

Chapter 2

Political Economy of Peri-urban Transformations in Conditions of Neoliberalism in Zimbabwe

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2.1 Introduction

The inexorable march of intensifying socio-spatial transformations taking place in the peri-urban areas of Third World cities seems to resonate with the dialectics and logic of capital accumulation and circulation shaping the processes of city making worldwide (Harvey 1973, 1982, 1989, 2006).

Thus, in the tenuous and conflictual peri-urban landscapes of urbanising Southern African countries, we may reasonably ask, how can urban planning policy concepts articulate the claims of the every day life of ordinary residents in negotiating their right of accessing and using urban services? Perhaps, do their negotiating strategies suggest for the democratisation of peri-urban space? What are the possible planning responses to ameliorate the resource challenges that Third World cities encounter in grappling with episodic peri-urban change and political questions?

In offering possible explanations on these questions, the discourse looks at contemporary urban planning policy practices in selected Southern African cities drawing mainly on Zimbabwean experience. To do so, the chapter starts by theorising the socio-economic impacts of neoliberal capital's mode of creative destruction in the reproduction of urban space in the peripheral space economies of the global South. The leading arguments of this volume demonstrate how the economic reform measures prescribed by the Washington Consensus, propagated by the mainstream Northern academy, and pushing even "the once educated and prosperous middle classes to the ranks of the urban poor in labour and housing markets" (Bayat 2000: 534). Hence the question: how has the economic plunge of

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Zimbabwe's economy inspired the self-built house building strategies of marginalised citizens in the country's neoliberal land markets.

Before we preview the local planning responses, discussed throughout the volume, the discourse now casts a gaze at the demographic profile of rapidly urbanising countries of the global South while care must be taken that the tidal wave of urbanisation will always remain uneven where some countries continue to urbanise faster than others. Supporting this claim, Potts (2013) has noted that the rate at which some countries of sub-Saharan Africa are urbanising has actually slowed down in comparison with earlier rates in the first decades of independence. Tracing out the demographic trends in sub-Saharan African cities, Potts (2013) established that the populations of many large towns, sometimes including even the capital city, have been growing only a little faster than the national population. Several cities have grown more slowly and have thus lost population share relative to the country as a whole. Some countries such as Mauritania, Kenya, Tanzania and Zambia have counter-urbanised, in other words, the urban population share has fallen (Potts 2013: 4). But how will these demographic trends concomitant with the spatial futures of these cities look like—is the question explored in the next section.

2.2 Dystopia and the Future of the African City

2.2.1 *Demographic Trends of a Dystopic Urban World Future*

In their famously pessimistic report to the Club of Rome, entitled “Limits to Growth” cited in Mike Davis (2006) “Planet of Slums”, Meadows et al. (1972) portray a dystopic urban future of the world predicting the demise of humankind. For the first time in urban history, they alert us that the urban population of the earth will outnumber the rural or, put differently, there will be more people living in cities than in the countryside (Davis 2006: 5). These scholars on dystopia argue that since the rural population of 3.2 billion will implode in the early 2020s, all the future growth of the world population, estimated to be 10 billion by 2050, will be confined to the cities. By then an estimated 4 billion people will be living in the Third World cities with “the bulk residing in the peri-urban areas of the global South” (Watson 2009a). Painting a rather bleak future of these Third World cities, Davis describes them as:

...not the rich, vibrant cultural centres beloved of Sunday-supplement dandies and middle-class flâneurs, but vast peri-urban developments, horizontal spreads of unplanned squats and shantytowns, simmering with the unsightly dumps of humans and waste, where child labour is the norm, child prostitution is commonplace, gangs and paramilitaries rule and with no access to clean water or sanitation, let alone to education or democratic institutions (cited in The Guardian 2006: 2).

Mike Davis (2006) states that already there are some 200,000 such slums worldwide. He asserts that the slum is becoming the blueprint for cities of the future, which, “rather than being made out of glass and steel as envisioned by earlier generations of urbanists, are instead largely made out of crude brick, straw, recycled plastic, cement blocks and scrap wood” (*ibid.*)

In the imaginaries of Davis (2006), these slums are manifestations of the neoliberal restructuring of Third World cities that has occurred since the late 1970s. Davis attacks the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, the “middle-class hegemony” and international NGOs” for propagating the slum city. More directly, the product of the economic structural reforms in Africa has been an explosive growth of the major cities such as Lagos in Nigeria. Meanwhile the hybrid nature of peri-urban settlements and urban development in China and most of Southeast Asia has led to a theorisation of urbanisation as a process of structural change and intensified interaction at the rural-urban interface.

The resultant landscape, as Guldin (1997: 44) tells us, is “neither rural nor urban but a blending of the two wherein a dense web of transactions ties larger urban cores to their surrounding regions.” These new and emerging urban forms have inspired some international urbanists (Hall 1996; Davis 2004; Sassen 2005) to theorise the processes of clustering Third World cities into novel networks, corridors and hierarchies. Typical of these new urban configurations is the Beijing-Tianjin urban-industrial belt akin to the lower Rhine-Ruhr and New York—Philadelphia corridors in Germany and the USA.

Unlike in Europe and North America, the growth of cities in most sub-Saharan African countries—except South Africa—has not been driven by a powerful manufacturing-export engine and massive foreign investment as in the case of China. In the case of sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America, the Middle East and parts of Asia, rapid urbanisation has continued its resolute march de-coupled from industrialisation as opposed to Manchester, Berlin and Chicago—the vaunted “job machines” of the industrial revolution (Davis 2004). In the poor Southern countries, urban growth has not been linked to the capacity of cities to provide employment.

Instead, as a direct result of the economic marginality of African countries in the world economy, de-industrialisation, capital flight and the brain drain from both the cities and national economies themselves, there has occurred a population and economic de-concentration in the Third World city (Briggs and Yeboah 2001: 19). The bulk of foreign currency remittance inflows for investment targeted the housing sector in Dar es Salaam, Accra and Harare resulting in considerable urban sprawl into the peri-urban zones of these cities. In the following sections, we shall see that housing construction remains the mainstay of urban expansion with only limited commercial or industrial development—a pattern replicated in many other African cities. Individual builders are even prepared to build in areas which are at present unserved, in anticipation of future service and infrastructure provision, by taking advantage of lower land values of peri-urban locations.

2.2.2 Third World Urbanisms and Re-thinking the City

The dysfunctional and haphazard urbanisms of most developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, are direct outcomes of the late 1970s debt crisis and the impacts of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) austerity measures imposed on Third World countries in the early 1980s.

Most of the surplus population of the rural poor, created by the IMF enforced deregulation of agriculture, was forced to migrate to urban slums even as the hard-pressed cities were confronted with economic stagnation and stifling unemployment rates. This bleak result tallies with the UN-Habitat (2003) global report on human settlements accusing the IMF's structural adjustment programmes of being responsible for the ills of urban poverty and slums, exclusion and deepening inequality. Although the UN-Habitat (2011) global report was criticised for failing to draw attention to the topical land-use challenges of over-urbanisation, unplanned settlements, horizontal expansion, and the degradation of the environment with associated climatic change risks, it was widely recognised for its warnings about the global tragedy of urban poverty translating into reality.

However, recognising the widespread global urban poverty, the question can be asked, how are peri-urban residents responding to the measures of neoliberal restructuring in shaping the governance of peri-urban areas under conditions of declining productivity? In answering this question, the chapter features the findings of recent research on local policy responses in sub-Saharan Africa. But first what do we understand by neoliberalism in the context of this chapter?

2.2.3 Theory of Neoliberalism and Peri-urban Change

The neo-Marxist geographer, David Harvey (2006: 145), suggests that neoliberalism is a theory of political economic practices postulating that human welfare can best be advanced by the maximisation of entrepreneurial freedoms through institutions characterised by private property rights, individual liberty, free markets and free trade.

The role of the state, therefore, is to create and preserve institutions such as the military, police and juridical functions required to secure private property rights and to support freely functioning markets. Under the new round of global restructuring—the theme of this chapter—the rules of engagement were established through the World Trade Organisation and International Monetary Fund to represent neoliberalism as a global set of rules. All signatory member states agree to abide by these rules or face penalties. The creation of the neoliberal capitalist system has inevitably entailed much destruction, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers (such as the prior presumed state sovereignty over political and economic affairs) but also of divisions of labour, social relations, welfare provisions, ways of life and attachments to the land (Harvey 2006: 145–146).

So, how has urban planning practice navigated the tidal waves of the shifting and uneven geography of neoliberalism at local level, specifically in the domain of entitlements to peri-urban land resources? The following sections will project recent literature on local experiences in peri-urban land use planning under conditions of neoliberal restructuring in sub-Saharan Africa—with emphasis on Zimbabwe.

2.3 Local Responses to Global Restructuring in Sub-Saharan Africa

Some African peri-urban researchers (Stren 1994a; Simone 2004; Rakodi 1997; Mbiba and Huchzermeyer 2002; Potts 1995, 2007) have traced the knock-on-effects of economic restructuring to the contradictions of unintended material conditions—primarily around entitlements to land and the economy. These African research scholars acknowledge the contradictions or undesirable material conditions buoyed by structural antagonisms in the inadequate land use planning system of peri-urban resources thereby fuelling a polarisation between “winners and losers” (Mbiba and Huchzermeyer 2002: 120; Potts 2013). The majority losers and exploited are the marginalised, the de-institutionalised and the poor households. Arguably, the polarising processes, entrenched by skewed land use planning systems, have largely failed to protect the poor or the “urban de-enfranchised” (Bayat 2000: 534) from exploitation by alliances of the well-connected at all levels of society (Mbiba and Huchzermeyer 2002: 120). In a recent case study on political patronage in the “distributive politics and land-based power dynamics” of Greater Harare, Chirisa et al. (2015): 13 expose the hegemony of the Mugabe-led ruling Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) party government in “manipulating the issue of land grants” (Boone 2013: 382) to housing cooperatives affiliated with the ruling party but excluding those perceived to be sell-outs.

It is thus that a significant impact of the new round of global restructuring in Third World cities is the double process of integration, on one hand, social exclusion and the informalisation of the economy, on the other” (Bayat 2000: 234). In the context of city making processes, global restructuring has spawned one of the most important policy challenges of how urban planning can, particularly in developing countries, respond to the widespread poverty, inequality and the informalisation of the economy at all levels (Mutizwa-Mangiza 2009: 3). A large number of once educated well-to-do middle classes (government employees and students), public sector workers, as well as segments of the peasantry have been pushed to the ranks of the urban poor in labour and housing markets. Thus, in an emerging urban policy landscape, Mutizwa-Mangiza (2009) warns us that “...urban planners and managers increasingly find themselves confronted by new urban forms and processes, the drivers of which often lie outside the control of local government.”

Yet equally challenging are modernist imaginaries of the compact city, as socio-spatial change seems to be taking place primarily in the direction of spatial and institutional fragmentation, separation and specialisation of functions and uses within cities. While labour polarisation is accentuating the growing differences between wealthier and poorer areas in the cities of both industrialised and developing countries (Mutizwa-Mangiza 2009: 3). Exasperated by these policy challenges, the UN-Habitat Executive Director, Tibaijuka (2006), has urged upon planning practitioners to develop alternative approaches that are pro-poor and inclusive, and that place the creation of the livelihoods at the centre of planning efforts. However, Tibaijuka's appeal has not been given much consideration (Watson 2009b: 2260) in planning policy circles. In many cases, Watson observes that the inherited planning systems and approaches in the postcolonial era still remain unchanged to suit particular local political and ideological ends, despite that over time the overall context in which the systems operate has changed significantly.

Given the narrative of the new and emerging socio-spatial transformations and the persistent ideological preferences of Northern planning systems, we may reasonably ask: how then is global restructuring influencing the peri-urban space economies of Southern Africa? What strategies do ordinary citizens engage in response to their exclusion from the collective consumption of urban services? The various contributions to this book feature, albeit in small measure, reflect evidence of peri-urban land use change by drawing on recent local planning practices and technologies.

2.4 Peri-urban Agriculture Dominates the Poor Urban Space Economy

A recent study (Mbiba 1994) on the socio-spatial impacts of economic structural reforms on the African city reveals the prominence of urban agriculture as a local contingency response to the widespread and entrenched poverty in African cities such as Harare. The economic plunge and, in particular, the massive decline in formal employment and incomes of the indebted countries such as Zimbabwe after adoption of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) in the early 1990s (Bond and Manyanya 2002) contributed both to the increase in off-plot urban agriculture and direct rural-to-urban food procurement (Mbiba 1995; ENDA-Zimbabwe 1996; Bowyer-Bower et al. 1996; Masoka 1997). Mbiba (1994) views urban agriculture as "the production of crops and livestock within the administrative boundaries of the city." He identifies peri-urban agriculture as a sub-category of urban agriculture involving the production of crops and livestock in areas outside the city boundary up to a radius of 150 km—economically inclined to the city (Mbiba 1994, 1995).

However, beyond the prominence of agriculture in African peri-urban research, the attention to the rapid socio-economic transformations on the edge of apex cities in the global South seems to be taking the frontier of Third World urban policy studies. Firmly situated in the meta-narrative of contemporary neo-liberalism is a recognition of the fragmented socio-economic growth and spatial expansion of cities in the sub-Saharan African region (Harrison 2003) mainly attributing to the proliferation of informal land use and sprawling high quality middle class housing estates (Briggs and Yeboah 2001: 24) in peri-urban areas.

The rapid sprawl of the African city is inexorably encroaching on distinctly rural agricultural land spaces at the city edge (Briggs and Mwamfupe 2000; Simon et al. 2004; Sebego and Gwebu 2013). The emerging new land-use patterns have important consequences for peri-urban agricultural activities in terms of existing opportunities and policy responses. Therefore, there is need for research that can offer “additional and alternative theoretical policy resources” to help planners better understand the now-dominant urban conditions of informality (Watson 2009b: 2260) in the tidal waves of neoliberal globalisation.

Planners and decision-makers need to re-think policy alternatives that can insert urban agriculture in the built environment while minimizing the socio-spatial and ecological conflicts associated with agriculture. It is the processes and dynamics, rather than the forms, of peri-urban agriculture that demand renewed analysis by focusing on household subjectivities in response to the changing structural constraints as well as the motives and capacities that drive decisions affecting the everyday lives of beneficiaries in the use of space.

In the final analysis, the challenges of mapping and translating peri-urban transformations into plan making processes raise questions of appropriate technological resource mixes tapping into global networked information systems. Foregrounding the dynamics of information systems in mapping changing spatial configurations and assemblages over time (Sheller and Urry 2006a, b), the next section highlights an increasingly important role that geospatial cartographies can play in enriching strategic decision-making processes that embed multiple and complex permutations of rapidly transforming peri-urban landscapes.

2.5 Mapping Out a Transforming African Peri-urban Landscape

Although dominant in the large city planning and implementation processes of the global North, the resort to geospatial technologies in framing nuanced understandings of rapidly changing African urban environments is now a reality (Koti 2004). The product of “othering” the non-Western city grounded in the parochialisms of the North (Myers 2011; Robinson 2002, 2006) has been that peri-urban areas, one of the fastest growing yet little understood sectors of African cities, tended to disappear from the intellectual maps of mainstream urban theory

and practice. In most instances of African urban development, land use changes were not adequately quantified due to an overreliance on and the “situatedness” of conventional methods that often ignored the dynamics of volatile land use changes in the fringe areas of a Southern city. Thus, overtaken by imploding urban growth without a corresponding institutional and technical capacity, peri-urban governments in sub-Saharan African countries now often find themselves unable or least prepared to understand their own growth patterns for planning purposes.

Responding to these policy making and implementation challenges, Chirisa, Shekede and Bandaiko in this volume relate a case study on how earth observation (EO) can help peri-urban local governments understand and cope with spatial transformation following land use patterns and processes in the context of peri-urban Harare. In particular, they appeal to the usefulness of earth observation (EO) in detecting and quantifying the rates and extent of land uses in peri-urban areas. Their findings shed light on how the cumulative spatial growth of Harare has been propelled by rapid sprawl in the past three decades increasing its built-up area by 13 % per year since 1984. Typical of other African cities such as Dar es Salaam and Nairobi (Briggs and Yeboah 2001: 24), it is hardly surprising that high quality middle class house building continues to fuel the sprawling Greater Harare encroaching on available open space and the precious few wetlands.

Although Africans have often been “represented as passive victims of structural adjustment programmes” (*ibid.*), the generalisation hides the fact that Africans are active agents capable of taking advantage of both local and global circumstances. The liberalisation of trade and foreign exchange in many African countries including Zimbabwe unleashed currency remittance inflows for investment in housing, the increased importation of vehicles, the emergence of real estate property development firms. Meanwhile, central government is overwhelmed by increased volumes of vehicular traffic on the country’s roads—most of which are riddled with potholes in the overcrowded in high density suburbia. Admittedly, human agency forces have actively responded to current worsening urban life circumstances and conditions in mobilising the cumulative foreign currency investment flows into expansionist housing schemes fuelling the sprawl of many African cities. However, the question that the dystopic urban demographic and spatial trends bring to surface is: what lines of action remain open to addressing the formidable challenges of bolstering urban growth following the widespread capital flight and dis-investment from the states blacklisted by the Washington Consensus.

2.6 Shifting from Managerial to Entrepreneurial Strategies

In the present economic climate, a central question emerging from unrelenting demands for adequate urban services and facilities to address the needs of imploding populations in the cities of the marginalised space economies such as

Zimbabwe. The urban economist Harvey (1989: 3) writes on need to “explore new ways in which to foster and encourage local development and employment.” For Harvey, such an entrepreneurial stance shift from the conventional managerial focus on the provision of services, facilities and benefits for the collective consumption of urban populations.

Given the widening gap between policy inspirations of planners and politicians and the reality of life in impoverished Southern cities: what lines of action are open to African governments and cities alike in responding to the widespread erosion of the economic and fiscal base of many large cities under present conditions of neoliberal restructuring?

Drawing on his earlier works, Harvey (1973, 1982, 1985, 1989) urges urban governments to be more innovative and entrepreneurial, willing to explore all kinds of avenues through which to alleviate their distressed conditions and thereby secure a better future for their citizens. Local authorities should “become increasingly involved in economic development activity directly related to production and investment” (Boddy 1984; Cochrane 1987) instead of preoccupation with management. Demonstrating the dividends of shifting from managerial to entrepreneurial approaches in urban governance, the exceptional growth of the small town of Ruwa on the edge of Harare during the turbulent years of Zimbabwe’s economic recession from 2008 to 2012, is a case in point.

By drawing on the synergies of private-public partnerships, a case study of Ruwa by Chirisa and Chaeruka in this volume demonstrates how a proactive packaging the competitive factors of location, corporatism and place marketing can be helpful in confronting the enormous pressures of social and economic change that technological and industrial restructuring can bring to hard-pressed local governments (Blunkett and Jackson 1987: 108–142). Such appeals push to the fore, ethnographic studies on African cities as entrepreneurial projects.

2.7 Conclusion

The chapter recites a growing need for mainstream urban trajectories to incorporate contemporaneity of all cities in the world in framing of cosmopolitan and inclusive city approaches to assist in re-thinking futures of individual cities. In contributing towards this appeal, the thesis of the chapter explores the helpfulness of drawing on current experiences with the political and economic dialectics of the contestations shaping the governance of peri-urban spaces in the indebted poor countries sub-Saharan Africa since adoption of the IMF and World Bank structural adjustment programmes in the mid-1980s. Significantly, the ensuing struggles over contented claims to land in the peri-urban spaces of these countries resonate with the contradictions and conflicts in Harvey’s (2006) thesis on the new round of neoliberal capitalist restructuring. Hence the appeal in recent urban and peri-urban literature (Mbiba and Huchzermeyer 2002; Briggs and Yeboah 2001) on the peri-urban for alternative theoretical resources (Robinson 2002, 2006; Simone

2004; Myers 2011; Pieterse 2008; Watson 2000) that can converse with the underlying structural forces entailing the new (and sometimes sinister) forms of peri-urban change.

Using the political economy of peri-urban transformations as a lens for reading the impact of social change on cities of the global South, the contributions to this volume largely anchors technical and planning policy responses to peri-urban land use change in Zimbabwe. Therefore, the reader can be advised to note that some of the case studies are epistemologically peripheral to the overall theme of this edition. In the next chapter, the book conceptualises the ascendancy of technical resources in mapping and planning rapid land use changes in a changing landscape of global information innovations.

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