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Some Perceptions on the Poverty Question in Zimbabwe

The World Bank estimated urban poverty in Zimbabwe in 1990/91 to be 12 percent while the 1995 Poverty Assessment Study found urban poverty to be 39 percent. In January 2009, Save the Children estimated that 10 out of 13 million Zimbabweans, over 75 percent of the population, were living in 'desperate poverty.'[2] In April 2010, UNICEF noted that 78 percent of Zimbabweans were "absolutely poor" and 55 percent of the population, (about 6.6 million) lived under the food poverty line[3] while *New Zimbabwe* estimated that more than 65 percent of Zimbabweans lived below the poverty datum line in December 2009.[4] Recently, commentators have argued that it is very clear that poverty is increasing in the country.[5] The sense we get from the above statistics is that some agencies have defined certain percentages of Zimbabweans as poor, below some abstractly conceived poverty lines. The statistics, however, do not tell us how long those poor people have existed in poverty conditions or the historical and social dimensions of people's understandings of poverty-what it is to 'be poor.'

This article attempts to tackle some perceptions about poverty in Zimbabwe, partly addressing the issue of the changing understandings of what being 'poor' has meant to those perceived as poor. Drawing from the experiences of the urban poor, I also attempt to explore historical and social dimensions of people's understandings of poverty-what it is to 'be poor'. This is partly because what people do for themselves, as poverty alleviation strategies,

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[2] E. Nsingo, "Zimbabwe now a Factory for Poverty", in http://ipnews.net/print.asp?idnews=45481
[3] Unicef Says 6.6 Million Zimbabweans Living Below Food Poverty Line, in http://www.voanews.com/zimbabwe/news/Unicef-Says-66-Million-Zimbabweans-Liv...
[4] "Zimbabwe Increases Poverty Datum Line" in http://www newzimbabwe.com/pages/inflation12.11615.html
[5] "Poverty Levels in Zimbabwe Shocking-Makhurane", in *NewsDay*, http://www newsday.co.zw/article/2011-03-02-poverty-levels-in-zimbabwe-shocking-...

presumably turns crucially on how they understand their own circumstances (rather than on whether the state or some other agency defines them as poor or not). Inevitably, the centrality of unemployment as the main cause of poverty featured high among urban Africans during the colonial period. The conception of unemployment, however, appeared to have changed in the post-colonial era especially after 2000 when some professional jobs like teaching began to be associated with poverty.

Perceptions on identifying poverty, its causes and solutions as perceived by the poor themselves, politicians, planners, practitioners, academics and outsiders vary considerably.[6] Other scholars have contended that the problem of defining and fighting poverty is more of a political and technical problem than a rational activity[7] while Pete Alcock argued that we need not look further than politics and politicians to find the causes of poverty as they run the country and are therefore responsible for the problems within it.[8] Understanding poverty thus also requires an understanding of the social policies which have been developed in response to it and which have thus removed, restructured or even recreated it.[9]

A challenge with studying poverty is that it has many facets and people have their own varied and changing notions of it. Worse still, the poor themselves are not a homogeneous group, they are diverse. According to John Iliffe, it is their diversity that makes it even harder to study them.[10] The above problematic is also related to various contested definitions of poverty used by anthropologists, economists, development workers, geographers, sociologists and urban planners and historians. Economists sometimes use indexes and formulas to back up their theories that may be very confusing to historians, while sociologists and development workers may feel they have the monopoly of writing about

[6] Hazel Chinake, "Strategies for Poverty Alleviation in Zimbabwe", in *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 12, 1, 1997, p. 40.
[7] Dinito and Dye, cited in Chinake, "Strategies for Poverty Alleviation", p. 40.
[8] Pete Alcock, cited in Chinake, "Strategies for Poverty Alleviation", p. 40.
[9] Pete Alcock, *Understanding Poverty*, (London: The Macmillan Press, 1993), pp. 4-5.
[10] John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 172.

poverty because of the proximity of their work to the poor in societies and also because the they have at times used the word poverty as a catchword for some of their programmes.

There is therefore no one correct, scientific, agreed definition of poverty because poverty is inevitably a political concept, and thus inherently a contested one.[11] R. M. Hartwell argued that there is no universally acceptable or unambiguous definition of poverty and the first three groups of scholars to concern themselves with poverty were historians, economists and sociologists and yet between themselves they have never solved the problem of definition.[12] I find P. Muzale's definition of poverty more comprehensive. He described poverty as more than just a physiological phenomenon denoting a lack of basic necessities like food, health, shelter and clothing, but also a state of deprivation and powerlessness, where the poor are exploited and denied participation in decision making in matters that intimately affect them.[13] However, any study of poverty should be aware of the dangers and limitations of making cross disciplinary conclusions.

The changing forms of poverty over time and between places, and the different measurements of poverty are some factors that make it very difficult to study poverty. Writing about the politics of measurement in general in early modern Europe, James C. Scott noted that there was "…no single, all purpose, correct answer to a question implying measurement unless we specify the relevant local concerns that give rise to a question."[14] He noted that particular customs of measurement may be "situationally, temporarily and geographically bound."[15]

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[11] Pete Alcock, *Understanding Poverty*, p. 3.
[12] R. M. Hartwell, "The Consequences of the Industrial Revolution in England for the Poor" in The Institute of Economic Affairs, *The Long Debate on Poverty*, (Surrey: The Unwin Brothers Ltd, 1972), p. 11.
[13] P. Muzaale, cited in Jotham Dhemba, "Informal Sector Development: A Strategy for Alleviating Urban Poverty in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 14, 2, 1999, p. 8.
[14] James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State- How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1998), pp. 26-30.
[15] Ibid.

For many purposes, Scott rightly argued that an apparently vague measurement may communicate more valuable information than a statistically exact figure and expounded that every act of measurement was an act marked by the play of power relations, that is, one that had to be related to the contending interests of the stakeholders for it to be understood. At times, state-approved measurements produce gross inefficiency and a pattern of either undershooting or overshooting fiscal targets.[16] This was also highlighted by Carey Oppeinheim who noted that statistics are snapshots, they do not show how long people are living in poverty, it could be a week, months or even years. As such, figures do not convey the intensity of poverty which results from spending a long time living on low income. Statistics thus do not show the depth of poverty, they can only provide a partial picture.[17]

Worse still, as has been noted above, because poverty is a contested political concept, no government worldwide would want to hear that most of its people languish in poverty. Sometimes, this has led governments to delay publishing statistics on low income, or producing them less frequently, sometimes omitting some years for comparison. Thus lack of correct, up to date government information, research and sometimes deliberate obfuscation makes the whole exercise of determining the extent of poverty difficult.[18] Measuring poverty can therefore be regarded as an exercise in demarcation. According to Megnad Desai, lines have to be drawn where none may be visible and they have to be made bold. Where one draws the line is itself a battlefield.[19] It is for this reason that V. Mundy once observed that "publishing data on poverty is asking for trouble as the reactions to it are likely to be determined by the readers' politics."[20]

[16] Ibid.
[17] Carey Oppeinheim, *Poverty: The Facts*, (London: Child Poverty Action Group, 1990), pp. 37-8, 44.
[18] Ibid, p. 44.
[19] Megnad Desai quoted in C. Oppeinheim, *Poverty: The Facts*, p. 37.
[20] V. Mundy, quoted in J. Dhemba, "Informal Sector Development", p. 9.

It is important to focus on urban poverty because of the ever declining urban living conditions, decreasing formal employment opportunities, declining real wages, acute low cost housing shortages, and rising food and fuel prices.[21] Urbanisation trends in developing countries have also pointed to a growing concentration of people in cities as a result of natural urban population increases and also because of the traditional rural to urban migration to escape rural poverty even though recent research has established that in most Sub-Saharan African countries rural urban migration has slowed down due to lack of economic opportunities in larger towns and the resultant increasing urban-rural migration in search of livelihood security.[22] Yet, in spite of a general influx of the population into the cities, central governments, Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and donor agencies tended to focus their poverty alleviation programmes mainly on rural areas. This was because of the "urban bias" idea that the scale of the rural/urban income gap was too large, and that this was caused by inefficiencies in resource allocation, a labour aristocracy thesis that argued that the urban sector in sub-Saharan Africa was characterised by high wages and many privileges (for example, subsidised food and housing).[23]

The result has been that the gap between the number of houses and jobs produced by the formal sector and the growth of the urban populations has been widening since independence in most cities, leading to the growth to urban informality, both self-employment and shanty towns. Yet, the state and local authorities have reluctantly accepted the world of "shanty towns, of corner stalls and makeshift sweat shops, of women selling little packets of flavouring for stew, individual cigarettes and bars of soap which did not

[21] Jotham Dhemba, "Informal Sector Development", p. 5.
[22] See Deborah Potts, "Recent Trends in Rural-Urban and Urban-Rural Migration in Sub-Saharan Africa: The Empirical Evidence and Implications for Understanding Urban Livelihood Insecurity", Environment, Politics and Development *Working Paper Series*, Paper 6, Department of Geography, King's College London, 2008.
[23] Deborah Potts, "Shall we go home: Increasing Urban Poverty in African Cities and Migration Processes", *The Geographical Journal*, 161, 3, 1995, p. 247.

belong to the structures that they proposed and planned."[24] Like Gilbert and Gugler, I subscribe to the view that there is a close relationship between poverty, informal housing and informal income generation.[25] This is because poverty is concentrated among the unemployed and those in low paying jobs, the elderly or disabled person-headed households, children, female-headed households, shanty towns or squatter camps and it is people from these categories that usually resort to informality as a poverty alleviation strategy.[26]

The economic situation in Zimbabwe has been dire in the last decade. In 2004, unemployment stood at 80 percent, and the worsening economic crisis forced many company closures. Eight hundred manufacturing companies closed down nationwide since 2002, while twenty-five were struggling and eight faced closure in 2004.[27] In June 2005, about three to four million Zimbabweans earned their living through informal sector employment, supporting another five million people, while the formal sector employed about 1.3m people.[28] Over 70 percent of the population lived below the poverty line.[29] But how is the poverty situation to be understood? Clearly, the post colonial government has never been able to provide enough formal jobs.

A historical justification is necessary to understand what most residents in African cities interpreted as poverty. In colonial urban Africa, the poverty question could not be separated from the labour question, together with the official and unofficial laws that

[24] Bill Freund, *The African Worker*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 75.
[25] Gilbert and Gugler, cited in Karen T. Hansen and M. Vaa, "Introduction", in K. T. Hansen and M. Vaa, (eds), *Reconsidering Informality: Perspectives from Urban Africa*, (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004), p. 8.
[26] J. Dhemba, "Informal Sector Development", p. 11
[27] *The Standard*, 28 November 2004, "Urban dwellers return to roots as poverty bites." A. Tibaijuka estimated that 75 percent of Zimbabweans were unemployed in 2005. See A. Tibaijuka, "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe to Assess the Scope and Impact of Operation Murambatsvina by the UN Special Envoy on Human Settlements Issues in Zimbabwe, 18 July 2005", p. 17.
[28] Tibaijuka, "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe", p. 17. Also see pages 13 and 14 of the same report.
[29] Ibid, p. 17.

governed the relationship between the rulers and the ruled. For one to understand severe urban poverty there was thus a need for an analysis of wages and conditions of work.[30]

In the 1930s, in the aftermath of the Great Depression, white poverty in colonial Zimbabwe was attributed to unemployment and the Commissioner of Labour blamed the causes of white unemployment on the increasing capacity of Africans to compete with the whites resulting in the unskilled and semi-skilled whites finding it increasingly difficult to obtain work. The Commissioner also blamed employers for their tendency to economise by employing more Africans at a lower pay, thereby displacing Europeans and also that employers took advantage of prevalent unemployment to offer absurdly low wages. As a result, some white men were out of employment because they refused to work for less than standard wages.[31] Poor whites appeared incapable for various reasons, of finding and keeping employment, or of maintaining themselves without continuous assistance from the state and charitable organisations.[32]

Jobless Africans in townships were regarded as poor. This was highlighted by Josphat Moyo who first arrived in Bulawayo in 1945.[33] Cain Sibanda, who arrived in Makokoba Township in 1948 also argued that there was serious poverty among the African communities in the township. He then asked this author a question, "How do you describe a situation whereby you find a house with a floor looking like sand, with more than six people staying in a room? The only property you find in there are small bags crammed in one corner. Is that not

[30] John Iliffe, *The African Poor*, pp. 168-169.
[31] NAZ 249/39/2 Report on Unemployment and the Relief of Destitution in Southern Rhodesia by the Commissioner of Labour, 14th March, 1934, pp. 3-5.

[32] Ibid, pp. 38-48.
[33] Interview with Mr Josphat Moyo, Manwele Market, Mzilikazi Township, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Monday 19 November 2007.

poverty?[34] For Mr Sibanda, overcrowding and lack of valuable property were signs of poverty. It meant that one had no money with which to acquire property.

Clive Kileff also established the centrality of work and money among black Africans in urban areas of colonial Zimbabwe. He noted that black African men strongly believed that work was linked to happiness, money and survival while unemployment brought anomie and death, theft and hunger, for a "man can only be happy in town when he is working. All what he needs, or all what he lives on, comes from money. If this town man cannot get the job, all he had to do is to hang himself."[35] Most of the poor in colonial towns in Africa therefore consisted of unskilled labourers who had become very poor due to any one of the following four circumstances: "they may have been unemployed, or worked especially in ill paid occupations, or they had unusually large families or their general wages may have been very low."[36]

In the 1960s, however, poverty as exemplified by unemployment and overcrowding conditions affected mainly blacks as there was very limited, if any, white poverty in the city. It was a time when the political and economic need of the African was paralleled by his need for social amenities.[37] The African unemployment problem co-existed with the problem of low wages. In 1962, for example, the average African annual wage was £68.8s while that of the European workers was £1,034. An estimated half of the African labour force of 612,593 earned less than £5 a month. A year later, it was estimated that less than five percent of

[34] Interview with Mr Cain Sibanda, Manwele Market, Mzilikazi Township, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, Monday 19 November 2007.
[35] Clive Kileff, *Research Report*, University of Rhodesia, Undated, pp. 79-80.
[36] John Iliffe, *The African Poor*, p. 169.
[37] Gerda Siann, *Bulawayo Diary*, p. 68.

African workers in the country earned a living cash wage. African workers earned about an average of £101 annually while European workers averaged £1,171.[38]

As formal jobs that paid starvation wages for unskilled African workers persisted, affected urban residents turned to informal economic activities for survival. In 1971, for example, the Bulawayo Council reported that youths in the city "haunt the streets" mainly because of joblessness. Some resorted to pilfering, pick pocketing, gambling, vegetable hawking and other illegal activities as ways of raising income and many youths confessed that they felt useless because of failure to find formal jobs.[39] The multiplicity of petty traders in towns was itself a sign of poverty as the poor consumers could only buy in minute quantities and poor sellers would compete relentlessly for minute rewards.[40]

It was also an exhausting exercise for any African, whether male or female, to obtain help from the Council welfare offices in Bulawayo. Residents seeking help from the African Welfare Society were subjected to a strict vetting system that sought to establish that the applicant's family income was: nil or negligible; quite destitute; all resources exhausted; a registered tenant; sub tenant or lodger; breadwinner unemployed or unemployable; called regularly at the employment exchange; had not refused any reasonable offer of employment; was permanently urbanised; and had no rural relatives who could take them in. "Aliens" were offered repatriation.[41] This continued after independence in 1980.

In 1980 at independence, while the new Zimbabwean government emphasized the informal sector as an important generator of income for low income people, the unemployed and the destitute, very little was done to support the sector, hence the continuing harassment

[38] T. H. Mothibe, "Zimbabwe: African Working Class Nationalism, 1957-1963", in *Zambezia* (1996), XXIII (ii), p. 168.
[39] *Sunday News*, January 5, 1975, "Rejected Youths seek outlets on streets."
[40] John Iliffe, *The African Poor*, p. 174. Iliffe was referring to colonial towns but this is also true of post-colonial towns.
[41] E. Gargett, *The Administration of Transition: African Urban Settlement in Rhodesia*, (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1977), pp. 66-67.

by police and coercive legislative measures like restrictive trade licensing, artificial health and safety regulations.[42] When the prospects of employment creation in the formal sector appeared good, national government attitude towards the informal sector was hostile, with stiff and oppressive regulations. The government behaved as the employer of the last resort until this policy was de-emphasized by World Bank and IMF sponsored ESAP in 1991.[43] This blighted focus on the increasing numbers of the urban poor, as the 'hidden' informal sector that the colonial government had attempted to contain, exploded.

The central government, NGOs and donor agencies still focused their poverty alleviation programmes mainly on rural areas, ignoring the urban poor.[44] For example, a survey carried out in 2003 by a civil alliance of Christian organisations Christians Together for Justice and Peace (CTJP) to investigate food supplies in selected Bulawayo townships that included Lobengula, Old Lobengula, Njube, Makokoba, Nguboyenja, Mzilikazi and Barbourfields revealed that more than 55 percent of families survived on one meal a day. Many families had tea in the morning and afternoons and the staple maize meal in the evening. The morning tea was taken with no bread, which was scarce and available in the black market where it was expensive for the poor. Even that one meal a day was not always available in most households because of the severe shortages of maize meal.[45]

The survey followed reports that 179 people had died of malnutrition in Bulawayo in the first four months of 2003. Zimbabwe's galloping inflation, pegged at 400 percent in July 2003, also fuelled crime and prostitution especially among the youth in Makokoba,

[42] B. Ndlovu, *BA Honours Dissertation*, "The Informal Manufacturing Sector in Bulawayo", History Dept, University of Zimbabwe, 1989, pp. 17-19.
[43] Mkhululi Ncube, "Employment, Unemployment and the Evaluation of Labour Policy in Zimbabwe", *Zambezia* (2000), xxvii (ii), pp. 174 and 166.
[44] Bulawayo Municipal Records Library (BMRL) N6A/17 Squatters/Vagrants, "A Situational Analysis of Urban Poverty Bulawayo" by Ben Strydom (Chairman and Director of Combined Churches and Mobile Soup Kitchen) (undated), pp. 2-3.
[45] *Daily News*, 25 July 2003, "Bulawayo families surviving on one meal a day-Survey." The CTJP was formed in 2001. Its members included the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe Council of Churches and the Catholic Church.

Nguboyenja, Mzilikazi and Barbourfields townships. The survey reported an increase in the number of child headed households and single parent homes mainly headed by females and also established that overcrowding was worsening in the older townships. The CTJP thus lamented that most food donors channelled their aid to rural areas, ignoring the equally starving urban dwellers.[46] The implementation of the structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) since the 1980s worsened the living standards of the urban poor in nearly all sub-Saharan African towns and cities and led to falling per capita urban incomes, public sector retrenchments and deteriorating urban infrastructure.[47]

SAPs aimed at reducing what became known as the "urban bias" through cutting out anything that smacked of state subsidisation, effectively making town life more difficult than in the countryside according to many criteria.[48] Western donors sought to increase the burden of development for those who would be its beneficiaries. As Freund aptly argued, the crisis in urban planning regimes was not seen as a catastrophe, the poor "were doing it for themselves" and if they chose to live in urban areas, it must be because that was where the market forces decreed them to go, they did not need the state to assist them.[49] An estimated 10,000 textile and clothing industry workers in Bulawayo lost their jobs due to business failure and retrenchment as a result of ESAP in the 1990s.[50] The Central Statistical Office

[46] Ibid.
[47] Deborah Potts, "Shall we go Home", p. 245. The standard features of SAPs included a reduction in the budget deficit through a combination of cuts in public enterprise deficits and rationalisation of public sector employment; trade liberalisation, including price decontrol, and deregulation of trade, investment and production; phased removal of subsidies, devaluation of local currency and introduction of cost recovery in the health and education sectors. See Leon A. Bijlmakers, M. T. Basset and D. M. Saunders, *Health and Structural Adjustment in Rural and Urban Zimbabwe*, (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1996), p. 11.
[48] Bill Freund, *The African City: A History*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 156.
[49] Ibid.
[50] Mirjam Zaaijer, *Urban Economic Restructuring and Local Institutional Response: The Case of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe*, HIS Project Paper Series, (Rotterdam: Institute for Housing and Urban Development, 1998), p. 23.

estimated that close to 20,000 jobs were lost in the city over a twelve year period between 1990 and 2002.[51]

Free market economics under structural adjustment programmes (SAPs), ripped the African city apart, resulting in what Paul T. Zeleza regarded as "a demonisation of African cities," which lead to large-scale urban unemployment, the criminalisation of the city, the expansion of urban agriculture, "a ruralisation of urban space."[52] These SAPs, according to Zeleza, first checked the growth of African cities and then ensured that it would re-commence on a distorted and violent basis, rendering the contemporary African city a site of violence and riot with the poor attempting to 'reshape and re-invent' the urban spaces to make them work for them.[53] It is for this reason that some economic anthropologists have argued that the project of economics needed to be rescued from the economists who have tended to portray the economy as an impersonal machine, remote from the everyday experience of most people but with devastating consequences.[54]

ESAP clearly added a new dimension to urban poverty in Zimbabwe. It left the poor poorer. This led Preben Kaarsholm to argue in 1995 that Bulawayo townships continued to display old characteristics of poverty and deprivation, and crime persisted as an everyday problem and there was a noticeable persistent segregation between living conditions of the rich and the poor, proper citizens and tolerated citizens. Unemployment, homelessness and destitution continued to be problems, not least in the context of persistent drought and

[51] The CSO, cited in Beacon Mbiba and Michael Ndubiwa, "Decent Work in Construction and the Role of Local Authorities", p. 12. See also Hansen, Karen Tranberg, *Salaula: The World of Secondhand Clothing and Zambia*, (Chicago, Ill; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000) for the effects of second hand clothing on Zambia.

[52] Paul T. Zeleza, "The Spatial Economy of Structural Adjustment in African Cities", in Paul T. Zeleza and Ezekiel Kalipeni (eds), *Sacred Spaces and Public Quarrels*: African Economic and Cultural Landscapes, (Trenton, N J,: Africa World Press, 1999), pp. 46, 54, 55.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Keith Hart, J.-L. Laville and A. D. Cattani, "Building the Human Economy Together", in Keith Hart, Jean-Louis Laville and Antonio Cattani, (eds), *The Human Economy*, (Cambridge, Polity Press, 2010), pp. 4-5.

accelerated influx from rural areas.[55] While Jeffrey Alwang *etal* also highlighted the depth of poverty that gripped Zimbabwe during the ESAP years they sometimes make sweeping statements, for example, that "in 1990, virtually no poverty existed in urban areas, whereas by 1995 urban poverty was recognised as a pressing social problem."[56] As Hevina Dashwood noted, ESAP's negative impact must not be allowed to overshadow the fact that the ruling elite's declining commitment to the welfare of the poor in Zimbabwe predates the introduction of ESAP in 1991.[57] There were serious signs of social and physical deterioration/poverty in major cities well before the launch of ESAP.

It is for the above reason that Mirjam Zaaijer's assessment in 1998, that compared to many other African cities, poverty was not yet visible in Bulawayo was perhaps an overstatement. Zaaijer argued that the city had no big squatter settlements and virtually everybody had access to basic services and estimated the number of destitute people (street kids, vagrants, homeless) to be between one and two thousands. This was at a time when local Bulawayo opinion leaders believed that the city's levels of poverty, homelessness and unemployment had reached alarming proportions.[58] Other studies also highlighted the growth of homelessness and poverty in Bulawayo since the late 1970s[59] and poverty was already recognised as a social problem in Bulawayo townships during the colonial period.

Zaaijer's argument highlights the problematic of evaluating the effects of the poverty of a certain group of people by comparison between cities or countries. As Anthony O'Connor aptly observed, it is in many ways easier to discuss poor countries than poor

[55] P. Kaarsholm, "Siye pambili-Which Way Forward? Urban Development, Culture and Politics in Bulawayo" in B. Raftopoulos and Tsuneo Yoshikuni (eds), *Sites of Struggle: Essays in Zimbabwe's Urban History*, (Harare: Weaver Press, 1999), pp. 241-242.
[56] See Jeffrey Alwang *etal*, *Why has Poverty Increased in Zimbabwe*, (The World Bank, Washington DC, 2002), p.15.
[57] Hevina S. Dashwood, *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transformation*, (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 200), p.12.
[58] Mirjam Zaaijer, *Urban Economic Restructuring,* p. 27.
[59] Ben Strydom, "A Situational Analysis of Urban Poverty Bulawayo."

people, that is, by dealing with issues like national aggregates rather than poverty as experienced by individuals. Poverty may not be so visible to the outside world; it may be hidden in homes, institutions and workplaces and therefore felt by those directly affected by it. It is the individual who may die of starvation, not entire nations.[60]

After 2000, former middle class professionals like teachers and nurses were pauperised by the collapse of the formally economy. They had firmly joined industrial workers and the unemployed as new classes of the urban poor.[61] Some teachers abandoned the classroom for menial jobs while those who remained could be found selling sweets and other small food stuffs in their classrooms. School children used to laugh at their teachers and some equated them to herd boys employed in rural areas. "Real jobs" and "real work", professions requiring any form of specialised education and others linked to wage labour[62] (like nursing and teaching) had become less rewarding in the eyes of many Zimbabweans. That is, people had become increasingly used to working in the informal sector and unlikely to view this as unemployment and they had come to accept that they would be poor even if they had a "proper job".[63] Almost everyone in the country was getting involved in *kukiya-kiya*[64] when in the past people involved in such activities were looked down upon as either lazy or as *tsotsis* (criminals). Jobs that "real" men were not expected to do like small scale buying and selling, and the selling of tomatoes by the roadside had now almost become a necessity.[65] *Kukiya-kiya* seemed to thrive on clever dodging, hiding and wandering[66] and

[60] Anthony O'Connor, *Poverty in Africa, A Geographical Approach*, (London: Belhaven Press, 1991), pp. 3 and 7.
[61] Mary E. Ndlovu, "Mass Violence in Zimbabwe, 2005-Murambatsvina", in *Development Dialogue*, no. 50, December 2008, p. 219.
[62] Jeremy Jones, 'Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe': The Rise of the *Kukiya-kiya* Economy 2000-2008, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 36, 2, 2010, pp. 285-299.
[63] Deborah Potts, "'Restoring Order'? Operation Murambatsvina and the Urban Crisis in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2006, p. 289.
[64] *Kukiya-kiya* refers to the desperate exploitation of whatever resources at hand just to survive. See Jeremy Jones, "Nothing is straight in Zimbabwe", p. 286.
[65] Ibid, p. 291.
[66] Ibid, p. 286.

engaging in games of chance like gambling that were detested by colonial authorities in Bulawayo townships but now they had become a necessity.

The Third *Chimurenga*[67] policies churned out new classes of the urban poor in the form of displaced victims of electoral violence and land occupations among others. In spite of the collapse of the formal economy under the third *Chimurenga* policies, the government continued telling people to heroically persevere, remain steadfast *(rambai makashinga)* in the face of deepening poverty. In 2005, vending had become a key (though risky and unreliable) source of livelihood in Bulawayo. "Everyone has become a vendor" was an oft-cited phrase, despite the risk of harassment for illegal vendors.[68]

It was under this scenario that the Zimbabwean government unleashed the now much publicised "clean-up" operation, Operation Murambatsvina (OM) that targeted all informality in urban areas in 2005, leaving hundreds of thousands of urban residents without shelter and sources of income, causing poverty on an unprecedented scale.[69] The central Government, however, argued that the real purpose of OM was not to destroy and cause pain, but to deal with crime, squalor, and fight poverty (not the poor) by rebuilding and reorganising urban settlements and micro, small and medium enterprises.[70] The main government argument, exemplified by statements from some national government officials, including the President, Vice President and the Police Officer Commanding Harare Province was that all Zimbabweans had a rural home.[71] This dominant and self-internalised assumption within ruling elites that "all" Zimbabweans have a rural home has severely weakened the ability of

[67] This refers to the period from 1999/2000 characterised by chaotic farm invasions and portrayed by government as an extension of the liberation wars but now to achieve economic independence.
[68] Kate Bird and Martin Prowse, "Vulnerability, Poverty and Coping in Zimbabwe", *Research Paper* No 2008/41, 2008, p. 17.
[69] Tibaijuka, "Report of the Fact-Finding Mission to Zimbabwe."
[70] Response by the Government of Zimbabwe to the Report by the UN special Envoy on Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order, August 2005, p. 20, in http://www2.uni.int/Countries/Zimbabwe/1152250806.pdf retrieved on 21 February 2009.
[71] Busani Mpofu, "Operation 'Live Well' or 'Cry Well?: An Analysis of the Rebuilding Programme in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Volume 37, No. 1, March 2011, p. 180.

urban Zimbabweans to claim a right to life in the city[72] and has also impacted on the state's promulgation of any objective policies to address urban poverty. It is because of government interventions like the one cited above 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."[73]

In the face of deepening poverty, the poor have adopted various survival strategies that range from working extra hours, sometimes without pay, to save their jobs,[74] doing informal jobs like street vending, urban agriculture, *shebeening*, prostitution, pick pocketing, stealing from their employers, and relocating to rural areas as a coping strategy. This contrasted with the colonial period when men believed that their work in town should prosper them so that they could support their family in rural areas.[75] Some destitute parents deserted their children and returned to their rural homes but were unable to send money to support their dependents left in urban areas,[76] highlighting the 'juvenisation and feminisation of poverty' with greater incidences of child poverty (persons aged 0-14 years) and poverty among female headed households.[77] Some destitute people resorted to being "perpetual mourners" (those who identify and attend funeral gatherings (of non-relatives and other people they may not know at all) almost every day) as a way of accessing food. Others frequented beer halls not because they had money to buy beer everyday but to "hide" away

[72] Sara Dorman, "Running from the Land ': Urban Development, Citizenship and the Zimbabwean State in Historical Perspective", *Unpublished Paper* presented at British Zimbabwe Research Day, Oxford University, 9 June 2007, pp. 19-20.
[73] James Ferguson, "Formalities of Poverty: Thinking about Social Assistance in Neoliberal South Africa", in *African Studies Review*, Vol. 50, No. 2, Jane Guyer's "Marginal gains: Monetary Transactions in Atlantic Africa" (Sep. 2007), p. 71.
[74] B. Mbiba and Ndubiwa, "Decent Work in Construction and the role of Local Authorities: the Case of Bulawayo, Zimbabwe", *Unpublished Report*, January 2008", p. 26.
[75] Clive Kileff, *Research Report*, University of Rhodesia, undated, p. 79.
[76] M. Grant, "Social and Economic Identities of Urban Youth in Bulawayo", p. 421.
[77] A. A. Hamdock, "A Poverty Assessment Exercise in Zimbabwe", p. 301.

from their hungry wives and children.[78] Other coping mechanisms involved doing a *dabulap*[79] from their work places due to the high transport fares or joining "walking clubs", popularly known as *Sihube*[80], or staff buses. Some youth tended to steal property from their parents, run away to *eGoli,* (Johannesburg) and many of them never remitted anything to their parents.[81]

The persistent attempts by the Zimbabwean state to "formalise" everyone in terms of wanting them to work in formal jobs and live in formal housing but without providing resources to do so are scandalous. The state's reluctant acceptance of the informal sector ignores the historical pattern of rapid urbanisation and the growth of informal economies supporting the livelihoods of hundreds of thousands of people in the country's urban areas. This needs rethinking.

Worse still, the commanding heights of the informal economy have been expropriated by the ruling elites and their associates, for their own benefit, but camouflaged in the name of providing basic commodities to the poor at affordable prices. For example, when already suffering from unprecedented hyperinflation in 2007, the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ), under the Mid Term Monetary Policy Review Statement of 1 October 2007, established of the Basic Commodities Supply-Side Intervention facility (BACOSSI) aimed "at boosting production through targeted financial support to manufacturers of basic goods as well as selected wholesalers and retailers."[82] Some of the beneficiaries of the funds never supplied the basic commodities. For example, a former popular TV and radio personality in the

[78] Interview with Pondo Ncube.
[79] *Dabulap* referred to a system whereby migrants from Bulawayo travelled the long distance from the city to the neighbouring South Africa on foot in search of greener pastures, but now was euphemistically used to refer to the long distances workers in the city walked between their living and work places.
[80] *Sihube* was a long distance bus that travelled between Bulawayo and rural areas. In this case city workers who travelled to and from work daily on foot had also been nicknamed *Sihube*, (the long distance bus).
[81] Solidarity Peace Trust, "Gone to Egoli", Economic Survival Strategies in Matabeleland: A preliminary study, 30 June 2009.
[82] Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe, Half Year Monetary policy Statement, 2008, p. 38.

country was arrested in 2007 over the allegations of defrauding the RBZ's BACOSSI programme but the case is yet to go on trial.[83]

The other stated RBZ aim was to ensure the availability of basic commodities like soap, cooking oil and sugar to the urban populations at cheap prices but this failed as towards the end of 2008, all supermarkets in Zimbabwe had empty shelves. Basic commodities could only be found in the 'black market' (informal businesses) at exorbitant prices, reducing most urbanites to hunter-gatherers of basic commodities on a daily basis. Meanwhile it was clear to most urbanites that there was a well networked political elite feeding off the economic crisis through the RBZ-sanctioned supply of basic goods produced locally that could not be found in major supermarkets.[84] In other words, the very bureaucratic institutions that were supposed to lay the ground for "straight" progress were themselves operating in the *kukiya-kiya* (informal way) mode.[85] For example, the streets of Bulawayo are now littered with new supermarkets that were established during the BACOSSI era and are suspected to be owned by those with links to the connected political elites. This is what Rob Davies called a 'pure rentier economy', in which the ruling party created incentives for trading in goods in short supply "not only as a way to become rich but also as virtually the only way to survive." The rewards for long-term investment in production were minuscule compared to the rapid profits of buying cheap and selling dear,[86] practising *homo economicus.* When some urban residents are asked of their views on BACOSSI as a government poverty alleviation mechanism, a common reaction was to laugh and argue that the programme was "a joke."

[83] NewsDze-Zimbabwe, "Tich Mataz Bailed on Fraud Rap", http://newsdzezimbabwe.wordpress.com/2011/06/28/tich-mataz-bailed-on-fraud-rap/
[84] Masimba Biriwasha, "Zimbabweans Forced to Stalk basic Commodities: Food Security has Become a major issue in People's Lives", in http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/sep26b_2008.html#Z10
[85] Jeremy Jones, "'Nothing is Straight in Zimbabwe', p. 298.
[86] Rob Davies, cited in B. Raftopoulos, "The Crisis in Zimbabwe, 1998-2008", in Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo, (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008,* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), p. 221.

Because of the high levels of poverty in 2009, Zimbabwe was described as a "factory of poverty."[87] Some NGOs believed that this was a " largely man-made, preventable and grossly unnecessary situation, the result of years of failed policies and the self-seeking actions of the ruling political elites whose corrupt and undemocratic tendencies have worsened the situation by heightening the levels of inequality to alarming levels."[88]

The last decade has also seen massive attempts by the country's ruling elites to 'blacken' the ownership of the country's economic resources through dubious indigenisation and economic empowerment legislation. This began with the invasion of white owned commercial farms by supporters of the then ruling ZANU PF party. Now the Zimbabwean state has moved on to other sectors of the economy, including banking, manufacturing, retailing and mining. Companies operating in the country have been told to embrace the country's equity laws, effected in March 2010, that requires large foreign companies valued at more than US$500 000 to surrender a 51% shareholding to black Zimbabweans. However, there is no way that poor Zimbabweans, living on a hand to mouth basis, can afford to acquire stakes in such companies. There are therefore reasonable suspicions that this 'blackening' of the Zimbabwean economy is just another gimmick to benefit the politically privileged few while the majority or urban residents continue languishing in poverty. Actually, there are reasonable fears that this 'blackening' of the economy is only another form of ZANU PF-iying the economy

The economic situation is gloomy for the jobless in the country in that while the economy has stabilised since the dollarisation of the economy after the collapse of the Zimbabwean currency in 2009, job growth and creation have been very disappointing. Just like the rest of Africa, Zimbabwe's recovery has been jobless, job creation remains very

[87] E. Nsingo, "Zimbabwe now a Factory for Poverty."
[88] F. Ngirande, cited in E. Nsingo, "Zimbabwe now a Factory for Poverty."

limited and the persistent high youth unemployment rate is a cause of concern and a potential source of instability.[89] At the same time, the central government has refused responsibility for the factors behind the poverty ravaging its citizens, shifting blame to the targeted travel and economic sanctions imposed by America and the European Union on high ranking ZANU PF officials who have been blamed for destroying the formal sector of the economy and undermining democracy in the country.

Conclusion

Poverty has become a major social problem in Zimbabwe. Yet local authorities and the central government have relentlessly destroyed self-help efforts of the poor, who, owing to the scarcity of formal sector employment and housing, have created their own jobs and shelter. In 1999, Dhemba argued that the informal sector was 'there to stay' in the country because of the existence of what he termed 'mass urban poverty.'[90] The situation has worsened in the last decade due to the collapse of the formal sector of the economy. At the same time, the central government has refused responsibility for the factors behind the poverty ravaging its citizens, shifting blame to the targeted travel and economic sanctions imposed by America and the European Union high ranking ZANU PF officials who have been blamed for destroying the formal sector of the economy. It is difficult to devise strategies to minimise poverty when its causes are misunderstood. At the same time, the poor have continued to express themselves in domestic life and organised informally in the cracks of the economic system; they have formed associations for their own protection, betterment

[89] Economic Commission for Africa, *Governing Development in Africa: The Role of the State in Africa*, (Addis Ababa: AU, 2011), p. 10.
[90] J. Dhemba, "Informal Sector Development", p. 17.

and recreation. What they do, however, has often been obscured, marginalised or repressed by dominant economic institutions and state ideologies.[91]

[91] Keith Hart etal, "Building the Human Economy Together", p. 5.