In the name of sovereignty: Displacement and state making in post-independence Zimbabwe

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In the name of sovereignty: Displacement and state making in post-independence Zimbabwe

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This article argues that state-induced displacements are not aberrations, but rather an ever-present possibility and practice integral to contemporary as well as past modes of rule and state making. States and their allies make discursive use of notions of sovereignty to legitimise violence and displacement against selective citizens in the service of different projects at multiple scales. Such practices are themselves a means of producing and performing sovereignty, in Agamben's (1998) terms. Three cases from post-independence Zimbabwe are used to provide some evidence and insight into more general patterns linking displacement, sovereignty and state making. At the same time, they confirm the historical and spatial diversity of particular assertions and versions of sovereignty, as reflected in situated expressions and effects of state making.

Keywords: displacement; sovereignty; state making; Zimbabwe

Territorialising practices and the control over space, resources and populations – including the latter's movement or confinement – are crucial to claims of sovereignty and assertions of rule. They are also critical to the strategies of various public authorities to raise revenue and sustain their legitimacy as providers or defenders of security and 'development'. Such logics and practices, that interweave cultural politics and political economies at different scales, have often precipitated violent physical, structural and symbolic displacements of selected populations. These practices are not limited to states alone but can apply to various other forms of authority. Indeed, it is often the overlapping of multiple regimes of authority and their competing or complicit modes of sovereignty that produce the most complex and intractable forms of violent rule. The colonial era, and its aftermath, on the African continent provide ample testament to this.

Certainly, there is much to be gained from expanding our understanding of sovereignty beyond an *automatic* or narrow association with the state. There are, for example, numerous ways in which citizens 'engender challenges to and reconfigurations of state practices' that 'may run parallel to or intersect with the formal controls of a state-centric vision of sovereignty' (Landau and Monson 2008, 315–6). Indeed, the contentious nature of state authority and sovereignty are not in question here. Stepputat (2008, 338) suggests thinking about sovereignty more broadly as 'a set of discernible practices of exclusion, exceptional measures and use of force in the name of a particular political or moral community'. This can be applied usefully to diverse contexts. However, for the moment I am concerned primarily with the particular linkages between states, sovereignty and displacement, using post-independence Zimbabwe as a lens.

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In particular, I would like to consider what work 'sovereignty' does in relation to the complex project of post-independence state making in Zimbabwe, and how displacement is profoundly implicated in that process. Such processes are not unique to Zimbabwe, but represent a more common, 'normalised' practice of state making, be this in colonial or contemporary times, or under authoritarian or liberal rule. The broad evolution of modern, territorially bounded states has commonly involved the construction and defence of both physical and metaphorical borders. These have been key to defining nation/ality and the (selective) rights of 'citizens' on the one hand, and to creating barriers to entry and belonging on the other. The *rhetoric* of 'sovereignty' (in this sense, the sovereign 'right' to rule and protect one's own territory) has been central to such processes. It has often precipitated and legitimised various kinds of large-scale (as well as smaller scale or individual) expulsions or exclusions of 'non'-citizens. Ugandan Asians under Idi Amin's rule are a case in point. Yet beyond the obvious extremes, routine immigration control in liberal democratic states, including deportation of failed asylum seekers, is one amongst many contemporary examples of the normalisation of often subtly violent displacement.[1]

However, sovereignty or sovereign power, as understood by Agamben (1998) among others, is not merely about the marking of official borders and territorial rule. It is more significantly about the authority – and means and methods – to define the distinctions between worthiness and unworthiness, insiderhood and outsiderhood. It is about producing the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion with respect to the political community, and identifying those beyond the protection of its laws and rules. It is, perhaps most profoundly, about the (asserted) right of the sovereign to define the parameters of life and death. Making such power visible through performing overt acts of exclusion is, according to Buur, Jensen and Stepputat (2006), a necessary affirmation of sovereignty. This speaks directly to acts of violent displacement by states of their own citizens. Such acts are often the most explicit expression of exclusion, and hence of sovereign power, especially when undertaken with impunity.[2] As Buur, Jensen and Stepputat (2006, 15) suggest in their reading of Agamben, such power is more or most deeply affirmed through the sovereign's ability to define 'persons or groups of persons that others, with impunity, can treat without regard for their psychological and physical wellbeing'.

This is not to imply that displacement is the *sole* means of rule, or that it is always necessarily a dominant expression of statehood (which is always historically and geographically specific). Neither is displacement a technology of rule that remains unchallenged or uninterrupted. On the contrary, moving beyond more static notions of the state in mainstream political science, for example, a growing body of ethnographically informed literature has helped to broaden and complicate our understandings of 'the state', and of how authority and rule are produced and sustained yet also challenged and multiplied in a variety of ways.[3] I would also argue that sovereignty, while crucially linked to displacement, is not the only or always the primary driving force of such practices. There are always multiple, overlapping interests and projects at stake. In this sense, particular acts of state-induced or state-sanctioned displacement, and the various forms of physical, structural, social and symbolic violence accompanying them, need to be understood in their specific historical and spatial contexts.

Much of the literature on displacement emerging from within technocratic humanitarian paradigms (where 'forced migration' is currently the more commonly used term for displacement), tends to focus on the *effects* of, and official ways of responding to, displacement. This has been reinforced by the production of various displacement-related categories (Turton 2003) which themselves have key material and symbolic effects. Less

attention is given to what and who produces and reproduces the conditions for and causes of displacement, including the multilayered interests and projects of various state actors, as well as of international financial institutions and aid agencies. In addition, such approaches are inclined to emphasise and simplify victimhood, rather than recognise and disaggregate the diverse and paradoxical effects of displacement. This article contributes to more nuanced approaches that recognise those affected by or affecting displacement (including displacees, replacees, stayees, hosts, perpetrators, various gatekeepers) as heterogeneous, and part of much more complex, uneven and interweaving multiscalar social, political and economic processes.

The present article limits itself to exploring some of the ways in which violent displacement has been implicated in, and produced by, assertions of sovereignty and processes of state making in post-independence Zimbabwe.[4] To this end, I present several examples of deliberate state-induced displacement in diverse settings, especially over the past decade.[5] Overt state-generated displacements in Zimbabwe have intensified since 2000.[6] Yet they follow a much longer historical pattern of routinised removals, marked by racialised colonial dispossession of both land and citizenship. Echoes of the past in the present have been manifested both through the postcolonial state's mirroring of certain colonial practices of displacement,[7] and in its discursive use of a particular version of 'the past' to legitimise present actions (Ranger 2004). Yet the unique conditions and dynamics of the present overlap with the past, both generating and accounting for the particularities of displacement witnessed since independence in 1980, and more overtly since 2000.

The examples discussed in this article reflect three different settings. They include the violent eviction of a group of small-scale migrant farmers in the northwest agrarian margins in the late 1990s (Hammar 2001), the invasions and evictions occurring on large-scale commercial farms from 2000 onwards as part of the state-driven radical land reform programme (Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen 2003; Rutherford 2003; Sachikonye 2003), and the military-style campaign of mass urban demolitions and evictions, called Operation Murambatsvina, undertaken in 2005 to 2006 (Bratton and Masunungure 2007; Sachikonye 2006; Tibaijuka 2005). Considered separately, these provide insights into a range of specific contexts, conditions, locations, actors and outcomes of state-induced displacement in post-independence Zimbabwe. Collectively, and bearing in mind other cases not discussed here, they illustrate a broader link between displacement, assertions of sovereignty and processes of state making. The first case developed out of ethnographically grounded doctoral fieldwork undertaken in 1998/9, while the latter two are based largely on secondary material and more informal yet first-hand observations and interviews at various times since 2000. However, before turning to these specific cases in more detail, the section below considers the relationship between displacement and sovereignty more generally.

Linking displacement and assertions of state or national sovereignty

Since independence in 1980, selected spaces and citizens in Zimbabwe, particularly in the rural and urban margins, have been simultaneously criminalised and securitised through particular state campaigns, through the deployment of various forms of state violence.[8] Examples of such campaigns include: the arbitrary rounding up of and assaults on 'single' urban women in 1983 who, if unable to prove on demand that they were attached to a husband, father or employer, were accused of being prostitutes, and were then arrested and sent off to rural re-education camps; frequent cases of forced eviction of 'squatters' and other unwanted settlers within both communal and commercial farming areas;[9] and the ethno-politicidal Gukurahundi campaign in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in the

mid-1980s, ostensibly targeted at 'weeding out' so-called dissidents yet in practice aimed at destroying the then opposition party, Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), and terrorising its actual or assumed constituencies.[10]

Despite the normalisation of various forms of violence, forced removal and resettlement as dimensions of state practice, more dramatic and publicly visible acts of mass displacement require additional efforts at legitimation. The forms of such legitimation, especially in the media-exposed cases in post-2000 Zimbabwe, will be examined later. However, a common characteristic of such state-driven campaigns of exclusion and displacement has been the practice of identifying a *dangerous other* (represented in the broader sense as a threat of impurity to the body politic of the nation), and then cleansing (by fire, demolition or removal), containing (by imprisonment or encampment), or excising (by torture or even death) the contaminating danger. Such dehumanising actions not only dislodge people from place but from the rights and entitlements of citizenship, and from belonging to the nation as a whole.

Usually, the broader national campaigns or 'operations' – with their often catchy if sinister names such as Gukurahundi (The storm that washes away the chaff) or Murambatsvina (Clean out the trash) – have been justified officially through invoking the law or articulating particular administrative, developmental or moral-political projects. This combination of discourses has been used to portray an image of the responsible and caring state that, nonetheless, is able to assert its full sovereignty and exclude from development or security, or from the nation itself, those it deems unworthy or defines as enemies of the state (Hammar 2005; Worby 2003).

In recent years, concepts such as 'governmentality' (Foucault 1979) and more nuanced uses of notions of 'seeing' and 'legibility' (Das 2004; Scott 1998; Tsing 1993), have provided innovative ways of reconceptualising the state and understanding the workings of rule. And yet the new technologies of welfare and development associated with the Foucauldian ideas of biopolitics and pastoral power (Ferguson 1990; Moore 1999) did not fully replace the well-worn technologies of violence in the service of sovereign power. These latter seem to have been sustained everywhere. In contrast to pastoral power, which is concerned with 'the administration of life' at the level of populations, sovereignty is characterised in this paradigm as 'power over life and death'. This latter has as its main instruments 'laws, decrees, and regulations backed up by coercive sanctions ultimately grounded in the right of death exercised by the sovereign' (Dean 2001, 47–9). However, according to Dean, 'the exercise of government in all modern states entails the articulation of a form of pastoral power with one of sovereign power' (2001, 53).

The work of Agamben (1998) has stimulated further thinking about sovereignty and exclusion in the modern world. Rather than seeing biopolitics and pastoral power as dislodging or competing with sovereignty, Agamben sees 'the production of the biopolitical body [as] the original activity of sovereign power' (ibid, 6, quoted in Buur, Jensen and Stepputat 2006, 15). His work focuses attention on 'the sovereign exception'– that is, 'bare life' as opposed to a socialised, governable subject – excludable and excluded from 'the political community', beyond the protection of its laws and rights. Ironically then, while the idea of state sovereignty is in large part made through a rhetoric of inclusion in a nation-framing project, it is precisely the identification and *actual exclusion* of excludable Others both from basic protection as well as from the benefits of pastoral power that, in this view, *affirms* sovereignty.

As Buur, Jensen and Stepputat (2006, 15–16) argue:

> In order to be effective, sovereignty must be performed and inscribed on bodies that are being excluded. Defining who can be improved and uplifted to become members of the political community and who should be excluded as dangerous or abandoned as useless is a sovereign act that makes sovereign power visible, as well as the boundaries of political community.

This perspective pushes us to take more seriously the relationship between representation, violent exclusion, sovereignty and state making. In post-2000 Zimbabwe, this relationship has become starkly exposed, especially in relation to how the construction of sovereign 'exceptions' has become embedded in discourses and violent practices of state-driven urban and rural mass displacement (Hammar 2006).

Increasingly since 2000, as part of Zimbabwe's persistent and continuously mutating crisis, physical, social and economic landscapes have been altered substantially by multiple forms and ever greater scales and extremes of party-state initiated violence and displacement. At different moments, people accused of being 'enemies of the state' (mostly for being, or assumed to be, opposition party supporters) have been forcibly and often brutally removed from farms, rural villages, informal urban housing, factories, non-formal business enterprises, local council offices, schools, churches and NGOs. For some, it has included illegal incarceration; for others, abduction, torture and death (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008a,b). These practices have strategically combined physical and symbolic removals of bodies (individuals, groups, institutions) from spaces that the party-state and its allies have wanted to reclaim, purify and occupy. Through this, those constituting the party-state could both affirm their sovereign authority and accumulate material and political resources.

At the same time such processes of displacement have involved *replacement* – physically and symbolically, for shorter and longer periods – mostly by those loyal to and hence included in a narrowly redefined version of the nation or state. Replacees include, among others, different kinds of new settlers on the former commercial farms (a mix of the land hungry, the urban unemployed, political elites and entrepreneurs), actual and self-styled war veterans occupying posts in rural councils and local development committees, military personnel being appointed to bureaucratic positions, and loyalist judges being fast-tracked to senior status. Cumulatively, this has contributed to a partisan reshaping of the state, with implications for social, political and economic relations at all levels.

Reshaping production and power in the agrarian margins in the late 1990s

I turn now to the first example of state-induced eviction.[11] This was undertaken by the 'local' state in a hard-to-reach corner of Gokwe North District in northwest Zimbabwe in the late 1990s. In September and October of 1997, the Gokwe North Rural District Council (RDC) violently evicted up to one hundred and forty migrant farmer households (over 1,200 people) from a geographically remote and economically marginal place called Vumba. Most of the evictees (culturally identified as Shona or Ndebele) had migrated there in the late 1980s and early 1990s from other parts of the country, where they had faced land hunger, drought and environmental degradation. Vumba's previous settlers were themselves quite recent arrivals, having been displaced by the colonial government from the Zambezi Valley in the late 1950s during the construction of Kariba Dam. Tonga communities living alongside the soon-to-be-flooded Zambezi River had been forcibly resettled in various areas, including in the remote and then unsettled Vumba. The area had since remained a neglected part of the country. Initially the Tonga firstcomers welcomed the migrants that followed, who brought more advanced farming know how, cattle, and

other important if limited capital into the area. At that time, land was still reasonably abundant.

Despite the migrants' strong assertions that they had followed the correct land allocation procedures when they first arrived in Vumba, the council subsequently accused them of being illegal and began calling them 'squatters'. The council had been trying for some years to remove them from where they were settled on communal land bordering both a state national park and a safari area. Although Vumba was located in an area considered marginal in both agro-ecological and economic terms, growing outsider interest in its previously undervalued natural resources had started to change during the 1990s. Reflecting wider global trends, the economic value of wildlife had increased significantly and the productive potential of such marginal spaces began to be redefined (Moyo 2000).

This new perspective contributed to the popularisation of a homegrown approach to community-managed natural resources in Zimbabwe called CAMPFIRE.[12] This drew on and expanded global environmental discourses, linking them to a form of community development that combined local community control of natural resources (primarily wildlife) with private sector interests, but mediated by the local government authority, the RDC. Consequently, in places like Vumba, new opportunities arose for substantial revenue generation from various kinds of wildlife-related activities that would benefit all the various partners, albeit to different degrees (Murphree 1990).

The 1990s was a decade in which public sector funds for basic services and infrastructure steadily diminished and pressures had been mounting on RDCs – newly constituted in 1993 through decentralisation reforms – to generate their own revenues. Without this, their credibility as local authorities would come into question. However, income sources for RDCs were limited, especially in the poorest districts (usually those in the least productive agro-ecological zones) where there was no substantial commercial farming that could generate unit taxes from privately owned land. This was the case in Gokwe North. Even the very productive small-scale cotton farming in some parts of the district brought no revenues directly into the council's coffers, since even successful agricultural production in communal areas was exempt from taxation. By contrast, any successful CAMPFIRE venture promised income (for example, from hunting licences) not only to local communities and the safari operators, but also to councils by way of lucrative management fees. In such circumstances, 'rewildernising' the agrarian margins (Hammar 2001) – that is, turning them into joint-venture community-managed wildlife areas – was preferred by councils to their alternative of supporting local cotton farming.

The 1990s was also a period in which RDCs had begun to assert their recently devolved political and developmental authority, facilitated by the promulgation of the 1988 Rural District Councils Act, which in principle aimed at strengthening decentralisation. It was at this juncture that the Gokwe North RDC found itself confronted by what it viewed as a recalcitrant group of migrant farmers in Vumba. The council had been hoping to establish a safari lodge precisely where these farmers were settled, and, through decidedly opaque practices, had redefined the area as a wildlife 'buffer zone'. In so doing, it criminalised those inhabitants that competed with its own goals. This required the manufacture of what Sundar (2001, 329) calls 'new legal geographies', in which 'legal categories are used to construct and differentiate material spaces which, in turn, acquire a legal potency that has a direct bearing on those using and traversing such spaces'. It was primarily on the basis of the buffer zone that the council had applied to the courts to issue summons for the eviction of the migrant farmers, now labelled squatters.

Earlier attempts by the council to persuade the migrants to leave the area had failed. The migrants, who against great odds had begun to grow cotton and other crops fairly

successfully in this far-flung corner of the district, persistently refused to leave on the grounds of being 'correctly' settled there. At the same time, they made claims on the party-state's nationalist rhetoric of promising land to 'the people'. On the former assertion, they were easily able to name which Tonga traditional leaders they had approached on arrival in Vumba, and in what order, to request allocation of plots. Many of the local leaders confirmed this. Legislative reforms introduced after independence had given rural local government (eventually the RDCs) land allocation authority, albeit always retaining some level of ambivalence in relation to traditional leaders. In practice, chiefs, headmen and kraalheads were still considered by most rural residents as having the legitimate authority to decide on who should have land, where, and how much.

Subsequent to local allocation of plots, many though not all of the migrants had then visited the Gokwe North RDC to obtain a 'letter of removal'; a form of documentary evidence that acknowledged and on some level 'legalised' their move from one district to another. These letters constitute part of what Das (2004, 234) has called 'the documentary practices of the state', which together with 'the utterances that embody it … acquire a life in the practices of the community'. The absence or loss of such letters (many during the eviction itself), or in some instances denial by the council of having issued them at all, would later contribute to the criminalisation of selected households, and fuel accusations of their illegality. Yet even where actual letters of removal could be proven to exist, in the moment of eviction they lost their illusory power of protection. This emphasised not only 'the blurred lines between law and its violation' but more generally the '*illegibility* of the state, the unreadability of its rules and regulations' (Das 2004, 234).

From the council's point of view, the forced removal of the migrants was fully justified by the 'fact' that they were illegal squatters, lawless, uncontrollable. In addition, they were portrayed by the council (supported by a few of its Tonga allies in Vumba), as 'foreign' and outsiders, clearly distinct from the 'authentic' Tonga firstcomers. Furthermore, the migrants' public resistance and insistence on their rights to land and belonging subverted both the council's and the local Tonga chief's authority claims. It overtly challenged certain state actors' assertions of sovereignty, as well as the ruling party's political project of hegemony, in the margins. Regarding the latter, the ruling Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) ZANU (PF) party (which dominated this council as all others) had a record of crushing any form of emerging leadership independent of its own control (Alexander and McGregor 2003). The rebelliousness and organising capacity of some of the migrant households in resisting removal, and their appeal to authorities outside the direct control of the state (at least at that time), such as the judiciary and NGOs, had begun to annoy both the party and the council.

Adding this to the economic and administrative pressures it was facing, the RDC began to intensify its rhetoric of danger and criminality to justify removing the migrants from Vumba. As the chief executive office of the council commented one year after the eviction:

> We were saying these people illegally settled in the area, because if you had not been given permission by the council to settle in a given area you were actually classified as a squatter. So from our point of view those people were squatters. At the same time, what actually happens is that, you know, these people become lawless, like they wouldn't even allow any civil servants, any workers from government I would say, to go there for their normal duties. And they had no respect for the chief … Because of this lack of respect, they were trying to actually establish themselves as a certain, sort-of separate entity, you know, with their own sort of leaders … They thought that they could actually represent themselves in whatever they were doing. Their own authority, they stamped their own authority.[13]

Criminalising the migrants in this way, on multiple levels, had a dual undermining effect in relation to their legitimacy and inclusion within the realms of 'the political community'. It undermined them in 'civic' terms, as worthy citizens of a common nation with rights to development and equal protection under the law. It also undermined them in 'customary' terms, as 'ethnic' subjects entitled to rights, resources and protection within the more localised traditional framework governing the communal lands. Increasingly then, they became the unworthy, the excludable.

But what ultimately legitimised the council's violent eviction of the migrant families, which involved burning down houses and full granaries, committing alleged beatings, and forcibly removing people on trucks and dumping them, unprotected, some forty kilometres from their homes, was the consistent interpretation and portrayal of these particular inhabitants of Vumba as already violent and dangerous.[14] In the council's minutes over several years prior to the 1997 eviction, there were recurring references to the migrant settlers as hostile, uncooperative and belligerent. Some were in fact arrested in 1995 for threatening and assaulting council officials following an attempted eviction exercise at that time. The point here is not to refute occurrences of violence in Vumba, but rather to assert that the council consistently magnified a certain *image* of violence and danger in order to justify its own violent intrusions. Ostensibly this was as a means of restoring stability and order in Vumba. However, at a more profound level it constituted an assertion of its own (and the broader state's) sovereignty.

Displacements and replacements in Zimbabwe's post-2000 'radical land revolution'

In contrast to this story of displacement in the agrarian margins in the late 1990s, targeted at poor, small-scale black farmers, I now turn to the second example, which shifts temporal focus to the post-2000 period, and geographical focus to the agrarian heartland of mostly white commercial farming. At the same time, it illustrates a case of state sovereignty at the national rather than local scale, even though each specific expression of this larger project of displacement has had its own localised dynamics and effects.[15] During the late 1990s, as broad-based dissent against the ZANU (PF) government grew and a viable political opposition began to emerge, increasingly President Mugabe and his ministers made both threats and promises of a radical land revolution. However, it wasn't until the aftermath of the constitutional referendum in February 2000 – in which Mugabe was the political loser for the first time since he came to power in 1980 – that the full implications of such a 'revolution' became apparent. The success of the opposition Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in the referendum (and fears of its success at the subsequent parliamentary elections in June 2000) was interpreted by the ruling party as being linked to support from white farmers and black farm workers. In turn, the MDC was accused of having Western or British backing.

This became part of ZANU (PF)'s vociferously anti-colonial and anti-imperialist rhetoric. It peppered countless political speeches reported in the media, and fuelled a proposed project of reclaiming and redistributing 'the lost lands' and reinstating 'authentic' African governance.[16] At the heart of these speeches were legitimate historical complaints against colonial dispossession. However, avoiding any responsibility for the government's own post-independence failings, these built shrewdly on the growing frustrations over land and other forms of economic marginalisation of war veterans from the liberation struggle, and the spontaneous yet low-key land occupations that had occurred around the country in the late 1990s.

Starting just weeks after the referendum, violent state-sponsored land invasions and occupations were undertaken on a massive scale across the country.[17] In the years that followed, thousands of mostly white commercial farmers and hundreds of thousands of black farm workers and their respective families were often brutally displaced. The occupations were subsequently institutionalised through the official Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) and other retroactive legislation, which claimed to be facilitating the restructuring of historically based racial inequalities in agrarian formations and relations. However, this was far from the universally inclusive project that it claimed to be. Instead, it was highly selective in terms of overtly excluding (and punishing) those perceived to be disloyal to the ruling party. Following from this, up to 90% of former white-owned commercial farms were occupied or appropriated for redistribution, with eviction notices or direct physical intimidation and forced evictions continuing on some of the remaining white commercial farmers up to mid-2008. This continued despite claims made several years earlier by government officials and loyalist commentators that the FTLRP had been successfully completed.

While premised and legitimised on a proclaimed political vision of radical land redistribution, in more macro-economic terms the FTLRP reversed a trajectory of successful capitalist agriculture. Efforts were made to replace it with a populist project of largely peasant agriculture, alongside an emerging black 'indigenous' commercial farming sector. In practice, both the distribution and productivity picture was more complex, with mixed results at best.[18] Among other national trends, a noticeable proportion of the expropriated land was either allocated to or seized by ZANU (PF)-affiliated political, military and business élites with little capacity or commitment to farm productively. Ostensibly, the majority of the land was allocated to poor (but politically loyal) rural and urban residents, but without sufficient capital or equipment to invest in the land or any clarity on their land rights.[19] Consequently, and alongside other worsening political and economic conditions more generally, agricultural production as well as industrial manufacturing levels fell dramatically.

Undeniably, the inherited pattern of racially skewed land ownership in Zimbabwe has been radically and irreversibly reshaped during this period. However, this has taken place in a context of extreme political violence and active exclusion. Narrowly partisan notions of sovereignty and deepening authoritarian nationalism have reduced 'legitimate' citizenship, security and belonging, as well as access to moveable and fixed resources, to ruling party allegiance. In addition, numerous cases of corruption and criminality marked programmes of resource distribution falling under the official umbrella of land and agrarian reform.[20] As such, repeated claims by ZANU (PF) of having 'finally resolved the land question', and of restoring 'the lost lands' to 'true' Zimbabweans, remain deeply contradictory and contested.

In practice, the emergence of new agrarian formations raises questions as to what or who might eventually help to restart productive agricultural enterprise at both smaller and larger scales. Related to this, one needs to consider the extensive scale and nature of displacements of both labour and capital, and the levels of destitution that the 'radical land revolution' has precipitated amongst those considered 'enemies' of the revolution, most significantly among former farm workers.[21] In addition, there is a need to explore what innovative strategies of survival and *em*placement, both on the farms and elsewhere, are being adopted by new settlers, as well as by dispersed former farm workers and white commercial farmers. Yet even asking such questions and envisaging pathways to future national development, presumes a logic of responsible statehood, let alone of 'normality' in relation to economics and politics, that has not existed for some time.

'Urban renewal' through mass displacement: Operation Murambatsvina and beyond

The third and final example of state-induced displacement shifts the terrain to focus on the urban environment, and a somewhat different yet connected moment of mass eviction and dispossession in the post-2000 period. In May 2005, the Zimbabwe government initiated Operation Murambatsvina (Operation 'Restore order' or 'Clean out the trash'), a brutal urban 'clean up' campaign that was condemned internationally. Officially presented as a campaign to 'drive out the filth' of both crime and disease in urban areas, in practice it was a highly militarised, nationwide operation with a more complex and politically partisan agenda. Critics viewed the campaign as combining political retribution against opposition supporters in the cities with 'a pre-emptive strike' against growing urban discontent in a time of extreme economic hardship for which many blamed the government (Sachikonye 2006).

Urban areas were indeed strongholds of the political opposition that the longstanding ZANU (PF) regime had been attempting to crush since 2000. The claim by the state to be 'cleaning up' urban spaces physically, morally and legally – *as if* undertaking an act of administrative and legal responsibility – needs to be considered beyond its own rhetoric. Firstly, one needs to consider the specific timing of the operation, less than two months after the parliamentary elections. Secondly, it took place in the context of deepening political and economic crises, with the state both losing legitimacy and having fewer and fewer resources including revenue to draw on, both formally and informally.

Regarding the timing of the campaign, this occurred soon after the March 2005 parliamentary elections. Although ZANU (PF) increased its parliamentary lead, as with all other elections since 2000, the results were widely questioned by the MDC itself and by independent analysts. Given that urban areas overwhelmingly voted for the opposition, the urban eviction and demolition campaign appeared to be at least partly punishment for their support, and a way of further undermining the MDC's key constituencies. But more than that, it continued the strategy of rule by fear and force. In this respect, legitimacy based on the pastoral dimensions of a responsible and accountable state, concerned with 'the administration of life' and attentive to at least the basic needs of all its citizens, had long since been abandoned by Mugabe, except towards party loyalists.

On the second point, there appears to be some validity to the argument that those constituting the evolving party-state needed to reassert their control over the flows of revenue that had drifted away from the formal to the informal sector since the 1990s. In particular, there was a need to gain control over the burgeoning black market in scarce commodities, and especially trade in foreign currency, as the economy spiralled downwards (Bratton and Masunungure 2007). With the economy shrinking so dramatically from 2000 onwards, it is not surprising that there was an attempt to expand control in this way. With ever decreasing arenas of formal production and commerce left for either the party or the state to drain off resources, the urban informal sector became a new if unpredictable source of accumulation and political patronage.

Yet at its official launch in Harare, Operation Murambatsvina was portrayed as an exercise that would 'enforce by-laws to stop all forms of illegal activities', 'eradicate chaos', and 'bring sanity back to the City of Harare'.[22] Consequently, and on a massive scale that eventually spread to all urban centres in the country, street vendors and small-business operators accused of operating illegally were arrested and had their businesses physically destroyed. Self-built homes in high-density townships were suddenly de-legalised in a dramatic reversal of the de facto acceptance by the state since independence of self-assisted housing. Bulldozers and demolition squads were brought in, the latter often made up of

ZANU (PF)-trained youth militia. Deaths of young children, the elderly and the sick were reported in the process. In many instances families were forced to destroy their own homes by hand under threat of beatings, fines or imprisonment.

Within the first six weeks of the launch of the operation, an estimated 700,000 urban residents were deprived of their homes and livelihoods, and up to 2.4 million people overall were said to be affected by the operation (Tibaijuka 2005).[23] Occupants were forcibly removed to either distant rural areas with which they had few if any connections at all, or were dumped in peri-urban holding or resettlement camps with barely any shelter or access to food, clean water, sanitation, or the means of earning a living. The camps, which were still in place over a year later, were guarded by security 'authorities' loyal to the ruling party, which controlled the little humanitarian assistance allowed in. Abuses in the distribution of resources were reported, including alleged denial of food aid to some of the displaced and demands for sexual favours.

In response to international criticism, President Mugabe claimed that the entire clean-up operation was a well-designed reconstruction programme, and that Zimbabwe 'would not lower its urban living standards to allow for mud huts and bush latrines'.[24] Yet efforts to provide alternative accommodation for evicted residents were far from adequate. Even if well-intended as cynically claimed by government spokespersons, the ongoing campaign, far from generating urban renewal, resulted in unprecedented scales of urban poverty, homelessness and extreme vulnerability. This was particularly acute in terms of food security and health, but also with respect to personal safety. Rather than 'restoring order' in cities, Operation Murambatsvina shattered the relative order and stability that preceded it. Instead, it heightened levels of poverty, crime and social disintegration by undermining livelihoods, shelter and security for the majority of impoverished urban dwellers.

Bratton and Masunungure (2007) interestingly point to the 'adaptability and resilience' of the informal sector. They note that it continued in spite of the wide-scale personal attacks and displacements, the physical destruction of homes, business sites and property, and the increasing danger and vulnerability that any such enterprise henceforth entailed.[25] What they don't discuss, however, is the extent to which Murambatsvina, (the 'tsunami' as it was popularly called) precipitated further large-scale migrations across the borders, or how such large-scale movements have affected the region.[26] This growing wave, compounding similar migrations prior to 2005, continues to be significant in contributing to the survival of many impoverished families in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, many of those that have migrated illegally to neighbouring states such as Botswana and South Africa live under appalling and precarious conditions (see for example Rutherford, this issue). In both rural and urban areas, they are subject to persistent harassment by various officials, and often earn too little to save and send home anything at all. Their vulnerability was sharply underscored during the xenophobic attacks against African foreigners in South Africa in May 2008. Zimbabweans were amongst the most widely affected group, given their growing (yet still formally unquantified) numbers.

These attacks were marked by a wave of brutal killings and beatings, lootings and burnings, in addition to wide-scale displacement of black African migrants (mostly but not only from other countries, and some from other parts of South Africa itself). There had been sporadic violence of this kind since the mid-1990s,[27] but the scale and intensity of these recent actions was unprecedented.[28] In the weeks following the initial attacks – first in Johannesburg, then spreading across the country to other cities and some rural areas – close to sixty people had been killed, more than six hundred injured, and figures given of those displaced ranged from forty to eighty thousand.[29]

In response, the South African government mobilised the police and eventually also the army to help deal with the crisis, while scores of church and humanitarian organisations offered assistance.[30] The Mozambican government sent buses to help transport some of its citizens from Johannesburg to Maputo to escape the attacks, and subsequently declared a state of emergency given the large numbers arriving, through their own means, from South Africa. In Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, without a hint of irony, declared that Zimbabwean citizens would be welcomed back and offered land if they returned.[31] Yet many Zimbabweans chose to flee to other neighbouring countries such as Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana, or risked remaining in South Africa, rather than face the political and structural violence perpetrated by their own state.

In Zimbabwe the previous year, at the beginning of July 2007, yet another wave of violence had emerged, especially urban focused, targeting mainly owners and managers of supermarkets and retail shops who were accused of 'sabotaging' the economy (in collaboration with Western imperialist forces) through alleged 'over-pricing'. President Mugabe publicly threatened to seize businesses found to be flouting new government price control laws, which were being monitored by a new unit of state-trained militia commonly dubbed 'the inflation police'. Within weeks, over 1,300 arrests of businessmen and women were recorded on charges of breaking such laws.[32] Mugabe's assertions of sovereignty in that moment were as persistent as ever, feeding seamlessly into his sustained discourse of accusing 'the West' of responsibility for the spiralling decline of the economy.

At the same time, this new campaign of control and punishment opened out one of the few remaining spaces for rentseeking within a deepening political economy of patronage. As one senior ruling party politician unabashedly warned:

> Let everyone who is in business take note. There is now going to be a rough game. We own the resources. We are the owners of this economy. We will seize those companies, we will nationalise them. We will no longer stand for their dirty tricks.[33]

The implicit 'them' and 'we' of this now-common discourse is located within a crude distinction between, on the one hand, an enemy camp of otherness, marked by an assumed political affiliation to the opposition and to the West, especially Britain; and on the other, a loyalist camp of insiders, marked by an assumed nationalist purity and unquestionable faithfulness to the ruling party and the president. While political (dis)loyalty is undoubtedly the central distinguishing factor of the enemy-outsider, by association race, particularly an association with whiteness, has become an additional marker of the unfaithful.

The militarised language of enemies and war intensified both during and after the 29 March 2008 harmonised elections, as did extremes of political violence and displacement leading up to the deeply controversial presidential election rerun of 27 June 2008 (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008a, 2008b). Campaign speeches by Mugabe and his supporters were couched repeatedly in terms of defending 'the revolution' against those enemies within that were intent on stealing the sovereignty of the nation and selling it back to the British. As one military official stated at the April 2008 national independence celebrations in Harare: 'Zimbabwe is a sovereign state; we shall defend it with our blood'.[34] The discourse of national liberation – of finalising the Third Chimurenga – had been a standard refrain since 2000, used to self-legitimise modes of brutality and displacement at home. Abroad, especially amongst fellow African leaders, the anti-imperialist rhetoric and assertions of sovereignty were calculated to mask an increasingly systematic project of political annihilation of the opposition. Yet for a young psychology professional I encountered in Harare in late June 2008, who had turned to raising

chickens since her government salary had become meaningless when set against hyper-inflation, Mugabe's claims of defending national sovereignty were a farce. 'Whose sovereignty is he talking about? Not mine. And anyway, you can't eat sovereignty', she quipped.

Conclusion

There are two different but related ways in which the notion of sovereignty works in relation to practices of displacement and processes of state making. The first and more obvious of the two is with respect to the discursive use of the term 'sovereignty'– and more specifically 'national sovereignty'– in the service of various political projects of a given state. This has been an overt feature of the Mugabe regime's political discourse and consolidation of state control for at least the past decade. Through its constant incantation, and in its name, crude and often violent forms of rural and urban mass displacement have been carried out and justified.

Not unrelated, the second and more subtle understanding of sovereignty, and its association with displacement and state making, is the way in which Agamben and others have framed it. This views sovereignty in terms of the authority, means and methods for defining the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion in the political community, and for identifying those beyond the protection of its laws and rules. Performing acts of violence with impunity, including displacing selected citizens, is part of the sovereign's or state's affirmation of its sovereign power. In turn, this becomes the grounds for implementing a range of concrete (and often exclusionary) state projects of 'development', securitisation and accumulation, among others.

This article demonstrates that state-induced displacements are part of historically continuous if complex processes of state making that discursively draw upon the notion of sovereignty in the first sense, while simultaneously producing and affirming sovereignty in the second sense. While underlining the particularities of time, place, actors, cultural politics, and political economy, the cases presented here provide some evidence and insight into more general patterns linking displacement, sovereignty and state making. The argument is that state-induced displacements, and the multilayered violence accompanying such practices – that is, structural, social and psychological violence as well as physical force – are not an aberration. Rather, they appear to be an ever-present possibility if not actuality integral to contemporary as well as past modes of rule and state making. This is not only the case during times of extreme crisis, as in post-2000 Zimbabwe, but also under more 'normal' conditions of governance.

What the cases confirm is the historical and spatial diversity of particular assertions and versions of sovereignty, while simultaneously pointing to more general patterns linking displacement, sovereignty and state making. To understand such specificity, as well as the links with broader trends, requires investigations into, among other things, who or what constitutes 'the state' at a particular historical conjuncture; what competing interests and projects of control, accumulation, development or exclusion are at stake; what forms and spaces of uncertainty, violence and displacement these generate and with what effects. These are matters that stretch well beyond the boundaries of a single bounded territory, be it local or at the scale of the nation-state.

What this current article has not addressed, however, is the other side of this dynamic equation of displacement, sovereignty and state making; namely the effects on and responses from ordinary citizens, and how this in turn shapes the practices of rule and boundaries of citizenship. Zimbabwe provides a pertinent laboratory for such explorations.

Thus, for example, while new and chillingly effective modes of surveillance, control and dispossession have been instituted in the name of sovereignty by those currently constituting the Zimbabwean state, innovative yet often risky practices of survival and resistance have surfaced. New spaces and forms of enterprise and exchange have begun to emerge.

In such moments of uncertainty, the distinctions – as well as the relationships – between the official and the unofficial, the legal and the illegal, are being redefined. In a country in which there had previously been far-reaching formalisation of everyday life through the rituals and regulations of a 'responsible', highly bureaucratised state, this constitutes a radical shift. To some extent this has led to a questioning of sovereign power itself. In the face of increasingly violent and exclusionary forms of state rule, and of mass urban and rural displacements, expectations of public provision of basic services and security have fallen away. Emerging instead are complex dynamics of survival, adaptation and inventiveness that challenge simplistic interpretations of victimhood and narrow conceptions of 'the displaced'. They also raise new uncertainties for the reconstitution of 'state' and 'society' in a post-crisis future.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. Consider for example the threatened deportation by Britain of up to 11,000 failed Zimbabwean asylum seekers in 2008, despite, simultaneously, official recognition and strong criticism of widescale political violence and dire economic crisis in Zimbabwe. See 'UK is sending 11,000 Zimbabwe refugees back', *Observer* (UK), 6 July 2008. See also Gibney 2008.
2. Sometimes displacement of certain populations is rationalised by the state as being 'for their own good', or putting them in their 'correct' place – a gesture of inclusion, albeit under conditions of violence and subjugation to state authority. I thank Graeme Rodgers for this astute observation. More often, however, it is conceived as being good for others, including 'good for the nation'.
3. See for example Das and Poole (2004); Foucault (1979); Gupta (1995); Hansen and Stepputat (2001); Mitchell (1999).
4. Inevitably this raises questions as to whether such practices are only or primarily used, or are feasible, under conditions of authoritarian rule, and are aimed only or primarily at those most marginalised or vulnerable, or whether they constitute a 'normal' and generalised dimension of postcolonial rule in Africa or elsewhere.
5. It would be more accurate to talk of 'party-state' here, given the increasing (and increasingly overt) inseparability of the persons and projects constituting these respective institutions.
6. This date is considered a landmark in the shift towards the current extremes of political and economic crisis. See for example Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen (2003).
7. This includes both rural and urban evictions formally sanctioned by policies and laws.
8. By 'securitised' here, I mean that they have become both the objects and subjects of security policies and practices.
9. For trends in state evictions in rural areas since 1980, see for example Alexander (2003); Hammar (2001); Matondi (2001); Moore (1999); Moyo (1995); Nyambara (2001); Sachikonye (2003).
10. See for example Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resouces Foundation (1997); Pohjolainen-Yap (2001). In many senses, this latter case – with strong echoes in the recent party-state campaigns of political violence (Solidarity Peace Trust 2008a, 2008b) – was the ultimate expression of sovereignty in Agamben's (1998) sense of 'bare life'. But in addition to being primarily about displacement (or decimation) of the then political opposition, ZAPU, it also involved practices of forced confinement.

11. As noted above, this formed the empirical basis for my doctoral research. The final thesis was entitled 'The day of burning': Land, authority and belonging in Zimbabwe's agrarian margins in the 1990s (Roskilde University 2007).
12. CAMPFIRE (Communal Area Management Programme for Indigenous Resources) in fact became internationally renowned.
13. Interview with Alan Chinho, Nembudziya, former CEO of the Gokwe North Rural District Council, 10 October 1998.
14. See Das and Kleinman (2000, 4) for a discussion of the devastating effects elsewhere (Yugoslavia) of the essentialising attribution of a form of dangerous subjectivity to the inhabitants of a particular territory, consistently defined as a 'violence-prone area', marked by an inherent 'culture of violence'.
15. See for example Lamb (2007).
16. See for example Mugabe's speeches published by the government in 2001 as 'Inside the Third Chimurenga'.
17. There are ongoing debates as to the degree to which the invasions were 'spontaneous' and part of an evolving 'land occupation movement' (as claimed by Moyo and Yeros 2005), or were to a large extent generated and supported by actors in the party-state as part of their own set of interweaving political, economic, social and cultural projects (see Hammar, Raftopoulos and Jensen 2003). These latter projects certainly included reconstituting the historically racialised agrarian landscape, represented as part of the historical continuum of nationalist liberation struggles (consecutively the First, Second and Third Chimurenga). But they also included, among other things, destroying the political opposition, and facilitating elite accumulation.
18. For analyses of the varied effects see for example Matondi (2005); Mavedzenge, Mahenehene, Murimbarima et al. (2008); Sachikonye (2003); Zawe (2006); Zimbabwe Institute (2007).
19. See for example reports in the *Mail & Guardian* (SA), 22 October 2002; *Africa Confidential*, 21 February 2003; *The Sunday Mirror* (ZW), 16 March 2003. For government's partial refutation of some of these anomalies, couched in decidedly technocratic terms, see 'Report of the presidential land review committee on the implementation of the fast track land reform programme, 2000–2002' (otherwise known as 'The Utete Report'), Government of Zimbabwe, 2003.
20. In some cases this even led President Mugabe himself to accuse one of the responsible parastatals associated with the reforms (ARDA) of being 'rotten' and needing a complete overhaul. See 'President orders audit of tractors', the *Herald* (Zimbabwe), 4 December 2006.
21. Estimated numbers of displaced farm workers range from 150,000 to 250,000, which – taking their families and other dependents into account – implies anywhere between 750,000 and one million people affected.
22. From 'Transcript of the speech by the chairperson of the Harare Commission, Cde Sekesai Makwavarara, on the occasion of the official launch of Operation Murambatsvina', presented at Town House, Harare, 19 May 2006.
23. See also 'Harare's hawkers go undercover', *Sunday Independent* (SA), 31 July 2005; 'Vending blitz hurting Zimbabwean hawkers', *Associated Press*, 20 September 2005; 'Zimbabwe arrests vendors', *New York Times*, 8 October 2005.
24. 'Mugabe defends urban demolitions', *BBC News* (online), 18 September 2005. See also 'In Zimbabwe, homeless belie leader's claim', *New York Times*, 13 November 2005; 'Zimbabwe rejects UN assistance to provide shelter to victims', *People's Daily* (China), 3 November 2005.
25. This is confirmed by interesting new research, for example by Jones 2008, and Musoni 2008.
26. See 'SA, facing Zimbabwean immigrant flood, may ditch visas', *SouthScan*, 29 September 2005; 'Zimbabwe migrants', *BBC News*, 26 April 2006.
27. For a brief chronology since 1994, see 'Burning the welcome mat', *UN Integrated Regional Information Networks*, 19 May 2008 (http://www.irinnews.org), circulated through AfricaFocus Bulletin, 20 May 2008. See also Landau, Ramjathan-Keogh and Singh (2005).
28. For a discussion of xenophobia in the region more generally, and its complexities linked to a shifting politics of citizenship and exclusion within Southern Africa, see Nyamnjoh 2006.
29. See 'S Africa to set up migrant camps', *BBC News*, 28 May 2008.
30. See 'Army deployed to assist police to quell violence', *BuaNews Online*, 22 May 2008.
31. Mugabe made this 'offer' in a speech to launch his presidential election campaign. See 'Muagbe threat to expel US envoy', *BBC News*, 25 May 2008.

32. See 'Mass Zimbabwe arrests over prices', *BBC News* (online), 9 July 2007.
33. See 'Reign of inflation police'*, Mail & Guardian* (SA), 9 July 2007.
34. Reported in the *Herald*, (Zimbabwe), 19 April 2008.

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