grew to 172,000 people and today, at over 321,000 people, it is the third largest urban centre in the country after Harare and Bulawayo. Much of the growth during the 1970s was due to refugees fleeing the liberation war being fought in the rural areas in search of security in the towns (Brown 2002, 267). The population and housing densities in Chitungwiza are even higher than those found in Harare's high-density suburbs (Zinyama 1993, 27).

In Zimbabwe, as in most of the developing world, there has been a constant experimentation with various policies and strategies for achieving affordable housing as long as there has been urbanization and, despite this, there has been little in the way of successes (Kamete 2001a, 31). Rhodesia was no different with the colonial era regime attempting to keep the cost of providing its 'temporary' Black residents with housing that did not overly burden the public coffers. Rhodesian government housing policies tended to concentrate on single-use, low-income housing projects which reinforced racial segregation and placed these housing projects in the new low-income communities isolated on the outskirts of the city (Brown 2002, 265). The central government invited the private sector, including employers, to participate in housing delivery in its attempt to

reduce the load on the public sector's dwindling and insufficient resources (Kamete 2001a, 38). In the early days of settlement, local authorities initially delivered finished bachelor-type accommodation for the temporary Black workers. In terms of quality these units were small, poor and in many cases health hazards. In the 1930s, the central government attempted to counter the 'squalid and atrocious' environment by providing finished family accommodation on larger plots in 'native locations' (Kamete 2001a, 34). For several years, the central government's public sector housing projects in the urban areas focused on delivering finished housing units. It soon became apparent that the intended beneficiaries of the new housing could not afford them without large subsidies, given their low wages, which resulted in the central government phasing out the provision of completed housing units (Kamete 2001a, 34). Instead, the government decided that since completed houses were not affordable, then providing serviced plots with a minimal amount of initial development would be more affordable and could thereby mean they could phase out the subsidies, (Kamete 2001a, 24). The first 'sites and services' project was commissioned called Kambuzuma in Salisbury in the 1950s. These sites and services schemes are still the dominant housing delivery strategy in most urban centres in Zimbabwe. This is largely a result of the advice of donors, such as the World Bank and USAID, despite the fact that they still do not adequately address the housing shortages (Kamete 2001a, 34).

In a continuing search for affordable housing, in the 1960s Rhodesia's central government attempted to offset the cost of housing through the use of a controversial Services Levy, a fixed fee that all employers were required to pay to the local authority for every employee other than domestic workers. The government ended up giving in to

the protests from employers so this levy did not last long (Kamete 2001a, 35). In the 1970s, in a concession to African discontent and in an attempt to foster a Black middle class, the first home ownership area for Blacks was created in Marimba Park. Stands between 2000 and 4000 square metres were provided and a minimum building clause was included in the regulations to encourage reasonably good quality housing (Rakodi 1995, 52). Elsewhere, in contrast, the government looked to a reduction in standards in order to make housing more affordable. The Rhodesian government questioned the high minimum standards that existed and so brought in lower standards in an attempt to reduce costs. This resulted in the introduction of the 'infamous ultra-low-cost houses', built on 200 square metre plots, which were constructed using cement and chicken wire mesh and later of cement blocks with asbestos roofs (Kamete 2001a, 34). These were not very popular as they were bleak, cramped quarters. This kind of mixed housing policy with higher regulations for the more modern, 'European' parts of the city (even though Marimba Park was for Blacks, it was still aimed at having reasonably good quality housing) and lower standards for the 'African' parts of the city illustrates the origin of the conflict between urban modernity situated in the African context. It is interesting to note that the concept of minimum housing standards would come back again under the Mugabe government as it grappled with the high cost of providing housing for its citizens and then again as part of Operation Garakai, the grossly inadequate rebuilding program announced by the Zimbabwean government following Operation Murambatsvina.

### **Conclusion**

The early history of Harare laid the groundwork for many of the problems that were to come. The racial divide in the colony created and then continued to reinforce the

message that the urban areas were for the European settlers and the rural areas were the 'natural' home for Africans. The spatial structure reflected this split with high-density areas and townships created for the temporary residents of the city, while the European settlers enjoyed sprawling gardens and generous homes. The beginnings of the quest for urban modernity were laid down by the settler community and early governance structures. The original layout of the city would later give rise to additional challenges as urbanization increased post independence. Having large numbers of low-income citizens located so far outside of town would make it difficult to provide infrastructure and services such as sewerage, water, and transportation to many of the population.

As urbanization in Harare grew, the need for housing would increase and, just as the early colony was unable to fully address the housing shortfall this created, neither would the post-independence government. While informal settlements were not tolerated in the colony, the layout that was created during that time would later offer locations where informal settlements could be established.

## **Chapter 4: Independent Zimbabwe**

As previously outlined, the colonial era in Zimbabwe left the newly independent government with an inherited political economy, established city structures, racial tensions, and various types of legislation to maintain order, often to the detriment of large portions of the population. While there is much to criticize ZANU-PF and Mugabe for in recent years, economic mismanagement and abuse of human rights to name a couple, it is important to realize that the new government was not left with a well-functioning economy but a socio-economic situation that they were not able to manage well. In this chapter, I will describe this inherited political economy, with particular mention of the Economic Structural Adjustment Program, and what impact that had on events to follow.

After independence, the vote was not automatically given to Black residents in local level elections as the new government turned its attention first to national suffrage. For several years, local councils continued to be elected by a minority of the population. I discuss how the introduction of party politics into the local elections exacerbated the tensions between levels of government which in turn led the central government to resort to direct interference in local level responsibilities to frustrate the opposition. Additionally, the housing strategy taken up by both the central and local levels of government would shift as the economic situation deteriorated. I touch on some of the strategies employed and their inability to satisfy the growing need for housing the poor in Harare. The economic downturn and the inability on the part of the government to address the housing crisis encouraged the growth of the informal sector in the years immediately leading up to Operation Murambatsvina.

## **Inherited Political Economy**

Despite a strong showing in the 1980 elections, ZANU-PF and Robert Mugabe were politically vulnerable and faced a number of threats both domestically and internationally. A number of immediate actions were needed to address various issues on the developmental front. The threat from the Rhodesian army and from apartheid South Africa made attention to the national army an immediate necessity. As well, Zimbabwe wanted to avoid a white exodus like the one faced by Mozambique, since the country was dependent on white-owned commercial farms to provide food for the population, including the more than a million internally displaced during the war (Rakodi 1995, 16). A policy of 'reconciliation' was taken towards the white population to reassure them that their way of life and their economic interests were not threatened by the new regime (Ibid.). Despite this policy, out-migration of whites following independence cut their numbers almost in half by the mid-1980s. At independence the white population (only three percent of the total or roughly 275,000) received two-thirds of the national income, both from wages and salaries as well as profits, and together with foreign interests, owned almost all the capital in industry and mining (Rakodi 1995, 18). The need for structural changes to the economy and an extreme redistribution of wealth and income was recognized in the government's platform, a strategy of 'growth with equity and transformation' (Rakodi 1995, 18). However, expedience, real constraints and a relatively conservative fiscal policy by the then Finance Minister Chidzero limited the ability of the government to make significant changes (Ibid.). Following independence, trade with the international community reopened and there was an inflow of loan funds, which helped to reinforce an essentially capitalist economic development strategy, and a

reliance on a continuation of these foreign loans meant that little was done to seriously undertake wealth redistribution (Ibid.).

Despite ZANU-PF's rhetoric promising socialist transformation, a redistribution of wealth and assets, and an equalization of access to opportunities and services for all, there was little evidence of this taking place. A racial bias remained for some time prompting Brian Raftopolous to comment in 1993 that "the economic structures that produced and sustained a white elite are, in their essentials, still prevalent" (cited in Bond 1998, 164). While progress had been made on giving all citizens access to services such as health and education, the governing groups linked the well-being of the national economy and their personal livelihoods to the continued success of the inherited industrial machinery, which primarily remained in the hands of whites (Bond 1998, 164). Had Mugabe undertaken what ZANU-PF had promised, it would have meant the destruction of the political economy. The struggle for independence took place far from the urban centres and the settler community, for the most part, leaving the white community almost completely intact. Meanwhile, the existing economic structure meant a heavy reliance on powerful economic interests in order to feed the black population and as blacks made their way into economic niches, they ended up supporting the economic structure in which they found themselves, making it that much harder to destroy it (Rakodi 1995, 21). Zimbabwe's relations with the global economy and its growing reliance on foreign loans influenced their ability or desire to reform the political economy, as well. Zimbabwe's debt service as a proportion of export earnings increased from 3.8% in 1980 to 32% in 1992, well above the sub-Saharan average of 20% at the time (Rakodi 1995, 23). The government's ability to draw in foreign investment and

increase export earnings following independence did not develop as hoped and it was forced to borrow to achieve its economic aims and fund some of its policies such as increased access to healthcare and education (Rakodi 1995, 23).

At independence, Zimbabwe inherited a relatively diversified economy based on agriculture and manufacturing. However, after years of isolation and under-investment during the time of the UDI and international sanctions, the economy was already suffering from a large fiscal deficit, low economic performance, high unemployment and a lack of foreign currency (Brown 2002, 269). In addition to foreign exchange and import restrictions from the previous regime, new controls were introduced after 1980 including protection of staple foods and wages (Brown 2002, 269). ZANU-PF had based its politics on socialism and as such undertook programs in the area of health, social services and infrastructure, spending 50% of its gross domestic product (GDP) on them (Brown 2002, 269). The budget deficit led to Zimbabwe seeking recourse from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in 1982, and it adopted a policy that attempted to be a compromise between conventional economic stabilization and its own political commitment to redistribution in the form of subsidies, transfer payments and spending on social services (Rakodi 1995, 18). However, the subsidies gradually reduced from 1983 onwards, any post-independence wage increases were eroded by inflation, and spending on social services decreased while user fees were increased and extended to cover more services (Rakodi 1995, 18). At independence, the majority of the urban workforce was employed in the formal economy. However, by the end of the 1980s rising unemployment, increased inflation and the difficulties financing the spiraling budget deficit forced the new government into shifting its economic policy (Brown 2002, 270).

Inflation was running at 11% for most of the 1980s and rose towards the end of the decade to 17%. The central government's debt reached 71% of GDP by 1989, 35% of which was held outside the country. Successive devaluations of the Zimbabwe dollar and the inability of the government to attract foreign investment through the 1980s exacerbated the situation (Brown 2002, 270).

*ESAP: Structural adjustment by any other name...*

All of the above, combined with pressure from international financial institutions and key donors such as Britain, led to the 'voluntary' adoption of Zimbabwe's Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in 1991 (Potts 2006a, 539), similar in content to Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) implemented in the 1980s by other African countries. The ESAP period, from 1991 to 1995, was characterized by a litany of economic changes which savaged the livelihoods of Zimbabwe's working urban populations, in just the same way as SAPs had greatly exacerbated urban poverty throughout sub-Saharan Africa in the 1980s (Potts 2006a, 538). The concept was that the short-term pain would result in longer-term healthier economic structures and renewed economic and employment growth (Rakodi 1995, 19). ESAP, in effect, signaled the end of the Mugabe regime's supposed 'socialist' economic policies (Brown 2002, 270). ESAP<sup>10</sup> meant that within a few years subsidies on food, including the staple mealie-meal, and controls on other basic food products were removed; import controls were dropped exposing local industries to external competition; the currency was devalued; the private sector was encouraged to take over the provision of services, even in sectors such as low-income housing; the public sector wages bill came under huge pressure to reduce; and cost recovery measures were introduced in public services including health and

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<sup>10</sup> ESAP was often dubbed the Eternal Suffering of the African People.

education. Zimbabwe's version of the structural adjustment program included a focus on employment creation and social welfare with a program of cost recovery for social services (Brown 2002, 270). Zimbabwe also saw the development of the 'wages puzzle', a concept witnessed in many SAP-inflicted countries as a result of massive downsizing in both public, and private, sectors as well as trade liberalization. It meant that those lucky enough to still have a formal wage found that prices of all necessities, including food, accommodation, education and health, rose so much faster than their formal wages that they could no longer cover the cost of their basic needs (Potts 2006a, 537).

It can be argued that the austerity measures under ESAP were a catalyst for the downturn in the economy. These measures led to the retrenchment of skilled and unskilled workers, closures of many manufacturing companies and higher priced goods as well as the deterioration of social services. These factors, along with economic liberalization, led to a decrease in the formal economy and the rise of the informal economy, particularly in cities and towns. In 1992, a severe drought led to an 8% decrease in the GDP and sparked the worst recession since independence (Brown 2002, 270). The private sector was unprepared for foreign competition with the opening of trade barriers, and manufacturing output declined by 20% between 1991 and 1996 (Ibid.). While exports increased, the cost of imports also rose, fuelling a rapid increase in inflation (Brown 2002, 271). Per capita GDP dropped sharply in 1991 to below 1980 levels and inflation hit 42% in 1992, fuelled by a shortage of agricultural commodities and the phasing out of consumer subsidies (Brown 2002, 270). Foreign exchange rates were controlled until 1993 and were regularly adjusted downward to compensate for the gap between Zimbabwe's inflation rate and those of its major trading partners (Ibid.). By

1995-96, debt burden had risen to 80% of GDP, with debt repayment constituting over 30% of the government's expenditures. By the end of ESAP in 1995, per capita GDP, consumption of goods, and expenditures on health and education were lower than in 1990, while formal sector employment had risen by only 12,000 jobs per year, and none of the ESAP macroeconomic goals were achieved (Brown 2002, 271).

### *Impacts of ESAP on the economy and urban livelihoods*

In addition to the subsequent economic crisis, the impact from ESAP can also be seen in some very key government decisions in the late 1990s that would eventually influence Operation Murambatsvina. ESAP sowed the seeds of urban economic discontent which would later manifest itself in the overwhelming support for the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in urban constituencies. This will be explored further in this chapter.

The new levels of poverty and vulnerability caused by ESAP, both in rural and urban areas, greatly increased people's felt need, and thus active demand for, new means of livelihood (Potts 2006b, 539). This desire to access new sources of income can be linked to massive political pressure to access state resources which brought about one of the most significant moments in Zimbabwe's post-independence economic trajectory (Potts 2006a 540). In 1997, the liberation war veterans, spearheaded by the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans Association, forced ZANU-PF to make good on their independence promise and give them large one-off payments and ongoing pensions. The effect of this was to throw the government budget (which tended to run a dangerously high deficit anyways) into complete disarray (Ibid.). Mugabe agreed to the demands of war vets without consulting his cabinet or parliament. The unbudgeted Z\$4 billion

settlement resulted in the collapse of the Zimbabwe dollar which fell by over 75% in a matter of hours on what came to be dubbed 'Black Friday' (Ramsamy 2006, 520).

Other options available for both urban and rural residents included access to rural means of production as urban livelihoods faltered, which would have an impact on both urban workers and the rural families that depended on them. Sam Moyo argues that demands for swifter and larger scale land reforms could in part be found in the impact of ESAP; "economic reforms led to increasing poverty, leading ... growing numbers of retrenchees, low-income urbanites and black elites to ... turn towards land for their survival or economic enterprise" (cited in Potts 2006a, 539). There was a "gradual build up of pressure from the poor and deprived for resources, especially land, when economies do not show signs of vigorous growth (creating) ... fertile soil for agitation for a 'final solution' to the land question" (Sachikonye cited in Potts 2006a, 539). This pressure resulted in the 'Fast Track' land redistribution program where white farms were invaded and farmers and workers were driven off the land. The seizure of these farms came to be called the 'third Chimurenga' but left thousands of farm workers out of work and a major export industry in tatters. There are some who say the land redistribution program forced the country back into the feudal system (Tibaijuka 2005, 18). The official justification for the farm seizures was that 'they stole our land and we are simply taking back what is rightfully ours' (cited in Martin 2006, 249). As an aside, this was not necessarily true because as many as two thirds of the farms invaded at this time had been purchased after independence so had land titles issued by the Mugabe government (Power cited in Martin 2006, 250).

One other decision by the Mugabe government in the late 1990s had a disastrous impact on the government's budget and ramifications on the economy. The country's military became involved in the civil war in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), at a cost of nearly US\$1 million a day (Ramsamy 2006, 520). The government budget could not cover such involvement and it left the government searching for financing options.

By 2003, as a result of these economic policies and political decisions at the national level, the situation for urban residents was progressively worsening: 72% of urban households were defined as poor. This included 51% 'very poor', meaning they could not afford to buy enough food to feed themselves; within high-density areas, 77% of households were poor and 57% were very poor. The proportion of high-density area residents below the poverty line had almost trebled in 12 years. In addition, urban water and electricity supplies were increasingly sporadic, and urban health and education services increasingly expensive. Taken together, these issues highlight an extremely rapid decline of urban living standards so that, by 2005, they were very similar to other African cities and towns and, in fact, were worse than many (Potts 2006b, 274).

### **Modern Harare**

An unexpected result of ESAP was a property boom in Harare with more than thirty high-quality new office blocks built, increasing the amount of rental office space by almost 60% (Brown 2002, 271). Suspected reasons for the increase in building included the belief in the long-term improvements to the economy as a result of ESAP; soaring inflation and negative real interest rates that made money markets unattractive for investments; and, cash-rich companies looking to protect their money through safe

investments in the local economy, saw real estate with pension and insurance funds as leading the way (Brown 2002, 271). This property boom transformed Harare into a modern high-rise city. It also created a powerful lobby among those with vested interests in promoting the continued control of urban space in the city centre, including the retention of high levels of parking and a restriction on informal activities in the area (Brown 2002, 271). In 1998 minibuses were prohibited from stopping in the city centre and were forced to stop at outlying bus stations, while a one-way traffic system was brought in to ease traffic congestion but without regard for facilitating pedestrian traffic (Brown 2002, 272).

### **Elections**

In Zimbabwe, there are two levels of elections (national and local) and each level has two types: the national has presidential and parliamentary while the local has mayoral and council. National elections are often seen to be more important and often receive the most attention as the voter turnout is usually higher and they are more bitterly fought (Kamete 2003, 196). The Lancaster House Constitution introduced universal adult suffrage for the first time, which allowed blacks to finally vote in the 1980 general elections. Residency, age, and citizenship rather than race and property ownership became the new qualifying criteria (Kamete 2003, 198). This democratization saw many people of foreign origin, with Zimbabwean residency, cast their vote along with indigenous Zimbabweans. Many of these people were immigrant workers from Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique who dominated the farming and mining sectors and who also made up a large proportion of the working class in urban areas, including Harare (Kamete 2003, 198).

However, this universal suffrage was not automatically extended to urban elections where the right to vote was still based on property ownership (Kamete 2003, 198). At independence, African townships were incorporated into municipal areas to be run by urban local governments (Kamete 2006, 259). The legislation indicated that residents needed to have a 'material stake' in the city in which they voted and this was still interpreted as owning property (Kamete 2003, 198). This automatically meant that large numbers of Blacks could still not vote in local elections as most were tenants and lodgers and so, according to the law, did not have a material stake in the city (Kamete 2003, 198). The 'right' to vote was limited to a few ratepayers so Whites continued to dominate the local political scene. Those Blacks who had climbed the socio-economic ladder were too few to make a difference and often saw little point in going through the complicated voter registration process (Kamete 2003, 199). This meant that in local governments anyways, ten years after independence, the majority still did not have the vote, leaving a situation where representatives chosen by a minority ran the affairs of the city, a situation clearly reminiscent of the colonial era (Kamete 2003, 199-200).

### **Urban Governance Zimbabwe-style**

As discussed, urban local governments are created by central governments, partly to perform tasks that the national state would find difficult or impossible to perform from the centre, for reasons of either efficiency or practicality (Kamete 2006, 256). In Zimbabwe, urban councils under the colonial state had been little more than an extension of a heavily centralized state and little happened immediately following independence to change that (Kamete 2006, 256). The local governments are in a precarious position of having their mandate, functions, or very existence changed at the whim of the central

government that created them. The politics of local governance is not only about local government and local people but also about the relationship between local government and the central state (Kamete 2006, 256). Since 1980, ZANU-PF has espoused a formal policy of decentralization, with the intended aim of creating a more democratic and locally accountable state structure (McGregor 2002, 17). This was particularly important in achieving the transformation of the local state apparatus inherited from the colonial era regime, which had a history of being used primarily to further central control. However, notwithstanding its rhetoric, the post-independence government has found it more desirable to maintain this central control and instead has severely constrained local state structures (Ibid.).

Relations between local and national levels of government go smoothly as long as the local council adheres to the national ruling party line, which is easier in a country where the local and national political elites are the same. While a difference between the political party at the local and national levels of government does not usually present a problem in advanced democracies, it can be problematic in cases where a strong central government objects to separating representation between the central and the local (Kamete 2006, 256), or when it finds itself dispossessed of its traditional position as the party in power. In Zimbabwe, especially since 2000, when the electorate voted in the opposition in the local elections, the central government “in addition to feeling belittled and rejected...fear(ed) that ‘a rival might be created’” at the local level (Kamete 2006, 257). There is often a dichotomy of roles that the local government plays, sometimes taking on one role or another, depending on the particular circumstance; the local government can be seen as an expression of the local community or as an agency of the

central state (Keating cited in Kamete 2006, 257). When residents vote into power the opposition and the central government sees a threat in this local government, voters may see this as an assault on their democratic rights, or as an 'erosion of autonomy,' while the central state could argue that it is only ensuring the lower tier of government behaves as a 'good agent' of the central state, especially in the area of service delivery (Kamete 2006, 257). This played out in developments between central and local levels of government in Zimbabwe after 2000. Even if city residents dismiss a national ruling party from the local council, it does not necessarily end the national party's control over the council, it just changes the method of control, a situation easily illustrated in Harare (Ibid.).

#### *Party politics at the local level*

Party politics originally entered local government when ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU sponsored rival candidates in the 1981 elections. With the exception of some losses in Matabeleland, notably Bulawayo City Council, and some minor setbacks in Harare, ZANU-PF maintained clear support at the local level (Kamete 2006, 259). ZANU-PF finally decided to turn its attention to local government issues and looked at universal suffrage at that level in the late 1980s. The party had most of its support from low-income workers but because they did not own property they could not elect urban council representatives. The ruling party tried to empower low-income groups through various types of purchasing schemes and eventually extended the vote by relaxing home ownership as a criterion at the local level (Kamete 2006, 259). Legislation was passed that stipulated age and residency as the only requirements for participating in the urban local government electoral process. Not entirely for altruistic reasons, the party went about democratizing the urban electoral system because it was confident that it could win

a majority in every case; it was also partly motivated by the party's desire to get power at the local level to in turn receive financial benefits like free urban services, access to land and employment and controlling contracts, services, etc. (Kamete 2003, 201). In fact, after the Unity Accord in 1987 that saw the joining of ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU, local governments everywhere were dominated by ZANU-PF (Kamete 2006, 259). By the mid-1990s, the party was dominating all urban local authorities with only a few independent councilors in cities such as Harare, Bulawayo and Mutare preventing ZANU-PF from having 100% control over municipal councils (Kamete 2003, 201). By 1996, so confident was the party in its ongoing support in the urban areas, and in keeping with its decentralization rhetoric, the ZANU-PF dominated Parliament repealed the existing *Urban Councils Act* and replaced it with a new *Urban Councils Act (Chapter 29:15)* that gave more powers to urban local governments (Kamete 2006, 259). While maintaining some ministerial powers, the Act created a powerful new office of a popularly elected executive mayor and broadened the scope for citizen participation in local governance. ZANU-PF was confident that it had nothing to fear in making these changes since it dominated urban councils both administratively and politically (Ibid.).

#### *Urbanites disillusionment*

ZANU-PF continued to control local government through elections until the late 1990s but there were early signs of growing voter discontent in urban areas including Harare. The percentage of urban registered voters dwindled from a massive 106% turnout in 1985, to only 51% in 1995 (Laakso cited in Kamete 2003, 202). The rapid deterioration of the economy, discussed earlier, contributed to the souring relations between urbanites and ZANU-PF. The proportion of urban poor increased from 41% in

1995 to 63% in mid-2001 and amidst skyrocketing increases to the cost of living, urban poverty began to be politicized (Kamete 2003, 202). The 2000 referendum on a new constitution was the first time in Zimbabwe's history that ZANU-PF faced defeat. Almost two out of three urbanites voted against the referendum despite a massive campaign by ZANU-PF (Kamete 2003, 202). One of the results of the referendum campaign was the creation of an opposition party, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), led by Morgan Tsvangirai, a labour leader who campaigned against the change to the constitution (Martin 2006, 250). Then later that year, in the June general elections, arguably the most hotly contested ever with the newly formed opposition party on the scene, ZANU-PF was kicked out of every major city, barely hanging on to a couple of seats in the smaller urban centres. These smaller victories were won mostly through gerrymandering, which resulted in urban constituencies being diluted by large swathes of rural territories, traditional strongholds for ZANU-PF (Kamete 2003, 202). In Harare, all 19 constituencies rejected ZANU-PF and returned MDC candidates (Kamete 2006, 255). Notably voter turnout among the urban population was high for both 2000 elections, motivated by their desire to demonstrate their lack of support for ZANU-PF (Kamete 2003, 202). These election results amounted to a betrayal in the eyes of the ruling party and probably sparked the idea among party officials of an urban-based conspiracy, to bring about its downfall (Kamete 2003, 202). Within two years, ZANU-PF lost mayoral elections in Masvingo, Bulawayo and Chegutu and lost all by-elections in Bulawayo (Kamete 2003, 202).

Previously, in February 1999, the then Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing had taken steps to dissolve the Harare City Council in

response to an overwhelming public outcry over erratic water supplies in the high-density areas. The Minister put in place the Harare City Commission to run the city and “restore it to its former glory” and once restored, the plan was for the commission to hand over the running of the city to an elected city council (Kamete 2003, 204). The law stipulated that a commission has a limited lifespan, in this case six months, and could not be indefinitely extended. However, the commission was in place when the previously mentioned elections occurred and the city rejected ZANU-PF at the polls. The rejection of the constitution, losses in urban centres during the June parliamentary elections, combined with losses of the party in the various mayoral elections, all sent a clear message to ZANU-PF that it had no hope of winning any council election that was held at this time (Ibid.). The Minister resisted calls to terminate the tenure of the commission and instead repeatedly and illegally extended its life. Despite repeated appeals to the courts by various stakeholders, and a decision by the Supreme Court to hold elections prior to the 2002 presidential poll, the government refused and held the council and mayor votes at the same time as the presidential election (Kamete 2003, 204).

### **Elections: Democracy lost**

National level elections are often seen to have a greater impact on shaping national identity and are decisive in the crafting of national legislation. They are critical to defining access to natural resources, power and influence across space, society and time. This should not downplay the importance of local elections as issues of governance and democracy are often felt more acutely at this level (Kamete 2003, 196). Local governments are heavily involved in the day-to-day life of the population as it deals with critical issues of service delivery and management. Additionally, local government

elections, which often take place more frequently than national ones, are more important as quick indicators of public opinion and political allegiances than parliamentary and presidential elections (Kamete 2003, 197). Elections are usually regarded as an important measure of democracy as they constitute a “general indicator of the relationship between state power and different groups in society” (Laakso cited in Kamete 2003, 193).

Democracy, however it is defined, is in turn an indicator of urban governance (Joseph cited in Kamete 2003, 193). Using this framework of liberal democracy as a reference point, urban governance in Harare since 2002 has become progressively less democratic. In the run-up to the presidential and parliamentary (and mayoral and council) elections, there was an intensive campaign to disenfranchise people through legal, physical and administrative means, especially in the urban areas (Kamete 2003, 204). First there was the legal change in the citizenship laws that seemed to target the white population and black immigrants. The law stated that anyone who was not Zimbabwean by descent and/or had dual citizenship was required to renounce foreign citizenship within a specified period of time or risk losing the right to vote. The Registrar-General interpreted the law to mean that anyone ‘entitled’ to any foreign citizenship had to renounce that entitlement. This meant that Zimbabwean citizens had to apply to foreign embassies in order to ‘renounce’ their other citizenship; the timing of the pronouncement made it administratively impossible to complete the process before the end of the voter registration period. Foreign embassies said they simply could not complete the paperwork in time. As a result tens of thousands of urbanites lost their right to vote (Kamete 2003, 205). The government also made it a requirement to prove that one owned property or show proof of residence in order to register. This was thought to

target the 'born frees,' those born after 1980, most of whom did not own property and were opposition supporters (Ibid.). The government then put up physical barriers to voting by cutting the number of polling stations in Harare by 40%. Add to that the fact that the 2002 election was to be a tripartite poll (mayoral, council and presidential) and the process of voting was slowed immensely. It took up to ten minutes to process one vote, which led to long lines remaining by the end of the voting period. As a result, the opposition appealed to the High Court to extend the voting period in Harare by a day, and while the government did so in response to the court's ruling, they opened the polling stations late and closed them early (Ibid.). In the end, more than 250,000 residents of Harare alone had been disenfranchised through the various measures undertaken by the government (Kamete 2003, 205).

By the beginning of 2002, the ruling party and its leadership were in arrears in their rates and services accounts in virtually all urban centres. In Harare alone, ZANU-PF officials owed the city council the equivalent of US\$7.3 million dollars in unsettled bills, which amounted to about 40% of all uncollected revenue for the city (Kamete 2003, 201). Just prior to the council elections to finally replace it, the Harare City Commission hired some 2,000 labourers and a new senior executive, most of whom were loyal ruling party supporters (Ibid.). The 2002 elections cemented the ruling party's ejection from Harare when ZANU-PF ended up losing the mayoral race and all but one of the contested wards to the MDC. ZANU-PF had already lost all the parliamentary constituencies to the MDC in the 2000 general elections. As a result of the growing disillusionment of the urban citizenry, the MDC received widespread support within the cities winning 41 seats in the 2002 election, mostly in urban areas.

*When all else fails...*

Since they could not win the local elections, ZANU-PF went about controlling the local government directly through legal and administrative means instead (Kamete 2003, 201). The ruling party used legal and administrative provisions, as well as bullying, in order to neutralize the opposition-controlled local government by invalidating its decisions, frustrating its actions, and forcing it to adhere to central government policies (Kamete 2006, 260). This campaign to regain control began shortly after the election when the Minister of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing, Dr. Ignatius Chombo, issued three directives in quick succession. In response to the opposition-dominated council resolution to cancel all recruitment and promotions effected by the ruling-party-aligned commission in the six months prior to the election, the Minister simply reversed the decision (Kamete 2003, 206). In addition, he instructed council to refer to the Minister all council resolutions dealing with human resources and financial matters and banned all mayors from attending Cabinet Action Committee meetings unless specifically invited to do so (Ibid.). The three directives amounted to the denial of democratically elected representatives the right to decide and observe processes that directly affected their constituency (Kamete 2003, 205).

Minister Chombo continued to issue directives that he knew, or hoped, the newly elected Harare Executive Mayor Elias Mudzuri would not accept (Kamete 2006, 260). When council fired senior employees, including the public relations manager, director of health and the town clerk, for incompetence and corruption or because they did not have valid contracts since they occupied non-existent posts, Chombo reversed the decision saying the government was merely trying 'to safeguard the interests of ratepayers and

residents' (Ibid.). Chombo unexpectedly appointed a committee that was supposed to assist council to come up with a 'turnaround plan' for the city. It is partly because of Mudzuri's refusal to work with the committee that Chombo suspended him in April 2003. Chombo then went on to set up two commissions; the first, to investigate allegations leveled against the suspended Mudzuri; the second, to conduct a hearing probing the same mayor. Both commissions were staffed by known ZANU-PF supporters (Ibid.). In a show of brute force, the government used the *Public Order and Security Act* (POSA) which prohibits political gatherings without police permission, to limit contact between council, particularly Mudzuri, and residents and to prevent any public show of solidarity between the two (Kamete 2006, 264). When Mudzuri attempted to hold consultations with the public, government used POSA to arrest him and when Harare residents tried to demonstrate in protest against Chombo's excessive meddling, they were arrested too (Ibid.).

Chombo kept up his campaign to frustrate the Harare council by issuing a series of directives the council defied, prompting Chombo to issue a series of suspensions and firings of defiant councilors (Kamete 2006, 260). By the end of 2003, it was apparent that ZANU-PF had 'won over' the deputy mayor who was now acting executive mayor since Mudzuri was suspended (Kamete 2006, 261). Citing loss of confidence, the MDC councilors resolved to get rid of her and vote in a new deputy mayor as allowed under the *Urban Councils Act*. In response, Chombo banned the elections and when councilors defied him and held the elections anyways, Chombo nullified the elections and suspended 13 city councilors (Ibid.). In December 2003, the government announced it would use the *Provincial Councils and Administration Act*, to appoint provincial governors,

provincial administrators and district administrators for Harare and Bulawayo (Ibid.). The unprecedented move of superimposing a new administrative layer allowed ZANU-PF to have oversight and some measure of control over the city councils. In 2004, the central government banned full council meetings in Harare, which by law was the only way financial decisions could be approved, resulting in Harare City Council operating for more than half the year without an approved budget. Before the end of the year, central government finally fired Mudzuri, suspended and fired more councilors and appointed another commission to run the city. With the provincial governor in place, along with the provincial administrator and district administrators, ZANU-PF was finally in charge of all key institutions in Harare (Ibid.).

This could be considered a blatant disregard for the democratic wishes of the urban population and highlights the complexity of the concept of the 'state' and the scalar relations of the various levels at play. The legitimacy of the local state structures was constantly being questioned on legal, administrative and democratic grounds by the central government (Kamete 2006, 261). Relations between the central government and city residents became increasingly poor following the elections in 2000. In the media and public appearances, the urban population was repeatedly insulted by ZANU-PF and accused of being unpatriotic and sell-outs because they supported a "foreign-sponsored puppet party" (Kamete 2006, 263) which the MDC was considered to be by ruling party supporters.

This campaign of interference was not without precedent in the country. During the 1980s when ZAPU was still dominant in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands, and

when the Fifth Brigade<sup>11</sup> was active, the Minister of Local government intervened on a number of occasions to suspend councils and put them under the management of civil servants (McGregor 2002, 19). Only after ZAPU was incorporated into ZANU in the Unity Accord were the councils allowed to operate again as democratic bodies.

### **Housing for the Urban Poor: The more things change...**

In neo-classical economics, with its emphasis on consumer choice and utility maximizations, there has been an emphasis on the physical value of housing while others have argued that the value of a house should not be restricted to its physical characteristics but should extend to the meaning that the house has for its users (Kamete 1999, 137). This kind of incorporation of use values in housing analysis may help explain the use of high-density housing in most developing countries for both social and economic purposes (Ibid.). Amidst the euphoria of independence and majority rule, housing standards surrounding space and infrastructural standards were raised in Zimbabwe. Unfortunately, as in the colonial era, high costs and affordability were also an issue for the new government until 1992 when standards were once again reduced in the name of affordability (Kamete 2001a, 34). Table 4.1 below outlines the minimum housing standards during the colonial era, the increase in standards in the early days of independence and then after ESAP implementation had begun when they were lowered even below standards in the colonial era.

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<sup>11</sup> The North Korean-trained squad undertook Operation Gukurahundi (meaning the spring rain that gets rid of the chaff) which targeted ZAPU supporters throughout Matabeleland (Shale 2006, 119). Reports estimate more than 20,000 people were killed during their campaigns with many more raped and tortured.

**Table 4.1 - Minimum housing standards in pre- and post-independence Zimbabwe**  
(Kamete 2001a, 37)

Period	Space (m <sup>2</sup> )	Superstructure	Infrastructure	Materials
Before 1980	200	One bedroom, semi-detached, terraced	Individual on site	Standard Approved non-standard
1980-92	312.5	Two bedroomed	As above	Strictly standard
From 1992 onwards	150	One room and wet core	As above	Standard, room for approved non-standard

Research that had previously begun in the late 1970s led to the publication in the 1980s of a series of design manuals on planning standards, building regulations, and water and sewerage designs for the Ministry of Local Government in Zimbabwe. These documents had a profound impact on the design and appearance of low-income housing areas (Brown 2002, 268). And while these manuals may have been updated, the least-cost philosophy still held. These manuals perpetuated the separation of low-income housing areas from other sectors of the city because they contained regulations that there should be no mixing of plot sizes within the low-income housing schemes (Ibid.). It is unfortunate, as one of the main issues in Harare post-independence was access to land for low-income housing and a study showed that in fact, 141,000 to 354,000 people could have been accommodated on infill plots in just four of Harare's suburbs alone (Brown 2002, 269). This would have gone a long way to addressing the rising housing crisis in the capital. The supply of land for low-income housing has always been considered public sector responsibility in Zimbabwe and the post-independence socialist ethos reinforced this idea. Since independence, the housing policy has been to address the shortage through state initiatives mainly through providing serviced plots for home

ownership (Brown 2002, 267). In the early 1980s, work began on several site and services schemes, including Warren Park, Kuwadzana, Hatcliffe, and Budiro.

Unusual for a fast-growing city, Zimbabwean authorities remained intolerant of informal sector housing for over 20 years after independence (Brown 2002, 267) partly in the misguided adherence to 'modern' planning ideals. In keeping with the urban modernity influence, and the continued adherence to colonial regulations and urban management guidelines, the authorities continued to maintain the look of a modern city. Extensive squatter areas of the late 1970s were cleared with little public outcry and new informal settlements quickly removed with their populations exported to various holding camps, e.g. Porta Farm, 40 kilometres west of Harare near Lake Chivero. The only exception for a long time was Epworth, a large settlement on Mission land located 10 kilometres southeast of the city, beyond the Harare Municipality boundary, which accommodated 50,000 people and was the only regularized squatter area in the capital (Ibid.). Instead, the pressure of rapid urban growth is seen in the high rate of occupancy on plots and in overcrowded conditions. The increase in the use of backyard shacks for rent caused considerable social pressures. In the 1990s, the average occupancy rate in low-income areas was estimated at 12 people per unit, with occupancies as high as 27 people in at least one case (Ibid.). There have been some serious social costs of the overcrowding including problems of family breakdown, increase in crime, threats of assault on women, increase in number of street children, malnutrition, and high rates of communicable diseases (Ibid.). With a population estimated at over 1.2 million, with over 300,000 of those in Chitungwiza, and a growth rate of 6% a year, the problem was going to get worse (Brown 2002, 268). At the end of 1997, 64% of the total city's

housing stock was in low-income areas which housed 75% of the urban population but took up only about a quarter of the municipal area (Ibid.). Of the people in the low-income areas, 48% of those were lodgers, with just over 1,000 squatters, but some 12,000 squatters had been relocated to Porta Farm and Hatcliffe (Ibid.).

### *Housing Delivery Strategies*

After independence, the socialist doctrine adopted by the new state required the exalting of self-reliance (Kamete 2001a, 38). The central government received criticism from donors for making housing expensive because of “its over involvement in housing delivery which it (erroneously) views as a social commodity” (Kamete 2001a, 35). International donors, such as USAID and the World Bank, influenced the Zimbabwean government’s approach to housing following independence (Bond 1998, 268). Their broad solution was to provide the high-density areas the same sorts of market-oriented institutions and practices as those available to the low-density areas. A reflection of this market-oriented policy towards low-cost housing was to privatize the state-owned housing stock and offer it for purchase to tenants (Bond 1998, 273). Within fifteen months of independence, 16,000 of Harare’s 19,000 public housing tenants had confirmed their desire to buy their properties. Of course, they were strongly encouraged to do so because if they had not, rent increases of 30% would have been imposed within six months of the offer (Ibid.). But this plan could only attempt to assist those who were currently in a residence to purchase and did nothing to address those who did not already have access to some form of housing. Harare’s official housing waiting list was 100,000 by the end of the 1990s. Not surprisingly, Harare continues to be dominated by lodgers

who, according to a study in the early 2000s, constitute more than two out of three of all urban households (Kamete 2003, 199).

Dwindling public sector resources and rising building costs ensured that the various levels of Zimbabwean governments needed little convincing to change their strategies for housing delivery (Kamete 2001a, 35). The World Bank downplayed the housing problems that were already reaching crisis stage in the early 1980s by saying that “Zimbabwe’s cities and towns have coped successfully with the demands that have been placed on them. Housing shortages exist for lower income households, but these have for the most part been reflected in overcrowding rather than squatting or illegal subdivision” (cited in Bond 1998, 268). Just weeks after the Bank made this statement, the Zimbabwe central government cut spending on housing by 65% and reallocated funds from urban to rural housing (Ibid.).

The Mugabe government started to explore new strategies that allowed for other actors to participate in housing provision. A popular strategy used was that of aided self-help, where local authorities provide participants with serviced stands, technical assistance and affordable loans, and sometimes even on-site materials stores, and participants build their house using their own additional resources such as labour, tools and materials (Kamete 2001a, 35). Elsewhere, in 1996, the Urban Councils Association proposed a variant of the services levy for low-income housing called a ‘housing levy’ which would be used to create a revolving ‘housing fund’ for low-income people who wished to access the fund.

The problem of housing affordability in Zimbabwe is actually an income problem, and yet, the solutions put forward by donor groups and the government didn’t focus on

improving incomes or the economic characteristics of the target group (low-income urban population) but instead the solutions focused on reducing the cost of housing (Kamete 2001a, 36). The common prescription to 'reduce the initial cost of the project' has found committed disciples in Zimbabwe's public and private sector delivery systems for urban low-income housing (Ibid.). The nature of cost-reducing measures limits their success because inflation, rising costs of living, building materials and construction time itself will always drive up housing costs (Kamete 2001a, 40). For example, between 1985 and 1987, housing construction costs rose by 60% while the monthly median income during the same time period rose by only 42%. This meant that the combined effect of cost reduction and ordinary periodic income increases could not keep pace with inflation. Cost reduction approaches are not ineffective in their own right but it does depend on how they are implemented. The major weakness in the Zimbabwe situation, like most other national strategies in developing countries, was that the delivery systems have tended to expect too much from them (Ibid.). It was expected that the various strategies, including provision of minimal product or minimizing standards, could somehow solve the income problem and make housing affordable for the majority of the nation's urban low-income earners, which was simply not reasonable. The problem with all of the attempted solutions was that they could not adequately address what has often been called an 'irreducible core' of people that cannot afford housing, which in Zimbabwe consists of 75% of the population (Kamete 2001a, 41).

### **Conclusion**

After the initial jubilation of independence wore off, it became apparent that the newly elected government was going to be facing some major challenges. The economic

deterioration, much of which was beyond the control of ZANU-PF, forced the government to undertake its ESAP program, which rather than saving the economy, ended up further exacerbating the situation. By 2001, according to the UNDP 2001 Human Development Report, Zimbabwe was only one of three countries in the world where general living conditions had fallen so far that they were below 1980 levels (Potts 2006a, 542). It is the severe economic downturn, coupled with several poor policy decisions on the part of the Mugabe government, which led to the disillusionment of the urban electorate with the ruling party. Following significant losses at the national and local polls, ZANU-PF began to suspect there was an urban-based conspiracy to see them removed from power. Seeing the loss of support within the cities, especially Harare, ZANU-PF began a campaign to control the local government through legislation, regulation and administration.

Along with the economic downturn, housing issues within the country continued to worsen. To add to the dissatisfaction of the urban electorate with the ruling party, housing provision was inadequate and the situation continued to worsen. The Zimbabwe government decided to adopt a pragmatic approach to development following independence. Many of its donor-influenced housing policies did not attempt to transform the colonial basis of economic and spatial inequality in Zimbabwe. The problem was often viewed as one of 'extreme duality' but the difference and unequal relationships between black high-density townships and former white residential areas in Zimbabwe is better illustrated by the idea of uneven capital development (Bond cited in Ramsamy 2006, 519). The authorities also chose to continue their unfortunate adherence

to 'modern' planning principles and so continued using rules and regulations which precluded the adoption of more informal methods of meeting housing demands.

Due to economic pressures, urban workers had to generate their own incomes in the informal sector, sometimes at the government's own urging with the central government pressuring local authorities to relax standards to accommodate informal economic activities (Ramsamy 2006, 521). The conflict between the Mugabe regime and local government, and in some ways by extension the urban electorate, would eventually culminate in Operation Murambatsvina, which will be examined in more detail in the following chapter. The economic developments post-independence, particularly as they relate to the rise in the informal sector, and the rise in local-central state relations eventually led to intra-state violence; that is between different actors conceptually identified as the 'state'.

## **Chapter 5: Operation Murambatsvina**

The people of Zimbabwe have long been dispossessed of land rights, during the colonial era and continuing post-independence. Rather than address the inequity issues, the Mugabe government did little to change the circumstances of many of Zimbabwe's urban poor. There are several examples where the government forced evictions and destroyed informal housing over the years both during the colonial era and since independence. In fact, the current government used colonial-era legislation in its defense of Operation Murambatsvina (OM).

When a government starts to run out of ideas and is no longer able to govern effectively, it will sometimes turn to alternative ways of maintaining control and staying in power. One option is usually persuasion or patronage to win loyalty and only when that does not work does a regime turn to more coercive instruments. Or when faced with losing elections or an empty treasury, the urge to cling to power may tempt a government to call out the armed forces against its own citizens. ZANU-PF was facing a serious political and economic crisis in 2005. There had been a series of disputed elections marred by intimidation, vote-buying and ballot fraud, a program of land seizures which led to Zimbabwe's international isolation, and a shift from being a food exporter to needy recipient of international food aid. Gross economic mismanagement meant that the state was essentially bankrupt and was desperate to gain access to dwindling supplies of foreign exchange. The elections in March 2005 just reconfirmed that ZANU-PF had lost its control over the cities; particularly worrisome to its leaders was the loss of control over Harare.

### **Unleashing of a tsunami**

The first indication that a comprehensive national operation was underway came on May 19, 2005 in a speech by the chair of the central government-appointed Harare Commission, Sekesai Makwavarara, at the Harare Town House:

The City of Harare wishes to advise the public that in its efforts to improve service delivery within the City, it will embark on Operation Murambatsvina, in conjunction with the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP). This is a programme to enforce by-laws to stop all forms of illegal activities (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005b, 42).

She characterized the Operation as an attempt on the part of the government to enforce bylaws in an effort to stop all forms of illegal activity (Potts 2006b, 275). Five days later, the City of Harare<sup>12</sup> issued a notice, which appeared in the State-run newspaper *The Herald*, indicating that people who had erected illegal structures had until June 20, 2005 to demolish them. The next day, with complete disregard for its own deadline, the central government launched what has been described as a military-style campaign targeting vendors' markets, flea markets, and 'illegal' housing structures. Over the next few weeks across the country, more than 20,000 vendors were arrested and many thousands of the urban poor had their homes bulldozed, smashed and burned.

So-called shanty-towns and high-density areas were the first of the informal housing areas to be hit, with settlements on farms in peri-urban and rural areas subsequently targeted. In all, 52 sites were affected and no urban centre was spared. The scale of displacement was unprecedented in Zimbabwe or the region. Not even in apartheid South Africa were so many people forcibly relocated in the space of a few weeks (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 9). Despite claims by the government, this was not part of a well-planned reconstruction plan (which the government subsequently named

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<sup>12</sup> Harare appears to have been the only city to receive such a warning.

“Operation Garikayi” or Live Well) since the government failed to budget any money for the program. Also, if Operation Murambatsvina had been planned, it would have made more sense to have it preceded by Operation Garikayi not the other way around (Dhemba 2006, 69). Meanwhile, it appears that there had been a split within the ZANU-PF leadership over how the Operation was conducted and that some Ministers were caught by surprise when the military operation began. For example, Pearson Mbalekwa resigned in protest over the Operation from both Parliament and ZANU-PF's Central Committee and Philip Chiyangwa resigned his position on the Central Committee but opted to remain a member of the party (International Crisis Group 2005, 8). Elsewhere, there was a case where the Minister for Local Government wrote to the Minister of Home Affairs, who is responsible for the Zimbabwe Republic Police, telling him to stop destroying housing cooperatives that had been set up with the blessing of the Ministry of Local Government (Tibaijuka 2005, 76).

Additionally, there did not appear to be any advance warning for the local governments by the central government even though it was local bylaws the central government was supposedly enforcing through OM. No consultation seemed to have taken place with the mayors of the various cities, except perhaps in the case of the central government-appointed commission in Harare. In fact, the Mayors of Bulawayo and Gweru are both quoted as having been openly against the evictions (Tibaijuka 2005, 88). This is not a surprise given that many of the vendors who lost their stands were licensed and policed by municipal authorities and operating within city council designated areas. Businesses that had been allocated stands were evicted and their premises destroyed, although in some cases they were given notice in time to remove stock and equipment

(Stevens and Mugova 2006, 157), but in many cases there was no warning. In some instances these markets had been set up using ratepayers' money, officially opened by government officials and maintained by municipalities (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 16). These cities lost valuable income because of this destruction, too. For example, in Bulawayo, legal vendors were paying Z\$63 million a month in rates or roughly US\$250 (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 18).

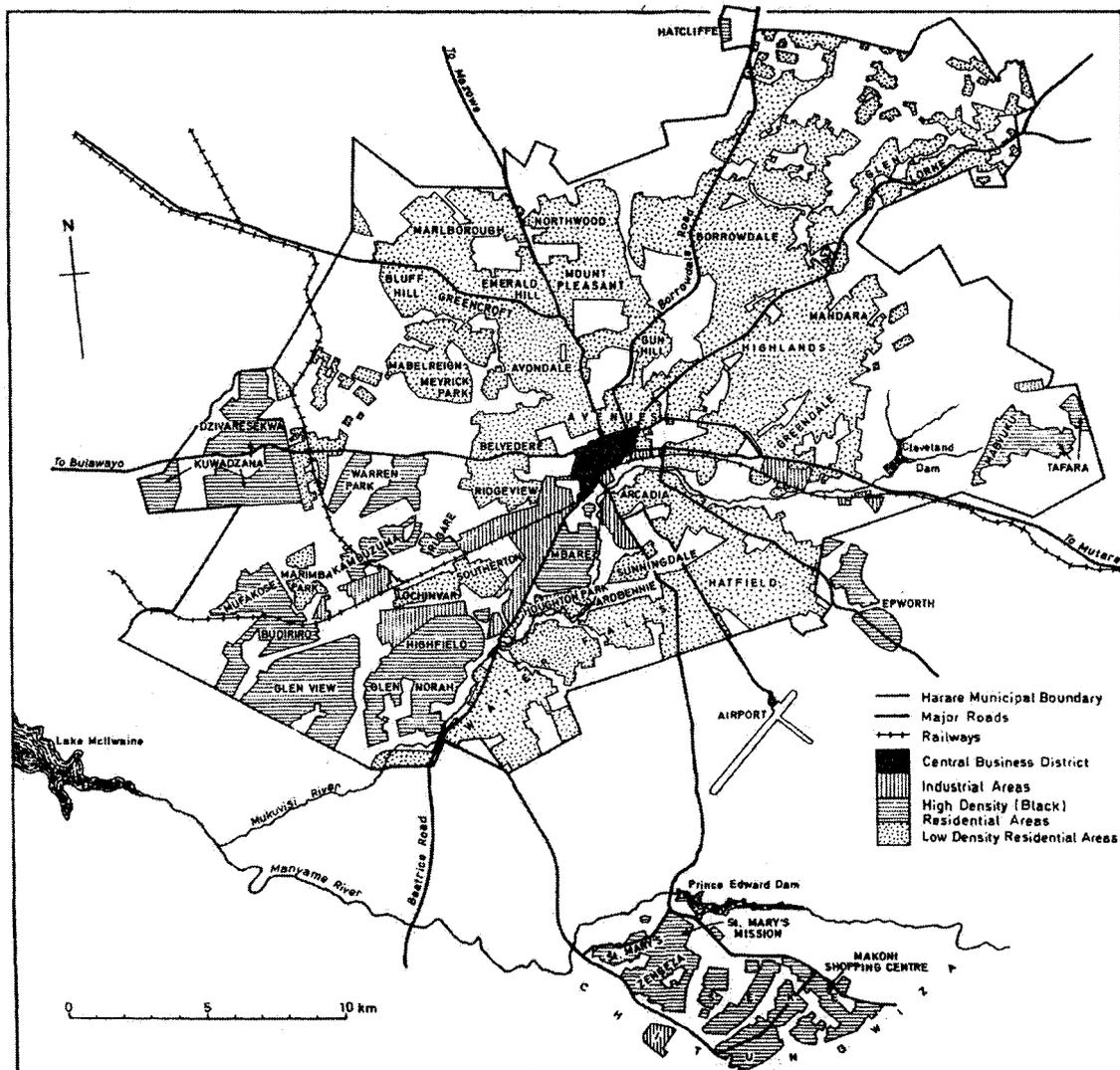


Figure 5.1 – Major land uses in Harare and Chitungwiza, 1989 (Zinyama et al. 1993, 10)

Murambatsvina had different impacts on the various urban centres, mostly in terms of the breadth and depth of the devastation. For some centres, due to a lack of provision of adequate housing, more informal structures and backyard extensions had been built to satisfy the housing backlog. This meant that as a percentage of existing housing, the informal structures were quite high. For example, at the time of the Operation, Mutare had 34,000 backyard extensions compared to 27,000 legally recognized and approved buildings. In Victoria Falls, 'illegal' structures comprised 64% of available housing (Tibaijuka 2005, 26). Because of its size, Harare sustained the largest amount of damage where, in some of its neighbourhoods, entire settlements housing thousands of people were wiped out. The Operation saw the destruction of everything from flimsy backyard structures to solid two-story cement block buildings, including a daycare centre financed by the World Bank (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005b, 16). A survey conducted by the Combined Harare Residents' Association (CHRA) towards the end of the campaign found that 76% of those asked had lost some form of shelter (cited in Potts 2006b, 277). Hatcliffe Extension, which was completely destroyed in the Operation, had previously been declared a legal settlement by the previous sitting of the Zimbabwean Parliament and it was on this basis that the World Bank had funded a water and sewage network for the area (Tibaijuka 2005, 29). Some areas were spared because the bulldozers came late in the campaign. While some parts of Epworth had been completely destroyed, other households lost only one or two outbuildings on their plots because the international outcry against the Operation muted some of the destruction (Stevens and Mugova 2006, 163). The various areas in the city impacted by

the Operation can be found in Figure 5.1 which shows land use in Harare during the 1990s.

This is not the first time the Mugabe regime has forcibly evicted and destroyed the homes of urban residents. In 1993, about 20,000 residents of Churu Farm were forcibly removed in a way reminiscent of Operation Murambatsvina. Although the residents received nine days warning and eviction orders four days in advance, the government ignored a temporary interdict issued by the court on the basis that the government had not followed its own *Land Acquisition Act* and obtained a proper court eviction order and went ahead with the evictions (Auret 1994, 3). More than 3,000 families were forced to pack up their things and leave with nowhere to go. The residents happened to be living on a farm that belonged to one of Mugabe's political foes and there was speculation at that time that it was political retribution (Auret 1994, 7). The official reasons given at the time had about as much credence as the current ones. The government suggested that they evicted the residents for their own health protection, which may have held more water had they not left them on the side of the road in poor sanitary conditions. In fact, the Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, Joseph Msika, was quoted at the time as saying, "let the Churu Farm settlers join the ranks of their homeless colleagues on the streets and we will deal with them from there" (cited in Auret 1994, 3).

Operation Murambatsvina devastated Zimbabwe, a country that was already experiencing acute economic and social decline. It took place at a time when the economy was experiencing triple digit inflation rates and negative growth rates, as well as critical food, fuel and foreign currency shortages. In the words of a World Bank

employee, it is hard to “think of a country that has experienced such a decline in peace time” (cited in International Crisis Group 2005, 2). Unemployment rates were nearing 80%. According to an International Labour Organization (ILO) report in June 2005 the informal economy in Zimbabwe employed three to four million people, on which another five million Zimbabweans relied, while the formal sector only employed 1.3 million people (Tibaijuka 2005, 17). The findings of the CHRA survey reaffirm the reliance on informal sources of income as an overwhelming majority of respondents had indicated a loss or a decline of at least one source of income as a result of Operation Murambatsvina (cited in Potts 2006b, 277). The survey showed that formal salaries were the main source of income in only 15% of households, indicating how dominant the informal sector was. Also, rentals of backyard shacks or rooms were very important as the most significant single source of urban household income (Potts 2006b, 288). Not all of this would have been destroyed by Operation Murambatsvina since rentals from rooms inside the main house would have continued. However, homeowners immediately hiked the rents for such rooms after the demolitions, to reflect their massively increased scarcity value in the house rental market and also, presumably, to try to make up for the drastic loss of backyard shack rents (Ibid.).

It is important to note that Operation Murambatsvina took place in the context of a continuing deterioration of the rule of law. Disregard for laws and court orders had been occurring in the country since the Fast Track land reform program set a dangerous precedent. It is clear that the rule of law is subject to selective interpretation by the government. On the one hand, the government said that it was using the Operation to crack down on its citizens for being unlawful, while the Operation itself was illegal and

contravened several national and international human rights laws, as well as a number of municipal ones. The Operation was purported to have targeted illegal dwellings and structures and to clamp down on illicit activities – but it was carried out in a completely indiscriminate, some would say unlawful, fashion, razing entire communities to the ground (Tibaijuka 2005, 7). In many cases, vendors whose stalls were destroyed and whose goods were seized actually held valid vendors' licenses. In other cases, homes, which had been constructed in compliance with appropriate laws, were also destroyed. In some cases, where people filed applications to have the demolitions and evictions halted and had been successful in getting a court order, the police and military ignored the legal orders and went ahead anyway (Tibaijuka 2005, 59). The central government showed no consideration for human suffering. It had no plans for what to do with these people once they were left homeless. In fact the government seemed intent on ensuring they remained homeless. After many had taken refuge in churches, police abducted families in the middle of the night and drove them into the rural areas. The timing of these abductions was around the release of the UN Report on Operation Murambatsvina and appeared to be an attempt by the central government to remove access to these people by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the press or the churches (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005b, 8).

One of the biggest complaints heard from the Mugabe regime around Operation Murambatsvina was that Zimbabwe was not the only country to conduct forcible evictions. In a conversation with UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, Mugabe was reported to have expressed surprise over the UN investigation into something so “mundane” as OM (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 3). While Operation Murambatsvina

can hardly be called mundane, it is true that Zimbabwe is not the only country that has conducted evictions. There has been little criticism of the Zimbabwean government for these clearances by other African leaders, which can partly be explained by the fact that some of the other countries have also conducted similar operations. For example, in Angola between 2001 and 2003, 5,000 houses were demolished outside the capital which resulted in thousands living in tents for up to two years until other accommodation was found for them (Tibaijuka 2005, 78). In early 2005, in Nigeria, a series of evictions were conducted. According to the Centre for Housing Rights and Evictions, over the course of the year, over 30,000 households were forcibly evicted amounting to roughly 150,000 people (Ibid.).

#### **Rationale of the presumed irrational**

There are two official reasons given for Operation Murambatsvina by the Government of Zimbabwe. These were: 1) to address the chaotic effects of rapid urbanization, including its health consequences, and 2) to stop illegal and parallel market transactions, including the black-market foreign currency exchange and the hoarding of scarce commodities (Tibaijuka 2005, 20). Meanwhile, the international community was highly critical and human rights defenders in the country condemned the move; they all put forward their own ideas for why the government took such drastic action. In short, these other motivations included: an attempt to destroy the informal economy in an effort to build up a new one which the State could control; a misguided social re-engineering process to reverse rural-urban migration; punishing the opposition supporters primarily located in the cities; and taking a pre-emptive strike against a potential urban uprising.

As has been argued in this thesis, a combination of the latter two are the most likely reasons for the action, but there were other factors at play.

The central government insisted that Operation Murambatsvina was a long overdue “clean up” and was its attempt to deal with the issue of rapid urbanization, and resulting rise in poverty in the cities, a challenge faced by most of the continent. Zimbabwe’s cities experienced growth rates around 5% a year during the 1980s, which increased to 6 to 8% in the 1990s (Tibaijuka 2005, 23). This growth put a strain on both the central and local levels of government to provide adequate housing and services to the poor and led to the growth in the urban informal economy and alternative housing solutions. One of the recommendations of the UN Special Envoy, who undertook a fact-finding mission on Operation Murambatsvina in June 2005, was that the international community should view Zimbabwe as a warning if more is not done to help African countries deal with this rapid urbanization. She suggested that other countries in Africa could very well experience their own versions of Operation Murambatsvina (Tibaijuka 2005, 10). Indeed, a few months after OM, the chief executive of Lilongwe, Malawi, commented that such a clean up operation and reconstruction was something that should be emulated throughout Africa (The Herald, Dec. 2005). In alignment with the drive to achieve a modern city, he encouraged clean environments as going a long way in attracting investors and maintaining the dignity of the people. This highlights the pervasive thinking among many urban authorities and governments that informality is in conflict with modernist planning and the associated image of a ‘modern’ city.

At the time, the informal economy was the lifeblood of the economy (and still is); it was said to control as much as 60% of Zimbabwe’s GDP, money that was not passing

through the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe or the tax system. Meanwhile, one of the biggest crises facing the country was a lack of foreign currency. Despite attempts by the government to control the flow of remittances and access some of this foreign currency, 90% of it continued to find its way into the parallel market (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 15). By getting rid of the informal economy, the government hoped to funnel most of that foreign currency through the formal banking sector (Potts 2006b, 291). There is some speculation that the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), Gideon Gono, was closely involved in the Operation. A day after the Operation commenced Gono announced his *Post Election and Drought Mitigation Monetary Policy Statement* in which he outlined current problems in the economic system and his plans to fix them. References were made to the various forms of corruption and abuse within the economy and he called for a reorientation of the law enforcement systems in order to combat these ills. He repeatedly made reference to the need for more punitive measures to be taken against offenders.

We enjoy the support of all the law enforcement arms of the State and Government itself to win the battle against indiscipline, corruption, illegality and the sheer madness that we have been witnessing on the streets, at airports and border posts...<sup>13</sup>

In this report Gono warns of “the need to cleanse the individual rot on the streets of the nation and the need to destroy the shadow forces in the economy” (cited in Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 15). The link between Gono and the Operation is further underlined by a report in *The Chronicle* on May 27<sup>th</sup> titled “Operation Restore Order Intensifies” (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 15). Police Commissioner Augustine Chihuri is quoted

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<sup>13</sup> Perspectives on the Ills of Corruption, Supplement 4 of 5 to the January - April Monetary Policy Review Statement Delivered by the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Dr. G. Gono. Harare: Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, May 2005, various.

addressing a workshop jointly organized by the RBZ and the Zimbabwe Republic Police in Harare:

I would want to warn any miscreants within our society who may wish to show their discontent against the current clean-up operations to stop the day-dreaming forthwith... Let no one be used as cannon fodder by criminals whose illegal source of livelihood has been hemorrhaging the economy (cited in Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 15).

Critics suggest that the government did not really want to destroy the informal economy for good but actually wanted to control who operated within it (Potts 2006b, 291). For parts of the informal economy other than foreign exchange, the motivation behind controlling it is seen as patronage. It would offer up an opportunity to reward those who support the government by awarding licenses to them. Operation Murambatsvina is seen as a way for the central government to rid the urban areas of those who supported the opposition and reallocate the entire informal urban sector to ZANU-PF supporters (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 25). While it is the jurisdiction of city councils to allocate stands for housing and vendors' licenses, the central government stepped in and took over this responsibility following the clearances, illustrating yet again that the local government is but "a creature of statute subject to the vagaries and predilections of central political administration" (Sullivan et al. cited in Kamete 2006, 256). Vending licenses were being reissued by an "inter-ministerial committee" made up of representatives from the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development, the Governor's Office, and the Department of Construction within weeks of the Operation. The duties of the committee included "facilitate vetting of vendors, registration of vendors and relocation of vendors" to sites outside the central business district (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 25).

Another of the suggested alternative motivations for the government to undertake Operation Murambatsvina was the idea of social engineering. One of its main goals appeared to be to displace the urban poor to the rural areas, perhaps in an attempt to increase the supply of agricultural workers (International Crisis Group 2005b, 5). Deputy Minister of Local Government, Public Works and Urban Development Morris Sakabuya described the Operation as an attempt to “resuscitate the rural areas” (International Crisis Group 2005, 5). People were told to return to their ‘rural origins’ but such a policy assumes homogeneity of background as well as rural linkages and assets which is not necessarily the case for many urban residents (Potts 2006b, 279). Central government officials repeatedly asserted that one of the major results of Operation Murambatsvina was a ‘return’ of people to their rural homes. While it is true that the significance of urban livelihoods to urban-rural links would mean some urban residents would have an option to return home, realistically that was not applicable to the vast majority of those affected (Ibid.). In June 2005, ZANU-PF MP for Masvingo South, Walter Nzembi, declared with pride in Parliament that “this exercise that we have applied in the last month or so has been one of the biggest reversals of rural-urban migration” (cited in Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 7). There are few, if any, examples of a government forcibly moving so many of its citizens, particularly in peace-time. The move was compared to the peasantization under Pol Pot's Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia in the 1970s (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 27). However, the Zimbabwean Operation targeted ‘disorderly’ urbanization, or characteristics of urbanization that did not fit the ‘modern’ city model, and not urbanization per se (Potts 2006b, 280). What the government does not seem to remember is that the liberation war was fought to correct the imbalances of

the colonial era. Not just those over the exclusion of black Zimbabweans from owning prime farming land, but also those that kept many from living in the urban centres and enjoying the many benefits this afforded such as education, access to jobs and housing (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 26). However, as we discussed, ZANU-PF's relationship with the urban populace was not friendly and some would suggest that the ZANU-PF government is anti-urban with urbanites being excluded from their "authoritarian nationalism" (Ibid.). The idea was to send these people back to the rural areas where they could be reformed by ZANU-PF supporters to see things the 'right' way (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 26).

The central government showed a complete disregard for the many people affected by the Operation who did not have a rural home to return to. Many of the people forced out of the cities were of Malawian, Zambian and Mozambican origin and had no rural home. Of course, the government had repeatedly made comments to the effect that if one did not have a rural home than one was not truly Zimbabwean. Didymus Mutasa, Minister of National Security, said three years before that "we would be better off with only six million [people], with our own people who support the liberation struggle... We don't want all these extra people" (Sunday World Times, June 2005). Many of the people Mutasa was referring to were former farm workers who were displaced as a result of the 'Fast Track' land reform program. While rural-urban migration is motivated by economic reasons, an attempt to find work and escape the rural poverty, an urban-rural migration would simply exacerbate an already critical situation in the rural areas. In 2005 rural areas were, and still are, experiencing food shortages, drought, and falling incomes. The failure of the 2005 harvest due to drought meant that more than four

million people in the country would become food insecure before the next harvest. There was also a shortage of fertilizer and seeds for the coming season which meant the problem would not improve in the short-term. Reports indicated that for many people who were forced to return to their rural homes, they had to show allegiance to ZANU-PF or were denied access to land or shelter (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 27). Instead of being poor in the urban areas, they faced abject poverty in the rural areas and potential starvation. This is why some have argued that Zimbabwe appears to be undergoing a process of social engineering “where those who are not wanted have been driven out of the cities in order to reward and entrench those who are wanted” (cited in Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 7).

Operation Murambatsvina is seen by many as retribution by the government against those who support the MDC. Early on, speculation was articulated in the press that “though some residents had first welcomed the clean up of hawkers and criminals, there was now widespread speculation that the government was hitting the city’s residents for voting for the MDC” (The Daily Mirror, May 2005). Some of the older residents of Harare pointed to the opposition party as the one to blame for the evictions; their presence in local government brought with it collective punishment on residents (Kamete 2007, 52). This view was summed up by a 70-year-old Chegutu woman:

When ZANU-PF was defeated, they got angry, very angry. They do not know who stabbed them in the back, so they think all of us are traitors... Now they hate us all. So, when somebody becomes naughty, they beat up the whole town. When we are in distress they ignore us because they think all of us betrayed them [the ruling party]. The police and army beat us; green bombers [members of the ZANU-PF youth brigade] harass us. ...We suffer because of the decision of a few renegades to turn their backs on the party (cited in Kamete 2007, 52).

This was not an unfounded assumption as when the issue was raised with a senior ruling party operative in Chitungwiza, his response was that urbanites were “all dissidents and sell-outs” adding “when you are not sure what beast killed your livestock, burn the whole forest” (Kamete 2007, 53).

At the same time, the urban dwellers forced to relocate to the rural areas were simultaneously disenfranchised because they no longer lived where they were registered to vote (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 22). Whether this was a prime motivation for the government or simply a pleasant side effect, having thousands of MDC supporters disenfranchised just ahead of the Senate elections that fall would not hurt. The Operation sent a strong message that it did not matter that urban MPs and city councils were MDC or not, the central government was in control (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 22). To counter the political retribution argument, some say that, in fact, many ZANU-PF supporters were victims of Operation Murumbatsvina too, and it did not make sense that the government would also destroy the homes of its supporters. Not that much of what the government does makes sense, but what is more likely is that the Operation gained its own momentum and lost any kind of targeting it had, if it had any to begin with (International Crisis Group 2005, 5), or perhaps the idea to ‘burn the entire forest’ won out. Also, there was the strong perception that post-Operation Murumbatsvina programs initiated by the government such as new sites for informal trading and Operation Garikayi housing plans would benefit these ZANU-PF supporters first (Shale 2006, 121).

The clearances took place in the wake of popular uprisings elsewhere in the world, such as in the Ukraine and Georgia, and the ruling party was concerned that a similar situation could take place in Zimbabwe. There was speculation within the

government that Western powers would take a more active role in trying to achieve regime change in Zimbabwe and that the discontented urban population could provide assistance (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 4). The Central Intelligence Organization (CIO) apparently had evidence that there was the real possibility of a popular uprising being planned in the high-density areas of Harare. Shortly before Murambatsvina began, on May 11, the police beat up and forcibly detained residents in the Harare suburb of Mabvuku who were protesting three days without water (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 4). By dispersing the population, removing the vendors and ridding the streets of any places to hide, the central government took pre-emptive action to avoid such a situation (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 25). Sending in the kind of force that they did sent a strong message to an already demoralized people and destroyed any kind of neighbourhood and political groups that may still have existed. Displaced traders were to be given new stands in markets located on the outskirts of town, a plan pointing again to the government's desire to keep large populations from 'milling about' in the city centre (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 25).

### **A colonial-era defence**

As in the colonial past the current regime has used the arguments of criminality and urban squalor to 'restore order' to the cities, and as with past attempts this one will not solve the problems... For the basis of this urban poverty is the crisis of the reproduction of labour, and the continued failure of current economic policy to stabilize the livelihoods of urban workers. In fact labour is now more vulnerable in livelihood terms than it was in 1980, having had to endure the eroding effects of falling real wages, increased food prices and the massive cutbacks of the social wage. ...At no time in the post-1980 period, and perhaps even before that, has the capital city been so badly run with so little regard for the majority of its residents (Brian Raftopolous cited in Davis 2006, 114).

The Government's National Housing Programme of 2003 acknowledged the inability of the government to adequately provide housing for its population. While the annual target was 162,000 houses between 1985 and 2000, the numbers actually provided were between 15,000 and 20,000 per year. Yet, the government failed to address its overly high building standards in any comprehensive way and was slow to deliver serviced, legal land for site-and-service plots, substantive initiatives that could have gone a long way to addressing the housing shortfall. Soaring levels of urban poverty and a determined policy of preventing true squatter settlements which, in other poor countries often fill the gap between unaffordable, legal housing solutions and what the urban poor can actually manage, resulted in the growth of backyard shacks and other "semi-legal" peri-urban housing options (Potts 2006b, 290). Given the government's intolerance of squatter settlements, backyard shacks and extensions flourished since they seemed to be relatively less illegal in comparison to squatting. Because the shacks were in planned high-density areas on land assigned to low-income housing, there was the assumption that they would be more tolerated (Ibid.). Prior to Operation Murambatsvina this housing type was not faced with a policy response of rapid clearance in the way that freestanding informal (squatter) housing was.

The government defended its actions by saying they were conducting the evictions based on laws already on the books. However, the action was based on colonial era laws and policies that were used by the Smith regime to segregate the African population from the cities and to socially exclude the black Zimbabwean population from the urban centres (Tibaijuka 2005, 7). The Government of Zimbabwe never reformed parts of the colonial-era *Regional Town and Country Planning Act* or the *Housing*

*Standards Act*. The norms and standards contained in these acts were completely unreasonable and impossible to adhere to under the economic situation at the time. Modeled as they were after European cities, the bylaws did not take into account local building supplies, cost limitations, or the situation that the housing shortage left many urban residents in. For example, the bylaw requiring individual connection to water supply and water-borne sewage was simply not economically feasible for high-density area residents, not to mention that the sewage system did not have the capacity to service those numbers of people. Water treatment facilities are costly to build and maintain and are not required for middle and high-income segments of the population who were allowed to use on-site sanitation and septic tanks. Building codes contained in these colonial era acts actually exceed some of the standards seen in some developed countries today including access roads needing to be 8-10 metres wide, tarred or gravel, and a ban on houses being built out of wood or mud (Tibaijuka 2005, 25).

The government suddenly decided to enforce the antiquated laws while previously it had stated that those same laws were responsible for the desperate housing shortages experienced in Zimbabwe. Implementation was done by central government authorities, including the military and the Zimbabwe Republic Police, without consulting local authorities who were the responsible jurisdiction for compliance and enforcement of these housing standards and regulations (Tibaijuka 2005, 26). The Operation was conducted in contravention of the Government's own *Regional Town and Country Planning Act* and its *Urban Councils Act* (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 18). In addition, Zimbabwe ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in May 1991, which includes the statement that “forced evictions are *prima facie*

incompatible with the provisions of the Covenant and can only be carried out under specific circumstances” (Tibaijuka 2005, 57). These special circumstances include persistent anti-social behaviour which threatens neighbours; persistent behaviour which threatens public health or is by definition criminal; and illegal occupation of property without compensation. Regardless of whether these circumstances were met, there are a number of procedures that the government would have needed to have undertaken in order to go ahead with forced evictions and these were not done (Tibaijuka 2005, 60). Additionally, Operation Murambatsvina infringed on rights protected under Chapter III, Declaration of Rights, in Zimbabwe’s own constitution. These include the violation of the right to adequate housing, right to life, property and freedom of movement.

The government claimed that Operation Murambatsvina was about cleaning up the illegal activities that were taking place including much of the informal economy. But in fact, with increasing unemployment rates in the cities by the mid-1990s the government actually provided some motivation through its own policies for the growth of the informal sector in its attempt to deal with this problem. These included reducing regulatory bottlenecks to enable new players to enter into the production and distribution of goods and services, supporting indigenous business growth and relaxing physical planning regulations (Tibaijuka 2005, 23). Statutory Instrument 216 of 1994 of the *Regional Town and Country Planning Act* effectively allowed for non-residential activities to take place in residential areas. Meanwhile, some activities were deregulated including hairdressing, tailoring, wood-working and carving. Statutory Instrument 216 sent a clear message to local authorities that the central government wanted to encourage the informal economy in residential areas (Ibid.). To add to the legitimacy of the sector

was the existence of several informal traders' association, the largest being the Zimbabwe Chamber of Informal Economy Associations with 1.8 million members. The City of Harare seldom enforced the bylaws against informal traders partly because of the implicit message from the central government that it was okay and encouraged. It was not uncommon to see hawkers selling their wares right outside stores that carried the same items but who actually paid taxes. In the end, little was ever done to discourage them. This actually made sense for a country whose formal economy employs less than 20% of the workforce; the informal economy is its lifeblood, which is why it is all the more surprising that the ZANU-PF government took such drastic steps to get rid of it. To the government's perception, these informal traders were no better than "crooks, greedy people, opportunists and black market traders in foreign currency, fuel and basic commodities" (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 14). After Operation Murambatsvina, the government claimed "the obscene feast is over. Law and order must now prevail" (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 14). It is ironic to note that several of the markets that were forcibly closed, with their vendors arrested and goods seized or destroyed, in the Operation had approval by the central government. Unity Village on Main Street in Bulawayo was officially opened and proclaimed a successful small enterprise development by Minister John Nkomo and the Fort Street Market was opened by Cain Mathema, the then Governor of Bulawayo (Solidarity Peace Trust 2005a, 19).

### **Conclusion**

Despite condemnation and international outcry, Operation Murambatsvina continued for weeks throughout the country. Harare, as the capital city, was the hardest hit urban centre because of the size and geographic scope of the impact. The central

government used local level government areas of responsibility to crack down on those it perceived to be opposed to it in an effort to maintain power at the national level. OM radically transformed the urban geography of Harare through the removal of large swathes of settlements and changed the make-up of the urban electorate through forced relocation to rural areas of the country. The message the central government sent was clear – it would consolidate its state power through any means necessary.

The causes of the housing crisis which manifested itself in the backyard shacks and, to a lesser extent, in free-standing informal housing, are more complex than economic downturns and a shrinking formal sector job market alone, although these played their part. The sheer injustice of Operation Murambatsvina is obvious, for the symptoms of poverty that it tackled were forced upon the urban poor, not chosen by them. Any illegal ‘practices’ that the vast majority were involved in, related to the contravention of a host of by-laws, inherited from a racist, colonial state. These bylaws and planning practices were based in large part on the concept of a modern city, on a well-resourced urban government and central state and an urban population in reasonably remunerated formal jobs. Such regulations in the poor countries of the world, including Zimbabwe, force far too many people into ‘illegality’ and deem them only too vulnerable to the actions of an authoritarian state under cover of ‘restoring order’ (Potts 2006b, 291).

## **Chapter 6: Conclusion**

Operation Murambatsvina was the largest forced eviction to take place in Africa. With over 700,000 people displaced in a matter of weeks, it stands out as one of the largest forced relocations in peace-time anywhere. Many are tempted to dismiss it as a desperate attempt by a despot to hang on to power in the face of rising opposition both internationally and especially at home. And in some ways it was, but to truly understand it, other factors must be considered and the event needs to be put into a broader geopolitical context.

Operation Murambatsvina was characterized by the government of Zimbabwe as part of an 'urban renewal' program. Robert Mugabe explained the government's vision in an address to the central committee of ZANU-PF.

Our cities and towns have become havens for illicit and criminal practices and activities, which just could not be allowed to go on. From the mess should emerge new businesses, new traders, new practices and a whole new and salubrious urban environment. That is our vision. (Ramsamy 2006, 521)

In keeping with the ideological adherence to modernist planning, ZANU-PF used this ideology to justify its evictions. This image of the 'modern' city, established under the colonial government, continued into post-independence policies. As explored earlier, this image of a 'modern' city does not, and cannot, realistically reflect what is taking place in most African cities today (Swilling et al. 2003, 221). Attempts to 'develop' along this linear, rational path, in the image of a modernized developed country city, leave little room for capitalizing on characteristics unique to African cities (Gilbert cited in Beall et al. 2002, 10) or for addressing some of the challenges facing them.

Urban poverty in Zimbabwe today is significant in relation to Operation Murambatsvina for it is both cause and effect of the informalization of the urban

economy and environment, which the campaign targeted (Potts 2006b, 287).

Informalization is a major characteristic of cities in developing countries and has been seen as both a symptom of poverty and a sign of adaptation on the part of urban citizens to poor economic conditions and the inability of urban and central governments to adequately provide shelter. As the urban economy in Harare began to decline under ESAP in the early 1990s, then accelerated downwards after the budget crisis of 1997 and declined even more after 2000, formal job opportunities in the city became exceedingly scarce. Formal employment losses after 1997 eclipsed those during ESAP<sup>14</sup>. The “absurd unemployment figures” (Potts 2006a, 541) reported in the international media around Operation Murambatsvina do not properly reflect the transformation of the urban economy to an informal one. In 2004, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) reported 70% unemployment, while at the same time the government reported only 9%. Reports around Operation Murambatsvina mentioned 80% unemployment. These incredibly high levels of unemployment are impossible and cannot reflect true unemployment, but seeing beyond them, one finds that many of the ‘unemployed’ have turned to the informal economy. Relying on the informal sector is not new, but the depth of dependence on this sector for the costs of daily living, and its dominance as the way of life in the city, was new in Zimbabwe, although it had long been the norm in many other African cities (Potts 2006b, 288). As a result of the growth of the informal sector, numerous ‘illegal’, unplanned trading sites and increasing levels of street trading in the central business districts of the towns became prevalent. These essential economic activities, driven by urban poverty, were made the target of Operation Murambatsvina so

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<sup>14</sup> In the early years of ESAP the shedding of 11,000 jobs a year in the textile industry was considered serious, by 2004 the total number of jobs left in the textile industry was only 12,000 (Potts 2006a, 541).

that 'order' could be restored. That being said, since the structural conditions determine that the majority of the urban poor make a living informally, restoring 'order' of the sort linked to urban modernity – tidy, formal-sector-dominated – can never be achieved in the cities of very poor countries (Ibid.).

Much of the current research on urban governance tends to present the 'state' as a single unit, operating with a single purpose, in its relationship with other actors such as civil society, the private sector and those it is meant to govern (McCarney, Halfani, Rodriguez, 1995; McCarney, 2003; Stren, 2003; World Bank). In discussions about the various actors involved in governance, it is increasingly being recognized that the state is actually made up of different levels with, in some cases, quite different interests from each other (Swyngedouw, 2006; Kamete, 2007; Brenner 2004; Clark, 2000). Previously in highly centralized states, the idea of a single state with uniform interests may have held true more often, with local governments often simply representing a miniature of the central government's positions. We have seen this play out in many developing countries, particularly in Africa. It is important when considering the concept of governance that we consider all the players involved, including the many actors that make up the 'state'. Oppositional politics can highlight the complexity of the state in its relationship with other actors, and clearly shows that different government institutions and levels of government may have different interests. These differences are all the more clear when different levels of government are represented by different political parties. It is when this happens that we see the potential for tension to increase between the players. In Zimbabwe, the local government originally reflected the policies of the central regime during the colonial era and in the early post-independence years. Even initially after

political parties were introduced at the local level, there were few cases where this scalar relationship within the state was clearly articulated. Post independence, ZANU-PF was able to consolidate its power by either uniting with or harassing any party that attempted to challenge it. However, with the creation of a strong opposition party in the late 1990s, which competed at both the national and local levels and took power at the local level, tensions began to rise between the levels of government.

As the party to liberate Zimbabwe from the colonialists, ZANU-PF was considered by many to be the natural ruling party. There is a strong paradigm of nationalism in Zimbabwe, where political discourse in the form of 'patriotic history' has been appropriated by the ruling party in a quest to maintain its grip on power and resources and to de-legitimize the rights of others (Kriger 2006, 1153-1154). In fact, in a survey conducted in 2006 of urban citizens on the role of opposition parties in urban politics, those over the age of 65 (and typically men) felt there was no need for an opposition after independence at the local level, or at the national level either for that matter (Kamete 2007, 47). As a 63-year-old Chitungwiza businessman put it:

We needed an opposition when we fought evil colonialists. The purpose of there being an opposition was to fight the racists... We do not need them at the national level...so why should we need them in our cities? ...The question is not whether somebody sent them [the MDC], but who sent them?

With the advent of oppositional politics in Zimbabwe, and the subsequent electoral victories by the MDC, there was an increase in tensions in various parts of society: between and within families, between political parties, and most prominently between residents and government and by extension the ruling party (Kamete 2007, 51). These tensions gave rise to electoral battles between ZANU-PF and MDC at both the national and local level. When the ruling party was unable to win the local elections, it turned its

attention to undermining these MDC-led governments, attempting to assert its authority as the natural governing party, and eventually targeted the electorate that had the nerve to elect the opposition in the first place.

Whether tension between levels of government evolves into open conflict or violence depends on a number of factors. For Zimbabwe, the historical context and the spatial development of the city had an impact on a number of policies after independence that laid the groundwork for the conflict to come. As discussed, ZANU-PF's management of the economy was primarily responsible for the rise of the informal sector, both the economy and housing, which in turn put increasing pressure on government to do something about the 'illegality' of the sector and its presence in the city. Additionally, housing policies under the colonial regime and corresponding regulations made it extremely difficult for governments after independence to adequately address the increasing housing shortfall without making changes to these policies. The existing housing regulations, and ensuing difficulties providing cost-effective housing for the poor partly as a result, are also linked to the urban modernity concept discussed above. In fact, governments at both levels eventually turned a blind eye to the sector because the economic situation offered no alternatives for the citizens to turn to for economic sustenance or shelter. Other factors that contributed to Operation Murambatsvina included an extremely autocratic leader, believing himself to be the only one with the 'right' to govern, and who saw his grip on power loosening with the arrival and popularity of the opposition party. ZANU-PF was a liberation party and as such it was necessary to keep a tight rule within the party, and this tradition translated to the nation as a whole. In the face of this challenge from within the urban centres, the central

government attempted to commandeer traditionally local areas of responsibility. The ruling party at the national level claimed that it was stepping in to clean up the cities, when in reality it was consolidating its power.

Moving forward the question is: is it possible to see more events like this one? In short, the answer is quite possibly. The spatial heritage found in Zimbabwe's cities can be found elsewhere on the continent. Countries such as South Africa and Kenya, with their strong white settler communities, have urban spatial structures similar in characteristic: namely the racial (now more economic) divide, high-density townships, lack of housing provision for the poor and growth of the informal sector. Additionally, those countries, among others, are seeing an increase in oppositional politics playing out at the local level leaving open the possibility of seeing similar tensions appear. We have already seen the centre-local disjuncture occur in South Africa in 2006 with the ANC losing control of Cape Town to the small opposition party of the Democratic Alliance and Nairobi, too, has seen the powerful ruling party in Kenya lose its grip on power at the local level.

This disjuncture could be argued to be partly the result of the dual transformations that have been occurring in urban centres since the 1980s: decentralization and democratization (Stren 2003, 6). Whatever the rationale, level and efficacy of decentralization and democratization, these processes are an expression of the acceptance, grudging or otherwise, by ruling elites sharing what was once monopolized 'space' be it political, social or economic (Ibid.). Democratization and decentralization imply increasing the degree of political competition, and participation in political institutions being both the key battlegrounds and the prized trophies (Kamete 2007, 55).

These phenomena are on the rise in developing countries and are touted by donors and multilateral organizations as fundamental to good governance. It is difficult to find a discussion around governance in a developing country without decentralization being put on the agenda. What results from these transformations is a newly enlivened governance space, a space of multiple contestations, disagreements, conflicts and dissensions.

However, sharing of this space is only possible if the ruling elite is willing to accept it. In the case of Zimbabwe, the radically transformed governance space resulted in unprecedented centre-local disjunctures, which in turn resulted in conflict and acrimony as the centre attempted to rectify this critical disconnect. There is the potential to see such centre-local disjuncture play out in other countries as well, especially as this trend is on the rise.

Urbanization around the world is continuing and even more rapidly in developing countries. Africa, traditionally one of the least urbanized continents in the world, is also experiencing this trend, at even higher growth rates than other parts of the world. This trend will see increased pressure on local governments to provide services for the population. The number of poor residents in cities is also increasing. African cities have not leveraged all sources of revenue to help them provide key services to its people. This in turn is giving rise to informal settlements and slums. Linked to urban modernity, nearly all former African colonies have inherited a complex collection of regulations and by-laws pertaining to, for example, building materials, room size, building of new structures on-plot and development of non-residential activities, many of which remain on the books. When one combines the increase in informal settlements with the desire on the part of many African cities to progress and 'develop' into modern urban centres, a

conflict can arise between these two trends. Many governments in African cities could be tempted to further marginalize their people living in informal settlements in the name of modernity. Operation Murambatsvina stands out for its magnitude in comparison to similar state actions in Africa, but it is unlikely that forced evictions and urban clearances will cease anytime soon. There is already a kind of acceptance of urban clearances among African countries, with forced evictions taking place in several other countries (Tibajuka 2005, 78). These evictions and clearances are not a long-term solution to growing urban pressures.

Much of the scholarly literature on urbanization in Africa concerns itself with questions of urban development, including traditional areas of shelter and housing, but increasingly involves the management of urban services and urban institutions, as well as the informalization of many aspects of the urban economy (Stren 1995, 244). However, more work needs to be done on how to work towards finding a uniquely African urban modernity that capitalizes on the unique characteristics of African cities, including its tendency towards informality, instead of trying to fit within a concept of modernity. Further study could focus on how to incorporate informalization into today's African cities, whereby those implicated in the informal sector are given a voice in the governance structures and management of the cities. The link between Operation Murambatsvina and the outcomes of urban poverty are clear, but they also indicate the Operation's ultimate pointlessness since the majority of the urban poor, who must still survive mainly on informal sector activities, are not going anywhere. With the growing pressure of rapid urbanization on the continent, African governments are going to have to contend with many of the myriad challenges that have been discussed in this thesis.

Meanwhile, in the area of governance, some definitions and concepts need to be reconsidered, as the complex relationships that take place in the governance process are even more complex than previously articulated. The 'state' refers to a number of actors that do not always behave as one, always set against competing political actors operating as a unified monolith. If governance is in part about relations between the various actors, if urban politics is in part about competition, conflict and strife, and if democracy is in part about participation, then moving forward in the reconstituted spaces of local governance the assumption that the 'state' is one needs to be revisited (Kamete 2007, 55). To not do so, would limit one's ability to fully understand what is playing out in many urban centres in Africa, and other parts of the world.

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