

Perpetual ‘Outcasts’? Squatters in peri-urban Bulawayo, Zimbabwe¹

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After independence in 1980 Zimbabwe’s cities experienced a proliferation in the number of squatter camps. This was because of the failure of the urban economy to offer adequate housing and jobs, leaving peri-urban space as the only sanctuary for the urban poor to live in and eke out a living informally. The promotion of rural ‘growth points’ by the national government to promote rural development to discourage migration to urban areas failed. Yet, a poor policy response by the state to this negative outcome of rapid urbanisation that aims to reverse this rural-urban migration has led to unending confrontations between its various arms and squatters who continue to be regarded as encroachers. Focussing on Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe, and based on interviews, archival research, Council minutes and newspapers, this article critiques the state’s urban development policy vis-à-vis squatters and informality. It is argued that the persistence of a salient perception by government officials that all Africans belong to rural areas and have access to land they can fall back on in hard times serves as a vital lubricant to the state’s action of forcibly sending squatters to rural areas. This ignores the historical pattern of rapid urbanisation and the growth of informal economies supporting the livelihoods of thousands of people. I seek to add to the literature on low-cost housing shortages, urban squatters and peri-urbanism in Zimbabwe and on studies of informality in Third World cities in general.

Key words: squatters, outcasts, informality, institutional weaknesses, peri-urban Bulawayo, Zimbabwe

Introduction

Acute shortages of low cost housing in Zimbabwe since independence in 1980 led to a proliferation of peri-urban squatting. This development, which signalled an increase in urban informality, confounded the expectations of the new state whose national development discourse tended to prioritise the expansion of rural ‘growth points’² instead

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 - 2 These were rural centres chosen by the central government to serve rural communities and provide commercial, industrial and administrative functions. Initial central government investment in improving physical infrastructure was aimed at attracting more public and private investment which would eventually promote rural development to discourage rural-urban migration in search for employment. For more information on this see B.M.C. Sibanda (1985) “Growth Points-A Focus for Rural Development in Zimbabwe” in *Agricultural Administration*, 19:

of cities to stem the then increasing rural-urban migration flow. The state, however, has been bent on ensuring ‘formality’ in its urban centres, leading to endless confrontations with squatters. Various arms of the national and local authorities have also confronted each other and denied responsibility for addressing the squatter problem, signalling institutional weaknesses. It soon became apparent after independence that peri-urban space was, and will clearly continue to be, an arena in which competing claims are constantly negotiated and re-negotiated (Trefon, 2011). National government officials thus labeled squatters with names ranging from ‘outcasts’, ‘new gypsies of our society’, ‘bandits’, ‘social deviants’ to ‘criminals’. This conceptualisation of livelihood strategies (peri-urban squatting) by authorities is also reflected in the negative treatment of squatters in economic policy, legislation, planning and management.

Based on interviews, archival research, Council minutes and newspapers, this article critiques the state’s urban development policy vis-à-vis peri-urban squatting in Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe. Focussing on the experiences of the inhabitants of Killarney squatter settlement, which is the largest on the outskirts of Bulawayo, I argue that the state’s policy ignores the historical pattern of rapid urbanisation, impact of war fuelled urban influx and the inevitable growth of informal housing sheltering thousands of homeless people. Its policy has thus been static, contradictory and based more on its desire for formality than the reality on the ground. This is generally because squatter communities have tended to be regarded as socially disorganised, as people that reject all forms of progress (Stren, 1975). My critique here acknowledges that development in Africa has always been a site of class struggle between the bureaucracy, both national and international, and the people who have been classified via a number of labels. Human lives have been overlooked by bureaucratic planning strategies that ignore people’s real interests and practices (Hart and Padayachee, 2010). I seek to add to the literature on low-cost housing shortages, urban squatters and peri-urbanism in Zimbabwe and on informal economies in Third World cities in general.

A squatter settlement indicates housing that is a result of illegal occupation or has been developed in an unauthorised fashion (Aldrich & Sandhu, 1995). I view squatting here as a de facto phenomenon of the country’s social and economic system, reflecting shortages in socially acceptable housing and shortages in employment opportunities that are rewarding and formal in character (Stren, 1975), which thus requires economic- rather than politically-oriented solutions, the latter being often guided by impractical political discourse. Squatter settlements indicate the failure of society and government to provide an adequate environment for human development. The amount of squatter housing indicates the extent of housing poverty in a society. The main characteristic of squatter housing is the lack of formal ownership of the land on which squatters reside (Aldrich & Sandhu, 1995). M. Juppenlatz (1970) defined squatters as “illegal occupants of urban land whether government or private property”. J. van Valsen (1975) noted that in addition to being illegal occupants of land, these people also infringe on a variety of

161-174 and K. H. Wekwete (1988), “Rural Growth Points in Zimbabwe-Prospects for the Future” in *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 3, 2 :5-16.

building, planning and sanitation regulations. The manifestation of urban squatting becomes apparent when the rate of in-migration of families is greater than the rate at which a city can absorb or integrate the immigrants into the existing social structure of urban society. Homelessness is the most extreme effect of poverty associated with poor housing conditions (Oppenheim, 1996).

The regulation and control of urban areas that ensued after independence became an integral part of the construction of new identities by the national government, because it was intended to create areas which could not be classified as 'home', and to which people could make no claim. The state was thus determined to ensure that those who did not fit neatly within its newly constructed urban identities were sent back to their 'homes' in rural areas even when the reality was that some may not have had any home to go to (Dorman, 2007). The persistence of this salient perception by the national bureaucracy that all Africans belong to rural areas and have access to land they can fall back on in hard times (Dorman, 2007) serves as a vital lubricant in the perpetuation of state discourse against squatting in Zimbabwe's urban areas. This suggests an urgent and critical 'need [for the state] to decolonize [its] imagination about city-ness... if it is to sustain [its] relevance to the key urban challenges of the twenty-first century' (Robinson, 2002; Demissie, 2011).

The continuing refusal by both the city authorities and national government to acknowledge a responsibility to provide for peri-urban squatter communities exposes serious institutional deficiencies in Zimbabwe. Across much of the rest of Africa and in many other regions, peri-urban disorder has recently taken on a new and much more positive glow. In South Africa, for example, while extreme poverty still exists in the formerly deprived and disorderly peri-urban shanties, townships and locations, these areas are no longer viewed as a horror to be exposed and denounced, but are now increasingly understood as places of hope and possibility, sites of development rather than proof of the failure of development (Ferguson, 2007). Therefore, any sympathetic treatment of squatters in this work should not be interpreted as support for disorder in peri-urban areas, but as an attempt to highlight their normal human qualities, their motivations for entering the city and the activities they engaged in once there, as an attempt to better their lives in the face of serious disadvantages they suffered from (see Burton, 2005).

Many studies have analysed the emergence and suppression of squatter settlements around Harare, Zimbabwe since the late 1970s (Patel, 1984; Patel, 1988; Bourdillon, 1991; Potts and Mutambirwa, 1991). The only squatter camp that was not destroyed in Harare was Epworth, which the state opted to upgrade perhaps because of the massive numbers of squatters involved, that is, about 50 000 (Butcher, 1993). Adopting a historical approach, this work attempts to trace and analyse theoretical foundations behind recurring confrontations between the squatters, Council and the national government in peri-urban Bulawayo. I begin with a brief overview of the low cost housing crisis, which led to the proliferation and intensification of squatter settlements. This is followed by a chronicle and analysis of the continuing confrontations between the squatters, the city Council and the national government.

Origins of Low Income Housing Crisis and Intensification of Squatter Settlements in Bulawayo

The squatter problem in Bulawayo, which was formally established as a white settler town on 1 June 1894 (Kaarsholm, 1999) is a symptom of the acute low-cost housing shortages in colonial and post-colonial Zimbabwe. Traditional principal low income housing providers, the national government and city Council, have not been able to provide enough serviced land and raw materials for low income housing, while low income earners have been too poor to build housing for themselves. This intensified during the growth of secondary industry in the city in the late 1930s and 1940s and housing supply did not keep pace with demand in the 1950s and 1960s. The housing crisis intensified in the late 1970s when Bulawayo, like other urban centres of Zimbabwe, experienced population influx of rural refugees during the later years of the national liberation war as people flocked to cities to avoid abduction, recruitment and violence.

This resulting urban influx strained the Council's housing services even though such people were absorbed into the existing accommodation in townships (Director of Building and Amenities June, 1981). In June 1972, for example, before the intensification of the war, applicants on the housing waiting list were estimated at 5,717 with a current rate of fifty applicants per month. However, towards independence, the Council's waiting list was estimated at nearly 10,800 applicants with a rate of four hundred and twenty-seven per month (Director of Building and Amenities June, 1976/77). In 1978, the Director of Building and Amenities department in Bulawayo, Van Der Meulen hinted that a squatters' township to accommodate families displaced by the liberation war was '...an idea' in the Council's policy, with a possibility that the Council could provide a simple site and services scheme 'if the need arises' (*Chronicle* 12 May 1978). However, when the need arose, no squatter township was ever developed. Evidence of homelessness in the form of vagrants and squatters, soon appeared.

In 1979, the housing crisis was exacerbated by the violence between the armed units of former liberation movements Zimbabwe African Patriotic Union (ZAPU) and Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) accommodated in Entumbane and Glenville townships at the request of the national government during a demobilization exercise. The City Council had allocated the army over eight hundred and fifty-two new houses. The violence left many casualties and considerable damage to residential property. For example, in Entumbane Township alone, 4,300 houses were destroyed during the conflict, leading to a diversion of Council resources from constructing new housing to repairing damaged ones. Houses occupied by the armed units had been intended for ordinary city residents who were on the Council's housing waiting list (Report of Director of Building and Community Services June, 1980/1).

In the early 1980s, the Gukurahundi operation, a 'dissident eradication' campaign unleashed by the national government in the rural districts of Matabeleland and Midlands provinces following a falling out between the Matabeleland-based ZAPU party, and the ruling ZANU PF party, forced many villagers to flee to Bulawayo as refugees. The operation left between 20,000 and 30,000 civilians deemed dissident sympathisers dead (CCJP, 1999) as the government's Fifth Brigade carried out a grotesquely violent campaign be-

tween January 1983 and late 1984 when it was withdrawn (Alexander et al., 2000). Some victims of the violence fled to Bulawayo resulting in a population growth of 9.8 percent per annum between 1982 and 1985 and by 10.9 percent between 1985 and 1991 (see BMRL N6A/17 Squatters/Vagrants, 1998). The conflict came to an end in 1987 with the signing of a Unity Accord between ZAPU and ZANU PF. One of the symptoms of the 1980s violence was the spontaneous emergence and growth of squatter settlements around Killarney and Trenance suburbs in Bulawayo. A contingent of pavement sleepers from the war-torn rural districts of Tsholotsho, Lupane, Nkayi, Gwanda and Kezi became a novel nocturnal phenomenon around the Railway Station premises. For the first time, scavenging by the war-displaced and helpless vagrants became tolerated as a way of gaining a living in Bulawayo (see BMRL N6A/17 Squatters/Vagrants, 1998).

Higher building costs and payment of high monthly charges for new houses also slowed the provision of cheaper low-cost accommodation in the 1980s (Annual Report of the Director of Housing and Community Services June 1985). In 1989, for example, then Minister of Public Construction and National Housing Joseph Msika conceded that the cost of building materials was increasing rapidly, making it difficult for those on the lowest incomes to 'afford even a square metre of a decent house' (GOZ, Press Statement Ref. 177/89/BC/CB/SK, June 13, 1989).

The housing crisis nationwide led to calls that the national housing policy be oriented towards providing shelter first, and only when this was successfully achieved could the policy then be directed towards providing ownership of shelter (Sunday Mail 14 October 1990). Christopher Mafico (1991), for example, called for the lowering of housing standards to a level affordable to the majority of low income earners, including the legalisation of relatively cheap traditional African village norms in the planning of low-cost housing in urban areas, the use of Blair pit latrines and the construction of un-surfaced roads, which, however, seemed impracticable in 1991 in Zimbabwe's urban planning environment which was overly obsessed with the maintenance of stipulated cumbersome standards (Potts, 2006: 290). The delivery of low cost housing worsened in the city during the 1990s under the World Bank/ IMF sponsored structural adjustment economic reforms. This intensified after 2000. In 2002, Bulawayo Council stopped all direct funding for the building of low income housing in the city due to lack of financial resources (Personal interview with Mathe, 22 November 2007).

The low cost housing situation worsened in 2005 when the well-publicised Operation Murambatsvina (OM) clean-up operation rendered hundreds of thousands of people homeless after the destruction of their shelters. (Tibaijuka, 2005). The dwellings that were destroyed were not only shacks made of plastic and corrugated aluminium or traditional mud and pole huts found in the backyards of some townships such as Lobengula and Njube. The majority were in fact one or two-roomed houses made of brick or concrete blocks – some were large and had involved substantial cost and had taken a number of years to build (Ndlovu, 2008). The majority of the victims of the blitz in townships were pushed into peri-urban squatter areas, including in Killarney.

Life in the Killarney Squatter Camp

The case of Killarney squatters was first publicised in 1981 when they numbered about 700, but by 1982 there were well over 2000 (*Chronicle* 24 June 1982). The squatter camp resembles a sparsely populated rural settlement with round grass-thatched huts occupying the unimproved land next to the Killarney middle income suburb in peri-urban Bulawayo (*Chronicle* 13 October 1989). Many of the residents originated from rural districts such as Esigodini, Plumtree, Tsholotsho, Kezi, Murewa, and so on, while others originated from neighbouring countries especially Zambia and Mozambique. Some formerly worked for white employers who fled the country during the 1970s liberation war and the violence after independence. Others had lived in townships and had held formal but low paying jobs. High rentals forced them out to become scavengers (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, 24th June 1998). One of them, Giyani Dube, remarked that 'We are here [at the squatter camp] because we want to be closer to town where we work' (*Sunday News*, 11 August 2002).

The Killarney squatter camp has always been the biggest in Bulawayo (*Chronicle* 13 March 2000).³ It comprised three villages, known as Xotsha, Tshaka and Two Stamp camps, and at its peak contained some four thousand families. Residents drew water from the nearby Umguza River or vandalised municipal supplies. There were no sanitary facilities in the area; squatters used the bush to relieve themselves, thus exposing themselves and residents of nearby middle income suburbs of Killarney and Mahatshula to potential outbreaks of disease. Prostitution was rife in the area and children under five years were not immunised against vaccine-preventable childhood diseases (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, Memo, 24th June 1998).

In the squatter camp, there were *shebeens* (informal social establishments) and burial societies. Mrs Elizabeth Mhlanga's daughter ran a 'thriving *shebeen*' which was the family's major source of income (*Chronicle* 11 November 2000). Many other squatters brewed beer for sale and three unlicensed stores serviced their community (*Chronicle* 8 March 1988). Esther Nkomo, resident at the Two Stamp camp, argued that 'We have been accused of being useless drunkards but people do not understand that drinking is our only way of forgetting our problems...' (*Chronicle* 7 October 1989). In the camp, there were two burial societies known as Machembere and Maxhegwini to which each member contributed Z\$50 a month (*Chronicle* 11 November 2000). Women at the camp had formed a 16-member group known as Asibone Women's Club which was involved in a soap making project. The chairperson of the co-operative, Mrs Mary Tembo indicated that the word 'Asibone' meant 'let us see', adding they were attempting to see if they could remove themselves from the poverty that they had been facing (*Chronicle* 18 August 2000).

In their 'unsightly' environment, squatters had selected an area 'Chief' and his 'right hand man' who indicated that they had squatted in the area for varying periods of up to thirty years (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, 24th June 1998). In 1983, the 'Chief' at Killarney was Maxson Phiri of Malawian origin, who used to be the squatters' 'Headman' earlier on

3 The second biggest squatter camp in Bulawayo is found at Richmond dumpsite.

before becoming a 'Chief' (*Chronicle* 5 January 1983). Government officials referred to him as a 'self-imposed or self-styled Chief' (*Chronicle* 17 May 1983).

In late 1983, the Deputy Minister of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development, Mark Dube, ordered all the 2 347 Killarney squatters to disperse from the camp within a week or risk being treated as 'criminals'. The formally employed among them were asked to seek accommodation from the City Council, while all those who originated from rural areas were ordered to report back to their respective rural district administrators. About 300 school children were going to be affected. All but one of the squatters, their 'Chief', Phiri, complied with the order (*Chronicle* 13 April 1983). The squatters, however, resettled in a new camp adjacent to the one from which they had been evicted. 'Chief' Phiri argued that they were afraid of going back to their original rural homes as 'they had nothing to go back to' (*Chronicle* 12 May 1983). Some families, however, immediately returned to the old camp. The District Administrator (DA) for Bulawayo, O. Mashengele, accused them of only wanting to pursue a squatter life (*Chronicle* 12 May 1983). In 1984, the Minister of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development, Moven Mahachi, threatened tough action against squatters (*Chronicle* 20 January 1984).

Squatting intensified on Council land especially in the Trenance, Umguza and Killarney areas after 1985. The Council asked the national government to resettle or repatriate the squatters, but no action was taken (Reports of the Director of Housing and Community Services, June, 1985; June 1986). At the same time, about 500 Killarney squatters had agreed to be resettled at Dombodema in Plumtree district. The Bulawayo City Council, however, did not have the financial resources to transport them. The Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development officials told squatters that if the Council could not provide transport to Plumtree they must find their own. The Provincial Administrator (PA) for Matabeleland North, Zwelibanzi Mzilethi, representing the national government, was angered by the Council's refusal to transport the squatters, adding that 'It is their concern... We might have to ask a Non-Governmental Organisation for assistance' (*Sunday News* 20 July 1986). Once resettled, the Dombodema resettlement was soon attacked by dissidents (*Sunday News*, 31 July 1983) who beat them and set fire to their homes, forcing some squatters back to the squatter camps in Bulawayo. Similarly, resettlement schemes in Umguza and Mbembesi in Nyamandlovu and Lupane rural districts respectively were attacked by dissidents (Alexander, 1991). For some squatters, the attack confirmed their fears that resettlement schemes 'were intended' as places where they were to be victimised by dissidents (*Chronicle* 16 December 1985). These dangers faced by squatters in resettlement schemes failed to move authorities to review their policy on urban squatters.

In 1985, the Killarney camp was administered by 'Chief' Khumalo. Other 'chiefs' were temporarily employed and no longer 'effective' in their villages. The camp was also policed by strong young squatter men chosen by the 'Chief'. Their responsibility included the registration of new residents, escorting strangers into the camp, as well as maintaining law and order (*Chronicle* 16 December 1985). Of the 220 family units present, there was a large number of elderly people who were difficult to resettle or repatriate (*Chronicle* 16 December 1985).

In 1987, when the Minister of Local Government and Town Planning, Enos Chikwore threatened squatters with eviction, they vowed to resettle elsewhere. Opra Mpofo indicated that ‘My late father was a Malawian. If I am evicted there would be nowhere for me to go since I have known this place to be my home’ (*Chronicle* 1 September 1987). The former ‘Chief’ at Two Stamp squatter camp, Maxson Phiri (then 77), refused to relocate to a resettlement area because ‘there was a lot of work to be done there’, adding that, ‘I am too old for that kind of life and besides I am not moving from here’ (*Chronicle* 1 September 1987) The squatters were finally evicted in 1987 and resettled in Tsholotsho but they soon returned because they had been consigned to an inhospitable area ravaged by malaria and wild animals and with no clean water (*Chronicle* 8 March 1988). In 1987, the ‘Chief’ at Killarney was Jaison Kumwenda and his assistant was Siphso Moyo. Their main roles also included allocating land to desperate families and presiding over family disputes (*Chronicle* 8 March 1988).

Squatters preferred to be resettled elsewhere and on a permanent basis. They also wanted to be resettled in places with good facilities such as clinics, schools, shops, clean drinking water and arable land. In 1989, they vowed to continue squatting if they were not resettled on productive land (*Chronicle* 26 March 1989). One of the squatters, Samuel Dlodlo, stated that living conditions in Killarney were better than those in the Tsholotsho resettlement area. Another squatter, Esther Nkomo, claimed that ‘everybody wants to be resettled but only in those areas where there are amenities to give one a fresh start in life. There is no point for the authorities to dump us in the bush where there are no facilities at all... unfit for human habitation... We will stay put in Killarney and if they force us out, we will illegally resettle elsewhere’ (*Chronicle* 26 March 1989). Other squatters did not want to be resettled in rural areas but preferred to continue squatting until they found formal jobs in the city (*Chronicle* 26 March 1989). They also resisted Council efforts to resettle them near Hyde Park on the north-western outskirts of the city arguing that the area had unsuitable land and was also ‘too small for the people who were accustomed to living on the sprawling seven square kilometre squatter camp’ (*Chronicle* September 23, 1997).

Squatters demanded recognition as a permanent feature of society. In 2000, “Chief” Kabaya Ndlovu’s son, Peter, a former soldier, for example, argued:

We have been stereotyped as social misfits, thugs, thieves and criminals. But we want to tell society that we are a normal upright people with our own set of values. We work for a living like everyone else and there is no reason why we should be treated as outcasts. We yearn for a day when the Government will resettle us so that we revert to what we know best-farming... (see Chronicle 11 November 2000).

Squatters’ requests that they be resettled on productive land have at no time received a positive response from national government officials. In 1998, for example, squatters registered for land but state officials were not forthcoming about when and where they were going to be resettled (*Chronicle* 21 September 1998). In 2000, squatters hoped that the state was going to consider them first in the accelerated land reform to give them ‘a

chance to lead normal lives'. Bernard Nkala, representing 1 400 families in the camp, argued that 'we have been crying for land and each time we are promised that we will be given some' (*Chronicle* 25 July 2000). One Siphilisiwe Ncube noted that 'as the white commercial farmers leave the vast tracts of land... we hope that we will finally get our own pieces of land where we can earn an honest living and contribute to the development of our country' (see *Sunday News* 11 August 2002). They had filled in application forms for resettlement issued by the national provincial land committee officers but expressed concern that those officials were side-lining them (*Sunday News* 11 August 2002).

Because residents in slum areas are commonly associated with deviant behaviour, it is almost a given that squatters will be the objects of the outside world's suspicion (Stren 1975). The Killarney squatters also faced constant accusations that they were criminals, an excuse often used by national government authorities to justify their eviction. Peter Ndlovu, however, vehemently denied this, highlighting that 'We have an internal policing unit which works hand in hand with Queens Park Police Station. Each village has about four such neighbourhood watch officers... We are a closely knit community and we know each other on a personal basis... any person found to have committed an offence is immediately handed over to the police' (*Chronicle* 11 November 2000).

Explaining squatters' actions

As noted above, squatters always resisted the authorities' attempts to resettle them on barren/infertile, inhospitable land with very poor rainfall patterns and no social amenities (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, 24th June 1998). They also resisted being labelled criminals or lawless, pointing the presence in squatter camps of appointed, elected or selected 'Chiefs' and their assistants to distribute stands/land to newcomers, maintain order, solve disputes and to curb crime. The chieftainships were not hereditary; rather, they were conferred by squatters on their fellows who exhibited good leadership qualities and commanded the respect of the majority of the squatters.⁴

The behaviour of squatters is similar to what Rouan (2009) described as exhibiting some signs of insurgent citizenship, that is, a form of revolt against some established authority. Slums are regarded as spaces of insurgent citizenship. Because the inhabitants do not have access to formal housing, they have to find ways to produce their own housing according to their needs and available resources. By doing so, they introduce new practices and create their own [informal] 'city inside the city'.⁵ James Holston argued that 'insurgent citizenship' relates to claims, usually by marginalised groups, that question

4 These traditional authorities in squatter camps were not recognised by the Zimbabwean state and hence could not be compared to recognised urban chiefs of the kind seen in some West African cities as described by Peter C. W. Gutkind (1996) "African Urban Chiefs: Agents of Stability or Change in African Urban Life?" in *Anthropologica*, New Series, Vol. 8, No. 2: 249-268.

5 I am aware that slum and squatters settlements can be different, even though their distinction is a very loose one in sub Saharan Africa. The squatter settlement studied here can be also regarded as slum, hence my use of the word "slum" when also referring to it. On differences between slum and squatters settlements, see R. A. Obudo and Constance C. Mhlanga (1998). *Slum and Squatter Settlements in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards a Planning Strategy*, New York: Praeger, 7-11.

conventional practices associated with membership in a community. They ‘introduce into the city new identities and practices that disturb established histories’. Insurgent claims are therefore expressed ‘outside of the normative and institutional definitions of the state and its legal codes’ to ‘avoid, resist and subvert the dominant discourse of the state and the capital’ (see Rouan, 2009).

In Bulawayo, squatters’ continual resistance to the pressure to return to communal areas challenged both the authority of the state and the foundations of the new nation, premised upon the authentic rural counterpoint to the urban. Their continual reconstruction of the shelter destroyed by authorities has become a public statement forcefully negating developmental discourses which are intended to support the state (Dorman, 2007), leading to their condemnation as perpetual ‘outcasts’ by the authorities.

National Government and City Council Response to Urban Squatting

Since 1980, both the national government and the Bulawayo City Council have had no well-defined methods of dealing with squatters, other than attempting various ways of ejecting them. The source of this unceasing hostility to squatting should be located within the state’s development discourse which focused on the development of services in rural areas, through the promotion of rural ‘growth points’. Developing existing urban areas was not high on the list of priorities of the national government (Wekwete, 1988) but the development of rural areas also failed to prevent rural-urban migration in search of jobs. The state’s preoccupation with reversing rural-urban migration, which has never succeeded anywhere, discourages the promulgation of any objective policy to address the problem. A chronic instance of the authorities’ action given below illustrates this.

In 1982, Minister Enos Chikowore launched his nationwide ‘war on urban squatters’ by razing the Mayambara squatter camp in Harare. He highlighted that ‘I am trying to make sure that within four months, urban squatting in its entirety will disappear, because squatters in themselves were a social hazard... the emergence of squatters threatened to create the new “gypsies of our society” which carry with it the worst social evils’ (*Chronicle* 25 May 1982). Lacing his speech with the then trademark populist socialist rhetoric that characterised the new government’s social programmes, Chikowore added that ‘In this era of transformation, we cannot expect people to live under these conditions. We cannot afford the luxury of people who live as if they have been divorced by society’ (*Chronicle* 25 May 1982). The national government then formed a ‘joint force’ of ministries that comprised the Local Government and Town Planning, Home Affairs, the Ministry of Lands and Rural Resettlement, the Zimbabwe National Army and the local political leadership in districts ‘to show these people’ [squatters] that all government departments were against squatting (*Chronicle* 22 December 1982).

In 1983 the state gazetted the Emergency Powers (Vagrancy) Act (Chapter 92) (Modification) Regulations under which ‘people living off prostitution, those not living in a proper house and without adequate income, people who tell fortunes or play games of chance to cheat the public’ and ‘any person who is unable to show that he is

living by honest means and has a settled way of honest living were to be targeted as vagrants' (*Chronicle* 22 November 1983).⁶

In October 1985, Minister Chikowore announced his intention to form 'squatter hunting units' to smash any squatting tendencies (Mafico, 1991: 69). In 1987, Chikowore, who had become the squatters' most hated public official, reiterated his call for a 'formidable anti-squatting campaign' to 'rid the cities of this social evil' (*Chronicle* 10 July 1987), adding that 'squatters were an evil menace that hindered planning and development' (*Chronicle* 21 August 1987). He noted 'In my opinion, notwithstanding the shortage of land, squatters should be considered no better than bandits because they flout the law of the land. They only want to destroy and plunder the country's natural resources and as such should be treated as bandits' (*Chronicle* 21 August 1987). This contradicted the statement made years earlier by the Minister of Lands, Resettlement and Rural Development, Moven Mahachi, that 'squatters are not criminals and should be treated as humanely as possible' (*Chronicle* 16 September 1982).

Squatters wishing to be resettled were ordered by Minister Chikowore to first return to their original communal homes and be resettled by district authorities from there. Chikowore also demanded that every urban council have a 'bank' of serviced stands, particularly residential ones for low income housing, (*Chronicle* 21 August 1987) but this never materialised. At the same time, PA Mzilethi also threatened the Killarney squatters, declaring that '... they will definitely go back to their original homes whether... Chivi, Wedza, Maputo or Zambia. They will go whether they like it or not. We have had enough trouble from them' (see *Sunday News* 21 June 1987).

Two months after Minister Chikowore's threat, squatter camps around Bulawayo were either set ablaze or bulldozed, leaving an estimated one thousand families homeless. They were transported to some rural districts of Matabeleland for resettlement (*Chronicle* 10 October 1987). However, squatters who were resettled in Tsholotsho rural district in 1987 initially received no material assistance to build their new homes. They were later offered drought relief food, seed maize and fertiliser by the state but most of them sold the materials and used the money to travel back to Bulawayo because of inhospitable conditions in the resettlement areas (*Chronicle* 8 March 1988). A 40-year-old Alice Banda returned to the squatter camp because she had lost her mother to malaria, and all her four children were suffering from the sickness and had hospital cards as evidence (*Chronicle* 23 June 1988).

PA Mzilethi, however, argued that his office had lost patience with squatters, describing them as 'social deviants' and threatened to charge them with trespassing and a minimum fine of Z\$100. Mzilethi added that those who did not want to be resettled in Tsholotsho rural district were going to be resettled in Binga, Lupane and Nkayi rural districts, other very inhospitable areas. He ignored squatters' requests to be resettled on

6 This was not very different from the 1960 Vagrancy Act in colonial Zimbabwe that defined a vagrant as 'a beggar, any person wandering about and unable to show that he is in gainful employment or has sufficient means of subsistence, people in urban areas without lawful residence, people in urban areas without jobs or adequate income from self-employment'.

fertile, productive land (*Chronicle* 23 June 1988). PA Mzilethi accused squatters of having ‘made outcasts of themselves’ as they ‘created a society [abnormal] outside our society,’ adding that as a result, they should not expect to be involved in charting the country’s development, least of all to exercise their constitutional rights to vote or to expect the government to assist them in provision of food, shelter, and health, and educational facilities for their children (*Sunday News* 16 July 1989).

Squatters were, however, defiant. They vowed to remain at the squatter camp ‘at all costs’ because their request to be resettled on fertile land had fallen on deaf ears (*Chronicle* 23 June 1988). Despite this, Minister Chikowore dismissed urban squatters as being uninterested in resettlement and having ulterior motives of accumulating urban property, accusing them of squatting at one place and then moving onto another squatter area after being allocated a house. He accused them of pressurising the Council to giving them houses, while others were accused of squatting in order to jump the long housing waiting list (*Chronicle* 14 September 1989).

Another national government method of removing urban squatters in the 1980s was to issue them with travel warrants through the Social Welfare Department so that they could return to their former communal areas, where some no longer had ties or homesteads. The government, however, accused them of always selling their travel warrants and not wanting to leave the city (*Sunday News* 1 November 1987). In the 1990s, a new set of regulations on squatters were gazetted, with particular emphasis on urban and peri-urban land, which established national and provincial level ‘squatter control committees’ to tighten the government’s policy on squatters (GOZ Circular no. 160; 6 October 1992).

The Council’s suggestion that squatters be resettled and the rest be returned to their rural homes or repatriated to their countries of origin did not materialise. This was because it required the involvement of national government ministries, of Local Government and that of Lands and Agriculture, which was a very slow bureaucratic process (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, Memo 2nd November 2000). The Council also proposed to establish a resettlement area at Mazwi village outside the city where about fifty squatters could be resettled, but this never materialised due to lack of funds (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, 24th June 1998). In 1998, the Council also failed to resettle squatters in a village scheme at Hyde Park at a cost of Z\$3.5million. Because of this and other unfulfilled promises, Egenes Zaza, a squatter at Killarney, complained that ‘We have heard many promises... They have come here to register us more than once, but we are still where we were before they came. Nothing has changed. We remain with promises’ (see *Chronicle* 13 March 2000).

While the Bulawayo City Council failed to resettle squatters, it resented members of the public who assisted squatters. For example, it once labelled a businessman who sunk a borehole for Killarney squatters ‘chief culprit’ in promoting squatting in the area as the presence of a clean water source was bound to make squatters refuse to leave when ordered to do so (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, Memo 2nd November 2000). Despite having accepted the drilling of a borehole by a private company, the Council noted that that should not be misconstrued as legitimising the settlement, as it was welcomed only on purely humanitarian grounds (*Chronicle*, 8 September 2000).

The situation of alien squatters has been worse. Sending such squatters who originated from the neighbouring countries to rural areas is problematic as they do not have rural homes in Zimbabwe. This was initially raised by Bulawayo DA Oscar Mashengele in 1983 when he noted that 'When they are evicted, the squatters are told to go back to their original homes and register for resettlement, but the aliens have no homes in this country so they look for a new place to squat' (*Sunday News* 31 July 1983). Two Killarney squatters, Malaika Banda and Lazarus Phiri, for example, indicated that if they were evicted from the camp they would have no communal land to go to in Zimbabwe since they originated from Malawi (*Chronicle* 24 January 1984). A. Sibanda, who was Zambian by descent but was born in Bulawayo, did not mind being resettled anywhere in Zimbabwe, while Joseph Ndlovu, who had fled dissidents from Tsholotsho district, was prepared to return only if evicted from the squatter camp (*Chronicle* 24 January 1984).

To address the problem of 'alien' squatters who had not acquired Zimbabwean citizenship, in 1989, PA Mzilethi called for their repatriation arguing that 'I think this is the only way we can solve the problem of squatters in Zimbabwe'. He also suggested that neighbouring countries whose nationals were squatting in Zimbabwe should be wholly involved in the repatriation exercise (*Chronicle* 14 August 1989). Nearly two decades after this, the national government also argued that if 'aliens' still existed, it could easily create a rural space for them. Then Justice Minister Patrick Chinamasa argued:

... The Fifth Parliament, passed a law which basically facilitated people of Malawian, Mozambican and Zambian origin to gain citizenship in our country... those will be relocated to our rural areas. We have got farms which we can relocate them to, into A1 A2 where they can be accommodated, so we see no problem... Government will put into place the necessary mechanisms to ensure that these people are settled on land. They are our citizens, they are our responsibility and we will discharge that responsibility without any problem (see Dorman, 2007).

The usefulness of the national government's statement that it had promulgated legislation granting citizenship to all Southern African Development Community (SADC) citizens who were resident in the country in 1980 (GOZ, 2005) was questionable. This was because national citizenship would not guarantee the right to permanent residency even for the local homeless in cities, and as such, national citizenship could not be expected to protect the former migrant workers suffering from the effects of unending blitzes as it had failed to protect locals from the same.

The then ruling ZANU PF party-aligned Affirmative Action Group (AAG), which labelled squatters in Bulawayo as "the poorest of the poor", also questioned the motives of the national government's fast track land redistribution that began in 2000 for its failure to accommodate such landless people (BMRL N6A/17 Squatters, Letter 16 November, 2000).⁷ The land redistribution was elitist, not intended absorb the majority of the desti-

7 The fast track land redistribution programme followed commercial farm invasions by supporters of the then ruling ZANU PF party. For more information on this, see Jocelyn Alexander (2006). *The Unsettled Land: State-making and the Politics of Land in Zimbabwe, 1893-2003*, Oxford, Harare, Athens: James Currey, Weaver press, Ohio University Press.

tute (Sadomba et al., 2008). It appears that the majority of ordinary citizens who received pieces of land were those who took the parcels themselves, not those, such as squatters, who waited to be allocated a piece of land.

Therefore, as Dorman (2007) has argued, what has been striking about the Zimbabwean government is its determination to send people ‘to the land’, even when the reality was that those who had formal jobs in the city may not have had anywhere to live in rural areas. The dominant and self-internalised assumption within ruling elites that ‘all’ Zimbabweans have a rural home severely weakens the ability of urban Zimbabweans to claim a right to life in the city.

The latest assault on the Killarney squatter settlement was on 11 June 2005 during the massive state sanctioned OM clean-up operation, advanced by the state as an urban renewal campaign (Tibajuka, 2005). The state argued that it embarked on OM ‘in close consultation with local authorities to rid our urban settlements of unsanitary and sub-standard developments...’ (Speech by President, 24 November 2005). Informal housing and shacks in townships were portrayed as havens for criminals that needed to be destroyed to rid townships of criminal elements. For example, police spokesman Inspector Smile Dube was quoted as saying ‘... Criminals have been hiding in the shacks and we are after them. They shall face the wrath of the law...’ (see Mpofu, 2011). It is, however, scandalous for the state to attempt to ‘formalise’ everyone in terms of wanting them to live in formal housing but without providing resources to do so. It is because of government interventions like OM in Zimbabwe that James Ferguson once argued that ‘nowhere is the tension between pragmatically “informal” economic life and putatively “formal” state structures more evident than in the domain of poverty interventions, which typically aim to bring state institutional power to bear precisely on those who are most excluded from the “formal sector”’ (Ferguson, 2007).

Confirming their long held view that squatters ‘created a society [abnormal] outside our society’, after the destruction of their homes in 2005, state officials claimed they had not destroyed anybody’s home. Dr Godfrey Magwenzi, for example, argued:

We have not made anybody homeless. These people were not living in homes; these people were living in shacks. And these are the things that we were destroying. We have not destroyed anybody’s home... We are not making anyone homeless... before they put up these structures these people had homes somewhere. We are saying go back to your homes (see Dorman, 2007).

Therefore, as Dorman (2007) has rightly argued, in defining what is ‘home’, the state was also defining who can claim to be home and significantly, who can claim to control that. State officials still wanted squatters to return to their rural homes. For example, government officials, including the President, Vice President and the Police Officer Commanding Harare Province argued that all ‘authentic’ Zimbabweans have a rural home (Mpofu, 2011).

However, despite the brutality of the OM clean-up, some Killarney squatter camp residents still vowed never to leave the place. One of the victims, Edward Mujaji, who had squatted there for ten years, argued that ‘... these people are destroying my home and

are not giving me another... I am not going anywhere, they should come and destroy it tomorrow again because I am going to build another'. This was in spite of a police threat that those who intended to rebuild shacks would face the full wrath of the law (*Chronicle* 12 June 2005). Another victim, Alfred Mathe, noted that 'We were born and bred here and now we are being told to move. We are not going to move anywhere. We are prepared to die here. This is the only home I know. My parents were both foreigners and they died some time ago so this is the only home that they left me' (*Chronicle* 12 June 2005).

Within a month after the destruction of the Killarney squatter camp, squatters had returned. Anna Mpofo argued that "What only changed is that we no longer have proper shelter, otherwise we are coping, we sleep in the open, and since there are many of us we are not afraid" (see *Chronicle* 23 July 2005). Saineth Phiri argued that "Some of us were born here and it is not easy to abandon this place. The Government should vet us, and leave people who have lived here for a long time like us" (see *Chronicle* 23 July 2005).

Those squatters who did not return to their former squatter camps remained stranded outside the city where they had been left by state agents. For example, eleven families, part of the group of squatters evicted from Killarney Squatter camp in 2005 were relocated to a transit camp at the Agricultural and Rural Development Authority's Balu estate. The families were again forced from the transit camp and some were moved to the Chief Sigola area on the outskirts of Bulawayo. Some were taken to Spring Farm, once occupied by a successful white farmer before the chaotic 2000 farm invasions (Mpofo, 2011: 188-9). Most of the former squatters lived at Spring Farm temporarily as they had not been allocated land there. Josephine Mhlanga, one of the ex-Killarney squatters indicated that 'We were once addressed by the police, state security agents and representatives of the local authority who promised us land but eight months later, there is no hope that we will get the land' (see Mpofo, 2011).

Beauty Ngwenya, an ex-resident of Killarney squatter camp who was dropped at Spring Farm on the outskirts of Bulawayo, argued that living at the Killarney Squatter Camp had been far better than where they were left by government security agents... (see Mpofo, 2011). Another squatter, Tifkane Sibanda, highlighted that 'It is not that we are comfortable staying at this place. Life has been difficult for some of us that we ended up making our way here. What I am asking for is for the Government to give us some land so that we can fend for our families in a decent way' (see *Chronicle* Thursday, May 7, 2009). The Mayor of Bulawayo, Councillor Thaba Moyo, however, still voiced concern over the presence of squatters in peri-urban areas, indicating that '... Whether they are there because of economic problems as Council we cannot support them' (see *Chronicle* 7 May, 2009). He also accused some squatters of not being 'genuine', noting that 'Some of them rent out their houses and decide to live there... Even the furniture, which is owned by some of those people in their shacks can bear testimony to the fact that they are not genuine cases' (*Chronicle* 7 May, 2009). A highlight of the institutional weakness that has existed since 1980 has been the confrontation between the national government and local authority officials over the responsibility of addressing peri-urban squatting.

Squatters: Whose “Baby”? National Government versus Local Authority Officials

Since the 1980s, there have been recurrent confrontations between the City Council and national government officials over who bears the responsibility of addressing the squatter problem. Evading the responsibility in the early 1980s, the Bulawayo Council argued that the Killarney squatter area was under the jurisdiction of the adjacent Esigodini Rural District Council, so it had no obligation to address the problem. The Council also refused to bend its housing rules to prioritise accommodating squatters as demanded by the national government, highlighting that they also register and queue on the Council housing waiting list (*Chronicle* 22 March 1983).

Bulawayo Council officials who sympathised with those squatters that had returned from Tsholotsho rural district after their 1987 eviction were criticised by Minister Chikowore who argued that ‘... the most difficult problem is that there are some people in positions of authority who sympathise with squatters and even try to champion their cause by being their spokesmen. To the Government, these spokesmen have become part of the problem... They make people think we are insensitive to the problems that our people face...’ (*Chronicle*, 14 September 1989). PA Mzilethi also dismissed Alderman Eugene Gordon’s statement that the national Government was responsible for Killarney squatters as ‘nonsense’ (*Sunday News* 30 July 1989). Mzilethi accused Councillor Walter Sidanile of being a member of the Apostolic sect (like some squatters) and so agitated on squatters’ behalf because he ‘wanted his folk to be returned to Killarney’ while the then MP for Mpopoma constituency, Sydney Malunga’s support for the squatters was dismissed as mere politicking. Mzilethi thus pushed all responsibility for solving the squatter problem on to the Council (*Sunday News* 30 July 1989).

For his accusations, PA Mzilethi was labelled by MP Malunga as an ‘overzealous maladministrator’ the country would be better off without, one who ‘worked his way to the top because of telling lies and misleading the ministry and the entire nation.’ MP Malunga, like the City Council, firmly believed that the responsibility of solving the Killarney squatter issue rested with the central government and its representative, PA Mzilethi. Mzilethi was also accused of ‘dumping’ squatters in an inhospitable environment and for that whenever he visited Tsholotsho rural district, he carried his own water because he could not drink the water drunk by squatters in resettlement areas (*Sunday News* 13 August 1989).

In 1989, PA Z. Mzilethi argued that the issue of the Killarney squatters was not his ‘baby’, but ‘This is the Bulawayo City Council’s baby’ (*Sunday News* 16 July 1989). He noted that since the presence of squatters affected the welfare of the rate paying Bulawayo residents of the Killarney suburb, the Council had a mandate to evict them. The Council, however, regarded squatters as PA Mzilethi’s responsibility since he chaired a national government committee set up to address the problem (*Sunday News* 23 July 1989). When his early enthusiasm and commitment to address the squatting crisis had waned due to the lack of success of the many efforts made, Mzilethi described squatters as ‘useless’ and ordered them to approach the Council if they needed food or any assistance (*Chronicle* 13 October 1989).

In 2000, the national government and city authorities still evaded the question of the responsibility of resettling squatters. When asked to comment on this issue, the then Matabeleland North Provincial Governor Obert Mpofo, representing the national government, argued that the squatter camp fell under the jurisdiction of the Bulawayo City Council and referred the matter to then Bulawayo Mayor, Japhet Ndabeni Ncube who, in turn stated the camp was under state land (*Sunday News* 11 August 2002). It was only in 2012 that the Council, in conjunction with World Vision (NGO) and the International Organisation for Migration (IMO), unveiled a building project at Hyde Park to build 197 households to resettle 197 squatter families from Killarney and Trenance squatter camps (*Chronicle* 21 May 2012).

Conclusion

The handling of the peri-urban squatter situation by the Zimbabwean authorities is symptomatic of the poor response at a policy level, to the challenges of rapid urbanisation. The government should know that the world over there is no known successful coercive state effort to reverse rural-urban migration trends. Squatters' actions highlight their refusal to be condemned by the state as 'outcasts', and as they argue, they are normal citizens with rights to be respected by authorities. The location of peri-urban squatter settlements on land which both the national government and local authority can conveniently disown has made it easier for both parties to deny that addressing the squatter situation is their responsibility. They, however, attacked squatters for being in an 'illegal' place when it suited their purpose. This highlights that it is still the state that determines the urban citizenship of urban residents through this contradictory urban development policy that has gone unchanged since independence. Authorities fail to understand that structural conditions determine that some sections of the urban poor must live informally, outside 'order', tidy, modern, formal sector dominated housing (Potts, 2006).

The state's actions are contradictory: sending squatters to the communal areas, but at the same time failing to provide suitable land for their resettlement. Squatters' requests to be resettled on productive rural land have been ignored. Therefore, as the situation stands at present, there has been no change on the situation of the 1980s when squatters had no permanent homes, '... no legal status, no benefits of modern day society... they are unwanted' (*Chronicle* 1 September 1987). Squatters remain condemned to be perpetual 'outcasts'. Officials (both from the national government and the local authority), have been evading responsibility to address the squatter situation. It was only in 2012 that the Bulawayo Council, in conjunction with World Vision and the IMO embarked on concrete efforts to resettle the Killarney squatters at Hyde Park. The stance of the national government is bound to continue because of its salient perception that all 'authentic' Zimbabweans belong to rural areas and have access to land they can fall back on in hard times.

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