

# CRISIS! WHAT CRISIS?



THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF THE ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS  
Edited by Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa

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## Foreword

WHAT MAKES THIS ANTHOLOGY attractive is its multidisciplinary approach, using as it does expertise from a wide variety of fields ranging from history, political science, information science and linguistics to media studies and other disciplines. This is as it should be, given the multidimensional nature of the subject under investigation. Such multidisciplinary approaches are to be encouraged if there is to be a nuanced and more grounded understanding of the forces that have shaped and continue to shape the Zimbabwean experience. If we are to understand these forces, we need to document and analyse as many diverse developments and experiences as possible.

*Alois S Mlambo*

## Preface

THIS BOOK EMERGED OUT of a conference on 'Exploring Hidden Dimensions of the Zimbabwe Crises' held at the University of the Witwatersrand in July 2009. The conference was a collaboration between scholars in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of the Witwatersrand and aimed to analyse and unpack the complex and dynamic facets of the Zimbabwean crisis and the various and innovative strategies used by Zimbabweans in Zimbabwe and abroad to negotiate the unfolding crisis. The chapters in this book are critical, scholarly renditions of the Zimbabwean crisis in its multidimensional forms. The chapters are designed to offer fresh ways of understanding the developments that have come to characterise the nation's political image over the past decade.

The conference attracted a number of interesting papers, some of which were published in a special issue of *Communicare: Journal for Communication Sciences in South Africa*, which focused on the mediation of the Zimbabwean crisis. Professor Alois Mlambo, an eminent Zimbabwean social historian, gave the keynote speech. The speech, 'When liberators turn into oppressors: Some thoughts on Zimbabwe's multi-layered crises', encapsulated the main and critical issues pertaining to the Zimbabwean crisis.

We would like to thank Dr Dumisani Moyo, who, together with the editors, organised the conference out of which the papers of this book emerged. We also wish to acknowledge and thank the University of the Witwatersrand's Strategic Planning and Resource Allocation Committee (SPARC) and the Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Professor Tawana Kupe, for financing the workshop.

*Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa*



# Introduction: Perspectives of the Zimbabwean crises

*Sarah Chiumbu and Muchaparara Musemwa*

STARTING IN THE LATE 1990s, Zimbabwe experienced a profound economic and political crisis that almost pushed the country to the edge of total collapse. As a result, the literature on what came to be known as the 'Zimbabwe crisis' has tended to frame the crisis in singular terms. This approach has been inclined to either obfuscate or deliberately disregard the multifaceted nature of the problems and challenges that Zimbabwe has faced in recent years.

Recent work by scholars such as Hammer et al. (2010), Jones (2010), Musoni (2010) and Raftopoulos (2009) has acknowledged the multiple ways in which the crisis manifested itself, namely

- ◆ 'confrontations over the land and property rights;
- ◆ contestations over the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship;
- ◆ the emergence of critical civil society groupings campaigning around trade unions;
- ◆ the human rights and constitutional questions;
- ◆ the restructuring of the state in more authoritarian forms;
- ◆ the broader pan-African and anti-imperialist meanings of the struggles in Zimbabwe;
- ◆ the cultural representations of the crisis in Zimbabwean literature; and
- ◆ the central role of Robert Mugabe' (Raftopoulos 2009).

These mainstream debates have been useful in dissecting and bringing to light the core nature of the crisis. However, they exclude the experiences and resilience of ordinary people in negotiating, responding to and coping with the main political crisis as well as the series of other micro-crises engendered by the former. While literary texts<sup>1</sup> and a thin diasporic scholarship<sup>2</sup> on Zimbabwe have provided insights into the coping strategies of ordinary Zimbabweans during the crises, there remains room for further exploration, exposition and theorisation.

This book thus seeks to move away from the deterministic ways of looking at the 'Zimbabwe crisis' and is anchored on the premise that it is plainly simplistic, if not reductionist, to view and characterise the political situation in Zimbabwe as a mono-crisis. Such an approach simply does not allow enough space to get at the diverse everyday experiences arising out of the different and immediate constituent

crises engendered by the political maelstrom in Zimbabwe roughly between 1998 and 2009. Indeed, the political conflict left in its wake various other crises, the majority of which were crises associated with resource scarcities, namely: water crisis, health crisis, monetary/cash crisis, fuel crisis, energy/electricity crisis, food crisis and the cholera crisis. One of the central propositions of this book is, therefore, that each one of these crises deserves an independent internal analysis and a critical assessment of how it related to the other crises in terms of the time and space in which they occurred and what their individual and collective impact on the citizens of Zimbabwe has been like.

Although not explicitly stated, most of the chapters in the book place their discussion within the structure-agency framework. Most accounts of the Zimbabwe crisis have adopted a structuralist position and have thus underestimated the reflexivity and autonomy of human actions. As Anthony Giddens (1984) points out in his structuration theory, structure and agency are mutually dependent and internally related. His theory offers 'an account of human agency which recognises that human beings are purposive actors, who virtually all the time know what they are doing...and why...' (Giddens 1984: 258). As some of the chapters show, people in Zimbabwe, facing a devastating crisis situation, had the capacity to transform their existence and were not merely passive recipients of institutional or structural arrangements. At the same time, the prevailing structures of political and economic repression constrained and enabled different forms of human agency. In his analysis of coping strategies of Zimbabweans in South Africa, Muzondidya sees migrants from Zimbabwe as 'self-aware actors in charge of their lives and destinies rather than defenceless victims' (Muzondidya 2008: 4). As most chapters show in this volume, although there were constraints on actors from the structure, this does not mean that the actors remained passive; rather the crisis produced new forms of agency and creative coping strategies (for instance Mukwedeya, Duri, Kadenge and Musangi in this volume).

In addition to this introduction, the book consists of twelve chapters. However, the chapters are not presented chronologically due to the cross-cutting nature of the themes of this book, but rather organised thematically. The themes discussed in this book are not exhaustive, but are broad enough to capture the essence of the Zimbabwean crises between 1998 and 2009.

## Many crises, many causes

Scholars have differed on the endemic and historical causes of the Zimbabwe crises, but have converged on the point that it hardly began in 2000, as popular and contemporary literature would seem to suggest. Perhaps Raftopoulos has been

more to the point than most when he states, ‘the origins of our crisis pre-date independence’ for ‘it is analytically impossible to discuss the problems of internal politics, economics and land reforms without an understanding of the colonial inheritance’ Raftopoulos (2004: 1). Therefore, the ‘crisis’ needs to be understood historically, namely within the context of both colonial and post-colonial structural economic and political developments.<sup>3</sup>

Two schools of thought seem to dominate analyses of the Zimbabwe crisis, both couched in Leftist ideologies. This has prompted Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (2007a) to talk of the ‘Two Lefts’ – the so-called ‘internationalist’ and the ‘nationalist’. The former is influenced by the discourse of human rights and democratisation, while the other by nationalistic and neo-colonial ideologies. The so-called ‘Internationalist Left’ adopts a ‘historiographical reading of the Zimbabwe crisis’ (Raftopoulos 2006). This foregrounds the authoritarian politics of the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) as one of the main contributing factors to the Zimbabwe crisis (e.g. Hammer et al. 2003; Raftopoulos & Phimister 2004), while at the same time not overlooking issues of political economy, nation and race. It is argued that at independence in 1980, the government inherited the repressive and violent machinery of the Rhodesian state, which contributed to the emergence of an intolerant post-colonial state. In addition, as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003) states, ZANU-PF adopted the dominant nationalist ideology that guided the liberation struggle, which however became bankrupt and irrelevant in post-independent Zimbabwe. ZANU-PF has maintained this ideology through patronage, cronyism, violence, and lawlessness.

Another historical determinant of the crises facing the country is the inherited political culture of the country, which, to all intents and purposes is undemocratic. Pre-colonial political practice was non-competitive, colonialism was by its nature undemocratic, yet the icons of the nationalist liberation struggle, meant to dislodge brutal colonial repression, ‘generated and institutionalised a culture of fear, conformity and unquestioning support’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003:103). Tim Scarnecchia’s chapter addresses the historical antecedent of this type of fear that the ruling party, using state machinery and extra-parliamentary methods, employed during this period of multiple crises. Specifically, he traces the ZANU-PF government’s aversion to opposition politics and diversity of opinions to the ‘sell-out’ logic in the formation of nationalist politics in the 1960s.<sup>4</sup> Scarnecchia argues that the continued role of the sell-out logic in contemporary Zimbabwe has created a legacy that perpetuated particular styles of political violence. As David Moore and Brian Raftopoulos also indicate in their chapter in this book, the post-colonial Zimbabwean state under ZANU-PF failed to make a complete break with the practice of nationalist authoritarianism leading to diminished expectations of a ‘thick’ and meaningful democracy in the country.

Thus, the crises in Zimbabwe took place in an environment replete with deeply entrenched structural impediments, all of which hindered the development of democracy, however much differently conceived.

Therefore, the ‘unfinished business’ of the colonial past related to land, economy and nation building created fault lines in the post-colonial state. This was manifested in the flawed 1979 Lancaster House Constitution, the *Gukurahundi* massacres in the 1980s, violence in the 1985 and 1990 elections,<sup>5</sup> the fragile, yet enduring Unity Accord forged between ZANU-PF and the Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF-ZAPU) in 1987<sup>6</sup> and the attempts by ZANU-PF to impose a de facto one-party state ideology in the 1990s.

External factors such as the World Bank-imposed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) also planted the seeds of a precipitous economic calamity that befell Zimbabwe in the 2000s. The neo-liberal ESAP removed government subsidies on health, education and food. Prices of goods soared incredibly amidst massive retrenchments (Mlambo 1997). In the late 1990s, the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) organised a series of strikes and work stay aways that the government met with brute force. These strikes, together with high food prices, coalesced into widespread discontent among the populace, leading to the formation of a broad-based social movement, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1998, and immediately thereafter the first strong opposition party in post-colonial Zimbabwe, the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), founded in 1999. There is a general consensus that these developments in the late 1990s were the defining moments of what came to be called the ‘Zimbabwean Crisis’, writ large (see Hammer et al. 2003; Raftopoulos 2009).

The ‘Nationalist Left’ school of thought, drawing on the insights of historical materialism, has taken a more imperialistic analysis of the Zimbabwe crisis. In a number of articles, Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (2007a, 2007b, 2009) locate the Zimbabwe crisis within two historical questions: the national and the agrarian. Their broad argument is that the economic, social and political crises that gripped Zimbabwe in the 2000s are a direct result of imperialism, neo-liberalism and peripheral capitalism that have characterised post-independent Zimbabwe (Moyo & Yeros 2007b). They dismiss scholars who in their analyses of the Zimbabwe crisis have ‘celebrated bourgeois political institutions, whereby civil society, the rule of law, corporate media and parliamentary democracy have been extolled’ (Moyo & Yeros 2007a: 174). They argue that what others have loosely termed ‘the Zimbabwe crisis’ was in reality ‘an interrupted revolution marked by a radical agrarian reform and a radicalized state’...which has rebelled against neo-colonialism (Moyo & Yeros 2007b: 103). What these scholars point out are the tensions and contradictions of this ‘revolution’. ZANU-PF’s policies towards land and economic reforms heralded a struggle against imperialism and neo-liberalism, but the party failed to broaden its

social base and gain popular support, especially from the urban areas. In addition, the passing of repressive laws and the mass evictions that took place under Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order)<sup>7</sup> in May/June 2005, point to the contradictory nature of the radicalised state (Moyo & Yeros 2007a, 2007b). These negative developments, however, should not detract from the long-term nationalistic project that reached its peak with the land reform between 2000 and 2005, and is continuing. Scholars such as Mandaza,<sup>8</sup> Shire<sup>9</sup> (2003) and Mamdani (2008), who situate the Zimbabwe crisis within a class analysis of neo-colonialism, echo these views.

Despite the differing analyses of the Zimbabwe crisis, what remains worth noting, especially in the context of this book, is that over and above the overarching political and economic crisis, there are other crises that emerged, mostly as by-products of the former. In relation to the millions of Zimbabweans who have migrated to other countries, Beacon Mbiba's and Thabisani Ndlovu's chapters on Zimbabweans in the UK and South Africa respectively note that there are several crises facing Zimbabweans pertaining to exclusion from meaningful jobs, racism, social isolation, xenophobia and the breakdown of the family unit. Throughout these myriad crises, Zimbabweans have creatively devised a repertoire of strategies to survive as reflected in a number of chapters in this book.

## Migration and disembedding

In periods of crisis, spatial and physical dislocation in the form of internal and external migration is often pervasive, as people, facing difficult situations, move away from their places of location to seek new livelihoods and other forms of survival. Closely related to migration is the notion of 'disembedding', which, according to Giddens, refers to the 'lifting out' of social relations from local contexts of interaction and the restructuring of these relations across indefinite spans of time and space (Giddens 1990: 21). As noted by Hammer et al., displacement caused by the Zimbabwe crisis was more than people moving from one place to another. It was also a process that

reconfigured Zimbabwean geographies, political economies and social forms [and in the process created] a multitude of new transnational regional links... and economic and political networks [that] stretch across and beyond the region's border. (Hammer et al. 2010: 264)

Within Zimbabwe itself, urban and rural spaces have been reconfigured through accelerated mobility and displacement. Historically, internal migration in many

African countries has normally been from rural to urban. However, economic hardships, unemployment and the government's urban clean-up have created dynamic living conditions where people move back and forth between urban and rural locations as they try out different livelihood options.

By far the most visible manifestation of the Zimbabwe crisis was a wave of outmigration from Zimbabwe. From the beginning of the crisis in Zimbabwe, a large number of Zimbabweans emigrated to Europe, the US, Australia, South Africa, Botswana and many other parts of the world. This saw families and identities fractured in the migrants' homes and new identities forged in the diaspora (see McGregor & Primorac 2010; Pasura 2008). But this, too, engendered new challenges and new modes of survival in the countries that Zimbabweans struggled to call home (see Muzondidya 2008).

While migration is not a new phenomenon in both colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe, there was an increase of migration after 2000 as more and more people sought livelihoods beyond Zimbabwe's political borders. What is noteworthy is that this new pattern of migration included more women and young people than had been the case a few decades before. While there has been a plethora of studies on Zimbabwean new migration patterns (e.g. Crush & Tevera 2010; Gaidzanwa 1999; McGregor 2007; Tevera & Zinyama 2002), there is very little about the lived experiences of Zimbabweans in the host countries. The recently published book edited by JoAnn Macgregor and Ramka Primorac, *Zimbabwe's New Diaspora: Displacement and the Cultural Politics of Survival*, includes a collection of chapters that map out the daily experiences of Zimbabweans in the diaspora, focusing on South Africa and the United Kingdom. The reason for focusing on these two countries is that Zimbabweans have particular embeddedness in these countries shaped by connected histories (McGregor & Primorac 2010). Eric Worby (2010) highlights an important experience of diasporic life when he analyses 'strategies of disconnection' used by Zimbabweans in Johannesburg, who due to shame, a sense of failure and the need to protect their limited assets in South Africa, disconnect from family and friends in Zimbabwe by changing their mobile phone numbers and not sharing their addresses. Worby states:

Zimbabweans in Johannesburg are typically beset by a complex set of material demands and ethical constraints. These may include the demand to send money, food, durable goods and clothing to relatives back home. They may also include the demand to physically host and provide for relatives and friends in unending succession – and often in the most inhospitable circumstances... (Worby 2010: 419)

Certainly, the dilemma brought about by the moral and economic obligations to remit money and goods back home reveals the contradictions and ambivalences that frame the existence of Zimbabweans in the diaspora.

Two chapters in this volume contribute to this emerging diasporic literature. Beacon Mbiba provides an analysis of Zimbabweans living in the UK, focusing on their livelihood strategies. The chapter also compares the coping strategies of Zimbabwean migrants with those of migrants from other African countries. Mbiba argues that Zimbabwean migrants (whom he calls 'global citizens') through the creation of a migration sub-culture of their own 'have penetrated every aspect of British society, challenging stereotypes, traditional perceptions and prejudices, refusing the refugee tag and demanding to be seen as part of the host society'.

Thabisani Ndlovu examines how Zimbabweans in South Africa imagine and re-imagine 'home'. He argues that increased transnational migration has had an ambiguous effect on the concept of Zimbabwe as 'home'. For example, Zimbabwean immigrants of Ndebele ethnicity appropriate South Africa as their 'home' based on shared linguistic and historical ties with the Zulu ethnic group. At the same time, they face the same social isolation and exclusion as their Shona counterparts – xenophobia, lack of jobs, harassment from the police and crime. As Samah Sabra notes,

the rupture between current national dwelling space is enforced through the racism encountered in everyday interactions with privileged nationals and national policies which remind one that they can never truly belong to their current home-*scape*, that regardless of how long they live in this location... they will always have to explain where they are 'from'. (Sabra 2008:93)

The dissonance, contradictions, and ambivalences surrounding home (both temporally and spatially) are underscored in such situations. Juxtaposing his analysis with examples of the constructions and visions of 'home' and 'transnational migration' in Zimbabwean literary texts, Ndlovu argues that 'home' becomes a contested spatial and temporal concept. Ndlovu's study departs from the emerging literature on Zimbabweans' construction and (re)imagination of home. This literature has looked at how new media technologies, specifically the internet, are allowing Zimbabwean diasporic communities to construct notions of identity and home (see Mano & Willems 2010; Moyo 2009; Peel 2010). Ndlovu's intervention provides a re-reading of Zimbabwe's canonical and new literary texts to analyse how Zimbabweans in South Africa imagine home.

In times of hardship, people exploit any available spaces, such as international borders, to eke out a living: for example, they could cross such borders, legally or illicitly to take away goods to sell in a neighbouring country. In his chapter, Fidelis Duri engages with the activities of Zimbabwean migrants who

foray in and out of neighbouring countries for survival. Despite the dangers and a variety of legal and geographical hurdles that this type of migration often presents, it is a viable livelihood option for thousands of migrants who enter neighbouring countries (International Organization for Migration [IOM] 2009). The migrants are involved in smuggling, border jumping, petty theft and prostitution. While there has been considerable research on this in relation to South Africa (e.g. IOM 2009; Mathe 2005; Ndlela 2006), very little of this research has documented experiences of Zimbabweans who cross borders into Mozambique. Duri analyses how young Zimbabweans from the eastern highlands town of Mutare negotiate the border to seek alternative livelihoods, often under very difficult conditions. These people became involved in smuggling daily commodities such as sugar, soap, potatoes, vegetable oil and fresh milk across the Zimbabwe–Mozambique Forbes border post, but later changed their strategies by using informal points, which were often dangerous. Duri argues that a considerable number of people (more than 1 000) took recourse to the practice of smuggling set in motion by earlier generations in order to survive the harsh colonial environment.

## Resource politics and livelihoods

Livelihoods are important to people's material wellbeing and societal identities. When these are threatened in periods of crisis, people adopt various strategies in the pursuit of viable livelihoods in response to constraints occasioned by the crisis. The crises that faced Zimbabwe resulted in dramatic changes in livelihoods across gender, class and age. Part of these changes included shifts from formal to informal employment. With between 80 and 85 per cent of the adult population being unemployed at the height of the crises, the informal economy became the mainstay for the majority of Zimbabweans. Participation in informal activities supplemented household income and functioned as a safety net for most urban and rural people. Indeed, as noted by Jones (2010) and Musoni (2010), the crises in Zimbabwe led to the profound informalisation of Zimbabwe's urban economies, which re-oriented people towards short-term rewards and survival. At the heart of the crises, the informal sector sold and marketed anything from toiletries, motor vehicle spares to basic commodities that were scarce or too expensive on the local market. However, after Operation Murambatsvina in May/June 2005, which targeted informal businesses and demolished vending sites and other informal business premises, the fledgling information economy was further decimated (Jones 2010; Musoni 2010). The operation 'resulted in the loss of livelihoods for many who had previously worked in the informal sector and it is estimated that some 650 000–700 000 people were directly affected through the loss of shelter



and/or livelihoods' (Tibaijuka 2005, cited in Bird & Busse 2007: 8). This forced people to resort to more mobile and flexible forms of informal selling, such as trading in mobile phone prepaid cards. In their chapter in the book, Sarah Chiumbu and Richard Nyamanhindi discuss how unemployed men and women relied on selling mobile phone prepaid cards, not only to negotiate the economic crisis in general but also to overcome spatial, temporal, physical, and structural boundaries created by Operation Murambatsvina. The chapter focuses on the role of the mobile phone prepaid cards in the growing informal economy and places this analysis within emerging literature on social and cultural appropriation of mobile phones in Africa (see De Bruijn et al. 2009). The trading in mobile phone prepaid cards not only created livelihoods for many people but also generated economic networks and social capital between mobile phone prepaid card vendors, mobile phone companies, banks and foreign currency dealers.

Linked to the themes of informal economy and livelihoods is the issue of remittances, which is addressed by Tatenda Mukwedeya in his chapter. The emergence of transnational families has increased instances of remittances into Zimbabwe. It is estimated that there are about 3 million Zimbabweans – a quarter of the total population – in the diaspora. Diasporic migrant remitters ameliorated the economic crisis in Zimbabwe by sending monetary and in-kind transfers to over 50 per cent of urban households (see Bracking & Sachikonye 2006; Mbiba 2005). Mukedeya explores the role that remittances have played in household livelihood strategies in one of Harare's townships, Glen Norah, and points to the gaps in our knowledge about the implications of these remittances for recipients. Employing evidence marshalled from in-depth interviews with recipient household heads in Glen Norah, Mukwedeya's chapter raises issues about the influence of structure and agency on human behavior and argues that households have not been passive victims of the crises. Rather, they have been active agents who adopted a surfeit of strategies to circumvent the impact of the crises.

Struggles for and access to resources are common features in profound crisis situations. The Zimbabwean crises were also characterised by politics over and access to resources, especially around service delivery. In this volume, Muchaparara Musemwa addresses resource politics over water in Harare, and focuses on the politicisation of water that led to Zimbabwe's worst cholera outbreak from August 2008 until the first quarter of 2009. Musemwa argues that the recent set of factors that contributed to the occurrence of disease has profound structural origins dating back to the colonial days. However, this has been exacerbated by 'an interventionist state which, since 2000, violated policy and institutional deliberations over water infrastructure and legitimate democratic forms of urban governance'.

## Mediating the crisis

In times of political turmoil, the media should ideally be an important social resource through which citizens can become more informed of critical issues that affect their lives. Media and other sites of meaning production enable citizens to interpret and make sense of their social reality. However, in Zimbabwe, regulatory and institutional restructuring by the government greatly narrowed down these communications spaces, forcing many citizens to resort to more informal and alternative modes of communicating and expressing their frustrations, joys and despair. In his book *Africa's Media, Democracy and the Politics of Belonging*, Francis Nyamnjoh (2005) views creative use of new media technologies, jokes, cartoons and humour as alternative spaces available to citizens to debate issues of national importance.

Facing serious threats to its legitimacy and hegemony, the government in 2001 embarked on a regulatory restructuring exercise of state media institutions because, as Dumisani Moyo argues in this volume, the media became 'veritable sites of contestation' between the ruling elites and pro-democracy movements. With the NCA's and MDC's growing influence among urban electorates and gradual encroachment into the rural areas, a battle of the control of the minds ensued. ZANU-PF's reaction to this was to tighten its grip on the state media and use it to mobilise the masses to rally behind ZANU-PF and its programmes. In tandem with state media restructuring, the introduction of repressive media laws also restricted discursive spaces in the country. A growing number of academic articles pay attention to strategies used by ZANU-PF to control the media (Chiumbu 2004; Chiumbu & Moyo 2009; Chuma 2007). However, Moyo's chapter examines how the ZANU-PF government survived a massive international media onslaught and how, despite the incessant 'demonisation' in the global media, it drew support from fellow African governments and ordinary citizens, as well as from other foreign nations and individuals. Despite the government's intention to control the flow of information, Zimbabweans did not remain passive, but demonstrated agency and found other means to receive and pass information. There is emerging literature that explores the various ways Zimbabweans produced and accessed alternative information. Moyo (2007) analyses how journalists who left the county in droves in the early 2000s established web-based newspapers and clandestine radio stations that provided alternative views. Zimbabweans in the diaspora also created cyber public spheres where they deliberated on socio-economic and political issues (Mano & Willems 2010; Moyo L 2009; Peel 2010). Citizen journalism also thrived during this period, whereby ordinary people relied on mobile phone short-messages (SMS) and blogs to contribute to public debate in the country (Moyo D 2009).

What remains under-researched has been the role of language and humour in both ‘mediating’ and negotiating the crisis. Wendy Willems has done one of the few studies on jokes. Looking at comic strips (Willems 2008) and SMS jokes (Willems 2010), she posits that the sharing of jokes and naming and re-naming have been powerful strategies used by Zimbabweans to comment upon political affairs, often without any dire consequences.

Language and humour can be perceived to be forms of ‘media’ that help people cope with crisis situations. A chapter by Maxwell Kadenge analyses how Zimbabweans relied on linguistic resources to negotiate the crisis. He focuses on the chiShona language and analyses how new chiShona words emerged to capture the various aspects of the Zimbabwean political and socio-economic crisis. The chapter argues that one of the reasons why people created indirect or metaphorical language was to be able to talk in safety about their everyday activities, many of which were illegal. As the crises deepened, these metaphorical expressions became widespread and used by almost everyone in society. Kadenge argues that these metaphors became coping strategies used by people to deal with the pain and confusion that they faced. Jokes and humour also acted as other forms of coping strategies. Jennifer Musangi discusses the emergence of humour found on various internet sites dedicated to mocking the political elites in Zimbabwe. She argues that this cyber-humour or e-humour had the potential of ameliorating the mundane existence of the people of Zimbabwe. Thus, language and humour created parallel discourses that contributed to some form of political subversion.

Grace Musila and Dumisani Moyo bring another dimension to the Zimbabwean political and economic crises – the representation of President Mugabe in the South African media. While the South African government under former President Thabo Mbeki practised so-called ‘quiet diplomacy’ for the major duration of the crises, the media took a tough and anti-Mugabe stance. In their chapter, Musila and Moyo, drawing on critical discourse analysis, analyse the representation of Mugabe in South African press cartoons. They argue that the representation of Mugabe in South Africa’s press became ‘shorthand for explaining the Zimbabwe crisis – encapsulating its causes, manifestations and ramifications all in one. At the same time, these images of Mugabe serve to fulfil a colonial fantasy about the destructive propensity of a black African leadership’.

Lastly, the title of the book reflects a sense of the denial of the existence of these crises (and their profound embeddedness in almost every facet of Zimbabwean society) by the Zimbabwean President and his South African counterpart when asked what they made of the unfolding conflict after the March and June 2008 general elections. Their separate but similar responses are a pointer to what went awfully wrong on the political, economic and social landscape as the chapters in the book attempt to indicate.

## Conclusion

Together, the chapters in this book present new insights into the multi-dimensionality of the Zimbabwean crises and some of the negotiation strategies adopted by its people. The period between 2000 and 2008 will go down in history as the toughest one for most ordinary people in post-independence Zimbabwe. This book has brought a slice of the quotidian existence of most people during this period to the research table. Of course, more exploratory and explanatory research needs to be done.

## Notes

- 1 Some of these literary texts are *Uncertainty of Hope* (2006) by Valerie Tagwira; *Harare North* (2009) by Brian Chikwava and *An Elegy for Easterly* (2009) by Petina Gappah.
- 2 For example, see MacGregor (2007) and Mbiba (2005).
- 3 For a full analysis of this, see Hammer and Raftopolous (2003).
- 4 Sell-outs were people who were critical thinkers and who pointed out some gaps that the liberation movement needed to fill.
- 5 The details of the violence in these elections is encapsulated by Makumbe and Compagnon (2000) and Moyo (1992).
- 6 The Unity Accord was not a product of broad-based consensus that included the people's voice. The agreement was confined to the top male leadership of ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU.
- 7 Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order) was implemented by the Government in May/June 2005 ostensibly to create order in urban spaces. The operation destroyed homes, business premises and vending sites in all Zimbabwean urban spaces.
- 8 Mandaza I (2002), The Zimbabwean crisis: Myths and realities, *The Sunday Mirror*, 22 September 2002.
- 9 Shire G (2003), Sinner or sinned, *African Business*, April 2003.

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## Acronyms and abbreviations

AIPPA	Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act
ANC	African National Congress
BACOSSI	Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention
BBC	British Bottom Cleaners
BSA	Broadcasting Services Act
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CWI	Cohen and Wood International
DRC	Democratic Republic of Congo
ESAP	Economic Structural Adjustment Programme
GNU	Government of National Unity
GPA	Global Political Agreement
ICFTU	International Confederation of Trade Unions
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRIN	Integrated Regional Information Networks
MDC	Movement for Democratic Change
MDC-M	Movement for Democratic Change Mutambara
MDC-T	Movement for Democratic Change Tsvangirai
MIC	Media Information Commission
NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NDP	National Democratic Party
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
PF-ZAPU	Patriotic Front Zimbabwe African People's Union
PTC	Postal and Telecommunications Corporation
RBZ	Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe
RENAMO	Mozambique National Resistance (Resistência Nacional Moçambicana)
RICU	Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers Union
RTGS	Real Time Gross Settlement
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SAMP	Southern African Migration Programme
SD	Source Domain



SIRDC	Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre
SRANC	Southern Rhodesian African National Congress
SRTUC	Southern Rhodesia Trade Union Congress
TD	Target Domain
TUC	Trade Union Congress
ZANLA	Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZANU-PF	Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union
ZBC	Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation
ZCTU	Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions
ZLHR	Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights
ZNLWVA	Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans' Association
ZRP	Zimbabwe Republic Police



# RESOURCE POLITICS AND LIVELIHOODS





## Perpetuating colonial legacies: The post-colonial state, water crises and the outbreak of disease in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1980–2009

*Muchaparara Musemwa*

IN HIS INAUGURAL LECTURE, 'Can we escape the past, eh? Development and history in Mozambique and Zimbabwe', presented at the University of Zimbabwe on 15 October 1998, the late Professor of Zimbabwean history, David N Beach, bemoaned the absence of long-term planning in both colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe and dramatically demonstrated the continuum between these two epochs this way: 'Unfortunately, when it comes to long-term planning *Homo sapiens zimbabweansis* is not significantly different from *H. sapiens rhodesiensis*. Indeed the two are far more alike than many would care to concede' (Beach 1999: 14).

Professor Beach aptly noted that nowhere was this clearer than in the siting of what was then Salisbury (hereafter called Harare), the capital city of Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), by the colonial state. He reported:

Even urban planning was atrociously bad. Leaving aside the lack of thinking that left only a 45° segment of Salisbury for the African population; the very siting of the city was and is incompetent. It is well known that in 1890 the site was chosen at very short notice but what is not generally known is that in 1891 the Company (British South Africa Company [sic]) did think of resisting it, considering Norton, Mvurwi, Darwendale and even Rusape. The proposal to move the town was rejected, allegedly because the other sites were a few metres lower and thus less healthy, but actually because six brick buildings had already been put up, and the property developers did not want to lose their investments. Consequently, the town remained where the city is, upstream of its main water supply, and thus we are condemned to drink our own recycled waste! (Beach 1999: 14)

Regrettably, neither Professor Beach (who died on 15 February 1999) nor those who for capitalist considerations had refused to budge when the relocation of the city was first mooted, lived to witness one of the devastating consequences of the

lack of long-term planning and foresight. This was the cholera outbreak in Harare towards the end of 2008, which spilled into the first quarter of 2009. In his lecture, Professor Beach stressed that as the population in Zimbabwean cities, such as Harare, was potentially increasing ‘at a rate faster than the national average, they are going to run short of water relatively quickly’ (Beach 1999: 16). He was right on the mark but hardly foresaw the consequent outbreak of a virulent water-borne disease that would decimate over 4 000 mostly poor township people within a few months. As a seasoned historian, the professor was acutely aware of the historical link between Harare’s post-colonial water shortages and sanitation problems and the monumental errors of judgement by early colonial planners. No scholar to date has traced the historical link between the contemporary water shortages, the outbreak of disease and the structural decisions pertaining to water provision, and the siting of water infrastructure at the initial moment of urbanisation in Harare.

The purpose of this chapter is to clarify this historical connection and simultaneously remind readers of the importance of history in explaining contemporary events, even if they may seem apocalyptic at that moment. In short, it is meant to emphasise that history matters. This discussion takes a cue from Tom McCaskie’s analysis of ‘water wars’ in Kumasi, Ghana, in which he has rightly asserted that ‘historical perspective reveals that current circumstances have deep structural roots’ (McCaskie 2009: 135). Indeed, as in Kumasi’s case, the water crises that residents of Harare have experienced for over two decades are the result of an assemblage of reasons that have persisted since the colonial era and for most of the post-colonial era in Zimbabwe. This reached such a critical point that the outbreak of disease became a veritable manifestation of how the situation had gone out of control. It is therefore a history that needs to be documented if we are to comprehend the colonial and post-colonial origins of the recent water and sanitation emergency.

Urban water scarcity, manufactured and/or a result of natural causes, is a developing transnational phenomenon. One only has to look at the existing literature on cities and ‘mega cities’ of the global South now confronted by an ever-growing crisis precipitated by the lack of basic amenities such as water, housing and transportation. Emblematic of these challenges are the cities of Lagos (Nigeria), Nairobi (Kenya), Kumasi (Ghana), Mumbai (India), Cairo (Egypt) and Lima (Peru), amongst others. Therefore, despite its historical specificity, Harare’s recent water crisis is part of a much broader continental and global trajectory (Whiteford 2005). In this predicament, Zimbabwe is far from exceptional as there are many prologues to the African crisis.

What characterises this reverberation among cities of the global South has been pertinently captured by McCaskie who notes that: ‘The present crises in Kumasi’s water supply are an instance of a generic urban phenomenon in contemporary West Africa that is set to get worse’ (McCaskie 2009: 135). He continues, ‘Galloping urbanism means unprecedented demand on resources and the agencies

and mechanisms that provide them. The consequence is infrastructural overstretch, dysfunction or collapse. Fundamental to this suite of faltering amenities is a potable water supply' (McCaskie 2009: 136). This 'generic urban phenomenon' lies at the heart of the degeneration of the majority of once promising cities and it is a theme that runs like a continuous thread in most of the cities mentioned earlier.

Elsewhere, studies by Gandy (2006a, 2006b, 2008) on the consequences of lack of direct access to municipal water services in Lagos and Mumbai, and by Chaplin (1999) on India's politics of urban sanitation have similar resonance with what has happened in Harare. For example, Chaplin posits that 'totally inadequate sanitation and water systems have turned rivers into sewers and have contaminated ground water supplies' (Chaplin 1999:146). In much the same way, Nilsson and Nyanchaga lament that 'although Kenya still fares well in comparison with other sub-Saharan African countries', urban water services in Nairobi and other towns 'have since deteriorated considerably' as the post-colonial period of 'water politics' has been characterised by the state's failure to explore alternatives to enlarging services in tandem with urban growth (Nilsson & Nyanchaga 2008: 133–158).

What then can one make of the convoluted water supply and access conditions in many of the cities in the global South? One thing is clear, and that is that they all point to the mounting risk and related social and political conflicts in the domain of water resources. As Swyngedouw (2004) correctly puts it, the social risk coupled with increasing water problems are expressions of broader socio-ecological and political-ecological transformations. Whilst the majority of these studies focus on contemporary water and sanitation crises, they all call for a 'historical perspective' because of the way it illuminates the colonial and post-colonial basis of these current crises (McCaskie 2009). This chapter seeks to explore this historical nuance in order to enrich and extend the current discourse on the water and sanitation crisis in Harare.

The chapter begins by examining the historical background to the growth and expansion of Harare and its water infrastructure. It seeks to demonstrate how the colonial state's provision of water to the inhabitants of the city was premised on a racial and spatial segregationist discourse and praxis, and show how the colonial racial and structural patterns of water provision to white suburbia and African townships essentially remained unchanged in post-colonial Harare. The article moves on to discuss the contemporary intricacies of Harare's water politics, running the whole gamut from the planners' poor judgement in locating colonial Harare's water reservoirs in a geographically unsuitable area, the decaying technological infrastructure, to the political intrusion of the state in Harare's municipal domain resulting in the institutional marginalisation of municipal governance and seizure of the latter's control over water. The chapter ends with a discussion on the cholera

outbreak as the culminating point of the water crisis and an examination of the various responses to the water-borne disease.

## The origins of Harare and the mobilisation of its water supplies

Harare was founded on 12 September 1890 by Cecil Rhodes' British South Africa Company (BSAC).<sup>1</sup> Its first settlers constituted the so-called Pioneer Column, which had marched from South Africa as part of Rhodes' endeavour to find the 'Second Rand' in Mashonaland and thus extend his imperial and capitalist predilections. Staking their hopes on the possibility that a greater Witwatersrand lay under the sub-soil of Mashonaland, the township of Harare was initially planned for the habitation of 25 000 people with a 'commonage' of more than 20 000 acres encircling it (Yoshikuni 2007). However, it soon became clear that this was not a gold-bearing country and that 'its proper economic basis must after all be farming' (Keppel-Jones 1983: 363). In the wake of this realisation, Harare could not be developed much further so that by 1908 the white settlement looked 'more like a hamlet than a town', home to just about 2 000 settlers and a total of 420 sparsely built houses, shops, and buildings (Yoshikuni 2007: 10–11).

Following a series of brutal suppressions of African uprisings and early economic downturns, Harare started to shed its overtly militaristic outlook and increasingly assumed 'the more genteel trappings of a white middle-class paradise' (Seirlis 2005: 413). As part of the broader 'colonial civilizing mission' of the early settlers, Harare – the 'purportedly empty but hostile and wild environment' – was to be transformed into one huge garden within which 'private gardens' would emerge as 'showcases of white cultured-ness' (Seirlis 2005). From early on, therefore, Harare was envisioned to become more than just a 'commercial and administrative centre' but also 'a countrified suburbia where whites could live in the manner of landed gentry on mini-estates complete with rose gardens and servants' (Seirlis 2005: 414).

### Early attempts at procuring reliable water supplies

The central concern in the creation of this 'island(s) of white', as Kennedy (1987) once called it, was the procurement of reliable water supplies. The first site – Mount Hampden – which the Pioneer Column had chosen as its destination and place of settlement in 1890 – was discounted primarily because of a dearth of dependable water supplies. The subsequent relocation to the Kopje area was dictated by the availability of water from the Mukuvisi River, sufficient, at least at the time, to support the requirements of the envisaged big settlement (Tomlinson & Wurzel



1977; Zinyama 1993). As in many other 19th-century cities, the settlers sourced their potable water from springs, rooftops, and from 1891 onwards, individual wells and boreholes (Rakodi 1995). For all its potential promise of being endowed with reliable water resources, an amalgam of factors such as climate (averaging 2 900 hours of sunshine annually), relief, geology and location on the central watershed, the long dry season characterised by about eight months per year of minimum stream-flow and the seasonal high rates of evapo-transpiration all connived against Harare's ability to have a reliable access to water as the city expanded (Davies 1986). For example, Tomlinson and Wurzel (1977) bemoaned the absence of sedimentary formations that could provide large aquifers in the vicinity of Harare. The climatic situation of Harare necessitated the need to make available season-to-season storage owing to the inadequacy of its groundwater supplies. From the outset, therefore, the difficulty of acquiring sufficient supplies persisted in the course of Harare's colonial and post-colonial history.

A mounting interest in health and sanitation stimulated municipal planning and public works in Harare. By 1902, the continued reliance on groundwater for the fledgling city had begun to receive expert and official censure, especially on grounds of health. As the town engineer of the Municipality of Harare at that time stated: 'The growth of this city necessitates a pure water supply, for the practice of well sinking in close proximity to dwellings involves great risk to the health of the community.'<sup>2</sup>

Apart from the health concerns, it had equally dawned on the municipal authorities that the centrality of water to 'municipal improvements' would very much depend on 'a water supply which can be drawn from the mains at distances of about 150 yards'.<sup>3</sup> Once again, the town engineer wasted no time in recognising the sanitary importance of water by extolling the multiple virtues of a modern water supply system. These ranged from landscaping, fire extinguishing, public utility and the convenience of easy access to water:

It would be useless to undertake extensive macadamising<sup>4</sup> of our streets, unless an abundant water supply is available. The storm water drainage works will also be more economically constructed if water is obtainable from street mains. Tree-planting can scarcely be undertaken with success unless the young plants are plentifully watered; and for our Public Gardens I propose to fix hydrants at suitable places, to which horses can be attached. This will economise labour in drawing water from the Garden wells, and allow the Curator to extend gardening operations. The greatest gain, however, will be a high-pressure water supply for fire extinction...I think I have shown how serious would be the consequences, and how useless it would be to rely on wells in such an instance; yet a fire in one of our larger

stores might require a greater supply for its extinction. Apart from the public advantages of a water supply, the comfort and convenience of an abundant supply of clear filtered water appeals to all citizens. Well water has at present to be laboriously raised, and is supplied in limited quantities. When water services are laid on to the bathroom and kitchen, and when standpipes are erected in the garden and stables, the consumption will certainly increase, but it will not cost the average householder so much as sinking a well, and native labour will be reduced.<sup>5</sup>

But, for a town that was yet to recover from the shattering reality that its survival lay elsewhere than in the imagined mineral riches of Mashonaland, the talk of developing a sustainable water scheme for this ‘retarded and bucolic settlement’ remained a pipe-dream for nearly two decades. The impetus for water development finally came about 18 years after the establishment of Southern Rhodesia’s capital city. This was because

by 1908 the economy was experiencing the first major expansive phase in its history, owing especially to the restructuring of the gold-mining industry, the shift of government policy towards ‘practical colonisation’, the extension of roads and railways which linked the land-locked colony to world markets, and the commencement of land settlement and settler agriculture. (Yoshikuni 2007: 11)

It was, specifically, during the period 1907–1911 that Harare underwent what Yoshikuni termed a ‘municipal revolution’ which was marked by a host of civic developments – ‘perhaps the most outstanding of which was the introduction in 1913 of long-awaited piped water and electricity supplies’ (Yoshikuni, 2007: 11). Another spin-off from the thriving economy and Harare’s prosperity that would eventually have a significant bearing on how water would be distributed and who would get what percentage, was the swift incorporation of both European immigrants and African migrants, ‘with the result that the population had more than doubled between 1907 and 1911, with the European population reaching 3 479, the African 6 400, the Asian and Coloured 339’ (Yoshikuni 2007: 11). Such population growth would naturally provide a catalyst for innovative ways to increase efficient water provision.

## The first modern municipal water schemes in Harare

The first modern municipal water scheme in Harare, the Cleveland Dam, was constructed to the east of Harare on the headwaters of the Mukuvisi River with financial assistance ‘raised largely from the BSA Company, who provided a loan

of £100 000 to be repaid over 20 years'. The dam was completed in 1913 and had a storage capacity of 200 million gallons (Southern Rhodesia 1951: 366). Capturing the mood of the moment at that time, Tanser noted that 'Salisbury was at last able to congratulate itself that it had overcome its water difficulties' (Tanser 1974: 254–255). The Cleveland waterworks, undoubtedly, transformed the way water was abstracted, distributed, used and paid for. According to Tanser, 'within three months of the opening, 160 houses had been connected to the system and the monthly consumption, at the time one and a third million gallons, began to rise steadily' Tanser (1974: 254). However, the 'earth and rubble dam', soon became a disappointment. The dam had been built on a cheap and poor site so that in 1923 it eventually breached (Rakodi 1995: 58). In the dry season, the Cleveland Dam failed to adequately meet Harare's requirements especially during periods of recurrent droughts, even when the city's average rate of consumption was between 0.2 and 0.3 million gallons per day (mgd) (Johnson 1956).

This situation was not helped by persistent water shortages particularly those caused by a series of droughts in 1917–1918, 1923–1925 and 1928–1929. This necessitated the construction of a second reservoir, the Prince Edward Dam, on the Manyame River in 1928. The dam was commissioned in 1930 with an estimated storage capacity of 600 million gallons (Southern Rhodesia 1951: 366). While the daily yield of the Cleveland Dam was 0.5 mgd, Prince Edward yielded 3.0 mgd (Johnson 1956). However, this increase in water did not satisfy the requirements of the city and groundwater continued to be exploited for use, especially after the Second World War.

The swift increase in population in the aftermath of the war and recurrent poor rainy seasons, particularly the acute droughts of 1947 and 1953, left Harare with a critical water shortage that resulted in the introduction of a water rationing scheme in April 1947. The water shortage continued intermittently until November 1953 when a new dam was commissioned. Notwithstanding these setbacks, residential development continued apace in those sections of the city where groundwater was available, but was arrested in other areas.

Population increase saw the establishment, in the early post-war years, of white suburbs such as Waterfalls and Hatfield, both located to the south of the city, and Malvern and Greendale to the east joining Highlands, with populations of at least 2 000 by 1951. By 1956, Mabelreign, which surfaced thanks to state funding, had grown to become one of the largest of the suburbs (Kay & Cole 1977). Figure 1.1 shows the location of these and other Harare suburbs.

In keeping with the modernisation of the city, all these schemes required a reticulated water supply but Harare could not provide water as it was undergoing a water shortage problem. The result was that a number of house-owners were compelled to drill boreholes for their water (Tomlinson & Wurzel 1977). By the end of the 1940s, it was apparent that there was a need for a lasting solution to the

FIGURE 1.1 Map showing Harare's suburbs

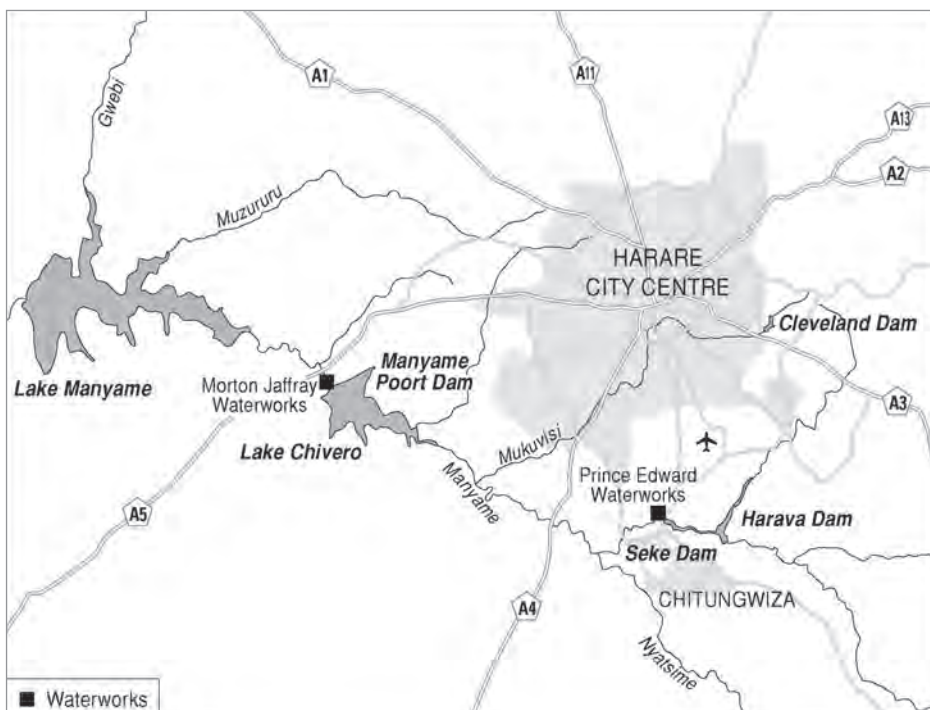


Source: Redrawn from <http://www.heavenonearth.co.zw>. Accessed on 19 and 20 March 2012

water situation. Hence, Lake McIlwaine with a capacity of 55 000 million gallons was built on the Hunyani River. The dam was a joint venture between the Harare Municipality and the Southern Rhodesia Government who both agreed to share the costs of £1.3 million. The municipality agreed to buy half of the yield of the lake and the government reserved the other 50 per cent for irrigation and industrial growth in areas such as Norton, and 'other purposes as the need arises' (Johnson 1956).

Once linked to the city's distribution infrastructure, the new scheme increased the peak delivery capacity to 13 mgd. In December 1948, the maximum daily consumption was 3.45 million gallons. This increased to 3.53 mgd in April 1950, to 4.40 mgd in March 1951 and to 5.75 mgd by June 1953. The swift increase in water consumption rates, which corresponded with the rising population of Harare,

FIGURE 1.2 Map showing Harare's dams and waterworks



Source: Redrawn from <http://maps.google.co.za> and other general info from the internet. Accessed on 19 and 20 March 2012

gave rise to the need for consolidation and expansion of the water infrastructure, resulting in the introduction of the Water Augmentation Scheme (was) in 1955. The was entailed the construction of new waterworks for the purification and pumping of water, and a new main stretching from Hunyani Poort into the city, all estimated at a cost of £1.58 million (Johnson 1956: 58). This resulted in the construction of the Morton Jaffray purification works, thus ensuring clean water supplies to the city's white residents. The areas just outside Harare, whose water supplies had hitherto been supplied by different town management boards, also benefited from these new waterworks. Before 1954, these boards relied on groundwater and small dams. However, from 1954 their water reticulation systems were connected to the new Harare waterworks. The expanded new water supplies became a source for municipal revenue as the city of Harare levied water tariffs to consumers (domestic/private, business, industrial and sports clubs) as well as municipal departments (Johnson 1956: 57). Until the mid-1970s, Lake McIlwaine and its related treatment works fulfilled about 95 per cent of Harare's water requirements. The increase in demand led to the building of another dam, the Manyame (Darwendale) Dam below

Lake Chivero, which was filled in 1976 and had a capacity of 2½ times the volume of the latter (Rakodi 1995). Figure 1.2 shows the location of these and other dams and waterworks around Harare.

## The early development of white suburbs in Harare

With water quantity and its efficient reticulation guaranteed, Harare's suburbia grew in both size and scenic beauty, as was well captured in this description:

The suburbs of the sun-drenched capital city of Salisbury...would not have looked out of place in Southern California: homes with swimming pools, vast and sparkling green lawns, and a retinue of servants were common. There were lush gardens that would not have seemed out of place in England; and unlike other parts of Africa, electricity was not irregular. (Horne 2001: 4)

The discussion about water development and how it aided the development of white suburbia in Harare was, of course, just one segment of a complex urban portrait, for most of the water as well as the suburbs were exclusively reserved for the white residents of the city. The establishment and growth of colonial Harare was linked to imported urban technologies indistinguishable from those that were modifying the towns of the West from the mid-19th century onwards. As Headrick has noted, the period 1850–1940 was 'the greatest era of city building the Western world had ever experienced' (Headrick 1988: 146). It was also a period in which social elites and urban planners agreed on the necessity to influence the growth of cities and to make them livable and exquisite. As such, 'the modernisation of colonial cities was therefore a transfer to the tropics of Western aesthetics as well as technology and economics' (Headrick 1988: 146). In ways that also mirror the growth of Gandy's 'bacteriological city', mounting concerns about sanitation among white ratepayers in Harare induced improvements in water supply. This anxiety about hygiene triggered off the motive for segregation and the new technologies of water supply and sewage disposal supplied the means to that end. However, as these technologies tended to be expensive they remained the preserve of the well-to-do and only filtered downwards to the less privileged classes gradually.

## Colonial state policy and the development of African townships in Harare

Assured of a modern water infrastructure, Harare was, by 1907, well on its way to becoming a bourgeois white city whose growth was marked by two entwined aspects. First, the city was rapidly expanding as a notable administrative and commercial hub providing the needs of an embryonic export-oriented capitalist economic enterprise. And second, it was fast consolidating itself as a living place where people went about ordering their modes of existence (Yoshikuni 2007). As Yoshikuni correctly observed, this twofold development process, involving the 'production process as well as the consumption process, the workplace as well as living space, affected populations and neighbourhoods in complex ways' (Yoshikuni 2007: 31). It is to one of these ways that this discussion now turns.

### Early urban racial problems

As Harare gradually shed its bucolic outlook and increasingly assumed a more urban character, it began to confront the first set of urban racial problems. As indicated previously, Harare was also home to Africans with a population double that of the white settlers (between 1907 and 1911, the European population had reached 3 479, the African 6 400, the Asian and Coloured 339). Their overwhelming presence engendered 'crosscurrents of conflict' both at work and in places of habitation.

The white upper and middle classes, who had made Harare a haven and had only begun to have the benefit of the salubrious urban resources and prospects, started to clamour for protection from the municipal and state authorities and requested them to impose stringent segregation controls. These concerns of the white bourgeoisie led to the evolution of an urban location policy in Harare from the turn of the 19th century. Thus began a brutally interventionist colonial state policy in terms of surveillance, rudimentary and disjointed in terms of planning and the development of a self-sustaining urban African community. Through a substantial social engineering programme and a set of social control regulations, the colonial state sought to produce a cheap African labour pool to secure the social and economic welfare of white settler society. Colonial strategic and commercial imperatives spawned the African migrant labour system in Southern Rhodesia, as was the case elsewhere in southern Africa (see, for example, Bonner 1995: 115–129).

By ensuring the migrant labour population continued to be 'temporary', and through supplying inferior housing, limited access to water and health sanitation services while generally ignoring environmentally depressed conditions, the colonial state hoped to reduce the costs of maintaining a growing African

urban population. The institutionalisation of labour migration was based on the misplaced assumption that African labour was always available and cheap and that the labourers' stay was transitory as they had their cultural and geographical roots firmly anchored in their rural homes. Consequently, the African 'location' or 'township' (as it later became widely known) became the chief institutional marker of racial and residential segregation. The establishment of the first African 'native location', named Harare (called Mbare today), south of the Kopje in October 1907 by the town council of Salisbury was rationalised in terms of rising 'urban nuisances' such as the Black Peril (see McCulloch 2000) and the public health problem purportedly caused by the presence of Africans in the city.

The tightening of segregation to protect the emerging white sanctuary had been preceded by statutory controls on Africans coming to the city from the rural areas. The Ordinances of 1892 and the Natives Regulation Ordinance of 1901 all controlled African movements and imposed curfews. The Native Urban Locations Ordinance (No. 4 of 1906) empowered the administrator to establish locations and ensure that their daily governance fell within the remit of the Harare municipality. Further attempts at controlling African influx into the city found more legislative expression in the introduction of the Land Apportionment Act (No. 30 of 1930) which inhibited Africans from possessing land categorised as European land. Another equally restrictive law, the Native (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act (No. 6 of 1946) (NUAARA) was passed in order to 'to clean up the town' and confined Africans to urban areas assigned to them, other than domestic workers who stayed at their places of work (Wild 1991: 177–190). The NUAARA limited access to accommodation to Africans employed in the towns. This legislation therefore, sought to control the influx of Africans through employment and restrictive access to housing. In addition, central and local governments checked African rates of migration by building compounds designed exclusively for male occupation in order to stem the migration of entire families from the countryside (Cumming 1993).

These restrictions were slightly relaxed during the era of the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland (1953–1963) when there was a less repressive political atmosphere in Southern Rhodesia. At the same time the demands of manufacturing for a more stable and permanent workforce increasingly led to the introduction of housing for married people (Raftopoulos & Yoshikuni 1999). Even the Land Apportionment Act was amended in 1961 to give space to a small number of middle-income Africans to gain freehold tenure of urban land.

However, this relaxation was short-lived as the earlier controls on African ownership of land within the urban landscape were further reinforced, resulting in the Land Tenure Act (No. 55 of 1969). This act partitioned Rhodesia into European, African and national lands. All urban centres were conveniently made to fall under



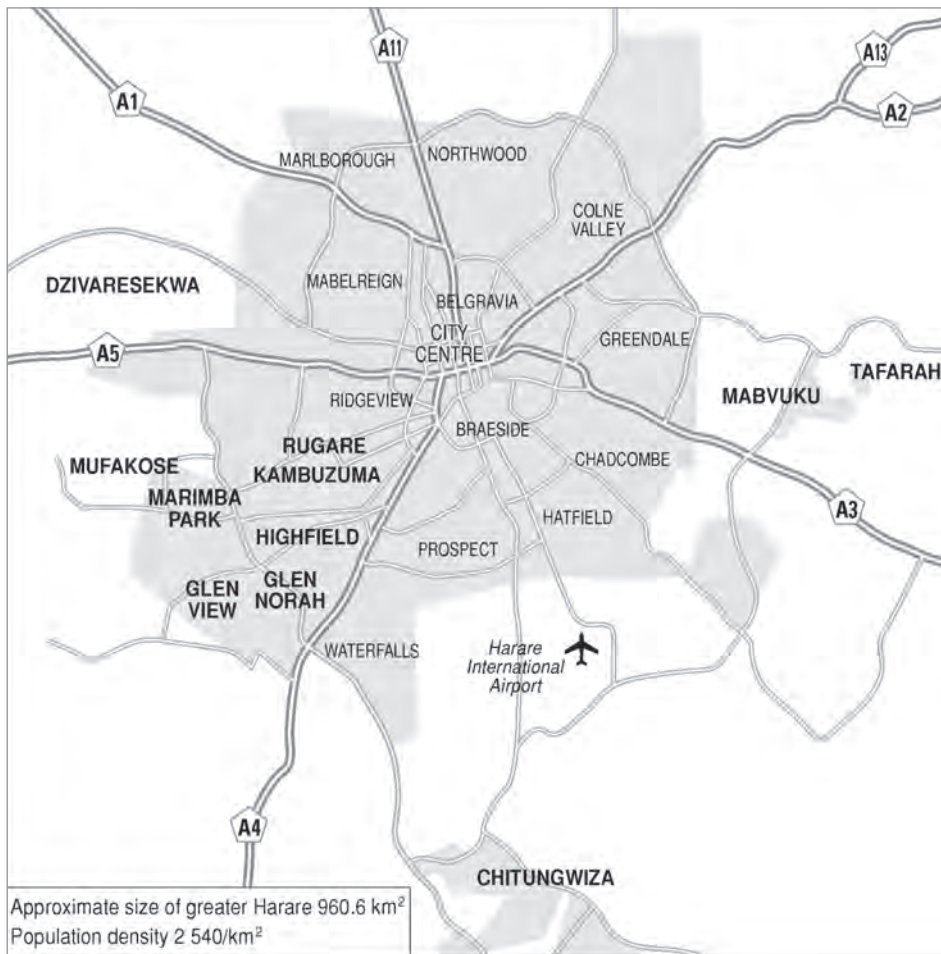
the European zones. Meanwhile, the African townships within the urban areas were specifically defined as spaces for the residence of African people only. This meant that Africans could not occupy lands outside these spaces in the urban centres except if they resided at their places of employment, for example, as domestic workers in the white suburbs (Cumming 1993). However, it needs to be pointed out that Africans were not hapless victims of these tight controls on their movements and freedom to own even a semblance of property and they often engaged in various ways to challenge the racial purity that whites sought to maintain and to penetrate what Barnes called 'virgin territory' (Barnes 2002). Indeed, Harare and other towns in Zimbabwe, as elsewhere, were not neutral ground. They were 'sites of struggle', as people devised alternative discourses that shaped urban realities and identities, in part as a form of resistance against the state or other powerful individuals (Howard 2003: 37; Raftopoulos & Yoshikuni 1999).

### The growth of Zimbabwe's African townships from the 1950s to 1980

It was against this labyrinth of restrictive legislation that the majority of colonial Zimbabwe's African townships mushroomed from the 1950s until 1980. The Harare location was conveniently near the city centre; however, in order to avert disease contagion as well as to preserve cultural distinction and social control, subsequent African townships were typically located 'at some considerable distance from the major workplaces and from the facilities of the city centre' (Kay & Cole 1977: 42).

Highfield African township, built in 1935, was the first township to be provided by the central state. It was during the decade of the 1950s that design plans were completed for the African townships (Rakodi 1995). The increased number of Africans employed, particularly in the manufacturing sector in Harare after the Second World War era, necessitated the provision of housing. In fact, between 1937 and 1949, Harare's estimated population had exponentially risen from 19 960 in 1937 to 59 358 in 1949. This figure was to rise again by nearly 90 per cent within five years to 90 885 in early 1955 (Barnes and Win 1992: 5). The 1962 census put the number of Africans in Harare at 215 810. At the 1969 census it had increased to 280 090 (Kay & Cole 1977). With such demographic increases over time, townships for Africans were therefore successively built. These included Mabvuku in 1952 (14 km east of Harare), Mufakose in 1959, Rugare in the mid-1950s, Dzivaresekwa in 1961 (12 km from the city centre), Marimba Park in 1961 (the only small low-density high-income scheme for Africans), Kambuzuma in 1964, Tafara in 1967 (17 km east of Harare), Glen Norah in 1971 and Glen View in 1979 (Zinyama 1993: 23). Continuing the segregationist trend, the state established the township of Chitungwiza in 1976 in a location far out of the sight of the white city of Harare – 23 km south of the capital city and 18 km from the closest major industrial area.

FIGURE 1.3 Map showing townships in and around Harare



Source: Redrawn from <http://www.heavenonearth.co.zw> plus other general info from the internet. Accessed on 19 and 20 March 2012

Chitungwiza, which was originally conceived as a big dormitory township for Harare before independence, with an official population of 172 000, lacked adequate civic amenities and commercial facilities (Underwood 1987). Figure 1.3 shows the location of these and other townships in and around Harare.

There was a marked difference in outlook and living conditions between Harare's white suburbia and the African townships. European homes 'generally accompanied by spacious living conditions' contrasted sharply with the 'small box-like dwellings set within individual plots, with a consequent lack of sizable open spaces for informal recreation, amenity and cultivation' (Kay & Cole 1977: 49).

These townships grew to become mere 'semi-autonomous appendage(s)' to the city of Harare rather than crucial parts of the white city, at least from the perspective of the colonial administrators (Kay & Cole 1977).

Although living conditions in designated African areas were, at least in theory, intended to achieve environmental health goals, in practice they fell way below those goals achieved in European areas. Water distribution to these townships closely followed the same segregationist impulse rationalised through the assumption about African impermanence in the urban area. Furthermore, since it was expensive to install water technologies, these were initially reserved for the affluent in the white part of Harare where even impoverished neighbourhoods received clean piped water, toilets, and sewers. But with per capita incomes ridiculously lower for Africans living in Harare's townships, and without much attention being paid to the comfort and welfare of Africans, their access to those sanitary and water improvements that the Harare municipal urban planners and administrators had proudly introduced, remained restricted for the most part of colonial rule. It could be said that with meagre sanitation amenities and rudimentary water technologies, the urban planners and administrators were setting up the townships as future sources of disease. This point is neatly reinforced by Headrick in his chapter on 'Cities, Sanitation and Segregation' who, in a striking contrast between the West and tropical overseas colonies, observed:

In the Western world after the mid-nineteenth century, municipal health officials and sanitation engineers strove to separate the germs from the people. In the tropical cities, when the officials could not achieve this objective, they substituted another: to separate the people with germs from those without. (Headrick 1988: 147)

Throughout the process of colonial suburbanisation in Zimbabwe, both the state and the local municipality (though they did not always agree on a range of issues including who was responsible for providing African housing) played critical roles in crafting opportunities for whites to consolidate their privileges (Musemwa 2006a). Promoting a racialised and differential access to water was one distinct way of guaranteeing and sustaining it. However, the corollary of this project was that differential access and control became one of the singular issues that affected the outlook of African townships and the livelihoods of urban Africans in Harare's townships.

It can be argued that for over seven decades, it was primarily because of these forms of state influx control legislation highlighted previously that Harare experienced relatively low rates of urbanisation. Indeed, as Patel has pointed out: 'in this way the growth of large shanty towns or 'informal' housing areas, frequently characteristic of cities in the developing world was prevented' (Patel 1984). The

percentage of the African population residing in cities and towns before 1978 had remained almost constant over the preceding seventeen years. But this was to change in 1979 when there was an incursion of rural migrants into the urban areas due to the intensifying liberation war – a drift that persisted from independence, only to be aggravated by the 1982–1984 drought (Patel 1984). The limited housing stock for Africans in Harare could not cope with the numbers of rural migrants leading to overcrowding as kith and kin provided shelter for the migrants or took in increasing numbers of rent-paying lodgers. Harare's population increased considerably from 280 000 in 1969 to 480 000 in December 1978. By January 1980, it was estimated that the African population was 633 000 (Patel 1984). As a result, squatter settlements emerged within the townships and on the periphery of the city (Pickard-Cambridge 1988). Thus began a process of 'galloping urbanism' in Harare – which exposed the insufficiency of the government's housing policy to satisfy the requirements of the urban poor for shelter and other attendant elementary amenities such as water, sewage, electricity and roads.

## Sunshine City: Losing the sparkle

As the euphoria of independence began to wane, post-colonial Harare was confronted by the realities that other post-independence cities had faced in Africa. Challenges characteristic of urbanisation in the global South began to manifest themselves in the 1980s. While there were laudable socio-economic and physical transformations that the new government effected, especially in the central business district, the spatial structure of post-colonial Harare continues to bear the colonial imprint. This is a result of over nine decades of colonial rule 'manifested particularly in the wide disparities in the location and quality of residential areas for the different racial (now socio-economic) groups' (Zinyama 1993). Raftopoulos and Yoshikuni underscored this observation:

The legacy of colonial rule confronts contemporary urban Zimbabweans in many ways. The problems faced by colonial administrators continue to face their post-colonial counterparts, but in exacerbated form; they include the stabilisation and sustainable reproduction of an urban workforce; housing and health; transport; and representative local government structures. (Raftopoulos & Yoshikuni 1999: 13)

The transition from white minority to black majority rule in 1980 witnessed the removal of the hindrances to rural–urban migration. Thus, a city whose rate of urbanisation had been heavily regulated and prevented the emergence of large

'squatter' camps, a trend typical of other cities in the global South, began to experience an unusual influx of people from the rural areas seeking new livelihood opportunities. The influx of people exerted mounting pressure on the Harare Municipality for the supply of amenities, such as housing, clinics, transport, health facilities, and water and sewage infrastructure. The shortage of housing, for example, compelled impoverished urban arrivals to construct 'illegal' shelters leading to increasing shanty dwellings in the city (Colquhoun 1993). The urban sprawl in Harare and a population growth of over five per cent per year throughout the 1980s severely burdened the capacity of both central and local governments to provide accommodation and basic urban amenities for the urban poor. A classic example of an urban service, which both the central and municipal governments failed to expand substantially in post-colonial Harare, was water.

At independence in 1980 until the occurrence of the first severe drought in post-colonial Zimbabwe the city of Harare's water provisions were relatively steady. This was mainly because of the new Manyame Dam that had been built four years prior to independence to augment the city's water supplies (Musemwa 2006b). Despite the transfer of the responsibilities for bulk water projects from municipalities to the state under the amended Water Act of 1976, the post-colonial government inherited the tradition of the strategic planning of water supply for the city. Since independence until about 2000, the Harare City Council (comprising a majority of ZANU-PF councillors) had a good working rapport with the central government, unlike the tense relations between the state and the City of Bulawayo over the latter's perennial water problems (Musemwa 2006b). Guaranteed supplies of water in Harare also enabled the expansion of the city by, among other things, the establishment of more townships for Africans (Warren Park in 1981, Kuwadzana & Hatcliffe in 1984 and Budiro in 1988) even though racial desegregation was the new government's policy. However, following the severe droughts of 1982–1984 and 1992–1993 Harare, like other parts of the country, began to experience serious water shortages, some of which had nothing to do with natural causes. The water crises eventually translated into the outbreak of a devastating cholera outbreak in mid-2008 killing over 4 000 people. How did it all come to this?

This study suggests that the origins of the present urban water crisis and its attendant consequences can be traced back to the colonial period, when the present bulk water systems were poorly planned and situated within the same water catchment zone as the routes of sewage discharge. In addition, it was during this period that the post-colonial government's rural bias in terms of water development at the expense of the urban areas, and its subsequent intrusion into the municipal domain, resulted in political decisions that negatively affected urban water supplies.

## Post-colonial rural development

In 1980, when ZANU-PF took over power from Ian Smith's government, it immediately sought to reverse what it recognised as the colonial 'urban bias' in spatial investment and non-spatial policies (Republic of Zimbabwe 1982). This led to an over-reaction that saw flows of government expenditure and international aid redirected to rural development. For two decades, the post-colonial state focused heavily on rural water development at the expense of urban areas.

The government's rural bias was premised on both historical and political considerations from which it derived its legitimacy. It was historical because of the conscious desire by government to redevelop rudimentary rural infrastructure in most of Zimbabwe. But it was also political because peasants and other rural-based social groups had been the backbone of ZANU-PF's armed guerrilla struggle, waged predominantly in the rural areas, which ensured the ruling party's rise to power in 1980 (Lan 1985). Until the March 2008 elections, the rural constituencies had continued to vote the ZANU-PF back into power. Such unflinching support had not gone unnoticed by the leadership. On winning the 2005 elections, President Mugabe hailed the rural voters for being 'the most consistent revolutionaries and decisive pillar of support for the party' (*The Herald* 11 April 2005, cited in Kamete 2006: 255).

The government, it would seem, felt obliged to offer some kind of recompense to the 'masses' by investing state resources in people-oriented projects. It is also not surprising that there have been many more scholarly writings on water development in the rural areas than there have been on the same issue in urban areas – a trend that seems to have been influenced by the ruling party's rural-based water development trajectory.

## Post-colonial urban decline

On the urban front, particularly in Harare, the state of water supplies was still relatively good until the late 1990s. Since then, however, Harare, and other surrounding towns in general, began to experience severe water shortages, which the urban local authority maintained was caused by drought and increased consumption levels (Manzungu & Machiridza 2005). This took place against the background of a general culture of mismanagement at Harare Townhouse and a steep decline in the maintenance of the city's outlook. Harare, which once boasted of being 'the cleanest city in sub-Saharan Africa' had, over the years, progressively lost its sparkle: Harare was now 'more noted for debris on the sidewalks, cracked cement paving, broken street lights, potholes, uncollected refuse, and burst

pipelines' (Meredith 2003:159). This view was widely supported by a number of interviewees in Harare we spoke to recently.<sup>6</sup> One of them, I Makumbe of Glen View 3, spoke romantically, if nostalgically, about the 'glorious' days of the capital city, then lowered his voice when he turned to its progressive degeneration:

Mfana, Harare was the best city in Africa. It was always clean. There were no street kids. The City Council was doing its duties very well by then. Refuse was collected in time. Everything that made the city function well was running and serviced well. So we had no complaints like we have today. Now Harare has become an eyesore to its urban dwellers and visitors. It has become one of the dirtiest cities in Africa. Roads have potholes, streets have a lot of dirt, uncollected refuse everywhere. There is no water: the taps and toilets have run dry. It's terrible. (Makumbe interview, 16 May 2009)

During this period, corruption and poor management at Harare's Townhouse were also rife. A ZANU-PF executive mayor, Solomon Tawengwa, who took office in 1995 promising to root out corruption and financial profligacy, left Harare in no better shape when he was fired in 1999, ironically, for gross mismanagement (Hill 2003). For more than two years, the mayoral post remained vacant. Instead, the government appointed the Elijah Chanakira Commission to run Harare's municipal affairs. However, during the presidential elections in March 2002, mayoral elections were conducted in Harare and Bulawayo, as well as in other urban centres, and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) won all seats. Although water quality and supply problems had already become an endemic problem when the city council was under Tawengwa's helm, water did not feature prominently in the local election campaigns as did other issues such as job creation, improved transport services and access to residential stands (Manzungu & Machiridza 2005). The administration of an MDC mayor of Harare, Elias Mudzuri, which had shown signs of dedication to the improvement of the government, was short-lived as he was fired by the Minister of Local Government on what seemed to have been trumped-up charges. Under the Angeline Makwavarara Commission, the provision of water and other public services continued to decline (*The Zimbabwe Independent* 6 June 2003). One of Zimbabwe's few independent newspapers, *The Financial Gazette*, reporting on a litany of 'corporate governance breaches' in the capital city, captured the general state of decay in some parts of the capital city:

Residents have been forced to dump litter in open spaces, posing a serious health hazard that had been boiling underneath as a result of the population explosion and the mushrooming of squatter shacks, now home to over 500 000 people. Raw sewage is also flowing in some suburbs, while potholes

have made some areas inaccessible in what could have inspired the lavish spending on 4x4 luxury vehicles by officials at Townhouse. Water supplies to swathes of Harare have largely been erratic with the eastern suburbs of Mabvuku, Tafara, Msasa Park and Greendale being the worst affected. (*The Financial Gazette* 5 December 2005)

That Harare had lost its claim to the 'Sunshine City' image was even acknowledged by the new chairperson of the Harare Commission, Angeline Makwavarara – a ZANU-PF appointee who replaced the disgraced MDC mayor, Elias Mudzuri, and President Robert Mugabe during the height of the infamous Operation Murambatsvina (OM) conducted in 2005 to remove Harare's 'surplus humanity' (Vambe 2008). Although the rationale behind OM was couched in hygienic and benign terms, such as the 'creation of a salubrious environment', it was largely a politically-motivated exercise ostensibly crafted to reduce the numbers of people in overcrowded urban areas whose political empathies were purported to lie with the MDC. For example, officially launching OM at the Townhouse on 19 May 2005, Makwavarara spoke sanguinely about the need to restore Harare to its former respectable status:

These violations of the by-laws...are in areas of vending...traffic control, illegal structures, touting/abuse of commuters by rank marshalls, street-life/prostitution, vandalism of property, infrastructure, stock theft, illegal cultivation, among others, have led to the deterioration of standards thus negatively affecting the image of the City. The attitude of members of the public as well as some City officials has led to a point whereby Harare has lost its glow. We are determined to bring it back. Harare was renowned for its cleanness, decency, peace, tranquil environment for business and leisure: therefore we would like to assure all residents that all these illegal activities will be a thing of the past. (*The Herald* 28 May 2005)

Similarly, Harare's deplorable condition was also taken up by President Mugabe when he sought to justify the OM:

Our cities and towns are a real cause for concern. Apart from the failing reticulation systems and broken roads and streets, our cities and towns, including Harare, the capital, 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 salubrious environment. That is our wish and vision. (*The Herald* 30 May 2005)



Much as OM was a politically motivated exercise, it is undeniable that general living conditions in Harare had deteriorated, as had the physical infrastructure such as roads and drainage systems. Water shortages continued unabated in Harare in the mid-2000s. Unlike the water scarcity problems in Bulawayo, which were due to both anthropogenic and natural causes, those in Harare were mostly the result of mismanagement. As a Harare council employee simply put it, 'Our water problems are man-made' (*Mail and Guardian* 16 September 2007). The water problems that blighted the city's residents had as much to do with 'dilapidated and decaying' pipes, lack of chemicals to treat the water due to foreign currency shortages, as inefficient management and political interference from the state.

Despite transforming Harare above ground (e.g. name changes and installation of digital traffic lights.) soon after independence, the 'hidden city'<sup>7</sup> of pipes and sewers beneath the city streets and avenues laid by the colonial municipality did not get a parallel overhaul to meet the growing needs of an expanding post-colonial city. Inevitably, such negligence led to water wastage through visible and undetected leakages resulting in an incessant water crisis. Consecutive ZANU-PF councils that had administered the municipal affairs of Harare since independence in 1980 failed to refurbish or expand the Morton Jaffrey Water Works built in 1953 to meet the rising consumer demands as the population of the capital city increased. The Firlie Sewage Works were also in a state of disrepair (*Mail and Guardian* 16 September 2007).

These structural problems with the distribution network led to interminable water shortages for many townships. Perhaps the most affected were Mabvuku and Tafara, which dominated media reports on the issue. For example, Mabvuku and Tafara, whose connection to Harare's water reticulation system was done by the colonial government, had to endure the results of a poorly planned water supply system. The reservoir lies on higher ground and because of the breakdown of the engines at the main reservoir the water had not been filling up the Mabvuku-Tafara reservoir regularly. The result was that both townships suffered from acute water shortages as the main Morton Jaffrey Water Works had not been repaired for a long time (Manzungu & Machiridza 2005: 928–929). It is no wonder that even before the major outbreak of cholera in 2008, people in the two townships had already resorted to digging shallow wells to cope with perennial water shortages.

The water crisis in Harare was not just about quantity; it was also about the water quality, which was increasingly becoming a problem in the city. However, this was a problem that spanned the colonial/post-colonial divide and was mainly due to poor planning, which saw colonial hydrological engineers and planners locate Harare's two main reservoirs, Lakes Chivero and Manyame, downstream from the city's sewerage works. It was also because of agricultural runoff. The lakes lie within the same catchment as the city of Harare, which it supplies, and

as a result Harare takes 'some 95% of its water from the same body into which its waste products are discharged' (Tomlinson & Wurzel 1977: 10). In 1973, scientists described Lake Mcllwaine as 'a Rhodesian impoundment which has become eutrophic through the addition of sewage effluent', adding that

The main flow to the lake is provided by the Hunyani River which rises about 72 km to the south-east, and, together with its tributaries drains an area of about 2 230 km<sup>2</sup> into the lake. In addition, the Makabusi (Mukuvisi) and Marimba rivers receive a daily total of about 41 000–50 000 m<sup>3</sup> of treated sewage effluent, which, in the dry season, constitutes their entire flow. This effluent is discharged from several sewage works, all of which have been in existence for many years. Effluent has thus been added to the lake since its creation. (Marshall & Falconer 1973: 109–111)

Scientists who tested the water in Lake Chivero for pollution also concluded that 'pollution loads are at their highest level since the lake was built in 1952' (Moyo 1997: vii–viii). Continuous treatment of the water over many years had ensured that residents of Harare would receive water of good quality. However, the political quagmire that unfolded in Zimbabwe leading to a high-inflationary environment and non-existent foreign currency reserves left the City Council unable to purchase enough chemicals to treat the water.

Harare's water woes continued unabated at the same time as the ZANU-PF government was becoming increasingly annoyed by the surging popularity of the MDC and its control of almost every urban council in Zimbabwe since the national parliamentary elections of 2000. In response the government adopted measures that were bound to frustrate and weaken the MDC's stronghold on the urban areas by interfering in the day-to-day municipal operations.

## Water and politics: State intrusion into the municipal domain

The current urban water 'crisis' in Zimbabwe owes its genesis to the central government's pervasive politicisation of most decisions affecting the municipal provision of water and sanitation in the country's cities and towns. From 2000 onwards the state's policy veered sharply from a focus on the rural areas to a sudden 'interest' in the urban management of water supplies. This renewed interest was given expression by, among other things, the government's directive to the Zimbabwe National Water Authority (ZINWA) to take over the management of urban water supply and sanitation from all the urban local authorities in Zimbabwe. Subsequently, the government of Zimbabwe continued to treat ZINWA as an extension

of itself, financially propping it up, and defending it to the hilt even in the face of palpable operational deficiencies to further its political objectives. This strategy, I would argue, perfectly fitted into ZANU-PF's broader strategy of debilitating and marginalising the MDC to compel it to loosen its grip on the urban areas so that ZANU could regain lost control and influence over urban areas (Masunungure 2004).

The city-state conflict that ensued once the ZANU-PF government had decided to reinstate itself to its vanished urban political glory has been well articulated by Kamete (2006). Briefly, Kamete argues that in response to the overwhelming rejection of its candidates in the 2000 parliamentary elections, 'a trend that was to be repeated with chilling regularity during the next four years', the ZANU-PF government hatched a plan to 're-urbanise' the city of Harare in particular. Kamete delineates two strategies that were central to ZANU-PF's come back, namely, regaining control of institutions of local governance and being re-elected into council and parliament. Although Harare was the principal site of the intense city-state struggles, Kamete also presents the 'big picture' to show that other cities experienced the wrath of the government personified by the Minister of Local Government, Dr Ignatious Chombo, who seemed to have taken it upon himself to ensure that the MDC was completely incapacitated (Kamete 2006). This part of the chapter builds upon and extends Kamete's analysis by exploring a less examined strategy, namely, that as the political crisis in Zimbabwe intensified, the ZANU-PF government instrumentally used water shortages in the cities of Harare and Bulawayo to wrestle control of the cities from the MDC. The government sought to use water in the same way it had partly manipulated land in the hope of gaining legitimacy and consensus.

In scenes reminiscent of state politics and urban local governance in India, the intervention of the central government of Zimbabwe in the municipal realm also stimulated the dismissal of elected local government members. Chaplin (1999) has pointed out that in Delhi it is common practice for state governments to intrude into the municipal sphere and fire elected municipal officials 'usually on the grounds of mismanagement, and the subsequent suspension of elections'. Indeed, Delhi was left without an elected municipal government for 14 years until 1997. Similarly, when Elias Mudzuri of the MDC became the executive mayor of Harare, he immediately set out to repair 'more than twenty years of neglect suffered under a succession of ZANU-PF councils' (Hill 2003: 236). However, when he tried to meet with residents, particularly in Mabvuku and Tafara, to explain his council's commitment to solving the incessant water woes, he raised the ire of central government and was arrested several times for addressing gatherings without the express permission of the police. It was claimed that he was furthering the political agenda of the MDC (Hill 2003). His tenure was, however, short-lived. In April 2003,

the Minister of Local Government fired Mudzuri on trumped-up charges of incompetence (*The Zimbabwe Standard* 23 January 2006).

From the municipal elections of March 2002 until those of 27 March 2007, urban democracy in Harare had become a long-forgotten concept. When the ruling party lost municipal power it launched a sustained assault on municipal liberties previously enjoyed by ratepayers in Harare. The government's continued political interference with administration at Harare Townhouse ensured that the ratepayers' right to vote was withheld so that they would not use it to vote in an MDC-led council ever again. Mudzuri and his council were replaced by yet another commission headed by Angeline Makwavarara to run the Harare municipality. Thus, as in the Delhi case, the consequences of state influence over municipal administrative functions have been a lack of accountability, an inefficient and pliable bureaucracy always at the beck and call of the ruling state, internal struggles (e.g. between the town clerk, Nomutsa Chideya, and Makwavarara) and general apathy toward state-aligned institutions of local government. Above all, such intrusive actions by the state in the running of the Harare City Council created political and administrative crisis conditions that rendered it impossible for the latter to deal with the emerging environmental problems competently and a marginal interest in the allocation of urban resources and services.

Exploiting the deteriorating water situation in Harare, the central government encroached into spheres that had been expressly assigned to the municipality under the 1976 Water Act – namely water distribution, sanitation, billing and revenue collection (*The Herald, Business News* 14 February 2007). The government delegated ZINWA – a single-purpose institution established under the 1998 Zimbabwe National Water Act – to oversee the implementation of the neo-liberal reforms in the water sector aimed at realising profits from the sale of water rather than treating it as a 'social good'. Although, ZINWA could assist small towns in distress over water, no provision was ever made, at its formation, for it to take over urban water supplies. Its obligations outside the urban areas were very clear (Hellum & Derman 2005).

This practice of imposing a single-purpose institution had its antecedent in the takeover of municipal control of electricity by the Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) in 1988, thereby depriving city councils of much-needed revenue (Colquhoun 1993). But this happened at a less politically charged time than the one that existed in 2005 when the cabinet issued a directive to all urban municipalities to surrender all their water supply and sanitation functions as well as the revenue collection systems and their workers to ZINWA. Because municipalities in Zimbabwe were financially dependent on central government, this action was bound to cripple the urban local authorities. Such authorities, observed Mukhopadhyay, are 'bureaucratic in composition and unaccountable to

local people', and have a tendency to act in authoritarian ways heavily influenced by state politics (cited in Chaplin 1999: 151).

## ZINWA's efforts to alleviate the water crisis

Given the severity of the water shortages and pipe bursts in the city, there were high expectations among residents within the low- and high-density suburbs of Harare that ZINWA would fix the problems. But within two years of assuming its new functions, ZINWA was under attack from various quarters (as discussed later) as it failed to stop water shortages because of constant breakdowns of the waterworks. To raise funds to meet its operational costs ZINWA increased rates ten-fold – yet taps went dry and waterborne diseases, especially cholera, broke out regularly in Mabvuku and Tafara, which bore the brunt of water shortages more than any other township in Harare.<sup>8</sup> From the outset ZINWA did not have adequate funds and equipment to carry out its cabinet-sanctioned mandate. No amount of intermittent cash injections into the ZINWA coffers from the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe or routine increases in tariffs improved water service delivery, let alone, good quality water. This was because of the lack of foreign currency to enable the water authority to source water treating chemicals from South Africa. ZINWA's failure to provide better quality service than the municipalities hardly endeared it to urban residents.

## Public reaction to the imposition of ZINWA in Harare

Reactions to the poor performance of ZINWA by some members of the government would seem to suggest that even at cabinet level there was no unanimity regarding its takeover of urban water systems. Some of the political leadership in government, who had been party to the cabinet directive, individually castigated ZINWA's competence. Vice President Joice Mujuru warned ZINWA that the erratic supplies of water to urban areas were 'unacceptable' (*The Herald* 22 August 2007). For its part, the Harare Commission, despite being part of the problem, also censured ZINWA for failing to treat water to acceptable WHO standards. In self-defence, ZINWA denied the charges and put the blame squarely on the commission's failure to pay for water on time, thus inhibiting its efforts to secure enough water chemicals. Even the state-controlled newspaper, *The Herald*, joined the mounting chorus of criticism levelled against ZINWA by taxpayers, civic leaders and some politicians. The newspaper berated ZINWA for having become 'an expert in crisis management' since taking over water supplies for the Harare metropolitan area. It went further in its sardonic critique:

the addition of distribution, the sewers and the sewage treatment plans have just given the authority more crises to manage. The latest problem, the breakdown of at least part of the giant Firlie Sewage Treatment Plant that treats all Harare's sewage from the Mukuvisi Catchment, is typical. (*The Herald* 17 January 2007)

The Combined Harare Residents Association (CHRA), the foremost critics of government, dismissed the legal instruments upon which the much-vaunted water reforms and subsequent creation of ZINWA had been premised (Kamete 2009). To the CHRA, the problem lay with the Water Acts of 1927, 1976 and 1998. As reported by Tonderai Kwidini in *IPS News*, CHRA Senior Programmes Advocacy Officer Jabusile Shumba put it cynically:

This talk about introducing pieces of legislation aimed at improving water availability is bar talk. The coming in of these new laws have [sic] actually worsened the problem of water shortages, particularly the vesting of all water powers in the hands of ZINWA. In all fairness, the coming of ZINWA heralded a new era...that of water shortages.<sup>9</sup>

In the two years (2005–2007) of its takeover of Harare's water supplies, ZINWA received huge grants from the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe to rehabilitate Harare's water works, but the lack of evidence of value for money evoked the wrath of Reserve Bank Governor Gideon Gono. Not known for equivocating, Gono reminded ZINWA that the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe 'will not stand by and watch as service delivery deteriorates in local authorities'. Addressing the Zimbabwe Local Government conference in Harare on 26 July 2007, Gono went to the core of the problem and questioned why ZINWA had accepted the wholesale appropriation of water and sewer responsibilities when it was obvious that it lacked the capacity to deliver. He added that 'it was disheartening to see that some sections of a city, or a school, go for up to 10 days without water' (*The Herald* 27 July 2007).

Such was the enormity of the problem confronting ZINWA that its sponsor, the Minister of Water Resources, defended the water authority and admitted that ZINWA had neither the funds nor equipment to deliver water supplies in urban centres: 'We have a dedicated manpower which is committed to deliver, but there is a critical shortage of equipment to carry out the task,' said Minister Mutezo (*The Herald* 22 August 2007). ZINWA's operational deficiencies, lack of financial and technical capacity to deal with the problems obtaining in just one urban area raised doubts about its professed competencies as reflected in the minister's confidence in the water authority. This situation effectively set up conditions, which became a fertile ground for the outbreak of cholera.

## ‘Cholera?’ What cholera?’: Harare and the cholera plague

The comment captured in the heading to this section was made by President Robert Mugabe speaking at a gathering of party supporters at the funeral for a senior member of his ZANU-PF party on 11 December 2008 (*The Star* late afternoon edition 12 December 2008).

The cholera epidemic, which ravaged Zimbabwe from August 2008 until the first quarter of 2009, had the most profound impact and perhaps the highest mortality rate in recent epidemiological history of water-borne diseases in southern Africa. Ranked by the medical fraternity as, perhaps, one of the most deleterious infectious diseases in the public health realm, cholera is ‘an acute bacterial infection of the intestine caused by the ingestion of food or water contaminated by certain strains of the *Vibrio cholerae* organism’ (Lee 2001). It is a water-borne disease spread by the oral-faecal route. Common symptoms of the disease are acute watery diarrhoea and vomiting. It is also known for being one of the most rapidly fatal illnesses known, due to severe dehydration or water loss. If treated effectively with oral rehydration salts and drugs, mortality rates can be minimised to less than one per cent. However, the opposite is equally lethal. Individuals affected by cholera are highly contagious and easily contaminate water and food sources that they touch. If cholera is not treated urgently, the mortality rate can be as high as 50 per cent (Lee 2001).

### The major cause of the cholera epidemic in Harare

The major cause of cholera appeared to have been perennial water shortages which forced people in townships to resort to using contaminated water in polluted rivers and streams as well as shallow wells dug by people out of desperation. In November 2009, the situation regarding sanitation, water availability and its quality had become untenable. Already in 2008, there were reports that in the first week of November that year, Harare, including the central business district, had been without piped water for four days. This, according to the Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN)<sup>10</sup> ‘...while sewerbursts are being left unrepaired, resulting in raw sewerage running in the streets’. IRIN went on to report that ‘ZINWA confirmed that it had been pumping raw sewerage into Harare’s water supply dam, Lake Chivero: when supplies are available, the water coming out of the taps often emits a pungent smell’.<sup>11</sup> The quality of water transported through the water systems in Harare had not been chlorinated and often contained green algae owing to the failure of ZINWA to purchase the required chemicals because of shortage of foreign currency.

## The effects of the cholera epidemic

The pandemic left in its wake high levels of morbidity and mortality along with social, environmental and political ramifications. The disease, which decimated around 4 000 and infected about 100 000 people, primarily afflicted the townships of metropolitan Harare, namely Budiriro, Glenview, Kuwadzana, Chitungwiza and Dzivarasekwa. In Harare's water crisis, cholera found ambient conditions from which it was transmitted further afield – from its townships to the peri-urban areas, the country's 10 provinces and rural areas. This eventually made it a cross-border disease as it spilled over transnational borders, especially the Beitbridge–Musina border, as people left to seek treatment in Musina's hospitals. A disproportionate number of these deaths and infections took place in poor urban and rural communities. Most of Harare's poor people lived and still live in these townships and among them were the majority of cholera's victims. As discussed previously, some of these townships were built by the colonial state with fewer civic amenities and rudimentary water and sanitation systems, and have continued over the post-colonial years to enjoy no more resources than they had before. It can therefore be said that there is an enduring colonial legacy in terms of the structural and spatial divisions along racial lines. Others – namely Budiriro (which ironically means progress/achievement/success) and Kuwadzana – were built by the post-colonial state in the same areas where the colonial state had established African townships. Strikingly, even though suburbs such as Greendale, Avondale, Vainona, and Borrowdale had also experienced water cuts on a daily basis, the residents were not infected with cholera.

There is no doubt that cholera followed class and spatial lines so that to comprehend the unequal distribution of the disease one would need to reflect on the colonial legacy of the once racialised divisions, now just socio-economic class divisions, which continued to be replicated after independence. The distinction becomes vivid through the views of a number of interviewees. For example, E Doro, who resides in Borrowdale, confirmed that while they experienced water cuts, the effects were obviously not as profound as in the townships and the prospect of catching the cholera disease was remote:

The Borrowdales of this world and Glen Lorne are completely detached from these problems and disasters. I can testify that as a resident of one of the most affluent places in Harare, issue of water shortages, burst sewer pipes and uncollected garbage are stories that we hear through hearsay and through the media. Yes, we have been experiencing water cuts in Borrowdale but like, at most houses in the suburb, there is a borehole where I stay so water is not an issue. However, at work (University of Zimbabwe) I have to worry about where to relieve myself, where to get drinking water and



where to wash my hands because of the perennial water problems there... In fact most residents prefer to use their safer borehole water because they do not trust City Council or ZINWA water and their fears have certainly been supported by the recent cholera outbreak in greater Harare which was essentially a ZINWA water-related epidemic. (Doro interview, 18 May 2009)

This testimony contrasts sharply with that of a discerning nursing sister who worked at Parirenyatwa Hospital and lived in Avondale West, but who was deployed to Budiriro in early September 2008 until April 2009 to be part of a contingent of experienced health professionals to deal with the overwhelming cases of cholera infections and mortality rates. Sister N Matereke spoke frankly about the outbreak of the water-borne disease:

I was not amazed when Budiriro and other nearby high-density areas became the epicentres of cholera with the highest numbers of infection and deaths. This is simply because, as I said before, they were the worst affected in terms of water and sanitation problems. In addition, they are the most highly or densely populated residential zones. Many Harare residents including some of my relatives stay in these western suburbs where you find everyone there, including landlords, lodgers, the aged, youths, children, among others. Most of them are also very poor people who could not afford seeking quick treatment for themselves during the cholera outbreak. (Matereke interview, June 2009)

The unequal spread of the disease, therefore, has to be sought in the historical physical, socio-economic, spatial and class disparities straddling the colonial and post-colonial divide.

## Responses to the cholera epidemic

As the public health crisis continued to ravage the urban communities, some residents embarked on a repertoire of ways to cope with the water crisis. Those who could afford it sunk unauthorised wells and boreholes in Glen View, Budiriro, Mabvuku and Tafara. The selling of potable water by vendors, once a rare phenomenon in Zimbabwe but virtually commonplace in most of Latin America and some Asian countries, became brisk business in parts of Harare. What made the situation rather desperate for many a township resident was that cholera is customarily a treatable disease through oral hydration therapy, especially the effective sugar and salt solution, which is ordinarily easy to prepare (eight heaped teaspoonfuls of sugar and one level teaspoon of salt in one litre of clean water).

However, the timing of the disease was unfortunate because of the absence of most basic foodstuffs, such as sugar and salt, from the shops due to the economic collapse. If these foodstuffs were available, they were beyond the reach of many, as they could not afford them. To make matters worse most of the public health system had been limited to the 'intensive care unit' as the main hospitals in Harare, such as Parirenyatwa and Harare, had been closed due to non-availability of medicines and health workers failing to report for work due to poor remuneration.

Official reaction to the outbreak of cholera uncovered more than medical solutions at play for the plague turned out to be both a biological fact and a social and political metaphor.<sup>12</sup> Cholera is one of three mandatory notifiable diseases under the International Health Regulations of the WHO. As such, according to Lee 'it is widely accepted that there is substantial underreporting of cases'. The main rationale behind this, she continues, 'is the lack of desire by national governments to attract adverse publicity that would have negative political and economic consequences' (Lee 2001: 16). The Zimbabwe government, it would seem, also sought to wittingly or unwittingly downplay the spread of cholera so that it would not besmirch its already bartered international image. Despite the state's initial denials of the viciousness of the contagious pestilence and its attempts to suppress the alarming mortality figures, it was forced to declare the epidemic a 'national disaster' on 3 December 2008. The former Minister of Information and Publicity, Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, is said to have ordered the media to not pay attention to the increasing mortality figures that were being bandied about by the local and international media houses but to instead concentrate on the steps that the government and NGOs were taking towards containing the epidemic (Physicians for Human Rights 2009).

Rather than accept that the disease was a result of the inertia of his government's poor and centralised water management policies, President Mugabe and his ministers launched a daring vitriolic attack on the West and accused it of being the source of the cholera. In charges reminiscent of the armed liberation struggle in Zimbabwe when the white Rhodesian army was accused of using unconventional tactics or 'biological warfare' by spreading anthrax pathogens on humans, the Minister of Information and Publicity, Dr Sikhanyiso Ndlovu, accused the West of deploying similar tactics on Zimbabwe. In other words, the government saw the disease as representing a national security threat from the West which was purportedly using it as a pretext to overthrow it. It is an accusation that has a profound historical resonance with excerpts from HIE Dhlomo's play *Malaria* highlighting the challenges that the Zulu people in the early 20th century had confronted when the rapid intrusion of commercialising white agriculture and the excesses of an ever more interventionist state blended with a public health crisis – a malaria epidemic: 'Disease is deliberately caused by the white man to decimate the race, to undermine our

well-being, to impoverish and compel us to serve as his laborers. Disease never comes of itself. It is caused' (cited in MacKinnon 2001: 76).

Given ZANU-PF accusations that the West, especially Britain, was bent on recolonising Zimbabwe, the connections between disease and colonisation come into sharp relief. It is within this frame of thinking that the Zimbabwean government blamed international sanctions for causing cholera: 'These are hurting the economy, putting pressure on the health delivery system,' said Deputy Minister of Health Dr Edwin Muguti.<sup>3</sup> To some commentators, such accusations rang hollow at the core as they simply demonstrated the state of a government in denial and increasingly feeling politically insecure, rather than an orchestrated scheme by the West to overthrow it (*The Star* late afternoon edition 12 December 2008). The Zimbabwe government's suspicions and explanation could have been readily accepted if it had borne part of the blame and not apportioned total blame on the West.

Besides, if one focuses on the long historical trajectory (and not just the immediate) of Zimbabwe's economic problems, one may very well deduce that some of the root causes of the epidemic can be located beyond Zimbabwe itself, however much this may sound far-fetched. Foremost among these causes was the IMF and World Bank-sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) introduced in 1991. The economic problems of the 1980s under a socialist-oriented government forced the government of President Mugabe to accept the introduction of market reforms and other measures to stabilise the shrinking economy. The social outcomes of the ESAP and their disproportionate effects on the poor have been extensively documented (for more details, see Mlambo 1997). Despite having achieved phenomenal successes in providing health, education and other services to the Zimbabwean majority for the first 10 years of independence, the ZANU-PF government's endeavours were acutely reversed by the IMF/World Bank ESAP, as Mlambo (1997) has noted.

What ensued were pitiful efforts by the government to apply crisis management measures to contain the disease. This outbreak could not have come at a worse time. The entire health system was already at a moribund stage as hospitals in Harare, including the biggest referral ones – Parirenyatwa and Harare hospitals – had either totally closed down or were so under-resourced that they were completely dysfunctional. Doctors, nurses and other health personnel had generally ceased coming to work as the transport system had nearly ground to a halt and ultra-inflation had severely eroded salaries. Caught off-guard by the rapidly spreading disease, the Ministry of Health responded with ad hoc measures that demonstrated a complete lack of coordination among different sectors.

With virtually no functioning municipality in Harare, the state response to the outbreak simply presented yet another exemplar of crisis management. Information channelled through the state broadcaster, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting

Corporation (zbc), and the state-owned newspapers, *The Herald* and *Chronicle*, was characteristically sanitised to downplay the extent and depth of the effects of the pandemic. This was supposedly not to risk further international alienation of the ZANU-PF government, which had deployed electoral chicanery in order to remain in power even in the face of overwhelming evidence that the MDC had clearly won both municipal and parliamentary elections held in March 2008. Independent newspapers, the *Zimbabwe Independent* and *The Standard*, were, as was to be expected, more vocal on state lethargy.

The state campaign confronted the Harare population with a complex spectrum of measures, some of which revealed the government's desperation. One such form of advice was the Minister of Health's call to people to stop shaking hands when greeting each other: 'I want to stress the issue of shaking hands. Although it's part of our tradition to shake hands, it is high time people stopped shaking hands'.<sup>14</sup> It seems the fear of contagion forced some people to take the minister's warning seriously, amidst other measures intended for people to keep infection at bay, as N Matereke confirmed:

with the help of the media and other sectors, we went on a cholera campaign blitz that taught people about ways of avoiding cholera and I am glad to say that the various campaigns were heeded by people out of fear of getting infected or losing their family members and relatives. We told people to avoid contact as much as possible, especially shaking hands and many of them devised many ways of greeting each other. Some began to use sign languages and others used what many call *kubhigana* or *Big Up* by just making contact with their fists or arms. (Matereke interview, 4 June 2009).

## Why Harare?

Finally, the question needs to be asked: why did cholera become predominant in Harare and not in the second largest city, Bulawayo, and other smaller towns such as Masvingo (although they also experienced a severe water crisis and for much longer periods of time dating back to their establishment)? Both cities vehemently refused to surrender their water and sanitation infrastructure to ZINWA and managed to source chemicals with the help of local business people. Of the two cities, Bulawayo launched the most sustained and fervent opposition to the central state's manoeuvres to seize its water systems in 2007. Bulawayo's resistance needs to be located within a long history of city/central state struggles over housing during the early colonial period (Ranger 2007), and over water during the post-colonial period, a topic which I have extensively addressed elsewhere (Musemwa 2006b,

2008). That these places were not afflicted by cholera to the extent that it occurred in Harare may partly explain why the central government has reversed its order and restored control over water to municipalities.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the chronic inadequacy of municipal water to satisfy growing demands experienced in Harare – a city that has hardly suffered from a natural drought of calamitous proportions – was not only the outcome of rapid population growth and the extension of water services. The situation was largely exacerbated by an interventionist state, which from 2000 had violated policy and institutional deliberations over water infrastructure and legitimate democratic forms of urban governance.

It has further contended that part of the heavy social cost of politicising urban water management in Zimbabwe has been the outbreak of cholera and its dire consequences, particularly on the poor, and that it exposed the deepening social inequalities among residents of Harare. The chapter has also briefly explored the ways in which the city and state authorities and ordinary urban residents attempted to cope, or failed to cope, with water scarcity, the sanitation crisis and ultimately with the catastrophe occasioned by the cholera epidemic, and the effects all these developments eventually had on the city and the larger political crisis.

The outbreak of cholera drew poignant attention to the vulnerability of the communities affected by the water-borne disease and to the need to speed up the negotiations over the implementation of the SADC-brokered Political Global Agreement between the erstwhile enemies, the MDC-Tsvangirai (MDC-T), MDC-Mutumbara (MDC-M) and ZANU-PF. The catastrophic nature of the water-borne disease may very well have partially ‘struck the death-knell’ to the decade-old political conflict between ZANU-PF and the MDC and hastened the final implementation of the power-sharing deal consummated on 11 and 13 February 2009 with the swearing in of a prime minister and two deputy prime ministers from the opposition and cabinet ministers respectively. Though by no means alone in nudging the three parties to talk, the epidemic marked a momentous and emblematic moment in the resolution of the conflict in that it set the scene for the SADC region and the international community to force the MDC-T, MDC-M and ZANU-PF to reach a compromise (Mafaro 2009).

Cholera has a propensity to recur for as long as the conditions are favourable. Despite vanishing from the western hemisphere for close to a century, cholera made a sudden comeback in January 1991 in three coastal towns in Peru (Oliver-Smith, 1999). With ‘unprecedented speed and intensity’ the disease migrated two thousand kilometres along the coast to Ecuador, reaching Colombia and Chile by March–April

(Lee 2001; Sepulveda, Valdespino & Garcia-Garcia 2006). Therefore, Zimbabwe has to restore, improve and further modernise its city and municipal drinking water supplies and sanitation infrastructure as a matter of urgency if it is to avoid the recurrence of another cholera epidemic which, as fresh evidence suggests, does not completely disappear but lies dormant and opportunistically waits for appropriate conditions to incubate and erupt. This view is reinforced by Lee:

Cholera is recognised as more complicated and durable than previously thought, possibly existing permanently within the environment than only living a few days outside of the human intestine. The relationship between the organism and environmental conditions continues to be a subject of keen debate. (Lee 2001: 16)

In addition, it is important that Zimbabwe resuscitate the country's collapsed public health system so that it spans multi-sectoral activities, transcends party political agendas, involves community participation and political will, and considers all economic issues at stake. In the same way that the Mexican government initially cast the cholera outbreak that broke out in Latin America in 1991 as a threat to national security and put in place a suite of measures such that the disease never became endemic, the Zimbabwe government may very well 'paradoxically' reap benefits from the last pandemic (Sepulveda, Valdespino & Garcia-Garcia 2006).

As a massive operation, the campaign to contain cholera in Zimbabwe presumably benefited the population, especially in urban communities, as they acquired knowledge about preventive measures. Other benefits accrued from the modification of hazardous practices and the gradual boosting of municipal potable water supplies, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The order placed on ZINWA by the Zimbabwe government, just before the installation of a new power-sharing government between the MDC and ZANU-PF, to disband and return to local councils the water and sanitation services it had appropriated, was an indictment to the government that state centralisation and politicisation of urban resources, such as water, was bound to have grave and far-reaching multidimensional consequences (*The Zimbabwe Standard* 10 January 2009).

## Acknowledgement

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## Notes

- 1 The Pioneer Column first settled at Mount Hampden and named this settlement 'Fort Salisbury' after a former Prime Minister of Great Britain. However, two years after the independence of Zimbabwe in 1980, the city was renamed Harare – a name the local African people had given to the small hill on the western edge of the original settlement.
- 2 General/Salisbury Town Engineer (1902: 1a). Primary document retrieved from the National Archives of Zimbabwe.
- 3 General/Salisbury Town Engineer (1902: 1a). Primary document retrieved from the National Archives of Zimbabwe.
- 4 Macadamising means to construct or finish (a road or path) with broken stone used in compacted layers, typically bound with tar or bitumen.
- 5 General/Salisbury Town Engineer (1902: 1a). Primary document retrieved from the National Archives of Zimbabwe.
- 6 Interviews with G Chemhuru of Malborough, Harare on 1 June 2009; B Matanhire of Budiriro on 2 and 3 June 2009 and S Mwatwara of Glen View on 3 and 4 June 2009.
- 7 The idea of the 'hidden city' is borrowed from Gandy (2004): 366.
- 8 Kwidini T (2007) Zimbabwe: Good intentions plus poor implementation equals dry taps, *IPS News* 30 December 2007. Accessed 14 February 2012, <http://ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=40641>
- 9 Kwidini T (2007) Zimbabwe: Good intentions plus poor implementation equals dry taps, *IPS News* 30 December 2007. Accessed 14 February 2012, <http://ipsnews.net/print.asp?idnews=40641>
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## Enduring the crisis: Remittances and household livelihood strategies in Glen Norah, Harare

*Tatenda Mukwedeya*

THE MULTIFACETED ZIMBABWEAN CRISIS that dominated the greater part of the last decade was characterised, amongst other things, by hyperinflation, unemployment and a critical shortage of basic goods. Dominant narratives about the country have focused on the political economy and its negative impacts on citizens, and the language of ‘crisis’ that appends the politico-economic transformation of Zimbabwe and casts people and households as helpless, vulnerable, passive or essentially victims. However, in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork conducted in June and July 2008 at the height of the crisis, and again in October 2009 in Glen Norah, Harare, revealed another side of the Zimbabwean crisis. It revealed how households coped and how remittances from Zimbabwe’s massive diaspora were, undoubtedly, the people’s saving grace.

Despite the obvious positive impacts, studies that seek to understand how remittances (cash or in-kind transfers) contribute to household wellbeing in Zimbabwe remain scant. This dearth is possibly due to the informal nature of most remittances to Zimbabwe, which has made it difficult for researchers to quantify their impacts amongst recipients. For this reason, the study on which this chapter is based took a micro-level approach by focusing on recipient households in a low-income neighbourhood called Glen Norah, a sprawling high-density suburb located 15 km south of Harare’s central business district (CBD).

The suburb is about 40 years old and houses generally semi-skilled workers who work in the nearby Southerton industrial area. Teachers, nurses and other civil servants needing cheaper accommodation close to their workplaces in the city centre also live there. Nurses and other health workers are especially close to Harare Central Hospital and the main Infectious Diseases Hospital in the city. Whilst the study does not attempt to make a case for the generalisation of its findings to the wider Zimbabwean society, it must be noted that Glen Norah is similar to other more central townships such as Glen View, Budiro and Kambuzuma and can be considered a microcosm of what was happening in most low-income urban areas.

There has always been a tendency to undervalue the capacities of crisis-affected populations, which are often portrayed as helpless and vulnerable, yet people's own efforts are often crucial to survival. Recognising the importance of remittances can be part of the process of better appreciating people's own contribution to survival.

This chapter attempts to show how households managed during the crisis particularly during its peak in 2008 and investigates the contribution of remittances to household livelihoods in Glen Norah. The chapter explores the changing patterns of remittances as well as the channels of remitting and the uses of remittances. However, remittances were not the sole source of livelihood during this period, and the chapter also considers other household survival and livelihood strategies adopted in Glen Norah. The chapter begins with a brief global, regional and Zimbabwean overview to contextualise the discussion.

## Remittances: A global, regional and local overview

International remittances, defined by the World Bank (2007) as both cash or in-kind transfers,<sup>1</sup> now represent the second most important source of external funding in developing countries after foreign direct investment (FDI) and are about double the level of official aid-related inflows to developing countries (Adams & Page 2005). The International Organization for Migration (IOM) highlighted that remittance flows have continuously increased in the last 20 years and have remained largely uninfluenced by the woes affecting global financial markets and violent conflicts (IOM 2005). During the recent global financial crisis, remittance flows to developing countries proved to be resilient as they fell only 5.5 per cent in 2009 and registered a quick recovery in 2010. By contrast, there was a decline of 40 percent in FDI flows in 2009 (World Bank 2011). In 2005, remittances to developing countries totalled USD188 billion. These increased to USD229 billion in 2006 and then to USD265 billion in 2007 (Ratha et al. 2007). In 2010, remittances recovered to the 2008 level of USD325 billion after having dropped to USD307 billion in 2009 as a result of the global financial crisis whilst flows were projected to rise to USD346 billion in 2011 and USD374 billion by 2012 (World Bank 2011). This data, as the World Bank (2011) notes,<sup>2</sup> is indicative rather than comprehensive as informal remittances sent through unconventional channels such as traders, courier and bus companies are said to be as high as 50 per cent of the total formal remittance flows (Gupta et al. 2007). Therefore, it is beyond any doubt, at least anecdotally, that these capital flows have had a significant impact on the lives of people in developing countries. Various studies have shown a largely positive phenomenon in which migrants' earnings have assisted families and communities to alleviate poverty (see Acosta 2007; Adams & Page 2005; Bracking & Sachikonye 2006; Gupta et al.

2007). In Africa, remittances represent an important financial flow with significant development potential because they are private income transfers that directly address sub-Saharan Africa's ultimate challenge of poverty (Tom 2005). Gupta et al. (2007) note that remittances address poverty because they are part of a private welfare system that transfers a degree of purchasing power from relatively richer to relatively poorer members of a family or community.

In Zimbabwe, remittances have been lower because up until the mid-1990s the country's economy was relatively stable and migration lagged behind other countries in the region. However, the failure to meet the ill-informed<sup>3</sup> prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank through the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the mid-1990s resulted in increased economic stagnation and unemployment. This consequently led to a steady increase in migration to other countries in the region and overseas in search of the proverbial 'greener pastures'. This trend increased sharply at the turn of the new millennium when the country began its generalised plunge after the Fast Track Land Reform Programme initiated in 2000. This was coupled with recurring droughts and international isolation that contributed to Zimbabwe's rapid social and economic deterioration, which was characterised by hyperinflation, unemployment and a continued decline of the Zimbabwe dollar against major currencies (Bird & Busse 2007).

Reliable estimates of Zimbabwean migrants are scarce due to the undocumented nature of large migrant groups, especially in South Africa. However, Bracking and Sachikonye (2006) note that South Africa has attracted the vast majority with an estimated 2 to 2.5 million Zimbabweans living in the country, whilst approximately 0.5 million and 0.4 million Zimbabweans are believed to be in the United Kingdom and Botswana respectively. A significant number of Zimbabweans have settled in America, Australia and neighbouring countries such as Mozambique and Zambia. Remittances from this large pool of Zimbabwean migrants have reportedly also surged in the last 10 or so years; however, it is difficult to assess the amounts involved because most of the flows come into the country informally. Some estimates have put remittances to Zimbabwe to be over USD1 billion a year (*Mail and Guardian* 7–13 March 2008). In December 2007, the state-run daily, *The Herald*, reported that Zimbabweans in the diaspora sent home USD361 million in 2006 excluding hand-in-hand transfers, representing 7.2 per cent of the country's 2006 GDP.<sup>4</sup> Other estimates include one by Besada and Moyo (2008) who believe that remittances inject approximately USD490 million into the national economy every year.

Whilst the focus on remittances and their impact in recipient countries is not a new phenomenon, less written evidence exists on countries such as Zimbabwe that have experienced lower levels of labour migrancy. The sudden upsurge in migrancy and the notorious lack of reliable information on remittance flows seems

to have led only a handful of scholars to research, explain and understand the effects of this phenomenon amongst recipient households in Zimbabwe.

## Remittances in Glen Norah

Crush (2008) notes that understanding the processes and patterns of remittance behaviour can help shed light on their usage and impact, both on recipient households and on wider socio-economic development in migrant-origin countries. This section on remittances in Glen Norah first examines how patterns of remittances changed to adjust to the volatile environment thereby allowing households to cope. The section then explores the forms and channels of remittances and finally considers how remittances have been used, particularly as survival and livelihood strategies.

### The changing patterns of remittances

As the employment market shrank persistently from the mid-1990s, leading to 80 per cent unemployment by 2008, migration became a viable option for the skilled and unskilled alike to secure their livelihoods. As a result, most households sent more than one member out of the country to secure the household's survival. In Glen Norah, 67 per cent of households in the sample had more than one migrant outside the country whilst 33 per cent had a single migrant. In contrast, Lindley (2006; 2007) found that in Hargeisa (Somalia) the majority of respondents, around 80 per cent, received money from one relative and about 15 per cent received from two people. This shows that the level of migration and subsequent contribution of remittances to household livelihoods is higher in Zimbabwe than in other crisis-affected countries.

South Africa has been the most attractive destination because of its proximity to Zimbabwe and the opportunities provided by its massive stable economy. The dominance of South Africa as a destination country was also evident in the sample. According to respondents 56 per cent of migrants lived and worked in South Africa, with 27 per cent based in the UK and the remainder scattered around the world. As the following discussion shows, the practice and nature of remittances from developed countries (such as the UK) are different from those stemming from South Africa.

### Forms of remittances

Research on remittances has mainly focused on money sent to recipient households and its effect on them, and the effect of remitted goods has been largely ignored

in the literature. However, the Zimbabwean case is peculiar because in-kind remittances were significant due to chronic shortages of basic commodities and played an important role in sustaining the social fabric of the country. Studies on remittances in Zimbabwe should therefore increasingly consider the implications of in-kind remittances in order to gain a full understanding of their implications.

Research in Glen Norah found that remittances from South Africa were largely in kind, while those from international destinations tended to be mostly cash. It is important to understand the different forms of remittances to Zimbabwe, because at different conjunctures of the crisis, a change in the nature of the remittances enabled households to stave off some of the more negative manifestations of the turmoil. Pendleton et al. reported that the importance of goods remittances is noteworthy in Zimbabwe, since the proportion of households receiving remittances in the form of goods was approximately 68 per cent (Pendleton et al. 2006). Similarly, 87 per cent of households in the sample under study received significant in-kind remittances – especially from South Africa – thus supporting the Pendleton et al. assertion.

In-kind remittances seemed to have facilitated another survival strategy of barter trading. The shortages of goods and the increasing irrelevance of the local currency resulted in a tendency to barter trade commodities and many people had resorted to barter trading to acquire basic commodities as shops continued to run empty. We could attribute the increasing significance of in-kind remittances to the economic environment, which at that time was characterised by chronic shortages of basic commodities.

International remittances from England or the us were largely cash remittances because it is easier and cheaper to send cash than goods from these countries. Freight charges for goods were identified as the biggest deterrent, hence the dominance of hard currency. During an interview with Monica, whose sister is in the UK, she indicated that

Sometimes we get clothes, but she says that it is very expensive...She has always said that it is very expensive to send goods, you know shipping. She has told us that she has bought flat screens and the like, but she says it's too expensive to ship the items, so she's going to take forever. (Monica interview)

However, due to the shortages of commodities in the economy, a significant proportion of these international remittances were transformed into goods through regular shopping trips to neighbouring countries. Chipso, whose husband had been working in the UK for five years, is one such case. From 2005 to 2008, she would make twice-monthly shopping trips to Johannesburg after receiving cash from her husband. Chipso would buy virtually all her groceries in Johannesburg, and in 2008



mentioned that she even transported meat back home in a cooler box as the shortage of basic commodities had reached critical levels (Chipo interview). The prevalence of these shopping trips led scholars like Polzer (2007) to categorise 'shoppers' as one 'type' of Zimbabwean migrant who entered South Africa to shop for food and basic goods and returned to Zimbabwe almost immediately. An article in the *Mail and Guardian* noted that Zimbabwean cross-border shoppers were largely responsible for the growth in retail sales in South Africa, which rose from 8.7 per cent in 2006 to 18 per cent in 2007 when Zimbabweans spent R2.2 billion in the South African economy.<sup>5</sup> This made them the biggest non-South African spenders.

The economic crisis shaped forms of remittances in that as it progressed it manifested itself in the shortage of basic commodities. Remittances, especially those from South Africa, were increasingly in the form of scarce commodities not available in Zimbabwe. Households in the study indicated that prior to the shortages cash remittances used to be the dominant form; however, as the economic situation changed, the forms of remittances also changed so as to allow households to maintain or improve their living standards. In 2008, after the presidential election, the economic meltdown deepened and resulted in an unprecedented scarcity of goods, including the staple maize-meal. Households had to look outside the country, and their migrant relatives stepped in to make up for the shortages.

This was illustrated by Munashe, who emigrated to South Africa in 2003 and has been working as a boilermaker in Johannesburg ever since. In addition to his parents in the rural areas, he has a wife and two children in Zimbabwe dependent on his support. He used to send cash to them but started to send goods instead in 2007. He reiterated that since then he mainly sent goods because everything was in short supply in Zimbabwe. He sent R2 000 worth of groceries home every month. Munashe indicated that he had never sent maize-meal home since he came to South Africa because maize had always been available and although it was scarce, an absolute shortage was unheard of. However, Munashe, along with many more like him, had to send bags of mealie-meal for the greater part of 2008 (Munsahe interview).

With the formation of the unity government between ZANU-PF and the MDC in February 2009 and the official dollarisation of the economy at the beginning of the same year, the country reached a turning point after years of decline. This was evidenced by improved availability of goods and commodities on shop shelves and a decrease in inflation. A follow-up field trip in October 2009 revealed a completely different picture. The adoption of the multiple-currency system and the introduction of duty free regulations on imported basic commodities had led to price declines and a marked improvement in stock levels in most shops. However, prices remained high for most poor urban households with limited purchasing power. In addition, unemployment worsened to over 90 per cent whilst the average salary

was USD200, yet the poverty datum line stood at USD500 in 2009.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, since 2009 the importance of in-kind remittances has been decreasing, as the supply of goods has improved in the country, and cash remittances have increasingly come back to play a central role in household livelihoods.

At the peak of the crisis in September and October 2008, official inflation was over 231 million per cent, and Professor Steve Hanke from the CATO institute put the annual inflation rate as of 31 October 2008 at 2.79 quintillion<sup>7</sup> per cent (Hanke 2008). Later that year the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) then issued licences to retailers and wholesalers to sell their goods in foreign currency to try to ease food and fuel shortages (a move considered to be the partial formal dollarisation of the economy). This sidelined the Zimbabwe dollar and further increased the importance of foreign currency amongst households in order to access goods and services. The complete dollarisation of the economy was formalised in early 2009, after which the supply of goods improved almost immediately. As the US dollar, the SA rand and British pound sterling dominated the local market, cash remittances were increasingly welcomed, since they permitted access to goods now being sold in foreign currency. This was especially so amongst poorer households with limited sources of foreign currency.

The largest proportion of cash remittances arrived from migrants in developed countries and ranged from USD100 to USD500 a month. Households that received the highest remittances received them over a couple of months; for example, in an interview in June 2008, Wes pointed out that their household received USD1 000 every two or three months (Wes interview). However, the average monthly remittances to households in my sample in Glen Norah was about USD400 in 2008 and exceeded the poverty datum line of USD500 only in 2009.

Households in Glen Norah fared better than those in other crisis-affected countries, such as Somalia, whose average remittance was USD215 monthly (Lindley 2006). Cash remittances from South Africa to Glen Norah ranged from R200 to R1 000 per month. Although the cash remittances from South Africa were lower, they tended to be largely in the form of goods worth between R400 and R2 000 a month. The difference in the volumes is explained by Sander and Maimbo, who note that intraregional and domestic remittances are generally significantly lower than international remittances because income levels for migrants in industrialised countries tend to be higher than those of domestic or intraregional migrants (Sander & Maimbo 2003:16).

## Channels of remitting

The main determinants that affect the channels of remitting are the regulatory frameworks applied to remittance transfer and the availability of formal financial infrastructure (Coss 2006).

### Informal channels of remitting

Informal remittance strategies are a reaction to weak or nonexistent financial systems and barriers created by financial and monetary policies (IOM 2005). In Zimbabwe, the absence of supportive monetary policies resulted in the proliferation of informal remittance transfer strategies, especially concerning South Africa.

All households in the sample with relatives in South Africa received their remittances through informal channels, usually bus operators and friends or relatives. Field trips to the Zimbabwean cross-border bus terminus in Johannesburg revealed that bus operators charged a standard 20 per cent commission on cash remittances whilst goods had no standard mode of charging. Arriving at a charge for non-cash remittances appeared to be a subjective procedure and although the charge could be negotiated, the transport operators had more power in the negotiation process than the remitters. A bag of groceries to be delivered to Zimbabwe could cost anything from R150 to R500 depending on size. The 20 per cent commission was significantly more than that charged by formal money transfer agencies. The World Bank notes that on average it costs about 12 per cent to send money using formal channels from South Africa to Zimbabwe (World Bank 2009). Despite formal channels being cheaper, Zimbabweans avoided them because policies of the RBZ on receiving foreign currency constantly changed. To get the most value from their money, migrants opted for informal channels because they were assured that their recipients would receive foreign currency.

The major drawbacks associated with these informal channels pertain to delays in receiving the remittances, losing them altogether and the relatively high cost of these channels. Migrants in Johannesburg complained bitterly about how expensive it became to send groceries, as bus operators charged a fee depending on the size and weight of bags. Maphosa notes that arriving at a charge for non-cash remittances is an arbitrary procedure. The charge for transporting goods is determined by weight and there are no standardised methods of determining weight, such as scales. Rather, the weight is determined by lifting the parcel and 'feeling' its weight. Maphosa adds that although the charge can be negotiated, the transport operator has more power in the negotiation process than the remitter. These fees also change during peak periods such as holidays, when they increase, and vice versa (Maphosa 2007).

### Formal channels of remitting

Formal money transfer agencies, mainly Western Union and Moneygram, were mostly used for international remittances. Participants in the study highlighted some additional social costs, especially in 2008 and 2009, suffered by the recipients over and above the cost of sending remittances. These include spending hours in a queue to receive cash (this also indicates the high occurrence of remitting behaviour). Long queues were regular phenomena outside Western Union offices in Harare. Another problem mentioned is the occasional shortage of smaller denominations – people had to return to collect their change, thus spending more hours in the queues. Problems like these motivated individuals to opt for using informal money transfer companies, which proliferated, especially in the UK.

### Other channels of remitting

There were also other mechanisms to send remittances to Zimbabwe from international senders, such as electronic payments that utilised the internet and cellphone technologies. These mechanisms were innovatively developed to allow the transfer of both cash and goods from international destinations such as England: upon receiving payments in the UK the company delivered text message coupons to recipients that could be redeemed for actual goods across a network of local stores, banks and petrol stations. This enabled recipients to bypass the Zimbabwe dollar and therefore hyperinflation. This facility was particularly common in 2008 during the severe shortages of basic commodities. Some agencies even offered a variety of goods ranging from cement to meat. However, these channels were uncommon in Glen Norah because they were said to be expensive and it was cheaper to receive cash and then buy goods in South Africa.

### Uses of remittances among households in Glen Norah

There is consensus in the literature that the bulk of remittances to developing countries are used primarily for consumption and then for investment in human capital (which includes education, health and better nutrition). Investment in land and livestock or in building or improving a home is also relatively common, but is secondary to daily needs and human capital expenses (see Lindley 2006 & 2007; Maimbo 2006; Sander & Maimbo 2003). Coss notes that remittances improve human development outcomes, since households receiving remittances generally spend more on healthcare and have higher school attendance rates (Coss 2006).

Similar usage patterns were also evident in Glen Norah, where remittances were mainly used for household consumption, education, healthcare, rent and investments.

**TABLE 2.1** *Uses of remittances*

Category of remittance use	% of remittance spend
Food expenditure	100
Education	53.3
Healthcare	40
Accommodation/rent	26.6
Investments (building, acquiring assets)	20
Other household expenses	–

Table 2.1 shows how households in Glen Norah spend their remittances. It is difficult to quantify the proportion of remittances used on each item because of the volatility of the environment, which constantly forces households to change their allocations to different items.

The table shows that all households spend a portion of their remittance on food, whilst 53.3 per cent channel some of their remittance towards education, and 40 per cent spend part of the remittance on healthcare. Although the patterns of remittance use in Glen Norah were similar to those in other developing countries, the excessive reliance on remittances for food expenditure is unique, and the high investment in human capital accumulation, given the unfavorable economic conditions, was striking. Therefore, it is necessary to unearth how households in Glen Norah used their remittances for food and human capital accumulation, which includes investments in education and healthcare.

### Expenditure on food

The use of remittances for food was more evident in Zimbabwe than in other countries, as shown in a survey by the Southern African Migration Project (SAMP) in five SADC countries. The survey found that 90 per cent of households purchased food and other basic goods with remitted funds (Hughes et al. 2007).

Due to the severe economic constraints in Zimbabwe that manifested in the shortage of basic goods, the use of remittances for food was critical to all households in the sample studied. Food insecurity in urban areas, as in other parts of the country, was rampant and compared to rural areas there was inadequate humanitarian support. The amount of food remittance and the use of cash remittances to buy food in Glen Norah is testimony to the key role of remittances in stabilising household food security. Food remittances were mainly from South Africa, and 87 per cent of the participants in the study with relatives in South Africa received remittances mainly in the form of goods, primarily groceries such as cooking oil, soaps, rice and so on, which were a central part of their food supply.

Revai explained her family's reliance on remittances for survival by saying, 'for the groceries that is what we eat because if you go to the shops, you will not get

bread or maize meal, they are scarce these days. So we eat that rice [received from South Africa]...so we use the remittances to survive every day (Revai interview).

### Expenditure on education

The education system was on the verge of total collapse in 2008 as an estimated 45 000 teachers had left the profession since 2004.<sup>8</sup> The remaining teachers resorted to absenteeism in protest against meagre salaries as they opted to engage in other informal economic activities. Despite these challenges, some schools managed to remain functional throughout 2008 by relying on the teachers' and parents' own initiatives in which remittances were central.

One of the initiatives adopted to keep the schools afloat involved charging tuition in foreign currency and groceries<sup>9</sup> whilst teachers increasingly resorted to giving private lessons to supplement their salaries. Tinashe had a child in boarding school that had managed to remain fully operational because parents agreed to pay USD50 a term and also supplied the school with a range of groceries for the pupils and staff. Tinashe reiterated that 'we now have to take care of the teachers otherwise they will just go down to South Africa.' Tinashe also highlighted that the groceries and money sent by his son in South Africa had to be channelled to his sibling otherwise she would be out of school like others whose parents could not manage. Tinashe said, '*vasina vana kunze kwenyika varikunetseka kudya nekuendesa vana kuchikoro*' – 'those without children outside the country are struggling to eat and to send their children to school' (Tinashe interview).

Despite these problems in the education system, a significant proportion (53.3 per cent) of households in the sample spent their remittances on education, including school fees, stationery, transport and uniforms. About 70 per cent of households with school-going children used their remittances for education. This unusual quest for education in a hostile environment that predominated over at least 10 years possibly resulted from the realisation that education offered more opportunities to establish stable longer-term livelihood strategies. Education was seen as increasing the prospects of migration and securing a job in another country that would result in remittances.

### Expenditure on healthcare

Zimbabwe's health system was not immune to the wider economic meltdown in the country. In early November 2008 the Zimbabwe Association of Doctors for Human Rights (ZADHR) reported in *News24* that the country's four main hospitals, in the two major cities of Harare and Bulawayo, were 'virtually closed', while smaller district hospitals and municipal clinics 'were barely functioning or closed'. This was due to shortages of drugs and equipment.<sup>10</sup> Private hospitals had been the main

option for those who could afford to pay high fees for medical care whilst others sought medical attention and drugs outside the country.

The closure of major public health institutions subjected patients, including the poor who had no access to foreign currency, to private medical care that was beyond the means of many. Medical fees in private hospitals ranged from USD200 for consultations to USD3 000 for operations such as a Cesarean section. In Biri's household, as in most others, remittances were central to health expenditure. Their mother had a heart problem and she needed to visit the doctor regularly for her check-ups. She also required a steady supply of drugs every month because she stayed in the village. The medication cost them USD100 every month, a sum they would have found impossible to raise in Zimbabwe considering that a teacher's salary was ZWD150 billion equivalent to about USD5 in June 2008. Biri's brother in England took care of the health expenditure and Biri's rent whilst the other two brothers in South Africa were responsible for food expenditure (Biri interview).

However, it is disturbing to note that the challenges in the health system led others to simply ignore healthcare and only hope that they would not need it. Mary acknowledged this tendency when responding to whether they used remittances on healthcare by stating that, 'for healthcare it is very negligible, you can put it at zero comma zero something per cent. I mean with the situation around, hospitals are not really something that people can subscribe to. We have not been accessing healthcare that much...' (Mary interview). The overall situation in Glen Norah was that households were forced to ignore normal access to healthcare because of the prohibitive costs; however, when they really needed to access healthcare, remittances were of prime importance.

## Other household survival and livelihood strategies in Glen Norah

As noted earlier, households adopted multiple livelihood strategies as a form of diversification. These strategies could be considered an insurance plan in an ever uncertain environment, so that if one plan failed, there would be another to fall back on. Unfortunately, due to the extent of the predicament, most of these strategies failed to provide a stable means of living and were therefore largely survival strategies adopted to cope with the short-term constraints on the household. The following sections discuss some of these survival and livelihood strategies that households in Glen Norah adopted.

## Moonlighting

Moonlighting involves engaging in other economic activities outside one's job. Salaries for the majority were paid in the local Zimbabwe dollar and were irrelevant due to the hyperinflationary environment that always outpaced salary increments. In addition, the attendant cash shortages caused delays, which resulted in people receiving their money at a fraction of its original worth. I talked to Monica, whose parents are teachers, and she reiterated that their combined salary was ZWD300 billion which was equivalent to R80 on the parallel market exchange rate in June 2008 (Monica interview). As a result of this situation, most workers resorted to moonlighting to supplement their meagre wages, especially in the informal economy. One respondent, Joe, indicated that

what is happening with those who go to work is that in their workplaces they take care of each other. Some have farms, so they sell maize-meal, meat and other stuff. So those who go to work link with others to get whatever they can... (Joe interview)

In other words, the work environment was being used as a platform to engage in other more rewarding activities; it was used as a space to establish networks important for accessing scarce resources. Company resources, such as telephones, cars and even offices, were also used when workers engaged in moonlighting. In a conversation with Mandy (a foreign currency trader) at the Glen Norah shopping centre, she said,

people are now just going to work to use the phones to do their own business...I sell my foreign currency to someone who works in a bank and I just go there and do my business in his office sometimes. (Mandy interview)

## The informal economy

A recession in the formal economy and the resultant high rate of unemployment caused the informal economy to flourish as it became an obvious opportunity for households to sustain themselves. There were diverse informal economic strategies that were more profitable than most formal jobs. Zimbabwe's informal economy in 2008 constituted nearly 60 per cent of the country's GDP – the largest such proportion in Africa – followed by Tanzania at 58.3 per cent and 57.9 per cent for Nigeria.<sup>11</sup>

The presence of the informal economy was also evident in Glen Norah as every household in the sample had at least a member who was involved in the informal economy. There were different types of informal economic activities but



I will focus on three of the main ones: petty trading, cross-border trading and self-employment.

### Petty trading

With the collapse of formal trading systems, individuals stepped in to provide the goods and services, thus creating an informal economy that effectively dwarfed the formal one. Mambondiani (2009) asserts that it is quite possible that approximately 60 per cent of the population turned into traders as there were three or more layers of middlemen such that the same commodities were sold several times before they reached the final consumer.

Chronic shortages of virtually all commodities made the trading of almost anything profitable. Scarce goods were being sourced from within or outside Zimbabwe for resale on the parallel market. '*Ndinongokiyakiya*' was a common response used by people to describe the nature of the activities they were engaged in. Jeremy Jones described *kukiya-kiya* as cleverness, dodging, and the exploitation of whatever resources are at hand, all with an eye to self-sustenance (Jones 2010)<sup>12</sup>. It involved acquiring a sixth sense to source and sell scarce commodities in a frequently changing economic environment – people had to constantly change what they were involved in depending on what was available at that time. Monica, an unemployed graduate illustrated this when she said,

I deal, you know how it is here in Harare, if you just hear that there is a shortage of something and if you can get it from somewhere, you just get it and supply it and you know how it is, that's it, you make some money.  
(Monica interview)

### Informal cross-border trading

Informal cross-border trading has a long history in Zimbabwe, but in the 1980s and 1990s it was despised and associated with low-income earners and unemployed people who had no alternative means of living. It was a mere survival strategy used by the poor to cope with their economic situation (Nyatanga et al. 2000). However, with the advent of the crisis, it was taken to new heights in terms of coverage and the type of goods involved. The traditional destinations of South Africa, Botswana, Mozambique and Zambia were supplemented by trade with international destinations such as Dubai and China. The trade mutated from the traditional export of crochet products (especially handmade table cloths) and other artefacts and the import of second-hand clothes to sell in Zimbabwe, to the import of groceries and other consumables. Cross-border trade seemed to thrive in spite of the crisis, or rather because of it, since virtually everything was scarce and the import of virtually anything was profitable. Traders even imported beer, soft drinks and various groceries.

In 2008, South Africa supplied one-half of Zimbabwe's imports, some USD2 billion worth; however, it is the unofficial trade born of necessity that was most noticeable here.<sup>13</sup> Just over 30 per cent of households in the Glen Norah sample had a family member involved in cross-border trading and Chipo, a 51-year-old woman who has been a cross-border trader for 13 years, succinctly described how the trade mutated. She would export crochet products and other artefacts to South Africa and import second-hand clothes to sell in Zimbabwe, whereas she used to smuggle whiskeys, spirits and brandies to Zambia. However, as the crisis manifested into chronic shortages of basic goods, she shifted to importing groceries and other consumables from South Africa (Chipo interview). A notice at her gate indicated that soap and cooking oil were available for sale. Such signs were common across Glen Norah and indicated the evolution of a phenomenon that can be described as underground supermarkets.

#### Small-scale production of goods and services

There were also small-scale producers involved in a heterogeneous set of activities who operated small-scale units to produce and distribute goods and services, generally within their own communities. Observations and interviews with participants in the Glen Norah sample uncovered a wide range of self-employment activities. These included backyard industries, specifically welding and fabrication, peanut butter making, plumbing and vegetable markets. Independence and the irregular flow of income are some of the merits that encourage self-employment, as evidenced by Joe when he said,

I do my own things...I am involved in welding and fabrication, so I do services to people with broken/damaged things and then I make my own stuff for resale like TV stands and peanut butter making machines. Plus I am also involved in peanut butter making which I also sell...we are helping where we can because our money does not wait for a pay day. So sometimes I can get it today or tomorrow, so it helps because it is not fixed...I can get it today and buy whatever will be required at home that day. (Joe interview)

#### Urban farming

Most households also resorted to urban farming as a coping mechanism to enhance food security. Masiya and Mazuruse (2007) noted that whilst widely practised among the poor and the lower-income groups in Harare, urban farming also became common in affluent areas. To counter expected food shortages brought about by the economic meltdown, maize and vegetable plots sprouted in well-heeled suburbs like Avondale and Mabelreign. The cultivation of sweet potatoes was common and their

role as a substitute for bread was striking, explaining the increased cultivation of the crop. Popularly referred to as *chingwa*, which literally means bread, sweet potato farming was widespread in public spaces. In Glen Norah, 73 per cent of households in the sample indicated that they maintained small gardens and fields in the area. Gladys, who looks after three children and two grand children in their Glen Norah residence, was very proud to be a self-proclaimed sweet potato master farmer and boasted that she had overcome the erratic bread supply. She said that ‘...you cannot get bread anywhere in the shops...we now grow our bread, we just grow our sweet potatoes and eat them with tea for breakfast’ (Gladys interview).

Gladys is just one in many households who resorted to growing sweet potatoes and other crops to assure some kind of a consistent food supply during the devastating food shortages.

## Urban–rural linkages

The links between the urban and rural communities were maintained and strengthened as a practical response to the scarcity of resources. Urban households in Glen Norah supported relatives in rural areas with monthly contributions, whilst they in turn were supported by migrant relatives. Two-thirds of the study participants maintained their rural links in such a way that it was a deliberate investment that contributed to household wellbeing. This was illustrated by Wes, who said,

we do not buy things like maize and peanut butter, we get them from my mother because she’s a farmer...we send groceries, money and things like fertilizer, because they do not have any other source of income in the rural areas. (Wes interview)

## Conclusion

As Zimbabwe’s political and economic free fall accelerated, the residential majority had to look outside the country’s borders for alternative sources of income, resulting in the migration of millions of Zimbabweans to different parts of the world – for their own survival and that of their families. Remittances from Zimbabwean migrants became critical for the recipient households left behind.

This chapter shows that households in Glen Norah were not passive victims of the crisis, but through their own efforts adopted multiple strategies that complemented and supplemented one another so as to manage in the crisis. In Glen Norah, there was a huge involvement in the informal economy to generate some income as the formal economy succumbed to the crisis. Non-income

generating activities such as urban farming, urban–rural links and barter trade were also established as contributors to overall household wellbeing. While some of these strategies were a combination of survival and livelihood strategies, the study also found that the severity of the crisis made it difficult to draw a line between the two. As a result, whatever category one chose to use, all these strategies allowed households to cope with the dire circumstances brought on by the crisis, thus denoting the concept of coping strategies.

Most households in Glen Norah used their cash remittances for food expenditure because of the severe food insecurity characteristic of the crisis, indicating that remittances allowed households to manage in the crisis. However, remittances also contributed to investments in human capital accumulation at a time when the education and health systems were facing tremendous challenges, indicating the resilience of human agency. The use of remittances in human capital accumulation can also be said to have fostered longer-term livelihood strategies as investments in education increase the prospects of more stable forms of employment. The patterns of remittances changed with the crisis – their fluidity placed them in a more central position in Glen Norah households. Remittances in the form of goods were crucial during this period, but as the country's political and socio-economic landscape took a turn for the better from 2009 onwards, the importance of in-kind remittances decreased and cash remittances came back to the fore. This is perpetuated by the current economic situation in which unemployment remains unreasonably high and wages remain low.

Overall, the chapter demonstrates that, in contexts of crisis, households manage through the amalgamation of several strategies. Migration and the resulting remittances were important components of these strategies in Glen Norah and were used in a manner that has enabled households to cope in the Zimbabwe crisis.

## Acknowledgement

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## Notes

- 1 The International Monetary Fund (IMF) takes an econometric approach to remittances by focusing on formal cash transfers and the balance of payments framework that rests on the identification of residents and non-residents of a reporting economy. The World Bank (2007) has adopted a broader approach that defines remittances as cash or in-kind transfers by migrant workers to their countries of origin.

- 2 Remittance flows and the stock of migrants may be underestimated due to the use of informal remittance channels, irregular migration, and ambiguity in the definition of migrants (foreign born versus foreigner, seasonal versus permanent). Considerably more effort is needed to improve the quality of data (World Bank 2011).
- 3 Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) were imposed to ensure debt repayment and economic restructuring. Poor countries had to reduce spending on things like health, education and development, while debt repayment and other economic policies were made the priority (<http://www.globalissues.org/article/3/structural-adjustment-a-major-cause-of-poverty>). This has led some scholars including the author to view SAPs as ill-informed.
- 4 Zimbabwe: Diasporans remit US\$361 million, *The Herald* 7 December 2007. Accessed 7 November 2008, <http://allafrica.com/stories/200712070051.html>
- 5 Zimbabweans turn to cross-border shopping sprees, *Mail and Guardian* 14 January 2008. Accessed 7 November 2008, [www.mg.co.za/article/2008-01-14-zimbabweans-turn-to-crossborder-shopping-sprees](http://www.mg.co.za/article/2008-01-14-zimbabweans-turn-to-crossborder-shopping-sprees)
- 6 Zimbabwe: Food security outlook, July–December 2009, *Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET)*. Accessed 12 August 2011, [www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Zimbabwe\\_OL\\_Jul\\_Dec\\_2009\\_final.pdf](http://www.fews.net/docs/Publications/Zimbabwe_OL_Jul_Dec_2009_final.pdf)
- 7 A quintillion has 18 zeroes.
- 8 Zimbabwe: School's really out, *IRIN News* 20 October 2008. Accessed 15 February 2012, [www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=80997](http://www.irinnews.org/report.aspx?reportid=80997)
- 9 Each pupil was required to bring a small grocery as part of their tuition. This could be cooking oil, rice, sugar, soap, etc. These contributed to the school's supply, used to feed all the pupils. A portion of the groceries was also distributed amongst the teachers for their own consumption with their families as an incentive for their services.
- 10 Health 'in state of collapse', *News24* 19 November 2008. Accessed 15 February 2012, <http://www.news24.com/SouthAfrica/News/Health-in-state-of-collapse-20081119>
- 11 Mambondian L (2009) Market hemorrhaged by massive profit taking, <http://newzimbabwe.com/pages/markets26.17426.html>, Accessed 27 August 2009
- 12 Jeremy Jones (2010) examines the development of what he terms the 'Kukiyi-kuya economy', a new logic of economic action in post-2000 Zimbabwe. His work is useful in getting a fuller understanding the whole idea of *kukiyi-kuya*.
- 13 Cross-border trade thrives amidst Zimbabwe crisis, *VOA News* 25 February 2009. Accessed 20 August 2009, [www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-02-25-voa72-68810917.html](http://www.voanews.com/english/news/a-13-2009-02-25-voa72-68810917.html)

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## Interviews

(The names of all participants have been changed to preserve their anonymity and confidentiality.)

- Biri (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 16 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Chipo (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 13 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Gladys (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 30 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Joe (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 17 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Mandy (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 7 July 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Mary (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 14 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Monica (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 30 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Munashe (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 30 October 2008, Johannesburg  
 Revai (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 4 July 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Tinashe (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 14 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare  
 Wes (2008) Interview by Tatenda Mukwedeya, 12 June 2008, Glen Norah, Harare

## Negotiating the crisis: Mobile phones and the informal economy in Zimbabwe

*Sarah Chiumbu and Richard Nyamanhindi*

THE ECONOMIC CONTRACTION IN Zimbabwe that began with the failed Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the 1990s and that escalated after 2000, generated a growing informal economy and led to the disappearance of sustainable formal sector wages. The launch of Operation Murambatsvina in 2005 destroyed the informal sector, but as Jones (2010) maintains, it did not eradicate it, but radically changed its face. The informal economy sold and marketed anything from toiletries, motor vehicle spares and fuel to basic commodities that were scarce or too expensive on the local market. This sector provided alternative livelihood strategies for many Zimbabweans across class, age and gender.

Studies on the informal economy have focused on the causes and effects of this sector and only a few have analysed the coping strategies used by informal economy traders or vendors. One study that does this is by Musoni, who argues that informal vendors were not hopeless victims against structural forces, but demonstrated a high level of political sophistication by opting for 'adaptive resistance'. He states, 'rather than viewing roadside traders as passive victims of state-sponsored violence', we should view them 'as critical thinkers whose interactions with the state are guided by a deep understanding of the broader politics of the day' (Musoni 2010: 307). Previous research on the informal economy has looked at street vendors who sell commodities such as fuel, food, clothing and other grocery items. This chapter contributes to this literature on agency in the informal economy by focusing on the informal selling of mobile phone cards by street vendors.

Trade in prepaid mobile phone cards formed a big part of this informal economy and mobile phones have provided opportunities for self-employment and entrepreneurship across Africa. Resale of mobile phones services through teleshops set up in spaza shops and roadside markets has become an important source of income (De Bruijn et al 2009; Skuse & Cousins 2008). As Etzo and Collender note, 'A large informal economy has also emerged to support the mobile sector, with people selling airtime, charging and fixing mobiles, and renting them out' (Etzo



& Collender 2010). In Zimbabwe, the crisis engendered a booming trade in mobile phone cards and other accessories. Apart from the selling of mobile phone prepaid cards, other downstream industries in mobile phone lines, namely handsets and accessories such as batteries and hands-free components, were created. This chapter focuses on this informal sector and locates the analysis within emerging literature on mobile phones in Africa and their social and cultural importance. According to Pfaff (2010) mobile phones are being incorporated into the ways of life of many people in Africa and are playing a significant role in everyday processes of identification, and in the case of Zimbabwe, played a key role in dealing with the crisis.

The 'informalisation' of the economy and inadequate control and supervision by the government over the telecommunication sector opened opportunities for unemployed men and women to trade in mobile phone prepaid cards. The trading took place in the context of a high demand for mobile prepaid cards from a cross section of Zimbabweans. This demand corresponded to several developments connected to the crisis, one of them being the deficit of democracy facing the country.

As the crisis intensified, the government tightened its grip on the media and communicative spaces in order to maintain its authority. New media technologies, including mobile phones, provided ordinary Zimbabweans with alternative opportunities and means to engage in some form of limited political discourse, especially during election periods (e.g. see Chuma 2008; Moyo 2009; Willems 2010). For instance, the information blackout around the results of the 2008 harmonised parliamentary and presidential elections provided fertile ground for what Moyo (2009) refers to as a 'parallel market of information', which acted in a similar manner to the parallel market of goods in the informal sector. The mobile phone became the main vehicle for filling in information gaps in the country and circulating rumour and humour relating to the elections (see Willems 2010).

In seeking to address the role of the mobile phone in the informal economy, this chapter draws on semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with former and current mobile phone prepaid card vendors in the Harare metropolis area and officials from mobile phone companies in the country. The fieldwork was conducted in June 2009. Sixty interviews were carried out with 32 males and 28 females aged between 15 and 30 years. This study also draws on the personal experiences of the researchers, who witnessed the growth and operations of this mobile phone informal economy.

## Contextualising mobile telephony in Zimbabwe

Until 1993, telecommunication services in Zimbabwe were a monopoly and remained the exclusive responsibility of the Post and Telecommunications

Corporation (PTC). After independence in 1980, the PTC failed in its mission of making telecommunication accessible to a great number of people. Teledensity figures remained low and there was a long waiting list for households requiring a telephone (Goodstein & Velamuri 2009). It is against this background that Strive Masiyiwa, a local businessperson, saw mobile telephony as a solution to Zimbabwe's telecommunication problems (Goodstein & Velamuri 2009; Mazango 1998). Through his company, Retrofit, he challenged the monopoly of the PTC in the Supreme Court of Zimbabwe, where the judge ruled in favour of Retrofit, arguing that the PTC monopoly violated section 20 of the Zimbabwe Constitution, which states that 'Every Zimbabwean has a right to impart and receive information without hindrance'. The Supreme Court ruling paved the way for Masiyiwa to create a new firm, Enhanced Telecommunication Network (Econet). The PTC set up its own mobile phone company, Net\*One, which was followed by Telecel. The passing of the Postal and Telecommunication Act in 2000 paved the way for the creation of Tel\*One, the successor company of the telecommunication arm of the PTC. Currently, Zimbabwe has three mobile phone companies – Econet, Net\*One and Telecel. Econet is the largest telecommunication company in Zimbabwe. According to *The Financial Gazette* of 24 February 2010, Econet had increased its market share to 73.3 per cent from 61 per cent two years previously.<sup>1</sup> Tel\*One remains the only company authorised to offer fixed-line services.

At the time of writing this chapter, penetration figures for mobile phones in Zimbabwe remained low at 10 per cent against an average of 40 per cent for sub-Saharan Africa and mobile phones were the most accessible medium in the country after radio.<sup>2</sup> Mobile technology is playing a growing role in Zimbabwe, a country with a largely state-owned media and restricted communicative space. Civil society organisations in the country have demonstrated the power of mobile technology in their advocacy campaigns. Apart from political activism, mobile phones connect urban and rural Zimbabweans and create channels of communication with those in the diaspora.

## The crisis and the mobile phone industry

Zimbabwe's decade-old deep political and economic crisis did not spare the country's telecommunication industry. A dwindling local currency, hyperinflation and government interference all created a difficult operating environment for players in the mobile industry. The sole fixed telephone network, run by the state-owned Tel\*One, offered only erratic coverage in the urban areas and was virtually non-existent in the rural areas. This inadvertently led to a major increase in the use of mobile telephones by the majority of Zimbabweans from all socio-economic

and geographic backgrounds. The three mobile telephone networks, Econet Wireless, Telecel, and the state-owned Net\*One, however, failed to cope with the market demand for their services in Zimbabwe's hyperinflationary environment. As a result, the companies suffered huge losses, especially under the contract line system, which became more popular as hyperinflation continued its upward spiral. Subscribers would use up lots of airtime, but because of the inflation, by the time they paid at the end of the month the amount would be valueless. According to an Econet official in an interview on 19 June 2009, the network was forced to withdraw its contract line services for clients under the Business Partna scheme as a move to cut its recurring losses (Econet interview). As a result, the prepaid system became the main method for utilising the mobile phone.

One of the reasons for the prevalent use of the mobile phone during this time was the low tariffs. Mobile service providers and affiliate service companies tried increasing tariffs to remain viable, but were persistently frustrated by the Postal and Telecommunications Regulatory Authority of Zimbabwe (POTRAZ). For instance, in June 2007, mobile phone companies were forced to reduce prices by 900 per cent during Operation Dzikisa Mutengo (Reduce Prices).<sup>3</sup> POTRAZ forced the three mobile companies that were charging ZWD7 000 per minute to reduce the rate to ZWD500. According to an official at Econet, the company tried more than 160 times between 2007 and 2008 to have its tariffs approved by POTRAZ, without luck (Econet interview). These sub-economic tariffs not only increased the subscriber base for the mobile phone companies but also made it cheaper for Zimbabweans to talk for hours on the phone. Zimbabweans were spending 200 hours per month on the phone, against an international average of 40. According to a Telecel official, Zimbabweans were 'literally sleeping on the network' (Telecel interview). However, this did not last, as the economy was dollarised in late 2008 and mobile phone airtime charges became beyond the reach of many ordinary people.

## Mobile phone cultures in Africa

Mobile phones have revolutionised Africa during the past two decades. Several studies show that Africa is the first continent to have more mobile phone users than fixed-line subscribers. Less than 3 per cent of the population had access to a telephone in 2001, but by 2010, the number of mobile subscribers had grown to approximately 500 million (Rao 2011). The subscriber base has been growing at around 40 per cent per year across the continent and the mobile phone has begun to occupy an important place in the social, political and economic reconfiguration of Africa.

This tremendous growth has spawned growing literature on the importance of mobile phone telephony in Africa. However, most of this literature is celebratory

and embedded within the modernisation and 'leapfrogging' paradigm that equates use of technology with economic growth and development (e.g. Heeks & Jagun 2007; Waverman et al. 2005; Williams 2005). These studies are partly motivated by an interest in developing technologies with more appeal to the large potential market of people at the 'bottom of the pyramid' – the least prosperous consumers (Kreutzer 2009). This is in contrast to research conducted in other parts of the world that focuses on mobile phones and how they are affecting and reconfiguring cultural and social practices (e.g. Ito et al. 2005; Ling 2000; Lonkila & Gladarev 2008; Katz & Aakhus 2002). However, emerging research in Africa is challenging the 'mobile phone and economic growth' paradigm by highlighting local dynamics of appropriation that are more mundane (see De Bruijn et al. 2009; Hahn & Kibora 2008).

In the context of Africa, very little research addresses the question of how Africans use the mobile phone to negotiate their multiple identities. In a study, *Mobile Phones: The New Talking Drums of Everyday Africa* (De Bruijn et al. 2009), it is argued that not only are mobile phones (re)shaping social realities in African societies, but in turn Africans and their societies are shaping the mobile phone technologies in different ways. Other emerging studies on this subject engage with how Africans are using the mobile phone for democratic activism (Obadare 2006), rural livelihood strategies (e.g. Burrell 2010), building and maintaining social networks (Skuse & Cousins 2008) and for trading (Pfaff 2010).

De Bruijn et al. (2009) argue that there is now an emergence of an African mobile phone culture centred on a variety of activities involving the mobile phone. Emerging research shows that the mobile phone is not just a communicating tool, but is used for a multiplicity of purposes (e.g. De Bruijn et al. 2009; Horst & Miller 2006). Hahn and Kibora (2008), for instance, in reference to Burkina Faso, talk about 'domestication' of the mobile phone, referring to the multi-use of mobile telephony in Africa. Pfaff (2010: 352) states that in Africa 'the mobile phone is much more than just a tool for calling, text messaging, music, photos and phone numbers. It is the device itself as well as its attributes that play a role in processes of individual expression and identification'. Africans use mobile phones to transfer money, check market prices for agricultural and other products, monitor elections and send and receive public health information (Berger 2010; Etzo & Collender 2010; Smith 2007 cited in Wasserman 2011).<sup>4</sup> These scholars thus view mobile phones not only as devices to communicate, but also as material objects used for different social, cultural and economic needs of people.

One of the activities related to the mobile phone, relevant for this chapter, is the economic opportunity provided by the mobile phone for the unemployed people in Zimbabwe. Therefore, this chapter places the mobile phone phenomenon at the centre of its analysis of the Zimbabwean crisis.

## Mobile phones, economic survival and the informal economy in Zimbabwe

Mobile phones are fuelling the informal economy across the continent in different ways. The mobile phone phenomenon is changing the African urban spaces and is having a strong effect on identities, livelihoods and mobility. The importance of mobile phones in many African cities is demonstrated by the prevalence and visibility of leading mobile phone companies in public spaces. Econet Wireless has a high presence in Zimbabwe through billboards, television, radio and print advertisements and their red and blue colours dominate the urban landscapes of the major cities. These advertising campaigns are boosted by several phone shops. In addition, prepaid cards from all the three major mobile phone companies are sold by street vendors at strategic points across Zimbabwe. The mobile phone has thus become part of people's lives, leading to a new urban culture and the development of varied economic activities.

Trading in mobile phones and its devices is becoming common across the continent as illustrated by Gnamien:

The mobile phone thus occupies public spaces in an anarchic manner: streets, sidewalks, squares, road junctions, parks and gardens, markets and coach stations. The proliferation in these same places of a whole host of kiosks selling prepaid phone cards clutters up streets even more. (Gnamien 2002 cited in Chéneau-Loquay 2008: 7)

According to the interviews carried out, the majority of the people became involved in the mobile phone trade for varied reasons, ranging from low-paying formal employment and loss of employment to dropping out of school due to lack of school fees. Trading in mobile phone prepaid cards, amongst others, was thus seen as one of the livelihood strategies that Zimbabweans embarked on.

### From formal employment to informal trade

The growth of the informal sector in Zimbabwean urban areas has been well documented (e.g. Bracking & Sachikonye 2007; Chagonda 2010; Dube 2010; Mhone 1992). At independence in 1980, the informal sector in Zimbabwe was relatively small, accounting for less than 10 per cent of the labour force (Mhone 1992 cited in Chagonda 2010: 11). However, two events in post-independent Zimbabwe led to the growth of the informal sector – the IMF-sponsored Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the early 1990s and the economic downturn that reached a

peak in 2000 (Chagonda 2010; Dube 2010). By 2007, the informal economy was absorbing over 70 per cent of the labour force (Dube 2010).

The economic, political and social decline in the country also had a marked effect on formal employment remuneration. Salaries for most of the 15 per cent of the population who remained working were so low as to be insignificant. Hyperinflation reduced salaries to rates between USD1 and USD30 a month, with most workers, especially civil servants and factory workers, failing to get their salaries from the banks. Fifty-seven per cent of the respondents highlighted that they were forced to leave the formal sector to join the mobile phone business because it paid much better than most of the jobs that they did. With the daily increase in transport fares, accommodation costs and prices of food, working in a formal setting where salaries remained stagnant became difficult for most people.

In the interviews, there was an interesting case of one respondent, an accounts clerk, who left his job distributing prepaid cards for the three mobile phone companies because he realised that he could make more money selling the cards himself. Another respondent said that he knew several teachers who became involved in this business because the education system had collapsed. As many as 75 per cent of the respondents stated that the mobile phone business was so profitable that they not only managed to sustain themselves financially, but also acquired some productive and non-productive assets such as televisions, satellite dishes and phones.

## The effects of Operation Murambatsvina on the informal economy

The 2005 Operation Murambatsvina (Restore Order) not only destroyed many home-based businesses and other forms of informal trading, but also people's homes. Sixty-two per cent of the respondents said that they entered the mobile phone business as a direct result of the operation. Most of them were involved in other types of informal trading that were destroyed during the operation, while others embarked on this trade after losing their homes. Unlike other 'visible' and often physically fixed informal economy activities that, for example, sold vegetables and fruits, the trade in mobile phone cards continued to take place with the cooperation of some members of the police force. Although the police sometimes harassed the vendors and confiscated their wares, the vendors often paid fees, varying from USD10 to USD30, to police officers for 'protection' on the streets. The mobile phone prepaid card business is also very 'mobile' and this allowed vendors to move from one place to another and thus escape official harassment. These practices are also noted by Hammer et al. who state that following Operation Murambatsvina, 'excessive policing intensified and the threat of arrest or confiscation of assets/goods was ever present...new solidarities and complex relationships with the police allowed some traders to accumulate considerable wealth' (Hammer et al 2003: 272).

## Diversifying informal trading

Cash incomes from other informal trade were low. As a result, the high demand for mobile prepaid cards saw some people involved in other forms of informal trading joining the mobile phone business. Forty-three per cent of the respondents said that they were selling fruits and vegetables before they began selling prepaid cards. They highlighted that they combined trading in fruits and vegetables with the mobile phone business to take advantage of the high demand from customers who constantly asked them about the prepaid cards. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, one of the reasons for the success of the prepaid card business was the strategic positioning of the stalls/businesses in different parts of the city.

## The youths and the mobile phone informal economy

By 2008, the education system was near collapse with an estimated 45 000 teachers having left the profession since 2004. In 2008, no meaningful teaching took place as teachers went on a prolonged strike. In addition, post-election violence following the March and June elections disrupted school activities as youth militias targeted teachers and school buildings were used as bases for ZANU-PF supporters. It is estimated that teachers taught for only 23 days in the entire year.<sup>5</sup> In order to survive, many youths transformed themselves into occasional traders in varied commodities, including the mobile phone prepaid cards business. The phenomenon of young people in low-income and marginal communities becoming involved in the mobile phone business is quite prevalent across the continent. Lack of school fees also forced many youths, especially from poor families, to drop out of school. For example, two female traders, aged 15 and 16 years, said that they dropped out of school after their parents coerced them to enter the informal trading business to contribute to the family income.

## Mobile phones, economic networks and social capital

Another pattern emerged in practices related to the mobile phone during the crises. The breakdown of the economic infrastructure created economic networks between the mobile phone prepaid card vendors, mobile phone companies, banks and foreign currency dealers. In relation to these informal networks, Moyo and Yeros state:

A key development in this process [informal business networks] has been the emergence of systematic linkages between large, formal businesses with the small informal enterprises whose epicentre has been irregular urban

growth points. Thus, banks 'externalised' their business activities both outside the country and outside the formal economy inside the country and by conducting foreign exchange transactions in parallel markets. (Moyo & Yeros 2007: 114)

These networks also generated social capital through which the unemployed citizens were cushioned from the worst impact of unemployment and mobile phone companies realised some modest economic benefits.

A growing body of literature (e.g. Silvey & Elmhirst 2003; Wambugu 2007) has examined the role of social capital in low-income people's approaches to coping with crises and resource shortages. The argument is that people use different forms of social capital to navigate economic and political crises through the creation of social and economic networks. The concept of social capital is often associated with what Pierre Bourdieu generically refers to as an individual's network of social relationships and the qualities of those relationships, which enhance the ability of participants to associate with each other for mutual benefits (Bourdieu 1986; Coleman 1988).

## Networks between mobile phone companies and prepaid card vendors

Mobile phone companies could no longer rely on formal channels, such as fuel stations and supermarkets, to sell their prepaid cards as these channels had nearly collapsed. For instance, between 2006 and 2007, supermarkets were virtually empty and the fuel stations literally stopped operating due to fuel shortages. The mobile phone companies thus relied more and more on street vending as a sales and marketing strategy. However, it should be pointed out that mobile phone companies had introduced street vending before the economic crisis reached its crescendo. Econet Wireless introduced street vending in early 2001 following the success of this strategy as used by the newspapers industry. Prior to 2001, selling any product on the streets required a licence from the city councils; however, mobile companies took advantage of the relaxation of urban by-laws and placed vendors on almost all street corners.

With increasing levels of unemployment beginning to characterise the Zimbabwean economy, the industry began to employ several thousands of unemployed youths. According to an Econet official, in 2002 Econet-Wireless employed more than 1 000 youths who were paid on a commission basis (Econet interview). As the other companies followed suit, there was an increase of prepaid card vendors on the streets of Harare and other cities. Unlike other products such as fruits, cigarettes and second-hand books, prepaid cards could be sold anywhere, including on commuter (public) taxis and in bars. The outsourcing of mobile phone



card selling is also a feature of other African countries facing economic challenges. For instance in Burkina Faso and Mali, major telephone companies use hundreds of youths to sell prepaid cards at crossroads on the main routes (Chéneau-Loquay 2008).

However, the relationship between the mobile phone companies and vendors in Zimbabwe was not always beneficial and sustained throughout the crisis period. A Telecel official said that its relationship with the street vendors 'essentially broke down as everything became too informal and we had no real means to control market behaviour on say, retail prices or sales territories' (Telecel interview). This meant that the distortion in the Zimbabwean currency made it impossible to determine real profits. This relationship also became complicated as vendors, who initially sold cards from a single mobile company, realised that it was more profitable to sell cards from all three mobile companies.

### Networks between foreign currency dealers and prepaid card vendors

Another element of the Zimbabwean crisis was the emergence and institutionalisation of the foreign currency parallel market. As the Zimbabwean dollar went on a free fall and the banking system all but collapsed, the foreign currency parallel market flourished. The vendors we interviewed stated that they established close relationships with foreign currency dealers because they wanted to change their profits quickly into foreign currency (US dollars, South African rand or Botswana pula) for them to remain viable. The vendors highlighted that on average they sold between 20 and 300 prepaid cards a day, especially at the month-end. They said they made on average around USD8 a day, which would translate into quadrillions of Zimbabwean dollars on the parallel market. The idea was to get rid of as many Zimbabwean dollars as possible daily, through buying foreign currency from dealers or straight from the customers. The Zimbabwean dollar, which was popularly known in street lingo as '*marara*' (garbage) during this time, was not worth keeping.

### Networks between banks and prepaid card vendors

The vendors also established some relationships with bank tellers whom they paid a certain amount in foreign currency to transfer monies in their accounts to prepaid card dealers or mobile networks accounts (for those that had such connections). When the transfer was confirmed, the dealers would release the prepaid cards. Because of the long queues that formed at the banks to transfer monies for a wide variety of transactions, knowing a bank teller meant that one was able to acquire prepaid cards faster than the other street vendors could. Those without bank accounts had to work through dealers, who charged them a middleman fee for their services.

## Mobile phones as 'virtual currency'

As the demand for prepaid cards grew, some people started selling airtime via their mobile phones where they could transfer airtime directly from their phone to other users. Prepaid cards also became a form of currency, especially during the cash crisis that started in 2004. If one had airtime on a mobile phone, it was an acceptable medium of exchange. This phenomenon, contributing to what Ndiwalana and Popov (n.d) term 'virtual currency', is part of the growing mobile phone culture across Africa.

Several 'barter' deals also took place using prepaid airtime as the currency. As an official from Telecel explained:

At one time, the cost of printing recharge cards was more than the face value of the card itself. Thus a card with a face value of ZWD20 000 worth of airtime would cost ZWD80 000 to print, meaning there was no value in that card. We agreed to pay printers in recharge cards through a barter deal where they would charge us a percentage... (Telecel interview)

The street vendors also used the prepaid cards as 'money' in their dealings with foreign currency dealers. At the height of the cash crisis, they would exchange mobile phone prepaid cards for Zimbabwean dollars, which they would need to buy the cards from mobile phone companies. In turn, the foreign currency dealers would sell the phone cards at a higher price as demand outstripped supply. People would be desperate to get hold of prepaid cards and would pay inflated prices.

Mobile phones also became part of what Horst and Miller (2006) call the 'remittance economy'. Zimbabwe has an extensive transnational population that sends money and other material goods regularly to friends and family (Bracking & Sachikonye 2007). The mobile phone became key to the process of money transfers. While countries such as Kenya embarked on formal mobile banking (m-banking) through M-Pesa,<sup>6</sup> in Zimbabwe, money transfers through mobile phones were conducted informally and creatively.

## Towards an understanding of mobile telephony appropriation in Zimbabwe

Although this chapter narrowly focuses on how unemployed men and women negotiated the crises by resorting to informal trade in mobile phones, and did not carry out an ethnography study of mobile phone appropriation by urban Zimbabweans, the findings have implications for mobile telephony appropriation in the country. While informal trading involved several commodities during the crises

in Zimbabwe, the widespread ubiquitousness of the mobile phone cards business point to the importance of the mobile phone in Zimbabwean society. In spite of Zimbabwe's acute economic challenges, the demand for mobile phone prepaid cards remained relatively high. This shows that even people facing economic challenges are willing to make social and economic investment in mobile telephony. Recent research on mobile phones in Burkina Faso (Hahn & Kibora 2008), South Africa (Skuse & Cousins 2008), Uganda (Burrell & Anderson 2008), Zanzibar (Pfaff 2010), Ghana (Slater & Kwami 2005) and South Africa (Kreutzer 2009) attest this fact. Therefore, mobile phones in Africa may not be 'reduced to the functionality of a communication, but must be understood also as material objects with a particular social and economic embedding' (Hahn & Kibora 2008:103).

Although this chapter focuses on the economic dimension of the mobile phone prepaid cards, mobile phones also became powerful tools for political mobilisation, advocacy, and citizen participation in the national political discourse (e.g. Moyo 2009). Even though no empirical evidence exist, it can be assumed that as in other African countries, apart from political activism and citizen participation, mobile phones in Zimbabwe played important roles in maintaining social networks and creating identities.

## Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how unemployed men and women in Zimbabwe relied on the sale of mobile phone prepaid cards as a coping strategy to negotiate the various crises. It has been argued that the economic crisis spawned a growing informal sector in the country that saw the marketing of various material goods on the 'parallel market'. Although a lot of research has analysed the phenomenon of the informal economy during the height of the crises in the country (e.g. Bracking & Sachikonye 2007; Chagonda 2010; Dube 2010), no studies have examined the mobile phone informal economy and its role in the negotiation of the crises.

Our focus on the mobile phone was also motivated by the growing importance of the mobile phone in the economic and social ecology of African cities. The mobile phone has become useful to help ease the flow and movement of information, money, goods and people. Mobile phones have provided opportunities for self-employment and have given unemployed people across Africa an opportunity to make a living. Mobile phones have also become central in maintaining relationships across time and space, thus creating networks in crisis situations. A growing body of literature on diasporic communities and their links with 'home' has pointed to the centrality of the mobile phone in maintaining these links (e.g. Burrell & Anderson 2008). The phenomenon of the mobile phone

in a crisis situation therefore becomes important to examine. While there is emerging literature on how Zimbabweans have used mobile telephony for political engagement (e.g. Moyo 2009; Willems 2010), this study focuses on an unexplored area of how Zimbabweans negotiated the crises by using the mobile phone as a strategy to master the economic challenges.

We have argued therefore that the economic crisis in the country created fertile ground for the growth of the informal trading in mobile phone prepaid cards. This in turn created livelihood opportunities for ordinary Zimbabweans. Therefore, the mobile phone became not just a phone, but also a multipurpose tool for economic survival, the creation of economic networks/social capital and virtual currency. We have identified economic networks that were created between street vendors, mobile phone companies, the banks and the foreign currency dealers. These networks sustained the informal trading of prepaid cards and provided safety nets for hundreds of Zimbabweans. We gave examples of how people across the demographic divide entered this business to make a living.

Our findings illuminate one element of the unhidden dimension of the 'Zimbabwean crisis'. However, the findings presented in this article are preliminary and invite further scholarly research on mobile phone appropriation in Zimbabwe and its various social and economic peculiarities. An ethnographic and anthropological exploration of the significance of the mobile phone for an African country such as Zimbabwe is thus needed.

## Notes

- 1 Makoshori S (2010) Econet takes market share to 73pc, *The Financial Gazette* 24 February 2010. Accessed 24 February 2010, [www.financialgazette.co.zw/category-table/2893-econet-takes-market-share-to-73pc.html](http://www.financialgazette.co.zw/category-table/2893-econet-takes-market-share-to-73pc.html)
- 2 Hungwe S (2009) Zimbabwean queue for mobile phone lines, *Bizcommunity.com* 15 May 2009. Accessed 1 June 2009, <http://africa.bizcommunity.com/Print.aspx?i=78&ci=35983>
- 3 The government launched Operation Dzikisa Mutengo (Reduce Prices) in June 2007, forcing shops and businesses to halve their prices. Mugabe accused businesses of colluding with his foes in the West to push prices beyond the reach of many and ignite a popular revolt against his 27-year rule.
- 4 See also Essoungou A-M (2010) Africa's social media revolution. *Bizcommunity.com*, 12 December 2010. Accessed 14 November 2011, [www.bizcommunity.com/Article/410/16/55280.html](http://www.bizcommunity.com/Article/410/16/55280.html)
- 5 Zimbabwe: School's really out, *Irin News* 20 October 2008. Accessed 22 April 2009, <http://www.irinnews.org/Report/80997/ZIMBABWE-School-s-really-out>
- 6 M-Pesa is an innovative payment service for the unbanked. 'Pesa' is the Swahili word for cash; the 'M' is for mobile.

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## MIGRATION AND DISEMBEDEDMENT





## Zimbabwe's global citizens in 'Harare North': Livelihood strategies of Zimbabweans in the United Kingdom

*Beacon Mbiba*

**THIS CHAPTER FOCUSES ON** Zimbabwean immigrants who formed part of the wave that 'stormed' the United Kingdom, dubbed Harare North, from the late 1990s into the new millennium. The purpose of the chapter is to provide a sketch of this new group of migrants and compare their experiences with those of other groups. It is hoped that a more detailed analysis of the experience will contribute to a better understanding of the livelihoods of the migrants themselves, as well as their communities in Zimbabwe and the UK host communities.

The chapter seeks to underscore a link between the Zimbabwean social, political and economic crises from 1998 to 2009 and the roles played by Zimbabwe's global citizens during these crises. Global citizens (the diaspora or so-called international brain drain) are the major providers of emergency and development aid to Zimbabwe.<sup>1</sup> They can play, will play and should be given the space to play a constructive role in the revival of Zimbabwe, especially in areas of human capital development, skills, education, health, commerce, investment and international trade. Compared to the overvalued role of traditional donors and aid agencies, the role of global citizens is largely marginalised in development discourse. In the context of Zimbabwe, it needs to be located alongside an understanding of the crisis and the lived experiences of Zimbabwe's global citizens. The Zimbabwean crises have demonstrated that Zimbabwe's social, economic and political spaces are not confined to the territorial or geographic space within Zimbabwean borders. In the present context, a global perspective is more helpful than a narrow outlook focusing only on Zimbabwe itself.

In discussions of the international and humanitarian aspects of the crises, little is said about those Zimbabweans who have left for other countries in the region and globally. Yet there are many Zimbabwean diaspora groups, networks and businesses that have mushroomed, and act to address needs of Zimbabweans both abroad and at home.<sup>2</sup> While the Southern Africa Migration Project has devoted much attention to the migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa, there is little about

migration to other countries and on the lived experiences of Zimbabweans in the host communities.<sup>3</sup> Abuse of their human rights at the hands of host communities and officials, for example, is a subject hardly discussed at international forums.

This chapter contributes to an understanding of the lived experiences of Zimbabweans living outside Zimbabwe and the impact this has on communities (in Zimbabwe and the United Kingdom in this case) and on the migrants themselves.

## Conceptual and methodological frameworks

A contested process, migration is a sensitive topic to research. This chapter is based on a study undertaken between 2003 and 2004 by a group of Zimbabwean researchers based in the UK, coordinated by the author. The study confirms the inappropriateness of survey methods that use postal and self-completion questionnaires. The researchers used snowball methods to identify potential respondents whereby contacts from everyday life (work, church, educational institutions and others) were used to identify migrant Zimbabweans and build a pool of potential respondents. When a degree of familiarity between researcher and potential respondent was established, the respondent was introduced to the research project and invited to participate by completing a questionnaire. Despite these measures, only 20 per cent of the questionnaires left for self-completion or posted for completion were returned or completed. In contrast, it was possible to complete all questionnaires attempted through telephone and face to-face interviews. Candidates who did not complete the questionnaire 'felt uncomfortable' writing down responses, although during conversations they were prepared to talk about almost all of the issues on the questionnaire. This chapter is based on a sample of 25 completed questionnaires complemented by field observations and key informant discussions.

The respondents had left Zimbabwe between 1998 and 2002 and had settled largely in London and South East England. Sixty per cent were female, aged between 28 and 40 at the time of the interviews; the male respondents were between 29 and 45. At the time when they left Zimbabwe, 80 per cent of the respondents had a job there and 70 per cent had a solid education base (a university degree, a college level diploma or an 'O' level qualification). Once in the UK, 80 per cent of the respondents had enrolled in an educational institution or on a training course. Before leaving Zimbabwe, 40 per cent of the respondents had no property there. At the time of the interview, 13 per cent of the respondents had purchased property in the UK.

Although the design of the questionnaire had a quantitative dimension, this chapter does not use statistics and prefers to summarise life stories told by the respondents. These experiences and testimonies bring out the integrated nature

of the migration experience, which is often lost in the reductive use of figures. Furthermore, a small sample is only useful as a source of suggestive insights rather than broad generalisations. Insights were also obtained through discussions in which no questionnaires were completed and through participant observations. Conceptually, this study relies on migration systems theory (see Harris 1995). This theory sees migration as a micro-macro process rather than a single event. It recognises both national and international as well as community and individual linkages. At the macro level, economic and historical structures such as colonial influence, institutional harmony, languages, communication links and regulatory regimes are significant factors affecting migrant dynamics. Thus for Zimbabwe, its history as a former British colony partly explains why the UK has been a primary European destination for immigrants. At the micro level are the individual, family and community dynamics where cultural and social capital is deployed to support livelihoods.<sup>4</sup> Households and families are seen as dynamic multi-located institutions that make short-term decisions in order to survive now and in the future: decisions made in one place influence and are influenced by processes in distant and diverse places.

Figures show that Africa's contribution to the global refugee pool is the largest of any continent with the bulk of these refugees remaining as internally displaced people within their own countries and in Africa (IDMC 2009). Statistics often fail to include migration within Zimbabwe (internally displaced) and to southern Africa. This is largely because of the legal status and terminology used to categorise migrants in which the focus is on 'refugees and asylum seekers'. The result is that Zimbabwean crisis-related migrants in places such as South Africa and the UK remain outside official attention. For example, in 2003 *The Independent* newspaper (UK) reported that up to 400 000 Zimbabweans were living in the UK (half of them illegally) and that at least 300 were leaving Zimbabwe daily to join friends and relatives in the UK (*The Independent* 18 January 2003). This referred to the period before Zimbabwe was categorised as a visa country in November 2002. At that rate, it means that over 100 000 Zimbabweans would have come to the UK annually. It is doubtful whether the figure of 300 new arrivals a day could have been sustained consistently over a long period. Not all travellers from the country would be coming to stay – many went back – but there is no system in the UK to monitor this. A 2008 study by the UK Border Agency estimated that there were approximately 100 000 Zimbabweans in the UK.<sup>5</sup>

In 2002, The United Nations Development Programme contracted the Scientific and Industrial Research and Development Centre (SIRDC) to conduct an analysis of the cause and effect of the brain drain in Zimbabwe. They established that there were '479 348 Zimbabweans in the Diaspora...mainly in the United Kingdom, Botswana and South Africa' (SIRDC 2003: 42). The report admits that

this figure is low and that it underestimates the number of Zimbabweans in South Africa. However, it also states that it cannot agree with the claims of phenomenal exodus made by newspapers at the time. The difficulty is that official statistics only report breadwinners and not dependents and, as noted earlier, there is no system to track return migration.

The lack of reliable UK official statistics on return migration extends to movement of dead bodies out of the UK. For such movement, notification and permission to the coroner is given on Form 103. However, there are no systems at the coroner's offices nor anywhere else to consolidate and keep track of the numbers of bodies moved from the UK to countries like Zimbabwe.<sup>6</sup> Anecdotal evidence indicates that body counts of Zimbabweans moved have risen sharply since the late 1990s. Unlike Chinese migrants in the UK, Zimbabwean deaths in the UK are not due to old age.<sup>7</sup> This aspect of bereavement, death and burial in the diaspora is addressed elsewhere (see Mbiba 2010).

## Zimbabweans in Britain: Some preliminary observations

What is the profile of the Zimbabwean migrant in the UK? Zimbabwean community members are likely to have, on average, better academic qualifications than the host community and other African communities. In 2004, the Home Office published a skills audit of refugees conducted over a three-month period and found that of all the groups surveyed, the Zimbabweans had the highest levels of education.<sup>8</sup> This is largely because of the general investment they put into education as the route to progress, as well as the higher level of literacy achieved by the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe in the 1980s. Coupled with this, migration to the UK is an expensive exercise afforded only by those from middle- and upper-class families who also happen to be better educated. Thus, prior to 2000, Zimbabweans were a favoured group with regards to UK employment.

Until November 2002, Zimbabweans did not have visa restrictions that applied to most African nationals coming to the UK. This, in addition to their higher education and perceived positive work ethics, meant that employers had fewer hurdles to deal with if they employed a Zimbabwean, compared to the situation with 'visa nationals'.

As political and diplomatic tensions between Harare and London worsened, the numbers of Zimbabweans refused entry into the UK increased. Respondents described Zimbabwean experiences at the hands of immigration officers as 'traumatic', 'demeaning', 'frustrating' and 'utter human rights abuse'. In the UK, the Zimbabwe Association was one of the groups that spoke out about the ill-treatment of immigrants. However, as an asylum-focused organisation, it did not articulate

broader human rights issues, such as conditions experienced in the workplace or in attempts to access services, but sought to highlight alleged dangers faced by refused asylum seekers forced to return to Zimbabwe or held in UK detention centres.

Unlike some immigrant communities concentrated in specific regions and inner city areas of large cities, Zimbabweans appear in every corner of the UK. Settlement in a particular place appears to depend on a combination of factors, such as Zimbabweans' general perceptions of class, access to employment opportunities, access to services, especially education colleges, access to good schools for children and availability of affordable housing.

For most Zimbabweans, settlement in a low-density residential neighbourhood is considered an ideal indicator of success (in colonial Zimbabwe, these were whites-only residential areas). They have no qualms settling in places such as London's Eltham, Bromley, Bexley and Kent, which other African communities refer to as 'those racist places'.<sup>9</sup> The health and care industry (old people's homes) and warehouses are major sectors where Zimbabweans found employment, mainly during the 1997–2004 period. Consequently, they have ended up in locations where old people are concentrated or wherever care services are needed. Southend-on-Sea (a former fishing industry node) is one such area, with an ageing British population in need of care and a thriving Zimbabwean community. Hull, Southampton and Brighton are areas with similar communities. There is a good chance that a black person one comes across in small and remote agricultural towns all over the country may be Zimbabwean. Cleaning toilets and care work (derogatorily labelled 'BBC' – 'British Bottom Cleaners' – by Zimbabweans back home) is something most people would not want to be identified with in Zimbabwe (label subsequently adopted by McGregor 2007). Those doing such work initially sought employment in remote places where there was a low risk of meeting travellers likely to report this back home. However, a survey carried out in 2005 found that care work constituted the largest single occupational category of work amongst Zimbabweans (Bloch 2005).

Those who shun care work (mostly men) are concentrated in industrial areas where order pickers in warehouses, sorting and packing workers and bakery workers are needed. Areas of London along the lower Thames, such as Greenwich, Woolwich, Belvedere and Erith, have such employment opportunities and Zimbabweans have settled within easy travelling distance to these areas. These patterns appear to be repeated in other metropolitan areas of the UK, such as the Birmingham–Coventry–Wolverhampton area, the Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield and Doncaster areas as well as Glasgow. Zimbabweans are also concentrated in the Slough area (now referred to as '*kwaChirau*' – an area in the Mashonaland West province of Zimbabwe whose name rhymes with the pronunciation of 'Slough'). Reading, Luton, Leicester and Bedford are other areas with significant concentrations. After initially settling in London,

Zimbabweans with families have often opted to move to these smaller towns where house rentals are lower but which still allow them access to London and other major cities. There are emerging settlement patterns with individuals from the same region in Zimbabwe concentrated in the same region in the UK with suggestions that Leeds and North Yorkshire is dominated by those from Matabeleland, while Luton is home to 'maZezuru'.<sup>10</sup>

More recently, those Zimbabweans who have applied for asylum from within the UK have been subject to a dispersal policy that resettles such people away from London and South East England. The settlement pattern of white Zimbabweans takes a slightly different pattern with discernible concentrations in regions like Surrey, Hampshire, Berkshire, Oxfordshire, Devon and Nottinghamshire.

## Zimbabweans taking the United Kingdom by storm

Earlier, the chapter referred to the wave of Zimbabweans that 'stormed' the UK at the end of the 1990s and the new millennium. While this may refer to the numbers, there are other ways in which the presence of Zimbabweans was and is very noticeable in the everyday life of the United Kingdom. As described in the preceding section, Zimbabweans have aided the suburbanisation of black Africans in the UK and have become visible in almost every sector of the job market. For example, according to *The Economist*, in 2001, Zimbabwean nurses and those from South Africa obtained the 'the most work permits' to work in the United Kingdom.<sup>11</sup> A later section will expose that the 'storming' was not only about headcount and geographical spread but also about the kinds of activities and jobs they have taken up such as in the social care industry.

In the health and education sector, figures from Buckinghamshire University (BUCU) illustrate the patterns of growth in numbers of individuals from Zimbabwe (see Figure 4.1). In numerical terms, women have dominated the migration of Zimbabweans to the UK with health and education providing a source of livelihood to a large proportion.

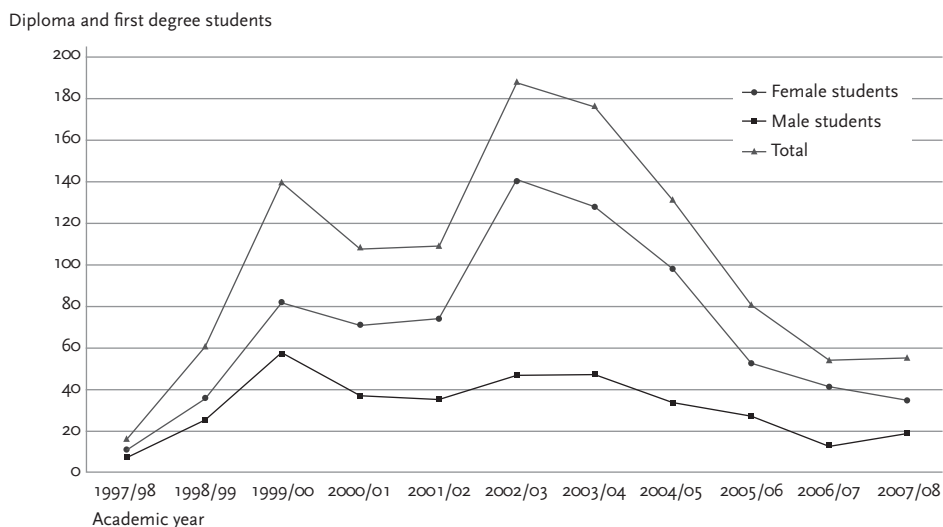
The figures shown support the fact that the migration of Zimbabweans to the United Kingdom has been a female-led process; women will determine the future of Zimbabwe's new global generations.

Figures 4.2 and 4.3 highlight the impact of the visa regime implemented by the UK from November 2002.

In the post-2002 period, when Zimbabwe became a visa nation, it is very likely that the numbers of new entrants has dropped. This affects not only student numbers but also all other categories such as asylum seekers, and work permit applications.

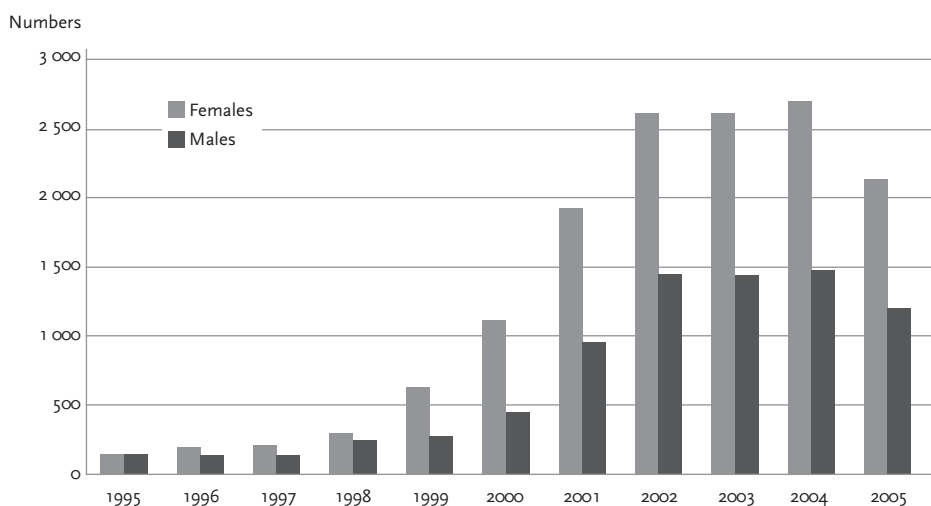


**FIGURE 4.1** *New students declaring Zimbabwean nationality registered for diploma and first degree courses at BCUC*



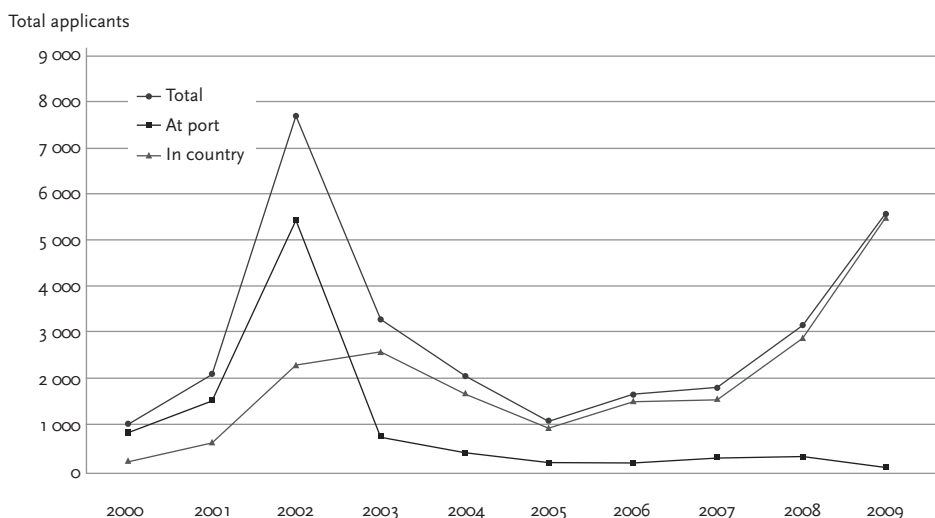
Source: BCUC Head of Management Services, 25 June 2004 and 27 February 2009.<sup>12</sup>

**FIGURE 4.2** *Zimbabweans granted work permits in the United Kingdom*



Source: Immigration and Nationality Directorate Freedom of Information, 2006; see also Home Office Statistical Bulletin, Control of Immigration: Statistics UK for the years 2001–2008.<sup>13</sup>

**FIGURE 4.3** *Zimbabwean asylum applications to the United Kingdom*



Source: Home Office, Research Development and Statistics Directorate, Croydon.<sup>14</sup>

There is a major item on Zimbabwe or Zimbabweans in the press (tv and newspapers) almost every week. Stories of Zimbabwean asylum seekers, HIV/AIDS among Zimbabwean groups (such as nurses), and crime stories (especially relating to domestic violence and related murders), have competed with those on the politics of the Zimbabwe crisis and the response (or lack of it) of the international community. In 2005 Zimbabwe even provided its own vibrant barn-storming *Big Brother* contestant in cardiac nurse Makosi Musambasi who, amid controversy, survived to the last day eventually coming out in third place.

## Exclusions and understanding the British

Beyond the legal immigration conditions that plague many immigrants, economic and social survival is about overcoming multiple unexpected barriers. 'You have to prove legality at every stage,' one respondent commented. In particular, Zimbabweans in Britain often experience exclusionary forces that operate in the job market. These have to do with unwritten codes of practice, preferences and behaviours. A respondent used a combination of proverbs and emotional recollections to capture this feeling:

My life here has taught me that you have to understand the British....To know what is happening to you, you have to understand their language. When I say

language, I do not mean English. I do not mean that you have to know how to speak English. Of course you do. What I mean is...that language which is not written, the signs and symbols, which they use to communicate among themselves. When they don't want you to know, they will always find a way to exclude you.<sup>15</sup>

Even those with decent jobs often feel frustrated at work and consider moving elsewhere. A graduate nurse reflected:

Frustration...maybe go to America? But then although there is good money there, there are problems as well. It is far from home but the most critical issue is the litigation culture. For a nurse you have to consider this seriously. Again, you are already settled here so moving may not be the best... greener pastures are not always green when you get there.<sup>16</sup>

Traditionally, migration within and from Zimbabwe was a male-led and male-dominated process whatever phase one looks at – be it migration to South Africa's gold mines in the 1800s or colonial-day migration to cities such as Bulawayo and the then Salisbury and to mining towns, plantation towns or South Africa in the 1970s. In the 1980s and 1990s, migration to South Africa was still male-dominated (Dobson 1998). However, the 1990s saw a transformation of industry in Europe consolidating the move of labour away from extractive sectors such as agriculture towards less labour intensive sectors. Associated with this has been the rise of female labour coupled with the casualisation of labour. Women now dominate in most service sectors while at the same time no job is permanent. In this environment, the rights and social support of workers, especially migrants, have been eroded. This in part is the context within which female nurses and teachers were the favoured recruits to the service sector of the UK (such as the health, care and teaching sectors). Women, whose incomes were much lower in the home country, consider that they have found 'emancipation' in the new economy in Britain.

For Zimbabwe, the exodus of nurses to the UK became significant around or soon after 1996 when the economy, salaries and working conditions of civil servants declined dramatically. Professionals dissatisfied with working conditions in Zimbabwe have also moved to neighbouring countries, especially Botswana and South Africa, as is well-documented for education and health professionals (see Gaidzanwa 1999; Mutizwa-Mangiza 1996; Polzer 2008; Tevera & Chikanda 2009). As with teachers, the role of recruiting agencies for nurses was significant (although no agency-recruited nurses were interviewed for this study). Two broad trends can be identified: (a) school leavers and other non-health professionals who came to the UK to enrol on nursing courses; and (b) qualified nurses who only needed to do

a short 'conversion' course that enabled them to work as full professionals in the National Health Service. There was also a large group of workers who came to work as carers, with training given on the job. Given the bias towards female recruitment into nursing in Zimbabwe, as well as the female preference for jobs such as care assistants, the recruitment of nurses from Zimbabwe into the UK could be described as a process that further expanded 'the feminisation of labour' and migration.

Until 2002, in contrast to other college courses, there were no fees to pay on nursing courses in the UK. In fact, nursing students were paid a £500 monthly stipend and allowed to work. Given their status as trainee nurses, they received a higher hourly pay than did 'unqualified workers' working as casual care assistants. However, recent policy changes mean that nursing is no longer attractive although it remains the major route to a livelihood in the UK. In 2002, the UK government abolished the no-fee policy for non-EU citizens. The government argued that migrants were misusing the system as a way to get work permits and to make money.

According to one respondent operating a nursing recruitment agency, the second major change related to the regulation of nursing homes and care agencies: since 2002, hospitals have been restricted in their use of nursing agencies. Similar regulations have affected care homes. This has resulted in a reduced demand for agency staff and closure of nursing homes. The regulations for nurses have also changed for those with work permits (non-EU nationals): they can now work for only one hospital or institution, namely the institution that supported their application for a work permit. In practice, they can now no longer offer their services to nursing agencies, even during their free time. Thus, for Zimbabweans, the potential for raising money in a short time is now constrained. It has not yet disappeared, but as a respondent put it, 'We are bonded into slavery'.<sup>17</sup>

These changes in the employment of nurses are already the norm for most workers who get work permits to work in the UK. They cannot change employment without the consent of the employer. Our respondents felt that this undermines their ability to assert employee rights in circumstances of perceived unfair treatment by the employer. Castles (2000) reminds us that historical precedents to this 'tied labour' include slavery, indentured labour and systems of control of foreign labour pioneered by Germany before the First World War. In colonial Rhodesia and South Africa, a similar system tied an African worker to a particular 'baas'. Thus, in a subtle way, 'Harare North' workers find themselves bound by structures reminiscent of colonial Salisbury.

After a period of settlement and when most of the major home concerns are taken care of, migrant labourers become aware that their position is one of abuse and exploitation. They become more aware of their confinement to the '3D' jobs (Castles 2000) – dirty, difficult and dangerous (e.g. cleaning, factory and security guard work). 'Tinokuvava nebaso' was how respondent Mudiki put it, referring to

'back-breaking' shift work he has to do in order to survive and meet remittance expectations back home.<sup>18</sup> Another male respondent studying and working in London put it this way '...Shift work kills...I am now 34 and to continue like this to the age of 40...I would be finished'.<sup>19</sup> He left his wife and children in Zimbabwe and could not bring them over due to his restrictive student visa status.

Relegation to '3Ds' is not a phenomenon exclusive to Zimbabwean workers. Elam and Chinouya (2000) and the Relief Line's Croydon Study (2003) both affirm that this is the experience of all African immigrant communities including highly educated men with PhDs. These studies observe that the situation is traumatic and accelerates the increase in ailments such as depression, high blood pressure and stress among immigrant men – ailments proportionately lower in the home communities of these migrants. Literature from the Trade Union Congress (TUC) appears to acknowledge the lack of rights and decent work for migrant workers in the UK. This has initiated awareness campaigns for those coming in from East European countries, but nothing specific for those, such as Zimbabweans, coming from outside the European Union.<sup>20</sup>

## Alternative livelihoods

Although the migration process has been portrayed as a 'brain drain', it appears to offer opportunities for potential 'brain gain'. There are a growing range of entrepreneurs going into business and self-employment and creating opportunities to employ others in a range of sectors. An example of this is Zimat, in Plumstead, South East London. The 'market' is located close to a railway station along a regional highway where public transport is abundant. It operates from 11:00 am to midnight every day and is patronised by many Zimbabweans.<sup>21</sup> It sells music cassettes and disks, Zimbabwean food such as dry meat, *matemba* (a type of dried fish), cereals, and drinks such as Mazowe (a Zimbabwe-produced cordial). *Sadza*, the traditional staple Zimbabwean meal is prepared and sold at lunch times. The premises are very basic: a six by three-metre room on the ground floor with a separate outside door that leads to a flat used as accommodation by the proprietors. At least three adults – a man and two women – are involved in running the shop. Other examples of similar enterprises and vibrant food stores are the Mau Mau shop at Southend, East London and Zim Expo and Zambezi Foods in Luton.<sup>22</sup>

Other Zimbabweans are engaged in brokering money transfers and offering financial services. These include Mukuru, Fanob Exchange, Alliance Link, Global Exchange, Zimbabwe Exchange, sms Country and Abnob Cash Transfer. The basic model requires few start-up costs – a telephone, a fax machine, a bank

account in the UK, and, on the Zimbabwe side, a similar set of inputs plus large sums of ready cash in Zimbabwe dollars. To send money to Zimbabwe, a client is requested to deposit cash into the UK account and show proof of deposit to the UK financial broker. An exchange rate is agreed prior to the deposit. Once the deposit is confirmed, the UK broker sends a fax or email or telephones the Zimbabwe broker giving details of the amount deposited and the beneficiary of the transaction in Zimbabwe. Cash in Zimbabwe dollar equivalent is then transferred or deposited into the beneficiary account for collection. Depending on the urgency of the matter and social capital existing between the client and the brokers, the Zimbabwe-based beneficiary can receive cash within 12 hours.

There are also less formal financial service providers – what respondent Mudiki characterised as ‘*maBureau de Change eChivhanu*’ – a very elementary bureau de change. In this case, an individual in the UK uses personal networks to identify a person with local currency cash in Zimbabwe. They agree an exchange rate after which the UK person deposits money in the UK account of the contact in Zimbabwe who, in turn, deposits the local currency equivalent in the Zimbabwe bank account of the person in the UK. In other circumstances, the local currency is passed to a nominated person in Zimbabwe in order to pay bills or other commitments of the person in the UK. The transaction is based on trust and little or no paperwork is involved. There are no offices and few or no employees involved. As in the *Hawala* money transfer system used by Somalis, cash in Zimbabwe stays in Zimbabwe while the forex in the UK or elsewhere stays outside Zimbabwe. Clearly, the financial support goes where it is needed, quickly and effectively, compared to the formal channels of aid. However, officials in the West have taken a dim view of these financial transactions, alleging that they are used to sponsor terrorist activities, drugs and money laundering.<sup>23</sup>

The bulk of these transactions occur where a worker in the UK needs funds for family members or business in Zimbabwe but has no access to Zimbabwe dollars and would lose financially if the funds were transferred through the formal banking system. That is where the brokers come in, collecting foreign currency in the UK and making sure that an agreed amount is delivered in Zimbabwe to the appointed recipient within the shortest time possible, often a matter of hours. A reverse process can also take place. This occurs when a business or a family in Zimbabwe in need of foreign currency to pay for fees at a UK university or for costs to transport the body of a deceased relative in the UK, for example, will give Zimbabwe dollars to a broker in Zimbabwe for pounds sterling to be made available in the UK. While some brokers have advertised on the internet, the bulk are advertised by word of mouth – usually the more efficient they are, the more potential customers get to know about them.

One place where financial services, brokers and agencies are concentrated is Sydenham, South London. We shall call these the 'Sydenham syndicate'. At least four offices are allocated to Zimbabwean entrepreneurs. Each of these offices has a number of 'desks', each devoted to one service but all integrated to give clients a package. Money transfer, funeral insurance, property buying and mortgage services, travel agency and employment agency are key components of the package. The Sydenham syndicate is significant in that it illustrates how some of the main UK business portfolios are extensions of Zimbabwean companies who, as a key informant remarked, have 'followed money to the UK'. Some of them are Zimbabwe-registered companies that market their services in the UK but are not registered in the UK.<sup>24</sup>

The Sydenham syndicate, which includes companies such as Intermarket Building Society, helps UK-based Zimbabweans to open bank accounts in Zimbabwe and processes mortgages for house purchase in Zimbabwe. In partnership with estate agencies and built environment firms, it can facilitate the purchase of land, construction of property and tenant management. Another company, the MEC Consultancy, has a UK company registration number and works in conjunction with Moonlight Funeral Services to provide funeral insurance and services including 'elite' graves through a Zimbabwean subsidiary, Mashfords Funeral Services, which has 'land banked' graves in cities such as Harare. UK subscribers with sufficient funds deposited with Moonlight Funeral Services can nominate beneficiaries in Zimbabwe who will be given access to burial service packages provided by some of Zimbabwe's elite funeral parlours. The subscriptions can also be used to transport the subscribers themselves or their nominee to Zimbabwe for burial, in the event of death in the UK. The minimum cost of such service is estimated at £1 900 or more. In addition to business brochures, MEC Consultancy produces and distributes *Zimbabwe Connection*, a magazine in which many Zimbabwe-based companies advertise.

More recently, during the 2007–2009 period when the economic crisis in Zimbabwe was at its peak, remittances to Zimbabwe diversified into goods such as clothing, medical supplies, and crucially, food hampers and drums. These were shipped directly from Britain, or procured by South African based agents for delivery to families in Zimbabwe. With the government of unity since early 2009, the Zimbabwe economy has stabilised and goods and food have become more plentiful. The UK diaspora shifted away from sending food back to sending cash and other investment goods such as building materials, machinery, cars and trucks, engines and electricity generators. All these have created opportunities for the growth of cargo businesses run by Zimbabweans.

## In search of security

Remittances from global citizens have become a major source of direct investment for developing countries in Asia, Latin America and, increasingly, Africa. Preliminary observations on remittances among global Zimbabweans in the UK indicate that those with insecure legal and economic status send proportionately more money back home than professionals with indefinite leave to remain and in stable economic positions. For those with legal insecurity or 'those without stationery',<sup>25</sup> investment in the UK is not an option, hence, the urgency to send as much as possible back home before time runs out. Those with children or spouses still in Zimbabwe send proportionately more than is sent by those with complete nuclear family units in the UK. Women appear to send more money more frequently than is the case with their male counterparts. But the greatest deciding factor is perceived need.

Education and housing are the two main areas in which Zimbabweans invest their hard-earned cash. Diaspora remittances to fund housing development kept the property market in Zimbabwe afloat. While the rest of the economy shrunk, the housing market remained buoyant. Companies in Zimbabwe have teamed up to offer packages that help those outside to build, purchase or manage real estate back home. The Zimbabwe government, and in particular the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Dr Gideon Gono, led a campaign to portray global Zimbabweans as partners in economic development and to tap into their intellectual wealth. Following trips and dialogue with Zimbabweans living in Western nations, a Homelink programme was established in which those outside Zimbabwe could invest in a number of products (such as real estate) with remittances channelled via formal institutions. However, 'Murambatsvina', the government destruction of 'illegal' or informal businesses and squatter settlements in May to July 2005 affected some of the investments in land and small enterprises. While the impact of this social engineering on 'diaspora investments' is yet to be assessed, there is now an urgent challenge for urban social scientists and policy-makers to critically examine what has been described as '*Gushungo's* new paradigm of town planning and urban management'.<sup>26</sup> Although the Homelink programme became entangled in national politics and was discredited on the grounds of an apparent link between the Reserve Bank and the then ruling party (ZANU-PF), similar initiatives are emerging, such as the Investment Trust promoted by Tawanda Nyambirayi's TN Bank/TN Holdings.

Prior to coming to the UK, respondent Mudiki's income as a salesperson was too low to get him on the first rung of the property ladder. On moving to London in late 2001, in-laws supported him with initial accommodation and college fees for the first year.<sup>27</sup> While working in the '3Ds', he studied at diploma level. Between January 2002 and December 2003, his remittances enabled him to buy three



properties in Zimbabwe – complete houses in secondary towns within 50 km of the capital Harare and a vacant piece of land in a Harare suburb, which he hoped to develop. In 2003 he sent home remittances of between £3 000 and £4 000, most of which went into the purchasing of the properties. Few would have managed this on a Zimbabwean salary, even in the 1980s when the economy was at its peak. Thus, although the young man was a tenant who paid £300 per month rent in a shared two-bedroom flat and had ‘nothing to show’ in the UK, back home he was now a person of substance.

It appears that the majority who invested in property back home are those who had nothing when they left, or who felt that their UK employment or status was precarious. In Harare, as in other towns, distinct districts have been developed largely on remittance income. An area in the low-density high-income Mount Pleasant suburb of Harare developed this way is now nicknamed ‘*Machembere*’ on the assumption that the incomes used to develop it were earned by Zimbabweans (mainly former nurses) working as carers in UK’s old people’s homes. *Machembere* is the local equivalent of ‘old people’, in this instance used in a derogatory way by those seeking to devalue the progress made by their compatriots overseas.

For many Zimbabweans, the major constraint to entry into the UK housing market is lack of the required 10 per cent cash deposit. Key workers with government support have managed to overcome this hurdle. Those coming out of universities have qualified for 100 per cent mortgages. In both cases, the condition of a secure, well-paying job has been critical. However, with time, even those previously eligible for 100 per cent mortgages have encountered difficulties, as some mortgage lenders have refused to lend to foreign nationals. The limited choice has meant purchasers have ended up taking mortgages that are more expensive. Recent legal regimes demanding monitoring of foreign-national banking transactions appear to discourage mortgage lenders from dealing with foreigners.

However, the process of finding security can be easy at times. For respondent Venus and her sister care worker, mortgage support was easily available when they qualified as nurses. They opted for a joint mortgage and bought a cosy flat close to central London. With few commitments, they have enjoyed life and work, travelling abroad on holidays. Sending money home is not a regular chore for them since there are others, senior to them, who have to worry about that. Buying property in Zimbabwe is also not a priority as they feel secure where they are now in the UK. Yet, as for Mudiki and others, their early years in the UK were years when they relied on financial support and accommodation from relatives.

## Conclusions

This chapter set out to provide an outline of preliminary observations from a study conducted on Zimbabwe's global citizens in 2004. The themes covered are not exhaustive and important topics such as political participation and the cultural, social and civic activities of these citizens are not explored. It is through these associations and organisations, rather than the individual citizens, that development institutions such as the Department for International Development (DFID) are able to engage. Hence, there is a need not only to understand what is currently in place but also to build their capacity for enhanced policy development and investment in the home country. Our interrogation of concepts like the shifting 'migration gender contracts' is just beginning to lead to an understanding of the social transformation of settlement in another country in an era of globalisation. This is an attempt to move away from restrictive concepts associated with refugees and asylum seekers, though these too are valid categories.

The chapter has attempted to show that a migration sub-culture, with its own rules, language, territory and vibrancy has emerged among Zimbabweans. Like most migrants, Zimbabweans desire to pursue a decent and honourable life through legal means. However, as the regime of controls and costs increases, it is not surprising to see an increase in the number of those involved in 'illegal transactions'. Contributions from Zimbabweans to the host community are great. They have stretched the limits of social diversity into areas previously shunned by most black communities. Zimbabweans have invested in themselves, especially through education and training. They have also helped prop up the British National Health Service through quality professionals – nurses, doctors and care assistants. With experience gained in these sectors, Zimbabweans are slowly crafting their own institutions to create jobs. Zimbabweans also boost the British economy through tax contributions. In relative terms, few receive welfare benefits and those who work are not eligible for family tax credits, child-care support or child benefits until they acquire indefinite leave to remain, or become British citizens. At the same time, their remittances have helped to keep Zimbabwe's economy afloat. Makosi's ventures into *Big Brother 6*, 2005, are just one example of how Zimbabweans have penetrated every aspect of British society, challenging stereotypes, traditional perceptions and prejudices, refusing the refugee tag and demanding to be seen as part of the host society – 'here to stay!'

There is still much that needs to be established regarding global Zimbabweans in the UK. Impacts on real estate, health, education, business, democracy and culture in Zimbabwe need to be investigated further. In addition, the analysis of the experiences and roles of Zimbabwe's white global citizens needs

to be included in the ongoing work as well. The space for Zimbabwe's future is now global and researchers need to examine it more fully.

## Acknowledgement

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## Notes

- 1 The term 'global citizen' is used in an effort to imagine and bring into being a person whose social, economic and political life is not bound by the confines of a single country's political boundaries. He or she can settle and contribute to the welfare of any place on the globe, and make a home anywhere without restrictions. In reality, legal and social prejudices often constrain the development of this kind of citizen, but the term is used here as a way of stressing the dignity and the positive contributions of displaced Zimbabweans.
- 2 Some of these experiences are captured in McGregor & Primorac (2010).
- 3 See Southern African Migration project (SAMP), <http://www.queensu.ca/samp/>
- 4 For social capital and the livelihoods approach, see Rakodi & Lloyd-Jones (2002).
- 5 Zimbabwe: Rebuilding a nation. *Phoenix Zimbabwe* March 2009. Accessed 22 November 2010, <http://www.phoenixzimbabwe.org/reports.php>
- 6 Richard Allen, Home Affairs, National Statistics, personal communication, 8 August 2005 (Richard.Allen2@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk); Christine Martin, Southwark Council Coroner's office, personal communication, 8 August 2005 (Christine.Martin@southwark.gov.uk).
- 7 Richard Allen, personal communication, 8 August 2005.
- 8 Zimbabwe: Rebuilding a Nation. *Phoenix Zimbabwe* March 2009. Accessed 22 November 2010, <http://www.phoenixzimbabwe.org/reports.php>
- 9 Respondent, Nigerian lawyer, interviewed March 2001, New Cross, London
- 10 A businesswoman, personal communication, Luton, 20 August 2005.
- 11 African migration: Home, sweet home – for some. How can Africa move from brain drain to brain gain? *The Economist* 11 August 2005. Accessed 28 February 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/4277319>
- 12 Data gathered from personal telephone and email communication.
- 13 Compiled by author using UK immigration statistics: monthly, quarterly and annual reports.
- 14 Compiled by author using UK immigration statistics: monthly, quarterly and annual reports.
- 15 Respondent, Thamesmead, 2005
- 16 Respondent, Isle of Dogs, 2005
- 17 Respondent, Changamire, Milton Keynes, 2005
- 18 Respondent Mudiki, Plumstead, London, 2005
- 19 Respondent, South London, 2005
- 20 Living and working in the UK: Your rights. *TUC*. Accessed 28 February 2012, [www.tuc.org.uk/extras/workingintheuk.pdf](http://www.tuc.org.uk/extras/workingintheuk.pdf)

- 21 Although patrons and respondents referred to it as a market, it is in fact a shop.
- 22 Both Zimat and Zim Expo had closed by the end of 2007 due to increased competition from Asian shops selling similar products as well as increasing costs of importing goods from Zimbabwe in an inflationary environment. However, many other new retail enterprises have started, see Mbiba (2011: 50–75).
- 23 Although no evidence could be made available, some respondents alleged that UK bank accounts for some of those had been frozen pending clarification of their operations (focus group discussions, Sheffield, 2004)
- 24 The Sydenham syndicate had closed down by 2007; however, similar outfits emerged elsewhere, for example, in Luton, Coventry and Birmingham.
- 25 Those ‘without stationery’ is a colloquial term used by Zimbabweans to refer to those whose immigration status is not in order, also referred to as illegal or undocumented immigrants.
- 26 ‘Gushungo’ is the totem of President Mugabe. Refer to Shona customs for the deeper meaning and understanding of these terms in Zimbabwean society.
- 27 Mudiki returned to Zimbabwe in 2006, married, and now lives in Harare with his wife and three children.

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## Escaping home: The case of ethnicity and formal education in the migration of Zimbabweans during the Zimbabwean ‘crisis’

*Thabisani Ndlovu*

**THIS CHAPTER USES LITERARY** texts, such as novels and poems, together with social texts, such as parlance and anecdotes, to examine the self-description of Zimbabweans inside and outside the country’s borders. These texts are mined for subjective experiences or voices of black Zimbabweans and show how personal ambition, ethnicity and formal education shape the discourse and pattern of Zimbabweans’ migration.

It might be a mundane but necessary observation to make, that significant socio-historical events make people (re)evaluate, fashion, contest and (re)negotiate certain identities, amongst which is national identity. This chapter argues that what has become known as the ‘Zimbabwean crisis’ has made Zimbabweans both inside and outside the country think about their ‘Zimbabweanness’. Perhaps not so directly about what that designation means, but indirectly through the advantages and disadvantages of this identity in a time characterised by acute suffering and high levels of migration. Whether consciously or not, it has become impossible for most Zimbabweans to resist asking the question: Who or what is a Zimbabwean? Ethnicity and formal education are two key factors that have influenced group, individual and other forms of identity, both inside the country and in diverse destination countries. The crisis both heightened and occasioned a certain ‘homelessness’ amongst Zimbabweans and asked many questions, not only about Zimbabweans’ financial, but also their emotional resources, as they have had to dig deep for these.

Barring the white minority, comprising approximately 2 per cent of the population, Zimbabweans are a conglomerate of different ethnic groups, amongst which are the Kalanga, Suthu, Shangaan, Venda, Nambya, Tonga, Shona and Ndebele. Peoples’ imaginations of Zimbabwe as home are fractured along ethnic as well as historical, spatial, political and personal lines – and indeed, a multi-dimensional intersection of all these factors. The creative literature explored in this chapter seems to suggest a deep-seated psychic tension in the minds of

Zimbabweans about the significance of home, giving rise to a propensity for emigration. The parlance and newspaper reports suggest both a repudiation of 'Zimbabweans' and a conflicted embrace of this idea. In spite of much touted rhetoric of unity by the Zimbabwean government, and perhaps because of it, fissures have (re)appeared or widened in the national conglomerate. At the same time, there is an emerging sense that some of the fissures are narrowing due to increased transnational migration and shared suffering of Zimbabweans.

This chapter focuses on chiShona- and isiNdebele-speaking Zimbabweans who comprise approximately 15 per cent and 80 per cent of the country's population respectively. Ethnic labels are problematic. As Kahari observes, the word 'Shona' 'is an artificial term used by linguists to refer to an agglomeration of mostly but not completely, mutually intelligible dialects found within and outside Zimbabwe' (Kahari 1990: 5). Keenly aware of similar intricacies, Ranger correctly points out that the word Ndebele 'does not refer to a single ethnic group but to a multi-ethnic nation built through assimilation' (Ranger 1999: 100).

It is widely accepted that the Shona have occupied Zimbabwe for at least a thousand years and that the Ndebele came into Zimbabwe from South Africa about two hundred years ago (Ranger 1999). The country's identities, especially prior to colonialism, were 'permeated by complex processes of assimilation, incorporation, conquest of weaker groups by powerful ones, inter- and intra-marriages, alliances, fragmentation, and constant movements' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2009: 98). Some of these processes, especially intermarriages between the two biggest ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, have continued. This does not, however, erase long-term and persistent tensions between the two. Some of these tensions are being played out in foreign lands.

## Ethnicity

The self-location of Zimbabweans is most instructive. For the most part, Zimbabweans have had a provincial or parochial concept of Zimbabwe as home. Most Ndebele have largely imagined home as their natal territory – Matabeleland,<sup>1</sup> or their village. It would not be out of place to say that the majority of Shona people have generally conceived 'home' as Mashonaland<sup>2</sup> or a particular natal village in that area. The two regions are also geo-political spaces whose history cannot be fully explored in a chapter of this length. Suffice to say that spatial identity, based on nomenclature, is merged with ethnic and linguistic identity. Figure 5.1 shows the regions of Mashonaland and Matabeleland.

**FIGURE 5.1** *The regions of Mashonaland and Matabeleland*



Source: Redrawn from <http://www.ezilon.com/maps/africa/zimbabwe>. Accessed on 19 and 20 March 2012

Increased transnational migration has had an ambiguous effect on the idea or understanding of Zimbabwe as home. On the one hand, there is a confirmation of enduring ethnic, linguistic and political rifts, and on the other, what appears to be the dissolution of these rifts. I argue that the collective trauma of Zimbabweans at one level perpetuates, and at another, reconfigures associational life between the Ndebele and Shona, suggesting a trans-ethnic identity, albeit a shaky one. The bond of suffering appears to have given rise to a coherent imagination of Zimbabwe that nominal citizenship and political rhetoric failed to achieve. Adversity could be shaping a collective identity that one could hazard to call a clearer national consciousness.



## Home

The concept of home can have either a strong or a weak claim on people's loyalty and emotions in its reference to either a real or an assumed homeland. The word 'home' itself is an emotionally loaded word that I use in my exploration of the migration of Zimbabweans following the idea that migration itself is bound up with the practice and politics of belonging in both the country of origin and of destination. The deliberate embrace of a word with such affective value is an attempt to move away from impersonal analyses informed by a narrow categorisation of push-pull factors of an economic and socio-political nature, such as economic collapse and political persecution. This is not to dismiss these factors but to add to them by exploring subjective voices. Disproportionate focus on generalised and de-personalised push-pull factors tends to give staple answers to obvious questions.

'Home' is a most familiar and affective idea. Sayings to this effect abound. They include, 'Home sweet home,' 'There is no place like home,' 'Home is where the heart is' and 'A man's home is his castle.' These expressions have such a comforting ring of familiarity to them that we instantly assume we know what the value-laden phenomenon called 'home' is. Birth and death, two key life stages, do inform us, but by no means exhaustively, of how most Zimbabweans understand the concept of home and belonging.

One ritual that marks belonging is the disposal of the umbilical cord once it falls off the infant. The most common way to do this is to bury the umbilical cord in a hut, in an ant heap, in the centre of the homestead or at any other significant spot (Bozongwana 2000). Dzvairo's poem 'Birthright' captures this symbolic act (Kadhani & Zimunya 1981):

They took my umbilical cord  
And buried it  
In the fertile soil of the field nearby  
Mingling me with the soil ...  
Giving me birthright. (1981: 13)

Thus, one understands the significance of the phrase 'son/daughter of the soil' to mark indigenous heritage and belonging. It is common in Zimbabwe, even today, to have the umbilical cord of a child born in town transported to the rural home for burial. Black Zimbabweans also attach a lot of importance to burial. Most prefer to be buried in their rural homes, completing the cycle of belonging that was started by the burial of one's umbilical cord.

This brief sketch gives an indicative rather than comprehensive definition of the multidimensional, deeply symbolic and sometimes ironic concept of home. In

fact, it runs the risk of oversimplification. In its broad sense, 'home' refers to one's homeland or country of origin – where one hails from. At the same time, it refers to a specific area in that country. For the majority of black Zimbabweans, as indicated earlier, it means a specific geographic place in a rural area, or for some, both an urban and rural home, with greater importance placed on the latter. In Zimbabwe, as virtually anywhere else in the world, home is conflated with house and family. Thus, home is more than just a physical dwelling. It connotes an interaction between place and social relationships. It encompasses 'cultural norms and individual fantasies' (Rapport & Dawson 1998: 8). Home speaks of kinship networks as part of belonging, in which social relations validate an individual as a human being. Mallet gives a succinct summation of home as an 'emotional environment, a culture, a geographical location, a political system, a historical time and place, a house, etc. and a combination of all of the above' (Mallet 2004: 83).

Most views of home tend to be romanticised, with a heavy bias towards harmony and order. There is a tendency to over-communicate the positive and under-communicate the negative. Home, whether at a national, regional, provincial or domestic level, is generally perceived as a haven; a place of security and refuge and a warm and nurturing place in which people can regenerate in the recuperative and reproductive sense. However, home can also disappoint, constrict, endanger, torture, and indeed, kill. Home can be a site of oppression and tyranny. This ambiguity explains the varied conceptions of Zimbabwe as home as well as the motivations for leaving the country.

## Escaping home

It is instructive to examine the discursive construction of home before the economic collapse of Zimbabwe and before Ndebele/Shona tensions were heightened by *Gukurahundi* (the first rains that wash away chaff) – the systematic massacre of more than twenty thousand 'innocent, unarmed civilians' in Matabeleland (Ncube 2007: xi).

As pointed out, most Zimbabweans conceive home through the urban/rural divide. For the older generation in Charles Mungoshi's work, for example, the rural home is regarded as a sanctuary.<sup>3</sup> In the words of Lucifer in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, 'home is where dreams and innocence still survive' (Mungoshi 1975: 162). Old Musoni, Nhamo's father in Mungoshi's short story 'The Setting Sun and the Rolling World', in *Coming of the Dry Season*, harps on this idea when he says to his son, 'Nothing is more certain to hold you together than the land and a home, a family'. But according to Nhamo, home is a 'sunblasted land', a 'rubbish heap' where people 'scrape for a living' (Mungoshi 1991: 27–28).

The sentiments expressed by Mungoshi's character, Nhamo (the short story was first published in 1972) regarding home, may sound very unkind but ironically ring true considering the country's protracted economic decline, the corollary of which has been, amongst other reactions, public anger and the need to escape Zimbabwe. In fact, the suffering brought by the economic meltdown, together with extreme political repression, vies to top the list of scarring historical events in pre- and post-independent Zimbabwe. The context of deprivation that triggers a flight from home is given by Mungoshi's definition of home in *Waiting for the Rain*:

Not until you cross Chambara River into the old village with roofless huts and gaping doorways and the smell of dog-shit and burnt rags are you at home. And then the signature of time truly appears in the work-scarred body of an abandoned oxcart with its shaft pointing an accusing finger at the empty heavens, and the inevitably thin dog – all ribs and the fur worn down to the sore skin – rummaging for something to eat among the ruins. Not until you look towards the east and see the tall sun-bleached rocks of Manyene Hills casting foreboding shadows over the land beyond like sentinels over some fairy-tale land of the dead, are you really at home. (1975: 40)

Home emerges as a challenging physical and emotional space, from which the youth especially feel a dire need to escape. It is a barren land with equally barren prospects. The euphoria of Zimbabwean independence in 1980 might have assuaged this situation only for it to resurface vigorously during the country's economic and humanitarian disaster. Whereas the economic disaster is popularly thought to have started in 1997 with the paying out of huge gratuities to war veterans (Raftopolous 2003), followed by a plunge brought about by a botched land reform in 2000, the humanitarian disaster for the Ndebele started in 1983 with *Gukurahundi*. More will be said on this subject and how it has continued insistently to shape the Ndebeles' sense of belonging in Zimbabwe and South Africa respectively.

Barring the politics of land alienation alluded to in Mungoshi's *Waiting for the Rain*, post-independence poverty and repression, home can be stultifying and suffocating. The source of this disenchantment is largely the family. On the contrary, Zimunya writes that 'Mungoshi sees the family as an ideal mask, a cushion for individual worries. The horror of life is suddenly revealed to the individual as soon as the security of the family is removed' (Zimunya 1982: 92). Nothing could be further from the truth. In Mungoshi's work, danger, insecurity, fear, anger and depression are located in the family or home. Home can force the youthful characters to either flee or refuse to assume their allotted responsibilities. Their refuge becomes a local or overseas city.

The family in *Waiting for the Rain* is plagued by interminable quarrels, dogged by *ngozi* (avenging spirits) and mothers with exacting demands on sons and daughters. In fact, the atmosphere of suspicion and discord is so pervasive that Kizito Muchemwa is apt to observe that the society depicted in *Waiting for the Rain* is 'mired in a web of mistrust and jealous rivals and vindictive witches, the ill-will and transgressions of relatives and the vengeance of unappeased ancestors' (Vambe & Chirere 2006: 44). We observe that Rhoda, Lucifer's aunt, is accused of having poisoned to death Lucifer's brother Tichafa. Garabha, Lucifer's elder brother, who is pro-tradition, is, like Lucifer, opposed to the climate of suspicion and mistrust that pervades the village. It is largely the same reason Lucifer has stayed away from home for two years and not answered the letters written to him for these letters would indirectly ask him to believe the sources of the squabbles and bickering and to take sides.

One cannot contest that the arid land described in *Waiting for the Rain* and in the story 'The Setting Sun and the Rolling World' is a crippling environment because it is a colonial construct and that the infertile land signifies land alienation with its attendant problems. The characters, as most critics correctly point out, are victims of land dispossession following settler rule. Zhuwarara (2001) condemns flight from home by young adults, especially with regard to Lucifer who wants to go overseas as the armed struggle for liberation is gathering momentum. Vambe echoes the same sentiment in opining that

the problem arises when Lucifer and those educated like him refuse to commit themselves to transform the poverty of home and country. By refusing to commit himself to work to transform the poverty of home and country, Lucifer is actually supporting the continued domination of his people by the settler system. (Vambe 2004: 63)

Vambe holds that 'As an educated and therefore enlightened individual [Lucifer] should have spearheaded the liberation of the country' (Vambe 2004: 63). Post-independence state repression also demands the sort of commitment that Vambe and others speak of regarding colonial oppression.

Change-facilitating criticism has its uses but it is too easy an answer as the flight of so many Zimbabweans, including some liberationist critics, attests. In any case, emigration has not been the sole preserve of educated Zimbabweans and transnational migration is not a phenomenon exclusively occasioned by the country's economic meltdown. There has always been personal ambition. Similarly, leaving home is not new in Zimbabwean literature. Whether there is a political, economic or other crisis, and indeed, in the absence of crisis, personal ambition and adventure remain constant.

Mujubheki, in Mungoshi's *Makunun'unu Maodzamoyo* set in the late 1960s to the early 1970s, serves to demonstrate that emigration was a part of Zimbabwean life before and during the discovery of gold in Johannesburg in the early twentieth century. Mujubheki's name literally means 'The one who has been to Johannesburg.' He is rich by village standards and can afford to throw away food that does not appeal to his palate because '*mari matombo*' he says, meaning his money is as abundant as stones that you can pick up and discard at leisure. Because he is always clean and smart, and eats well, Mujubheki looks ten years younger than his real age (Mungoshi 1970: 15).

Mujubheki's story is largely free of complication – an uneducated peasant leaves home to seek his fortune in Johannesburg. The text is silent on how he related to other ethnic groups there. Mujubheki obtains his fortune and returns to the same village he embraces effortlessly and identifies with fully. He does not appear to have a conflicted view of the home he left and to which he was keen to return. His status as a village celebrity does inspire young men to want to venture to Johannesburg so that they too can bring back a loud radio, beautiful clothes and money that will enable them to buy sugar, tea and bread and also build a multi-roomed 'European' house like Mujubheki's. Cain Mathema captures this sort of ambition in his poem, 'The Mud Hut':

I don't want no mud huts  
 I don't want them  
 Do you hear?  
 They must be confined to museums  
 History books, leisure and tourism,  
 Not to necessity and everyday life. (Kadhani & Zimunya 1981: 82)

The persona in the poem insists that what he wants instead, is

Something more permanent  
 Something of cement  
 And corrugated iron or asbestos tiles.  
 Something with a fresh scent  
 But not the smell of cow dung. (1981: 81)

To fulfill these ambitions, one may have to reside outside the village – in a city in one's own country or in another country.

## Exported tensions

The simplicity of Mujubheki's story can be attributed partly to the historical period in which the story is set and partly to Mungoshi's selection of detail. The situation has since changed. The number of chiShona-speaking people migrating to Johannesburg since 2000 has increased and some are hesitant to return to Zimbabwe. This has ignited latent conflicts of belonging between the Shona and Ndebele. There is a common joke amongst the Ndebele regarding the answer to Zimbabwe's crisis – simply extend the South African border to cover Matabeleland and build a strong tall wall. Many wishes, half-truths and anxieties are encapsulated in this joke. Flawed as this thinking is, it nonetheless brings into sharp relief the heritage battle in which the Ndebeles, descendent from Zulu migrations in the 19th century, were not, for the most part prior to the 1987 Unity Agreement, fully part of official Zimbabwean historiography.<sup>4</sup> Some argue that even today, Ndebeles are a forgotten minority with regard to the country's official historical narrative and consequently the imagination of Zimbabwe and its people. The retort that some Shonas give to the Ndebele joke is that it is a great pity there is no cattle herding in Johannesburg, meaning that most Ndebele people are less educated than Shonas and will find themselves doing menial jobs or struggling to get any work at all. The implications of formal education for Zimbabweans at home and abroad will be explored later.

Always sensitive to the plight of the powerless, Mungoshi captures sentiments of purging and exclusion along ethnic lines in the story 'Sins of the Fathers'. Mr Rwafa, an ex-Minister of Defence, is a firebrand tribalist driven by anger and revenge. He is a slave to a history in which the Ndebele raided his Shona forefathers for cattle and women. He cannot forgive the Ndebele, whom he describes as

Enemies of the state. Enemies of the clan, of the family. Looters and cattle thieves. Personal enemies. People who spat in the faces of their own people. Child thieves. Baby snatchers...[who] need to be smoked out, flushed out, blasted out of their hiding places, the impostors! (Staunton 2003: 157–158)

Mr Rwafa's ire, as enshrined in his tribalistic rant, betrays his part in which as Minister of Defence he zealously spearheaded *Gukurahundi*.

The enactment of ethnicity for political ends, driven by brute state force, has left some Ndebele with a lasting legacy of distrust and weakened national affiliation. Some commentators and politicians may charge in the interest of 'national unity' that this claim is divisive, and indeed, that it is an exaggeration. This kind of view underestimates memory and how it is a crucial link between the past and present, especially when the memory is that of traumatic violence. That there has been no

reconciliation regarding this issue exacerbates the situation. The rhetoric and goals of unity are laudable but will not be well intentioned if they exclude proper reconciliation. As such, I tend to agree with Lindgren that 'As a result of the Fifth Brigade's atrocities in southern Zimbabwe, Ndebele ethnicity has become more salient after than before independence' (Lindgren 2002: 19). Lindgren adds that the corollary to *Gukurahundi* was that 'many people in southern Zimbabwe have reacted by defining themselves as Ndebele rather than as Zimbabwean' (Lindgren 2002: 22). This partly explains why the Ndebele tend to identify with the Zulus in South Africa.

A common response in Matabeleland to the Zimbabwean crisis is, 'This mess was caused by the Shonas and only they can sort it out.' It is not only an abdication of responsibility or a feeling of resignation but also a spurning of belonging. There is, however, an element of truth in this statement, reductive as it is, given that the Shona comprise the majority of the population. It is largely their vote that determines the outcome of an election and the cabinet is largely made up of chiShona-speaking ministers. Perhaps this used to apply more during ZANU-PF's popularity; nonetheless, it is an oversimplification because the implication is that the Shona are responsible for the collapse of the country and it is their sole responsibility to solve the problem.

The weakened sense of affiliation felt by the Ndebele has seen a steady stream of members of this ethnic group cross the South African border since the 1980s, peaking after 2000. The Ndebele coined a phrase for this movement: '*UShaka ubiza abantwabakhe*' (Shaka is calling back his children). History and language are seized to claim belonging. Most Ndebeles attempt, and for the most part manage, to assimilate into Zulu communities, picking up isiZulu speech inflections and lexical items with ease, convincing themselves that they are only claiming their heritage, even if sometimes it is through false identification bought from the South African Home Affairs Department or other sources. For that reason, some Ndebeles ask the question: 'What's wrong with Shonas? They messed up Zimbabwe and now they are following us to South Africa.'

This sentiment speaks the grammar of exclusion based on migration history and language. The implications of this utterance seem validated to some extent during the xenophobic attacks that took place in South Africa in May 2008. The shibboleth the attackers demanded was the isiZulu equivalent for 'elbow', which the majority of chiShona speakers and other linguistic groups would not know. Even if they did, their pronunciation would give them away. The Ndebeles could pass the shibboleth test easily. That explains why some Ndebeles kept away from Shona people they knew because '*baya makisa*' – they will expose us as Zimbabweans.

Much as some Ndebeles think that they are at home in South Africa, the dramaturgy of evading arrest by the police for those with no legal status as well as

the relations that they have left behind in Zimbabwe suggest otherwise. Ndebeles with no legal status have to enact a convincing show of belonging, to the police. The staple question from the police is '*Uphumaphi wena?*' (Where do you come from?). The cue here is to sound offended and say, '*Hlukana nami*' (Just leave me alone). If this does not work, then one has to speak convincing isiZulu, citing a particular area of purported origin in KwaZulu, describing how to get there from Johannesburg, reeling out the family names around that area and possibly reciting quickly one's *izangelo* – family praise names.

Prior research and practice are needed to pass this test of belonging. One must be aware of isiZulu lexical items that differ from those of isiNdebele, for a simple slip may give one away. The isiNdebele '*uchago*' (milk) is '*ubisi*' in isiZulu, '*amagwili*' (potatoes) become '*amazambane*', and so on. Thus, there is a crucial list of words that one has to master. To achieve fluency, listening to Zulus talk, especially about their rural homes, is a necessity. Where there is a close relationship between a Zimbabwean with no legal status and a Zulu, the former can adopt the latter's family name, visit the area and become intimately familiar with it. These experiences, however, speak either of a virtual or surrogate home. This becomes quite clear when the Ndebeles, just like their Shona counterparts, have to remit goods and money to blood relatives in Zimbabwe. Some attempt to relocate the whole family but because of the extended nature of Zimbabwean families that move normally proves impossible. The ties between migrant Zimbabweans in South Africa and those at home remain and in some cases deepen unless the emigrant decides to cut ties completely, resulting in a situation the Ndebele call '*Wadliwa yi Goli*' (He/she was eaten/swallowed by Johannesburg).

Another strategy of claiming belonging is through obtaining a legal status. This path is open mostly to educated Zimbabweans who offer 'rare skills.' This is a strategy that quite a number of chiShona-speaking Zimbabweans (especially those who make jokes about no cattle herding for the Ndebele in Johannesburg) embrace, for it means a good job and salary and life in the suburbs, far from the insecurities of inner city Johannesburg. It also means access to credit facilities and mortgages. Thus, buying a house already suggests, no matter how tenuously or strongly, family – some sense of rootedness in the host country. Even here, in the safety of leafy suburbs, close links with Zimbabwe exist. If anything, more is expected from those Zimbabweans who have 'made it' by way of helping as many family members cross the border and secure employment in Johannesburg. Most Zimbabweans who have 'made it' still hold Zimbabwean identity and travel documents, or in a most symbolic manner, both Zimbabwean and South African documents – just in case there is an improvement in Zimbabwe's fortunes.



## Swallowing the alphabet: Formal education as a double-edged sword

Several scholars acknowledge that formal education, ‘the classic meritocratic ladder of the poor’ (Gorle 1997: 183), is a crucial factor in the emigration patterns of Zimbabweans and their conceptions of belonging. These scholars point out that Zimbabwean migrants tend to have higher educational qualifications than non-migrant populations (Bloch 2006; Kirk 2004; McGregor 2007; Ranger 2005). Ranger observes that

Zimbabwean asylum seekers [in England] are very different from any others. Zimbabwe is the most literate country in Africa and the most familiar with English. The overwhelming majority of Zimbabwean refugees speak and write excellent English...In many ways, of course, they are more British than the British. (Ranger 2005: 407)

Some may feel that Ranger is guilty of exaggeration here. However, an article from *The Times* reveals that Ranger is only mentioning what to some is general knowledge. The article cites the then Prime Minister Mr Mugabe’s ‘elegance of speech and gentleness of manner’ and continues

Mr Mugabe, in his independence speech...flabbergasted white Rhodesia with his television appearance, blinking shyly under scholar’s spectacles with words so honeyed, so exquisitely Hampstead, that he made Ian Smith look the most hamfisted butcher’s boy from Selukwe, provincial even by Rhodesian standards.<sup>5</sup> (*The Times* 12 March 1983)

This is not to say that every formally educated Zimbabwean is as competent and articulate in English as Mugabe, but to point out that they cannot be far behind in this respect and that, indeed, some have an even firmer command of this language and view it as the open sesame to success.

Dambudzo Marechera, one of Zimbabwe’s most popular writers, mesmerised the English-speaking world with his unusual facility with the language. When asked how he had gained such a stunning mastery of English, he replied in his trademark tongue-in-cheek style: ‘I was a keen accomplice in my own mental colonisation’ (Veit-Wild and Schade 1988: 7). Marechera was referring to the Zimbabwean hunger for formal education through the English medium and the thoroughness with which it was pursued. It is not surprising then that the chiShona phrase for whoever is perceived to be educated is ‘*akadya ma “b”*’, meaning he/she ate/swallowed letters of the alphabet. There is no image better than this intimate one of ingestion to portray the Zimbabweans’ love of education through the

English medium. Perhaps there is no better illustration of this veneration of formal education than the scene in Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* where Jeremiah praises his brother Babamukuru when the former returns from England an educated man. Jeremiah's eulogy runs thus:

Our father and benefactor has returned appeased, having devoured English letters with a ferocious appetite! Did you think degrees were indigestible? If so, look at my brother. He has digested them. (Dangarembga 1989: 36)

This level of fanaticism regarding formal education is echoed by the late Ndabaningi Sithole, one of Zimbabwe's early nationalists, who once reflected:

The study of European languages had roused such a keen interest in [black Zimbabweans] that at times it bordered on fanaticism. No [black Zimbabwean] considered himself modern unless he had mastered some European language. (Sithole 1968: 92)

The mastery of the Queen's language, owing to Zimbabwe's robust education policies in the 1980s and 1990s, plus certificated education in English, have both influenced migration destinations to a point where by 2002, an estimated 1.2 million Zimbabweans were in Britain; the same number as Zimbabweans estimated to be in South Africa at that time (Bloch 2005). It is no wonder that London has since been dubbed 'Harare North' and that one of Zimbabwe's recent talents, Brian Chikwava, winner of the 2004 Caine Prize for writing in Africa, has written a novel by that name and published it in the very same 'Harare North' (Chikwava 2009). Johannesburg is called 'Harare South'. An interesting question to ask here is why neither of these places is named after Bulawayo.

Whatever the reasons for the dubbing of London and Johannesburg with the prefix 'Harare,' Zimbabweans who migrate to South Africa are, on average, found to be less educated than those who opt for the United Kingdom (Bloch 2005). Thus, certificated education, which accrues to the individual holder of the certificate, encourages educated Zimbabweans to seek cosmopolitan attachments and to confidently seek out other homes in English-speaking countries with less trepidation than migrants from other parts of the world. McGregor writes that 'Zimbabwe... became the target of specific controls when it topped the [British] Home Office's list of countries producing asylum seekers in late 2002' (McGregor 2007: 806).

Educated Zimbabweans have suffered alienation both at home and in the UK. At home there was the psychic tension created first by the poverty of colonialism. In addition, the collapse of the economy saw the educated, such as teachers and nurses, already suffering diminished esteem occasioned by pervasive

poverty, further persecuted by the ZANU-PF government for alleged support of an opposition party (Movement for Democratic Change) with imperialist British ambitions. Thus, irrespective of ethnicity, the educated became outsiders in independent Zimbabwe by virtue of their English-medium education and supposed political affiliation to the British.

A sizeable number of government workers who left Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2008 to seek asylum in the UK did so because they were being hounded by the state through war veterans and the youth militia. The youth militia camps established in August 2001 by the ZANU-PF government had, as their key thrust, the teaching of ‘patriotic history’ (Ranger 2004: 219) which would fight ‘anti-Government mentality factories’ such as universities as well as the products of those ‘mentality factories’ (*The Herald* 28 January 2002). As Ranger puts it, ‘The militia became available to discipline their own parents; to attack the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) supporters; and to intimidate teachers and other educated civil servants’ (Ranger 2004: 219). There was hardly any evidence against the persecuted; their level of education was enough indictment that they did not support the so-called ‘Third Chimurenga’. Ethnicity did not matter – education did. The accused were perceived as being in need of education or re-education on what it meant to be Zimbabwean. The educated were excluded from the ‘nation’. Muchemwa comments on this strategy:

There is an insistence on memory as a sacred set of absolute meanings, owned by a privileged group. When so considered, memory becomes a set of instruments used to expel the undeserving from the ancestral house. (Muchemwa 2005: 195)

To borrow from Appiah (1992), the educated were being expelled from the ‘father’s house’. In a sense, the parochial view of Zimbabwe according to province and ethnicity was beginning to dissolve in the minds of both persecutor and persecuted.

The polarisation of Zimbabweans according to education level and political party affiliation by ZANU-PF did work in favour of the latter, to some extent. Hondo, the war veteran in Valerie Tagwira’s *The Uncertainty of Hope*, has his shack demolished in Operation Murambatsvina (clean up)<sup>6</sup> and shouts at the riot police, ‘I know who sent you! You are all British puppets!’ (Tagwira 2007: 150). Similarly, the unnamed narrator in Chikwava’s *Harare North*, a graduate of the youth militia, known as the Green Bombers, emigrates to London and when he reads a letter from his mother’s friend decrying the results of Operation Murambatsvina, the narrator says,

Now many people become homeless, Zimbabwe is no more she cry. Me I don’t have no sympathy for Zimbabwean people about this because they have

spend a lot of time throwing they tails all over trying to vote for opposition party. (Chikwava 2009: 204)

When Hondo realises the irony of his standpoint, when in addition to the demolition of his shack there is also the demolition of his market stall where he was selling goods bought from South Africa, he commits suicide by letting a train run over him.

In their study on language proficiency and the labour market of immigrants in the UK, Dustmann and Fabbri conclude that 'language proficiency is associated with higher employment probabilities and with higher earnings' (Dustmann & Fabbri 2003: 713). Zimbabweans in the UK, for all their command of English, find themselves faced with humiliation, non-recognition and lack of respect as they become undocumented migrants existing within the cracks of the host society. They become, as Chikwava shows in *Harare North*, prepared for under-employment and downward occupational mobility. The cultural disdain for care work is overturned and more Zimbabweans than any other nationality are employed as the BBC – British Bottom Cleaners (McGregor 2007). Because black Zimbabweans are phenotypically different from the rest of the white population, they become, regardless of class and ethnicity, easy targets of discrimination and exploitation. It is not unusual, for example, for a person who had been a bank manager in Zimbabwe to find him- or herself gutting fish alongside a person who had been a security guard in Zimbabwe. For this reason, many Zimbabweans feel that Britain cannot be home and hope to return to Zimbabwe if the situation there improves (Bloch 2006).

In *Harare North*, Brian Chikwava's nameless protagonist, in spite of his warped mentality, illustrates subterranean anxieties of non-belonging in the UK. He migrates to London to raise USD5 000. He needs USD1 000 to reimburse his uncle for the air ticket and USD4 000 to bribe the police so they can make his murder docket disappear. Under the auspices of the ruling party and the youth militia, he takes part in killing a member of the opposition party. The fact that he cannot raise that money at home should open his eyes but it does not. He still defends the brutalities of the ruling party. He cannot go home because he is far from raising the USD5 000. At least there is one thing he admits – a feeling of homelessness as he runs from the British police for crimes against humanity as well as because of his insecure legal status:

I walk on the white line with suitcase on my head. Nothing can hit my head. I feeling like *umgodoyi* – the homeless dog that roam them villages scavenging until brave villager relieve it of its misery by hit its head with rock. *Umgodoyi* have no home like the winds. That's why *umgodoyi*'s soul is tear from his body in rough way. That's what everyone want to do to me, me I know. (Chikwava 2009: 226)

With the exception of a few Zimbabweans with proper legal status and reasonable jobs in the diaspora, the rest, irrespective of political affiliation, language or ethnicity, will identify with this sentiment in which they feel as unhoused, exposed, homeless and vulnerable as *umgodoyi*.

Chikwava's realisation of the combined suffering of Zimbabweans in the UK, regardless of ethnic background and educational level, is reflected through his use of a nameless narrator whose main narrative is in broken English, switching easily in his use of chiShona and isiNdebele words. Interestingly, the isiNdebele word '*umgodoyi*' – a useless homeless dog – was popularised by the late vice president, Joseph Msika, to describe teachers in Zimbabwe, for their 'unpatriotic' behaviours, such as supporting the opposition party and migrating to the UK to do care work. To have a member of the youth militia define himself using the very same words mocks the warped version of patriotism espoused by the likes of the late Msika. In Zimbabwe, apart from feeling like *umgodoyi*, people have developed a language of solidarity. Whereas the Ndebele initially thought they were laughing at the Shona by saying, '*Sithenga ezitolo ezifanayo*' (We buy from the same shops), this utterance has come to underline the fact that both ethnic groups are Zimbabweans with a common problem. Outside Zimbabwe, it is common for Zimbabweans to lament, '*Lawe uyakwazi okwekhaya*' or '*Zvekumusha ka...*' (You know the troubles of home). This elliptical utterance also emphasises the common suffering of Zimbabweans.

## Crises of intimacy

This chapter would not be complete without discussing how, at a most intimate and personal level, the emigration of Zimbabweans has complicated all spheres of Zimbabwean life, including spousal relationships. Husbands who stay in the country instead of emigrating to secure employment sometimes see their marriages under stress. Whereas it used to be the case that marriages would break down because of the separation of couples, some marriages in Zimbabwe are now under a lot of strain because the man, the 'hunter', has not ventured out of the home.

In 'The Sound of Water',<sup>7</sup> I dramatise a situation in which a wife is so disenchanted with her husband who is reluctant to cross the border into South Africa to find work that she virtually boycotts sex with him. She just passively offers her body in a way that reminds him that not until he crosses the border into South Africa will he be worthy of her sexual favours and by extension, her affection. She constantly asks him, 'Why don't you make a plan like other men?' (The Caine Prize 2009: 126). It is the phrase 'like other men' that bothers the husband. He is quite aware of the implied feminisation or emasculation – that his wife is tacitly telling him that by not taking chances like other men, especially those who manage to

secure jobs and remit money and goods, he is less of a man. To drive her point home, the wife cites instances of Zimbabweans, including women, who have gone a step further than crossing into South Africa – who have even fraudulently acquired South African identity documents and moved on to England. It is her answer to the husband's 'We can't all flock to Johannesburg' (2009: 125). The husband is likely to emigrate to salvage both his manhood and marriage.

In the story 'The Hare' (Mungoshi 1997), Mungoshi subverts assumptions and expectations of the male sex-role in a patriarchal society. Sara becomes the breadwinner by default when Nhongo (he-goat), her husband of sixteen years and father of four, is retrenched at work following the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme of the 1990s. As soon as Sara leaves on one of her numerous business trips, Nhongo hastily embarks on a puerile counter trip to his rural home, a place he regards as a site of authority and direction by virtue of the fact that he was born there and this is where his parents reside. Nhongo considers himself a 'traditionalist' and 'tribesman' in spite of his tertiary education and former position of manager in an industrial firm (1997: 8). Whilst he held his job, he had barred his wife from furthering her education and taking up formal employment. When Sara engages in cross-border trading to rescue the family from abject poverty and starvation, Nhongo, 'the patriarch who belonged to a proud tradition that said the hunting is done by the man of the house' (1997: 13) can no longer master or fathom his wife. Hence Nhongo is overwhelmed by the feeling of nakedness or emasculation because his traditional power base and privilege have been appropriated by his wife.

## To return or not to return?

Before I end this chapter, it is worth thinking about what Zimbabweans living outside its borders mean when they say they will return when things improve. At a simple level, people want basics, symbolised in Zimbabwean literature by sugar, bread and tea. The Old Man in *Waiting for the Rain* calls these commodities 'snares' to trap black people who have elevated the goods to the status of 'gods' (Mungoshi 1975: 115). But there is a scramble to get the 'snares' and 'gods' that the Old Man dismisses. One is reminded of Bhabha's remark that

both the imperialist and nationalist views of colonialism often missed the importance and complexity of the socio-political struggles being fought out on a cultural front. They missed the daily struggles over things like rice and bread...Colonial people were not always thinking of dynamite and guns.  
(Makos 1995)

These commodities are no longer symbols of modernity, but basics. The family of the protagonist in Tagwira's *The Uncertainty of Hope*, Onai, has sugarless tea, boiled cabbage with no tomatoes or cooking oil. Boiled beans and sadza are seen as a 'welcome change from their usual fare of boiled cabbage and sadza' (Tagwira 2007: 88). They are lucky if they have this meal once a day. As for meat, we are told, 'Meat was now a dream' (2007: 67). In the rural areas, hunger is even more acute. As *The Times Online* reports:

Families...are surviving on wild berries or nuts that they grind into powder and mix with water, a weed called lude that they boil into a thin soup. They also eat insects such as locusts, if they can find them. Some even eat the moist inner fibres of bark. (*The Times Online* 6 December 2008)

What Dambudzo Marechera called the 'House of Hunger' had become literally that.

At another level, Zimbabweans want their cities back. The cities must have sugar, tea and bread. Given a chance, most Zimbabweans, irrespective of their education levels, prefer to stay or live in a city as opposed to the rural areas. Generally, a city is perceived as a place of opportunity, orderly and free of the drudgery of rural life. Since 2000 however, the cities have seen much of what I call rusticisation – turning the city into a rural area or a place worse than the rural areas. *The Uncertainty of Hope* dramatises this diminishing privilege of city life. Tagwira cites frequent and long power and water cuts, even at crucial institutions such as hospitals. The lights suffer first, that archetypal image of the city, so reminiscent of Zimunya's *Country Dawns and City Lights* (Zimunya 1985). The city is plunged into darkness. Refrigerators and other modern conveniences are abandoned. People fetch water from boreholes and transport it on their heads or in wheelbarrows, very much as they would in the rural areas. Similarly, firewood becomes the main source of cooking energy. Taxi fares are so exorbitant that most people walk. Industries shut down every day and the city ceases to be a place of work. Burst sewer pipes become perennial rivers, some running through people's yards. Uncollected refuse keeps piling up. The city becomes the home of cholera.

In fact, the modern Zimbabwean city seems to fit Lucifer's sentiments in *Waiting for the Rain*. Lucifer describes home as the 'Aftermath of an invisible war' (Mungoshi 1975: 52). Home becomes a place 'where you come back to die, having lived your life elsewhere' (1975: 162). Lucifer decides, 'That is only a biological and geographical error. I can change that' (1975: 52). However, he is profoundly aware of the complexity surrounding his aversion toward home and his desire to escape. As he comments, 'It's silly and childish of course... he can never seem to completely dig up and cut the roots that plant him in the earth of this dark arid country' (1975: 52).

It is not difficult to imagine the majority of Zimbabweans at home and abroad sharing this ambivalence. In real terms, however, it means Zimbabweans will feel at home when the pervasive smell of death disappears, when people feel safe, when hunger ends, when industries re-open, when people get jobs, when fallen electricity pylons are lifted and when potholes in roads are mended. The reconstruction process is as national as the suffering brought upon the people by a corrupt oligarchy. The ubiquitous nature of suffering both inside and outside the country has, to differing degrees, made Zimbabweans think of themselves as belonging to a country afflicted by trans-ethnic problems.

But returning to Zimbabwe is fraught with doubt in a way reminiscent of a game Ndebele children used to play at night, and perhaps still do. The game is called '*Bantwana Bantwana*' (Children Children) in which at one end is a 'mother' calling out to her children to come home, and at the other are 'children' and in between is someone (significantly one or two people who can be paralleled to rogue politicians) who play the role of lions standing between the children and the mother, with the sole aim of pouncing on a child. The game goes like this:

Mother: *Bantwana bantwana!* (My children!)

Children: *Ma!* (Yes, mummy!)

Mother: *Wozan' ekhaya!* (Come home!)

Children: *Siyesaba!* (We are scared!)

Mother: *Lesabani?* (What are you scared of?)

Children: *Iz'lwane* (Lions!)

Mother: *Iz'lwane kudala zaphela zathi du!* (All lions are now dead!)

Then the children attempt to run past the lion(s), knowing very well that one of them might be seized by the 'beast.' In spite of the latest political developments in Zimbabwe, and the new Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai's call that Zimbabweans should return home,<sup>8</sup> most Zimbabweans are just as wary and indeed as distrustful as foreign investors are of the country's future stability. To use the metaphor of the children's game, most are scared of being mauled by lions.

In spite of the unhomeliness of home and exile, Mungoshi suggests that one has to let go of bitterness. In his poem, 'If You Don't Stay Bitter and Angry For Too Long', Mungoshi writes: 'If you don't stay bitter | and angry for too long | you might finally salvage | something useful | from the old country' (Veit-Wild 1988: 6).

Even for the less fortunate, those who cannot, to borrow from Mathema, have a 'brick house,' it should be possible to say,

never mind sister  
this is our home



houses full of smoke  
and pendent soot  
full of the odour of life. (Veit-Wild 1988: 70)

However, for a significant proportion of the Zimbabwean population, home is no longer a place of origin and return.

## Notes

- 1 Zimbabwe, in spite of its diverse ethnic groups, was divided by early colonialists mainly into Matabeleland and Mashonaland. Matabeleland came to be associated with the Ndebele, and Mashonaland with the Shona. These two labels have had a long lasting legacy as reflected by the country's 10 provinces which are: Matabeleland North, Midlands, Matabeleland South, Bulawayo, Masvingo, Manicaland, Harare, Mashonaland East, Mashonaland Central and Mashonaland West.
- 2 See note 1 above.
- 3 Less known outside Zimbabwe than, for example, Dambudzo Marechera, Charles Mungoshi is arguably Zimbabwe's best writer in both his native tongue, chiShona, and English. Mungoshi's achievements reflect his great artistry. They include the 1977 International PEN Award for *Waiting for the Rain* (1975) and the 1976 Rhodesian Book Centre Award (Best Book) for *Ndiko Kupindana Kwamazuva* (1975). In 1980, he won the PEN Longman Award for best book of the year in English with the first publication of his poetry anthology, *The Milkman Doesn't Only Deliver Milk*, which was to be republished with a few more poems in 1998. That same year, *The Setting Sun and the Rolling World* (1987), which combined selected stories from *Coming of the Dry Season* (1972) and *Some Kinds of Wounds* (1980) won the Commonwealth Literature Prize, Africa Region. Other achievements include the Noma Children's Book Award twice, in 1990 and 1992. *Walking Still* (1997) was voted *The New York Times* Notable Book of the Year in 1998. Mungoshi also had three Honourable Noma Mentions: in 1981, 1984 and 1990. In the Silver Jubilee Awards in 2005, Mungoshi beat well-known writers such as Chenjerai Hove, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera, confirming him, according to the awards, as Zimbabwe's best writer up to that moment. Some of Mungoshi's works have been translated into Hungarian, Norwegian, Russian, German, Japanese and French. He has been a visiting lecturer at institutions such as the University of Florida and given papers at the University of Iowa, Durham University and Cambridge, to name a few. In honour of his contribution to Zimbabwean literature, the University of Zimbabwe conferred on him the Doctor of Letters degree in 2003.
- 4 The Unity Accord of 22 December 1987 was signed between the two biggest political parties in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe African National Union–Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) led by Robert Mugabe and Joshua Nkomo respectively. ZANU, by then, was largely known as a party of Shonas and ZAPU as a party of Ndebeles. The agreement was aimed at ending the political unrest in Matabeleland but to all intents and purposes was aimed at wiping away ZAPU from the country's political landscape given that the 'new' party was ZANU-PF and there was to be no more ZAPU; and the First

- Secretary and President of the 'new' party would still be the First Secretary and President of the 'old' ZANU-PF, Robert Mugabe.
- 5 *The Times* 12 March 1983. Primary document retrieved from author collection of dated newspapers.
- 6 Operation Murambatsvina or 'Restore Order' as it was officially called, was a Zimbabwean government campaign to forcibly demolish slum settlements and shacks attached to proper houses or located in formal residential areas. As often happened with ZANU-PF sanctioned programmes of action, in the end even proper and decent houses were destroyed. Those displaced from slums were expected to occupy far from enough, poky, unfinished and sub-standard two-roomed houses under yet another operation – Operation *Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* (Good Living/Housing). Most of the displaced did not have the money to register for these houses and pay monthly rent for them. As a result, most of the houses ended up in the hands of civil servants who could afford the required money and had 'connections' but were hardly in need of the houses.
- 7 This is a short story that was inspired by how notions of manhood were being challenged or reconfigured by the economic crisis.
- 8 Mr Morgan Tsvangirai appealed to Zimbabweans in England to return home. This idea was not welcomed by the audience. *The Times Online*, 17 July 2009. Accessed 20 August 2009, [www.timesonline.co.uk](http://www.timesonline.co.uk)

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## Negotiating the Zimbabwe–Mozambique border: The pursuit of survival by Mutare’s poor, 2000–2008

*Fidelis Peter Thomas Duri*

AS STATED THROUGHOUT THIS book, during the first decade of the 21st century, Zimbabwe experienced the worst socio-economic and political crisis in its history, leading to high inflation, food shortages, political violence and high unemployment. The severe droughts that gripped the country from 2001 exacerbated these hardships. The common people were worst hit and they devised a number of survival strategies, one of which was the informal cross-border option.

This chapter shows how vulnerable people from Zimbabwe’s eastern border city of Mutare exploited opportunities in neighbouring Mozambique for survival through irregular means. It explores the life-threatening experiences of Mutare’s poor in circumventing the border posts of Forbes (on the Zimbabwean side) and Machipanda (on the Mozambican side, in pursuit of survival. Most people had to resort to clandestine cross-border activities largely because they could not afford the financial obligations for travel documents, visa fees, border taxes, work permits, as well as import and trade licences. In addition, several of the commodities they imported or exported were either subject to duty, or forbidden altogether either in Mozambique or Zimbabwe.

This chapter dwells on two central cross-border activities pursued by the common people in order to earn a livelihood, namely smuggling and irregular employment. The central argument is that national borders become meaningless to poor people in times of serious socio-economic crisis. These people do not merely sit idly while hunger stares them in the face, but devise ingenious ways to survive. National governments may criminalise such activities, yet such informal pursuits assist the poor where the state has failed.

## Situating the study in academic discourse

The end of the Cold War from the late 1990s into the last decade of the 20th century eased tension between the once polarised Eastern and Western blocs and their respective satellites. There arose concerns across the globe of vanishing borders and an upsurge in irregular cross-border activities. This resulted in a significant number of scholars gaining unprecedented interest in the subject of informal cross-border movements.

This literature dwells on various aspects of cross-border crime including clandestine migration, trafficking of women and children, peddling in illicit drugs, smuggling and vehicle theft. Ricca's work, for example, was concerned about the 'notorious disorder' of irregular cross-border migrants in Africa from the late 1980s but admitted that this problem was largely caused by socio-economic marginalisation (Ricca 1989: v). These sentiments were echoed by Gaidzanwa (1999) in her study on the migration of Zimbabwean nurses and doctors mainly to South Africa during the 1990s. Solomon (2003) studied clandestine migration into South Africa and concluded that it was largely the result of various social, political and economic sources of insecurity. Mafukidze's overview of human trafficking in Africa also examined how traffickers took advantage of the socio-economic deprivation of children and young women to transport them to various South African cities where they sold them into domestic work and the sex industry (Mafukidze 2006).

The subject of informal cross-border activity is not new in academic discourse. This chapter contributes to this discourse by legitimising informal cross-border struggles for survival in times of crisis emanating from a decaying state economy and bad governance. Although such an informal economy operates in conflict with the institutional imperatives of the decaying official economy, it alleviates the plight of the poor where the government has failed. This chapter therefore opines that such developments will always persist if the socio-economic conditions of the majority of the population remain harsh.

## Brief history of mobility across the Zimbabwe–Mozambique border

The Zimbabwe–Mozambique border, which stretches for about 1 000 kilometres (United States Bureau for Intelligence and Research [USBIR] 1971) was established after a bitter struggle between the Portuguese and the British that culminated in the settlement of 3 July 1891 (Warhurst 1962). While the 1891 agreement dwelt on the major demarcations of the boundary, subsequent treaties up to 1937 completed the delimitation process (USBIR 1971). The Anglo-Portuguese border settlement established the border between Zimbabwe and Mozambique without considering

African interests. As a result, the border isolated many African communities from each other. The chiShona-speaking people are found in both Zimbabwe and central Mozambique, having been split by the border. In both countries, the five major Shona groups are the Manyika, Barwe, Teve, Zezuru and Ndau (Samuels & Bailey 1969). It is therefore no surprise that throughout the colonial period, borders became contested terrains as Africans continuously violated them. The paradox of the border was that while it restricted the movement of Africans, it also offered them opportunities to move freely between Portuguese and British regimes in colonial Mozambique and Zimbabwe respectively.

Throughout the colonial era, formal and informal cross-border labour migration took place between the two countries. There was virtually one-way labour traffic as Mozambican Africans fled their country, which was characterised by gross colonial abuses and neglect. Job seekers in Mozambique were particularly attracted by the emergence of the towns of Nyanga, Mutare, Chimanimani and Chipinge, as well as farms and mines in eastern Zimbabwe where wages were much higher (Isaacman & Isaacman 1985). In December 1947, the Portuguese government authorised the Rhodesia Native Labour Supply Commission to recruit up to 15 000 Mozambican African labourers from the Tete province.<sup>1</sup> Clandestine labour migration across the border, mostly by Mozambicans, was prevalent during the entire colonial period.<sup>2</sup>

Since its establishment, the border had been familiar terrain for both Zimbabwean and Mozambican traffickers of illicit alcohol and dangerous drugs such as dagga. In 1971, for instance, RA Hedges, the detective chief superintendent of Mutare, stated that during the first nine months of the year, more than 145 people had been arrested in Manicaland province for offences related to dagga, mostly sourced from Mozambique.<sup>3</sup>

Cross-border property theft was quite prevalent during the colonial period. The low-density suburbs located on the northern and eastern margins of Mutare were worst hit by spates of housebreaking and theft, with most stolen goods ending up in Mozambique. In December 1959, for example, the Mutare Criminal Investigation Department (CID) advised residents that the preponderance in the theft of clothing items in the city was largely because of the ready market in Mozambique.<sup>4</sup>

During Zimbabwe's struggle for independence, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), one of the political parties fighting the colonial government, took advantage of Mozambique's independence in June 1975 to shift its military bases from Zambia to that country. ZANU recruited youths from Zimbabwe for military training in Mozambique while the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), its military wing, launched attacks on the Rhodesian government. There was a great deal of cross-border movement from 1975 to 1980, with young men and women crossing into Mozambique as military

recruits or refugees while ZANLA guerrillas infiltrated Zimbabwe. From the mid-1970s, hundreds of youths from Mutare crossed into Mozambique for military training. It was largely because of this massive exodus to Mozambique for military training that the Rhodesian government declared a night curfew along the entire eastern border from 25 July 1975.<sup>5</sup>

Thousands of refugees crossed into Zimbabwe during the Mozambican civil war (1975–1992). Most of the refugees streamed into Zimbabwe after it had attained its independence in 1980. In 1992, there were five refugee camps in Zimbabwe accommodating 100 000 officially recorded Mozambicans who had fled the civil war in which the opposition Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) fought the ruling Front for the Liberation of Mozambique (FRELIMO).<sup>6</sup>

Human traffic across the Zimbabwe–Mozambique border has a long history. This mobility was inevitable considering that the delineation of the border in 1891 split homogenous African communities previously bound by a common history and culture. While borders were primarily established to contain human mobility, Africans exploited them to seek opportunities on either side during times of socio-economic and political hardship. It was therefore inevitable, if not historically logical, that when Zimbabwe plunged into its worst post-independence crisis from 2000, many Mutare residents sought opportunities for survival, mainly through informal means, from just across the border in Mozambique. This study addresses two of these irregular struggles for survival, namely, smuggling and informal employment.

## Smuggling

Smuggling of goods across the Zimbabwe–Mozambique border was a clear manifestation of the innovative means used by the poor in order to survive socio-economic hardships. It was an operation involving a heterogeneous community whose participants had ‘agendas as diverse as their attire and backgrounds’.<sup>7</sup> Most of the smugglers were in their teens and early to mid-twenties, the majority being unemployed youths (Tinarwo and others group interview, 1 May 2009). Women also constituted a significant percentage and were often targeted by the Mozambican border police (*matembeya*).<sup>8</sup>

Most smugglers used bush paths that link Mutare and Mozambique, often bribing police and army details on both sides of the border. By far the most common routes throughout this period were found in the area extending from Cecil Kopje Game Park in the north-eastern end of Mutare, through Marymount Teachers’ College and Rimai farm, up to Fiesta Hotel, close to Forbes border post in the east (Chanaiwa interview, 2 May 2009). The bush paths around Forbes border post

constituted one of the most popular informal routes. Smugglers from Mutare boarded vehicles to Mutare Truck Inn, a service station just 200 metres from Forbes border post, from where they disappeared into Mozambique through bush paths. They would then board taxis at a point beyond Machipanda border post on the Mozambican side, which took them to Mumango (Mangwe) market, some five kilometres from the border, and the towns of Manica and Chimoio.<sup>9</sup>

The smugglers who used bush paths through Cecil Kopje and Marymount either carried their goods on their heads all the way or boarded vehicles at certain points along the journey. These smugglers frequently used public taxis operating between Meikles Park in the city centre and Greenside suburb, which borders Cecil Kopje and Marymount. It was also common for groups of smugglers to hire a vehicle. Having disembarked in Greenside suburb, the smugglers used various bush paths through Marymount, Cecil Kopje and Rimai to cross into Mozambique. By 2005, Rimai farm had earned itself the nickname 'Rimai border post' because it was a popular crossing point for smugglers who were made to pay some amount for the storage and passage of smuggled goods.<sup>10</sup> While some carried their contraband by head all the way to various destinations in Mozambique, such as the small border town of Machipanda, the settlement of Mumango and the town of Manica, others relayed their goods through a network of porters stationed at two or three points along the way. The return trip to Mutare underwent a similar process.

Smuggling networks also involved householders in the Mozambican villages along the border and Mutare's eastern suburbs whose premises were used as depots for goods in transit. Such Mozambican border villages included Mugariwondo, Arufaso, Buzi, Nyamakari, Chiseya and Mafambise (Moyana interview, 30 April 2009). On 1 September 2007, Mutare police recovered 452 boxes of sterilised milk, each box consisting of 24 half-litre bottles, stockpiled in a house along Taylor Road in Morningside suburb. Smugglers had stockpiled this milk at the home over time and it was bound for Mozambique.<sup>11</sup>

It was also common for smugglers to meet halfway, at various points on the eastern outskirts of Mutare, with those from Mozambique bringing in used clothes and other goods. The used clothes and other goods were then exchanged for Zimbabwean basic commodities brought from Mutare and other areas.<sup>12</sup> Trips were often undertaken during the darker hours of the day to avoid detection by the authorities. Smugglers, however, risked losing their commodities to Zimbabwean and Mozambican pirates who took advantage of darkness to waylay them from strategic positions along bush paths on both sides of the border. On 12 December 2001, for example, a Zimbabwean and a Mozambican, masquerading as soldiers, were arrested. The Zimbabwean pirate was from Dangamvura and usually operated in the Cecil Kopje area where bands of pirates pounced on cross-border smugglers.<sup>13</sup>



The creativity of the smugglers was also reflected by the various strategies they devised to avoid detection by the authorities. In response to the intensification of police patrols along Mutare's eastern boundary in late 2006, for instance, smugglers brought in smaller quantities of consignments to reduce chances of being spotted and to enable them to flee with their goods when approached.<sup>14</sup> It was also common for cornered smugglers to engage in running battles with the police.<sup>15</sup> While the majority of smugglers used illegal crossing points, some passed through the border posts with their contraband concealed in various ways. As one Mozambican shop-owner based in Manica told *The Sunday Mail*:

You Zimbabweans are very clever. Your friends who bring us Cerelac and Cerevita first remove it from boxes then pack it in bags. They put clothes, especially dirty underwear, on top of the bags if they want to cross through the border post. Immigration officials usually don't search such bags with underwear on top. The boxes, together with the glue, are packed separately and are also stashed under the clothes.<sup>16</sup>

When on the Mozambican side, they repacked the products in boxes before marketing them. Some smugglers stashed their goods in cross-border haulage trucks where they hid them under various wares that were officially in transit. It was a common practice for truck drivers to bribe Zimbabwean and Mozambican border officials in order to ensure safe passage of smuggled goods.<sup>17</sup>

Smuggling trends tended to correspond closely to the socio-economic and political developments in Zimbabwe, which impoverished the ordinary people. The supply-and-demand situation on both sides of the border usually determined the nature of goods trafficked during given periods. From 2000, the list of Zimbabwean goods smuggled out of the country grew each day. First, it was mainly sugar, then sterilised milk, and later cigarettes, eggs and various other commodities.<sup>18</sup> Smuggled goods from Mutare found a ready market in the border areas of the western Mozambican province of Manica. The practice was most prevalent between the towns of Mutare and Manica while some commodities reached as far as Chimoio.<sup>19</sup>

Basic commodities such as bread, maize meal and milk, as well as footwear and clothing items were in great demand and offered opportunities to many Mutare residents who had become jobless as a result of industrial closures since 2000. Even civil servants, such as teachers, extended weekends and holidays in order to traffic goods to Mozambique as the economic climate in Zimbabwe increasingly became hyperinflationary, eroding disposable incomes (Mashizha interview, 12 April 2009).

The smuggling of goods from Mutare was spurred by the drastic decline in value of the Zimbabwean dollar, which made it more profitable to sell goods across the border in foreign currency. While Zimbabwe faced severe shortages of basic

consumer goods because of farm invasions and persistent droughts, it became common practice from 2002 for Mutare manufacturers, wholesalers and chain stores to hoard goods and to engage dozens of unemployed people to smuggle them into Mozambique to sell in foreign currency. Most businesses also withheld goods in protest against the government's land reform programme and the invasions of private businesses that had violated property rights. During the first week of April 2002, heavily armed police and soldiers raided major wholesalers in Mutare and impounded goods after suspecting that the businesses were hoarding essential commodities and selling them to illegal traders for export.<sup>20</sup>

From 2000, smuggling of goods between Mutare and Mozambique became rampant as economic hardships worsened, largely as a result of land invasions, which saw widespread industrial closures, and a drastic rise in unemployment and food shortages. During the first half of 2001, Mutare police arrested an average of 40 cross-border smugglers per month.<sup>21</sup> In June and July 2002, the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) arrested well over 1 000 smugglers, most of them unemployed women and youths, along Mutare's border with Mozambique and recovered basic commodities worth more than ZWD10 million.<sup>22</sup> During the first week of September 2002, the ZRP arrested 153 smugglers at illegal crossing points linking Mutare and Mozambique. Of those arrested, 88 were Zimbabwean nationals from Mutare (28 of them women) and 65 were Mozambican.<sup>23</sup> Most of the goods, which included sugar, sterilised milk, bread, soap, cooking oil, washing powder and toothpaste, were smuggled out during the dark.<sup>24</sup> The list of smuggled goods grew daily and during late 2003, following the shortage of meat in Mozambique, included beef.<sup>25</sup>

Operation Murambatsvina in 2005, during which the Zimbabwean government destroyed squatter settlements and unlicensed business premises in urban and peri-urban areas, accelerated smuggling across the border, largely because of the destitution and desperation brought about by the disruption of income-generating informal sector activities. 'Smuggling has become an industry in Mutare and Mangwe', observed Kanhema in December 2005, 'with thousands on both sides of the border literally living on it'.<sup>26</sup> Mumango literally developed into a warehouse where Mozambican traders stored the goods acquired from Mutare smugglers before transporting them to Manica, Chimoio and Beira for resale (Chikuni interview, 4 May 2009). By December 2005, the Mumango market had developed into 'a major dumping site' for most basic commodities smuggled out of Zimbabwe. Most of the smugglers were from Mutare and made short trips from the eastern border town to Mozambique recurrently.<sup>27</sup>

The smuggling of basic commodities escalated from late June 2007 following a government order to slash the price of essential goods by 50 per cent. People flooded shops and bought out all the commodities, some of which they smuggled out into Mozambique for resale at a higher price. In September 2007,

for example, a 500-millilitre bottle of sterilised milk was selling at 35 meticals (zwd350 000) in Mozambique and zwd32 970 in Mutare.<sup>28</sup> The political decision to slash prices backfired and instead gave opportunities for Mutare's poor to earn more by selling commodities in Mozambique while exacerbating shortages locally. In the tuck shops of Manica, observed Roselyn Sachiti in December 2007, 'Zimbabwean basic commodities...have literally taken over all shelf space...'<sup>29</sup>

In 2006, diamonds were discovered in the Chiadzwa area, about 60 kilometres south of the city, and commercial diamonds joined the list of goods smuggled out of Mutare. Hundreds of Mutare residents, mainly the unemployed youths, joined the illegal panning of diamonds and some of the proceeds were smuggled into Mozambique where they fetched high prices.<sup>30</sup>

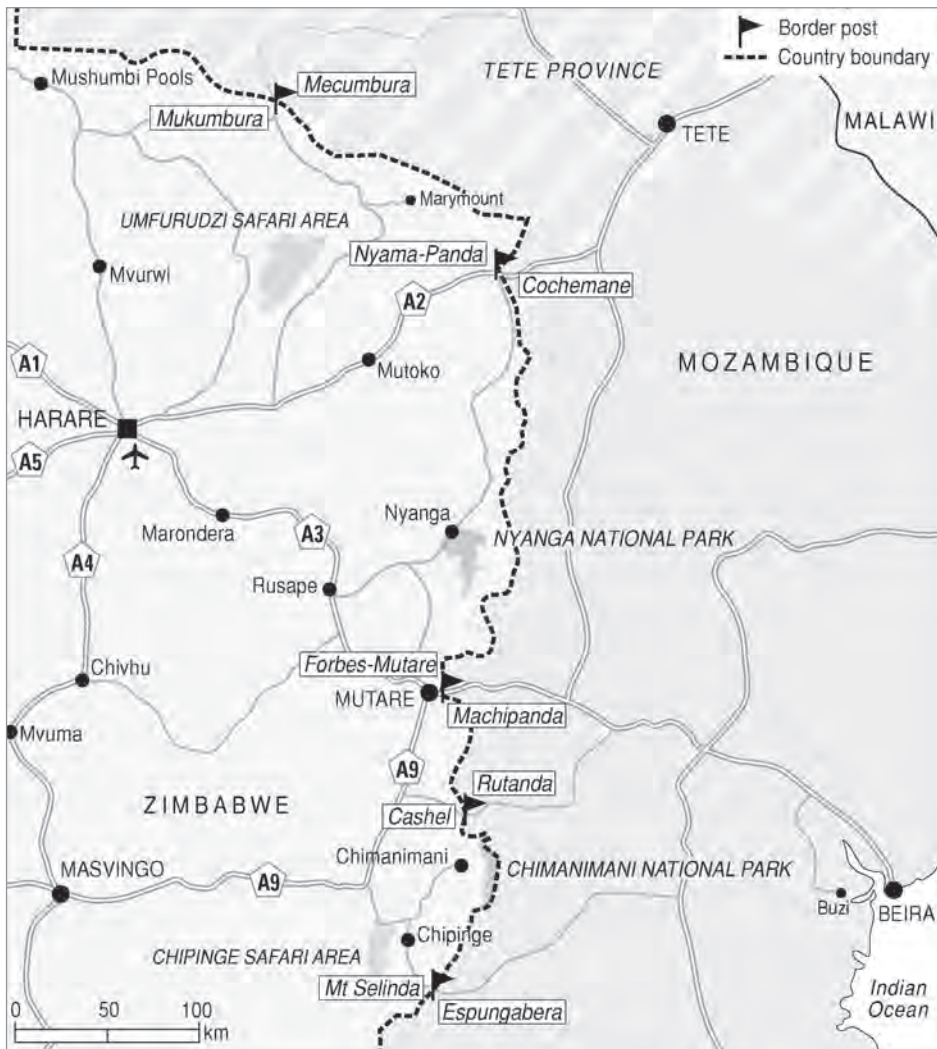
The scrapping of the visa system on 7 November 2007, following an agreement between Zimbabwe and Mozambique,<sup>31</sup> did not have much effect in curbing the smuggling of goods from Mutare to Mozambique. The new arrangement still required passports, and the huge delays in processing them as well as their exorbitant cost meant that informal border crossing continued. In addition, Zimbabwean travellers were obliged to pay the equivalent of USD3 or R40 as border tax for each entry. Most smugglers could not afford to pay that much considering that most of them crossed the border for the greater part of the week (Mascolini 2008).

Smugglers, always abreast with information about goods that were in short supply in Zimbabwe at any given time, were continually on the move to and from Mozambique to source and then resell these goods in order to earn a living. On 9 March 2001, for example, the *Manica Post* reported that some Mutare informal traders had become 'rich overnight' by selling scarce petrol, diesel and paraffin obtained from local and Mozambican sources.<sup>32</sup> By the end of 2007, nearly every homestead in Mutare's high-density suburbs and some low-density areas had become a tuck shop with posters at the gates advertising various commodities, most of which had been sourced directly or indirectly from Mozambique.<sup>33</sup>

The smuggling of foreign currency became rampant as the Zimbabwe dollar continued to lose value. Some Mutare residents who crossed into Mozambique to do business often smuggled thousands of United States dollars, South African rands and Mozambican meticals into Zimbabwe. In July 2002 the *Manica Post* reported that some female smugglers were hiding thousands of dollars worth of foreign currency in their private parts to avoid arrest on their way from Mozambique.<sup>34</sup>

As Zimbabwe ran out of beer during 2007 and 2008, smuggling Mozambican alcoholic beverages into Mutare became brisk business. The alcohol drought was largely because of the scarcity of foreign currency to purchase various commodities needed in the brewing and packaging of beer. The most popular Mozambican alcoholic brands smuggled into Mutare were the *Lawidzani* and *Tentacao* spirits. (Smugglers preferred spirits to lagers because of the higher alcohol concentration that

FIGURE 6.1 Map of the Zimbabwe–Mozambique border area



Source: Redrawn from information for certain of the border towns and border posts taken from <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/55569749/zimbabwe> and other general info from the internet. Accessed on 19 and 20 March 2012

made the spirits more cost effective.) By the end of 2008, nearly all bottle stores in the high-density suburbs of Mutare were stocked with beer, largely smuggled from Mozambique. Considerable quantities of smuggled beer were also sold along streets, at domestic premises and in shebeens (Maturu interview, 2 May 2009).

The smuggling of used clothes filled the gap created by the closing of most clothing and textile shops in protest against the government's price-control policies

and invasions of foreign-owned enterprises. The second-hand clothes, which were smuggled in bales weighing between 80 and 100 kilograms, were much more affordable to most ordinary Zimbabweans reeling under socio-economic hardships.<sup>35</sup> Smuggling of second-hand clothes became a realistic option due to the exorbitant import duties charged by Zimbabwean authorities that made it impossible for traders to realise much profit after resale. In 2006, for instance, customs duty on used clothes was USD20 (ZWD5 000) per kilogram. There was also a value added tax of 15 per cent and 15 per cent surtax.<sup>36</sup> On 28 August 2000, Mutare police seized 22 bales of used clothes from smugglers during a pre-dawn raid at Rimai farm.<sup>37</sup> On 2 October 2005, Mutare police intercepted and confiscated 12 bales of second-hand clothes that were on their way from Mozambique.<sup>38</sup> On 2 December 2005, Mutare law-enforcement agents impounded 12 bales that were being smuggled into the city from Mozambique.<sup>39</sup> Sixteen people were apprehended at Rimai farm during the night of 24 October 2006 while attempting to smuggle 10 bales of used clothes into Mutare.<sup>40</sup> In May 2001, vendors of used clothes and other commodities, mostly sourced from Mozambique, had 'virtually taken over most roads and streets in Mutare's Sakubva suburb, blocking motorists'.<sup>41</sup>

## Negotiating the border for informal employment opportunities

Some sections of the Mutare population sought informal employment in various parts of Mozambique with most of them concentrated in the region along the border and between Machipanda and Manica. Most work seekers had lost their jobs because of industrial closures since 2000; others had had their informal sources of income destroyed by Operation Murambatsvina, while some sought to supplement their incomes in view of the hyperinflationary environment that prevailed in the country. Some civil servants, especially teachers, abandoned their professions altogether (Chigumira interview, 7 May 2009). When teachers embarked on industrial action, which saw them teach an average of only 23 days in 2008,<sup>42</sup> some of them crossed into Mozambique where they were employed in various informal sectors.

### Seasonal agricultural workers

Most socio-economic refugees from Mutare were informally employed as seasonal agricultural workers in Mozambican communal farms along the border. Mozambique was fortunate in that it had not faced serious drought problems since 2000. Cheap agricultural labour was always in great demand during the summer months from October to April and various sections of Mutare's vulnerable society exploited such opportunities. The average daily wage for seasonal agricultural

labour was 30 meticals with lunch. The wage excluded accommodation, breakfast or supper. Groups of agricultural workers often collectively booked communal overnight huts in the villages, which in most cases had no bedding and toilet facilities (Godo and others group interview, 5 May 2009).

After 2005, it became common for some Mutare schoolchildren, even those at the primary level, to cross into Mozambique to seek piece-job employment during weekends and school holidays. Most of them joined relatives and family members already employed in agriculture in the villages stretching between Machipanda and Manica (Tigere interview, 4 May 2009). When schools closed for nearly the whole of 2008 because of a strike by teachers, the presence of Mutare schoolchildren in Mozambican villages close to the border became more conspicuous (Mlambo interview, 10 May 2009).

## Porters

Many unemployed Mutare youths found employment as porters for cross-border smugglers. They were collectively known as *matunge* in Zimbabwe and *majorijo* in Mozambique. In 2001, some *matunges* from Mutare were as young as 11 years, most of them having dropped out from school due to the socio-economic hardships.<sup>43</sup> Porters from both countries usually positioned themselves along unofficial routes on both sides of the border, waiting to be hired by smugglers. From 2002, for example, hundreds of Mutare youths milled around Mutare Truck Inn close to Forbes border post from early morning, waiting for trucks to come with contraband that they would carry through bush paths across the border into Mozambique. The approach of a vehicle usually triggered off a stampede of over 300 youths who scrambled to outrun each other for work. The so-called 'no-man's land' between Forbes and Machipanda border posts was another popular spot where porters bound for either side of the border congregated, waiting for hours until the police went for lunch, during which time they smuggled goods across the border.<sup>44</sup> Along the Imbeza route in 2001, Mozambican and Zimbabwean porters were usually stationed at the Imbeza mountains (Mashizha interview, 12 April 2009). Rimai farm, at the eastern end of Mutare, was another popular relay point for Zimbabwean and Mozambican porters throughout the period of study. Female smugglers normally employed male porters. Some juvenile male porters, as young as 16, reported to the *Manica Post* in 2002 that 'some of the women were offering sex in lieu of payment for transporting their wares across the border'.<sup>45</sup>

Mozambican and Zimbabwean porters tended to be concentrated on their respective sides of the border although they occasionally carried goods deep into each other's territory. Porters from opposite sides of the border sometimes constituted networks that enabled smuggled goods to be relayed smoothly to and

from Mutare unless they were intercepted by the authorities or pirates (Mandirahwe interview, 11 May 2009). Clashes sometimes took place after porters from the other side of the border encroached into foreign territory without 'permission'. An example was the fierce clash at Rimai farm in late September 2001 during which Zimbabwean porters attacked their Mozambican counterparts.<sup>46</sup>

## Informal traders and small entrepreneurs

Some Zimbabwean informal traders and small entrepreneurs from Mutare positioned themselves along streets in towns and at business centres in Mozambique on a semi-permanent basis. Paulo Madjamane, the Manica district administrator, reported in September 2001 that about six illegal Zimbabwean migrants were being repatriated through the Machipanda border post every week. He stated that most of them were border violators who had settled to sell Zimbabwean sugar in Mozambique.<sup>47</sup> On 7 November 2001, Mozambican police deported 120 Zimbabwean 'small-time traders', mostly Mutare women, who were being held in various prisons between Machipanda and Chimoio.<sup>48</sup> After Operation Murambatsvina had destroyed various unregistered trading structures in Mutare in 2005 there was a marked increase in the number of informal traders who shifted to Mozambique. When Tobias Duri's welding shop at Mutare's Green Market was demolished during Operation Murambatsvina, he relocated to Nyaronga Business Centre in Mozambique (Duri interview, 10 May 2009). During December 2006, Mozambican authorities deported 150 women and five men, all of whom were Zimbabwean traders stationed in Chimoio and Gondola to sell various wares. During the same period, Mozambican police carried out raids twice a week at Mumango on suspected hideouts for illegal Zimbabwean traders.<sup>49</sup>

Zimbabwean street traders operated all over Mozambique, as a *Sunday Mail* news crew discovered in December 2007. The news team came across Zimbabwean goods such as Mazoe orange crush, sterilised milk, brandy and opaque beer (scuds) being sold by Zimbabwean vendors along the streets and at Makinoni market in Beira. Vendors displayed only a sample of each item at strategic points along the streets as a way of advertising while most of the commodities were piled in rented houses, safe from the Mozambican police. Most of the Zimbabwean vendors in Beira stayed in groups of five, in flats. They generally paid a monthly rent of 1 000 meticals with each person contributing 200 meticals. After selling their goods, most traders converted their meticals to US dollars at foreign exchange agencies.<sup>50</sup> Clashes between rival traders were common, with Mozambicans blaming Zimbabweans for taking business from them. On 22 September 2001, one person was killed during such clashes at Mumango.<sup>51</sup>

## Foreign currency black market traders

As the Zimbabwean dollar went on a freefall, a fledging foreign currency black market developed around the Forbes and Machipanda border posts and at various points in Mozambique where several Mutare residents exchanged virtually worthless dollars for foreign currency. Most of the foreign currency was brought back to Mutare for resale on the parallel market. The majority of the roadside foreign currency dealers were informally employed by Mutare businesspeople. In January 2005, for instance, a survey by the *Manica Post* noted youngsters of an average age of 22 milling around the Zimbabwean and Mozambican sides of Forbes border post with bundles of Zimbabwean dollars and stashes of Mozambican meticals, waiting to do business with cross-border traders and travellers.<sup>52</sup> A Zimbabwe Revenue Authority official stationed at Forbes border post told a *Manica Post* reporter in January 2005 that illegal deals in foreign currency involved many unemployed youths from Mutare:

The volume of cross-border traders, especially those who are bringing in second-hand clothes, has risen. These do not use the banks or any of the legal structures to change money; they come to the border post where these youths have forex in waiting.<sup>53</sup>

In February 2006, there was a heavy presence of roadside foreign currency dealers around Forbes and Machipanda border posts, at Mumango and in Manica and Chimoio. This partly explains why most banks in Mutare were short of Zimbabwean dollars at that time.<sup>54</sup> Informal foreign currency deals remained rampant throughout the period of study. Just across the Machipanda border post in Mozambique during mid-December 2007, zwd20 million was being exchanged for 100 meticals.<sup>55</sup>

## Sex workers

Sex work in Mozambique was a common form of self-employment for some Mutare women. In March 2003, women from Mutare were reported to have flooded Chimoio, the capital of Mozambique's central province of Manica.<sup>56</sup> In October 2003, the Mozambican towns of Machipanda, Manica and Chimoio had 'apparently become the biggest havens for the desperate Mutare commercial sex workers'.<sup>57</sup> The majority were school-leavers, most of whom milled around in various nightclubs, bars, shebeens and streets soliciting for clients. During an interview with the *Manica Post* in October 2003, a Mutare commercial sex worker stated:



‘Although I haven’t gone there [Mozambique], my friends are going there because here in Mutare, clients have become very few because of the financial crisis.’ She added that most sex workers who went to Mozambique were returning with a lot of Zimbabwean and American dollars.<sup>58</sup>

Marilia Pugas, the head doctor at the Manica Provincial Health Department, noted that the number of Zimbabwean sex workers, most of them from Mutare, had increased during the period 2007–08.<sup>59</sup> By May 2008, Hotel Madrinha in Chimoio, which used to be an esteemed resort for travellers, had degenerated into a haven for Zimbabwean sex workers.<sup>60</sup> Another popular spot for Zimbabwean sex workers in Chimoio during 2008 was the 25 de Setembro Social Centre, one of the most well-known brothels in the city. During December 2008, the brothel had six resident sex workers who entertained an average of 30 clients a day.<sup>61</sup>

It is quite apparent that most women engaged in sex work as a result of the socio-economic hardships in Zimbabwe. In 2008, a Mutare mother-of-two based in Chimoio told Agence France-Presse (AFP) that she resorted to sex work as ‘a sure way of earning US dollars.’ She added: ‘We cannot find jobs back home and here we do not have identification papers and that is why many women have opted for prostitution.’<sup>62</sup> In 2008, the average cost of protected sex in Chimoio was USD3 a night while unprotected sex went for USD10.<sup>63</sup> Some Zimbabwean women who spoke to AFP in May 2008 stated that it was very difficult to earn USD20 (13 euro) a day and at times they got as little as 50 US cents for sex acts.<sup>64</sup> Under the guise of improving the health system, the Mozambican police launched ‘Operation Broom’ in 2008 during which brothels and drinking places which sex workers frequented were dismantled and Zimbabwean sex workers deported. Five ‘sweeps’ in the town of Manica during the same year resulted in 400 Zimbabwean sex workers, most of them without valid travel documents, being deported.<sup>65</sup>

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the informal cross-border attempts by Mutare’s marginalised populations to survive under very difficult socio-economic and political circumstances during the 2000–2008 period. Though criminalised by the authorities, these attempts can be credited for the survival of many deprived Mutare residents. This work has articulated the creativity of people disadvantaged socially, economically and politically in negotiating national borders for a livelihood.

It should be noted, however, that this chapter has not treated the marginalised Mutare residents as a homogenous social entity. The struggle for survival involved men, women and children of diverse socio-economic backgrounds

and aspirations. Thus, this chapter has unravelled the general struggle against poverty as well as struggles within the struggle where the suffering often clashed within their ranks.

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## MEDIATING THE CRISIS







## Linguistic negotiation of the Zimbabwean crisis

*Maxwell Kadenge*

**THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL CRISIS** THAT plagued Zimbabwe in the 2000s resulted in 'the rapid decline of the economy, characterised by, amongst other things: steep declines in industrial and agricultural productivity; historic levels of hyperinflation; the informalisation of labour; the dollarisation of economic transactions; displacements; and a critical erosion of livelihoods' (Raftopoulos 2009: 202). This economic implosion reduced the majority of the population of Zimbabwe to desperate measures: many became vagabonds, paupers, black-market hustlers and prostitutes. To survive the crisis, Zimbabweans devised a multiplicity of ways to earn a living... most of them illicit.

As the ZANU-PF party realised that it was losing favour with the majority of Zimbabweans, it retreated into massive repression. In consequence, matters relating to the political and socio-economic conditions became unspeakable and/or taboo in the ailing country. Talking about the crisis figuratively became an imperative survival strategy, mainly to 'save face' or to protect oneself against victimisation and/or possible arrest. One of the main communicative strategies that Zimbabweans adopted in order to capture or name various aspects of the multifaceted crisis was the use of metaphor. Metaphor is the use of a word or phrase to indicate something different from the literal meaning. Zimbabweans created metaphors, colloquial expressions, euphemisms and slang to name various aspects of the crisis. Metaphors were thus used as the substitution of direct words which would have been regarded as politically sensitive, disrespectful and offensive to the ruling party and its leadership (Kadenge & Mavunga 2011).

The widespread usage of figurative language throughout the social ladder of Zimbabweans was not surprising, given the fact that traditional and modern Shona society encourages stylised communication that is distilled to obviate possible open confrontation when talking about sensitive issues such as politics, HIV/Aids, religion and conflicts in the family. Therefore, a competent Shona speaker is fully

aware of speaking norms that prohibit verbal reference to certain words and events whose direct verbalisation could unleash forces of instability or stir grief (Mashiri, Mawomo & Tom 2002).

This chapter demonstrates that the creation of metaphorical language by Shona-speaking Zimbabweans allowed them to deliberately create ambiguous and/or polysemous expressions to name and describe their everyday bitter experiences and the largely illegal activities often engaged in for day-to-day survival, as well as the actions of profiteers. The semantic duality that we find in metaphorical expressions afforded Zimbabweans the opportunity to fearlessly discuss their illegal activities in public. As a result, the police and other security agents could not arrest them although they knew what was being talked about. It is, therefore, the contention of this chapter that using metaphor became one of the innovative ways through which Zimbabweans negotiated the national crisis. It is also interesting to note that – while the general infrastructure of the country such as roads, buildings, public healthcare delivery systems and people's standards of living deteriorated during the crisis – Zimbabwean languages became richer as new words and expressions were created to name and discuss the new prevailing circumstances.

The analysis of how languages develop in response to societal change becomes critical because generally language serves a triple role in people's lives. First, it is a carrier of culture. This means that its change signals the change of a people's culture. Second, it is an image-forming agent that provides the group with a whole conception of themselves, individually and collectively. Third, it is a transmitter of the images of the world and reality (Ngugi 1986). This chapter focuses on one aspect of language, which is metaphor, because it has a very strong cultural component. For example, the metaphor 'there is a bug in my program' would not make sense in a culture without computers, even if the idea of having a bug is indicative of a problem. This observation shows that the use of metaphors by members of a particular society presumes shared knowledge of the cultural values and sensibilities and language functions and norms among the members of that community. This means that language users must acquire communicative competence which enables them to perform all linguistic functions meaningfully.

Together with changes in the activities people engaged in to earn a living, Shona terms and expressions also emerged to describe their bitter everyday experiences. Examples of such famous expressions are *kubhena mari* (lit: 'burning money'), *kumhanyisa* (lit: 'to cause someone to run fast') and *kurova pasi petsoka* (lit: 'beating the underside of one's feet') which, respectively, were metaphors for 'electronic money transfer', 'selling something fast' and 'exorbitant prices'. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, there seemed to be several reasons why people created these metaphors, one of which was to be able to talk in safety about their everyday activities, many of which were illegal. The following section discusses

some features of the cognitive view of metaphor that are relevant to the analysis of Shona metaphors.

## Metaphor: A cognitive grammar approach

The traditional view of metaphor as a figure of speech that is used to simply talk about things in a roundabout manner has been challenged in recent years because it has been shown that it is a mode of conceptualising our everyday experiences (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, 1999; Langacker 1987; Hein 1997; Svorou 1994). Similarly, scholars such as Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), Lakoff and Turner (1989) and Lakoff (1993) argue that metaphors are not simply stylistic devices but a critical component of meaning generation in human communication.

According to cognitive linguists such as Lakoff (1987), Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999), Langacker (1987, 2000), Taylor (2002, 2003) and Ungerer and Schmid (1996), metaphor is not just a way of speaking but is intrinsic to abstract thought. The cognitive grammar (CG) approach has demonstrated that metaphors are powerful cognitive tools used for the conceptualisation of abstract categories. Thus, metaphoric processes are defined as ‘understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another’ (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 50). This means that metaphors are integral to language and understanding.

Lakoff and Turner say that ‘metaphors allow us to understand one domain experience in terms of another. To serve this function, there must be some grounding, some concepts that are not completely understood via metaphor to serve as source domains’ (Lakoff & Turner 1989: 153). A typical metaphor uses a more concrete source to describe and understand a more abstract target. This is in conformity with Sweetser’s observation that ‘there is a pervasive metaphorical structuring of our mental world in terms of our physical world’ (Sweetser 1990: 145). This means that we understand metaphors in terms of our everyday experiences and they are largely unconscious in our reception and use, though attention may be brought to them – thus that their operation in cognition is almost automatic.

Metaphors play a crucial role in how we think and talk about the world. According to the CG approach, language is intrinsically or inherently symbolic. This means that linguistic expressions stand for conceptualisations of everyday experiences. Of interest to this chapter are the Shona expressions and terms that reflect the survival activities and experiences of Zimbabweans during the protracted and multi-staged national crisis. It is also believed that language provides speakers with a set of resources for representing thought. In CG theory, language is understood as a set of resources that are available to language users for the symbolisation of thought and for the communication of these symbolisations

(Taylor 2002). Therefore, what we experience every day and what we do is much a matter of metaphor.

Most cognitivist scholars of metaphor refer to the Lakovian or the domain mapping theory (Lakoff & Johnson 1980). According to this approach, metaphor is a conceptual phenomenon that involves a mapping relation between two domains, namely the source domain (SD) and the target domain (TD). A TD is structured and understood with reference to another, more basic domain, the SD. The SD is conceived as concrete concepts that can be experienced or perceived directly, while the TD is more abstract; that is, it concerns subjective experience. Thus, Lakoff notes,

the locus of metaphor is not in language at all, but in the way we conceptualise one mental domain in terms of another. The general theory of metaphor is given by characterising such cross domain mappings. And in the process, everyday abstract concepts like time, states, change, causation and purpose also turn out to be metaphorical. (Lakoff 1993: 203)

Using this approach, we can conclude that SDs include concrete phenomena such as *zvidhinha* (lit: 'bricks'), *moto* (lit: 'fire') and *murungu* (lit: 'white person') and physical actions such as *kudhakwa* (lit: 'drunkenness'), *kudya* (lit: 'eating') and *kurova* (lit: 'beating'). These are concepts that people experience directly. However, TDs include resultant feelings such as *kurwadza* (lit: 'pain') and *kurāsika* (lit: 'confusion') that people experience during a crisis. This means that our conceptualisation of categories such as confusion and pain is 'grounded in our experience with the concrete objects and events' (Kittay 1987; Ungerer & Schmid 1996: 121). In summary, therefore, metaphor functions at the conceptual level and is a cognitive instrument that we utilise in conceiving our world. This chapter will examine the conceptual metaphors of the Shona language that were created during the crisis, but first, the following section outlines the data gathering approaches that were employed in this investigation.

## Sources of data

The metaphors that are analysed in this chapter were collected from two main sources, namely field notes from participant observations taken of naturally occurring interactions in public and private spheres from August to December of 2008, and in-depth semi-structured interviews conducted with Shona speakers of varying age groups, educational status, gender and religious and political affiliation. The observations and interviews were carried out in places that I visited in and around the streets of central Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe. Data were

collected in areas such as homes, liquor stores, bars, nightclubs, churches and political rallies.

In Harare, I collected some of the metaphors when I visited areas such as the Road Port, an international bus terminus at the corner of 4th Street and Robert Mugabe Street in central Harare, where moneychangers targeted local people and foreigners who would be travelling in and out of Zimbabwe. Other areas that were visited during the data collection period in Harare were the Ximex Shopping Mall, along Angwa Street, the Copacabana bus terminus and the area opposite the Amalgamated Motor Corporation (AMC) showroom, at the corner of Julius Nyerere and Kwame Nkrumah Streets, where dealing in foreign currency had become rampant.

I elicited various metaphorical terms and expressions that dealers used to lure customers while avoiding the possibility of alerting the police and other security agents, since it was illegal to be in possession of foreign currency, especially if one were not a licensed foreign currency dealer. The majority of the money changers were men. In some areas in Harare, such as along Third Street behind the Meikles Hotel and along Fourth Street, there was, however, a higher concentration of young and middle-aged women than men. I also observed and recorded some of the data at bus termini and in public transport as I travelled to and from work.

More systematic observations were made when I spent time with friends during weekends at various public places. I recorded data during these periods, taking into account all relevant notes regarding contexts and transcriptions. In addition, lengthy observations were carried out in public drinking places that I patronised during my free time. Mostly, the conversations that I observed and participated in were between people acquainted with each other, though some of them involved people meeting for the first time, especially when they were in the process of carrying out one of the illicit business deals that had become the order of the day during the crisis.

I supplemented the participant observation method with face-to-face unstructured interviews, which were aimed at finding out more about the Shona speakers' intuitions about a number of issues concerning the data. The unstructured interviews were carried out to verify the literal meanings of the words and their new metaphorical meanings. The verification process involved randomly selected Shona speakers who were picked from neighbours, friends, colleagues and students at the University of Zimbabwe. Factors such as age, social status and level of education were not considered so that I could elicit data from across the divide of the Shona community. Ten people who speak Shona as a home language were involved in the process of verifying and interpreting the various meanings that the newly created Shona expressions have. The following section analyses the metaphors that were collected for this study.

## The Zimbabwean crisis as captured in Shona metaphor

After the collection of data I established that the terms and expressions that the Shona-speaking people came up with to talk about the crisis in Zimbabwe could be put into a number of clearly distinct categories. These categories include terms and expressions referring to challenges that people were facing during the crisis, local and foreign currency, corruption and its perpetrators, cheap items and illicit deals and coping mechanisms that Zimbabweans devised in order to survive the crisis. The tables provided in this chapter show the linguistic terms and expressions under each of the above-mentioned categories. They show the Shona term and its literal and newly acquired metaphorical meanings. The origins and semantic changes that the words underwent are discussed in each category.

### Metaphors referring to the challenges faced during the crisis

Table 7.1 provides the metaphorical terms and expressions that the Shona people created to talk about the challenges that they faced during the crisis in Zimbabwe. A number of terms and expressions refer to the hopelessness and confusion that characterised the Zimbabwean crisis. For example, the term *zvakahakwa* (lit: ‘things are drunk’) and its lexical variant *zvidhekwe* are metaphors that describe the state of confusion that people found themselves in as a result of their failure to

**TABLE 7.1** *Terms and expressions used during the crisis*

Shona terms	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
zvakahakwa/zvidhekwe	drunkenness	confusing situation
zvapakenga	madness	confusing situation
zvakahadzvanya	being hard-pressed	painful situation
marwadzo	pain	difficult situation
kuwona moto/fayazi	to feel fire	painful situation
kuwona hutsi	having smoke in the eyes	confusing situation
pakona	being in a corner	a very difficult situation
kurova pasi petsoka	to beat under the feet	painfully exorbitant prices
kukanga waya	roasting a piece of wire	hopeless situation
zvapakuresa	things are pressing	difficult situation
ljipita	Egypt	a land of oppression
nyika yaazvigamba/mamvemve	the country is now in patches or rugs	dysfunctional society
ngoda	diamond	scarce commodities

make ends meet. Financially, the terms are used to describe failure to succeed in a particular deal or transaction. For example, in response to the question, *wabudirira here?* (lit: 'have you succeeded?') one who had failed would simply respond, *zvakahakwa/zvidhekwe* (lit: drunkenness' for 'I have failed'). One can detect in the metaphor of the drunken person – with whom one cannot hold a meaningful conversation or any intellectually challenging discussion, let alone do any productive menial work – the people's hopelessness and despondency during the Zimbabwe crisis. The same can be said of the term *pakona* (lit: 'being in a corner') and the expressions *kukanga waya* (lit: 'frying or roasting a piece of wire'), *kuwona moto* (lit: 'to feel fire') and *kuwona hutsi* (lit: 'having smoke in the eyes') all of which have the same connotations of being in an unsustainably difficult, hopeless and confusing situation. The metaphor *kuwona moto* is derived from old Shona metaphors such as *kuwona ndondo* (lit: 'to be in trouble') and *kuwona tsvuku* (lit: 'to see red'). The expression *kukanga waya* (lit: 'roasting/frying a piece of wire') is particularly reflective of the hopelessness that the people felt during the crisis, as in practice, roasting or frying a piece of wire to eat is an exercise in futility which can only be motivated by extreme desperation.

The expression *kurova/kukwatura pasi petsoka* (lit: 'beating someone on the underside of their feet') had interesting origins. Its metaphorical meaning is to sell something at an exorbitant price or profiteering, as had become the norm during the crisis. This metaphor originated in the torture mechanisms alleged to have been used by state security agents, particularly on the political opponents of the ruling party, during the crisis. The expression compares the pain suffered by a torture victim to that suffered by a victim of being over-charged.

The word *ngoda* (lit: 'diamond') became a metaphor for anything valuable such as scarce fuel and food commodities. This was after the discovery of diamonds in the Chiadzwa area of Marange in the Manicaland province of Zimbabwe. The Chiadzwa area became an area of contestation during the crisis because some senior government officials from the ZANU-PF party wanted to monopolise the diamonds while thousands of ordinary Zimbabweans and other Africans wanted to benefit from the same diamond fields. It is believed that hundreds of ordinary men and women died as the diamond fields fell into lawlessness and violence. The word *ngoda* replaced the word *goridhe* (lit: 'gold') which was commonly used in the past to refer to anything that the Shona people considered priceless. This demonstrates the dynamic nature of language, in this case, in direct response to an economic variable.

Zimbabweans nicknamed their country *Ijipita* (lit: 'Egypt') as a way of expressing their frustration with the oppressive and repressive conditions that they were surviving in during the crisis. The terrible situation in Zimbabwe was likened to what obtained in Egypt when the children of Israel were being ill-treated by Herod's oppressive government. Interestingly, people nicknamed Morgan

Tsvangirai, the President of the major formation of the MDC and current Prime Minister of the Republic of Zimbabwe, as 'Moses' since they considered him as their saviour. They saw him as the only political leader who had the capacity to lead them out of the crisis, just as the Biblical Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt.

The slang term that was used to refer to the horrible situation is *mahwani* (lit: 'one'), a remark meaning 'it is difficult'. In response to the hyperinflationary environment in the country, '*mahwani thousand* (lit: 'one thousand') emerged. Perhaps the feeling was that *mahwani* would not adequately capture how difficult things were in the country. Perhaps *mahwani thousand* was a veiled mockery of the government for failing to deal with the problems afflicting the country, particularly hyperinflation. These terms and expressions that were used to refer to the crisis aptly and poignantly paint a bleak picture of the situation that the people found themselves in. They are a manifestation of the sense of hopelessness and despondency that the people had to live with at a personal, community and national level.

The examples that have been described above show a shift from the source domains (SDs) to the target domain (TD). As mentioned earlier in this article, the expressions *zvakahakwa/zvidhekwe* (lit: 'drunkenness'), *zvapakenga* (lit: 'madness') and *kuwona moto* (lit: 'feeling fire') metaphorically refer to the confusing, frustrating and painfully difficult situation that was obtaining in Zimbabwe. These expressions are not isolated because there is a relationship between the concrete meanings and the abstract meanings. For example, in the conceptual metaphor 'drunkenness-is-confusing Zimbabwe situation' the SD is a situation of drunkenness while the TD is the situation in Zimbabwe. The same thinking applies to the conceptual metaphor 'difficulties-are-being in fire' in which the TD is the painful Zimbabwe crisis, while the SD is the pain that is inflicted on one who is placed in fire. Using the metaphor *kuwona moto* (lit: 'to feel fire') Shona speakers are not just substituting words but the words are defining the Zimbabwean situation in terms of the pain that one goes through after being burnt by fire or having smoke in one's eyes. This serves to show how the Shona speakers conceptualised the nature of pain they went through as a result of the crisis that was obtaining in their country. The next section explores the metaphorical expressions that were generated in order to talk about local and foreign currency in Zimbabwe.

## Metaphors referring to local and foreign currency

During the crisis local cash was in short supply as evidenced by the incessant long queues at the banks. As a result, one needed to be very innovative and well connected to lay one's hands on meaningful amounts of the local currency. In addition, changing foreign currency on the parallel market became a highly



**TABLE 7.2** *Metaphors relating to local and foreign currency*

Shona terms	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
chidhinja	brick	a heavy bundle of notes
chibhanzi	buns	lots of money
chibhegi	huge bag	a lot of money
chihomwe	huge pocket	a lot of money
mari refu	tall money	lots of money
mari ine mumvuri	money with a shadow	lots of money
mari yakareba	long money	lots of money
mari yakasviba	dark money	lots of money/money acquired illegally
Zimkwacha	Zimbabwe kwacha	worthless Zimbabwe dollars
kupisa/kubhena/kugocha mari	burning/roasting money	electronic money transfer through the RTGS system
marara	litter	rands
magirinhi	greens	us dollars
mashizha	leaves	us dollars
huni nyoro	firewood that is not dried up	us dollars

lucrative business though very risky. Terms and expressions, therefore, emerged to refer to issues related to the handling of currency.

Table 7.2 provides the metaphors that the Shona-speaking people created to talk about large sums of money, foreign currency and the worthlessness of the local currency. For example, terms such as *chidhinja* (lit: ‘a brick’), *chibhegi* (lit: ‘a huge bag’) and *chihomwe* (lit: ‘a huge pocket’) assumed the extended meaning of ‘lots of money’. Hyperinflation caused people to carry large quantities of money (though of little value), sometimes in bags. These terms are associated with the Shona class 7 noun prefix {chi-}, which is generally used to designate ‘a number of physical types that are short and stout or large and stout’ (Fortune 1980: 57), which helps in capturing the shapes (resembling a brick) of the amounts of money that people were getting from the banks for everyday transactions such as buying tomatoes and vegetables or for transport fares.

Some of the terms and expressions were used to refer to someone who had a lot of money. People were often nick-named *VaChibhegi/VaChihomwe*, (lit: ‘Mr /Mrs. Chibhegi (bag) or Mr/Mrs Chihomwe (pocket)'). Nicknames thus became a barometer of one’s status. The Shona {va-} prefix that is associated with these words is an honorific plural, which is normally used with class 1a nouns and is also indicative of someone who is in possession of something, here a bag or a pocket (Fortune 1980).

At the peak of the crisis, in a single cash withdrawal from the bank, one could get such a thick bundle of notes as would literally cast a shadow if put on

a table. This is how expressions such as *mari ine mumvuri* (lit: 'money that has a shadow'), *mari yakareba* (lit: 'long money') and *mari refu* (lit: 'tall money') were coined. Money was said to be long, tall and to have a shadow because it was in very large quantities. The term *Zimkwacha* was used as a pejorative reference to the worthless Zimbabwean dollar and a reference to the Zambian crisis in the mid- to late 80s when the Zambian currency, the kwacha, also suffered severe inflationary pressures. Since the Zimbabwe crisis by far surpassed the Zambian one, the term *Zimkwacha* shows that sometimes linguistic terms can result from parallelism which does not need to have one-for-one equivalents.

The expression *kupisa/kubhena mari* (lit: 'burning money') emerged at the height of the abuse of the electronic money transfers facility through the Real Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) system in 2008, as a result of which even some unemployed people ended up with previously unheard-of amounts of money, such as quadrillions and sextillions of Zimbabwe dollars, in their bank accounts. Such amounts of money would be transferred into their bank accounts allegedly by dealers both inside and outside of banking institutions, who were prepared to part with such large amounts of the Zimbabwe dollars in exchange for small amounts of us dollars, which they would use to hedge themselves against inflation.

The term *kubhena*, which is borrowed from the English 'burn', originated from the fact that, since the transfers would be done electronically, they were very fast when compared to cheque transfers which would take days and, in some cases, even weeks to clear. The speed of the RTGS transfers, therefore, created mental pictures of a process that takes place very fast because it is facilitated by the power of electrical energy. Another variation of the expression was *kugocha mari* (lit: 'roasting money'). The money would be referred to as *mari yegochigochi* (lit: 'barbecued money'), a reflection of the speed at which the money would have been transferred into a bank account. The crisis, therefore, gave birth to a culture whereby people wanted very quick and astronomical gains to whatever investments they might have made and this was also captured in the language.

In CG terms, we can say that concrete phenomena, such as bricks, bags, colours, burning and roasting, were the SDs from which the TD, which is money, was conceptualised. For example, in the term *chidhinha* (lit: 'brick') which metaphorically refers to a thick bundle of bank notes, the conceptual metaphor is 'money-is-a-brick'. In this metaphor, the large bundle of money is the TD while the brick is the SD. Also, in the expression *kugocha mari* (lit: 'roasting money') the SD is the process of roasting or burning while the TD is the process of electronically transferring money from one account to another, which happens at a much faster pace than other methods such as cheque transfers. Again, this shows a movement from the SD to the target TD. In this case, the Shona-speaking people used their existing knowledge of bricks and fire to conceptualise the crisis.

There are some slang terms that were created during the height of the crisis in order to refer to specific amounts of money. According to Louw and Du Plooy-Cilliers, 'slang is a form of language used by a particular, limited group of people, and may not be generally understood' (Louw & Du Plooy-Cilliers 2003: 79). Contrary to this observation, the slang expressions that were recorded for this study were used by people from all walks of life. In other words, the language was not limited to a group of people. Mawadza says that slang is vivid, forceful and (more) expressive than standard usage (Mawadza 2000). It often avoids the sentimentality and formality which the standard terms tend to assume. The slang terms that emerged to refer to specific amounts of money include *thaza* 'a thousand dollars', *mita* 'one million dollars', *bhidza* 'a billion dollars', *tridza* 'one trillion dollars' and *matiriri* 'trillions of dollars'. All these terms were borrowed from English to refer to a thousand, a million, a billion, a trillion and trillions of Zimbabwe dollars respectively. These examples are either fully or partially rephonologised in order to make them conform to constraints imposed by the Shona permissible syllable structure which is typically of the consonant-vowel (cv) shape. Truncated terms such as *thaza* 'thousand' and *tridza* 'one trillion dollars' show tolerance of dental fricatives and consonant clusters (complex onsets) respectively in Shona loanword phonology.

The immediate coining of such terms as *bhidza* 'billion' and *tridza* 'one trillion dollars' in response to new Zimbabwe dollar denominations that would have been introduced by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) accords with the observation by Mawadza (2000) that slang is an ever-changing set of colloquial words and phrases that speakers use to establish group identity and solidarity. As the reality changed in relation to currency denominations, so also did the slang used by the Shona speakers to refer to this reality. For example, each time the RBZ knocked off zeroes from the currency and reduced the highest denomination to a hundred dollars, the terms *bhidza* and *tridza* would disappear from the slang referring to the Zimbabwean dollar, only to reappear with the rise in inflation when the central bank printed and introduced higher denominations in response to inflation.

There were attempts, though half-hearted, by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) to stop the practice of foreign currency exchange on the parallel market. To avoid being detected and arrested by the police, some of whom operated in plain clothes, the moneychangers had to come up with their own street lingo to refer to the various foreign currencies. The rand was, therefore, referred to as *marara* (lit: 'litter') and the US dollars were variously referred to as *magirinhi* (lit: 'greens'), *huni nyoro* (lit: 'firewood that is not dry') and *mashizha* (lit: 'leaves, which are usually green'). The term *marara* is a borrowing from the Afrikaans term *rand* which is the South African currency. The term *marara*, for the 'rand' can be said to be a form of what Dirven (1985: 88) refers to as 'sound metaphor'. In this case, the [r] sound in the word *marara* is utilised to refer onomatopoeically to the South African currency. The term

*magirinhi* has its origins in the green colour of the us dollar. Other variant expressions that were used to denote the us dollars are *huni nyoro* and *mashizha*. These terms were used to refer to the us dollars because the money is green in colour, which resembles the green bark of freshly cut firewood and the green colour of leaves.

Terms such as *pini* (lit: 'pin') and *waya* (lit: 'wire') were used to denote 100 Zimbabwe dollars, 100 rand and 100 pula notes, and the terms had been in use long before the crisis and continued to be used during the crisis. Although Mawadza (2000) classifies these words as slang, I wish to classify them as metaphors that are conceptually related to the thinness of a piece of wire or a pin. This structural property is metaphorically transferred to the shape of a Zimbabwean 100 dollar or South African 100 rand note.

## Metaphors referring to corruption and its perpetrators

In order to survive the crisis, quite a large number of people across the social spectrum engaged in corrupt activities. Thus, terms and expressions emerged which the Shona speakers metaphorically used to refer to corruption and its perpetrators.

Table 7.3 presents some of the linguistic terms that emerged to capture some of these activities and nicknames of the people who perpetrated them. For example, the expression *huwori* (lit: 'decay'), whose extended meaning is corruption, was coined in order to refer to corrupt activities. Some of the terms in this category, which were a result of borrowing from English, were *dhiri* (lit: 'deal') and *bhigi dhara* (lit: 'big man'). In the context of the crisis, the term *dhiri* was mainly used pejoratively to refer to an illicit transaction. The word *mudhila* (lit: 'dealer') was thus used to refer to someone who engaged in shady deals. In this case, the prefixing of the word *dhila* with the Shona class 1 noun prefix {mu-} to form the morphologically complex noun *mudhila* captures the fact that the word is referring to a human

**TABLE 7.3** *Metaphors referring to corruption and its perpetrators*

Shona terms	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meanings
huwori	decay	corruption
kuzvuvu dumbu	dragging one's stomach	rich person
bhigi dhara	big man	rich person
murungu	white person	rich person
muvheti	white person	employer/customer/rich person
mhene	duiker	rich person/regular customer
madhiri	deals	illicit deals

being. In the same nominal class are indigenous [+human] nouns like *mukomana* (lit: 'boy'), *musikana* (lit: 'girl') and *mudzidzisi* (lit: 'teacher').

Words such as *murungu* and *muvheti* (lit: 'white person') were used to refer to someone rich despite the fact that they might be black. The extension of the meanings of these terms was a result of the historical fact that during the colonial era it was the whites who were rich and powerful in Zimbabwe. Furthermore, this stems from the fact that white people were, for the most part, the employers in the colonial period, hence without *varungu/mavheti* (employers) there would be no business. The use of the word *varungu* to name potential customers was also meant to flatter them in order to encourage them to buy a lot and to elicit favours. This would encourage them to offer a big tip for the service rendered. This can be explained by the fact that, during the colonial period and soon after political independence in 1980, these terms were associated with the popular image of the white person as being wealthy and powerful and, therefore, likely to give generous tips to those who provided services (Mawadza 2000: 95).

The term *mhene* (lit: 'duiker'; Afrikaans name for a species of small buck) was a metaphorical expression also used to refer to someone with a lot of money; connection between a duiker and someone with a lot of money came from the poise, elegance and flamboyance of the duiker which could also be seen in most of the people who acquired sudden wealth as a result of being able to take advantage of the crisis. The expression *kuzvuva dumbu* (lit: 'dragging one's stomach') emerged to refer to the body structure of most rich people who had potbellies as a result of good living. The expression could often be used to refer to anyone who was perceived to be rich even if they did not have a potbelly. This explains why Geertz (1972) concludes that a number of words may be made to carry what might be referred to as status meaning, in addition to their normal linguistic meaning. When these words are used in conversations, they convey not only their literal meaning, for example *murungu* (lit: 'white person'), but also a connotative meaning concerning the status of the person being addressed.

In naming corruption, the SDs are concrete phenomena such as *kuwora* (lit: 'decaying') and *kuzvuva dumbu* (lit: 'dragging one's stomach') while the TD is corruption. Therefore, in the expression *kuzvuva dumbu* 'dragging one's stomach' the conceptual metaphor is 'dragging one's stomach-is-being rich'. In this metaphor, the SD is a person with a protruding stomach and the TD is riches. This means that the Shona-speaking people utilise their knowledge of potbellied individuals to refer to riches. The same logic applies to the naming of a rich person as *murungu* (lit: 'white person'). In this case, the conceptual metaphor is 'white person-is-rich' and the SD is the white person who is usually rich, while the TD is the black people who acquired riches during the crisis. Therefore, there is a clear movement from the SD to the TD. The next section examines the Shona terms that were created to denote cheap items and success in illicit business transactions.

## Metaphors referring to cheap items and success in illicit deals

Terms and expressions that emerged during the Zimbabwe crisis show that not all circumstances were characterised by gloom and doom. There would be occasions when people would get cheap items and also succeed in business deals. The linguistic terms and expressions in Table 7.4 were coined to describe such times and to refer to the purchase of cheap items.

The words *kuhwinha* (lit: ‘winning’) and *kunhonga* (lit: ‘picking up from the ground’) have the extended meaning of getting something at a very cheap price or winning in a deal. Words such as *kudyira* (lit: ‘eating as a result of selling something’) or *kunwira* (lit: ‘drinking as a result of selling something’) have connotations of one having benefited unfairly from the sale of an item as he or she can afford to spare some of the money for a drink or to buy themselves something from the sale instead of keeping all the money for essentials such as rent or school fees.

Another term for very cheap goods and services was *bhakosi*. This was a borrowing from the acronym BACOSI (Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention), an intervention strategy which was introduced by the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) in 2008 to make basic commodities available to vulnerable groups at very cheap prices. The term became very popular within a very short space of time and anything selling cheaply in the streets was said to be selling at *bhakosi* price. This also coincided with the RTGS period when people would sell commodities such as milk, ice cream, biscuits and toothpaste in the streets of Harare at ridiculously low prices in order to raise large sums of local currency (Zimbabwe dollars) that they would use to buy US dollars from the parallel market, which they would then go and ‘burn’ (electronic money transfer) to get quadrillions and sextillions of Zimbabwe dollars in return.

When the RTGS system was suspended by the RBZ, the practice of selling commodities at *bhakosi* (very cheap) prices also died a natural death and with it came a noticeable reduction in the use of the term *bhakosi* in the streets. This is another indication of language change in response to economic realities. Therefore,

**TABLE 7.4** *Metaphors referring to cheap items and success in illicit deals*

Shona terms	Literal meanings	Metaphorical meanings
kuluma	biting	an achievement in a deal
bhakosi	Basic Commodities Supply Side Intervention (BACOSI)	very cheap items (e.g. air time, ice cream, bus fare, biscuits, milk etc).
kudyira/kunwira	eating or drinking after selling something	I have sold it/ benefiting unfairly/ illegally
kunhonga	picking up	cheap price, almost for free
kuhwinha	winning	successful deal

the SDs for cheap items were the Shona people's existing knowledge of actions such as *kunhongwa* (lit: 'picking up') and *bhakosi* (lit: 'BACOSI'), through which people benefit without any significant costs. It is this knowledge of concrete events that helped them conceptualise cheap things as if they were for free.

## Metaphors referring to coping mechanisms

During the crisis, people devised quite a number of coping strategies for which they coined new terms. These terms are given in Table 7.5 below:

Terms that were coined to refer to coping mechanisms include *kujoyinisa* (lit: 'joining separate items together'), *kubatanidza* (lit: 'joining separate items together'), *kujingirisa* (lit: 'joining separate items together') and *kukiyakiya* (lit: 'locking repeatedly'), all of which have the same extended meaning of 'employing unorthodox means to raise money for survival'. These expressions are metaphorical in nature as they create a vivid mental picture of someone trying desperately to make things work in an environment where the normally accepted and conventional ways of earning a living, such as formal employment and honest business, no longer work.

A word such as *kumhanyamhanya* (lit: 'running around') has a connotation of there being no time to rest if one wanted to survive during the crisis, as relying on only one means of survival was risky. The word *kumhanyamhanya* is a prosodically reduplicated form of the motion verb *mhanya* (lit: 'run') and reduplication is an interesting derivational word-formation process in the context of this investigation because it indicates that 'a heightened quality or intensity is conveyed' (Fortune 1980: 90).

The term *kukiyakiya* is particularly interesting in that even politicians used it. Soon after the formation of the Zimbabwean Government of National Unity

**TABLE 7.5** *Metaphors referring to coping mechanisms*

Shona terms	Literal meaning	Metaphorical meaning
<i>kujoyinisa</i>	joining	unconventional means of surviving
<i>kujingirisa</i>	joining	unorthodox means of survival
<i>kubatanidza</i>	joining	unorthodox means of survival
<i>kukiyakiya</i>	locking repeatedly	unorthodox means of survival
<i>kumhanyamhanya</i>	running around	searching for opportunities
<i>kukorokoza</i>	gold panning	searching for opportunities
<i>kuvhara</i>	closing	cheating
<i>kudya negumbo</i>	using legs to eat	prostitution (sex work)
<i>kuverenga mbariro</i>	counting rafters (roof)	prostitution (sex work)

(GNU) when the Honourable Tendai Biti, the incumbent Minister of Finance was asked how his party, the MDC, had raised the foreign currency for civil servants' salaries, his response was *takakiyakiya* 'we used unorthodox means to raise the money', an indication that raising money through unorthodox means had become acceptable in Zimbabwe even among lawmakers.

The term *kukorokoza* (lit: 'gold panning'), a lucrative venture despite the risks associated with it, came to mean 'anything, like selling vegetables in the streets, that one would do to raise money for survival'. Another metaphorical term is *kuwhara* (lit: 'closing', e.g. a door) whose metaphorical meaning is 'cheating someone in a business deal'. This was so common a practice during the crisis that one always had to be alert in making business deals otherwise one would risk being on the losing end of the deal. Another metaphor was *kudya negumbo* (lit: 'eating by means of a leg') whose extended meaning is getting money from prostitution. Similarly, *kudya nekuverenga mbariro* (lit: 'eating from counting the rafters that make up the roof of house') also meant getting money from prostitution. These expressions are an indication of the not-so-virtuous means that some people in Zimbabwean society came up with to survive the crisis.

In CG terms, in the expression *kudya negumbo* (lit: 'eating using one's legs'), the SD is a situation whereby one uses legs to eat while the TD is prostitution, which was a result of the difficulties that Zimbabweans were facing. This means that some people had to open their legs and sell their bodies (prostitution) to put food on the table. All these observations show us that metaphors are not just words but are part of our conceptual system and affect how we think and express what we care about almost every waking moment (Lakoff & Johnson 1999).

## Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the nature of metaphorical terms and expressions that were created by the Shona-speaking people during the Zimbabwe crisis. It was shown that the metaphors were created to name and describe the challenges that people faced as a result of the crisis, in local and foreign currency, in corruption and its perpetrators, in cheap items and illicit deals and in coping mechanisms. This demonstrates that language is a resource that people can rely on in negotiating difficult circumstances. As this chapter has shown, language can successfully be manipulated to evade the oppressive instruments of dictatorial systems.

The metaphors were analysed using analytical tenets that are provided in CG theory. This contemporary view of metaphor shows that metaphorical expressions are shifts from one domain (SD) to another (TD). The major theoretical conclusion that is made in this chapter is that language users make use of metaphorical



expressions that refer to their environment and that they utilise existing cognitive models in the process of mapping from one cognitive domain to another. Metaphors aid communication by expanding the lexicon of the language. This study demonstrates the semantic change that the Shona language is undergoing. It is developing as the situation in Zimbabwe changes. It is worth emphasising that languages do not undergo change only during times of crisis. Language change is a continuous process which reflects the creative nature of human cognitive systems. A systematic study of all aspects of metaphor creation in Shona should indicate the directions in which the language is changing and/or developing, the knowledge of which is vital for language planning.

This chapter also shows that language reflects the everyday experiences and realities of a people. The nature of words that have been analysed in this study shows the experiences that the people of Zimbabwe went through as a result of the multidimensional crisis that obtained in their country.

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## ‘A Zimbabwean joke is no laughing matter’: E-humour and versions of subversion

*Jennifer Musangi*

IN JULY 1944, a German church minister, Father Josef Möller, was sentenced to death by hanging by a Nazi court for telling a joke that mocked Adolf Hitler and his close Nazi aide Hermann Göring. According to Möller, a fatally wounded German soldier asked his chaplain to grant him a wish just minutes before he died. The soldier requested that if he was to die the priest should place him between Hitler and Göring because that way he would die like Jesus – between two criminals. This mockery of Hitler and Göring by Father Möller was punishable by death. Had this joke been told elsewhere outside of Nazi Germany, it is most unlikely that it would have been seen as a criminal offence; at most it would have been viewed as a version of religious parody. However, since the joke was told in Nazi Germany and, most important, since it mocked leaders of the German Reich, its transgression was inflated; thus Father Möller had to die.

In an almost similar joke, Hitler and Göring are said to have been standing on top of Berlin’s radio tower when Hitler says he wants to do something to cheer up the people of Berlin. ‘Why don’t you just jump?’ suggests Göring. Like Father Möller, the female munitions worker who told the joke to colleagues in Berlin was executed. What therefore can one say of the place of the political joke? Are jokes such serious crimes as to warrant a death penalty or is it a case of unproportional crime and punishment? What makes a joke such a weighty narrative form? Indeed, the use of humour as subversion has a history that seems to have grown alongside that of political and social oppression across the world.

The most popular form of subversive humour is the political joke which, in the words of Gregor Benton (1988: 33), occurs in ‘modern dictatorships of all political sorts’. Indeed, as Benton suggests, it is almost obvious that any dictatorship leads to a massive production of various humour forms. In fact, humour is believed to have a subversive effect on dominant structures of ideas and is representative

of what Steve Linstead calls the 'triumph of informality over the formal' (Linstead 1988: 127; see also Douglas 1975). But then what do such old Nazi Germany jokes have to do with cyber humour on Zimbabwe? Is it a question of drawing parallels between Zimbabwe and Germany, or, worse still, is it a drawing of similarities and differences between Mugabe and Hitler?

This chapter seeks to examine the proliferation of internet humour in the midst of what has come to be known as the economic and political crisis in Zimbabwe. While some examples are drawn from elsewhere on the internet, the chapter primarily focuses on the website [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za) which, as shall be shown, announces itself as Robert Mugabe's personal website. Through this website, I attempt an analysis of the various ways through which internet humour has been used to make substantive commentary on the ubiquitous struggle of Zimbabweans through a 'reconfiguration' of Zimbabwe's president. Indeed, I want to argue that, through a virtual distortion/dismembering of the symbolic embodiment of power (in this case the president), digital humour can be employed as a form of subversion especially in contexts of autocracy. At the same time, however, humour forms are only valid for as long as they do not elicit actual action. In other words, that which may be grotesque in humour will most likely be antisocial or criminal if enacted in real life and, as such, any subversive force will be lost along with any sympathetic response.

As a starting point, it suffices to mention that the sample used in this chapter was arrived at through the Google search engine. Out of the numerous websites that appeared in the Google search for 'Zimbabwe' and 'humour', [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za) seemed to be more consistent with the idea of digitally-generated humour or what I would like to refer to as e-humour. As with other related internet research, such as on blogs, the possibility of subjectivity and sampling bias in this choice cannot be ignored. For obvious reasons, the most popular sites seem to be the focus of most research, a fact that remains relevant in the present discussion. However, evident in this particular site was the fact that it is clearly dedicated to the generation and archiving of humour arising from both the political and economic climate in Zimbabwe. What intrigued me more was the fact that the site is first an impersonation of President Robert Mugabe and second it runs a very consistent narrative on what appears to be a commentary on heterosexual masculinity/ies and its/their transgressions. For obvious reasons, [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za) is not President Mugabe's website, but is rather a mock arena on which a much more nuanced analysis of Mugabe's character can be published through (a) a digital manipulation and/or distortion of Mugabe's body and (b) a counter narrative that 're-creates' Mugabe through overlapping – and often inconsistent – masculinities.

It is important to mention here that [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za) has, since the time of research (between 2009 and 2011), been pulled down. A Google search of the website indicates that it is not available and that its domain cannot be found.

Although it is not clear why the website has been pulled down, it would be plausible to argue that Mugabe's regime has, over the years, taken a rather stern position on jokes about the president. In December 2011, for instance, Chimanimani West MP Lynette Karenzi was arrested for alleging that 'Robert Mugabe president *weZanu PF aiita zve homosexuality na Jonathan Moyo uye zve Canaan Banana aiitazve* [President Mugabe of ZANU-PF enjoyed homosexual relations with Jonathan Moyo. Canaan Banana too]'.

The most recent crackdown on 'Mugabe jokes' involves a carpenter from Dangamvura, Richmore Mashinga Jazi, who was charged at the Mutare magistrate's court for allegedly undermining the authority of the President, after making a joke about Robert Mugabe on the latter's 88th birthday. Mr Jazi, while watching the live coverage of Mugabe's 88th birthday celebrations, the court heard, suggested that the ageing ZANU-PF leader must have had help blowing up his birthday balloons. Mr Jazi's Shona joke, 'Ko ndiani abatsira kufuridzira Mugabe zvibharuma zvebirthday rake, uye achiri nesimba racho here? [Who helped Mugabe blow up his birthday balloons, does he still have the energy?]' earned him USD20 bail. He was due to appear in court on 12 March 2012 and faces possible prosecution in accordance with Section 33(2) a (ii) of the Criminal Law (Codification and Reform) Act Chapter 9:23. In the light of such arrests and several others in the past two years (see <http://www.africandictator.org/?p=7553>) and my failed attempts to reach the administrator of [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za) for copyright rights, it be that the site was a security risk and the webmaster did not want to make contact.

The major cyber humour form that this chapter focuses on is the visual text. In this chapter, visual text primarily refers to digitally reproduced graphics which are sometimes complemented with captions. Although the comic strip and the cartoon may be cited here, they are not considered e-humour forms for two reasons. First, the two forms do not entirely depend on digitalisation and were the focus of intellectual attention even before the advent of the internet. Second, in the sample used in this research, the cartoon and the comic strip do not appear to have had as much emotional agency as the e-humour forms and thus they do not make adequate evidence for the argument put forward. Visual humour types referred to in this chapter, therefore, will only include humour originating from the manipulation of pictures facilitated by computer programs and with specific focus on [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za). Such visual texts include, for example, funny photos and maniphotos. (A maniphoto is a digitally manipulated picture, in which a still photograph of one person is merged with that of another, producing a 'funny' amalgam.) My reading of these given forms of humour is largely informed by feminist and queer understandings of the underlying constructions of the postcolonial African state as both phallographic and patriarchal.

## Humour and the internet: A critical interface

The rapid development of the 'mass media interface of the internet' (Shifman 2007), the World Wide Web, has spawned numerous attempts to define and theorise not only the nature of the internet as 'new' media but also that of mobile telephony alongside which the internet seems to have grown (see for instance Lister 2003; Lievrouw & Livingstone 2002; Newhagen & Rafaeli 1996). Indeed, different people use the internet for purposes ranging from personal communication to academic research. Amongst the many other uses of the internet, and one which is crucial for the advancement of the argument in this chapter, is the production and circulation of humour which, as Liisi Laineste (2003: 1) puts it, is a 'founding member' of the internet. Indeed, while the internet was developed primarily as a means of serious communication, it seems to have become popular mostly for its entertaining nature. Clearly, the advent of the internet has expanded the boundaries of humorous creations as well as the spread of such texts. Indeed, there are various ways in which the internet has shaped and reshaped humorous texts which would not be possible without such a medium, something that this chapter will constantly revisit. While both humour and the internet have been the focus of an enormous corpus of research, the interface between them has only begun to surface in academic research.<sup>1</sup>

According to Laineste (2003), the biggest entertainer on the internet today is humour and its various forms of appearance. Emails carrying humorous texts, for example, move from one mailbox to another every day, often changing both their form and content like a hand-me-down oral narrative. 'In the present era', Laineste posits, 'the internet has become a major actor in the production and distribution of humour. Countless websites are devoted to humour and an enormous traffic of emails containing humorous messages daily congest PC terminals all over the world' (Laineste 2003: 93). In fact, a study by Coleman (2005) found that sending and receiving jokes was the most popular online political activity during the 2004 US presidential election. Similarly, research shows that over a third of internet users in the UK use the internet to find jokes, cartoons and other humorous material (Dutton et al. 2005) a phenomenon which I believe goes beyond the UK into other parts of the world and which, for the purposes of this chapter, has become a common cyber culture amongst Zimbabweans both at home and in the diaspora.

This link between humour and the Zimbabwean diaspora is particularly important in understanding e-humour emanating from the Zimbabwean 'crisis'. Not only does most of the humour on Zimbabwe revolve around the movement of Zimbabweans from the country into South Africa and beyond, it also comments on the literal movement of goods, ideas and humour (as a commodity) from other parts of the world into Zimbabwe. Reportedly, most jokes about Zimbabwe are, like many other commodities, illegally smuggled into the country from Zimbabweans in the

diaspora. This is particularly telling, especially given the emergence and growth of the 'Black Market' in which Zimbabwean dollars (or Gonollions in popular parlance<sup>2</sup>) can be exchanged at a rate higher than that of the mainstream banking system. Like the Black Market, humour seems to have been recruited into Moyo's (2009) 'parallel market of information' in Zimbabwe; a market that I want to argue is primarily cyber-based.

According to Shifman (2007: 187), '[h]umor has accompanied human society from its very beginnings, changing form, content and style in response to social, cultural and technological trends'. In fact, humour could be argued to have existed since the beginnings of life. Human society has always found reason to laugh, from ancient Greek mythology through to televised stand-up comedy: a fact that has spawned numerous scholarly interventions into the possible accounts of why people laugh<sup>3</sup>. Although most of these scholars seem to read humour as synonymous with laughter, it is imperative to note that humour does not always result in laughter. In fact sometimes humour manages only a smile or nothing at all and there are also

**FIGURE 8.1** A 'supposedly' Zimbabwean beggar at a traffic light in Johannesburg (image received by email; original source unknown).



various other non-humorous reasons for laughter. For example, someone might laugh as a result of being tickled or an excessive feeling of happiness (for instance in babies), which have nothing to do with humour in its modern received sense.

Indeed, humour has often been construed 'as a coping device through which people release tension, allay fear, forestall threat, defuse aggression or distance the unpleasant' (Linstead 1988: 142; Davies 1990). Although dictatorship and its various forms are not a prerequisite for all forms of humour, the Zimbabwean 'crisis' seems to provide many forms of humour whether through sms (Moyo 2009; Willems, 2011), in public taxis or even, much more recently, on cardboard signs, displayed by Zimbabwean beggars in Johannesburg (see Figure 8.1). In fact, this recent development on the use of humour by beggars is a telling illustration of how individuals manufacture humour for very specific purposes. For instance, humour for such beggars is geared towards winning more sympathisers (and/or even fans) who would then give more and in a way keep the beggars on or off the streets. Of course, beggars in Johannesburg particularly, have for a long time used various forms of humour but the emergence of jokes on Zimbabwe is intriguing in the understanding of Bourgault's (1995: 201) 'parallel discourses' in/on the Zimbabwean 'crisis'.

Political jokes can have grave consequences especially when the person telling the joke has not chosen an appropriate time and place for telling the joke. In present Zimbabwe, as in Nazi Germany, punishment for the joke cited above would possibly be a fine or a prison sentence because it would be considered tantamount to treason. The concept of burying a reigning president is the height of subversion of the state and state authority. In Kenya, for instance, it was an act of treason to even think of the death of President Mzee Jomo Kenyatta in the late 1960s and 1970s. In fact it is a criminal offence to ridicule the president in Zimbabwe and it is punishable by law. Article 33 (a) of the 2005 Zimbabwean Criminal Law states:

Any person who publicly, unlawfully and intentionally makes any statement about or concerning the President or an acting president with the knowledge or realising that there is a real risk or possibility that the statement is false and that it may engender feelings of hostility towards; or cause hatred, contempt or ridicule of; the President or the Acting president, whether in person or in respect of the President's office; [...] shall be guilty of undermining the authority of or insulting the president and liable to a fine not exceeding level six or imprisonment for a period not exceeding one year or both.

An important question to ask is perhaps if, as George Orwell posits, 'every joke is a tiny revolution' and is thus capable of being used as a tool of subversion, why then have we not had a revolution in Zimbabwe even though the media, pavements and



even virtual space is littered with what would be considered versions of subversion? Why does the postcolonial state in Africa take humour so seriously? What does the internet allow in the production and consumption of humour that is not available to other media?

## bob.co.za: A brief introduction and conceptual considerations

One very striking feature on the bob.co.za site is that the web address has a South African domain suffix (co.za). This is rather interesting as it signals the fact that the author of the website is either based in South Africa rather than in Zimbabwe or that she or he intends to falsely 'mislead' the visitors to the site about his or her actual location. Although a much more elaborate analysis could have been done from that point, this chapter focuses rather on the content of the site itself. To begin with, bob.co.za's copyright is owned by Robert G. Mugabe and claims to have been copyrighted on 1 April 2002. The copyright details are important for me in two ways:

- ◆ 'authenticating' the site by connecting the domain name bob.co.za to the president's full names. In this way, the author of the site seeks to erase any doubts about Bob to claim that it is in fact the president that the site refers to.
- ◆ the copyright date of 1 April, if read alongside the popular understanding of April Fool's Day, seems to subvert its own authenticity. In other words, in its claim to be President Mugabe's site, bob.co.za seeks also to frame itself within the fraudulent, the counterfeit, the fake, the not-so-real. This is the starting assumption within which this chapter considers this site as a form of e-humour.

But what is bob.co.za about? To begin with, the site's homepage has a picture of President Robert Mugabe with an animated Zimbabwean flag and the coat of arms to the left and right respectively. This page also introduces the site as the 'official' webpage of 'His Excellency Robert G. Mugabe (the president)'. Still on the homepage, right below the president's picture, is an introduction which takes the form of a letter. In a 'typical anti-West Mugabe' tone, the home page thus opens:

*Dear Comrades*

*After the recent spate of biased and mischievous reporting by the colonialist foreign press, I have ultimately decided to reveal to you, the honest and hard-working citizens of Zimbabwe, a little more of Mugabe – The Man.*

*I know you love your leader as much as you love your country. I know you deserve to see what kind of man I am. To those of you that already know me, this will simply be a joyous refresher of your cherished memories of me. To those with the still unfulfilled desire to know me better, I welcome you to an intimate glimpse of Mugabe – The Man. (<http://www.bob.co.za/index.htm>, italics in original)*

So, what is important on this website is the according of various personal attributes to Mugabe in the subsections of the site. For example, we find a list of his favourite movies (whose titles are also interestingly manipulated), his friends and enemies, his dreams and so on. What comes across in all these subsections is a representation of the 'popular' grand narrative of Mugabe the 'autocratic' Zimbabwean president on the one hand, and unknown characteristics of Mugabe 'the man' on the other hand. Both representations make for a very clear analysis of a continuum on which phallocracy could be explored. Clearly, from the introduction above, Mugabe appears to be a mystery that most people have always wanted to unravel, and thus he offers himself for closer scrutiny through this website.

In the pages that follow, I attempt an analysis of the images on bob.co.za through – and limiting myself to – two specific digital manipulation techniques: the maniphoto and the funny photo. These two techniques are particularly evident of how President Mugabe's body is disempowered through a sort of 'emasculatation' that leaves him unfit as 'the father of the nation'. This kind of emasculatation, as already mentioned, is clear in the digital infantilisation, feminisation and alternative hypersexualisation of the president. In these images, Mugabe is presented as a baby, a woman or a gay man who is highly sexualised, often bordering on whoredom. Of course this reading of emasculatation is fraught with undertones of a presumed heterosexual normativity often set as a precondition and/or inherently gendered characteristic of the state (particularly African), not only as male but also as a sort of manhood that is dependent on its sexual relationship with the female body.

A close relationship between such assertions of masculinity and the patriarchal nature of the African state is evident in most of the literature that came out of Africa by the first generation of African writers, including Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Sembene Ousmane, among others. Grace Musila (2009: 40) has argued, with relation to state power in Kenya, that 'one noticeable aspect of gendered constructions of the nation is the configuration of the nation as the land/subject/female and the state as rulers/male'. Indeed, this reading of artistic output from Africa almost falls into Fredric Jameson's (1986: 69) much criticised postulation that '[A]ll third world texts are necessarily...national allegories'. Admittedly, Jameson's is an oversimplification of what is a more intricate writing of African societies (with all their heterogeneity) but if we take his notion of 'experience' into account, then perhaps it is productive to understand the nuances

with which state and state power can be read in discursive spaces in which they are so often written. If we take these digital manipulations as a kind of writing of the state (and particularly the president), it is possible that we can begin to see how – when the power of the state is paraded as infantile or feminine or as homosexual – the president’s body is thereby loaded with a burden of incongruity. It is from our newly-acquired sense of superiority that we are able to laugh at the president since we know him more than we possibly should. The president, in this case, can no longer be seen as a ‘father’ since his fatherhood no longer fits into a stable relationship with his own body and those of others.

## Laughing at Zimbabwe with Zimbabweans: The analysis

As we explained previously, a maniphoto is a comical amalgam of two people’s photographs. Most important, in the maniphoto there must be an explicit digital manipulation – if it is not absolutely clear that the picture has been manipulated it would not be defined as a ‘maniphoto’ but as a ‘funny photo.’ According to Shifman

The maniphoto originated in the technique of photomontage, which existed prior to the Internet era mainly as a form of art that was not distributed extensively in mass media. However, the maniphoto became particularly popular (and much more humour-oriented) in the last couple of years due to digitization and the development of user friendly applications such as Photoshop. (2007: 198)

Most notably, the maniphoto is at the core of the humour site bob.co.za in which pictures of President Mugabe are manipulated and posted, as for example, being in ‘compromising’ situations with other men such as the pop icon Michael Jackson, former South African President Thabo Mbeki and former Namibian President Sam Nujoma. In one of the pictures (Figure 8.2), for instance, Mugabe, Mbeki and Nujoma are riding on a wooden horse which seems to be completely weighed down by the weight of the three men. The fact that Mbeki is actually leading the other two is an important commentary on the role of Mbeki’s approach of ‘quiet diplomacy’ as the chief mediator between Zimbabwe’s (then explicitly) warring factions, Mugabe’s party ZANU-PF and Morgan Tsvangirai’s opposition MDC. It could be inferred that the toy horse represents the people of Zimbabwe on whom the three men have decided to play and whom they ultimately punish. The picture’s caption catches the mood of this representation thus: ‘Here I am with Nujoma (Nam), Myself (Zim) and Mbeki (SA) in a playful mood. We used to be power-hungry communists. Now we are power-hungry bureaucrats.’

In this example, humour offers a more palatable version of the Zimbabwean condition in an attempt to explore the 'hidden dimensions' of the present situation. However, if this reading holds, this particular visual text can only be relevant for as long as there is an ongoing mediation process and Mbeki remains the mediator; if these conditions change, the humour in the text will have lost its currency.<sup>4</sup> Looking at Mugabe's face in this picture, one could infer too that he is being bullied by both Mbeki and Nujoma or that he is sexually aroused by the 'sandwich'. Again, if this reading of a hypersexualised Mugabe is anything to go by, the humour in the picture is not only because he too can be bullied but because he is a Mugabe who is capable of being in sexual relationships with other men. His is a 'threatened' masculinity and in that sense a body on which 'castration anxiety' is actualised.

In another maniphoto (Figure. 8.3), Mugabe's face is portrayed as a baby whose hands are chained. Amongst the many possible readings of this picture of a 'baby Mugabe' would be the presentation of Mugabe as a big baby who has to be restrained lest he causes trouble not only to other people but perhaps to himself (to paraphrase Fanon on the colonialists' 'attempt' to save Africans from themselves). By portraying Mugabe as a child, the picture has the overall effect of stripping him of his power as a 'man' and ultimately as the embodiment of state power. Mugabe becomes therefore a child that needs to be led rather than a leader.

In yet another picture, Mugabe as a young boy is holding a *panga* with his mouth open and a surprised face. On clicking on the picture, a caption reads, 'Don't touch the wrong side of a blade' which could either be read as a warning to

**FIGURE 8.2** *Here I am with Nujoma (Nam), Myself (Zim) and Mbeki (SA) in a playful mood. We used to be power-hungry communists; now we are power-hungry bureaucrats.*



Source: Originally from www.bob.co.za which can no longer be accessed

**FIGURE 8.3** *Mugabe as a baby in chains***FIGURE 8.4** *A panga is the first thing a politically aware child should acquire*

Source: Both images from [www.bob.co.za](http://www.bob.co.za) which can no longer be accessed

the reader not to touch Mugabe's 'wrong side' or an instruction to Mugabe to hold the weapon the right way ready to strike when need be. The *panga* in this picture becomes symbolic as it goes a long way to show how much violence has been part of the language of this child who refuses to grow. It is in this representation of Mugabe as a child, I want to argue, that the authors and consumers of such humour begin to unravel the mystery of who Mugabe is and why he does what he does. In such a representation therefore, the site's author and his or her imagined audience (whoever they may be) need to be in agreement that Mugabe is physically an adult but one who has the mental age of a child. In that way, and of course in many other ways, we can then laugh at his 'folly'. Indeed, infantilisation as a form of emasculation has a long colonial history in Africa. As Raymond Suttner (2008) and Grace Musila (2009) have separately pointed out, the emasculation metaphor could be read alongside the colonial strategy of infantilisation in Africa and, in Suttner's case, apartheid South Africa.

Unlike the maniphoto, the funny photo, on the other hand, does not necessarily need to be manipulated but often what matters is the narrative alongside which it appears. For instance, [bob.co.za](http://bob.co.za) uses pictures of Mugabe perhaps dozing at UN meetings, but, while the inappropriateness of his 'reflexes' in the given context gives us a sense of his lack of interest, what is humorous is the caption that accompanies the picture. For example, in this particular picture the caption reads: 'I should have laid off those baked beans at lunch'. However, sometimes the funny

photo might not carry a caption but still remains a humorous text. For instance, one of the photoshopped pictures shows Mugabe at the parade of the Brooklyn Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) Pride in which he is marching with, in this case, fellow gay men. Upon an internet search, I found out that the picture was indeed posted on an LGBTI activist site but a photo of Mugabe had been photoshopped into the crowd. This picture of 'gay Mugabe' is among numerous others (both maniphotos and funny photos) on bob.co.za in which the president's sexual orientation is put into question. In one other picture, for example, Mugabe is sitting in the toilet reading a gay magazine which has pictures of naked men. Although this is a portrayal that would require a much deeper analysis than this chapter is able to engage with, this running motif of a hypersexualised president would be crucial especially in the context of Mugabe's denouncement of homosexuality in Zimbabwe.

## Conclusion

The role of the internet in the production, circulation and consumption of humour in Zimbabwe was discussed in this chapter. However, despite the fact that several of these processes have been discussed, there is a need for detailed research of not only the production but the circulation and consumption of such humour. For instance, how do people decide which type of humour should be emailed to whom? What aspects of the internet allow for such processes without the danger of being charged in a court of law? Although the visual texts illustrated in this chapter do not solely depend on the internet, it is the centrality of digital reproduction in its production and its circulation through the internet that qualifies it as a form of e-humour.

Humour is, indeed, a powerful transmitter of the popular mood in societies where this mood can find no officially sanctioned outlet (Benton 1988: 33). Although, as Benton argues, and as put forward in this chapter, dictatorship is a necessary condition for a flourishing political humour, it is important to note that not all dictatorships produce humour, especially military dictatorships that use excessive physical force as in Idi Amin's Uganda. However, Zimbabwe seems to fit somewhere between a political and military dictatorship with the president's excessive control over the military. Indeed, humour can be a device for coping with unpleasantness, uncertainty or boredom in life by way of distancing ourselves from such feelings while, at the same time, humour ensures that we remain within the conventions of such negative feelings by actually accommodating them (Linstead 1988: 126).

If humour is indeed subversive, bob.co.za is a powerful example by virtue of its impersonation of the president himself. As Chris Powell and George Paton claim

in the introduction to *Humor in Society*, ‘the otherwise publicly unthinkable and outrageous act or belief can often be referred to or touched on and expressed more appropriately and acceptably in humorous form than in other literary or journalistic forms’ (Powell & Paton 1988: xxi). Although this chapter does not explicitly engage with the place of humour as an alternative discourse or as an alternative media space, clearly the political situation in Zimbabwe provides fertile soil for humour.

However, it is important to mention that, although most of the e-humour on Zimbabwe cited in this chapter seems to be primarily a ridicule of President Mugabe, e-humour also provides relief from, or a means of accommodating, crisis-driven hardship in day-to-day living conditions. For obvious reasons, however, Mugabe is indeed the most appropriate symbol and signifier of the Zimbabwean crises and thus much of the humour analysed in this sample appears to be centred on him as perhaps a failed president of a failed state.

While recognising the fact that e-humour may not necessarily be a revolutionary confrontation, this chapter argues that the subversive potential of this form cannot be underestimated. In fact, if humour was not such a threat to dictatorial powers, there would be no regulation or law governing its practice. However, for certain humour forms to be relevant, the crises must persist and the humour must carry only a potential threat which should never be actualised, because if the threat is actualised it can no longer be considered humour. For example, if Zimbabweans revolted against Mugabe as a result of being incited through e-humour, there would possibly be a significant change in humour trends.

## Acknowledgement

The first part of this chapter’s title is borrowed from Ben McIntyre’s article by the same title. Macintyre, B. (nd B). A Zimbabwean joke is no laughing matter <http://www.timesonline.co.uk> Accessed 2 May 2009

## Notes

- 1 There are a few pioneering works that have dealt with internet-based humour including Ellis 2002; Foot & Schneider 2002; Kuipers 2002; Oring 2003; Warnick 2002 among others.
- 2 Gonollions refer to Zimbabwean dollars, a name adopted to signify an inflation rate that millions, billions and trillions seemed unable to capture any more. The coinage stems from the name of the Zimbabwean Reserve Bank Governor, Gideon Gono.
- 3 Theories of humour have been largely classified into three major meta theories, namely Incongruity, Superiority and Relief theories. Proponents of the Incongruity theory include such people as Immanuel Kant and Søren Kierkegaard and argue that humour results from incongruity (ambiguity, logical impossibility, irrelevance, and inappropriateness). Superiority theory, on the other hand, emanates from a feeling of superiority over others. The major

- proponent of this theory is Thomas Hobbes who claims that humour arises from a 'sudden glory' felt when we recognise our supremacy over others. In fact Aristotle and Plato could be considered Superiority theorists although Aristotle is sometimes also remotely associated with the Incongruity theory. The two major proponents of Relief theory are Sigmund Freud (Freud 1905/1976) and Hebert Spencer who claim that humour is fundamentally a way of releasing or saving energy emanating from repression. See Berger (1977).
- 4 Former South African president Thabo Mbeki's 'quiet diplomacy' in Zimbabwe spawned serious debates across the continent and abroad with a letter coming from the leader of the opposition MDC, Morgan Tsvangirai (now Zimbabwean Prime Minister), accusing Mbeki of 'lack of neutrality' in the mediation especially in his public claim that there was no crisis in Zimbabwe even at a time when thousands of Zimbabweans were dying of a nation-wide cholera outbreak.

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## Mediating crisis: Realigning media policy and deployment of propaganda in Zimbabwe, 2000–2008

*Dumisani Moyo*

**THE POLITICAL SURVIVAL OF** President Robert Mugabe's government in the face of a massive and sustained domestic and international campaign for its ouster since 2000 has become something of an enigma. After the launch of its controversial land reform programme in 2000, the Mugabe regime has been a target for demonisation and delegitimisation in the international media where it is accused of, among other things, ruining the economy of what was once southern Africa's bread basket and turning it into a basket case. How is it that a government of a small country such as Zimbabwe could manage to survive such a massive international media onslaught to a point where the international community is divided and even paralysed in terms of finding an acceptable form of intervention in a crisis that has led to political and economic collapse? Why has the Mugabe regime continued to draw support not only from fellow African governments and ordinary citizens but also from other foreign nations and individuals, given its incessant demonisation in the global media? Even in neighbouring South Africa where reports on Zimbabwe and Mugabe dominate foreign news in almost all media, public opinion on Mugabe and Zimbabwe continues to be extremely polarised, if the negative slant in the news coverage on the one hand, and the standing ovations Mugabe receives on his public visits on the other, can be something to go by.<sup>1</sup> While several explanations can be advanced, one aspect that stands out is the Mugabe regime's conscious and well-calculated deployment of mediated propaganda directed at both the domestic and international constituencies.<sup>2</sup> Notably, the mediation of the Zimbabwe crisis has taken on multiple dimensions which encompass the national, regional and global spaces. In the process, this has created various versions of the reality of that crisis.

This chapter explores the various ways in which the Mugabe regime used the mass media as a tool for constructing a version of reality that advanced its cause in the face of rising global and local criticism between 2000 and 2008. The Zimbabwe government under President Mugabe, as Ezra Chitando aptly observes,

mounted 'one of the most determined and relentless propaganda campaigns in postcolonial Africa', from the beginning of its controversial land reform in 2000 (Chitando 2005). The chapter argues that as the crisis intensified and as criticism mounted, the Mugabe government continued to tighten its grip on the media in order to maintain its dominant position in defining the crisis to its citizens, both at home and in the diaspora, as well as its critics abroad. The mass media were expertly appropriated to narrativise and disseminate a highly selective discourse of the Zimbabwean nation which was deliberately calculated to interpellate the people of Zimbabwe as well as whip up pan-African sentiment across the continent in the fight against Western enemies seeking to overthrow the country's hard-won independence.

## Media, power and propaganda

This chapter is premised on assumptions about the power of the mass media. Media power, as Roger Silverstone has argued, can be understood in many different ways, and often manifests itself in 'contrary and contradictory dimensions'. This is because the media, as he goes on to argue,

are believed to set cultural agendas and destroy them, to influence the political process as well as being influenced by it; to inform as well as to deceive. They are believed to be at the mercy of state and market as well as to be resistible by informed or active audiences, citizens or consumers. (Silverstone 2005: 190)

Further, the media are said to 'provide the frameworks both for remembering and forgetting the past, and for representing and misrepresenting the other' (2005: 190). These contradictory interpretations of mass media power are well illustrated in the dynamics of state-media relations in Zimbabwe, especially the way the media were used in the mediation of the crisis. The question of media power, as Silverstone (2005) observes, has been at the centre of sociological inquiry since time immemorial – from Marx's preoccupation with ideology, to Durkheim's interest in representation, to Weber's interest in rationality and legitimation. These three dimensions of media power (ideological, representational and legitimation) are fundamental to understanding government media usages during the Zimbabwe crisis. However, it is important to note that media power cannot be understood without looking at the key actors – namely political and business elites – and their interests. As Thompson (1995) argues, media power is 'exercised at the conjunction

of the economic, the political and the symbolic' (cited in Silverstone 2005: 190). But increasingly today, it is imperative to look also at ordinary citizens and their engagement with the so-called 'new technologies of freedom' to re-mediate or construct counter-narratives to those circulated in the dominant mainstream media controlled by power and business elites. It is no longer possible to look at the power of mediation as concentrated in the hands of political and business elites who own and control the mass media but rather to see such power as more diffused and as exercised at both national and transnational dimensions.

To understand the Mugabe regime's uses (and misuses) of the mass media during the crisis, it is necessary to use what Aeron Davis called '*an inverted political economy of communication that focuses on the mediation of sites of power and those actors who inhabit them*' (Davis 2007: 2, original emphasis). Such an approach, as Davis suggests, 'reverses the line of investigation that is normally taken in typical studies of communication' by

moving away from media-centric investigations of power that seek to document the political, economic and cultural means by which media is shaped to further advantage those in power. Instead, the starting point is to identify political and economic sites of power and those that operate at those sites. Investigation is then led by asking how media and culture are used by, as well as influence, those actors, processes and sites themselves. (Davis 2007: 10)

Davis's inverted political economy of communication thus encourages us to lay emphasis on elite actors in terms of their attitudes, uses and approach to the mass media in order to understand the exercise of media power more fully. This can be seen as a significant contribution towards a more holistic approach that combines the two leading theoretical approaches in media studies which are often seen as conflictual and irreconcilable; that is, critical political economy and cultural studies. These two approaches are used as two complementary lenses that can help us create a complete picture of how political elites in Zimbabwe have used their power to shape mediated political discourse in that country.

The critical political economy lens looks at institutional structures, such as the policy changes and the shifts in ownership and control patterns which were linked to the realignments of power as the Mugabe regime increasingly saw itself as besieged.<sup>3</sup> This includes analysing the re-gearing of media laws and regulations after 2000, the restructuring of state media institutions such as the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation, the national news agency (the Zimbabwe Inter-Africa News Agency – ZIANA), the purchase of *The Financial Gazette* by Gideon Gono, Reserve Bank Governor and strong ally of President Mugabe, and the takeover of Ibbo Mandaza's media empire by the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO).<sup>4</sup>

The cultural studies lens on the other hand would then help us understand not only the nature of texts produced during this crisis period but also how audiences interacted and made sense of these texts. These texts include the news, music recordings supported by the Department of Information under then Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, and cultural events such as the galas which became a favourite way of diverting people from real issues. A deliberate tracking of the attitudes and actions of powerful individuals as they reshape and make use of the mass media thus becomes a critical layer of analysis for understanding the exercise of power.

The chapter focuses on three major strategies deployed by the Mugabe government in its fight for political survival, namely

- ◆ the institution of a re-regulatory regime, which led to further tightening of the government's grip on the vast public media empire encompassing both print and broadcasting;
- ◆ the reorganisation of state institutions, which saw major organisational changes not only in the state media sector but also in other strategic state institutions;
- ◆ and finally, how the state used its 'differential capacity to mobilise meaning' to disseminate propaganda through various ways, including news management at both state and non-state media institutions, direct intervention in the cultural sphere to promote 'cultural nationalism' through music, jingles and sponsored cultural events (for example galas) and national heritage television programmes that were led mostly by ZANU-PF ideologues/sympathisers (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems 2009).

These strategies had consequences for the Zimbabwean public sphere in general – both in the national and transnational sense. But creating restrictions on democratic space everywhere naturally leads to a search for alternative spaces for citizen engagement. Zimbabwe is no exception to this. Oppositional forces, civic groups and individuals have sought to break out of these restricted spaces to offer counter-discourses to the official government-manufactured 'truth' through alternative media such as the internet, clandestine radio and mobile phones (see Moyo 2007; 2009).

## Reform or realignment? Post-2000 media regulatory restructuring

Historically, the media in Zimbabwe (as elsewhere) have always been veritable sites of contestation between ruling elites and pro-democracy or opposition movements. This is because, in cases where power is contested, the main battle is the one

over the control of the minds of the people. There appears to have been a clear understanding in both the colonial and post-independence regimes that sheer repression is not sufficient to sustain a system of domination over the will of the vast majority. While physical torture has been employed as a method of coercion and instilling fear under both colonial and post-colonial orders, this has been done in tandem with a deliberate media policy aimed at shaping minds. Policies, as Guy Peters (1999) has rightly argued, are ‘path-dependent,’ and once set on a particular course they continue along until some sufficiently strong political force deflects it. Regime use of mass media as mouthpieces for state propaganda has persisted from the colonial through to the post-colonial era, despite attempts to ‘reform’ the media at independence in 1980 and in the democratisation decade of the 1990s (Zaffiro 2002; Moyo 2004; 2006).

Like most countries in Southern Africa, Zimbabwe had experienced a wide range of pressures from both foreign and domestic actors, throughout the 1990s, to liberalise its media sector and open it to competition. While these pressures yielded some results in the print media sector, as evidenced by the arrival of new independent titles such as *Horizon* magazine, *The Daily Gazette*, the *Zimbabwe Independent*, the *Zimbabwe Mirror* and the *Daily News* during this period, the broadcasting sector remained largely unchanged owing to its perceived sensitivity.<sup>5</sup> It took a legal challenge from one of the prospective private broadcasters, Capital Radio FM, for the government to initiate a set of reforms after 2000. But even then, these reforms were a mere formality meant to contain growing criticism from both home and abroad. The Supreme Court judgement which nullified state monopoly over the broadcasting sector set off a chain of events that led to a re-regulation exercise which left government dominance in the sector very much intact, contrary to the fine-sounding names and preambles to the new laws.

The government’s reluctance to democratise the airwaves can be attributed to a myriad political and economic developments that took place in the country in the late 1990s. Notably, the early economic collapse occasioned by, among other things, the payment of gratuities of ZWD50 000 (USD4 000 at the time) to the country’s war veterans in 1997, and the pan-African-driven intervention in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in the following year – both previously-unbudgeted-for expenditures – triggered political unrest which culminated first in the formation of the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) in 1998 to fight for constitutional reform. This was closely followed by the formation of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999 – the first opposition political party to pose a real challenge to ZANU-PF hegemony since independence. Opening up the airwaves at this juncture was therefore out of the question, as it would have strengthened the cause of the opposition.

When a referendum on the state-sponsored draft constitution was rejected by the electorate in February 2000, just four months before crucial parliamentary elections in June, this sent a signal to the ruling ZANU-PF party that its political fortunes were waning. It mounted, through state media, sustained attacks on the MDC, calling them puppets of the British and the Western world. This claim was supported with video footage gratuitously repeated on state television which showed the MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai, receiving cheque donations from white farmers, and also made reference to Tony Blair's statement that Britain was working with opposition forces inside Zimbabwe to bring about regime change.<sup>6</sup> The land question, which had remained a thorny issue since independence, was conveniently revisited and revived, this time with new gusto, making it the central election issue for the June 2000 election and all elections to follow since then. The mass media became key to refashioning the discourse around land reform, and their ownership and control became a central policy issue. Thus what had started as the promise of a new broadcasting dispensation ended in a retraction, with the government making renewed bids for total control over the airwaves. A sustained campaign was mounted in the state-owned media, linking land reform and media policy reform to the question of national sovereignty as a way of justifying and legitimising this rather unexpected reversal. As the Permanent Secretary in the Department of Information and Publicity, George Charamba, argued,

It [the broadcasting spectrum] is finite, therefore it's a national resource, and whoever has access to it must use it in a way that coheres with the national interest. You cannot use a national resource to undermine the nation. But you have an obligation to use the national resource to further the national interest... Whether doing it for the benefit of ZANU-PF amounts to pushing the national interest, that's a different matter but we start from the premise that when the Zimbabwean sovereignty is under assault, then necessarily it must muster all its resources.<sup>7</sup>

This was also echoed by then Minister of Information and Publicity, Prof Jonathan Moyo, who argued:

We believe that information is a strategic issue which is critical in maintaining a country's sovereignty and you cannot claim to be sovereign if you do not own the means of disseminating information... This is why we removed CNN from ZBC when we came in, in the year 2000 and we will never have it again as long as we are still around... We want to use the media to put across our national views and not those of the United States or Britain

or the Voice of America. We wish to put across our views as the Voice of Zimbabwe.<sup>8</sup>

The state-owned media became the lynchpin of ZANU-PF's campaign for survival during this stormy period. Any alternative voices were shut out from the state-controlled media, and journalists and the 'independent' press were systematically harassed. During the run-up to the referendum referred to earlier, the state-controlled media were awash with advertisements and programmes in support of the government-sponsored draft constitution. In total disregard of its public service mandate, the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) refused to air some of the NCA adverts, alleging that they were not balanced. In contrast with the norm of allocating equal amounts of coverage to competing viewpoints, the ZBC chose to broadcast programming exclusively on behalf of the government-sponsored Constitutional Commission.

Despite earlier promises to liberalise the broadcasting sector in the early to mid-1990s, the political changes that took place around 2000 led to a serious backlash which saw the ZANU-PF government abandoning any intention of democratising the media (Moyo & Hondora 2004). When the ZBC monopoly was declared unconstitutional, and Capital Radio's request to broadcast was granted, the government reacted by shutting down the station and confiscating its equipment, followed by an introduction of emergency legislation, called the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) (Broadcasting) Regulations of 2000.<sup>9</sup> The provisions of this temporary law made it difficult for any new players to enter the broadcasting market – thus indirectly reinstating the monopoly of the ZBC, which monopoly it has continued to enjoy up to the time of concluding this chapter. Due to its parliamentary majority, and despite spirited resistance from civil society and the opposition in Parliament, the ZANU-PF government simply turned the broadcasting regulations, almost *verbatim*, into the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA), which was enacted into law on 4 April 2001.<sup>10</sup> Again echoing his permanent secretary, Jonathan Moyo justified the BSA by arguing that

We had to re-examine our information policy. Key changes include the Broadcasting Services Act and we think it is the only one of its kind in the region. It was constructed out of recognition that the broadcast frequency spectrum is a limited resource just like land... The issue of security also comes in. We are not ashamed about that and we have restructured in such a manner that only indigenous Zimbabwe nationals have a right to a licence if they wish to operate a broadcast station. We will not completely liberalise the airwaves to the outside world. We are not a banana republic... (Moyo, cited in *The Herald*, 22 November 2001)



To complement the BSA, the government muscled into law the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA), which was aimed at muzzling print media and journalists. AIPPA required journalists to register with a government-appointed Media and Information Commission (MIC) as a condition for practising.<sup>11</sup> However, in December 2007, as part of the political negotiations led by the SADC under the leadership of the then South African President, Thabo Mbeki, AIPPA was amended, though the amendments were, in the view of government critics, rather cosmetic. But before it could be amended, hundreds of journalists were arrested apart from which several media houses had been shut down after the enactment of AIPPA. Jonathan Moyo went to great lengths to defend and justify this law, arguing that

With this law, it's not possible for any mischievous person to use the media for regime change. They (Western countries) are talking about removing the liberation regime and putting in the neo-liberalism regime, but we will change governments in democratic elections. (Jonathan Moyo, *The Herald*, 2 December 2004)

The nature of international media coverage on, and the Western government responses to, the Mugabe government's declining human rights record also had implications for the strategies and responses it had to adopt. The European Union imposed on the Harare government, senior ZANU-PF members, and companies linked to specific ZANU-PF members, what they called 'smart sanctions' – which in practical terms were broader in scope and effect than the targeted or specified individuals. Most direct aid to the country was also frozen and the country's access to loans from international institutions such as the World Bank was blocked. On 21 December 2001 the United States of America imposed sanctions under the Zimbabwe Democracy and Economic Recovery Act (ZIDERA).<sup>12</sup> This enactment empowers the President of America to instruct American representatives to multi-lateral and bilateral lending agencies in which America has veto power to block Zimbabwean applications for credit finance or cancellation of debt, inter alia. On the other hand, the Act also promises direct aid in the event of tangible efforts by the Zimbabwe government to return the country to the rule of law and democracy. It is against this backdrop that the Zimbabwe government perceived itself as a government under threat, and hence justified in introducing mechanisms to control the flow of information.

## Restructuring and realignment of state institutions

Apart from the introduction of an array of media laws and regulations discussed above, the government also sought to assert its control over the flow of information and cultural production through the restructuring of state media institutions. Other state institutions were also restructured during this period as part of a concerted effort to respond to the perceived external pressures for regime change. The judiciary, for instance, was reorganised, with ZANU-PF sympathisers appointed to key positions, partly to ward off any challenges in the courts over the land issue, but more broadly to ensure its allegiance to the ruling party. The police and the army were also restructured to guarantee total loyalty to the party. A number of parastatals (state-owned companies) were now headed by 'retired' military personnel or former liberation combatants, suggesting a total militarisation of state institutions (e.g. the Grain Marketing Board, the national airlines company (Air Zimbabwe), and the Zimbabwe Tourism Authority).

The state media, in particular, were earmarked for restructuring to better serve the interests of the ruling party. This restructuring needs to be understood within the context of the controversial land reform programme, the challenge from the new opposition and growing criticism from abroad, as well as the perceived threat to national sovereignty alluded to earlier. As previously noted, the mounting international pressure and persistent attacks on the Zimbabwe government provided it with the pretext for tightening control over the flow of information. Thus, the state media were effectively reformed to be used as tools for legitimising the land reform programme and defending the government position on this controversial project. The state media, especially the ZBC, were used to mobilise the masses to rally behind the Third Chimurenga<sup>3</sup> – as the land reform programme came to be known (Moyo 2006: 259).

The restructuring of the state media also came on the back of far-reaching reforms that took place in the government information system. Following its narrow victory against the newly-formed MDC in the parliamentary elections in June 2000, the government appointed a new Minister of Information, Jonathan Moyo, a former university professor and former ardent critic of President Mugabe and his ZANU-PF government. Soon after his appointment, the old Ministry of Information was disbanded and in its place, the Department of Information and Publicity, located in the president's office, was created.

The Department of Information and Publicity, which received a huge presidential funding vote, soon became a critical tool in the generation and dissemination of state propaganda. Its functionaries, despite being employed as civil servants, also became unashamed defenders of the Mugabe government. As Charamba bluntly put it, 'Any system looks to perpetuate itself ... I am a

functionary of a ZANU-PF government, and necessarily my role is to make as remote as possible the perishability of ZANU-PF. It is to amplify the chances.<sup>14</sup> Thus the power that once rested with the Ministry of Information was now located in the president's office. Jonathan Moyo became a powerful figure, not only in the president's office but within the ruling party. His personal attributes of a highly articulate and accomplished rhetorician backed by a strong academic training put him in such a position of power that he successfully pushed through some of the most controversial media law and policy reforms that came about after 2000 (Chuma 2007). Under him, the Department of Information became an efficient rapid reaction force, fighting international criticism abroad and at the same time churning out propaganda to pacify growing local disenchantment over shortages of essential commodities such as fuel, electricity and money.

More far-reaching reforms took place in the broadcasting sector, where the ZBC was radically transformed with regard to both its programming and human resources. This restructuring process, code named 'Vision 30', took place in three stages. The first stage involved the redefinition of the vision, mission and core values of the ZBC. The second phase involved a streamlining exercise that saw 60 per cent of the ZBC's workforce retrenched. Most of the retrenched staff were seasoned journalists who were replaced by young and inexperienced staff generally perceived as malleable. The third phase of the ZBC restructuring process saw the creation of a new holding company – Zimbabwe Broadcasting Holdings (ZBH), with eight subsidiaries.<sup>15</sup> The new holding company was created following the promulgation of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (Commercialisation) Act which was mainly aimed at weaning ZBC away from heavy dependence on government subventions. However, the commercialisation of the ZBC did not free it from political patronage. Apart from the appointment of editorial and key management staff, the Department of Information was also directly involved in the making of editorial decisions. These institutional realignments had a direct bearing on the nature of the discourse emanating from these organisations, as illustrated below.

## Shaping minds through mediated propaganda

As illustrated above, the policy and institutional restructuring that took place after 2000 was justified through a discourse of cultural nationalism which deliberately linked land reform to communication policy reform in such a way that the success of the former became conditional upon the realignment of the latter. The third strategy used by the government to negotiate the crisis was the deployment of propaganda, which Jowett and O'Donnell define as 'the deliberate and systematic attempt to shape perceptions, manipulate cognitions and direct behaviour to achieve

a response that furthers the desired intent of the propaganda (cited in Corner 2007: 671). As suggested earlier, the use of propaganda has been a feature of both the colonial and post-colonial reality of Zimbabwe. During the Rhodesian Front and UDI years under Ian Smith, propaganda and outright censorship defined the state-media relations (Frederiske 1982; Zaffiro 1984). During the transition and State of Emergency period between 1980 and 1990, ZANU-PF also used propaganda to ward off criticism of its heavy-handed approach to the crisis in the southern part of the country.<sup>16</sup> However, it could be argued that the use of propaganda during this period was crude and often improvised, while its deployment in the post-2000 crisis era, as the political stakes were raised, was qualitatively different.

This was a well-planned project designed by the Department of Information and Publicity in response to both domestic and international pressure. The government assumed immense power over the public media and ensured that these media played a critical role in articulating its interests. This articulation of government self-interests was channelled through the mass media, addressed to two distinct constituencies – the national and international (including the diaspora) – with the purpose of achieving mainly three objectives: to counter calls for regime change emanating from the West; to reclaim ZANU-PF's waning fortunes at home and to redefine the crisis in a nationalistic and pan-Africanist discourse as a way of closing ranks with fellow African countries.

## National and transnational dimensions of mediated propaganda

While the deployment of propaganda to the domestic constituency took several dimensions, two of these stand out; namely the political and cultural. On the political front, ZANU-PF became more directly involved in news management in both the print and broadcasting media, influencing the choices of who and what made news, the slant and tone of the stories and the overall deployment of resources for news coverage in the state media. The cultural dimension placed the issue of national identity at the centre of the political agenda and involved the sponsorship of musicians to compose music celebrating the imagined Zimbabwean culture and identity; the staging of music galas featuring pro-government artists; and the holding of solidarity conferences to promote the renaissance of 'indigenous' people across the world.<sup>17</sup>

## News management and propaganda

Since independence, ZANU-PF elites have mastered a news management technique in the state media which is meant to legitimise its rule on the one hand and delegitimise

its opponents on the other.<sup>18</sup> News management is defined by Tullock (1993) as ‘an attempt by an organisation or individual to systematically influence the coverage of news media through: (1) the planned production of information and events and/or (2) the creation of a manipulative relationship with journalists and media executives’ (as cited in Shrivastava & Hyde-Clarke 2004: 206). The restructuring of state media institutions discussed above made it possible for the government to institutionalise news management in a way that allowed it to influence the news production process, particularly the definition of news during those crisis years. The main opposition party, the MDC, and groups perceived to be hostile to the government became targets of disinformation. Shrivastava and Hyde-Clarke have argued that news management includes ‘the need to demonise the enemy, to build a moral and virile self-image and to carefully select coverage of the event’ while at the same time ‘relying on a variety of techniques, such as generalisations, recalling past violations, and suppressing or omitting information not conducive to the cause’ (2004: 206). The ZANU-PF news management strategy entailed all this. The opposition were constantly vilified and demonised in the state media, while ZANU-PF was projected as the revolutionary party that brought independence and was hence justified in defending the ‘motherland’ from outside interference.

The ZBC, for instance has often referred to the MDC as ‘sell-outs’; ‘traitors’ and ‘enemies of the state’; ‘unprincipled ... backed by enemies to spread mayhem and murderous activities in the country...’<sup>19</sup> The MDC has been spuriously linked to several acts of violence/terrorism, including plans to bomb skyscrapers in Harare and Bulawayo, staging anthrax attacks and masterminding train crashes in the country. In the run-up to the 2002 presidential elections, MDC leader, Morgan Tsvangirai was charged with treason allegedly for attempting to assassinate President Mugabe. It later turned out that the government hired a covert Canadian-based Public Relations consultancy firm, Dickens and Madson, run by a former Israeli spy, Ari-Ben Menashe, to frame the MDC leader. Menashe admits that he received USD200 000 from the government after providing the secretly recorded tape purporting to show that Tsvangirai was involved in a plot to assassinate Mugabe. Even the reporting of the treason trial in the state-owned media appeared to be part of the strategy as it was excessively biased against the MDC leader, and often presented him as if he were already convicted.

## Narrating land and national sovereignty

The ‘sacralised’ narrative of the nation as borne out of a bitter liberation struggle led by ZANU-PF, a struggle that entailed supreme sacrifices, has been repeatedly used in the national discourse where land and national sovereignty came to occupy centre stage. The Mugabe government’s news management technique should thus be read

within the context of this grand, totalising narrative of which it is both writer and custodian. This 'recurrent metaphor of landscape as inscape of national identity' to borrow from Homi Bhabha (1990: 295), was deliberately used to create a dichotomy between insiders and outsiders, patriots and traitors or sell-outs, heroes and villains, us and them (Moyo L 2010). As part of the news management technique, the people were constantly reminded that Zimbabwe was under threat from conspiratorial forces from the West, which was bent on recolonising the country and reversing the land reform programme. The ZANU-PF party newspaper, *The People's Voice*, put it thus:

their ties [MDC] with ex-Rhodesian and Western powers who have been working against the realisation of our people's aspirations and goals such as land reform is clear testimony that they are enemies of our revolution. To be more precise, they are the puppets of these imperialists who want to recolonise Zimbabwe.<sup>20</sup>

News items relating to the MDC and its leadership were always prefixed by statements such as 'the British sponsored puppets ...' The idea was to delegitimise the opposition on one hand while seeking to legitimise the ZANU-PF agenda on the other. This technique also involved a sustained campaign to discredit private/independent media which often provided stinging critique on government policy. Branded 'the opposition press', private media were persistently attacked in lengthy editorials in the state media for their lack of patriotism and limited understanding of national history.

## Re-memorising and mythologisation of national history

In addition to manipulating news and information, the government also used identity politics as part of its propaganda project. Using Central and Eastern Europe as examples, Heller argues that, in nations going through conflict, the media become important tools to forge fundamentalist ideologies and discriminatory discourses based on nationalistic, ethnic, religious or racial categories (Heller 1996). As Ranger and Raftopoulos argue, the Zimbabwe government's brand of nationalism was restricted and exclusionist in the sense that history was narrowly defined to legitimise an intensely bigoted notion of what it means to be a patriotic Zimbabwean (Ranger 2003 & Raftopoulos 2003). This 'national identity' project was part of the broader strategy of inculcating what Ranger refers to as 'patriotic history' in young people (Ranger 2003). Narratives of the nation, as Gellner cautions, are highly selective and interest-driven:

Nationalism is not what it seems, and above all not what it seems to itself.. The cultural shreds and patches used by nationalism are often arbitrary historical inventions. Any old shred would have served as well. But in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism... is itself in the least contingent and accidental. (cited in Bhabha 1990: 294)

The Mugabe government did not only have the power to select which shreds and patches to weave into the nationalistic narrative; it also exercised control over the spaces and platforms where this narrative was told and retold. Cultural programmes on national television, such as *'Nhaka Yedu'* (Our Heritage), 'National Ethos' or 'New Farmer' became critical platforms for 'narrating the nation' from an exclusively ZANU-PF perspective. These programmes featured prominent ZANU-PF ideologues and sympathisers, and focused on issues of land, national history, culture and identity – which also happened to be ZANU-PF's campaign themes in the national elections in 2002, 2005 and 2008. These themes ran across all the programming formats and genres, and several slogans were created around them. The most notable of these slogans was the one which said, 'The land is the economy and the economy is the land' – making land the central and foremost issue in all these elections.

As Chitando notes, the discourse on the land issue in state-owned media assumed mythical proportions, with the government appropriating religious imagery from both the Bible and Zimbabwean oral history to endear itself to the masses. President Mugabe himself has been projected as a messianic figure, as the biblical Moses sent to deliver his people to the Promised Land (Chitando 2005). One of the jingles produced by the Department of Information and Publicity in the Office of the President succinctly captures the prophetic vision of the land reform by imitating the Old Testament:

In the beginning was the land. The people were on the land. The people owned the land. As it was in the beginning, so shall it always be. Welcome to Zimbabwe. We are down to earth! (cited in Chitando 2005: 224)

Such borrowings from the Bible were carefully calculated in a country that is deeply Christian, given the work of the missionaries of various denominations in Zimbabwe throughout both the colonial and post-colonial eras. As a Catholic himself, Mugabe has used arguments based on the Christian doctrine to challenge the church in Zimbabwe to take a stand on the land issue. His address to Catholic leaders attending the Imbisa Plenary assembly in Harare on 30 July 2001 is instructional:

And for you specifically as church leaders, you face one fundamental question: what are Christians supposed to do, nay expected to do, when they live under an unjust system which claims to be Christian, to be Godly? What do we tell God's oppressed children; what do we tell 'a purchased people'; what do we tell the widow, the needy, the fatherless, the landless? What form does Christian witness take in such circumstances? (Mugabe 2001: 34, cited in Chitando 2005: 225)

This eloquent and rhetorical invocation of the Bible was combined with an appropriation of national spiritual mediums whose prophecies President Mugabe was seen as fulfilling. As such, memories of mythical figures such as Mbuya Nehanda and Sekuru Kaguvi whose early prophecies ignited the First Chimurenga of the 1890s were invoked, as the new land occupations were also repackaged as an extension of the First and Second Chimurengas. What is particularly striking about the appropriation of spirit mediums is that they were not merely harnessed for the purpose of hoodwinking the gullible masses but rather the Mugabe government strongly believed in its spiritually sanctioned role to repossess land stolen by the settlers from their ancestors. Thus it was not surprising that when a woman from Chinhoyi, Rotina Mavhunga – a self-styled spirit medium – approached the government in 2007 claiming to possess powers to summon diesel fuel from a rock, government officials believed her and sent a task force to investigate the claim and protect the area. Mavhunga was lavished with gifts, including ZWD\$ billion, a car, a piece of land, two head of cattle and three buffalo to appease the spirits to produce more diesel – before she was exposed as a quack.<sup>21</sup>

Together with its monopoly over the definition of national history, the Mugabe government also exercised its power to define who were heroes and villains in the liberation war, and to ostracise and forgive as it saw fit. Joshua Nkomo, former leader of the rival PF-ZAPU party, was appropriated into a national symbol upon his death, assuming something of sainthood, as he was now popularly referred to as 'Father Zimbabwe'. Speaking at the burial of Bernard Chidzero, independent Zimbabwe's first Finance Minister at the National Heroes Acre, Mugabe invoked the memory of Joshua Nkomo in language full of biblical connotation:

If Joshua Nkomo were to rise this hour, would you be fit to hold his hand and walk in step with him down the path that emanates from this very sacred shrine and ends in a great future for our country? (Mugabe 2002, cited in Bull-Christiansen 2004: 70)

This strikes a chord with most Zimbabweans who are accustomed to teachings about preparedness for Christ's second coming. As such, the message is for



Zimbabweans to imbibe the values of the liberation struggle, and honour the fallen heroes by defending the land reform. It is evident that the Mugabe government was able to repeatedly turn what Bhabha has called 'the scraps, patches, and rags of daily life' into 'the signs of a national culture' whose narrative performance is used to interpellate the Zimbabwean public – calling out to them as it were – to share the government's ideological position (Bhabha 1990: 297).

## Jingles, music compositions and mediation of the crisis

The process of 'writing the nation', Bhabha suggests, involves not only the weaving together of the 'scraps, patches and rags of daily life', but also 'the repetitious, recursive strategy of the performative' (1990: 297). The Department of Information commissioned propaganda music albums and jingles that filled the airwaves, leading to a near-total blackout of other types of music. The most played jingles included *Kwedu Kumachembere*, *Sisonke*, *Our Future*, *Siyalima*, *Mombe Mbiri*, *Nemadhongi Mashanu*, *Uya Uone Kutapira Kunoita Kurima*, *Rambai Makashinga*, *Sendekera Mwana Wevhu* and *Zesa Yauya neMagetsi*. Most of these jingles centred on the wonders of the land reform programme and its benefits to new farmers. An estimate conducted by the Media Monitoring Project of Zimbabwe (MMPZ) in 2003 showed that one of the propaganda jingles, *Rambai Makashinga* (Continue to Endure) was being played approximately 288 times a day, which amounts to 8 640 times per month. On television, the jingle was played approximately 72 times a day, which amounts to 2 160 times a month (Sibanda 2004). Radio Zimbabwe, for instance, which is the most-listened-to station because of its use of local languages, was extensively used to play this propaganda music and jingles, thus denying the majority of people access to a diverse range of programming. The Minister of Information himself, using public funds, promoted the rise of a brand of a music popularly referred to as 'urban grooves', and the production of a series of albums under the label of 'Pax Afro' intended to 'communicate the regime's political messages of a resurrected liberation struggle, ultra-patriotism, land reclamation, anti-colonialism and pan-Africanism' (Thram 2006). The most prominent of these productions was the 26-track double CD titled *Back2Black*. Responding to public criticisms that the ZBC was abusing its public service mandate to promote narrow party interests, Jonathan Moyo defended the shift in the ZBC's programming by stating that 'we have to use state resources to promote a culture that is truly Zimbabwean, a culture that identifies us as a people and promotes our values'.<sup>22</sup>

As a result of the unfolding crises, Zimbabwe came to dominate international news headlines in the period between 2000 and 2008. Although the government appeared dismissive and unconcerned about its representations in Western media, in reality it took the damage to its international image seriously

and deployed several strategies to counter those (mis)representations. A few notable examples of such strategies will suffice here.

### Sponsored spin: Engaging international PR firms to spruce up self-image

In 2001, the government hired a US public relations company, Cohen and Wood International (CWI), to improve its reputation abroad (McNair 2003). The firm, which was paid £2 million (ZWD160 million at the going rate then), was asked to counter what the government saw as deliberate demonising of President Mugabe. The confidential agreement between CWI and the Zimbabwean government stated that the crisis had 'unfairly poisoned international public opinion against Zimbabwe' with the result that 'political, commercial and financial co-operation are in peril'.<sup>23</sup> The government is also alleged to have paid some USD200 000 to another international public relations firm, Dickens and Madson, to frame opposition leader Morgan Tsvangirai as having requested the firm to facilitate the assassination of President Mugabe.

For its 2008 election campaign ZANU-PF printed its posters with Paarl Web, a subsidiary of South African media group Naspers, at the cost of R3 million.<sup>24</sup> This resulted in some of the sleekest campaign posters to be used in Zimbabwe to date. The theme on these posters was land and national sovereignty, and projected Mugabe as the only leader who could defend these values against Western imperialism. The messages on some of the posters read:

- ◆ 'If you want a farm, vote ZANU-PF. If you want a tractor, vote ZANU-PF. If you want a company, vote ZANU-PF'
- ◆ 'Vote ZANU-PF. Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe. Defending our Land and our Sovereignty'
- ◆ 'Vote ZANU-PF: Our Land, Our Sovereignty. CDE R.G. Mugabe'
- ◆ 'Vote ZANU-PF: Mugabe is Right'
- ◆ 'This is the final battle for total control of Zimbabwe by Zimbabweans: 100% Empowerment; Total Independence'

Land and national sovereignty were thus reified and given mystical status and only ZANU-PF (personified by Mugabe) possessed the capacity to provide them.

### Paid propaganda in international media

The government also put much effort into winning support for its policies from African countries and many of the countries that form the non-aligned movement. Judging by the support it continued to receive from other African governments, particularly within the Southern African Development Community (SADC), it can

be argued that the government of Zimbabwe effectively articulated and marketed the pan-African and anti-imperialism ideology. This discourse struck a chord with different factions within Africa and members of the non-aligned movement. The renowned pan-African magazine *New African* was appropriated in this anti-imperialist discourse, as evidenced by its editorial stance on Zimbabwe since the beginning of the crisis.<sup>25</sup> In March 2007, the government spent over a million (us) dollars on a 70-page sponsored supplement in *New African* in which it defended its actions following an international outcry over the beating and humiliation of opposition leaders.

Two months later, in June 2007, it poured yet more money into a 'Zimbabwe special issue' of *New African*, where it took 79 sponsored pages out of the 99-page total to present its version of the Zimbabwe story. Copies of this issue were distributed for free in Zambia during the SADC summit in August. Featuring a smiling and confident Mugabe on the cover – with a quote from him saying 'Our cause is Africa's cause' – the special issue sums up the way Mugabe has successfully sold the reading of the crisis to his African counterparts. The then Minister of Information, Bright Matonga, was quoted as saying 'We don't care how much it costs us... we are going to publish the Zimbabwe story in all languages necessary because people out there are interested in hearing the truth'.<sup>26</sup>

The Department of Information and Publicity also established transnational media networks. *The Southern Times*, a joint regional newspaper venture between Zimbabwe and Namibia, was launched in 2004. The two countries also mooted a 24-hour satellite television network based in Walvis Bay, Namibia, which failed to take off due to lack of resources. These sustained efforts to project 'the true Zimbabwe story' – as the Mugabe government called it – have had far-reaching ramifications on global understandings of and responses to the Zimbabwe crisis, particularly in international forums such as the United Nations, the Commonwealth, the African Union and the SADC. Everywhere, the Mugabe regime's sustained mediated propaganda has managed to divide world opinion, often to a point of paralysis in terms of coming up with forms of intervention acceptable to all.

## Conclusion

The Mugabe government responded to growing domestic and international pressure by instituting regulatory and institutional changes aimed at enabling it to provide uncontested narrative(s) of the nation and the crises it was facing. This chapter emphasises the centrality of the mass media as the main theatre of struggle over the definition of the Zimbabwe crisis, its nature, causes and ramifications. It demonstrates that the reshaping of the public media and the realignment of other

strategic state institutions, including the judiciary, the army and the police were crucial for the Zimbabwe government as part of defending national sovereignty. The global and local responses to the land reform initiated in 2000 appear to be the major driving force which influenced media policy and institutional realignments and also mediated political discourse in Zimbabwe between 2000 and 2008. These responses shaped the attitudes and actions of political actors who increasingly saw themselves as besieged and hence forced to deploy these resources for their self-defence and political survival.

The fact that Zimbabwe, a small country with limited resources, has managed to garner support from most African governments and divide world public opinion on a number of occasions persuades one to think that it is not simply a matter of big powerful media against a small powerless media but a matter of narrative power, and the rare moment of an underdog given a platform to speak. This is also a clear indication that, despite the increasingly global nature of communications policy-making and the pervasive nature of dominant global media, the nation-state remains a resilient and powerful unit of governance, with immense capacity to shape policy and direct national public discourse.

## Notes

- 1 When Mugabe attended the inauguration of Thabo Mbeki as SA president for a second term in 2004, for example, the largely black crowd gave him a hero's welcome and a standing ovation, much to the puzzlement of both the SA and international media. This was a repeat of a similar scenario the previous year when he got 'rapturous applause' from mourners at anti-apartheid icon Walter Sisulu's funeral in Soweto (see, for example, [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/may18\\_2003.html#link8](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/may18_2003.html#link8), accessed 20 March 2010). More recently, Mugabe stole the limelight once again when he arrived at the Union Buildings in Pretoria for Jacob Zuma's inauguration as President on 11 May 2009. See, for example, *The Herald*, President receives rapturous welcome in SA, at: <http://maravi.blogspot.com/2009/05/herald-president-gets-rapturous-welcome.html>, accessed 22 July 2009.
- 2 The Mugabe government used a multipronged strategy, which included both persuasive and coercive means at home.
- 3 Power is understood here both in the sense of 'allocative power' and what Thompson has called '*the differential capacity to mobilise meaning*' (in Silverstone 2005: 191).
- 4 Mandaza is a former ZANU-PF cabinet minister and owned the *Daily* and *Weekly Mirror* newspapers.
- 5 An experiment with leasing one of the two ZBC television channels to three private broadcasters, MABC, LDM and Joy TV did not last long, as the government felt threatened by these independent voices. MABC and LDM were the first to be switched off the air, allegedly for non-payment of their rentals, though it has been generally understood that the government was not happy with some of their programmes which were deemed to be 'politically sensitive'

- (see Maqeda 2000). Joy tv, because of the political connections of some of its shareholders, including Mugabe's nephew, Leo, remained in existence for a little longer.
- 6 In his address to the House of Commons on 9 December 2003, then British Prime Minister Tony Blair called for regime change in Zimbabwe, citing gross economic mismanagement and human rights abuses by the Mugabe regime (see *New African*, February 2004: 'Blair: we want regime change', available at: [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa5391/is\\_/ai\\_n21345191](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa5391/is_/ai_n21345191), accessed 10 January 2009).
- 7 George Charamba, Permanent Secretary of the Department of Information in the Office of the President and Cabinet, personal interview, 22 July 2003.
- 8 Information Minister Jonathan Moyo, cited in *The Herald*, 8 April 2004.
- 9 The Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) Act, 1986, 'empowers the President to make regulations dealing with situations that have arisen or are likely to arise and that require to be dealt with as a matter of urgency'. These regulations are valid for a period of six months, after which they have to be tabled before Parliament.
- 10 While in principle purporting to open up the sector to competition, the BSA in practice entrenched the monopoly status of the ZBC by making it difficult for new players to enter. Among other stringent regulations, the Act required the new operators to be Zimbabwean citizens residing in the country, and set unrealistically high local content quotas where no vibrant local production industry was in place (see Moyo 2006: 262–274).
- 11 In the 2007 AIPPA amendment, the Media Information Commission was replaced by the Zimbabwe Media Commission, which was given the task of establishing a statutory media council. Accreditation of journalists was also abolished. According to amendments to AIPPA and other media legislation, journalists who are not accredited by the MTC can practise but cannot enter state property for purposes of conducting their profession; i.e. there is no compulsory requirement for accreditation of journalists. However, the state-controlled media commission, which in effect ceased to exist in January 2008 following the signing into law of the amendments, has continued to operate from the grave, banning journalists from practising without accreditation, and more recently gazetting new prohibitive accreditation fees for both local and foreign journalists. See *Newzimbabwe.com*, 5 January 2009, 'MTC pegs prohibitive registration fees': <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/media12.19227.html>, accessed 10 January 2009. The continued operation of the legally defunct MTC suggests that the government was not keen on its disbandment in the first place.
- 12 Available online at: <http://www.coherentbabble.com/signingstatements/PublicLaws/S494PL107-99.pdf>, accessed 10 January 2009.
- 13 The First Chimurenga (or war of liberation) refers to the first resistance to colonial occupation in 1896/97, and the Second Chimurenga refers to the armed resistance to colonialism in the 1960s and 70s.
- 14 Charamba 2003: personal interview.
- 15 See Moyo and Hondora 2004.
- 16 Between 1983 and 1988, Zimbabwe was involved in an internal armed conflict between the newly formed government of Zimbabwe under ZANU-PF and followers of an opposition, PF-ZAPU led by John Nkomo. About 3 000 people from both sides died or disappeared in the conflict. The violence ended after ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU reached a unity agreement on 22 December 1987 that merged the two parties under the name ZANU-PF.

- 17 One such conference was held in 2004. The Conference on National Liberation was organised by the ZANU-PF External Relations Committee and delegates came from 'liberation movements; in the front-line states and from Afro-American and Afro-British support groups. The conference re-affirmed "solidarity with the people of Zimbabwe on land reform" and emphasised the "need for the revival of pan-Africanism and nationalism" (Ranger 2005: 9).
- 18 In the early years of independence, news on national television invariably started with the head of state, no matter how (un)newsworthy his activities of that day were. The state-owned newspapers also did the same and carried the picture of the head of state on the front page.
- 19 ZTV, 24 July 2002.
- 20 Editorial, *The People's Voice*, 19–25 September 2000.
- 21 See Newzimbabwe.com, 'Mugabe: Diesel mystic's beauty blinded ministers', at: <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/fuel42.17176.html>, accessed 10 October 2009.
- 22 *The Daily News*, 21 May 2000.
- 23 'Mugabe spends \$160 million to polish his image' retrieved from [http://www.zimbabwesituation.com\\_2001.html#link5](http://www.zimbabwesituation.com_2001.html#link5), accessed 16 April 2009.
- 24 See 'Naspers under pressure over ZANU-PF job', retrieved from [http://www.journalism.co.za/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1582&Itemid=99999999](http://www.journalism.co.za/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1582&Itemid=99999999), accessed 20 September 2009.
- 25 For instance, in a survey conducted by the magazine in 2004 on '100 greatest Africans,' Mugabe came in third place, behind Nelson Mandela and Kwame Nkrumah, much to the puzzlement of his foreign and domestic critics.
- 26 'Propaganda by any other name', *New Internationalist*, November 2007, Issue 406. Retrieved from: <http://www.newint.org/columns/currents/2007/11/01/zimbabwe/>, accessed 6 May 2009.

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## Subterranean faultlines: Representations of Robert Mugabe in South African press cartoons

*Grace A Musila and Dumisani Moyo*

IT HAS OFTEN BEEN remarked that if a Martian were to land in South Africa today and read the newspapers of the day, watch the news on television, or listen to radio, it would be justified to report home about Zimbabwe as the most troublesome/troubled province in South Africa. Since 2000, following President Mugabe's first electoral defeat in a referendum to decide on a new draft constitution, Zimbabwe has been gripped by multifaceted crises which have made the country and its president subjects for international debate and derision. Nowhere in the world has the economic and political meltdown resulting from these crises stimulated more media interest than in neighbouring South Africa (Medior Tenor 2001). The question one may want to ask is, why does Mugabe (and Zimbabwe) draw so much South African media attention when, as Scott Lovaas notes, 'there are plenty of other tyrants within Africa with equally extraordinary records who have not received the same degree of attention'? (Lovaas 2008: 179).

Several geo-political and economic reasons can be posited for South African media interest in Zimbabwe. First, the geographical proximity of the two countries, as sociology of news scholars have long established, makes events in either country newsworthy in the other. Second, the history of colonialism and apartheid and the resultant struggles against these forces of oppression have left strong political ties between the two countries. Third, just as Cecil Rhodes viewed Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia) as the second Eldorado, the South African business establishment has always viewed Zimbabwe as an extension of their domestic market, and this is evidenced by huge South African investment in mining, retail and other sectors of the Zimbabwean economy. With its similar economic systems, Zimbabwe has become far more knowable to South Africans than most other countries on the continent, and the fact that many former Rhodesians have settled in South Africa where they occupy influential positions also explains this huge media interest.<sup>1</sup>

Fourth, historically, colonial media interests always served the economic interests of the larger colonial project, with the Argus group literally following the empire as it expanded north into then Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) and Northern Rhodesia (Zambia). Finally, the fact that South Africa became the most popular destination for Zimbabweans escaping economic and political collapse has triggered a xenophobic sentiment in the South African media where Zimbabweans, among other 'Africans' have been stereotyped as thieves and job-stealers, among other things. Added to all this is the role bestowed on South Africa by the 'international community' to restore order in Zimbabwe by putting pressure on the Mugabe regime.<sup>2</sup>

Analysing media representations of Mugabe at this point is also an interesting endeavour, given the swings in world perceptions of him as a black African leader – from the liberation struggle era when he was represented as a terrorist threatening Rhodesian 'civilisation', to the post-colonial era where he became the shining example of a good African leader and a darling of Britain and the Western world, to the present image of a blood-thirsty dictator – reaffirming the old stereotypical view of him as a threat to 'civilisation' (see, for example, Media Tenor 2004). These shifts in global media perceptions of Mugabe over the years, we argue, is illustrative of the discursive power of the media, which is always linked to the interests of power elites.<sup>3</sup>

This study is partly influenced by Herman and Chomsky's propaganda model, which argues that the ownership and profit-driven nature of major media organisations, advertising demands on the media which influences decisions on news production, growing media reliance upon corporate and government elite sources as 'primary definers' of events in society, 'flak' as a mechanism of controlling the media, and anti-communist ideological frames tend to act as powerful filters that influence the manner and coverage of news media (Herman and Chomsky 1988: 1–35). Although this is a model meant for Western industrialised nations where the media are generally market-driven, we argue that the South African context, with its continuing uneven patterns of ownership and control of the existing media empires (with some having a global scope), coupled with its unresolved tensions and anxieties, lends itself easily to a reading based on the propaganda model. The continued uneven patterns of ownership have meant that the dominant voices of yesteryear – the voices of those in control of capital by dint of privileges created by apartheid (and a spattering of a few Black Economic Empowerment [BEE] elite) – continue to be the dominant voices today, filtering out any undesirable dissenting voices.

In this chapter we seek to extend the propaganda model by arguing that, instead of providing the opportunity for bypassing the various filters, political cartoons can actually act as an embedded filter within the broader ideological filter, where they can serve the purpose of limiting the range of possible debates (in this case on Mugabe) by reproducing and even amplifying the same ideologies contained

in the other editorial genres. The satirist has always been held sacrosanct, and seen as the moral conscience, reminding society when they deviate from the moral centre (see for instance Mbembe 1997 and 2001; Nyamnjoh 2004). Yet our study shows that the satirist can be complicit in the reproduction and sustenance of hegemonic views and institutions in society, instead of being the critical commentator that challenges these hegemonic views and institutions. It is notable that there is often a strong and almost seamless *intertextual* link between the cartoons and other editorial genres (including hard news, features and even advertisements) in terms of the range of debates and meanings produced and circulated about Mugabe and Zimbabwe – all reinforcing the same ideological perceptions.

We note that doing a study on media representations of Mugabe today can be a highly contentious thing, given the polarity of views everywhere on Mugabe and the Zimbabwe crisis in general (see, for example, Media Tenor 2003). As Zimbabwean journalist, Chido Makunike points out, ‘It is not easy these days to find calm voices on either or any side of “the Zimbabwe crisis”. Everyone seems to be competing to be louder and more emotional than the other.’<sup>4</sup> John Pilger argues that while it may be undoubted that Mugabe is ‘an appalling tyrant; ... there is a subtext to the overly enthusiastic condemnation of him by the “international community”, notably in Europe.’<sup>5</sup> This vilification, Pilger explains, is mainly to do with Mugabe ‘having slipped the leash’ in a continent where the role of the African leader in the post-colony is generally expected to be that of what Frantz Fanon (1963: 152–153) called ‘the Western bourgeoisie’s business agent’.

The complexity of analysing media representations of Mugabe in South African press cartoons is also compounded by the apparent variance between the media perception of Mugabe and the perceptions of Mugabe among the majority black population in South Africa. When Mugabe attended the inauguration of Thabo Mbeki as South Africa’s president for a second term in 2004, for example, the largely black crowd gave him a hero’s welcome and a standing ovation, much to the puzzlement of both the South African and international media. This was a repeat of a similar scenario the previous year when he got ‘a rapturous applause’ from mourners at anti-apartheid icon Walter Sisulu’s funeral in Soweto.<sup>6</sup> Mugabe stole the limelight once again when he arrived at the Union Buildings in Pretoria for Jacob Zuma’s inauguration as President on 11 May 2009.<sup>7</sup> This variance can be partly explained by the disjuncture between white-owned media interests and the aspirations of the majority black South African population which view Mugabe’s actions of taking over white-owned farms in Zimbabwe as coinciding with their own interests in a situation where the post-apartheid discourse on reconciliation and transformation has failed to deliver on promises of wealth redistribution.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section has presented the historical background, which explains South African interest in developments

taking place in Zimbabwe. The second section discusses the political cartoon as an editorial genre, and the ways in which cartoons signify and create/convey meanings. The third section outlines the methodological approach, while the fourth provides an analysis of the representations of Mugabe in South African press cartoons. Among the questions the chapter grapples with are: What tropes of representation emerge in these portrayals of Robert Mugabe? What archives of ideas and representational traditions do they draw on, affirm, challenge or reinforce? What faultlines of repressed anxieties, desires and fears underpin the doggedly demonising portrayals of Robert Mugabe in these cartoons, beyond mere neighbourly concern? In other words, to what extent do these cartoons reveal certain configurations of a 'return of the repressed' in South African socio-political imaginaries?

## Satire, the satirist and the signification process

The political cartoon often uses caricatures of familiar socio-political figures to comment on contemporary realities and topical issues within a given socio-political context. It is this process of commentary on topical issues that renders cartoons to be, in Achille Mbembe's words, 'figures of speech'. For Mbembe,

The pictographic sign does not belong solely in the field of 'seeing'; it also falls in that of 'speaking'. It is in itself a figure of speech, and this speech expresses itself, not only for itself or as a mode of describing, narrating, and representing reality, but also as a particular strategy of persuasion, even violence. (Mbembe 2001: 142)

Despite referencing actual figures, experiences and realities in ways that suggest mirror-representation of reality, political cartoons are largely dependent on their connotative level of signification through the body as a site of parody, caricature and distortion. As Roland Barthes notes, in visual images, the connoted message is carried by a fusion of the universal symbolic order and a collection of stock stereotypes or graphicisms and expressions that are culturally anchored (1977:18). It is at this level that the artist encodes a commentary on a given issue by drawing on a collective archive of signs and associative meanings shaped by a shared history of ideas, values and attitudes which form a given society's epistemological bedrock. Although firmly anchored in history and convention, this bedrock is far from frozen, as society constantly adds, revises, discards or retrieves fragments of ideas drawn from contemporary experiences and histories.

An important element of the political cartoon is the satirist's positioning as a perceptive social critic and custodian of moral integrity, who unmasks and

mocks the contradictions and failures of key figures in the society. Implicit in this positioning as society's moral thermometer is an unstated claim to objectivity. Indeed, in so far as satire works through the use of malicious laughter to unmask, ridicule and question inappropriate conduct, the satirist's objectivity and fairness become indispensable to the integrity of his or her work. Thus, although the political cartoon is by definition dependent on distortion through caricature and hyperbole, this distortion must always be grounded in unprejudiced interpretations of reality, as any prejudice compromises the 'social barometer/moral watchdog' status of the cartoon artist.

In view of this 'social barometer status', the political cartoon enjoys pride of place as one of the subgenres which have the potential of transgressing the limits of other genres such as news products, for instance, by expressing alternative views. A second important feature of the political cartoon – which in many ways assures its popularity and influential status in shaping popular opinion on topical issues – is that as a visual genre that uses graphics and text, while drawing on a shared archive of stock images, recognisable figures and popular archives of ideas, the cartoon is able to transcend the limitations of literacy, making it accessible to all audiences across the literacy divide; while at the same time creating a participatory space of meaning-making as the audience reads and decodes the meanings encoded in the images and text.<sup>8</sup> It is against this background that the political cartoon enjoys pride of place as one of the most important popular media sub-genres in Africa, perhaps only second to rumour (Nyamnjoh 2005). Indeed, as Francis Nyamnjoh observes, cartoons can be seen as part of Radio Trattoir or pavement radio – a 'perfect medium of communicating dissent and discussing the powerful in unflattering, even if muted terms' (Nyamnjoh 2004: 75). Ultimately, beyond these factors, the popularity of political cartoons lies in their power to parody, lampoon and unmask powerful figures in society. Put differently, political cartoons remove such figures from their high pedestals of power (which come with a certain claim to dignity), and instead reduce them to familiar objects of ridicule, laughter and, most important, critique.

Yet an important dimension in reading political cartoons is the question of institutional, socio-political and historical contexts, which frame both the satirist's interpretations of topical issues and the archive of ideas on which she or he anchors such interpretations. A key concern here is the reality of the media's embeddedness in a particular landscape of ownership, advertising and audience profiles, which shapes the hegemonic patterns of commentary and interpretations of topical and political issues. Within the South African context, while changes have been registered in most media houses in terms of racial mix, evidenced for instance by the arrival of black journalists and editors, this has not necessarily translated into diverse representations of the new 'rainbow nation'.<sup>9</sup> This, as Stuart Hall has argued, is because ideology operates at a level above the individual:

Ideological statements are made by individuals: but ideologies are not the product of individual consciousness or intention. Rather we formulate our intentions *within ideology*. They pre-date individuals, and form part of the determinate social formations and conditions in which individuals are born. We have to 'speak through' the ideologies which are active in our society and which provide us with means of 'making sense' of social relations and our place in them. (Hall 2000: 272, original emphasis)

Following Hall, we argue that the cartoon artists inevitably also find themselves and their work in conversation with circulating discourses on a range of topical socio-political issues.<sup>10</sup> In our particular case of Zimbabwe's recent political history under the rule of President Robert Mugabe, the South African media played an influential role in shaping the hegemonic thrusts of public debates on the matter and, ultimately, powerfully influencing the range of attitudes that came to enjoy hegemonic patronage as popular, legitimised views on the Zimbabwean political situation. Against this background, an examination of political cartoons on Robert Mugabe in South African print media becomes important as a means of establishing the ways in which the cartoon artists relate to the hegemonic views on the Zimbabwean political situation.

## A note on methodology

This research uses critical discourse analysis and ideological analysis to examine the representations of Mugabe in South African press cartoons. Our analytical approach borrows from Fairclough's model which interweaves three interdependent dimensions of discourse, namely description (text analysis), interpretation (processing analysis), and explanation (social analysis) (Fairclough 1995: 98). The idea behind linking these dimensions, as Hilary Janks paraphrases Fairclough, is that 'production and reception are socially governed literary practices which require social analysis to explain why texts are the way they are and why they are read in the way that they are read' (Janks 1998: 197). As Janks further argues, the way texts are constructed and circulated is critical to our understanding of how these texts 'produce and maintain the social relations of power' (1998: 197).

Ideology is therefore defined as the social production of meaning, which, as Mike Cormack adds, involves 'the creation and interpretation of signs.'<sup>11</sup> The fact that production of meaning is essentially social, Cormack further argues, suggests that it necessarily involves ideology – which means that the 'decoding' moment is also ideologically connected (Cormack 1992: 16; see also Thompson 1990). As such, 'every stage of the passage from cultural producer through mediated text to

audience member is heavily implicated in any comprehensive theory of ideology' (1992: 16). Such an approach to understanding the workings of ideology avoids the pitfalls of looking at audiences/readers as passive victims but rather as positioned actors engaged in the interpretive process. As John Fiske suggests,

The people are not the helpless subjects of an irresistible ideological system, but neither are they free-willed, biologically determined individuals; they are a shifting set of social allegiances formed by social agents within a social terrain that is theirs only by virtue of their constant refusal to cede it to the imperialism of the powerful. (Fiske 1989: 45–46)

The reaction of the ordinary South Africans to Mugabe on his visits at the occasions mentioned earlier should be read in this light – as a way of resisting the ideological frames imposed by the media in the 'reading' of Mugabe.

Cormack suggests five categories of analysing texts, most of which we apply (though not in a very systematic way) in our analysis of the representations of Mugabe in South African press cartoons. These categories comprise content, structure, absence, style and mode of address. In terms of content, he recommends that we look at four sub-categories: judgements, vocabulary, characters and actions. Our approach is to analyse the texts (the cartoons) in their setting (which means looking at them in relation to other related texts) and not in isolation. In the process, we explore the stereotypes used in the depictions of Mugabe in these cartoons. The four sub-categories, as Cormack observes, are ideologically important in that they 'are used to express a view of reality – a view which the audience is asked to share' (Cormack 1992: 29).

Our study looks closely at how the cartoons are structured in terms of the narratives that they seek to communicate. According to Cormack, structuring 'gives an order to events which is independent of the specific items mentioned... It imposes ideological clarity ("This is how things are") to an inherently unclear situation' (1992: 29). The study also focuses on the omissions or absences in these cartoons. Elements which are avoided or absent, Cormack suggests, can have 'a major determining effect on a text' (1992: 30). By avoiding or omitting these elements of a narrative, the cartoons are able to construct a certain view of Mugabe as the essence of evil, as the single destructive force in Zimbabwe. Avoidance of certain aspects also simplifies a narrative and presents it in an uncontested and unproblematic way. Analysing the mode of address used in the cartoons help understand how the text *interpellates* or 'calls out' to us to elicit a specific reaction (Althusser 1984, cited in Cormack 1992:18). This is because cartoons, like any other texts, work by interpellating the readers.

For the purpose of this study, we retrieved over 300 cartoons on Mugabe published in a wide range of South African newspapers between 2000 and 2008.

The cartoons were drawn from Sabinet, an online database that provides access to electronic information. Numerous themes emerge upon careful examination of these cartoons, but for the purpose of this chapter we have limited our analysis to the cartoons commenting on the popular iconography of Mugabe and the contradictions that these cartoons create. This sample of cartoons enables us to think through the limited representations of Mugabe and the Zimbabwe crises, and how these seek to impose on the 'readers' a narrow interpretation of Mugabe and the crises unfolding in his country.

## Mugabe, Mbeki and quiet diplomacy

Perhaps the one person to have received the most extensive criticism regarding the Zimbabwean political situation in recent years is former South African President Thabo Mbeki. Mbeki was consistently criticised and ridiculed across the South African media for failing to take a hard-line stance on the Zimbabwean situation and insisting on quiet diplomacy. Indeed, it is instructive that, although his 'recall' from the presidency only months from the 2009 elections had more to do with internal African National Congress (ANC) conflicts, the media consistently cited his stance on Zimbabwe as an important contributing factor in his 'recall'.<sup>12</sup> The cartoonists were even less forgiving of Mbeki, as suggested by the body of cartoons lampooning his relationship with Robert Mugabe. Various patterns of representation emerge from this body of cartoons, occurring notably at two of Cormack's categories: content – in the perspectives on the Zimbabwean political situation – and structure – in the iconography used in articulating these critiques.

At the level of content, these cartoons seem to express a certain burden of responsibility for the Zimbabwean political situation as lying on the shoulders of the SADC, South Africa, and – most importantly – Thabo Mbeki. To a certain degree, this assignment of responsibility is understandable within the context of international relations and regional relationships. Interestingly though, underpinning that responsibility lies a messianic motif that casts South Africa and, by extension, the then South African President Mbeki in a messianic role, as if to suggest that the fate of Zimbabwe was in his hands. The messianic trope in the various cartoons emerges as a highly ambivalent issue. On the one hand, Mbeki and South Africa are variously presented as either neighbours or paternal figures with a moral responsibility towards Zimbabwe. On the other hand, Mbeki is presented as misinterpreting this role, by failing to admonish Robert Mugabe and instead becoming a benefactor of Zimbabwe through financial support at the expense of the South African poor.

This messianism is expressed in Figure 10.1 above, where the cartoon shows Mugabe violently attacking the press and the opposition party, the Movement for



FIGURE 10.1



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FIGURE 10.2



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Democratic Change (MDC). Mbeki, holding Mugabe's left hand, mutters, like an indulgent mother, 'Tut-tut Robbie, we mustn't lose our tempers.' Former Finance Minister Trevor Manuel wonders, 'So, if quiet diplomacy doesn't work, what must we do? Roll in the tanks?' to which the international community responds, 'Perhaps if Thabo stopped holding Mugabe's hand long enough to slap him on the wrist.'

This cartoon portrays Mbeki and by extension South Africa as an irresponsible mother to an infantilised and irresponsible Mugabe, whose wrist needs a reprimanding slap, but instead the Mbeki-mother-figure here mutters indulgently as she looks on while the Mugabe-child-figure bullies other 'playmates'. This matriarchal trope recurs in Figure 10.2, where the cartoon presents Mbeki as a street beggar holding a placard that reads 'Country to support. Please invest', with Mugabe as a toddler crawling beside him, hand stretched in begging. On the wall is the legend 'Lord of the Renaissance', poking fun at Mbeki's African Renaissance as a failed dream, partly thanks to the 'embarrassment' that Mugabe has become.

A similar matriarchal trope is signalled in Figure 10.3. The cartoon features Mbeki disembarking from a flight on his return to South Africa, carrying two

FIGURE 10.3



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grown babies on his back – Mugabe and the deposed Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide, whose long stay in South Africa at the nation's expense was a sore point often raised by the media.

The messianic narrative in these three cartoons is couched in the stereotypical trope of the doting mother who indulges her spoilt child's indiscipline, implicitly suggesting that the fate of Zimbabwe at the time lay in Mbeki's hands and things would be different if he ceased pandering to the 'spoilt brat' Mugabe's bully tactics. The trope of the placard-bearing mother figure in Figure 10.2 is particularly striking in its referencing of a familiar sight at traffic lights in South African cities. Signalled here is Mbeki's 'warped' sense of priority as he seems over-invested in Mugabe and Zimbabwe, while ignoring the South African poor who are more deserving of this 'matriarchal' concern – something reminiscent of what Charles Dickens referred to in *Bleak House* as 'telescopic philanthropy'.<sup>13</sup> It is in this light that the cartoon references Mbeki's pet project of the African Renaissance, which South African popular imaginaries often saw as the backbone of the presidency's misguided privileging of the interests of the African continent, to the neglect of South Africa and its citizens.

The idea of Mbeki's privileging of Zimbabwe and Mugabe at the expense of the South African poor is variously signalled in a number of cartoons. In this regard, one cannot help noting the ways in which the needs of the workers and the poor, who often get lip-service from politicians and the middle class alike, are here marshalled as powerful ammunition in the critique of Mbeki's and South Africa's financial support of Zimbabwe. This illustrates the working of Cormack's category of mode of address, in the way these cartoons call up a pre-existing discourse of both South African poverty and Mbeki's commitment to the African Renaissance. In doing so, the cartoons push the argument against Mbeki's financial support of Zimbabwe by indexing an already emotive strand in South African public imaginaries. At the same time, a paradoxical split emerges here. On the one hand, the stance criticises Mbeki's perceived 'failure' to resolve the Zimbabwean political situation and end the suffering of Zimbabweans. On the other hand, it critiques the Mbeki presidency's financial support to the ailing Zimbabwean economy at a time when the country's economy had all but collapsed, and was confronted with harsh sanctions from key stakeholders in the international community. Instead, the cartoons re-interpret this latter element by suggesting that any aid to Zimbabwe is actually personal aid to Mugabe, which props up his life of luxury and the first lady's rumoured luxurious lifestyle.

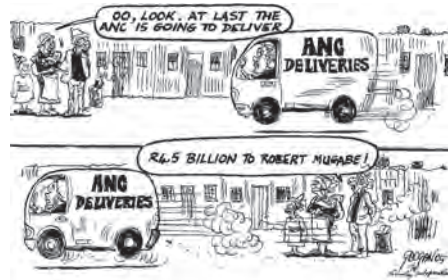
This idea of preferential support of Zimbabwe at the expense of the South African masses is evident in Figure 10.4, aptly labelled 'cross purposes', in which Mbeki and COSATU confront each other, with Mbeki saying 'What about Mugabe?' while COSATU's Secretary General Zwelinzima Vavi asks 'What about the workers?' In Figure 10.5 Mbeki is featured driving a van labelled 'ANC deliveries'. The van is

FIGURE 10.4



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FIGURE 10.5



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driving towards an informal settlement as a family of poor people watches with excitement shouting ‘Oh, look! At last the ANC is going to deliver.’ However, they watch in shock as Mbeki drives past them with ‘R4.5 billion to Robert Mugabe!’ The next cartoon signals the same idea, this time through the notion of South African taxpayers having to prop up Mugabe’s luxurious lifestyle as he destroys Zimbabwe.

Making allusions to a South African Revenue Services (SARS) advert which often runs at the end of the tax season, thanking taxpayers for their contributions to various elements of public service delivery, the cartoon features Mugabe saying ‘Thanks to your taxes I can destroy my country and still live in luxury’, as he holds a R6 billion bail-out cheque. These cartoons offer a candid critique of Mbeki’s financial support to Zimbabwe as both a waste of taxpayers’ hard-earned money and an indefensible indulgence of a despot’s greed as poor South Africans continue to suffer. While the ANC’s service delivery record leaves a lot to be desired, the implicit narrative here – that levels of poverty and failure of service delivery are further aggravated by the Mbeki presidency’s channelling of resources to Mugabe – is very

FIGURE 10.6



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FIGURE 10.7



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FIGURE 10.8



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selective. We see this in the ways in which it mutes certain compelling parallels between post-independence Zimbabwe and post-apartheid South Africa, among these the continued disproportionate control of land and wealth which, in both countries, remains concentrated in the hands of a white minority and a tiny, politically connected black middle class that has been successfully integrated into the ranks of the economic elite while the poor masses sink deeper into poverty.

But perhaps the most recurrent concern in these cartoons is Mbeki's stance of quiet diplomacy. This takes various forms, often portraying Mbeki and the then minister of Foreign Affairs Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as 'good neighbours' who keep quiet and refrain from interfering in the affairs of their neighbour. In Figure 10.7 Mbeki and Dlamini-Zuma sit relaxing on their lawn in South Africa, reading and braaing, as they ignore the chaos unfolding next door where Mugabe is busy physically assaulting the media, the opposition, the farmers and the judiciary. The placard in the cartoon reads 'Good neighbours don't make a fuss'. A similar critique emerges in Figure 10.8 where the cartoon features Mbeki reading a thick book in the lounge of his house, while across the fence we see Mugabe assaulting a woman as a house goes up in flames. In this cartoon, Mbeki continues to read, nonchalantly instructing someone to 'turn up the radio and draw the curtain please'.

In both of these portrayals, we have a damning portrayal of Mbeki as indifferent to the plight of Zimbabwean victims of violence and repression, and in fact implicitly endorsing Mugabe's repression and violence. Undoubtedly, Mbeki's abstinence from firm critique of the Mugabe regime is hard to defend, particularly given the depths of brutality that was levelled against ordinary Zimbabweans. What is striking for us here, however, is the fact that underpinning this critique is the assumption that the solution to Zimbabwe's crises lay in harsh interventions from Mbeki; that, in some ways, his failure to take a hard stance on Mugabe is responsible for fuelling the crises and postponing a long-term resolution. As

FIGURE 10.9



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Figure 10.9 puts it, in a comparison between Mbeki's stance on Zimbabwe and Ronald Reagan's stance on apartheid, 'Ronald Reagan is going to be remembered by Africa for propping up apartheid with his policy of constructive engagement, just like Thabo Mbeki whose policy of constructive engagement props up Robert Mugabe; only he calls it "quiet diplomacy".'

While the appropriateness of comparisons between the Zimbabwean political situation and apartheid is debatable, albeit valid within the medium of cartoons that enjoy a form of poetic licence to exaggerate, what is interesting for us here is the idea that Mbeki's support has propped up Robert Mugabe and by extension the Zimbabwean political and economic crisis. Perhaps the broader, unasked question here is, just how much agency and power did South Africa and Mbeki have over Zimbabwe, and to what extent could a hard-line stance by Mbeki have changed the course of history in Zimbabwe? Or, put differently, how real is this assumed power that South Africa and Mbeki have over Zimbabwe and Mugabe?<sup>14</sup>

On a different and rather ironic note, the comparisons in this cartoon are interesting particularly given the consistent silence on the land ownership question in all the lampooning of Mugabe. The comparisons between apartheid and Zimbabwe here become ironic in view of questions of land ownership and economic control in both Zimbabwe and South Africa. In this sense, we see what Cormack terms 'the absent', in so far as a selective narrative on the Zimbabwean political situation consistently amplifies Mugabe's despotism and undemocratic stance, while remaining silent on the sore point of land ownership and economic control – which the Mugabe regime was able to strategically mobilise and use to its advantage through a narrative of 'economic liberation' and a re-memorying of the Chimurenga struggle.<sup>15</sup> Regrettably, these deliberate blind spots cost the cartoons a nuanced, historicised critique which would meaningfully unmask the workings of power and the Mugabe regime's appropriation of fragments of national history to serve its own ends.

FIGURE 10.10



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The kinds of anxiety about ‘a repeat of Zimbabwe’ in South Africa are revealed, albeit obliquely, in Figure 10.10 which features then South African Vice President Pumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka saying, ‘Our land reform process is too structured and too slow. It requires a bit of oomph...’. The next frame interprets Mlambo-Ngcuka’s statement as an allusion to the need for a Zimbabwean-style approach to land reforms.

This cartoon betrays one of the key underlying anxieties in South African imaginaries about the possibility of the country ‘going the Zimbabwe route’, a phrase that came to attain cliché status both in media and everyday conversations in South Africa.

The critiques of Mbeki’s quiet diplomacy are further complicated by the presentation of Mugabe as actually fooling Mbeki and patently undermining his various ‘public relations exercises’ in defending Mugabe. This is evident in Figure 10.11 which shows Mbeki claiming, ‘I have no reason to think anyone in Zimbabwe will act in any way to prevent a free and fair election,’ while behind his back Mugabe – in military uniform complete with a gun – and an equally amused policeman laugh at Mbeki in scorn. In another cartoon Mbeki, addressing a press conference, asserts that ‘... Change is possible!’ while Mugabe, seated next to him, thinks ‘Bollocks!’

In Figure 10.12, Mbeki and Dlamini-Zuma are seated reading a media report with the headlines ‘Go hang! Mugabe tells Western leaders’, when he receives a parcel of a noose with the announcement ‘Mr President, the latest response to quiet diplomacy’. In all these caricatures, the joke seems to be on Mbeki, who is portrayed as making a fool of himself not only by defending the indefensible but also by allowing himself to be fooled by Mugabe.

Common to all these cartoons which lampoon Mbeki’s quiet-diplomacy approach to the Zimbabwean situation, is the idea of narrow-mindedness that

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FIGURE 10.12



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borders on foolishness. This idea is captured in Figure 10.13 featuring Mbeki as a loyal and vigilant knight-at-arms guarding his patron Mugabe.

Mugabe fondly asks, ‘What would I do without you?’ as Mbeki keeps station at the door, loyal protector to an implied autocrat. But perhaps one of the most striking critiques is in Figure 10.14, suggestively titled ‘The Quiet African’ in intertextual reference to the film of Graham Greene’s novel *The Quiet American*.

Set during the Vietnam War, this is a harsh critique of a destructive American naiveté and idealism which undermines meaningful critique and engagement with the war, as the American figure buries his head in abstract intellectual theorisation mixed with a naiveté that borders on foolishness. In this cartoon, Mbeki is dubbed ‘The Quiet African’ as he speaks silently to himself while a blood-soaked Mugabe, holding a panga freshly dripping with blood, pauses to ask, ‘You were saying?’ The received meaning is that Mugabe scorns Mbeki’s quiet

FIGURE 10.13



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FIGURE 10.14



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diplomacy, his intellectualism and his predilection towards what was popularly seen as ‘theorising’ issues. Mbeki’s silent discourse, his eyes closed as he stands holding a file labelled ‘diplomacy’, depicts him as ineffectual and implicitly giving Mugabe full support against his detractors.

## Mugabe: Savagery and threat to civilisation

If at the level of content these cartoons consistently reproduce often debatable assumptions about the Mbeki–Mugabe / South Africa–Zimbabwe relationship, it is at the level of the iconography deployed that we begin to see disturbing contradictions. In a number of these cartoons, the images deployed in the portrayal of Zimbabwe reach back into problematic archives of ideas and representational tropes that sit uneasily with parallel concerns about non-racialism in South African society and, indeed, South African public debates. A close examination of the caricatures reveals the consistent allusion to the evolutionary narrative of social Darwinism and its accompanying racist ideas about black savagery and primitivism, signalled by Stuart Hall above. One such manifestation of social Darwinism is seen in the consistent portrayal of Mugabe as an animal. In Figure 10.15, we have Mugabe as a mosquito threatening to bite the Commonwealth, the EU and the US, while Mbeki claims ‘he is harmless’.

In portraying Mugabe as a mosquito, an insect associated with malaria, the cartoon draws on a larger body of perceptions of Africa/ns as a diseased continent and diseased bodies respectively. Underlying this portrayal is a deeper anxiety about the possibility of the ‘Zimbabwe’ land reforms, undemocratic rule and ‘unconstitutionalism’ infecting the healthy South African constitutional democracy.

In Figure 10.16, Mugabe is a large ill-mannered dog in the Mbeki household – Africa – where the dog relieves itself on an Africa-shaped rug to Mbeki’s horror

FIGURE 10.15



© Peter Mascher



FIGURE 10.16



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(‘I think it’s time you were house trained’), as the commentator notes, ‘turning us into a turd world’. A number of issues emerge in this cartoon. First is the portrayal of Mbeki as a paternal custodian figure of the continent, perhaps in allusion to his championing of the continent through his doctrine of African Renaissance and his work across the continent through the African Union, Nepad and the sADC.

This is also linked to the wider impression of South Africa as the continental powerhouse. Second is the idea of Mugabe – and by extension Zimbabwe – as being under South African/Mbeki’s custodianship. Third is the pun on the ‘Third World’, which once again references the idea of Zimbabwe as a source of embarrassment to the continent and to Mbeki’s project of firmly placing the continent on the global socio-economic and political map. Underpinning this pun is the now clichéd South African self-perception as a nation distinct from the crisis-ridden continent; a distinction it guards jealously and which may in some ways explain the vested interest in the resolution of the Zimbabwean political-economic situation, lest it spill over the borders and infect South Africans with similar ideas. But, at the level of images, the portrayal of Mugabe as a sort of ‘wild dog’ which lacks the finesse and decorum that are the hallmark of more ‘civil’ ‘house-trained’ dogs is particularly disturbing both in its offensive and racist undertones, and in its referencing of ideas of domesticity and modernity to refer to democracy. These depictions of Mugabe as a savage beast are also deployed with careful interpellation which draws the readers to side with the cartoonist in his intention of evoking both fear and resentment of Mugabe, thereby denying them the opportunity to read him in any other terms. As Andy Mason aptly observes, ‘Looking at the recent proliferation of anti-Mugabe

FIGURE 10.17



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FIGURE 10.18



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cartoons, it is clear that he has come to symbolise what bourgeois South Africans fear most – the collapse of civilised society' (2008: 54).

In Figure 10.17 the cartoon alludes to the film *Defending the Caveman*, which is about the tension between the sexes, with the men as the cavemen of the title. Here the cartoon portrays Mugabe as a combative baton-wielding caveman, who hides in a dark cave, while Mbeki stands outside defending him. Again, underpinning the idea of the caveman – as a stone-age, pre-evolutionary figure – is a disturbing narrative drawn from a Darwinist anthropological archive on Africans. In another cartoon (Figure 10.18), we have Mbeki as a driver in a tour company named Thabo's Silent Safari. Mbeki drives the tourists past a Mugabe-look-alike hyena attacking a man and taking a bite out of him while the man lies helpless, gagged and with his hands tied up. The Mbeki figure addresses shocked tourists: 'Watch! They are going to start talking and all will be resolved.' Again, we have the portrayal of Mugabe as an object of curious spectacle for tourists; in this case a hyena viewed on a safari expedition.

What is interesting about the range of images deployed in these portrayals of Mugabe is the sense in which the hegemonic position in South African media and public debates of Mugabe as a roguish dictator figure seems to come with a certain exclusion from the discourse of non-racism that underpins public debate in South Africa. From the iconography deployed in these cartoons, one gets a certain sense of a special 'moratorium' on racist representation which seems to be grounded in the assumption that, where Mugabe is concerned, it is acceptable to retrieve this racist iconography of savagery from the annals of history and externalise it by associating it with Mugabe, while simultaneously grounding such 'critique' in a human rights discourse – that is, apparently fighting for democracy and the end of human rights abuses in Zimbabwe. Put differently, through his actions, Mugabe is seen to have relegated himself to the lower rungs of the evolutionary ladder, warranting the

deployment of racist, offensive imagery. The irony here is hard to miss, given his approximation of 'Afro-Saxon' sophistication in the not-so-distant past. A second interesting irony here is the resurgence of the 'savage terrorist' label that was branded on liberation fighters in both apartheid South Africa and colonial Rhodesia.

In these ways, these caricatures betray a total de-historicisation of Mugabe, the land reforms and the political-economic crisis. In this hegemonic demonisation of Mugabe, these cartoons overlook the complex and shifting identity of Mugabe and his relationship with Britain, and by extension South Africa, as occasioned by the shifting political reality on the ground. It must be noted that Mugabe was knighted by Queen Elizabeth II in 1994 for his significant contributions to relations between Britain and Zimbabwe.<sup>16</sup> A second silence emerges with regard to the thorny land reforms issue, and the cartoons remain mute on the economic landscape of post-independence Zimbabwe. In Figure 10.19 a defiant-looking Mugabe, shouting 'Timber', is depicted using a tractor to uproot a tree whose stem and roots are labelled, '3 000 white farmers' and '1.5 million black farmworkers and dependants' respectively.

Implied in this cartoon is the self-defeating foolishness of Mugabe in chasing away white farmers who provided a support base for some 1.5 million workers and their dependants. The use of the term 'farmworkers' in this cartoon – as elsewhere in the Zimbabwe crisis discourse – conceals some of the harsh realities of the working and living conditions of these workers, who were in essence labourers living a life akin to serfdom.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, the same cartoon inadvertently

FIGURE 10.19



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suggests that the real roots of these white farmers are these down-trodden farm labourers whose labour they had been exploiting. This is particularly interesting when one considers that peasants produced the bulk of food, while commercial farmers specialised in cash crops.<sup>18</sup>

Similarly, there is a certain oversimplification of the Zimbabwean economic crisis. Doubtless, the Mugabe presidency's policies and half-baked attempts at economic and land reforms, which were derailed by greed and rampant accumulation by a select middle-class and politically connected coterie, immensely contributed to the eventual economic crisis in the country. But, at the same time, it is hard to ignore the selective application of economic sanctions against Zimbabwe by the international community, while other equally repressive and corrupt regimes continue to enjoy economic support and patronage. These are some of the silences that echo across the body of cartoons on Mugabe as a particular selective pattern of critique emerges, suggesting the South African media's endorsement of a particular hegemonic and self-serving narrative on Mugabe and Zimbabwe.

## Conclusion

This chapter illustrates that the representation of Mugabe in South African press cartoons has become shorthand for explaining the Zimbabwe crisis – encapsulating its causes, manifestations and ramifications all in one. At the same time, these images of Mugabe serve to fulfil a colonial fantasy about the destructive propensity of a black African leadership. The images thus feed into one of the worst fears among whites in South Africa – a descent into chaos under black rule, and Zimbabwe and Mugabe have come to embody what Pumla Gqola has described as ‘manufactured paranoia.’<sup>19</sup> Contrary to the general perception that the cartoonist functions as a social barometer, providing necessary critique of developments within society, we note in this study that the cartoonist can be implicated in the production and reproduction of hegemonic ideas. Further, the uniform depictions of Mugabe in the South African press are suggestive of pack journalism, where cartoonists tend to rely on stock ideas in the same way journalists tend to make uniform news coverage as a result of moving around in large groups and following the same newsmakers and news leads.

Despite the obvious ills of the Mugabe regime, it is our contention in this chapter that representations of Mugabe in the South African press have not only been purposefully skewed to amplify the darker side of Mugabe and his regime, but their iconography further betrays disturbing racial attitudes. This, we argue, is linked to a variety of intersecting interests of the media owners and the corporate world they serve, and highlights the unending racial depictions of African political

leaders in the South African press. An important likely consequence of these representations is that they help legitimise these perceptions of Mugabe among the South African population and instil a sense of fear of taking any radical measures to address the prevailing economic imbalances created by apartheid. As such, they have also helped to 'sustain and reproduce dominant ideological representations' of Mugabe and the Zimbabwe 'crisis' in general. These repeated representations end up 'naturalising' these views of Mugabe as given, as incontestable. However, it is important to note that the readers of these cartoons are not so passive as to take their intended meanings as *the* meanings. Rather, it is clear that the South African public has oppositional readings of these cartoons, if the warm reception and hero treatment that Mugabe receives on his official visits is anything to go by.

What stands out in this body of cartoons is the near-hysterical obsession with Mugabe and the Zimbabwean situation, almost beyond the call of neighbourly concern and responsibility. Undoubtedly, this consistent spotlighting of the Zimbabwean situation is in many ways rooted in genuine concern about the political repression and human rights abuses that have marked the Mugabe regime since the year 2000. Beyond this, however, this obsession with Zimbabwe would seem to betray South African anxieties about similar occurrences, particularly where land reform is concerned. Given the slow economic transformation in post-apartheid South Africa, the continued economic dominance of a white minority integrated with a tiny black elite and the simmering sense of betrayal among the black poor whose dreams of freedom and dignified lives have failed to materialise in post-apartheid South Africa, the Zimbabwean land reform process remains a nightmarish source of anxiety in South Africa.

## Notes

- 1 It should also be noted that several South African media houses are staffed by journalists and editors of Zimbabwean extraction – both black and white.
- 2 Discussing Zimbabwe during his visit to South Africa in 2003, us President George Bush referred to then South African President, Thabo Mbeki as 'the point man in this subject (Zimbabwe).' See 'Bush backs Mbeki on Zimbabwe': <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2003/jul/10/zimbabwe.rorycarroll>. Accessed 9 November 2009.
- 3 It is notable that since coming to power in 1980, Mugabe received numerous international awards, including no less than ten honorary degrees from prestigious universities across the world, some of which have since been revoked in connection with his deteriorating human rights record. See for example: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert\\_Mugabe](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Mugabe), under 'Honours and Revocations.' Accessed 22 July 2009.
- 4 Makunike C (2008) 'John Pilger speculates on reasons for Mbeki's approach to Mugabe': <http://zimreview.wordpress.com/tag/south-africa/>. Accessed 9 February 2009.

- 5 Pilger J (2008) 'Silent war on Africa': <http://www.mg.co.za/printformat/single/2008-07-07-the-silent-war-on-africa>. Accessed 9 February 2009.
- 6 This variance in perceptions on Mugabe might have narrowed considerably over the years as images of Mugabe's brutality and dictatorial tendencies continued to dominate the SA media landscape. Some of these images are repeated over and over again on national television, and this tends to create an impression of endless violence.
- 7 See, for example, *The Herald*, 'President receives rapturous welcome in SA', at: <http://maravi.blogspot.com/2009/05/herald-president-gets-rapturous-welcome.html>, accessed 22 July 2009.
- 8 With increasing globalisation and developments in information communication technologies, political cartoons' subversive potential is even greater as it can cut across spatial, linguistic and cultural barriers, with little need for translation; a phenomenon best illustrated by the Prophet Mohammad cartoons which first appeared in Danish newspapers, but were circulated and accessed across the world by a whole range of different audiences.
- 9 The South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC)'s 2000 report, titled *Faultlines: Inquiry into Racism in the Media*, lists as one of its main findings the point that, 'expressions in the South African media "reflect a persistent pattern" of racist expressions and content of writing ...' and goes on to state that, 'South African media can be characterised as racist institutions ... regardless as to whether there is conscious or unconscious racism, direct or indirect' (SAHRC 2000: 80).
- 10 Further, the fact that South African press cartooning is dominated by a handful of artists, prominent among them Jonathan Shapiro (who until recently was the syndicated cartoonist for Independent Newspapers which owns, among other publications, *The Star*, *Pretoria News*, *Cape Times* and *The Mercury*), Brandan Reynolds, who draws for *Business Day*, *The Weekender* and the *Weekend Argus*, Dov Fedler who draws for *The Star*, and Sifiso Yalo who draws for *The Sowetan*, has implications for the diversity of viewpoints expressed in these cartoons.
- 11 Cormack explains 'signs' as 'everything which stands for something else in a social situation, including words (spoken or written), symbols, images, gestures and sounds' (1992: 16).
- 12 The African National Congress (ANC) party views people in leadership as deployed cadres of the party who can be recalled at any time at the behest of the National Executive Committee of the Party. As such, Mbeki's removal from office was couched in terms of a 'recall', though in some circles it was read as some form of coup.
- 13 Dickens used the term 'telescopic philanthropy' in the novel *Bleak House* to describe Mrs Jellyby's absorption in distant 'Borriboola-Gha' while neglecting problems nearer home. It is interesting to bring up this Dickensian analogy in reference to Mbeki, who became notorious for his proclivity for citing Shakespeare, Dickens and other famous English poets and novelists in his speeches.
- 14 It should be noted that Mugabe has always wanted to project an impression that he is his own man, and he often made statements to the effect that South Africa or Thabo Mbeki had no grounds to lecture him and as such could 'go to hell'.
- 15 We have chosen the land issue as a major omission or absence in the cartoons because land has almost become a swear word in South African media debate, where any attempts at questioning the imbalance in land distribution is always accompanied with a warning against 'Zimbabwe-style' land grabs which have led to economic collapse.

- 16 The knighthood was revoked in June 2007 on the grounds of abuse of human rights and  
disregard for democratic processes in Zimbabwe. Ironically, Britain had turned a blind eye to  
the atrocities perpetrated by Mugabe against the people of Matabeleland in the early 1980s.
- 17 Most of these farm labourers lived in sub-human conditions on the farms, where they were  
paid a pittance and were perpetually indebted to their employers. There were, however,  
exceptional cases where some white farmers had considerably improved the housing and  
living conditions of their labourers at the behest of government insistence upon provision of  
health and educational facilities on farms after independence.
- 18 It must be pointed out that when Mugabe won the Africa Prize for Leadership for the  
Sustainable End of Hunger in 1988, he gave credit to the rural peasant farmers who produced  
most of the food under the rural resettlement programme. The Director of the Hunger Project  
described Zimbabwe then as the agricultural success story of Africa. See *New York Times*,  
September 18 1988, 'Mugabe Wins Anti-Hunger Prize': [http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/16/  
world/mugabe-wins-anti-hunger-prize.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1988/09/16/world/mugabe-wins-anti-hunger-prize.html), accessed 22 July 2009.
- 19 See Gqola, P. (2009) 'Apartheid still lives in SA', in *The Weekender*, 27–28 June 2009. Also  
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# FROM THE PAST TO THE FUTURE





## The 'sellout logic' in the formation of Zimbabwean nationalist politics, 1961–1964

*Timothy Scarnecchia*

**THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS AN** historical analysis of how 'sellout' politics became such an integral part of African nationalist politics in Southern Rhodesia during the early 1960s. It examines diplomatic negotiations carried out between American diplomats and the leaders of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) to assess how important sellout politics were to these negotiations for financial support and assistance. While the sellout logic had violent consequences for party organisers and supporters in the townships and rural areas, the leadership of the various factions and parties competed with one another internationally over funding from a variety of Cold War sources, including crucial support from American sources for the formation of ZANU during 1963. This chapter also raises questions concerning the continued role of the sellout logic in contemporary Zimbabwe, and how this legacy helps to perpetuate forms of exclusion and political violence predicated on the sellout logic.

To understand how the 'sellout' logic worked in the early 1960s, it is important to briefly mention how an earlier period of sellout politics worked in the 1950s. The Central African Federation had offered a new opportunity for African politicians to be elected to a new Federal Parliament. When the Federation was formed in 1953, it offered two seats to African politicians from each of the three territories. Joshua Nkomo, who would later become the leader of the nationalist movement throughout the 1960s, was called a 'sellout' when he decided, against the wishes of a coalition of African political and trade union organisations, to run for a seat in the Central African Federation's parliament. Nkomo lost the election, but he was castigated by politicians such as Charles Mzingeli who labelled him a 'sellout', implying that his decision to run for the Federal parliament was selling out the larger struggle for African equality and rights as full citizens. Not long after this, Mzingeli himself would be labelled a sellout by the younger generation of township

political activists wishing to take over control of Harare (now Mbare) township politics from Mzingeli and his Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (RICU). This was an organisation Mzingeli had formed in the 1940s and one he had effectively used to serve as a voice of opposition to municipal and national segregation laws in Salisbury's townships (Scarnecchia 2008; West 2002).<sup>1</sup>

While this chapter concentrates on the use of the sellout label among nationalist politicians themselves, the reality of sellout accusations – being labelled a *mutengesi* (chiShona) or an *umthengisi* (isiNdebele) – became a violent and tragic strategy within the liberation struggle. While it played a role in urban and rural violence during the 1960s, it would become even more deadly during the liberation war years. The connotation of the chiShona or isiNdebele term was that of 'one who sells out' and therefore someone who betrays the unity of the resistance movement. Many people were tortured and killed after being labelled a sellout, and many of these individuals were victims of a cruel sort of local strategy to punish rivals and more successful rural farmers and business people (Kriger 1992; Alexander, McGregor & Ranger 2000; Mtisi, Munyaradzi & Barnes 2009; Chung 2006; Nyarota 2006). This chapter, while recognising the use of the sellout label as denoting someone who betrays the nationalist cause, also explores the historical origins of the sellout as an individual or party that allegedly sacrificed African interests to either white settler or foreign interests. Individuals in this category were also labelled sellouts and they were often on the receiving end of violence. This strategy was also used to deal with rivals and their followers and became a key component of nationalist party factionalism in the 1960s.

It is important to note that the sellout label had been used as a form of censure and criticism right from the beginning of African nationalist party formations. In the 1950s, a younger generation, led by George Nyandoro and James Chikerema, began to use the sellout rhetoric against Mzingeli and his RICU. Nyandoro and others in the Salisbury City Youth League (SCYL) organised hecklers to shout down Mzingeli at RICU public meetings, labelling Mzingeli as a 'sellout' and a 'yes-man' because he worked within existing Southern Rhodesian institutions. The SCYL evolved into the Southern Rhodesian African National Congress (SRANC) in 1957 led by Joshua Nkomo, George Nyandoro and James Chikerema.

In February 1959, the Rhodesian Government, worried that a concerted effort among the Central African Federation's African nationalists was imminent, arrested many of the leaders in the SRANC and African trade unions, detaining many of them without charges. Although Nkomo was able to avoid arrest, there was a serious leadership shortage in the party with so many leaders detained. This created a situation in which men like Robert Mugabe, Herbert Chitepo and Nathan Shamuyarira were pushed into joining Nkomo and the nationalists and leaving the multiracial organisations to which they had previously been aligned. The notion

that such men were ‘tea-drinkers’ – African men who would rather drink tea with white liberals than join the real nationalists’ struggle – was a very effective way of calling these men out and forcing them to denounce multiracial political and social organisations and commit themselves to the ‘people’s struggle’ (West 2002: 216–223).

Once they joined and began to lead the newly formed National Democratic Party (NDP), these new nationalists inherited a political organisation that already had used the ‘sellout’ label to chastise and censure other Africans for their participation with the Rhodesian state and with multiracial organisations. Having become part of the struggle, and in need of proving their nationalist credentials to the rank and file, they turned the sellout rhetoric against those African leaders who attempted to remain outside of the NDP’s control.

The first major historical example of how this sellout logic worked within African nationalist party factionalism revolves around the March 1961 NDP Congress that had been organised to approve the NDP’s decision to accept a negotiated new Southern Rhodesian constitution. NDP president Joshua Nkomo had previously gone to London to participate in the negotiations over a new Southern Rhodesian constitution. Nkomo had agreed to a draft constitution that allowed for African representation and a new Bill of Rights. But soon after the decision was announced, others in the NDP leadership heavily criticised Nkomo’s compromise, including Leopold Takawira who was the NDP representative in London. Prior to the March NDP Congress, NDP Vice President Michael Mawema, was suspended from the NDP executive for openly criticising the decision. Hastings Banda in Malawi made a public statement claiming that the NDP executive had been ‘spineless’ in accepting the draft constitution. Martin and Johnson say that Nkomo called Takawira a ‘Tshombe’ and ‘imperialist’ for openly criticising his decision to support the new constitution (Martin & Johnson 1981: 68).

Michael Mawema, who resigned from the NDP after his suspension, formed his own nationalist party, the Zimbabwe National Party, and issued a response to the NDP’s verbal attacks that express his contempt for a leadership that he believed had betrayed the stated goals of African nationalism. He writes of the NDP:

Our God and great-grandfathers will not forgive anyone of us who shall betray this land or fear to suffer for it because of wanting pleasures and money... What moral right have they in the name of Zimbabwe to continue to sell us for luxury and money which they have already? Of recent times many people are going about without food and jobs after being misled to go on strike; many lay in prisons, some died, but the people who asked them to violate the laws are free, enjoying themselves without worry or giving help to the people who are suffering. (Mawema 1979/1961)

Trade union leader Rueben Jamela joined the chorus of African leaders critical of Nkomo's position on the constitution, and he would later suggest that his outspoken criticism of the constitution decision at the NDP Congress marked him as an enemy of Nkomo and the NDP leadership (Scarnecchia 2008). After this vocal criticism, Jamela, who led the Southern Rhodesian African Trade Union Congress (SRTUC) with an estimated membership of 30 000 workers, was one of the primary recipients of the sellout charge, first rhetorically and then physically. The sellout label was a convenient way for leaders in the NDP, particularly Robert Mugabe and George Silundika, to challenge Jamela's control of the SRTUC and also its British and American funding. As the sellout charge grew to a crescendo, it led to a mock burial of Jamela in Bulawayo at a rival trade union meeting complete with a coffin, attacks on his house while he was in the United States in May 1961 and the march of hundreds of NDP supporters to his house in Highfield to break all the windows in September 1961. Most importantly, he barely survived a beating at the hands of ZAPU youth at the funeral of his friend Dr TS Parirenyatwa, the deputy president of ZAPU, in July 1962.

After the banning of the NDP in December 1961, the party was immediately replaced with the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) in December 1961. Following all of this verbal and physical abuse suffered by Jamela, and factional fighting between Jamela's forces and ZAPU youth in the townships of Harare and Highfield, the American diplomats in Salisbury were interested in finding out from ZAPU leaders what they thought of Jamela's future as leader of the SRTUC. The American Consul, Edward W Mulcahy, asked Robert Mugabe for his opinion of Jamela's future. Mulcahy paraphrased Mugabe's reply:

Mugabe admitted that African political or labour movements in this country cannot stand on their own without financial backing from some external source. However, Mugabe felt that Jamela's activities have proved beyond doubt that he is acting under ICFTU [International Confederation of Free Trade Unions] direction. Although Mugabe admitted that Jamela was one of the most able African trade unionists, the former did not think that he [Jamela] was capable of 'riding the tiger' without 'ending inside'. (Mulcahy 1962)

Thus there was an inherent duplicity in the sellout logic. No African nationalist party could hope to succeed in fighting against the increasingly hard-line Southern Rhodesian government repression of African nationalist parties without access to international funding, yet to acknowledge external funding would open up the party to sellout accusations and violence. As arrests and detentions increased, so too did torture and 'extra-legal' tactics by the Southern Rhodesian government against the nationalists and their followers. Therefore, after having succeeded in sidelining Jamela, the ZAPU

leadership appealed directly to the Americans for help. The inherent hypocrisy of this strategy by nationalist leaders was recognised by ZAPU's critics.

Once such critic, Edson Sithole, a central political figure in the formation of African nationalism and an important journalist, attacked the expulsion of Jamela by Mugabe and others. Sithole (1962) wrote a lengthy *Daily News* article titled 'Real reason why ZAPU expelled Jamela' in which he claimed that it was jealousy of Jamela that made the ZAPU executive go after him in the way they had done. Sithole pointed to the hypocrisy of ZAPU getting American support but using the sellout label against Jamela. Sithole wrote, '... ZAPU has representatives in America who live on American money. It is therefore insincere to say he who receives money from the ICFTU is an imperialist agent and he who buys a Rambler car and maintains his representatives by American money is a Pan-Africanist.' At the same time, ZAPU was attacking Jamela, those ZAPU leaders who were soon to break away from Nkomo's leadership, such as Herbert Chitepo and the Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole, were in Washington DC requesting direct funding from the Americans. However, before continuing to explore how elite African leaders handled the sellout logic and label, it is important to understand that leaders used the sellout label to motivate followers to acts of violence against their rivals.

After the violent beating of Rueben Jamela, sellout violence was not only reserved for leaders. When Jamela's SRTUC forces began to fight back against ZAPU supporters, violence in Harare township and Highfield settlement resulted in a number of deaths and serious injuries. If it were not for the direct campaign to attack those in the townships who were labelled sellouts or stooges, perhaps the sellout rhetoric would have had remained purely rhetorical. As the 1962 elections approached, the sellout violence expanded beyond Jamela's supporters to any African thought to be participating in electoral politics on behalf of European political parties. Such individuals, those who joined the United Federal Party's 'Build a Nation Campaign', for example, risked being labelled sellouts and could become victims of violence (Mlambo 1972: 133). The first use of petrol bombs to attack houses in Harare and Highfield in December 1960 had been directed against African supporters of European political parties (Scarnecchia 2008). By 1962, ZAPU's decision to boycott the 1962 elections was accompanied by more violence in the townships. A 14-year-old youth was arrested before the election and charged with distributing 'subversive leaflets...which stopped men and women from going to work', the *Daily News* reported, quoting a passage from the leaflet:

From Monday onwards no men, women or girls shall go for work – he or she who goes to work shall be killed – no hitting – but killing. We want everyone to play Chachacha. Edgar shall play this tune, *sell-out* shall play this tune till the day we shall take over. Prepare your arrows, bows, picks, mattocks,

shovels and the panga men should be on the field for the game to kill every enemy, *sell-out* and everything white. (*Daily News* 1962)

Doing the 'chachacha' was a concept based on a popular Congolese song that had been appropriated by the Northern Rhodesian nationalists as a popular symbol of independence (Sardanis 2003: 91).

## The 1963 ZAPU-ZANU split

Having succeeded in removing Jamela from his leadership position, what was left of the trade union movement was in ZAPU's control. The trade union movement was much weaker, however, as they no longer had the immunity from arrest that the earlier international pro-Western solidarity had offered a Jamela-led trade union congress. On March 24, 1963, Mugabe spoke to a group of 'several thousands of African workers' and told them, according to American diplomat Paul Geren (1963a) '...that there was no distinction between trade unionism and nationalism and urged the workers to rally behind Mr. Joshua Nkomo...' Only a few weeks later, ZAPU's Reverend Ndabaningi Sithole was in Washington openly discussing the difficulties he and others had with Nkomo's leadership.

Reverend Sithole also met with G Mennen Williams, President John F Kennedy's under secretary of State for Africa, on 16 April 1963 as part of his diplomatic visit on behalf of ZAPU. The transcript of the meeting (Department of State 1963a), indicates that Williams and Sithole were at odds over future nationalist strategy, and Sithole tactfully threatened the us that if they didn't offer more tangible help on behalf of the nationalists, they would be forced to look elsewhere. Reverend Sithole explained to Williams how he received letters 'from students in the us, in England, in India, and in the East' saying that they were willing to interrupt their education and come home and fight. Sithole then reportedly added: 'Help [is] being sought from all quarters;...a drowning man does not question the character of the man who extends a hand to help him.' In the Cold War context of 1963, such a statement was a challenge to the Americans to make their position more clear. Governor Williams assured Sithole and the students that they 'should rest assured that our [us] motives [are] always clear.' Sithole did in fact manage to gain some private financial support for ZAPU from his trip, most likely from American mining interests, but not directly from the us government.

On 16 July, a leading nationalist and lawyer, Herbert Chitepo, was in Washington, meeting with Department of State officials to provide his view on the ZAPU split. Chitepo explained that he was 'very much a party to the split and that his sympathies were entirely with the anti-Nkomo element. He then got to the point



about American aid for the new leadership. Mr. Brubeck, a senior us diplomat in the Kennedy administration who was keen on supporting African nationalists in hopes of improving America's standing in the Cold War, responded to Chitepo's request for 'meaningful help' and 'not just words'. Brubeck asked how exactly the us could help. 'To this Mr. Chitepo replied that the provision of money was the obvious and most direct way in which the United States could assist. However, he was realistic enough, he said, to know that the Department of State as such could not engage in providing funds directly but he felt it could encourage private American sources to come to the movement's aid' (Department of State, 1963b). Mr. Fredericks, another important member of the Kennedy administration's African Affairs Department, told Chitepo that they had been successful in finding private American sources of funding when Reverend Sithole had been to Washington, but now they were hearing from Salisbury that the Nkomo group was 'labeling Sithole "an American stooge", whereas this was clearly not the case.' Fredericks asked Chitepo whether or not

greater and more obvious American financial help to the movement might not hurt it more than help it. Mr. Chitepo said that he thought the Department should have no worry about such 'stooge' charges, particularly coming from the insignificant personalities they did. He laughed and said he would very happily accept '500 million dollars' from the United States and still defy anyone to call him 'an American stooge'. (Department of State 1963b)

Back in Salisbury, the pace of sellout accusations had quickened by mid-July, 1963. Geren began to report statements made in the press by the 'dissidents' critical of Nkomo. Eddison Zvogbo, just finishing his last year at Tufts University in Boston, made the following statement, reflecting the notion that leaders were betraying the nationalist cause:

The African students from Malawi, Zambia and Zimbabwe (MAZAZI) studying in institutions of higher learning in the United States of America welcome the deposition from leadership of Nkomo and his replacement by the dynamic Mr Ndabaningi Sithole....During the seven years of his [Nkomo's] leadership he has danced to the tune of the imperialists and betrayed the Zimbabwe nation...We demand that any leaders should now lead the proletariat and peasants to unleash a sustained struggle against the colonialists and capitalists. Long live Zimbabwe! Down with Nkomo and his Quislings. (Geren 1963b)

Sithole and Mugabe and the other ZAPU 'dissidents' established the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) on 8 August 1963 in Dar es Salaam. Geren left for Dar es Salaam a few days later and on 12 August he was meeting with Mugabe. Geren's personal confidence in Mugabe was clear. He wrote, 'We have a high estimate of Mugabe's analytical powers, his political sense, and his resolve for political action. While he has his share of ambition, his present alliance with Sithole cannot be dismissed as a scheme to supplant Sithole with Mugabe' (Geren 1963c). Geren's informality with Mugabe is also evident from Mugabe's request of Geren to get word to Sithole to tone down his appeals for non-violence:

Mugabe is worried about Sithole's favour for a programme of 'positive action' which is his name for what Sithole is describing as 'non-violent' action. Mugabe believes this argument may fail to win the masses who want a more radical policy than that followed by ZAPU. He seeks to get word to Sithole to go easy on 'non-violence' in his public speeches.

The familiarity between Mugabe and Geren was similar to Mugabe's openness with Edward Mulcahy before him. Geren asked Mugabe how to interpret Nkomo's sudden shift to an anti-American rhetoric:

Mugabe said that Nkomo knows this propaganda cannot budge the us one inch but may do him good with the UAR [Egypt] and Ghana. He said that the numbering of Mr AJ Levin as one of the plotters against Nkomo and his identification as a Jew is one of the several actions designed to please the UAR and Nasser, a chief source of support. Mugabe believes that the charges of identification between the Sithole faction and the us by the Nkomo faction do little harm with the masses, much less than a charge of collusion with the British or the Rhodesian whites would do. (Geren 1963c)

Mugabe's dismissal of the importance of sellout charges sharply contrasted with the realities back in the townships of Harare and Highfield. Geren reported back to Washington the less than heroic reception Reverend Sithole received when he returned to Salisbury on 3 August to address a meeting of ZANU supporters in Highfield. Sithole, Nkala and '200 supporters' required protection from the Rhodesian police. Geren reports that a 'milling pro-Nkomo mob of [a] thousand threatening death to "sellouts"' remained outside the meeting, and Sithole and Shamyarira's cars were stoned as they left the meeting.

The next day, Sithole acknowledged 'the miscalculation of Nkomo's mass strength' and that Nkomo was even stronger in Harare and Mufakose townships (Geren 1963c). Maurice Nyagumbo describes the reception he and other ZANU

leaders and their supporters received in August 1963 (Nyagumbo 1980: 183). Nyagumbo describes how ZANU leaders in Southern Rhodesia ‘...were finding difficulties in holding meetings. Each time we called one, Nkomo and his men fielded hundreds of thugs who would go about intimidating people and prevent them from attending. As it was not possible to protect every party member, those who could not protect themselves soon resigned and joined the Nkomo group.’ For the leadership of ZANU, who were outnumbered by a strong force mobilised by loyal ZAPU organisers in Harare and Highfield, being called pro-American was the least of their worries compared to Nkomo’s charges in rallies that the dissidents were in fact working with the Rhodesian government (Chung 2006: 60).

When Geremba asked Mugabe to predict when the Sithole faction might be able to come to take over the nationalist movement from ZAPU, Mugabe hesitated to give a timetable but told Geremba, ‘The Sithole group needs money above all.’ What money they did have was tied up in the ZAPU accounts at Grindlays Bank in Dar-es-Salaam. At the time of the split, according to Mugabe’s discussion with Geremba, there was a balance of £2 900 which Sithole believed to represent chiefly the donations of a group of ‘American friends’ who had pledged to give £500 a month to ZAPU, and had recently remitted one sum covering several months’ pledge. At that time the account required four signatures for operation, those of ‘Nkomo, JZ Moyo, Mugabe and Malianga, the former two [being] signatories in the Nkomo faction and the latter two in the Sithole faction’(Geremba 1963c).

Mugabe showed Geremba ‘an old bill for £500 from the Hotel Internationale in Dar, and spoke of similar bills outstanding in Dar, London and New York. He also mentioned that the executive committee members were supposed to receive a £25 monthly allowance but that none of the leaders had received their allowance for several months. Mugabe admitted that the claims of the Sithole faction to a part of existing ZAPU bank accounts would probably suffer from the creation of the new party ZANU.’ Geremba (1963c) concluded that ‘Mugabe in shirt sleeves and sandals gives the impression of a most impecunious politician’.

A Department of State telegram from Cairo in September 1963 shows the extent to which American support for ZANU had become an ‘open secret’ in diplomatic circles. The telegram records a conversation between a US Embassy officer and Egyptian Director of African Affairs, Mohammed Fayeze, the same Fayeze that Nkomo identifies in his autobiography as his close Egyptian friend who assisted ZAPU in obtaining funding, weapons, and military training (Nkomo 1984). Fayeze reportedly told the American diplomats in Cairo that elements in the UAR were critical of the United States for ‘choosing sides among factions [in] unliberated AF[rican] territories’.

Fayeze, while indicating that American funding had been productive, agreed with the criticism that it was important not to take sides when liberation groups

split, as ‘factions must work out [their] own quarrels’. The telegram’s author comments that Fayeze seemed ‘rather smug’ because it appeared that Nkomo was the more popular leader and that the UAR ‘seems currently [to] be backing [a] winner.’ But the author of the telegram also felt that Fayeze might be willing to switch over to Sithole should Nkomo’s popularity decline (Boswell 1963).

In September 1963, a month after meeting with Mugabe in Dar es Salaam, Geren requested an explanation from Reverend Sithole over why it was that the ZANU representative to the People’s Republic of China, Transo Makombe, had been heard making anti-American statements on Chinese radio. Sithole, who was likely under serious pressures given the difficulties he and the others in ZANU faced in organising against ZAPU, expressed his ‘frustrations’ with the Americans for not providing sufficient funds to help him and ZANU in their battle against Nkomo and his supporters. According to Geren, Sithole made the following points:

The us would help only in situations where communism threatens.

He (Sithole) having studied in the United States and having many friends there is reckoned by American authorities as ‘safe’ and it is out of the question that he should be identified with communism. Consequently, no aid is offered to him.

Officers in the Department of State talk big and with encouragement but when it comes to acting to help a cause like Sithole’s they cannot deliver. (Geren 1963e)

Sithole’s previous attempts to gain financial support from American sources, acknowledged earlier by J Wayne Fredericks as successful, appeared to be inadequate by September 1963, when ZANU was under attack both from Nkomo’s supporters and the Rhodesian state. The sellout logic had squeezed the new ZANU leadership between a street-level defence by ZAPU supporters of Nkomo as the ‘father’ of African nationalism and an American diplomatic mission willing to provide access to private US funding but unwilling in 1963 to fully commit funds to the untested ZANU leadership in ways Sithole and others had requested. Constrained by Cold War obligations to the Portuguese, South African and British interests in Central Africa, the US strategy of aiding African nationalists was both influential and at the same time frustrating from the point of view of ZANU’s leaders.

As demonstrated in this chapter, and in much greater detail in my book (Scarnecchia 2008), the sellout logic was used against the trade union leader Rueben Jamela in 1961–1962, to force him out of his prominent role and to make sure that his international funding went directly to ZAPU. Then, in 1963–1964, when Sithole,

Mugabe and others in the new ZANU leadership were under attack from ZAPU as 'sellouts', Sithole, Chitepo and Mugabe accepted American financial and logistical support. The Americans were quite aware that ZANU was also receiving aid from Ghana and the People's Republic of China (PRC), but they were more concerned with ZAPU's ties to Egypt and the Eastern bloc and saw ZANU as the better alternative. After all, the breakaway group consisted of many skilled and cosmopolitan politicians such as Chitepo, Shamuyarira, Sithole and Mugabe. However, for the American diplomats in Salisbury, having already seen the damage American funding had caused for Rubeen Jamela in 1961–1962, and then witnessing the ways in which initial American support for ZANU had hurt the initial reception of ZANU in Southern Rhodesia during 1963, it must have become clear that American financial support had become a necessary liability for African nationalists within the context of political violence and party rivalries. In the Cold War competition over the loyalties of African nationalists, this violence was overlooked and considered a necessary by-product if a potentially pro-American nationalist leadership might emerge. This was a gamble the US took in a number of other African nations as well, and the gamble failed in settler states, particularly in Kenya and Southern Rhodesia. During the 1970s and 1980s, however, the second Cold War in Africa would shift American allegiances toward the Portuguese and apartheid South Africa. As a result, US support for the Mozambique National Resistance (RENAMO) and assistance in South Africa's destabilisation of the Frontline States in the 1980s severely damaged the relationship between Zimbabwean leaders and the United States following the more amicable relations during the early 1960s. This did not, however, stop ZANU-PF from accepting large amounts of development aid from the United States after 1980. And yet the long legacy of financial assistance to ZANU-PF from external sources does not enter into the current sellout logic's preoccupation with external funding. The older ideological traces of anti-imperialism remain at the forefront of ZANU-PF's rhetoric long after the leaders have in fact betrayed an anti-imperialist agenda (Scarnecchia 2006; Moore 2008). The ruling party's ability to mobilise paramilitary violence against the opposition has therefore allowed for the continuation of an older combination of anti-imperialist sellout rhetoric along with violence used to discipline and terrorise those labelled as betraying the liberation war legacy and therefore the legitimacy of ZANU-PF's rule.

## The sellout logic at the core of contemporary ZANU-PF rhetoric and ideology

Brian Raftopoulos (2004), Terence Ranger (2004), and Sabelo J Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008) have all written excellent analyses of the ways ZANU-PF has used nationalist

rhetoric to reshape the notion of Zimbabwean citizenship and nation to meet the needs of the party's survival. Raftopoulos described the process in 2004:

ZANU-PF has set itself the task of establishing a hegemonic project in which the party's narrow definition of the nation is deployed against all other forms of identification and affiliation. In this project the media and selected intellectuals have been used to provide a continuous and repetitive ideological message, in order to set the parameters of a stable national identity conducive to the consolidation of the ruling party. As Zimbabweans listen to the radio, watch television and read the daily newspapers, all controlled by the ruling party, they are being 'informed' about what it means to be a 'good Zimbabwean,' and a 'genuine African'. They are also being told who is the 'enemy' within and without and advised to confront such 'enemies' with ruthless exclusion if necessary. For the present this political assault has seriously closed down the spaces for alternative debates around citizenship and national belonging. (Raftopoulos 2004)

The continued use of sellout rhetoric over the past 10 years is well known. Casting the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) as a 'puppet party' of the British in particular but also denouncing their American allies, ZANU-PF orchestrated the propaganda campaign Raftopoulos describes above. In February 2010, one year after the signing of the Government of National Unity (GNU), the ability of democratic forces to operate freely remains greatly constrained by the deployment of both sellout rhetoric and violence. In December 2008, when a GNU agreement was still an uncertainty, Jonathan Moyo continued his familiar sellout rhetoric when criticising Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC. It was Moyo who provided much of the sellout rhetoric to ZANU-PF's campaign, during the past decade, against the opposition and 'the West'. *Newzimbabwe.com* (2008) comments on the negotiations for the GNU continued to reflect the sellout logic in Zimbabwean politics:

Tsholotsho North MP Professor Jonathan Moyo...said if Tsvangirai pulled out of the power sharing agreement, it would be hard for him to argue that he is acting independently.

'Zimbabwe's problem in getting the much needed political settlement does not in fact come from the neo-colonial Americans but from their puppets amongst us,' said Moyo, a former government minister....

'For Africa, it has been the same problem in history. Just like slavery and colonialism were made possible by African puppets who sold out their

compatriots to slave traders and colonial masters, today imperialism and neo-colonialism are facilitated by puppets like Tsvangirai and his MDC lot who are selling out their countries while masquerading as democrats and human rights activists when they are in fact paid mouthpieces with no values of their own... [A]nd they must understand that any sellout who comes to power in Zimbabwe as an American or British puppet will not manage to rule the country. Never ever!

Moyo's language typifies the ruling party's sellout rhetoric: anyone in opposition to ZANU-PF, or working in civil society to expand civil liberties or workers' rights, must be a sellout to the Americans and British, and therefore any opposition politician or human rights lawyer or activist acts, not as a Zimbabwean, but as a sellout. In this sort of sellout logic, both the selling out of the country and the betrayal of the African nationalist history are implied. It is against this challenge that the MDC and its supporters have achieved a great deal by establishing their credentials in both urban and rural areas. However, the continuation of ZANU-PF violence during the GNU period also means that those working as teachers, lawyers, community organisers and so on, or anyone who expresses opinions that diverge from the ZANU-PF line, remain potential victims of sellout accusations and the associated violence (Magaisa 2010). Trade unionists and civil society activists also continue to receive threats of further violence, and often these threats are couched in terms of where they received their funding (Zimrights/ZLHR 2010).

As this chapter has shown, American support of the formation and survival of ZANU in 1963 presents an 'inconvenient truth' for those who continue to use the sellout logic as the litmus test for inclusion in Zimbabwean politics today. Joshua Nkomo, a month after the ZAPU-ZANU split was made public in 1963, raised an important question about sellout politics that, unfortunately, still remains relevant many years later. As Geren described Nkomo's speech:

Speaking to a crowd of 2 000 at Fort Victoria on September 7 1963, Joshua Nkomo again had some harsh words for the United States. According to press accounts, Nkomo said the United States will 'help us get the whites out' but with the aim afterwards of exploiting the country's mineral resources. Nkomo said that while he was in New York a few months ago he had visited the offices of an American mining company engaged in operations in Rhodesia. Nkomo said, 'The minerals are here, but so is the cheap labor... Patrice Lumumba died because he refused to sell the Congo to America...' Nkomo added, 'It does not matter about Sithole or Nkomo; but who is going to get our country back and not sell it to someone else.' He asked the crowd

if they wanted money from Britain, America or Russia, to which the crowd roared, 'No'. (Geren 1963e)

The question of 'getting the country back' still seems an appropriate one today. However, given the economic and political crises over the last ten years, the ruling elites are themselves open to such criticisms. As things stand at present, ZANU-PF and the ruling elites continue to control the violence that accompanies the sellout logic, making a true assessment of who is selling out the nation less important than the reality of political violence. As long as ZANU-PF can mobilise various forms of violence and intimidation against opposition leaders and their supporters and members of civil society, based on this older political category of sellouts that betray the cause, meaningful political change will remain a hostage to the sellout logic.

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## Zimbabwe's democracy of diminished expectations

*David B Moore and Brian Raftopoulos*

**THIS CHAPTER ATTEMPTS TO** examine the relationship in Zimbabwe between 'thin' liberal democracy – voting every few years on whether or not one section of the political elite should replace another – and a 'thicker' sort that would facilitate the gainful employment of millions of people as a minimal result of a project and process with social justice, economic reconstruction *and* democratic participation at its core. We wonder: after more than a decade of political and socio-economic crisis is there anything left of the hope for renewed democracy so evident at its beginning?

This period, generally called 'the Zimbabwean crisis', consisted of a combination of political and economic decline that, while it was rooted in the long-term structural political-economic legacies of colonial rule combined with the legacies of African nationalist politics, exploded onto the scene in the face of a major threat to the political future of the ruling party ZANU-PF. In multiple ways the crisis became manifest through confrontations over

- ◆ land and property rights; contestations over the history and meanings of nationalism and citizenship;
- ◆ the emergence of critical civil society groupings campaigning around trade union, human rights and constitutional questions;
- ◆ the restructuring of the state in more authoritarian forms;
- ◆ the broader Pan-African and anti-imperialist meanings of the struggles in Zimbabwe;
- ◆ the cultural representations of the crisis in Zimbabwean arts and literature; and
- ◆ the central role of Robert Mugabe. (Raftopoulos 2009a)

We think hopes arising from the crisis for either, and both, thin and thick forms of democracy are very dim at the present. The form of 'elite-pacting' that evolved and developed into the 'interim transitional government' in 2009 may snap the creative tension between thin and thick democracy that has been so stretched

during Zimbabwe's nearly three decades of 'majority rule'. As the GNU draws to a close, it is probable that either a very thin form of liberal democracy will ensue or a pretence towards it will disappear altogether in favour of a more overt form of authoritarianism than ever. Perhaps both extremes could be captured by a new term arising from analyses of stalemated democratic processes in Africa. 'Electoral authoritarianism' may be the order of the day in post-GNU Zimbabwe (Cheeseman & Tendi 2010; Cliffe 2009).

In 2012, at the level of thin democracy, almost anybody with access to the real counts in all the elections since 2000 knows that the numbers accepted by just about everybody else are wrong: ZANU-PF has, as well as resorting to gross brutality to maintain its rule, counted its own ballots and rigged other aspects of the electoral system managed by Mugabe's civil appointees ranging from the Attorney General's Office to the heads of the Grain Marketing Board, Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority, National Railways of Zimbabwe and military personnel. It was only the posting of ballots outside the polling stations that made this cheating impossible for the March 2008 'harmonised' elections, which included MPs and senators to the houses of parliament, municipal posts and the presidency (Booyesen & Toulou 2009).

Even then the ruling party spent five weeks fudging the results eventually released, thus setting the groundwork for the presidential runoff, followed by the Global Political Agreement and the GNU. A man whose party's violence during the presidential run-off of June 2009 was so excessive that MDC leader and presidential candidate Morgan Tsvangirai withdrew in order to save his party members' lives remained president in a government entrusted with generating a new constitution and economic recovery. It was a compromise born of attrition and stalemate, neither a victory nor a defeat. For

ZANU-PF the GNU was a means to seek a way out of the economic malaise they had created and to reach out for a broader political legitimacy, [while] the MDC accepted the agreement as its only viable route to state power, and the chance to initiate a process of national economic and political recovery. (Raftopoulos 2009b)

It was, however, a victory for the idea that losers can maintain power if they administer careful doses of violence, or unleash 'uncivil' dashes of it, established in Kenya in early 2008. So too can smaller parties with a much less popular mandate but whose pivotal seats in parliament make them king/deal makers.

This is the case for the breakaway split from the MDC led publicly by Arthur Mutambara (the 'traditional' MDC is now called MDC-T while Mutambara's party is labelled MDC-M). With 10 seats the new party had some purchase on the negotiations leading to the GNU (Eppel & Raftopoulos 2008).

The fact that the MDC-T was tasked with going abroad in the quest for aid – the test for international legitimacy for economy-less states – and the ‘end of sanctions’ means that the claim to sovereignty, another litmus test of ‘thin democracy’, has been reduced to the ability to carry a begging bowl around the world for a regime not trusted by countries with capital. Robert Mugabe remained with the right to proclaim against the ‘imperialists’, but ironically sent those he called Great Britain’s tea-boys abroad in search of billions for recovery – and to promise to pay back the debt he incurred. This task must have been as odious as the debt itself.

Also in the realm of ‘sovereignty’, the fact that the former president of South Africa, Thabo Mbeki, was to a large extent responsible for pushing the settlement forward in conjunction with reluctant Zimbabwean politicians further indicated the problems of democracy and sovereignty in Zimbabwe (Raftopoulos 2008). The Zimbabwean decade of democratic diminishment made it clear, too, that the possibilities of democratic reconstruction were now as much in the hands of a dialectic between regional and global powers and a ‘global civil society’ making its way in through ‘humanitarian plus’ aid projects, as in the balance of political forces at national level (Jacoby 2007; Moore 2007a; Raftopoulos 2010). That civil society could speak only rhetorically about the poor possibilities of the GNU gives further evidence in support of this argument (Moore 2008a).

At the level of ‘thick’ democracy (let’s call it social democracy), Zimbabwe represents disaster (Barber 2004). ‘Thick’ democracy entails ‘the people’s’ ability to make their government *at the very least* ‘level the playing field’ of class (and gender)-related disadvantages of birth so individuals can ‘compete’ fairly in a market-mediated state-society complex, and *at the most* moves society toward ‘equality’ not only of opportunity but outcome. In 2009 Zimbabwe had no currency of its own. Its mortality rates of the mid-thirties were among Africa’s lowest. A cholera epidemic in late 2008 and early 2009 heralded the fastest rate of infection in modern world history (Physicians for Human Rights 2009). Its working class was completely decimated (Chagonda 2012). Public works infrastructure was severely eroded and dysfunctional. The peasantry was either supported by humanitarian food aid or by mainly subsistence plots gained in the ‘fast track land reform’ that was one of the main causes of the general crisis. In the absence of manipulated exchange rates for its dollars, Zimbabwe’s ZANU-PF ‘bourgeoisie’ resorted to a warlord mode of production – gold and diamonds being mined by informal and ‘formal’ soldiers, the gains of which were channelled through ZANU-PF ministries far removed from the official treasury, under the *de jure* but far from real control by the MDC-T (Rogers 2009; Weidlich 2009). Finally, its state could receive ‘aid’ only in the ‘humanitarian plus’ package, meaning the state was not trusted to manage it, while some NGOs lobbied parliament advocating for constitutional reform.

The long crisis in Zimbabwe generated fundamental changes in the perspectives of oppositional (and even ruling party) actors and their regional and international counterparts regarding the nature of democracy in both its political and socio-economic senses. Compared to the mid-1990s, the early years of the 2000s saw a diminished sense of what could be achieved in either of these realms, and in the connections between them. In both left and right, among both 'socialists' and capitalists, and political scientists and actors, an economism and a narrow politicism emerged. That the twain between them met less and less meant there were even fewer chances of their linking and broadening. This process was concomitant with international currents that were also narrowed in their 'neo-liberal' economism. Politically, there seemed less confidence than before in liberal constitutionalism. This politics was increasingly replaced by either a muscular militarism or anodyne 'governance-ism', only sometimes flaring out in ephemeral if enthusiastic encouragements of 'Orange Revolutions' and Arab Springs on the peripheries of important regional powers (Carothers 2003; 2009).

These currents meshed with those in Zimbabwe as, inevitably, international and regional forces played in the game that has millions of Zimbabweans caught in its moves as they are further and further repressed and marginalised by both global and local curbs to their democratic desires (unless one believes that joining the global diasporas who send 'revolutionary remittances' home to increasingly dollarised economies is something to be heralded as 'progress').

In the interregnum, 'leftist' political economy discourse has been either too narrowly focused on land and mythologising those who apparently re-possessed it, or on a structuralist/welfarist vision either reverting to a racially modified Rhodesian type of developmental capitalist state or a rose-tinted view on Zimbabwe of the 1980s (Moyo and Yeros 2005, 2007a, 2007b; Moore 2004b, 2007b; Raftopoulos 2006b).

On the political side of the fence there are human rights advocates who concern themselves only with first-generation rights, with constitutions, with the ballot-box or with technocratic notions of 'good governance'. How can these sides of the democratic question be brought back together, to a time when the Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU) and the students seemed to see all these elements of democracy as inextricably intertwined and ineluctably marching forward? How can Zimbabwe reach back to the most vibrant moments, and the analyses emanating therefrom, of similarly revolutionary moments in history, such as those of the French revolution? Then it was clear to many that

the freedom of a nation is the product of two elements: the equality which its laws create in the conditions and enjoyments of the citizens, and the fullest extension of their political rights. The second is no substitute for the first...  
(Dunn 2005: 125)

This chapter will present an historical analysis of this transition. We hope to generate a political economy perspective bringing back some of the links between political and socio-economic democracy that have become severed in the past decade or more. Since then, perspectives on the economy and the polity have become narrowed in such a way that ideas about alternatives in the former have become more 'liberal' than ever in terms of the market alone. In the latter, notions of expansive participation have disappeared into the vapour while notions of the orderly transition of power – even within ZANU-PF alone! – have become paramount just as, ironically, without the strong participation of the 'masses' they become less and less possible as the spirals of conflict turn inward to ZANU-PF and even the MDC (Raftopoulos 2006a). The diminution of democracy in both spheres, held to nearly equally (but in different realms) by local and international actors alike, means that new (or remodelled) forms of a combination of free-marketism and authoritarianism are most likely to arise in Zimbabwe's new dispensation.

The repression ZANU-PF has incorporated into the Zimbabwean body politic has left Zimbabwe ripe for a corporatist or neo-liberal rebuilding, instead of the 'revolution' some of its intellectual apologists have hoped for. This would mean that those who thought the 'land invasions' heralded a radical new beginning for the millennium have actually worked towards a reinvention of a (Samuel) Huntingtonian dream: the new ZANU-PF may be able to implement an 'order' that will clamp down on democracy from below and implement a new regime of accumulation superimposed on a pliant peasantry – the only question being whether or not the property rights incorporated into the system will be those arbitrated by whoever is in the state or through forms of tenure secure for all. In it, 'politics' will be reduced to the most basic mechanisms of 'succession' within one ruling party. State-led industrial development will be a non-starter as Zimbabwe returns to its pre-1940s status as a supplier of minerals and perhaps some food and tobacco to the world market: the class most likely to bring progressive political and economic change will remain miniscule, unlikely to grow from the degradations of both the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and the Murambatsvina moments (Moore 2008a). This turns 'democratic development' theory decades back, when the Americans' 'modernisation' debates on democracy and order were settled in favour of the latter (Cruise O'Brien 1972; Binder 1986).

Against such a scenario even minimal forms of democracy are well-nigh revolutionary. So many people are expecting so little from the present conjuncture that even a little bit of thin democracy may inspire a re-invoking of more radical change – thus invoking the risk, for the powers that be, that even democratic inches lead to social-democratic miles (Chikwanha et al. 2004; Moore 2005a). If even thin democracy recedes into the distance the potential for a progressive political economy of democracy, so apparent in the mid-1990s, will have been lost almost irretrievably. To understand how a form of democracy that pays equal attention to socio-economic

and ‘civil’ dimensions can be imagined again, it is necessary to see how they have become unravelled in the past decade or so in Zimbabwe – in the context of their post-Cold War intertwining and separation (thickening and thinning) in Africa and further afield.

This chapter will try to analyse the movements and counter-movements in Zimbabwe, its region and the international system, towards and against a strong and ‘popular’ form of democracy that equally combines socio-economic and civil rights concerns – indeed, that *cannot conceive* of them as separate.

We will take an historical political economy approach, analysing the development of civil society (the unions, students, civic organisations and even the ‘war veterans’) and more traditionally defined political movements since approximately 1990 in their relationships to the state, regional and international entities (Eppel & Raftopoulos 2008; Raftopoulos 2009b; Moore 2008a, 2008b, 2009 *Cape Times*). Care will be taken to ‘mark’ significant shifts in the democratic discourse of these movements, organisations, agencies, parties and state apparatuses in relation to the political economy of alterations in them, with a view to charting the diminishing expectations attributed to the concept. Finally, we will attempt to theorise ways in which the current conjuncture allows the means by which the content of democracy may be deepened once again.

Thus we will try to assess the reasons for democracy’s diminishment and what might be the means for it to be remade. In so doing we are forced to reconsider the way in which ‘democracy’ has been constructed by all the actors – Zimbabwean and international – concerned with analysing Zimbabwe’s crisis and making it turn into opportunity instead of tragedy, if not farce. We will conclude that there have been serious misconceptions from all sides on the issue of ‘democratisation’ in Africa in the confused ‘post-structural adjustment’ age. Many of these misapprehensions are based on the illusion that underdeveloped societies simply need ‘freedom’ in the form of markets and liberal democracy to overcome their negative colonial and post-colonial legacies. As Christopher Cramer comments, we should know by now that ‘*laissez-faire* economic policies have (n)ever been the bedrock of successful economic development and “catching up” with those countries that industrialised earlier’ – and successful, relatively equitable economic development is necessary to give democracy much social meaning (Cramer 2006a, 2006b). All too often, political policies follow this ‘catch up via *laissez-faire*’ path, the maps being drafted in the advanced capitalist world. Theory and practice in both the political and economic dimensions (not that it is really possible to disentangle them in the first place: and this is arguably the root of the dilemma) must merge into a political economy of democratic development that accepts the challenge of a strong and accountable state that is a far cry from ZANU-PF’s authoritarian politics. As this legacy has become ever more deeply entrenched it is simultaneously more



difficult and more necessary to replace it with radical new perspectives going far beyond ZANU-PF's litany of 'the land is the economy' (Moore 2001).

Below are seven themes for a research agenda to trace the diminishment of democracy in Zimbabwe during the last decade:

1. *Origins*: Is there anything about the 'birth' of the first substantial political opposition to Robert Mugabe's ZANU-PF that had within it the seeds of its diminishment?
2. *Squashing*: By which strategies and tactics did ZANU-PF attempt to destroy the democratic forces in Zimbabwe? How successful has it been? What have been their long-term effects?
3. *Self-destruction*: What were and are the problems with the opposition – including both 'civil society' and the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC)?
4. *Sovereignty*: What is the effect of the ideology and practice of 'sovereignty' on democratic (and authoritarian) praxis in Zimbabwe?
5. *Donated democracy*: What are the consequences of 'Western' assistance to Zimbabwean democratic forces? Were there special attributes to this process in Zimbabwe?
6. *Neighbours*: How have South Africa and other African states contributed to the demise of democracy in Zimbabwe?
7. *Negotiated pacts*: Do arrangements such as the GNU Zimbabwe-style diminish democracy in Zimbabwe?

For the purposes of this chapter, the first decade of the 2000s is sufficient for this task (although this period of time barely scratches the surface of Zimbabwe's *longue durée* of democratic advances and retreats [Moore 2003a & 2003b]). We proceed to analyse the categories we have developed, aware that research is only in the earliest of stages.

## Origins

By 'the opposition' we mean a combination of 'civil society' and party-political forces (Moore 2008c). The opposition arose in Zimbabwe in a context of the increased inequalities consistent with the catalysed emergence of a finance-capital driven 'bourgeoisie' created with the ESAPs (Bond 1998; Carmody 2001; Gibbon 1995). The Zimbabwean Congress of Trade Unions and students gained critical consciousness and demonstrable strength from the mid-1980s through this ESAP period.

By the end of 1997 several key economic indicators pointed to the challenges facing the state: as a percentage of gross domestic income, the share of wages dropped

from 54% in 1987 to 39% in 1997, while the ratio of profit increased from 47% to 61% during the same period; real wages dropped from an index of 100.6 in 1985–1990 to 86.0 in 1996–1999; employment growth declined from an index of 2.4 to 1.5 and inflation increased 11.6 to 32.6 during this same period; poverty levels increased from 40.4% in 1990–1991 to 63% in 1996 (Kanyenze & Chiripanhura 2001).

Moreover, the involvement of the Zimbabwe government in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) in 1998, while initially part of an SADC attempt to stabilise the security situation, found increasing motivation in the economic opportunities offered by the engagement. In particular, the state encouraged entrepreneurs to penetrate the DRC market, citing the ‘attractiveness of low-cost, commercially useful, networks’ established by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces (Nest 2001). The cost of involvement in the DRC added to the failures of the structural adjustment programme by the end of the 1990s. The increasing imbalance between growth and equity, domestic development and export promotion and the declining possibility of developing a social contract between state, capital and labour under such conditions led to an impasse over future development strategy. The result was, as Dansereau observes, that the ruling party ‘retreated into repression, isolation and a strategy aimed at the support of an economic elite close to the ruling party, using the state to eliminate barriers to its expansion’ (Dansereau 2005: 25).

The long public service strike of 1996, bringing civil servants in with the ZCTU, may have indicated the peak of worker militancy (Raftopoulos 2001). As a new generation of professional petty-bourgeois actors with ideologies ranging from liberal to Trotskyist converged with this, a class and generational conjuncture allowed for the beginning of oppositional forces.

However, another ‘civil society’ group arose concurrently with this, on the ‘other side’ of that socio-political formation (Moore 2008c). In the eighties, after a small ‘demob’ payment which was often dispersed quickly, the war veterans established a ‘welfare organisation’, the Zimbabwe National Liberation War Veterans’ Association (ZNLWVA) by 1987, of which Mugabe was the patron. It soon lobbied for a pension programme, the War Victims’ Compensation Fund, to pay veterans for injuries sustained in the liberation war. By 1995, Dr Chenjerai ‘Hitler’ Hunzvi, who had trained in Poland while with the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Party (ZIPRA), gained favour with veterans by widening the programme beyond the ‘privileged few’ who were accessing it at first (Chirimbawe 2005). He signed papers certifying many false injuries, and became director of ZNLWVA.

When the extensive fraud involved in these claims was revealed, the ‘war vets’ lost legitimacy in society at large. Mugabe suspended the scheme in March 1997. In April the ZNLWVA waged a wide campaign of demonstrations to revive the deal. Mugabe promised to answer to claims on a case-by-case basis but refused to meet the association. By May, the demonstrations were becoming more violent.

This process followed the year in which the ZCTU allowed striking civil servants, who had almost paralysed the nation in 1996, to join it. It was casting its net widely, and indeed the possibility of an alliance between the ZNLWVA and the working class was possible: Hunzvi and Morgan Tsvangirai made an agreement that the ZCTU would support the war veterans' claims – but the cost would not be passed on to the workers (interview with Morgan Tsvangirai, August 2004). At this time, the possibility of the 'war vets' claim for a large pension, regardless of injuries, was widely discussed. One high-level Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation manager told one of the authors that he understood that the World Bank would pay the pension in order to ease the strain on a structural-adjustment-friendly client (interview, Harare, January 1997).

The question of land reform was debated at the highest levels: a commission of inquiry was struck – reporting regularly to retired General (but power behind the scenes) Solomon Mujuru – to be met by negative comments that 'this cannot be afforded now' (interview Harare, July 2007). A July 1997 protest disrupted a Zimbabwean/African-American business conference. Hunzvi organised a demonstration at the August 11 Heroes' Day celebration, drowning out Mugabe's speech with drums and chants (Chirombowe 2005). The minister of Labour and Welfare was almost forced off the road by a group of veterans. Then Mugabe sent cabinet ministers to provinces to meet ZNLWVA member to discuss grievances. They were often held hostage and then sent away.

The fateful meeting was held later in August. Reliable sources say that veterans held retired Air Force Marshall Josiah Tungamirai hostage for this meeting, while others say that Didymus Mutasa was held too.

Agrarian political economist Sam Moyo said in the United-Nations-operated Integrated Regional Information Network interview that the meeting was held 'more or less at gunpoint' (IRIN 2001). There is no doubt that the 'negotiators' were allowed into State House by the Presidential Guard, so at some level members of the security apparatus acceded to the meeting. In any case, the negotiators were promised ZWD50 000 (then about USD5 000) as a once-off payment, and a monthly pension of ZWD2 000 (then about USD200, it was increased to ZWD5 000 in 2001, but of course high inflation had eaten much of that away). The total cost, unbudgeted, was ZWD4.5 billion.

The war vets also demanded that land be redistributed according to the promises of the past, and that they would get 20 per cent of that. The agreement was gazetted in parliament in September. In November, it was announced in parliament that 1 471 farms would be taken, recompensed as decided by the state. The Zimbabwean dollar lost 75 per cent of its value and Zimbabwe started on its downward spiral.

Soon after, the war vets – perhaps in conjunction with the security apparatus of the state (i.e. the Central Intelligence Organisation), but in any case with a see-saw relationship with it – began a small campaign of land invasions (Sadomba 2008). By early 1998 an international donor conference was called to see if a workable reform plan could be hammered out. Mugabe hoped to raise 1.5 billion Zimbabwe dollars for a five-year programme of resettling 150 000 families on 5 million hectares of land. The conference failed: the UK and US governments refused to fund the programme on the grounds that it would not alleviate poverty; it failed to respect property rights and it was far too statist for the NGO and civil society approaches they favoured (McCandless 2001) – or perhaps Zimbabwe’s support for Laurent Kabila in the Democratic Republic of the Congo’s Second War had soured the ‘West’. Interestingly, the World Bank was quite enthusiastic about funding a new phase of land reform. With the conference’s failure, the ruling party was left with very few options on the land issue to which it was increasingly tying its fate, and Mugabe’s source of partners dwindled even further.

Just as the war veterans were exercising their power, the civil society groups joining together to challenge the constitution enabling the continuation of one man in power were encouraged by overseas funding (Rich-Dorman 2003). Formed as an initiative from the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and with a membership comprising religious organisations, trade unions, professional associations, grassroots structures, media bodies, academic institutions and business, women’s, students’ and human rights organisations, the National Constitutional Assembly (NCA) contributed to a seismic shift in the development of opposition politics after 1997 (McCandless 2011; Rich-Dorman 2003).

On the basis of seed funding provided by the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung the NCA set out its primary objectives in a meeting in August 1997 prior to its 1998 official launch (NCA 1998). These objectives included:

- ◆ to initiate and engage in a process of enlightening the general public on the current constitution in Zimbabwe;
- ◆ to identify shortcomings of the current constitution and to organise debate on possible constitutional reform;
- ◆ to organise the constitutional debate in a way which allows a broad-based participation;
- ◆ to subject the constitution-making process to popular scrutiny with a view to entrenching the principles that constitutions are made by, and for, the people;
- ◆ and generally to encourage a culture of popular participation in decision making. (NCA 1997)

Whether or not this was coincidental, the possibility of an alliance between a working-class organisation and something that *could have* become a peasant-based organisation

was foiled at this moment, and the unions became – temporarily at least – enmeshed in a project much more amenable to liberalism. When the Movement for Democratic Change was formed on 11 September 1999 – after a ‘workers conference’ in February that started the party ball rolling – the possibilities of a worker-peasant alliance were less than ever before. When (admittedly progressive) white farmers joined and actively assisted the MDC, the ire of ZANU-PF’s old guard must have increased exponentially. And, of course, any sign of foreign assistance would lead to accusations of imperialist puppetry. Paranoid tendencies were reinforced by reality. The early 2000 constitutional referendum results (ZANU-PF’s first effective electoral defeat) were seen, as one war vet put it, as a ‘clarion call’ signalling the intent of the ‘imperialists and running dogs’ (interview with Crispin Matawire, March 2005). The ‘war vets’ were ready to ratch up their commitment to work hand in hand with the state to take more farms than the few taken between 1998 and then.

Multiple questions arose out of that moment:

- ◆ Was there something about the class and organisational nature of the original moment of the ‘opposition’s’ formation that had within it the seeds of diminishment?
- ◆ Was there any chance that the organised workers, the professionals, the independently oriented bourgeoisie and the human and socio-economic rights oriented components of civil society could have made alliances with the ‘war vets’ and some segments of ZANU-PF?
- ◆ Could this have eliminated the opportunity of the ‘war vets’ and the state forming a potent alliance based on coercion for anyone but its core?
- ◆ What about the peasants and chiefs: wooed (and coerced, but not as much as urbanites) assiduously by Mugabe but not enough by the MDC or donors?

Hindsight does not change what has eventuated, of course, but trying to discover why some alliances formed and others did not might allow one to see which ones could be *reformed* and even *transformed*. Clearly, for example, whoever gains relatively straightforward power after the GNU – be it ‘legitimate’ or not – will still have to work on relations with the new peasant farmers unless they are meant to remain as subsistence producers selling a little surplus to the market.

## Squashing (a) Politics

When one examines the reports of the many human rights abuse monitoring agencies concerning themselves with Zimbabwe, one sees the clever use of ‘low intensity’ violence by the ruling party and its state apparatuses in efforts to stave off their losses of power (Zimbabwe Human Rights Watch 2007). More

(internationally) visible manifestations of violence encompass events from June 2005's Operation Murambatsvina to the 'March 11' (2007) attacks on the 'Save Zimbabwe Campaign' marchers, which included the death of youth organiser Gift Tandare. In the latter action Morgan Tsvangirai suffered the infliction of huge gashes on his head, and MDC activists Sekai Holland and Grace Kwinjeh among many others suffered extreme beatings.

This marked the beginning of an increase in repression over the next few months with Human Rights Watch documenting '49 hospitalisations and more than 175 lesser medical treatments resulting from politically motivated assaults by security forces [including] six gunshot wounds – one of them fatal' in April and May 2007 (Human Rights Watch 2007).

In later months, students were especially targeted: in October 2007 Edison Hlatshwayo, secretary general of the Great Zimbabwe University Students' Union in Masvingo, was gaoled for more than two weeks, with no access to his lawyers, following a meeting of the Zimbabwe Youth Forum at which he was arrested on charges of 'malicious injury to property' and assault (Makiwa, *sw Radio* 2007).

At about the same time, the entire student leadership at the National University of Science and Technology in Bulawayo was in hiding from the Central Intelligence Organisation. They had sent Robert Mugabe a petition informing him that on October 12 2007 he would be 'capping half-baked graduands at the 13th Graduation Ceremony'. This was because these students had 'attended lectures for less than 30 percent of their stipulated learning time' due to his 'government's failure to address the multifaceted socio-economic and political crisis bedevilling our beloved Zimbabwe'. They wrote that they were 'gravely concerned by your government's treatment of student activists and human rights defenders. Thousands of students are either expelled, suspended, arbitrarily arrested, detained tortured or killed for demanding better education' (Khumalo 2007).

A few months before, two students who had been kidnapped by suspected Central Intelligence Organisation agents were found about 200 kilometres outside of Bulawayo, 'with severe bruises on their bodies following a night of torture at the hands of state security agents'. Trust Nhubu, one of the students, said this night of torture was the consequence of his speaking out at a public meeting about government corruption (Sibanda 2007).

Consistent with the pattern of slacking off on violence in immediate pre-election phases, the March 2008 election was less brutal than the last election, but with the fear of losing palpably in June 2008 the ruling party executed a mini-*Gukurahundi*. More than one hundred MDC activists were killed and 1 500 wounded (Alexander & Tendi 2008).

The pattern, save in the second 'election' in 2008, was predictable. In the months before an expected election ZANU-PF would mete out severe violence to

opposition forces. This would taper off during the weeks immediately preceding the election, when various observation missions would visit. During the election itself, much cheating would take place during the voting and the counting (Bond & Moore 2005). The MDC would contest the results in the courts, which would take a long time.

As a new set of elections would appear on the horizon, there would be much discussion about whether or not the opposition would participate, leading to tensions within it. The infiltrated Central Intelligence Organisation members would report every word. In the lead-up to the new elections, regional powers would be engaged in much debate about how to make the elections 'free and fair'. The ruling party would be able to combine blatant, but carefully distributed, sticks of violence with the carrots of electoral opportunity – only to grab the latter away as the opposition came near to eating more than a few of them. Little seemed to have changed within the 'inclusive government' created by the Global Political Agreement (GPA) arising out of the electoral travesty of 2008, in spite of the fact that the MDC parties were part of the government while also in opposition, and the 'road map' traced in the GPA was held on to with tremulous will by the South African-led SADC facilitation initiative.

The question is how (and why) does ZANU-PF (and Mugabe) do it? ZANU-PF is riven with division itself – indeed this is one reason why Mugabe does not leave, given that he fears *après moi, la deluge* as the party's factions would self-destruct even more than with him at the helm (Moore 2005c).

At the December 2009 party congress, Mugabe blamed the loss of the 2008 harmonised elections on 'factionalism'. A move from the floor to eliminate the ethnic grounds of the presidium's appointments was deferred, as were many other amendments. The discourse of one anonymous insider about these diversions was interesting in its use of concepts usually applied to ZANU-PF from *outside* rather than within: 'all of this [deferment] is because of the leadership's fear of a revolt from people who wanted to challenge what is now common practice by the leadership to subvert internal democracy' (Nyathi 2009). Perhaps ZANU-PF's internal politics are leading to a desire for more democracy from within as well as without.

It is 'common knowledge' that the ruling party is balanced roughly between two factions. By late 2009, sources indicated that the faction led by retired general and liberation war military leader Solomon Mujuru (whose wife Joice was the vice-president, ostensibly but by no means certainly next in line) was slightly ahead of Emmerson Mnangagwa's (some of whose supporters were expelled when found to be 'plotting' in advance of the 2004 party congress). The allegiance of other smaller groups with characteristics ranging from ethnicity to 'generation' (including participation or not in the war of liberation) and policy preference (there being indications of differences of opinion over the issue of productivity on farms) was not clear (Muleya 2007). With Solomon Mujuru's death-by-burning in August 2011,

internal ZANU-PF politics were turned asunder: the top echelons of the military were seen to have entered the fray with a vengeance.

In the midst of such uncertainty, even more pretenders climbed onto the stage: recently one of them was discovered to have consulted on his chances for leadership with a *nganga* who proclaimed herself a discoverer of oil. When Mugabe discovered this, he was infuriated and threatened to fire the cabinet minister.

A certain amount of desperation accounts for ZANU-PF's hanging on past a modicum of decency. Many of its members fear a truth and justice commission, which would open the wounds of *Gukurahundi* and possibly open an exploration of its history going back to the nether regions of the liberation war, including Chitepo's assassination (White 2003), Tongogara's death by car accident (Zimbabwe Democracy Now 2009) and the fraudulent charges of 'rebellion' against the *vashandi* and the Gumbo-Hamadzaripi challenges during the liberation war in the late 1970s. Many others are so tied to Mugabe and the inner circles by networks of corruption that they can see only ill-fortune if a new ruling party comes into power.

Thus ZANU-PF's holding on to power well beyond its sell-by date is *in and of itself* detrimental to the democratic process: as the party rots, the wider process gets even worse. It is clear that ZANU-PF's lack of a succession policy is in itself a drawback to democratic procedures: this too probably goes back in history to the mid-1975s, when Mugabe climbed to the top during a very tension-ridden conjuncture. He, and only he, can read the entrails correctly, it seems. Such a situation is reminiscent of feudalism. ZANU-PF's consistent threats to cut the transitional inclusive government short and call elections foreshadow a repeated repression-filled election, the fig-leaf hiding the authoritarianism which structures Zimbabwe's deepening democratic deficit.

## Squashing (b) The economy

Some scholars theorise that 'Africa works' for its leaders through an almost deliberate economic disenfranchisement process (Chabal & Daloz 1999). Poor and illiterate peasants are reliant on their chiefs for patronage, and the chain goes upward to the politicians in power whose links with external forces are stronger than with their own. This particular social formation is 'extraverted' too, so most economic and political chains are oriented to the outside of local political economies in a relationship which is beneficial for the elites embedded in global networks (Bayart 2000).

In this perspective, Zimbabwe's hyperinflation (until the currency disappeared), starving peasants on the land they 'reclaimed' which is now at the beck and call of warlords big and small, its parallel currency market enriching



those with access to foreign exchange at the official rate (so it can be traded at its real value around the corner, creating instant billionaires), its best and brightest forced overseas for reasons of repression and sheer economic compulsion, its hordes of goods available for party supporters in the midst of starvation for perhaps a quarter of the population, and its arbitrary price-cutting, is just becoming what 'neo-patrimonial Africa' always has been. Its small niche of Weberian and capitalist rationality began to disappear as soon as majority rule arrived: it was speeded up when the biggest patronage deal of all was signed with the war vets in late 1997, and when they started invading the commercial farms it keeled over and died. When the privilege of an official exchange rate disappeared with the end of Zimbabwe's own currency, the 'big men' of Zimbabwe's ruling party became warlords, selling their ill-gotten diamonds and gold direct to shady characters of Middle Eastern heritage.

We are not comfortable with this theory, given its culturalist and even racist over- and undertones. As a start it may be better to conceive of the economic mess as the result of the deals made between the political leadership proper with 'interest groups' such as the war vets (Kriger 2003), combined with a theory of 'primitive accumulation with a (racial) twist' that sees the emergence of an African bourgeoisie in the context in which private property rights (one of the two roots of capitalist transformation – the other being proletarianisation) have been racially demarcated since the colonial interlude (Moore 2001, 2003b, 2004a, 2004b). There is still some debate about whether this process amounts more to narrow 'personal accumulation' than to 'primitive accumulation' in the more widely understood sense (Davies 2004). However, this discussion at least opens up the opportunity to locate the crisis in broader processes of class formation in a peripheral state (Mawowa & Moore 2010).

With 'fast-track' land reform transferring plots to over 130 000 small African farmers and a few thousand middling yeoman farmers, this theory would posit the beginning of an agrarian revolution. The construction of a new bourgeoisie and the replacement of one system of tenure with another are not easy processes, and indeed happen behind the backs of most of their protagonists (aside from the fact that many people make enormous amounts of money and many, many more starve and are brutally repressed). In the meantime, though, the state can and does destroy its class enemies economically as well as politically, an example being legislation passed to ensure that all economic enterprises are majority owned by 'historically disenfranchised' Zimbabweans. Will such acts create the bourgeoisie that modernisation theory dreams about? It is unlikely, but the notion of 'progress' should not be dispensed in its entirety (Moore, Kriger and Raftopoulos 2012). In the meantime it looks as if the *democratic* component of the bourgeois revolution – which came in the heartlands of capitalism with the bourgeoisie fighting against feudal restrictions and workers simultaneously fighting for civil and socio-economic

rights (which expanded in tandem as a victory in one realm led to more in the other) – is not developing in Zimbabwe as it ‘should’.

The process of primitive accumulation never repeats itself exactly – and of course in many cases it fails completely, creating frozen articulations of modes of production with the many morbid symptoms of long interregnums, of which Gramsci was so aware as fascism closed in on his world (Scarnecchia 2006).

## Opposition’s self-destruction

As noted above, the MDC has split into two factions over the issue of whether or not to run in the Senate elections, one led by Morgan Tsvangirai and the other by former student leader and scientist Arthur Mutambara. The roots, however, are in conflict between former Secretary-General Welshman Ncube and a supposed ‘kitchen cabinet’ around Morgan Tsvangirai. This conflict may have roots in tribal divisions as well as in how this ‘kitchen cabinet’ failed to follow constitutional rules about the participation of all executive committee members in important decisions. Indeed, Tsvangirai overruled a vote on whether or not the senate elections should be entered, and misinformed the press about this (Raftopoulos 2006a). A meeting in early 2006 clarified that

the division in the MDC had solidified and the split in the party would be formalised at the forthcoming congresses of the different factions... the senate issue, that provided the pretext for the party divide, was not in itself the fundamental cause of the problems in the MDC. It was merely the site on which the different factions fought out long-standing problems of organisation, structure, accountability and strategy within the party. At the mediation meeting held in October 2005 to try to resolve the party crisis there was a consensus amongst the leadership that the senate issue was a ‘tactical difference’ and ‘a symptom of a disease.’ In the discussions that ensued at this meeting the issues raised centred around the problem of the parallel structure, the ‘mafia kitchen cabinet’, the growth of youth violence, attacks on the authority of the President, conflict and competition between the offices of the Presidency and the Secretary General with the resulting lack of implementation of party programmes, Tsvangirai’s perception of the ‘destructive’ effects of President Mbeki’s mediation efforts, infiltration by the regime’s Central Intelligence Organisation, and the perception that the division over the senate was based on tribal affiliation in the party. There was, of course, different emphasis on which problems had proved to be most destructive, with Tsvangirai stressing the undermining effects of

the Secretary General's office and arguing that the 'consensus leadership' at the top was not the most effective way to confront an authoritarian regime. Alternately, Ncube and three other members of the top six concentrated on the destructive effects of the 'kitchen cabinet' and the parallel structure on the elected structures of the party. (Raftopoulos 2006a: 24)

By mid-2007, after months, the two factions had come to an agreement about how to remarry, dividing senate seats proportionately and setting seats to be contested. According to Mutambara, however, Morgan Tsvangirai decided the deal would not stand (interview with Mutambara, August 2007). Public opinion seems solidly behind the original faction of the party. It would seem, however, that internal democratic processes have diminished considerably.

## Sovereignty and donated democracy

If patriotism is the last refuge of scoundrels, sovereignty may be the last fig-leaf of nearly naked emperors of 'quasi-states' (Jackson 1990). Mugabe uses the rhetoric of sovereignty relentlessly. It seems to have some resonance with his peers in equally poorly clothed states, although it is hard to judge whether the people of these states are as patriotic as their leaders would like. There is no doubt, however, that such rhetoric is full of hypocrisy, serving mostly to justify tarring opposition with the brush of 'imperialist puppets' and to make every effort to stop the foreign funding of human rights and democracy promotion. As Timothy Scarnecchia's archival work has shown, however, Mugabe has long known the need for foreign funding and other sorts of assistance: in a discussion in the early days of nationalism with an American consular official in Salisbury he said that no African nationalist party could do without foreign funding. The question was to 'ride the tiger without ending up inside' (Scarnecchia 2008). As Moore has found in the British National Archives and in interviews with British foreign policy-makers involved in southern Africa from the 1960s to the 1980s, Robert Mugabe enjoyed support from a significant faction of the UK's foreign policy complex (2005a, interviews with Dennis Grennan and other British diplomats, November 2008). The party devoted to 'liberating ourselves' was in fact dependent to a great degree on well-meaning foreigners and indeed the British state. It would hardly be surprising that the new generation of opposition would utilise such support too, given that the contemporary state is hardly more well-disposed to the idea of a vibrant opposition than was Ian Smith's.

Recognising the impossibility of 'liberating ourselves' in a dependent social formation, however, does not mean the contradictions thereof cannot be recognised too. The dialectic of democracy emerging between state and society is inevitably

'distorted' by interventions, be they benign or malignant in intent (De Waal 1997). Thus one must ask if the enthusiasm of democracy exporters should not be lessened somewhat. Perhaps it should be that efforts are made to separate state from civil society more carefully, as fraught a distinction as that is. However, when it is clear that imperialist states are supporting supposedly 'civil society' groups that are inextricably involved in 'politics', there is no doubt that the lessons of Graham Greene's *The Quiet American* should be heeded.

## Neighbours

The question of sovereignty also arises here. But surely, a minimalist move by the most powerful country in the continent to guarantee the simple act of a free and fair election (consider the SADC's Mauritius accord of August 2004) would be a breach of statist 'sovereignty' that would enable the *real* sovereignty of Zimbabweans to be enabled. Sovereignty and power, then, could be utilised in ways that would strengthen democracy rather than diminish it. Again, the interactions of states with states and regional elements of civil society (the strong interventions of the Congress of South African Trade Unions are noted here) are crucial and complex (Southern African Liaison Office 2009).

After the March 2007 events in Harare, Mbeki was mandated by the SADC to facilitate dialogue between the major political parties in Zimbabwe to create the conditions for broadly acceptable elections in the country that would, in Mbeki's words,

begin the process leading to the normalisation of the situation in Zimbabwe and the resumption of its development and reconstruction process intended to achieve a better life for all Zimbabweans on a sustained and sustainable basis. (Mbeki 2007)

After a long drawn-out process that involved distrust, recriminations between the parties, growing tension between Mbeki and Tsvangirai, disagreements within the ANC alliance in South Africa and continued diplomatic pressure from the West on the SADC, some progress was made by the end of 2007 towards creating conditions for reasonable elections in 2008. Though serious disagreements remained over the preconditions for free and fair elections, one key reform agreed on in the mediation was the requirement that voting results be posted outside polling booths to ensure greater transparency. This was to prove vital for the MDC in the March 2008 parliamentary, local government and presidential elections (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008).

The elections took place in the context of the SADC mediation and with relatively little violence. After more than a month's delay in the release of the

results, it became clear that for the first time in its 28 years in government ZANU-PF had lost its parliamentary majority. The combined MDC won 109 seats against ZANU-PF's 97, while the presidential vote failed to deliver a decisive winner with a 50 per cent plus one majority. Tsvangirai polled 47.9 per cent of the vote to Mugabe's 43.2 per cent.

ZANU-PF's loss was a result both of divisions in the party and its growing loss of legitimacy amongst the electorate. The defection of former stalwart Simba Makoni – encouraged by the South Africans – to stand as an independent presidential candidate showed the fissures in the ruling party and opened the political space for the election, even if it did not translate into a political victory for Makoni himself. It is hard to tell if the votes for Makoni meant losses for the MDC (MDC-M leader Arthur Mutambara decided not to run for president, lending his support to Makoni) or for ZANU-PF. Despite the fact that the combined MDC won the parliamentary elections, their divided participation probably prevented a larger victory.

It was, however, the violence preceding the presidential run-off at the end of June – about which Thabo Mbeki famously said 'what crisis?' – that plunged the country into further political uncertainty. The violence inflicted by the ruling party on the electorate, as punishment for its loss in the March election and as a warning against the repeat of such a vote, was the worst seen in the country since the *Gukurahundi* massacres in the mid-1980s. Directed by the Joint Operational Command of the armed forces, most of the violence took place in the three Mashonaland provinces, former strongholds of the ruling party – against many of the voters who chose ZANU-PF for parliament but not Mugabe for president (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008; Alexander & Tendi 2008). Faced with this widespread violence, MDC candidate Tsvangirai withdrew from the run-off, signalling a universal lack of recognition for Mugabe's resulting solo 'victory' (Chan 2011: 192–194; Tsvangirai & Bango 2011: 479–484).

The period between July and December was marked by further SADC attempts to bring finality to the mediation efforts, with strong criticisms from the West, as well as from church and civic bodies in Zimbabwe and the southern Africa region, about the perceived complicity of the SADC in not bringing stronger pressure to bear in ending Mugabe's rule. Both ZANU-PF and the two MDCs faced limited options outside of the mediation process. While the former retained the monopoly of coercive force in the country, it had little prospect of dealing with the unfolding economic and humanitarian disasters. The MDC, while strongly supported by the West and civic bodies in the region, continued to face suspicion in the SADC where regional governments, in spite of more signs of dissent than before, refused to go beyond Mbeki's quiet diplomacy strategy. The political settlement that was signed by the two MDCs and ZANU-PF under the SADC mediation on 11 September 2008 thus represented the outcome of this balance of forces and the threat of the deepening

political quagmire that was the likely alternative to such an agreement (Raftopoulos 2009a, 2009b & 2010). The terms of the agreement left Mugabe very much in control of the security apparatus of the state but also gave the MDC a share of political power in an envisaged Government of National Unity. It took another four months for the parties to agree on the final sharing of power, amidst more SADC summits and pressure from the West and the UN.

In January 2009 the political parties finally agreed to form a Government of National Unity. The agreement presented severe threats and opportunities, seemingly irresolvable contradictions and a small opening for moving beyond the political impasse.

## Negotiated pacts

There has been understandable speculation about the viability of this project, given the political differences between the parties and the history of ZANU-PF's political repression against the MDC. As if to emphasise these differences, the one major issue that delayed the formation of the GNU revolved around control of the Home Affairs ministry, and the operations of the Joint Operational Command which had become the de facto government in Zimbabwe since 2008 and probably before that. It should be noted, too, that across Africa (most notably in Kenya just before Zimbabwe's) negotiated pacts similar to Zimbabwe's are gaining legitimacy; an indication, perhaps, that democracy is deteriorating elsewhere as post-Cold War euphoria about the prospects for liberalism evaporates slowly (Cheeseman 2009; Cliffe 2009).

Zimbabwe's GNU came into play as a result of a combination of factors: the weakening of both ZANU-PF and the opposition, together with the social forces and civics that supported the MDC; the cataclysmic economic and humanitarian decline in the country; increasing pressure from SADC; and the growing international isolation of the Mugabe regime. Thus, as noted above, while for ZANU-PF the GNU was a means to seek a way out of the economic malaise they had created and to reach out for a broader political legitimacy, the MDC accepted the agreement as its only viable route to state power, and the chance to initiate a process of national economic and political recovery. All of these motives may lead either to a very long period of elite pacting – in which the two MDCs become attuned and accustomed to the style of ZANU-PF governance, and perhaps another 'GNU' – or a new dispensation on the other side of the first GNU, wherein, finally, a real albeit 'thin' democracy emerges with enough liberty to allow trade unions and other elements of civil society to find some traces of social and economic justice. Perhaps even the 'new farmers' will get enough inputs and infrastructure to lead an agrarian renewal.

The GNU has to confront some formidable economic constraints including:

- ◆ dollarisation and randisation of the economy;
- ◆ widespread poverty and breakdown of livelihoods in both the rural and urban areas;
- ◆ rapid informalisation of the economy;
- ◆ enormous food shortages; and
- ◆ a humanitarian disaster that has developed in the context of the breakdown of the health and educational services in the country.

The sovereignty that Mugabe constantly ranted over in the last decade is in tatters, and his anti-imperialist gestures have been replaced by a GNU desperately seeking international assistance. Thus one of the great ironies of Mugabe's so called 'anti-imperialist' politics has been to make Zimbabwe more vulnerable than ever to the dictates of international finance and aid, with the likelihood that South Africa will preside over the new macro-economic stabilisation programme that is likely to unfold in Zimbabwe.

For the international community, the big strategic question was whether or not to engage with a GNU in which Mugabe remains president and his security sector retain a monopoly over the means of coercion in the country. The donors have been hesitant to re-engage a government that they do not trust, and more importantly in which they don't wish to entrust their funds. Thus for many in the donor community the attitude has been a mixture of 'wait and see', taking small steps towards engagement and the provision of assistance in the humanitarian field, the designation of which was expanded to a formulation labelled 'humanitarian plus'.

A major area of leverage for the MDC in the GNU has been its promise to bring international assistance to the table, an important factor in the negotiations leading to the political agreement. Thus the future of the MDC in the GNU and in preparing for the next election depends on its capacity to deliver on this promise, and to help stabilise the economy sufficiently to allow for the confidence and hope of Zimbabweans to begin to grow. The new minister of finance, MDC-T's Tendai Biti, was in no doubt about what the failure to attract international economic assistance would mean for the country. In mid-March 2009 he warned that, unless international donors urgently inject cash into the government's treasury, 'the consequences will be dire, such as a military coup or civil unrest'. Continuing, he pleaded that 'our capacity to deliver is linked to economic stability and we need help'. In the meantime, 'humanitarian plus' initiatives portend a new form of state – one without a local government (Smith, *The Guardian* 2009).

There is little doubt therefore that the GNU is severely hamstrung by the extremities of the economic decline in the country. Moreover, the GNU has been told

that it can only expect new assistance from the international financial institutions if it pays the country's outstanding debt, a proposition as odious as the debt itself.

Under such conditions economic recovery will at best be painfully slow and the conditions of the poor in the country are likely to remain in dire straits for some time to come. Given the limitations and obstacles facing the MDC in the GNU, its partners in the civic movement need to work carefully to build political alliances and open political spaces in the country. Biti's fear about a military coup was real, with the MDC parties effectively in a face-off with the military. Thus the rightful demands from civil society for constitutional reform, opening up of media spaces, repeal of repressive legislation and the right to public association had to be made within a better understanding of the economic challenges in the country, as well as with a better strategy for building alliances in the region. Historically, the major civil society groups in Zimbabwe devoted too little attention to economic issues, as well as the importance of choosing the right language and messaging for advocacy in Africa. This changed towards the end of the period of Zimbabwe's crisis, but simultaneously the importance of these factors became more urgent, given the fragility of the political agreement. Both the civil society groups and the two MDCs needed to construct a careful 'struggle for position' in the Gramscian sense, in order to isolate the militarists in the state and buy some time to expand democratic possibilities in the country (Moore & Sanders 2008). This was, to say the least, an enormous challenge.

The larger question remains: can negotiated pacts supplement, rather than diminish, Zimbabwe's fragile democratic prospects? Civil society groups remain divided about how to respond to both the opportunities and continued threats of the GPA.

## Conclusion

At the close of the third election stolen by the ruling party since 2000, Moore and Taper Kapuya (2005) wrote a short article advancing the idea that there should be a careful joining of parliamentary and street-style politics. While that article was being written, Operation Murambatsvina was instigated, partially at least in response to government perceptions that some sort of urban insurrection was under way. We would not retreat from our recognition that democracy is always won through struggle, but we would caution against adventurism fuelled by enthusiastic exporters of 1960s American-style student revolution – the ultimate end of which would be far from the dreams of the Students for a Democratic Society or any notion of social justice. Lives lost for the cause of a form of 'libertarianism' too close to the simple freedoms advocated by Milton Friedman and Ayn Rand are not worth



their ephemeral moments of exaltation: lives lost in pursuit of aims closer to those in which certain elements of 'freedom' are voluntarily foresworn for the public interest (Polanyi 2008) are not easier to handle in the short term, so it takes much planning to forestall them – but they are worth much more. Theory and practice must rest on the difference – which is getting wider as Zimbabwe's democracy is diminished further.

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## POSTSCRIPT

### Imagining a different Zimbabwe

*Levi Kabwato*

**HOPE IS A PRICELESS** and powerful tool. At the peak of the Zimbabwe crisis, arguably dated December 2008, even hope became a scarce commodity in the erstwhile breadbasket of Africa. Despair set in comfortably. Earlier in the year, in March 2008, the country had gone to the polls but these were characterised by grave politically motivated violence and marred by serious anomalies in their administration. The absence of a clear poll winner, a development astonishingly announced five weeks after the close of polling, meant that the leading candidates, Robert Mugabe (ZANU-PF) and Morgan Tsvangirai (MDC-T), would come face to face again in a run-off election slated for June of the same year.

More drama would unfold on the political scene a few weeks before the run-off election as Tsvangirai announced the withdrawal of his candidature, citing escalating politically motivated violence and a breach of his own security. At one point during this period, Tsvangirai sought refuge at the Embassy of the Netherlands as he claimed that his life was in grave danger. So, Mugabe ran against himself and predictably retained his position as head of state and government. However, Zimbabwe was bleeding badly – socially, economically and politically – and most people, especially those with no direct links to any form of state institutional power and diaspora activity, were hurting.

For those looking inwards from outside Zimbabwe's boundaries, especially the non-Zimbabweans, the political question in Zimbabwe appeared not all that difficult to resolve. Zimbabweans simply had to demand that Mugabe – with his alleged background of stolen elections – step aside or at least guarantee a free and fair election that would usher the 'people's choice' into government. And that choice – as seen by many, even to this day – was and still is Morgan Tsvangirai.

This idea of leading popular uprisings against dictatorships has since gained more currency (not surprisingly outside Zimbabwe), in the wake of the Arab Spring in early 2011 which has seen popular uprisings remove from power such authoritarians as Tunisia's Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, Egypt's Hosni Mubarak and Libya's Muammar

Gaddafi, and still make others quake in their fascist boots. But, so dangerous is the interpretation of this idea that any popular call for reform in sub-Saharan Africa can be read as an action that will soon beget a fully-blown uprising.

A minor diversion is in order at this juncture. The SADC region is also dealing with an additional two problematic countries after Zimbabwe, and these are the Kingdom of Swaziland and Malawi. The ban on political parties in Swaziland has meant that Africa's remaining absolute monarchy exercises repressive control of its people and makes political organising and mobilising very difficult. Pressure groups do exist, however, and occasionally, members of these are harassed, arrested or detained without trial. Mass protests in Swaziland in April 2011 were met with a heavy state clampdown, resulting in the injury of several activists and others going into hiding and forced exile.

Further north from Swaziland, the regime of president Bingu wa Mutharika in Malawi is showing dictatorial tendencies which cannot be ignored. In July 2011, the Mutharika regime attempted to thwart mass protests against fuel and foreign exchange shortages, the rising cost of living, poor service delivery and a declining democratic culture. The countrywide protests were met with heavy police presence on the streets – a trigger-happy police, who fired live ammunition at a defenceless people. The result was tragic; 19 deaths were reported across Malawi.

The developments in Malawi read like the Zimbabwe of the late 1990s which was characterised by food shortages, a rising cost of living and consequently mass stay-aways led by trade unions. It was Tsvangirai – as a trade unionist – who led the mass action in Zimbabwe and managed to follow through his actions by forming a political party. However, it can be argued that, as a prospective leader, had Tsvangirai accurately read the mood of the masses and not pulled out of the June 2008 election run-off, things could have turned out differently for Zimbabwe. The thinking is that, by the time of the June election, a jobless, hungry and frustrated electorate would not have allowed yet another election to be 'stolen' and would have led an uprising against the Mugabe regime, resulting in political change.

The critics of this strategy pointed to stumbling blocks standing in the way of a democratic transfer of power in the event of a Mugabe loss. Indeed, the state security sector led by the service chiefs who form what is known as the Joint Operations Command (JOC), combining senior elements of the army, police and intelligence, had made it quite clear to Zimbabweans that they were not going to allow anyone other than Mugabe to lead Zimbabwe. This development came as a surprise to many people, not least among them civil society organisations within and without Zimbabwe which had heightened their calls for security sector reform. Nevertheless, such an outcome was predetermined from the time Zimbabwe gained independence, as is clearly shown in the chapter by David Moore and Brian Raftopoulos.

Needless to say, the country teetered on the precipice of political anarchy and socio-economic problems persisted. Unprecedented levels of inflation, severe food shortages, water and electricity shortages and collapsing infrastructure all pointed to a country in ruins, a country desperate no longer for just redemptive ideology but for swift action; something that could restore hope in a nation. And, while the country was now excessively bleeding from the disastrous policies of the Brettonwoods Institutions dumped on Zimbabwe in the 1990s, it was almost impossible to see this challenge as it had been so carefully discussed by authors like Mlambo (1997). That is, the challenge to the socio-economic livelihood of Zimbabwe caused by the adverse effects of structural adjustment programmes.

Thus, on the political front – where all hope seemed to lie – a negotiated Global Political Agreement (GPA) in September 2008 gave birth to the Government of National Unity (GNU), which was inaugurated in February 2009. Overnight – or so it seemed – the crisis seemed to disappear as foodstuffs returned to the shop shelves, fuel became available and even the electricity and water supplies improved quite significantly. Hope had made a dramatic return. And, while the politics had guaranteed this outcome, they remained dangerously polarised so much so that it came as no surprise when the GNU began to attract such descriptions as a government of disunity, a marriage of inconvenience and an unhappy marriage. To the majority of Zimbabweans, though, the politics were not an urgent concern; at least you could now walk into the shop and buy bread and milk without having to queue for a full day or more.

But there were immediate challenges too. Zimbabwe adopted the use of the United States dollar and the South African rand as official currency in an effort to deal with illegal foreign exchange trading and also as a measure of ensuring economic stability. While this strategic move indeed brought some sanity to the country and ensured availability of basic commodities in the shops, it was not always stated that availability did not necessarily translate into accessibility. With a frightening unemployment rate flirting dangerously with the 80 to 85 per cent mark, many people remained barred from participating in the ‘new’ economy because they just did not have the means to do so.

The question of availability versus accessibility is a crucial one because it touches on the very core of human existence. Quite significantly too, it challenges the proponents of democracy to question the theory and practice of such a concept as applied to the lived experiences of Zimbabweans against the prevailing ideology of Marxism.

In essence, therefore, the post-GNU era in Zimbabwe is similar to the immediate post-independence Zimbabwe. The challenge lies, however, in how the two Zimbabweans can be defined. The post-independence Zimbabwe of the 1980s was clearly a post-conflict country<sup>1</sup> unlike the Zimbabwe of the 2000s that is not quite



sure if it is still in conflict or if it has embraced transition. If this latter Zimbabwe has embraced transition – which it appears to have done – and now desires to be defined as a post-conflict country, then a keen focus must be placed on the nature of the transition because ultimately it is the nature of the transition that will shape how the people of Zimbabwe respond to the circumstances in their country and express themselves within those.

Quite clearly, however, it would seem that the project of transition in Zimbabwe is not only premature but glaringly inconsistent with democratic culture. To begin with, this project was set in motion by the G<sub>PA</sub> and consequently the G<sub>NU</sub>. The problem with negotiated outcomes such as G<sub>NU</sub>s is that they create false senses of unity in deeply polarised societies made up of a profoundly wounded people – physically, emotionally and psychologically. Their true nature is that they are fierce power contests whose aim is for parties involved to make repeated attempts at swallowing each other in a bid to obtain influential control and authority of government. There is absolutely no unity whatsoever embedded in them. Evidence of disunity in the current arrangement abounds: unilateral appointments of senior officials by one party, arrests of members from another party – sometimes on trumped-up charges, blatant disregard of agreements by one party and selective application of the law, amongst a myriad of issues. But it has been quite clear up to this point who is ruling the roost in Harare.

It can be argued therefore that ZANU-PF may be hugely surprised at its own political comeback, thanks to this G<sub>NU</sub> and also the later fortunes of the discovery of large deposits of alluvial diamonds in Eastern Zimbabwe, which they have extensively controlled as a party despite this being a national resource. This is a party that was literally done and dusted in December 2008, a year in which Zimbabwe satisfied all the conditions for a people-led uprising to take place – sky-high unemployment, unprecedented food shortages, cancerous corruption and growing discontentment. But, like the proverbial phoenix, the party has risen from the ashes to which it had duly delivered itself as a result of bad governance and gross mismanagement of the economy.

Also, the G<sub>NU</sub> is the very antithesis of a democratic expression of the will of the people. None of the signatories to that agreement received their mandate from the people of Zimbabwe; they are simply governing on their own mandate. Essentially, therefore, the G<sub>NU</sub> is an elitist project that is far removed from the common experience of the ordinary Zimbabwean. And this is the point at which the frailties of the transition project are exposed.

Although the G<sub>PA</sub> clearly makes room for the setting up of a whole ministry dedicated to dealing with matters of national healing as demanded by all post-conflict societies, nothing concrete has been done so far to address the wounds that were left open during Zimbabwe's dark hours of the 2000s. Robust debate of issues

to do with transitional justice have been alarmingly restricted to five-star conference rooms, resorts and airport lounges across the world while the rural poor, many of whom bore the brunt of political violence, are relegated to the pages of glossy human rights reports as mere statistics, faceless and further dehumanised.

Hence, the project of transition takes too much for granted if it does not place a premium on national healing and transitional justice. Yet even these concepts of transitional justice and national healing need further interrogation, which can allow them to be adapted to the specific needs of the people who are supposed to benefit from such programmes. For example, how can neighbours who sit on different sides of the political divide and who have previously attacked each other be made to live together again in harmony? How can the women who were raped by men young enough to be their sons be assisted in overcoming such traumas? Indeed, how can those who raped, maimed or killed be rehabilitated and made useful to society again? In all of this, it still needs to be asked what, for instance, the role of cultural practices is in dealing with matters of compensation.

The above proves that politics may not be the best avenue through which Zimbabwe can reclaim itself nor, and more importantly, continue to reevaluate itself constantly as it fosters its identity. A country is always in a state of continual becoming and various factors affect it at various levels, but not only one factor should be allowed to dominate the shaping and reshaping of the national psyche. There is an urgent need for Zimbabwe's politics to reconnect with the grassroots in order to become more relevant and useful to the citizens.

To ask for our politics to be reconnected to the grassroots is to acknowledge that there has been a disconnection. For Zimbabwe, this disconnection occurred with ZANU-PF soon after independence and is happening now with the larger faction of the MDC after the 2008 poll. Disconnection from the masses occurs when the revolutionary political party or the party carrying the hopes of the nation begins to disintegrate (Fanon 1963; see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003). It is worth quoting Frantz Fanon at length:

The living party, which ought to make possible the free exchange of ideas which have been elaborated according to the real needs of the mass of the people, has been transformed into a trade union of individual interests. Since the proclamation of independence the party no longer helps the people to set out its demands, to become more aware of its needs and better able to establish its power. Today, the party's mission is to deliver to the people the instructions which issue from the summit. There no longer exists the fruitful give-and-take from bottom to the top and from the top to the bottom which creates and guarantees democracy in a party. Quite on the contrary, the party has made itself into a screen between the masses and the leaders.

There is no longer any party life, for the branches which were set up during the colonial period are today completely demobilised. (Fanon 1963: 138–139)

Not only is the above passage from Fanon accurately prophetic, it is also deeply instructive to the masses. Private accumulation of wealth in the name of the party and disguised as entitlement is what led to Zimbabwe's fall. After fulfilment of the historic mission – to fight oppression – whichever party has led this effort 'sinks into an extraordinary lethargy' (Fanon 1963: 138). As highlighted above, the coming together of ZANU-PF and the MDC under the lucid cover of (dis)unity is not what it appears to be, in practice at least. Since the GNU is a power contest and ZANU-PF has the unfair advantage of having state machinery on its side, the MDC is being sucked into the ZANU-PF beast and will soon, if it does not already, behave in the same way as ZANU-PF in conformance to its new surroundings.

What does all of the above and the preceding chapters mean for Zimbabwe going forward? Perhaps the key point to grasp is that language and humour have been tools for fruitful self-expression in Zimbabwe. Such self-expression occurs across various media channels, traditional and new. For the traditional media, especially those operating in Zimbabwe, a disturbing trend is that political powers are defining the media as evidenced by the amount of political control involved in the appointments of people to institutions such as the Zimbabwe Media Commission (ZMC).

Although that same commission has been responsible for licensing a number of newspapers, some of which are now on the streets, it seems to be failing to do enough to liberalise the airwaves which are still controlled by ZANU-PF. National radio is still being used as a platform to demonise opposition movements and also, quite tellingly, members of the government from previous opposition movements. The logic is simple: newspapers cost money and radio is free, especially in a country that has no large capacity to enforce viewing and listening licensing regulations. As highlighted above, many people have been marginalised and excluded from participating in the new economy, which means they also do not have access to news and information via newspapers but depend mainly on radio where they are exposed to certain propaganda.

Yet, Zimbabwean private media also have to deal with the challenge of their closeness to pro-democracy movements that pitted themselves against the ZANU-PF regime prior to the formation of the GNU. There is need for critical reflection on how these media became 'embedded' with certain civil society organisations and political parties. This is necessary because, as new languages and discourses emerge out of a new Zimbabwe, how they are reported is of fundamental consequence to how these find reception and are reproduced amongst Zimbabweans.

As Dumisani Moyo highlights in his chapter, the exodus of journalists from Zimbabwe meant that they started new enterprises wherever they found themselves.

Most of these enterprises were online initiatives that sought to lead a sustained effort at providing information on the crisis in Zimbabwe. Needless to say, some were successful and some were not, but either way it is important to recognise how these became critical elements of the diaspora psyche. However, there needs to be more interrogation of how effectively or not these spaces have captured the marginalised voices of Zimbabweans, especially the new voices in the post-GPA era.

This is what makes the chapter by Sarah Chiumbu and Richard Nyamhanhindi so relevant to the overall appeal of this book. The introduction of third-generation networks in Zimbabwe means that mobile phone users (when in Zimbabwe) are now able to do much more with their mobile phones than they could previously do – calling and smsing. The Arab Spring has been said to have occurred as a result of excellent coordination of mobile phones and social media applications that made it very easy to organise. Of course, the GNU will be looking at these developments with a keen eye as power shifts from party headquarters to the streets and homes.

Ultimately, Zimbabweans will have to fight the ghosts of their colonial past as they have reappeared in the post-independence state, dealing especially with the effects of fear on the national psyche. As noted at the beginning of this book, the ‘pre-colonial political practice was non-competitive, colonialism was by its nature undemocratic, yet the icons of the nationalist liberation struggle, meant to dislodge brutal colonial repression, “generated and institutionalised a culture of fear, conformity and unquestioning support”’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2003: 103).

With the GNU firmly intact as an undemocratic institution, it revives images of colonialism (exclusivity and elitism) and also images of the repressive state of the ZANU-PF regime. Is Zimbabwe going round in circles? Quite conspicuous is the absence of a clear concern for Zimbabweans by those in power because ‘to glorify democracy and to silence the people is farce; to discourse on humanism and to negate man is a lie’ (Freire 1972: 64).

What this work encourages, therefore, is dialogue that is informed by critical thinking or awareness or both. More importantly, it recognises and empowers ordinary citizens who are far removed from the popular centres of power that belong to or are propped up by the state and establishes an independent critical centre of power which challenges Zimbabwean political discourse. This should add much hope to the pursuit of negotiating the Zimbabwe crisis and also imagining a post-crisis Zimbabwe.

The last word belongs to Freire – at length:

Hope is rooted in men’s incompleteness, from which they move out in constant search – a search which can be carried out only in communion with other men. Hopelessness is a form of silence, of denying the world and

fleeing from it. The dehumanisation resulting from an unjust order is not cause for despair but for hope, leading to the incessant pursuit of humanity which is denied by injustice. Hope, however, does not consist of folding one's arms and waiting. As long as I fight, I am moved by hope; and if I fight I hope, then I can wait. As the encounter of men seeking to be more fully human, dialogue cannot be carried on in a climate of hopelessness. If the participants expect nothing to come of their efforts, their encounter will be empty and sterile, bureaucratic and tedious. (Freire 1972: 64)

## Note

- 1 This statement only restricts itself to the clear demarcation between colonialism and independence. The author is fully aware that soon after independence there was a deliberate war waged against the Matebeleland region, now commonly known as *Gukurahundi*. But that would be going against the focus of this book.

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## Contributors

**Sarah Chiumbu** is a lecturer and Head of Department of Media Studies at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Fidelis Duri** is a PhD student in the Department of History at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Levi Kabwato** is a journalist, writer and researcher based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

**Maxwell Kadenge** is a lecturer in the Department of Linguistics at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Beacon Mbiba** is a Senior Lecturer in Urban Policy and International Development and Programme Leader, Urban Planning in Developing Countries and Transitional Economies, at Oxford Brookes University, United Kingdom.

**Alois Mlambo** is a Professor of History in the Department of Historical and Heritage Studies at the University of Pretoria.

**David B Moore** is a Professor of Development Studies and Head of Department of Anthropology and Development Studies, University of Johannesburg, South Africa.

**Dumisani Moyo** is a media and ICT Programme Manager at the Open Society Initiative of Southern Africa, and is Honorary Research Fellow at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Tatenda Mukwedeya** is a PhD student in the Department of Sociology at the University of Witwatersrand and is also a PhD fellow with the Society, Work and Development Institute (SWOD) based at the same institution.

**Jennifer Musangi** is a PhD fellow at the Institute for Social and Economic Research, University of the Witwatersrand.

**Muchaparara Musemwa** is a Senior Lecturer in the Department of History at the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Grace A Musila** is a Senior Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Stellenbosch.

**Thabisani Ndlovu** is the Deputy Director of the International Human Rights Exchange Programme (IHRE), a joint project of Bard College in the USA and the University of the Witwatersrand.

**Richard Nyamanhindi** is a writer and researcher based in Harare, Zimbabwe.

**Brian Raftopoulos** is Director of Research and Advocacy at the Solidarity Peace Trust and a Visiting Professor and Mellon Senior Research Mentor at the Centre for Humanities Research at the University of the Western Cape.

**Timothy Scarnecchia** is an Associate Professor in the Department of History at Kent University, USA.

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