

NOT EXACTLY LIKE THE PHOENIX—BUT RISING ALL THE SAME: RECOVERY AND RESISTANCE AMONG DISPLACED YOUTH IN POST- MURAMBATSVINA HARARE*[©]

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ABSTRACT

The paper retraces the attempts of displaced Harare youth to recover in the wake of Zimbabwe's "Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order". The paper peers into some evolving practices by the embattled youth. It assesses how these strategies have fared in the face of determined efforts by the state's repressive apparatus to keep the 'filth' at bay. While noting the relative successes of the non-combative strategies, the paper argues that it is the transformation of the youth's modes of operation that has helped keep them going as the authorities have yet to come up with counter-strategies that can effectively match the evasive resistance and recovery practices of the youth. The paper also questions some postulations that the youth are returning only because the authorities allow them to operate, arguing that the putative tolerance of the authorities to the rapidly transforming underground economy is in part a result of official paralysis and the inability to design effective counter-responses capable of keeping up with mutations in the youth's modus operandi.

INTRODUCTION

When, in May 2005, the authorities in Zimbabwe launched *Operation Murambatsvina/Restore Order* (OM/RO—a nationwide urban campaign of evictions and demolitions—the declared intention was to drive out 'filth' (City Harare, 2005), a reference to people and structures violating a cocktail of mainly spatial planning laws and building codes (City Harare, 2005; Solidarity Peace Trust, 2005). Youth who operated in undesignated places and/or had no requisite operational licenses and permission constituted a significant proportion of the human dimension of the 'filth' (Kamete, 2005). True to the aims of its architects and sponsors, OM/RO massively destabilised spaces of informality and/or illegality and/or criminality (Bratton and Masunungure, 2006: 2), resulting in the displacement of hordes of urbanites whose sources of livelihood or housing had been destroyed (United Nations, 2005; Potts, 2006).

The ejection, dislocation and displacement of the 'filth' were meant to be permanent (GoZ, 2005), which explains why authorities started talking glowingly of a glorious future (The Sunday Mail, 26-06-2005). It was a future in which the lost glow of the cities would have been retrieved

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(Motsi and Chagonda, 2005; City of Harare, 2005), and everybody would be ‘living well’, thanks to the hastily concocted successor to OM/RO, *Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* (‘Live well’) (GoZ, 2005). The authorities were confident that the capital, Harare, was inexorably on the way to reclaiming its ‘Sunshine City’ status (The Herald, 16-02-2007). Informality, illegality and criminality would forever be history (GoZ, 2005: 6), as the ‘filth’ that had spawned these vices would perpetually be no more. Such was the optimism and determination in official circles. But it looked liked they had celebrated too soon. Either they overestimated their capability to keep the ‘filth’ out, or they underestimated the capacity of the ‘filth’ to ‘regenerate’, let alone ‘mutate’.

The paper retraces the attempts of displaced youth to return to the contested spaces of Harare in the wake of OM/RO. The discussion peers into some evolving practices invented and/or modified by the embattled youth. It assesses how these practices have fared in the face of determined efforts by the state’s repressive apparatus to keep the ‘filth’ at bay. Following this introduction is some conceptual scaffolding focussing on displacement and recovery. This leads to a presentation of the study and the study findings, which is followed by a detailed critique and the conclusion.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS: RECASTING DISPLACEMENT

Displacement has a lot to do with space and place; as such it is a spatial phenomenon. Like all spatial phenomena, displacement manifests itself at different spatial level. However, the trend in the social sciences has been to give disproportionate attention to displacement at the macro-level. There is a preoccupation with “displacement on a massive scale” (Escobar, 2003:158). Forced displacement, such as involuntary migration and eviction, as well as dislocation arising from war, civil strife, brutality, natural disasters and mega-projects get most of the attention (Fernandes et al, 1989; Castles, 2003; Gellert and Lynch, 2003). Further, the majority of these discussions of the “involuntary and deleterious discontinuities of place” are often fixated with “forced geographical displacements” (Fried, 2000:194) whose hallmark is “physical dislocation” (Anderson and Lee, 2005:3; see Bammer, 1994:xi). Another feature of these works is the almost taken-for-granted assumption that for the victims, displacement is a one-off event that is almost certainly followed by relocation and resettlement (see Partridge, 1989). This preoccupation with large-scale and involuntary physical uprooting explains the abundance of work on international refugees, internally displaced persons, relocation and resettlement (Cernea, 1995).

Not surprisingly, such works tend to exclude, trivialise or marginalise subtle displacement resulting from dislocations that do not entail massive movement and relocation. The recasting of displacement by some scholars in a way redresses this partiality. Gellert and Lynch (2003:16), for example, argue for a definition of displacement “that simultaneously embraces natural or material as well as social dimensions.” Significantly, Feldman et al (2003:9) contend that the social dimension of displacement is not restricted to “physical uprooting” but also includes “*in situ* displacement” which is a “form of displacement experienced by people while staying in place.” In its most extreme form, *in situ* displacement is characterised by the destruction of productive assets and the dismantling of production systems (Partridge, 1989:375). Depending as it does on relations of exclusion, this nuanced displacement demarcates “new boundaries for

people's physical and social movement." Unsurprisingly, it entails, among other things, "losing welfare benefits and other entitlements, suffering discrimination or ostracism, or having one's civil rights or property agreements suspended" (Feldman, 2003:9). Referring to displacement that involves physical uprooting, Holtzman and Nezam (2004:110) observe that the "socioeconomic dislocation emerging out of displacement separates...(displaced persons) from their ecosystem, workplaces...and other foundations that anchor their daily lives." This dislocation definitely applies to victims of *in situ* displacement, who find themselves 'separated' from their workplaces or livelihood opportunities, a critical component of the 'foundations that anchor their daily lives'.

Not all displacement is a one-off event that is inevitably followed by relocation and resettlement. To be sure, displacement may be transient, but, as correctly stressed by Feldman et al (2003:9), it "is more likely to be permanent, especially when one's place of origin "is no longer habitable or is given over to other uses." Needless to say, *in situ* displacement does not lead to resettlement; it precipitates somewhat different processes and/or sequence of events. Understandably, with respect to temporality, Gellert and Lynch (2003:16) properly view "displacement as an ongoing dialectical process" that unfolds temporally and spatially. As such, there is primary (direct) and secondary (indirect) displacement, with the later being "a ripple effect" where consequences are felt later in time and sometimes "in less profound ways" (Gellert and Lynch, 2003:19). Thus, whereas the initial impetus, such as a development project or conflict, may have a defined beginning and end, the same cannot be said of the process of displacement that is set in motion.

Spatially, human-generated displacement may take place in both rural and urban areas. In the urban centres of the Global South where power is often centralised in national governments, state intervention accounts for most of the human-generated displacement that is not induced by war or civil strife. Where it has taken place, this intervention is mostly linked to development projects or naked state repression. In urban areas, a significant proportion of displacement is related to this state intervention (Cernea, 1995; Lanjouw et al, 2003). Modernist urban planning, which is the embodiment of rational state intervention aimed at the control and manipulation of space, usually leads the way as the chief architect of this spatially situated phenomena (Yiftachel, 1998). Since "the production of space inevitably involves power and social control" (Stillerman, 2006:510), planning's investment with power by the state makes it the prime state institution for plotting and rationalising urban displacement in developing countries.

There is no shortage of cases of state-initiated *in situ* displacement in urban Africa. While Zimbabwe's mass evictions and demolition of 2005 provide an extreme example, displacement of urban livelihoods has happened in Malawi, Mozambique, Zambia and Lesotho, to mention but a few. In 2006, Malawian authorities ordered and hounded vendors off the streets of major cities (Sabola, 2006). In Maputo, Mozambique, "local government agents exercise physical violence towards vendors operating in...markets or in the streets" (Lourenço-Lindell, 2005:5). This culminated in the decision to remove vendors whose market stalls congested the road in 2003 (Kamete and Lourenço-Lindell, 2007). In Maseru, Lesotho, in 2001, the state apparatus descended on vendors and evicted them from their established trading sites (Leduka, 2002). In 1999, the authorities forced vendors off the streets of Lusaka, Zambia (Nchito, 2002). Each one of the preceding cases epitomises the displacement of livelihoods. After the displacement,

victims no longer had access to urban spaces that they had hitherto used for their survival practices.

That is not to say that urban displacement is unheard of in the developed world. In these cities, processes like gentrification, which for example, “has emerged as one of the most controversial issues in the urban United States” (Freeman, 2005:463), are responsible for displacing low-income urbanites (LeGates and Hartman, 1986). In contrast to the Global South where the national state seems to spearhead all displacement outside of socio-political upheavals and natural disasters, in the West, displacement may also be initiated by some powerful non-state interests such as the real estate industry or property owners (Smith, 1996; Hartman and Robinson, 2003; Newman and Wyly, 2006).

There is no doubt that most of the state-initiated urban displacement in African cities is motivated by the desire to serve the needs and fantasies of those in power (King, 1990). Rightly, Gellert and Lynch (2003:20) argue that the seeming inevitability of displacement results from “the practices and modernising ideologies associated with colonialism, development...and more recently globalisation.” Capital accumulation features prominently in state-initiated displacement that is orchestrated to economically benefit the rich and powerful. Sometimes though, it is difficult to read into state-initiated displacement anything other than power, egotism and fantasy (Lefebvre, 1991; Kamete and Lourenço-Lindell, 2007). In this case, displacement becomes a weapon for repression and social control, which is a reflection of the dark side of modernist planning (Yiftachel, 2002). In this case, this replacement is used to render impotent perceived trouble spots that are viewed as posing a threat to those in power or an impediment to the realisation of their fantasies, particularly notorious among these being the creation of a modern city inspired by western notions of modernity (King, 1990; Swilling et al, 2003; Kamete, 2007).

In conceptualising displacement, emphasising the agency of the displaced can be instructive (Baron, 2003). This agency manifests itself in the way the displaced respond to the displacement. Responses to displacement vary in space and time. In some cases there is immediate spur-of-the-moment physical and sometimes violent resistance by the targeted victims. Even in the West this initial resistance is often militant, which is not surprising as it is intended to confront what to all intents and purpose is a violent attack – or the threat of one – on the very being and selfhood of the affected people. That is why, for example, the powerful Real Estate Board of New York found itself having to deal with militant mobilisation in opposition to gentrification (Newman and Wyly, 2006:24; see Imbroscio, 2004). In urban Africa, state tyranny notwithstanding, immediate opposition to displacement often involves combative resistance. For example, the eviction of street vendors is often accompanied by street battles pitting the resisting vendors against the police or military. The high profile cases of Lesotho, Zimbabwe and Malawi, where vendors violently resisted displacement by the authorities are not unique (Afrol News, 2003; IRIN, 2006; Kamete and Lourenço-Lindell, 2007).

In most cases, even where it is successful, such immediate resistance often bears no lasting fruit. The determined authorities eventually get their way, thanks to the full deployment of the state’s repressive apparatus. After this point, the issue for the dislocated victims is no longer one of warding off displacement, but one of recovery and/or coping. Recovery involves attempts to

revive the disrupted ways of living and/or survival practices; coping entails efforts to come to terms or deal successfully with the difficulties and challenges resulting from displacement. For *in situ* displacement, efforts at recovery are directed at re-establishing access to lost benefits or entitlements, including access to resources. In the urban sphere, where the principal resources for the poor revolve around contested spaces, recovery means reclaiming the spaces and re-establishing livelihood practices and ways of living. In order to recover, the victims often have to re-appropriate ‘lost’ space or create new spaces (Wainwright, 2006:1). In contrast, coping focuses mostly on the creation of new spaces as victims seek to ameliorate the effects of the dislocation. Obviously, by appropriating old spaces and creating new ones recovery and coping count as resistance (cf. Thomas and Davies, 2005:715).

RISING LIKE THE PHOENIX?

The study

“See for yourself! The guys are coming back! They are rising from the ashes like a phoenix!” This triumphant declaration was made by an ecstatic youth activist at the beginning of my research on youth who had been dislodged by OM/RO from the places they had illegally occupied and used. The study sought to investigate the spatial recovery practices of unemployed youth – whom I had been studying for some time – in the wake of OM/RO. The focus of the study was on attempts to retrieve survival practices that had been disrupted, if not temporarily eradicated, by the controversial operation.

Table 1: The locational and sex distribution of the study sample

N=40

Location	Total		Male		Female	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
City Centre	13	32.5	7	17.5	6	15
Mabelreign	12	30	8	20	4	10
Warren Park	15	37.5	6	15	9	22.5
Total	40	100	21	52.5	19	47.5

Source: Research data, January 2007

The study took place between July 2006 and January 2007. It involved talking to a total of 40 youth, 21 male and 19 female (Table 1). As Table 1 shows, they were from sites that had been home to the informal survival practices disrupted by OM/RO, namely the city centre, a low-income residential area (Warren Park) and a suburban shopping centre (Mabelreign Shopping Centre). I had one-to-one interviews using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interviews focused on specific practices that the respondents had adopted to recover from the setbacks wrought by the ‘clean-up’ operation. In addition, I had six focus group discussions with the youth in groups of between 6 and eight. A semi-structured interview schedule was used to initiate discussion and develop probing questions to the issues raised. The FGDs discussed viewpoints and evaluations of recovery practices. Due to the issues raised by the youth, I ended up having unstructured interviews with key informants, among them planners, activists and officers of the municipal police.

Displacement — and a vacuum

The type of displacement that was wrought on the youth can be classified as *in situ*. To be sure, some of them (about 38%) did lose their housing, while a fifth were forcibly taken to the holding centre where government had set up what amounted to a concentration camp. However, these vicissitudes were at best temporary; the youth soon found alternative housing and those in the holding camp somehow left before the state officially shut it down. The biggest setback the youth experienced was a loss of livelihood opportunities; they lost all access to key resources, specifically sites for livelihood survival practices (cf. Gellert and Lynch, 2003:17). Thus, while there may have been no significant and permanent physical dislocation, there certainly was a displacement of livelihoods. As a result of this displacement, the relations of exclusion, which were already acute, were accentuated with the violent disruption of the underground economy and the attempted reconfiguration of urban livelihood practices by the state. The total absence of compensation for victims of the displacement impacted negatively on livelihoods during and beyond the operation. Because of the resultant ‘livelihood-unfriendly’ environment, the secondary displacement became a continuation and a worsening of the primary dimension.

It is not difficult to comprehend the state’s determination to keep the underground economy down and out (Potts, 2006). The authorities had labelled informality as the number one obstacle to its attempt to revive the country’s ailing economy (GoZ, 2005: 6). Immediately before the official launch of OM/RO the Governor of the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) had described the urban underground economy as “shadow forces...(that) interfere with, or derail our turnaround program” (Gono, 2005:18). Reading from this ominous characterisation, one would have expected that once they got rid of the shadow forces, the authorities would put in place measures that would make these diabolic and unpatriotic forces history.

The state may have been aware of the need to keep the underground economy permanently out by preventing its recovery. Government pragmatically stressed (GoZ, 2005:6):

Operation Restore Order was not conceived as an end in itself but as a precursor to Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle whose object is to provide decent and affordable accommodation as well as create an enabling environment that promotes small and medium scale enterprises.

It did look like the new operation was designed to make sure that the purported gains of OM/RO were protected and the ‘filth’ would disappear forever. On the surface, the government had thought about everything. There would be replacements for what had been destroyed; new houses would be built and new opportunities of livelihood created. However, apart from destroying the underground economy, not much was put in place to keep it down, notwithstanding government’s publicly declared intentions to “eliminate the parallel market and fight economic sabotage” (GoZ, 2005:15).

It soon became clear that the hastily cobbled together *Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle* (OG/HK) could not meet the challenge. Apart from it being a last-minute concoction – obviously intended “to placate critics, respond to negative international opinion, and fool the world” (Interview, 29-07-2006) – OG/HK was severely underfunded; it could not even meet the set target for resource mobilisation and deliverables (GoZ, 2005:6). Little wonder, then, that the

operation “was woefully off target” in all projects (IRIN, 2005)¹. The operation’s shortfalls were exacerbated by corruption, nepotism and partisanship (Solidarity Peace Trust, 2006:26–27). The Chairperson of the Combined Harare Residents’ Association summed up the prevailing scepticism when he stated:

What we have observed so far is that the government lacks the capability to avail accommodation to people who were affected by Operation Murambatsvina, and one is justified in being sceptical about the whole project.

Another shortfall of OG/HK was that it was soon reduced to a housing construction programme, the livelihood dimension having been inexplicably forgotten. As a strategy, the creation of an ‘enabling environment that promotes small and medium scale enterprises’ was never seriously operationalised. Even the pro-government press acknowledged this problem when it commented that “the demand for designated markets is just too high and the supply is too low” (The Herald, 12-05-2006).

In view of the above, it can be argued that there was no replacement for the displaced livelihoods; there was a vacuum. The deteriorating national economy meant that they were no viable officially acceptable alternatives to what had been destroyed during OM/RO, what with the formal sector itself shrinking and deindustrialisation being a reality (IMF, 2005). It was therefore clear that the youth had, as one of them, put it, “...two options: return to the old ways or starve to death.” The ‘old ways’ were all rooted in the underground economy. Like everybody else, the youth “simply ... (had) to reconstitute their old survival strategies” (Interview, 16-08-2006). The reconstitution of livelihoods directly translated into a resuscitation of the underground economy. The youth had to bring back the practices of “urban survival in precarious conditions” (Simone, 2005:517).

Recovery practices: an overview

Having decided that survival lay in “picking up the pieces and reviving old practices” (Interview, 19-08-2006) the youth soon discovered that they could not do things the ‘old way’. The few who “tried to test the waters by going back” (Interview, 31-07-2006) to the contested spaces – streets, shop fronts, public spaces and open spaces – were ruthlessly dealt with by the system. A hysterical state media assisted the authorities by raising the alarm whenever informality seemed to be reappearing (The Herald, 12-05-2006; 27-06-2006). Twenty-two-year-old Jimmy of Warren Park observed:

¹ “Originally, 3 billion (trillion) unbudgeted dollars were promised to the scheme by the President and various ministers. Only 10% of this money ever materialised, and with inflation, even within a few months of the demolitions, the buying power of this money had been reduced to less than 5% of the promised 3 billion (trillion)” (The Solidarity Peace Trust, 2005:27).

It did not take long for us to realise things were different and we had to do things in a different way. These people (the authorities) were serious ...and anyone serious about surviving in this impossible situation had to change the way s/she did things. The old had to go, because it would not work in the new Harare. You see ... this was a new city ... it demanded new ways of acting.

The research unearthed an array of these ‘new ways’. These are summarised in Table 2. The following section will look at these ‘new ways’ in detail. I need to mention at the outset that I constantly reminded that these ‘new ways’ are in a way still being experimented with.

Table 2: Recovery strategies of the youth in post-OM/RO Harare

Strategy	Characteristics	Notes
Mobility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operating ‘light’ Achieving speed of flight Ease of movement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common in all areas. Favoured by both sexes, especially sellers of perishable commodities
Invisibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operating in private spaces Ability to melt into the crowd Being inconspicuous 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common in all areas. Favoured by ‘service providers’ and dealers in bulk commodities Some ‘business arrangement’ with owners of premises or employees
Illusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ‘Keeping up appearances’ Intended to lull the system 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal collective strategy Compulsory compliance
Transience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief appearances Avoiding association with any one spot 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A city-centre strategy Favoured by dealers in lightweight and portable products
Infiltration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bribing individuals in the system “Early warning system’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Universal collective strategy Favoured by both sexes in residential areas and suburban shopping centres Compulsory ‘subscription’
Tenacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stubbornness and resilience “Standing up when pushed down” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Common in all areas. Not a stand-alone strategy
Going regional	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cross-border trading Informal 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evolving practice Border-jumping Smuggling

Source: Research data, January 2007

Mobility

Mobility is a trait that calls for ease of movement. From the outset, the youth knew they had to be a step ahead of the authorities, literally. This means they have to be able to outrun vicious state agents when the need arises. As 24-year-old Janet pointed out, “Moving is not enough. We need to run and run very, very fast.” According to a youth activist, mobility demands “operating light”, that is, not being heavy-laden with goods. For the trader, mobility is designed to save both limb and merchandise. To this end, most of them brought as little as possible to the trading site. Nyadzisai (17), based at Mabelreign Shopping Centre, aptly quipped, “We only bring out goods for display. When customers come I take them to my storehouse.” Pressed to state the location of what he called his ‘warehouse’, Taurai (19) could only wave his hand and say, “Somewhere here.” The off-site storage of goods in order to enhance mobility is by far the most popular method favoured by many (88%), especially vendors, in all areas.

The strategy seemed to work. A municipal police officer assigned to a unit responsible for keeping vendors out admitted that there was not much loot and there were “limited arrests [*sic*]”. However, he erroneously attributed this to the authorities success in keeping “the sickness” (informal trading) down and to the fact that “these people are now poorer and do not have many stolen things to trade illegally.” Obviously unbeknown to him, part of the explanation was that ‘these people’ could ‘run very, very fast’ and that they kept their things in ‘warehouses’ ‘somewhere’.

Invisibility

Invisibility entails keeping out of “the line of vision” (Interview, 16-08-2006) of the state’s repressive machinery. The idea is to not be seen. Invisibility also necessarily demands the ability to vanish. What is needed is to avoid being spotted or recognised by the ‘hunters’, the marauding bands of police officers. The most extreme form of invisibility is practiced by ‘service providers’ (such as hairdressers, car cleaners, and car guards), technicians (electronics and home appliance repairs) and car mechanics. These have virtually relocated to where the ‘hunters’ cannot see them. Most have struck up some deals with owners of homes and businesses nearby who allow them to use their premises for a fee. In Mabelreign, for example, Zivai (21), Dickson (23) and Sodindo (19), all car mechanics of note, still stand at their old place that the authorities razed to the ground. It is here that they pick up their old customers and redirect them to their new ‘workshops’. Sometimes, when they are busy, they hire some people to do the redirection for them. In Warren Park, Chido (22) and her hairdressing colleagues, fetch their clients from their old place at the shopping centre and take them to a nearby nightclub for to have their hair done.

In the city centre, they do it slightly differently. Here, the dealers in scarce commodities (such as food, fuel, and fertiliser) actually hire space in shops and other premises. “Empty handed” and “properly dressed” to allow themselves to “melt into the crowd” to enhance invisibility (Interview, 22-08-2006), Dzidzai (16), Miriam (23) and other ‘dealers’, still go to their old spot where their customers know they will be based. When a buyer comes they go to the rented space to make the transaction. The hiring of space is sometimes a straightforward business deal with the owner. In some cases, employees go behind the employers’ back and let out the space.

All those adopting invisibility as a strategy (62.5%), rated it as very successful. None of the municipal police officers was aware of what was going on. These were quick to attribute the decline in arrests and the confiscation of property to the success of their policing. Similarly, they explained the decreased instances of sightings of the youth from the contested spaces in terms of their absence and inability to return.

Illusion

Illusion involves keeping up appearances, “helping the authorities to see what they want to see” and “making them see what is not actually there” (Interview, 07-01-2007). As such, it relies on deceit and duplicity. Janet (24) explains,

They don't want to see us; so they don't see us. They want to see us beaten, so we let them believe we are beaten. They want to destroy our things, so we let them believe they have destroyed them. If they see what they want to see, they go to sleep.

This is the first of the collective strategies that I came across. Whereas the other practices are personal choices, illusion is characterised by the enforcement of compulsory compliance. Those breaking the pact are punished.

Illusion involved a complicated game of decoys, dummies and make-believe. For example, in Warren Park there are roadside vendors who roast and sell green maize. There are also 'shoe repair boys' and some vegetable vendors. When they know the police are coming (see below), these ones set up elaborate plastic and cardboard stalls, or 'ovens' complete with fire. They put some merchandise in these 'dummies'. When the police come they raid these with zest, while the owners watch from a distance. Sometimes these dummies become decoys that the youth use to slow down the police. Shingi (22) nicknamed 'Chiremba wepfungwa' (psychologist), explained to me:

We know these guys (the police) always come from the same direction. So we set up false structures in that direction and stock them up with rejects. Sometimes we put in a few good things (merchandise). When they come, we can see them pouncing on these structures and then we pick up our things and vanish... Sometimes we line these up in a completely different direction from where we are. ...It is fun to watch them attack these believing they are winning.

The construction of the dummies and the goods the youth put in them (aptly referred to as 'sacrifices') are collective responsibilities. Lodza (19), chairperson of one group in Warren Park explained that the reason for this collectivisation is that, "we all benefit, so we all contribute."

Illusion also involves "not arguing with the authorities" (Interview, 06-08-2006). The idea is to let the authorities think they are on top of the situation and that there is no need to revise their strategy. Illusion also requires giving the appearance that all is well and the youth are down and out. So, when the police come, sometimes they see no youth who, having knowing of the raid in advance (see below) would have agreed to disappear.

Illusion demands work and sacrifices. Indications in all areas were that it worked, hence its popularity and the universal compliance of participants. Interviews with municipal police officers confirmed that the authorities were indeed fooled by the dummies, decoys and make-believe. They were lulled into a sense of victory and effectiveness.

Transience

Transience is the practice of not staying long at the same place, the aim being to avoid being associated with any one place. It is involved brief and fleeting appearances. "We are ghosts. We sneak in and out. If you ask where to find me, nobody will know. I myself don't know where I will be next or for how long", explains 16-year-old Jaison, who operates from various spots in the city centre. Like Jaison, the nomadic 'ghosts' who prefer this practice (about 48%) are mostly males who operate mostly in the city centre. They deal in lightweight and portable merchandise such as foreign currency, phone cards, toiletries, stationery, and small electronic products, mostly mobile phone and mobile phone accessories. The idea behind not being tied to

any one place is to avoid a fixed spatial identity in order to lower risks, while at the same time confusing the authorities, “who will not know where to look for us” (Interview, 29-08-2006). The efficacy of this strategy is appreciated when it is remembered that operatives of the Central Intelligent Organisation (CIO), the national spy agency, and officers of the Criminal Investigations Department (CID) are always on the prowl (Kamete, 2005). These are interested in economic crimes, such as illegally dealing in foreign currency, scarce commodities and smuggled goods like mobile phones.

Being some kind of a peripatetic dealer, helps in the sense that the mostly place-bound operatives would “not have you as a long-term suspect” (Interview, 27-07-2006). Transience also included spreading out, not gathering in one place as had been the norm before OM/RO. This ensured that in the event of a raid, at least some members of some informal groups would survive. Notably, quite a number of these mobile traders distributed merchandise among themselves, having agreed to sell for each other. This was easy as there was some kind of ‘specialisation’, which in a way reduced competition and what one of them described as “chicanery”.

It was difficult to assess this practice. Its adherents rated it highly and credited it with their continued survival and the avoidance of ‘branding’ by the secret police and security operatives. Discussing with the authorities, it was clear that they were not aware of what was going on. As had become their habit, they predictably credited the decline in arrests and prosecution with a “marked decline in illegal activities”, according to one police officer.

Infiltration

Infiltration, a practice where the youth acquire and keep ‘moles’ within the municipal and state police, is a practice carried over from the pre-OM/RO era (Kamete, 2005). The idea is to have some kind of informer who sounds a warning when authorities are planning to raid the youth. Like illusion, this is a collective strategy, where participation is compulsory. Once an informer is identified and terms agreed, the youth operating in a given geographical area pay subscriptions to a ‘retention fund’. In Warren Park at the time of the study, this was equivalent to about US\$ 0.50 per month. The typical fee for a mole ranged from between US\$ 7.00 and US\$ 11.50, a lot of money by local standards, considering the fact that a middle-ranking police officer at the time earned less than US\$ 20.00 a month.

As soon as the mole gets wind that a raid is being planned, word is quickly sent to the youth, mostly through mobile-phone text messages. Having been thus warned the youth will be prepared. They will be at the place but with very little merchandise, just in case the raids fail to materialise, as they sometimes do. In any case, there is a verbal understanding that the youth have to be on site, acting normally and even go to the extent of feigning surprise when the raids occur. When a raid takes place, the mole gets a handsome payment. During periods of ‘peace’, in addition to the ‘retention fee’, the mole gets free handouts, lunches and access to scarce commodities.

Infiltration was rated as effective, the main reason being that the ‘early warning system’ was working. Some attempt at listing the instances when the moles had delivered failed to yield specific figure. Going by the lists the monthly average between July 2006 and January 2007

ranged from six to nine. Between a quarter and a third of the warnings turned out to be false alarms. Discussions with officials suggested that they may not have been aware of this infiltration of the system by the youth. A planning officer said it was “possible but very unlikely.”

Tenacity

As a strategy tenacity is characterised by persistent determination. It calls for “stubbornly standing up when pushed down” (Interview, 21-01-2007). It involves coming back, again and again, to the contested spaces after the authorities have mounted an attack, however vicious. This unquenchable stubbornness is the identifying mark of tenacious youth. Joyce (20), who operates at Mabelreign Shopping Centre, matter-of-factly stated:

When they attack us, we come back. ...We make sure we always come back. They raid us in one moment, the next minute we appear from nowhere; as soon as they turn their ugly backs to leave, we are back. When they call us names, blame us and threaten us we will always come back. If they want to play the game the whole time, we are there. ... We will see who gets tired – and it won't be us!

Notably, the study found out that tenacity is not a stand-alone strategy. It is always an aftermath, a response to what the youth perceive as an adversity. As Joyce aptly pointed out, the adversity is not limited to ferocious physical attacks by the authorities. Being maligned – and the authorities are notorious for regularly casting aspersions on those participating in the underground economy – also counts as an adversity. “Weathering these never-ending hostilities”, as a social worker put it, requires tenacity.

The fact that the youth always ‘come back’ to the site after raids, and continue with their practices despite raids and insults can be interpreted as demonstrating the efficacy of being tenacious. Tacitly conforming this, a municipal police officer who confessed that he was “getting utterly worn out by these stupid games” complained that the “malcontents are past all pain, fear and shame.” Significantly, another officer described the youth as “*nhinhi*”, a pejorative reference to someone who is not responsive to discipline.

Going regional

After OM/RO some youth joined the increasing number of cross-border traders. In order of frequency, the favourite destinations are Mozambique, Zambia and Botswana. This is a relatively small group, making up less than 20 per cent of the sample. Notably, even this sojourn into foreign lands is steeped in informality and/or illegality. Of the seven (5 males and 3 females), only two males had passports; two others (one male and one female) ‘hired’ passports from friends or relatives. The rest did not bother going through the arduous process of getting a passport or applying for entry visas for Mozambique the most popular destination and the only one requiring an entry visa.

The purpose of the travel is to ‘deal’. The youth smuggle items like cigarettes, sugar and soap to Mozambique and Zambia. These sell for a much higher price in these countries – between 7 and 15 times – than in Zimbabwe. The youth smuggle back foreign currency, bales of used clothes, mobile phones and other small electrical items for sell in Harare. The journey to Chimoio in Mozambique, the most favoured destination, involves border-jumping, a perilous practice

occasioned by three factors: absence of passports, absence of visas and the necessity to smuggle in order to save money and subvert administrative requirements which would make trading and travel impossible.

Zambia does not require visas, but it still presents problems for those without passports. Jumping the border here is made risky by the fact that the border-jumpers have to cross the treacherous and crocodile infested Zambezi River. The 'guides' and 'transporters' who help border jumpers into Zambia cost a lot more than those operating on the border with Mozambique. Further, the Mozambican authorities are also more amenable to bribes. Botswana's distance from Harare, coupled with the lack of a ready market for the products and the impossibility of smuggling anything in or out, made the country "not suitable for our kind of business" (Interview, 22-01-2007).

Among the studied youth, cross-border trading is still in its infancy. But it is gaining in popularity, with more youth stating that they are willing to take the risks because the rewards are worth it. The authorities were vaguely aware of this development, but surprisingly welcomed it because, according to a middle-ranking female officer, "it cures our headaches". She said, "I wish they all go...and stay there forever and ever."

Cautionary note

The preceding discussion may give the impression that the recovery practices are mutually exclusive and have a clear gender and geographic character. This is not the case. While it is true that some groups may appear to favour some tactics, it is only because the place, the time and the situation call for that particular practice to be the dominant mode. However, in the background and sometimes featuring inconspicuously are other recovery practices. What happened when I had visited Mabelreign Shopping Centre illustrates the point.

On Thursday morning, a sister to a municipal police officer, one of the moles, warned the youth of an impending raid. Clearly this was the result of *infiltration*. The youth quickly convened a meeting and went to work setting up the decoys and dummies which had not been attended to because they had been advised by their 'man' that the situation would be calm for some time. Compulsory 'donations' of vegetables, fruits and discarded items like mobile phone batteries and hot-plate stoves were quickly collected. This was *illusion*.

Interestingly, Joel (20) who was reportedly in Mozambique (*gone regional*) had his 'donation' paid by his best friend, Zviito (17), a fellow dealer who helped him 'move' (sell) his goods when he was not around. In the afternoon, when the blitz was supposed to take place, the youth were on site, but without most of their goods. They were dressed, as Judith (23) put it "like ordinary nice people" in order to blend in. But they were also dressed to run. Takkies (sneakers) replaced sandals; for the 'girls' track suits and jeans replaced skirts and dresses. These practices are a combination of *mobility* and *invisibility*.

By the end of the day, the police had not come. There was a possibility that they would come the following morning. The next day, the youth were there and ready, despite reports that the police

were then in the processes of raiding neighbouring Dzivaresekwa. The whole day the youth were there; but again the raiding party did not come. There were reports that they would come ‘any time from now’, but the youth did not budge. They kept their decoys and dummies and kept in touch with their mole, all the time being in a state of readiness. Even though the raid did not materialise during the following week, there is no doubt that the youth’s persistent determination to be there was *tenacity* at its best.

CONCLUSION

The preceding discussion brings to the fore the fact that nuanced and localised *in situ* displacement should count as displacement. The disruption of livelihood opportunities, even without physical uprooting, deserves as much attention as the massive internal and transnational dislocations, involuntary or otherwise. The fate of Harare’s youth agrees with those who contend that “one can be displaced without even going anywhere” (Gieryn, 2000:482). It shows that “attachment of people to place” (Fried, 2000:193) is more than a psychosocial phenomenon; it is also motivated by economic survival instincts. This is so because the symbolic meaning of space does have economic effects (Goodchild et al, 2000:144; cf. Gieryn, 2000:472). Accordingly, a disruption of livelihood practices, even where movement is not involved, is coterminous with a severing of this attachment – which is why it should count as displacement.

Furthermore, it is not helpful for attention to be monopolised by the traumatic dislocations arising from natural disasters, civil strife, brutality and war, or the equally inconvenient movements and resettlement resulting from so-called ‘development projects’. What the Zimbabwean case illustrates is that the state can and does orchestrate urban displacement that has nothing to do with ‘development’ as it is totally “unrelated to development projects” (Cernea, 1995:247). Rather this displacement has everything to do with the protection of the power and benefits of a few, or the advancement of their dreams.

The Harare case drives home the point that displacement that creates a vacuum – because it is not followed by the creation of viable alternatives to what has been destroyed – has no permanence. It is futile to expect people to suddenly participate in formal livelihood systems when they are under stress when it is clear that the systems of informality – the underground economy being a vital cog of these systems – they have developed and which have become their way of life, are a result, not of happy choices but of constraints arising out of their exclusion from the systems of formality that they are expected to suddenly participate in. Such unreasonable expectations and the resultant ill-advised inaction cancel out the ‘benefits’ of the displacement. In one way or another, the people who have had their livelihoods displaced are bound to respond to the irresistible imperatives of survival and reconstitute their livelihoods. As noted above, recovery entails reconstituting the underground economy and resuscitating old survival practices “outside the regulatory frameworks maintained by the state” (Gore and Pratten, 2003:213).

This is where claims of the youth rising like the phoenix from the ashes need to be interrogated. The youth are indeed rising, but not exactly like the phoenix. The youth’s continued reappearance on the contested spaces, the reconstruction of their survival practices after the massive OM/RO-induced displacement is more a result of subtle changes than a stubborn

renewal with the same old operational traits. Theirs is not a mere rising, in the original form, from the ashes. It is not a transmutation either; the youth still survive from the underground economy, in the old places, doing mostly the same old things. The changes are all in their response to the authorities' determination to keep the 'filth' out of the city. Theirs is more of a *mutation* to subvert hostilities from determined authorities than a revolutionary transformation of survival practices or the invention of new ones. It is this mutative transformation – the addition of traits to existing practices and the modification of old ones – that accounts for their notable success so far. All the additions and modifications – mobility, invisibility, illusion, transience, infiltration, tenacity, and going global – are mutations designed to survive repeated onslaughts by the authorities.

It can be argued that the youth have managed to considerably tone down secondary displacement (cf. Gellert and Lynch, 2003:19). This they have done by prising open access to livelihood opportunities that had been locked away by the authorities. The ripple effects that normally follow displacement have not had the intensity they would normally have had the youth not made a decision to rebuild their livelihoods. A look at some of the victims of OM/RO who are still in the holding camp just outside Harare and others who just decided to give up gives a vivid impression of the enormity of the ripple effects that the youth may have stemmed.

However, the recovery practices of the youth need to be put into perspective, lest they be over-romanticised. Their return to the contested spaces is not an act of brazen, heroic defiance; neither is it a calculated conscious choice among many options. Rather, it has all the makings of an act of desperation. Faced with the choice of pauperisation “and guaranteed starving” (Interview, 25-01-2007) on one hand, and living dangerously in the suffocating shadow of a repressive state apparatus on the other, the youth understandably chose the latter. As one of them admitted, “...if you look at it, for anyone who is not crazy there was only one option.” The return of the 'filth', therefore, is a result of the state's failure to provide and guarantee alternative livelihood opportunities. It is a result of the state's failure to successfully reconfigure the livelihood landscape to provide an outlet for the pressure it had generated by destroying and banning the underground economy.

The youth's relative success cannot be entirely credited to their ingenuity. They keep going because of a lot of what an activist described as “external support from the generality of the supportive citizenry.” For one, the youth's clientele have maintained their loyalty by continuing to buy goods and services from them. Granted, for most of the customers most of the time, there is simply no choice; what the youth supply is either in short supply or has a much higher price tag in the formal sector. Be that as it may, this 'customer loyalty' keeps the youth going. Accordingly, for all their success in evading and fooling the authorities, the youth would not get anywhere without their loyal customers.

A second group of the 'generality of the citizenry' crucial to the youth's remarkable successes so far are those who let them use their premises to store merchandise or attend to clients. As noted above, the 'renting' of space is critical to ensuring invisibility for those whose operations demand a lot of space or a lot of time attending to clients. It is the homeowners and owners of business premises – and of course the occasional misbehaving employee who goes behind the

employer's back – who contribute to the practicability of mobility, invisibility, illusion and transience as recovery practice. True, these 'landlords' do not do it out of principle or philanthropy; to them these are "pure business transactions" (Interview, 26-01-2007). This does not make their involvement in the recovery of the youth any less important.

Another less-talked-about section of the citizenry comprises people who perhaps truly act out of principle or philanthropy. These are the ordinary people who warn the youth of impending danger. They are the ones who help them melt into thin air when the authorities descend on them. These are the people who help conceal them and their property when things go awry and state operatives and functionaries are hot on their heels. As I was made aware, these are people who, for various reasons, have no love or respect for the authorities. Some of them are themselves victims of OM/RO. Nevertheless, this in no way trivialises their contribution to the frustrating of the authorities' plans to wipe out the 'filth'.

In the same vein, it should be stated that the youth's successes so far are not a result of state tolerance. The authorities have not softened their stance. They continue to malign and threaten the informal sector; and they have not been found wanting in proving that theirs are more than empty threats. The establishment of what amounts to a permanent mobile unit that is responsible for making sure that any vestiges of informality are permanently eradicated proves that the authorities' animosity and determination to eject the 'filth' has not abated. In view of the foregoing, it can be argued that the state has not suddenly become tolerant. Rather, it has failed to come up with an effective antidote. The mutation and evasive resistance of the youth is a new phenomena; it is different to what the authorities are used to dealing with.

Consequently, like all state bureaucracies that have rigid and standardised procedures to deal with the known, the state apparatuses are in a state of paralysis waiting to come up with rational methods to counter the new phenomenon. What is astounding is the authorities' conviction that they are, according to a very senior officer "right on the very top of the situation [*sic*]". With statements like this, it is tempting to conclude that illusion, invisibility and transience, which have so far served the youth well, will continue to be effective in ensuring recovery of displaced livelihoods and ameliorating secondary displacement. The recognition and acceptance of a problem is an indispensable step towards the design of a solution (Birkland, 2005:126; see also Dery, 1984; Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; Dunn, 2004). But the authorities are clearly in denial, which by extension means that they are nowhere near coming up with strategies to stem the youth's recovery. As a self-proclaimed 'youth rights crusader' triumphantly declared, "the system has been duped, period." In view of the foregoing, it is tempting to proclaim that the 'filth' has indeed returned – and it might be around for some time.

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