

# Decolonising urban space: Observations from history in urban planning in Ruwa town, Zimbabwe, 1986-2015

Terence Tapiwa Muzorewa  
*Midlands State University*  
terencemuzorewa@gmail.com

Vongai Z Nyawo  
*Midlands State University*  
nyawov@msu.ac.zw

Mark Nyandoro  
*University of Zimbabwe*  
*E-P research, School of Social Sciences, Subject Group – History,*  
*NWU Vaal Triangle Campus, South Africa*  
nyandoromark@gmail.com

## ***Abstract***

This article calls for a shift of attention from the colonial urban planning methods to a focus on the post-colonial planning methods being adopted in new towns such as Ruwa. The core of the studies on urban planning in Zimbabwe has been centred on colonial established urban centres tending to promote the reproduction of spatial disparities in urban areas. This article argues that the only way to decolonise urban space in Zimbabwe is through establishing new towns which are not linked to the colonial planning system. All of the major towns in the country except Ruwa were established during the colonial era based on a planning system which segregated the African population. The colonial planning methods produced uneven development between areas occupied by Europeans and Africans. Although urban policies were deracialised during the post-colonial era, the physical nature of the built environment remained the same. While it was possible to change colonial urban policy, it was impossible to change, fundamentally, the spatial physical structures such as buildings, roads, water reticulation and sewerage systems. The spatial form of today's Zimbabwean urban areas is an embodiment of colonial planning as this change entailed enormous financial costs. Ruwa town, therefore, demonstrates how modern urban development in the southern African country has been achieved on the basis of a totally different experience from the colonial established towns. Using insights from the town, the article illustrates the importance of studying post-colonial planning methods as a way of promoting the decolonisation of urban space.

**Keywords:** Decolonisation; Urban space; Urban planning; Policy; Built environment; Private land developer companies; Water infrastructure; Ruwa; Zimbabwe.

## **Introduction and literature review**

The concept of decolonising urban space, as this article posits, is an approach meant to reverse and deviate from the traditional colonial established planning which was elitist and segregationist in nature. The decoloniality concept in urban planning is similar to Lefebvre<sup>1</sup> and Harvey's<sup>2</sup> "the right to the city" idea which advocates for a radical transformation of urban life among the low-income earners. However, although Harvey calls for ordinary individuals to take control of the process of planning in urbanisation, the decoloniality concept advocates for an indigenous planning system which is not influenced by colonialism and elitism. Ruwa is discussed not only as a unique model of post-colonial<sup>3</sup> urban planning and a major vehicle for decolonising urban space in Zimbabwe,<sup>4</sup> but also as a case from which important observations from history on modern urban planning can be made. Using the case of Ruwa town, this article illustrates how modern urban development in Zimbabwe has been achieved on the basis of a totally different experience from the colonial established towns.

All colonial established towns in Zimbabwe were designed using a colonial planning system which was based on racial segregation.<sup>5</sup> Africans were viewed as temporary residents of the city who came for employment purposes only, with no permanent rights of residence in urban areas. Urban space, being a material product of a social order, was thus shaped by the tenets of the political and economic ideology of the ruling class in the society.<sup>6</sup> The colonial administration as a ruling class created urban areas that segregated the Africans and urban infrastructure designed to control African mobility or movement. Colonial established urban centres, together with supporting infrastructure such as water, sewer and transport systems to name a few, were meant to accommodate a small number of Europeans. However, after independence in 1980 the system was overwhelmed by the growing population of Africans

- 
- 1 H Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la ville* [The right to the city], 2 (Paris, Anthropos, 1968); R Shields, "Lefebvre and the right to the open city?", *Space and culture*, 16(3), 2013, pp. 345-348.
  - 2 D Harvey, "The right to the city", *New Left Review*, 53, 2008, pp. 23-40.
  - 3 The term "post-colonial" is used to simplify modern colonialism to new readers in the decoloniality discourse. However, decoloniality scholars like Ramon Grosfoguel prefer to call "post-colonial" period modern colonial period because colonialism continues but in a different form.
  - 4 Urban space refers to an artefact of urbanisation which is a social process that encompasses the manner in which urban areas grow. Urban space is a product of social structures and relationships in urban areas. It includes institutional arrangements, nature of built environment and social networks in the town. For further reading on the definition of urban space see G Ritzer, *Blackwell encyclopedia of sociology* (London, Wiley-Blackwell, 2007).
  - 5 K Munzwa & W Jonga, "Urban development in Zimbabwe: Human settlement perspective", *Theoretical and Empirical Research in Urban Management*, 5(14), 2010, p. 126.
  - 6 CO Rambanepasi, "Chitungwiza - The case study of a dormitory town in Zimbabwe", KH Wekwete & CO Rambanepasi (eds.), *Planning urban economies in southern and eastern Africa* (Avebury, Belmont, 1994), p. 206.

in urban areas which was not planned for. Ruwa, situated 23 km from Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare's (see Image 1) central business district (CBD), is an example of a post-colonial established town which tried to correct this planning oversight.

Image 1: Location of Ruwa in Zimbabwe



Source: Department of Surveyor General, Harare, 2013.

The town was established within a commercial farming area by the Government of Zimbabwe in 1986 and in 1991 it became an urban centre administered by a local board with a population of over 25 000 people. The town's phenomenal growth resulted in it being given town status in 2008 by the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing.<sup>7</sup> The last census in 2012 recorded a population of 50 000 people.<sup>8</sup> This big

7 Anon., "Ruwa Council's humble beginning", *The Herald*, 24 December 2009, p. E4.

8 Central Statistics Office, Harare, 2012.

population made Ruwa an important and fast growing urban centre in Zimbabwe. It became the only town in the country to emerge out of the initiative of Private Land Developer Companies (PLDCs) – companies that had relatively better financial capacity.<sup>9</sup> No other town in Zimbabwe has grown against a background similar to it.

At the time of the decolonisation of Zimbabwe in 1980 Ruwa, which did not exist as an urban settlement, only emerged from the ashes of a previously white commercial farming area in 1986/87. By 2015 the town comprised 11 major suburbs which fell under different categories of residential areas which are low, medium and high density. In the same year, there was evidence of a well-developed light industrial site and commercial centres in the town. With commercial and public service infrastructure sporadically dotted within the residential and industrial areas, Ruwa's hinterland is characterised by the surrounding commercial farm land which contributes to the town's local economy alongside the manufacturing industry.

To achieve its purpose of illustrating how modern urban development was achieved in Ruwa between 1986 and 2015 compared to the colonial established towns, the article uses both primary and secondary sources to explore these important questions. Archival sources were used to describe the colonial-built environment and urban space. In particular, primary data from the Ruwa town Archives in the form of council minutes and letters (official correspondence) was employed to establish new planning trends adopted by Ruwa which deviated from the traditional colonial planning methods. Interviews based on purposive sampling of key informants in Ruwa town were used to gather opinions on the new urban development. These methods were complemented by secondary sources (books, journal articles and newspapers) which were useful in constructing images of the colonial and post-colonial built environment in Zimbabwe. The important issues the article seeks to address are the characteristics of colonial urban space, the legacy of colonial Zimbabwean towns, and the decolonisation of urban space in Ruwa. Addressing these issues will shed light on decolonisation as a universal phenomenon which is not unique to Zimbabwe, but historical literature on it in the country is not extant.

---

<sup>9</sup> PLDCs are private entrepreneurs who purchased land from commercial farmers and subdivided the land into residential, commercial and industrial areas before they sell it to individuals for profit.

In the debates about urbanisation, urban space planning in the colonial era, marginalisation of some cultures, decolonisation and the social sustainability of multicultural cities, different but interlocking perspectives have been proffered by mainly international scholars such as Lefebvre, West, Jacobs, Jackson, and Harvey<sup>10</sup> to name a few. The concept of decolonisation in general is not new and has been discussed in several scholarly works in both development and urban planning discourses. The general concept of decoloniality can be traced to Fanon who advocates for Black people's liberation from mental colonisation.<sup>11</sup> He calls for decolonial epistemic which creates new categories of thought and construction of new subjectivities in all disciplines.<sup>12</sup> Decoloniality scholars like Grosfoguel and Cervantes have analysed the geopolitics of knowledge production.<sup>13</sup> They advocate for decolonisation to address the global class and regional asymmetries produced by colonial capitalist world systems.<sup>14</sup> Similarly, there is also literature by Hesse on dominant settler culture's land-based interests as well as the emerging planning practices of the colonial era - practices which asserted non-indigenous control.<sup>15</sup> Hesse views decolonisation within the context of multiculturalism, a concept which analyses inequality based on culture, race, ethnicity and gender differences.<sup>16</sup> He argues that the contestation of multiculturalism in Britain is symptomatic of an unresolved condition in that society.<sup>17</sup> The unresolved structures that perpetuate inequality in the "diaspora-space" in Britain have the same foundations that support urban governance structures afflicting the ordinary urban dwellers in Zimbabwe.

A number of other scholars have written on decoloniality, although most do not focus on planning, but on racial discriminatory or segregationist policies. Yoshikuni discusses African urban experiences during the colonial

---

10 H Lefebvre, *Le Droit à la ville...*; C West, "The new cultural politics of difference", R Ferguson, M Gever, TT Minh-ha & C West (eds.), *Out there: Marginalization and contemporary cultures* (Cambridge, MA, MIT Press, 1990), pp. 19-36; S Jackson, "Geographies of coexistence: Native title, cultural difference and the decolonization of planning in north Australia" (PhD, Macquarie University, Sydney, 1998); D Harvey, "The right to the city"; JM Jacobs, *Edge of Empire Postcolonialism and the City* (London, Routledge, 1996).

11 F Fanon, *The wretched of the earth* (New York, Grove Press, 1986), p. xii.

12 Fanon, *The wretched of the earth...*, p. 1.

13 R Grosfoguel & AM Cervantes, "Unthinking twentieth-century Eurocentric mythologies: Universalist knowledge, decolonization and developmentalism", R Grosfoguel and AM Cervantes (eds.), *The modern/colonial/capitalist system in the twentieth-century global processes, antisystemic movements and geopolitics* (London, Greenwood Press, 2002), p. x.

14 R Grosfoguel & AM Cervantes, "Unthinking twentieth-century Eurocentric mythologies", p. xiv.

15 B Hesse, *Unsettled multiculturalism: Diasporas, entanglements, "transruptions"* (London, Zed Books, 2000).

16 B Hesse, *Unsettled multiculturalism...*, p. 2.

17 B Hesse, *Unsettled multiculturalism...*, p. 12.

era in this context.<sup>18</sup> He accounts for the development of African urban residential areas in colonial Zimbabwe which was based on racial segregation policies.<sup>19</sup> The colonial Government racially segregated Africans by relegating them to African residential areas (“locations”) created for them away from the city by discriminatory legislation like the *Land Apportionment Act (LAA)* of 1930/31 and the *Native Land Husbandry Act (NLHA)* passed in 1950/51. Further, Yoshikuni analyses the planning of the built environment in African “locations” carried out in an endeavour to control the mobility of Africans in the urban areas.<sup>20</sup> While Yoshikuni focuses on Harare, Rambanepasi demonstrates how the colonial system of segregation influenced the development of Chitungwiza.<sup>21</sup> He argues that the ideology behind the origins of Chitungwiza was informed by a need to create a labour pool for Harare.<sup>22</sup> In Bulawayo (Zimbabwe’s second largest city), Mpofu also analyses how the urban space has been shaped by colonial segregationist policies.<sup>23</sup> As in Harare, the colonial Government controlled the Africans by designing African “locations” in a way which enabled it to easily control their movement,<sup>24</sup> and maintain policies that discriminated against them.

Coloniality in Africa, which is also perpetuated through globalisation, is a product of colonialism.<sup>25</sup> Under globalisation, policy making institutions in Africa remain subjects of the North since the continent is part of a complex network linking it to the North through training and research funding.<sup>26</sup> The African urban planning research agenda is then influenced by the North since research funds come from foundations and agencies based there. Narrowing down decoloniality to urban planning particularly in Africa, Miraftab’s work on Cape Town in South Africa discusses coloniality in post-colonial urban policies. She reveals a keen affinity for a contemporary urban development strategy in South Africa known as “Improvement Districts”. The districts were for the affluent, but were based on the colonial urban development strategy

---

18 T Yoshikuni, *African urban experiences in colonial Zimbabwe: A social history of Harare before 1925* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2007).

19 T Yoshikuni, *African urban experiences...*, p. 38.

20 T Yoshikuni, *African urban experiences...*, p. 39.

21 Chitungwiza is one of the most densely populated urban centres in Zimbabwe. For further reading on Chitungwiza see Rambanepasi, “Chitungwiza - The case study of a dormitory town in Zimbabwe”.

22 CO Rambanepasi, “Chitungwiza - The case study of a dormitory town in Zimbabwe”, KH Wekwete & CO Rambanepasi (eds.), *Planning urban economies...*

23 B Mpofu, “No place for ‘undesirables’...”, (PhD, University of Edinburgh, 2010).

24 B Mpofu, “No place for ‘undesirables’...”, p. 6.

25 N Maldonado-Torres, “On the coloniality of being: Contributions to the development of a concept”, *Cultural Studies*, 21(3), 2007, p. 243.

26 N Maldonado-Torres, “On the coloniality of being...”, *Cultural Studies*, 21(3), 2007, p. 244.

of “location creation” designed for the Africans by Europe.<sup>27</sup> She argues that while colonial practices of “location creation” segregated those at the bottom of the societal hierarchy (the non-Europeans), the post-colonial strategy of “Improved Districts” constructed special locations for those high up in the societal hierarchy.<sup>28</sup> Miraftab’s analysis illuminates the resemblance of the colonial and post-colonial urban development policies in South Africa which were both elitist and exclusionary. However, unlike Cape Town studied by Miraftab, Ruwa deviated from the colonial-established elitist urbanism as it adopted a less elitist approach to urban development. Its departure from the colonialist imperial ideology is one of its distinguishing characteristics.

The characteristics of the colonial urban space discussed by the aforementioned scholars still occupy the core of post-colonial urban scholarship. Nevertheless, urban infrastructure and space designed for Europeans in the colonial era failed to accommodate the growing population of urban Africans in the post-colonial era, hence the need to consider new planning policies in Zimbabwe. Munzwa and Jonga, though, plausibly demonstrate that while it is possible to change colonial policy on urban planning it is impossible to do so with the physical structure of the city.<sup>29</sup> It is not viable to demolish colonial established buildings and infrastructure in order to construct new ones based on new planning methods. The only way to decolonise urban space is through establishing new towns using new planning methods that are formulated based on the cultural values of society.

Clearly, over-emphasis on the colonial established planning system by Zimbabwean scholarship risks the reproduction of the colonial towns in independent Zimbabwe. Urban scholarship together with policy formulation and implementation in post-colonial Zimbabwe has been informed by case studies of western planned towns and cities. In the post-colonial era, prominent scholars such as Helmising, Mutizwa-Mangiza, Wekwete and Patel continued to focus on colonial established settlements, unpacking colonial adopted urban development strategies such as the Growth Point

---

27 F Miraftab, “Colonial present: Legacies of the past in contemporary urban practices in Cape Town, South Africa”, *Journal of Planning History*, 11(4), pp. 283-307.

28 F Miraftab, “Colonial present...”, *Journal of Planning History*, 11(4).

29 K Munzwa and W Jonga, “Urban development in Zimbabwe: Human settlement perspective”, *Theoretical and Empirical Research in Urban Management*, 5(14), 2010, p. 126.

and Peripheral Development policies.<sup>30</sup> However, emphasising the colonial established towns and their planning strategies is tantamount to dwelling on western epistemology which portrays Africa as an underdeveloped continent.<sup>31</sup>

It is, therefore, important to emphasise decolonisation in planning post-colonial urban spaces, but there is the general dearth of literature of decolonisation of towns in Zimbabwe. This may be linked to the scarcity of pre-colonial urban experiences to draw indigenous planning lessons from. In the pre-colonial period the population in the region now called Zimbabwe was scattered and this made it difficult for the establishment of urban areas. Some 400 years before colonialism there existed some form of built settlements such as the Great Zimbabwe, Dhlohdhlo and Khami ruins to mention a few.<sup>32</sup> The economic activities during the era were small-scale farming, mining and trade in petty commodities like beads and pottery.<sup>33</sup> Great Zimbabwe, for instance, was more of a political and religious centre than an economic one. For Mudenge, the population of the settlement was around 11 000, that is, 14 persons per square kilometer,<sup>34</sup> but this was less than half the number required for an area to be declared a vibrant urban settlement in the post-colonial era. In present-day Zimbabwe, an area should have at least 25 000 or more inhabitants to be considered urban. Thus, in the absence of pre-colonial urban space experience to draw lessons from, post-colonial established towns such as Ruwa do not only contribute to African urban planning epistemology, but show how indigenous concepts can be integrated into urban development discourse. This study on Ruwa therefore contextualises decoloniality in urban space planning issues thereby offering major insights into post-colonial indigenous planning methods – an area which is scarcely articulated in decoloniality studies. The foregoing literature review on colonial-built towns, thus, helps in establishing the major characteristics of the colonial established urban space.

---

30 The Growth Point policy entails that growth of regions manifest itself in one region and is then transferred to other areas. This policy was implemented by the colonial Government in the 1950s to establish growth points for the Africans in rural areas as an endeavour to stop rural urban drift. The same policy was adopted by the new post-colonial Zimbabwean Government in 1980. For further reading see KH Wekwete, "Rural growth points in Zimbabwe – Prospects for the future", *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 3(2), 1988; D Patel, "Some issues of urbanization and development in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 3(2), 1988, pp. 17-31; ND Mutizwa-Mangiza & AHJ Helmsing (eds.), *Rural development and planning in Zimbabwe* (Aldershot, Avebury Gower, 1990).

31 C Ake, *Social sciences as imperialism: The theory of political development* (Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1979), p. xiv.

32 Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ), "National Housing Policy" (Harare, Government Printers, 2012), p. 3.

33 For further discussion on Great Zimbabwe see PS Garlake, *Great Zimbabwe* (London, Thames and Hudson, 1973). SIG Mudenge, *A political history of the Munhumutapa 1400-1902* (Harare, Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1988). KN Mufuka, *Dzimbabwe: Life and politics in the Golden Age 1100-1500* (Harare, Harare Publishing House, 1983).

34 SIG Mudenge, *A political history of the Munhumutapa...*, p. 12.



## Characteristics of colonial urban space: Legacy of colonial Zimbabwean towns

Urban areas in colonial Zimbabwe were established out of a colonialist imperial ideology which was premised on exploiting raw materials and resources such as minerals and agricultural produce using cheap African labour. The towns developed out of a process described by Lefebvre as the “capital accumulation derived from primary processes such as mining, agriculture and plantations”.<sup>35</sup> In an endeavour to exploit resources from these sources, the colonial Government created supporting infrastructure, administrative and service centres for farmers and miners. This process explains the establishment of urban centres like Harare, Bulawayo, Masvingo, Kwekwe, Kadoma, Chegutu, Shamva and Marondera among many colonial established towns in Zimbabwe.

In the colonial era urban development was a consequence of a social order created from an economic, racial and political ideology of the colonial administrators. Economically, they wanted to exploit natural and human capital resources while politically they believed in racial segregation. Africans were considered to be temporary residents in colonial towns who would come for work in towns and go back to the rural areas after retiring from work.<sup>36</sup> Since Africans were needed as workers in urban areas, the colonial Government decided to create African suburbs that were physically separated from the European areas, but in close proximity to the emerging industrial areas. In 1906 the colonial administrators promulgated the *Native Urban Locations Ordinance*<sup>37</sup> which guided the establishment of African residential areas in the urban areas.<sup>38</sup> The *LAA* further racially divided the country into African and European areas.<sup>39</sup>

Although colonial Government policy restricted the migration of the African population to urban areas, the growth of manufacturing industry after the

---

35 Lefebvre argues that urbanisation is a by-product of capitalist investments. For detail see D Harvey, “The right to the city” (available at <http://www.davidharvey.org/media/righttothecity.pdf>, accessed, 5 November 2013), p. 6.

36 M Chenga, “Provision of housing in Zimbabwe”, L Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare: The growth and problems of the city* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1993), p. 46.

37 *The Native Urban Locations Ordinance*, 4, 1906.

38 L Zinyama, “The evolution of spatial structure of greater Harare: 1890 to 1990”, Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare: The growth and problems of the city*, p. 20.

39 M Chenga, “Provision of housing in Zimbabwe”, p. 47. For more detail on the *LAA* see B Floyd, “Land apportionment in Southern Rhodesia”, R Prothero (ed.), *People and land in Africa South of the Sahara* (London, Oxford University Press, 1972); RH Palmer, *Land and racial domination in Rhodesia* (London, Heinemann, 1977); LH Gann, “The Southern Rhodesian Land Apportionment Act, 1930: An essay in trusteeship”, *The National Archives of Rhodesia and Nyasaland Occasional Paper*, 1, 1963; ML Rifkind, “Land apportionment in perspective”, *Rhodesian History*, 3, 1972.

Second World War resulted in a high demand for African labour and this prompted the development of African suburbs in the cities for the exploitation of this labour. The planning of such residential areas, nevertheless, did not prioritise African social conditions. Kamete concurs with this by asserting that planning has a potential to ignore social processes in order to achieve preferred special order.<sup>40</sup> In this regard, the colonial exploitative agenda ignored urban African social processes and living conditions and prioritised capital accumulation.

Since Africans were viewed as temporary residents in urban areas, housing and accommodation in the African areas was constructed mainly to cater for temporary single male residents. African residential houses were in the form of single men hostels or small housing units on less than 200m<sup>2</sup>-plots.<sup>41</sup> In Bulawayo, for example, the colonial Government constructed hostels for single workers and these included Burombo, Sidojiwe and Vandu.<sup>42</sup> In the early 1900s when Harare 'Township' (now Mbare) was established, there were no urban amenities such as clinics, schools, shops and churches. African areas were deprived of basic amenities like water and sanitation, while European areas in the Causeway and Avenues districts of Salisbury (now Harare) enjoyed a well-developed public and sanitation infrastructure.<sup>43</sup> Hence, African areas in the colonial established towns were typified by small quarters and hostels for single men with diminutive public amenities.

In the post-colonial era, public amenities in the so-called African townships or high density suburbs continued to be limited. With independence and the repealing of African movement regulation laws in 1980, the population in the colonial-established suburbs rose as a result of increased rural-to-urban drift.<sup>44</sup> Harare experienced exceptional population growth rates of over five per cent per annum throughout the first decade of independence and in the preceding decades.<sup>45</sup> For instance, the city's population phenomenally increased from 310,360 in 1961 to 658,400 in 1982. Consequently, houses that were constructed for single men were now occupied by whole families

---

40 AY Kamete, "In the service of tyranny: Debating the role of planning in Zimbabwe's urban 'clean-up' operation", *Urban Studies*, 46(4), 2009, p. 899.

41 L Zinyama, "The evolution of spatial structure of greater Harare...", Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare...*, p. 20.

42 B Mpofu, "No place for 'undesirables'...", p. 8.

43 National Archives of Zimbabwe, hereafter referred to as NAZ, Harare, reference LG52, /6/2, M.O.M.: HE Hick to Town Clerk, 20 June 1920.

44 N Marongwe et al, "Scoping study: Governance of urban land markets in Zimbabwe" (Paper presented at the Urban Land Marks Conference, Harare, 2010) p. 36.

45 M Nyandoro, "Citizen-engagement circumvented: An analysis of liquid-waste information/knowledge, control and environmental policy-perspectives in Harare, Zimbabwe", *Environment and History*, Forthcoming Issue, 2019.

resulting in overcrowding. Migration from the rural areas to the colonial established towns, therefore, worsened the shortage of public amenities which were already lacking before independence.

The geographical situation of African and White areas in the urban environment, shaped by the colonial ideology of racial segregation and economic exploitation, meant that industrial and African residential areas were located to the south-western side of the Harare CBD while European areas were located to the north.<sup>46</sup> Following the south-easterly wind pattern, it was the Africans in the south-western side of the industrial sites who suffered much from air pollution. The arrangement to settle people in this way was meant to create a physical distance between European and African areas. Zinyama notes that the *Town and Country Planning Act* of 1946 was designed to ensure that the location of African residential areas was planned in such a way to provide a “noise” buffer between African suburbs and European areas.<sup>47</sup>

On the whole, Africans were not entitled to freehold tenure and property ownership in urban areas. The municipality and colonial Government monopolised prime land for the construction of houses and exclusive use by Whites, whereas Africans were not allowed to build houses or own property. Although up to the 1920s, Africans in some “townships” such as Makokoba in Bulawayo were allowed by the municipality to build houses for themselves using material that included pole, dagga, grass-thatch, corrugated iron and few bricks, this system was abolished in 1929 as such urban spaces were perceived as “no place[s] for ‘undesirables’”.<sup>48</sup> In 1929 the private construction of houses was, therefore, outlawed and privately built houses in African townships were demolished by the municipality. The rationale behind prohibiting Africans to construct houses was to control urban population. In 1930, a colonial town clerk, Robert Pollet, discouraged the private construction of houses in African suburbs pointing out that it would give Africans the freedom to let their properties to other Africans without legal urban residence status.<sup>49</sup> This argument by Pollet resonated well with white Rhodesians’ age-old colonial land and racial policies in which the Morris Carter Commission or the Lands Commission of 1925, which was appointed to test opinion on the question of land segregation in Rhodesia had succinctly enunciated European fear of the

---

46 K Munzwa & W Jonga, “Urban development in Zimbabwe”, pp. 133-134.

47 *The Regional Town and Country Planning Act*, 29:12, 1946; L Zinyama, “The evolution of spatial structure of greater Harare...”, Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare...*, p. 20.

48 B Mpofu, “No place for ‘undesirables’...”, p. 8.

49 NAZ, Harare, Reference S85: Native Affairs Commission, Salisbury Municipal Location, 4 December 1930.

“inevitable racial conflict” which would ensue if a policy of land segregation was not adopted then.<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, in 1969 the colonial Government enacted the *Land Tenure Act* which gave the municipalities the mandate to facilitate housing for the African urban population.<sup>51</sup> This gave the colonial government great monopoly over the provision of houses in the urban areas. Government monopoly in urban development and housing provision was inherited by the post-colonial administration. This was more so in the 1990s when the Zimbabwean economy was liberalised<sup>52</sup> and private players and individuals were roped in to facilitate the development of Ruwa town.

The political need to control the movement of Africans by the colonial government dated back to the early 1900s and it clearly shaped the planning of public amenities in colonial established towns. In 1912 the colonial administrators erected a fence around residential areas in Harare ‘Township’ with only one entrance which acted as an exit.<sup>53</sup> This pre-independence move was taken to effectively monitor the movement of Africans in the township as well as keeping the unemployed out of the suburb. Amenities such as churches, market places and shopping facilities were located outside the residential areas. The colonial government feared that African “illegal” urban residents would masquerade as church members (worshippers) and shoppers in the suburbs yet they were seeking urban accommodation.<sup>54</sup> This policy resulted in most of the public amenities being established on the fringes of the residential areas. In 1920 the Salisbury Town Clerk advocated for markets to be established outside the “townships” in order to avoid the infiltration of Africans who did not belong to the suburbs.<sup>55</sup> The need to control movement in the town “locations” or “townships” led administrators to select and designate special sections (portions of land) away from the residential areas to house public and service amenities personnel. However, this was not convenient for urban residents especially those who had to walk long distances

---

50 HV Moyana, *The political economy of land in Zimbabwe* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1984), p. 58; RH Palmer, *Land and racial domination in Rhodesia*; M Nyandoro, “Development and differentiation: The case of TILCOR/ARDA irrigation activities in Sanyati (Zimbabwe), 1939 to 2000” (PhD, University of Pretoria, 2007), pp. 60-61; M Nyandoro, “Zimbabwe’s land struggles and land rights in historical perspective – The case of Gowe-Sanyati irrigation (1950-2000)”, *Historia*, 57(2), 2012, pp. 298-349.

51 *Land Tenure Act*, 44, 55, 1969; M Chenga, “Provision of housing in Zimbabwe”, L Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare...*, p. 46.

52 The economy was liberalised under the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) from 1990/91-1995. Detail on ESAP can be gleaned from AS Mlambo, *The economic structural adjustment programme: The case of Zimbabwe, 1990-1995* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1997).

53 NAZ, Harare, Reference LG52/6/1: Letter from J Smith to Town Clerk, 14 November 1912.

54 T Yoshikuni, *African urban experiences in colonial Zimbabwe...*, p. 44.

55 NAZ, Harare, Reference S85: Native Affairs Commission, Salisbury Municipal Location, 4 December 1930.

outside their residential areas to get services from outlying public amenities. The difficulties arising from the need to control African movement resulted in the centralisation of amenities which, in turn, led to the creation of some African business centres adjacent to the suburbs as a strategy to forestall rural-to-urban migration.

In order to prevent rural-urban drift by Africans, the colonial Government therefore adopted the Growth Pole Policy which was meant to develop African towns or miniature service centres. The policy was implemented in the 1950s. In that decade the Government started to establish rural-urban centres which generated employment and provided basic services for Africans.<sup>56</sup> Such “urban” expansion lessened the proximity between the first African suburbs like Mbare and European areas.<sup>57</sup> In reaction to the rapid expansion of these areas, the Government used the Growth Pole Policy to design and establish African satellite towns away from European areas. A satellite town is defined in urban planning as a smaller metropolitan area located close to or in the vicinity of a large town or city to house and employ people who would otherwise create a demand for the expansion of the existing settlement, but is dependent on the parent-city to a certain extent for population and major services.<sup>58</sup> It is self-contained and limited in size, though.

The towns, known also as dormitory townships, that provided industries in the metropolis with labour, have some resemblances with satellite settlements. A dormitory town, more or less like the satellite, is a place where many people who work in a bigger town/city live because it is a small community with no major industries. Being centres for relieving population pressure, recently people have moved from the city centres to the suburbs or dormitory towns.<sup>59</sup> In Zimbabwe, the dormitory towns were established near major urban areas and these included Chitungwiza adjacent to Harare, Ntabazinduna near Bulawayo and Zimunya close to Mutare.<sup>60</sup> These satellite towns were created as labour pools and were never meant to be self-sustaining but rather to be integrated

---

56 K Wekwete, “Growth centre policy in Zimbabwe: A focus paper on district centres”, *RUP Occasional Paper*, 7, 1987, p. 11.

57 L Zinyama, “The evolution of spatial structure of greater Harare...”, Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare...*, p. 26.

58 Encyclopedia.com (A dictionary of architecture and landscape architecture), *Satellite town* (available at <https://www.encyclopedia.com/education/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/satellite-town>, as accessed on 27 September 2018).

59 Merriam-webster.com, *Dormitory town* (available at <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/dormitory%20town>, as accessed on 27 September 2018); Cambridge dictionary, *Dormitory town* (available at <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/dormitory-town>, as accessed on 27 September 2018).

60 L Zinyama, “The evolution of spatial structure of greater Harare...”, Zinyama et al (eds.), *Harare...*, p. 29.

within the European metropolitan economy.<sup>61</sup> In these African towns all the land was vested in the hands of the state, denying local municipalities a resource base to justify their own separate administrative entities. This policy of peripheral development then kept the colonial established towns dependent on the large metropolitan areas around them.

After independence the Zimbabwean Government inherited the Growth Centre Policy together with the Satellite Town Development policy. Prominent scholars such as Rambanepasi, Patel, Wekwete and Chirisa examine the unfolding urban development process during the post-colonial era using the growth point and peripheral development lens as their analytical tool.<sup>62</sup> Although Rambanepasi points out flaws in the growth centre policy, there is little knowledge on how indigenous ideology shaped the post-colonial urban space. Unlike the emerging towns like Ruwa, the inherited colonial legacy has kept Chitungwiza, Ntabazinduna and Zimunya with a diminutive economy. In these satellite towns, the Government of Zimbabwe inherited the colonial land tenure system where communal lands were vested in the hands of the colonial Government.<sup>63</sup> Chitungwiza, located in the Seke communal lands, became state owned. This means the Municipality of Chitungwiza does not own land and cannot effectively manage the resources and artefacts in its area of jurisdiction. The lack of Municipal-owned land affected the Local Authority's revenue sources since it lacked land to establish industries and offices for letting. This retarded the growth of the satellite town and various other growth points established after 1980.

The Growth Point policy was generally a failure in post-colonial Zimbabwe as there was stagnant development of the areas designated as growth points like Chimanimani, Mwenezi, Insiza, Nyanga, Uzumba Maramba Pfungwe, Lupane, Mutasa, Mudzi, Rushinga, Kariba, Chipinge, Bikita, Tsholotso, Mberengwa, Chivi, Shamva and Mount Darwin all in the rural districts of the country.<sup>64</sup> The cost of funding the growth points – areas mooted by the Zimbabwean Government in the 1980s as a means of decongesting cities and

---

61 CO Rambanepasi, "Chitungwiza...", KH Wekwete & CO Rambanepasi (eds.), *Planning urban economies...*, p. 200.

62 For further reading on post-colonial urban development see I Chirisa et al, "Servicing the needs of inflating population at growth points in Zimbabwe? Spatio-temporal and economic considerations", *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies*, 4(1), 2013, pp. 36-52; I Chirisa, "Housing and stewardship in peri-urban settlements in Zimbabwe: A case study of Ruwa and Epworth" (PhD, University of Zimbabwe, 2013); KH Wekwete, "Rural growth points in Zimbabwe"; D Patel, "Some issues of urbanization and development in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Social Development in Africa*, 3(2), 1988, pp. 17-31.

63 CO Rambanepasi, "Chitungwiza...", KH Wekwete & CO Rambanepasi (eds.), *Planning urban economies...*, p. 200.

64 B Zwizwai et al, *Zimbabwe economic policy making and implementation: A study of strategic trade and selective industrial policies* (Toronto, IDRC Books, 1999), p. 6.

towns - overwhelmed the post-colonial Government. In spite of Chitungwiza having a relatively large labour pool and services, it failed to attract industry to decentralise or relocate there. Growth Pole Policy failed to promote rural industrialisation because of a number of underlying factors such as the weak strategic positioning of growth points, lack of significant financial support and infrastructural development, corruption, lack of consultation with people who were to benefit from participation in the process and lack of incentives to encourage the private sector to expand and open up branches in these quasi-urban set ups.<sup>65</sup> The failure to lure investors and to maintain the existing infrastructure has therefore undermined the early gains of the growth point strategy. By the 1990s, most growth points lay dormant and they least resembled “growth points” but perhaps “declining points”.<sup>66</sup> After the 1980s, the prospects for small rural centres were exceedingly bleak. Hence, since the colonial established Growth Point policy failed to work in the post-colonial era, it is important to focus on relevant examples of success in post-colonial urban development such as the establishment of Ruwa town.

The colonial urban development legacy continues to haunt Zimbabwe urban dwellers in the post-1980 era as they negotiate for independence of the physical, social and economic urban space. Although racial segregation policies were repealed during the post-colonial era, it was nevertheless impossible to change the structure and morphology of urban space and the built environment. The physical structure, morphology and spatial forms of urban areas in Zimbabwe as they appear today were designed by the colonial administration in conformity with its political and economic demands before decolonisation. In the independence era, some innovative changes in urban infrastructure are demanded. However, since towns cannot be demolished and built again, the only way to decolonise the urban landscape is through embracing indigenous influence on urban development exhibited in the development of post-colonial towns like Ruwa.

---

65 Information on the failure of the growth point policy can be gleaned from Wekwete, “Rural growth points in Zimbabwe”, pp. 5-16; M Nyandoro, “Development and differentiation”; IO Manyahaire, B Mhishi, E Svotwa & N Sithole, “Growth points or declining points? A case of Magunje growth point in Mashonaland West Province of Zimbabwe”, *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*, 10(4), 2009, pp. 506-520; NT Nhede, “The Zimbabwe growth point phenomenon: Impact and implications on public service delivery”, *Administratio Publica*, 21(4), 2013, pp. 117-129; Anon, “Growth points in development dilemma”, *The Financial Gazette*, 27 September 2018.

66 IO Manyahaire et al, “Growth points or declining points?”; Anon., “Growth points lie dormant”, *NewsDay*, 28 November 2011.

## **Decolonising urban space in Ruwa: Observations from history**

In contrast to the 1980s, the development and growth of Ruwa in the 1990s was achieved through involving the private sector. Traditionally, the government spearheaded and monopolised urban development using colonial established strategies like the Growth Point and Peripheral Development policies to directly invest funds for urban growth. The Mashonaland Holdings Limited, a PLDC, acquired land for residential, industrial and commercial development in what was originally a white commercial farming area in Ruwa and was granted a development permit to establish the first residential and industrial area by the Goromonzi Rural District Council in 1987.<sup>67</sup> Urban population growth in particular catalysed the demand for urban infrastructure in areas hitherto dominated by European agro-enterprises.<sup>68</sup> The demand led to increased government presence in directing socioeconomic growth. However, faced with depleting financial resources, the Government gave in to the encroachment of the Ruwa farms by a private company, the Mashonaland Holdings Private Limited, whose operations were overseen by a Government-initiated Urban Development Corporation (UDCORP). The advent of Mashonaland Holdings witnessed the opening of floodgates to further encroachment onto the land by more private company developer agencies after 1987, mostly at the invitation of the Ruwa Local Board (RLB).<sup>69</sup> From 1987 Ruwa, thus, shifted from a dependence on Government funding as ascribed by the growth point policy to a liberal approach that incorporated private land developers in the infrastructural development of the town after the adoption of economic structural adjustment policies in 1990/91.

In 1990, once the RLB had been established as the first local authority, it immediately partnered with PLDCs in implementing the infrastructural development of the area. This witnessed the emergence of vital private-public sector partnerships in promoting urban development. Related companies like the Zimbabwe Reinsurance Corporation, Zb Building Society, Damofalls Land Developers, Fairview Land Developers, the Zimbabwe Housing Company, Barochit Property Developers and Tawona Gardens Private Limited were incorporated into the partnership to help in establishing residential and

---

67 Anon., "Ruwa Local Board turns 16", *The Herald*, 23 October 2007, p. 5.

68 M Nyandoro & TT Muzorewa, "Transition from growth point policy to liberal urban development in Zimbabwe: The emergence of Ruwa town, 1980-1991", *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 13(1), 2017, pp. 1-10.

69 M Nyandoro and TT Muzorewa, "Transition from growth point policy to liberal urban development in Zimbabwe...", *TD: The Journal for Transdisciplinary Research in Southern Africa*, 13(1), 2017.



industrial areas. In the partnership PLDCs provided land and constructed onsite and offsite infrastructure which included roads, sewerage and water reticulation systems on a Build and Transfer agreement.<sup>70</sup> In the end, land in Ruwa was privately owned, with the RLB possessing only one percent of the land in the area.<sup>71</sup> Since the bulk of the land was owned by private entities, it became necessary for them to be involved in the development and growth of the town. However, the land developers in Ruwa did not own land for speculative purposes as was in the case of Harare described by McGregor where the politics of patronage and urban control by the elite was rampant.<sup>72</sup> For instance, during Zimbabwe's economic crisis which reached its peak in 2008, urban land and property development in the capital had become so central to the politics of accumulation and so skewed that only a few private business people had the monopoly of property development.<sup>73</sup> Ruwa, in comparison, conformed to a near equitable share of roles with both private companies and individuals involved in property development.

Unlike in the colonial developed towns, the PLDCs in Ruwa were required by law to facilitate the establishment of public amenities in all residential areas, with the idea of partnership being emphasised by the Government. The partnership between the RLB and PLDCs was guided by the *Regional, Town and Country Planning Act of 1976* which made it mandatory for urban land developers to provide public amenities in their areas of jurisdiction.<sup>74</sup> The clause which provided for the development of public amenities was incorporated into the land development permits issued to the PLDCs by the Ruwa town Council (RTC).<sup>75</sup> In compliance with the land development permits, all the PLDCs availed land for the establishment of education, health and recreational facilities. Churches, beer halls and sporting facilities which included football/soccer grounds were established in every residential suburb in the area.<sup>76</sup> Companies

---

70 Under the Build and Transfer agreement the PLDCs constructed onsite and offsite infrastructure which included roads, water and sewerage reticulation systems and other supporting public amenities. The developers then handed over the infrastructure to the local authority after they completed construction. PLDCs benefited from the opportunity they got from the Council to subdivide their land and sell it for profit and the Build and Transfer was part of endowments they paid to the Local Authority.

71 Ruwa Local Board, "Ruwa town Council at a glimpse", Report from the secretary, 2011, p. 6.

72 J McGregor, "Surveillance and the city: Patronage, power-sharing and the politics of urban control in Zimbabwe", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39(4), 2013, pp. 783-805.

73 J McGregor, "Surveillance and the city...", *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 39(4), 2013.

74 NAZ, Harare Reference 38971: Ministry of Local Government Rural and Urban Development: Department of Physical Planning pamphlet, 1995.

75 A development permit is a document issued to a land developer by the Department of Physical Planning before any development is carried out. The document contains conditions to be achieved by the developer and some guide lines during the development process.

76 Ruwa town Council (RTC), "Ruwa town Council at a glimpse", Report from the Secretary, 2011, p. 12.

like Mashonaland Holdings constructed commercial centres and shopping malls.<sup>77</sup> As a result, there was a fair distribution of public amenities in both low and high density suburbs in Ruwa. This situation was noticeably different from colonial established towns where there was scarcity of public amenities in the high density areas where the majority of Africans resided.

Recreational facilities were created considering the cultural needs of the local indigenous people. The PLDCs established many football facilities than any other sporting facilities in the area. In this respect, Cheater has argued that in the Zimbabwean culture sporting activities like tennis, rugby, golf, cricket, hockey, basketball and swimming were regarded as European and affluent people's sports and the larger part of the African population, it was assumed, was not interested in them.<sup>78</sup> The residents' interest in football resulted in land being reserved for soccer facilities in most of the suburbs in Ruwa. There are two main football arenas in Damofalls Park and Runyararo Park where domestic soccer league games are played.<sup>79</sup> Other but underutilised sporting facilities such as tennis courts and swimming pools are housed on private properties. This demonstrates that the planning of sporting amenities was carried out with the knowledge of the social needs of the majority of the indigenous people. In the colonial established towns, facilities for European sports and recreation such as swimming pools and tennis courts are becoming white elephants after the proliferation of the African population into formerly European areas since independence.

As a way of decolonising space through the decentralisation of amenities, Ruwa successfully flourished without a CBD. The Ruwa town Planning Authorities deliberately decentralised commercial and public services in the town in order for residents to easily access them. According to the Ruwa Local Development Plan (RLDP),<sup>80</sup> "there was need to minimise the distances to be travelled to obtain day to day commercial consumer needs".<sup>81</sup> The RLDP promoted the development of public service infrastructure within the residential suburbs so that people would not travel long distances to a CBD in

---

77 Anon., "Ruwa Local Board turns 16", *The Herald*, 23 October 2007, p. 5.

78 AP Cheater, *Social anthropology: An alternative introduction* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1986), p. 133.

79 M Nyandoro, (Personal Collection), interview, P Matipedza, Ruwa (Town Football Club Coach), Chiremba Grounds, 7 July 2014.

80 A local development plan is a blueprint prepared by local authorities illustrating major directions to the development and planning in a town.

81 RTC, Ruwa Local Development Plan, follow up to a report of study prepared in 1991 and its addendum 1996, 1998, p. 6.

search of goods and services.<sup>82</sup> This resulted in the establishment of commercial and public amenities like schools, clinics, shops, beer halls, churches, market places and banks within Ruwa's residential and industrial areas. All shopping malls in Ruwa were established within the suburbs while corner shops were established for neighbourhood services. Corner shops provided residents access to petty commodities and groceries which they needed on a daily basis. Only industrial sites were separated from the residential suburbs by empty land spaces which acted as buffer zones between the two. Establishing CBDs has always been a traditional tenet of urban development in Zimbabwe. The idea was borrowed from colonial planning systems. However, there were critics who were against ascribing Ruwa town status because it did not follow the traditional planning system of establishing a CBD.<sup>83</sup> Prominent among these were critics from the Ministry of Local Government, Public Works and National Housing who were against awarding town status to Ruwa because it did not have a clearly defined CBD.<sup>84</sup> They also argued that the services it was offering were not befitting a town. The critics, who happened to be officials in the Ministry, were influenced by the colonial administrative system which sought to centralise commerce and amenities for political reasons to maximise control of the African population. Hence there is need for the decolonisation of urban planning and official attitudes. Colonial urban planning had stressed the importance of a CBD. However, Ruwa thrived without a CBD because its local people preferred service infrastructure within their suburbs over a CBD.

After the dismantling of colonial rule, residents desired a measure of independence in their areas. This partly explains why home owners in Ruwa constructed houses using their own building plans and materials. This gave them the opportunity to design their houses in ways they liked unlike in the colonial established suburbs where houses were designed (to a specific standard) by city municipalities for single men who were temporary residents working in the manufacturing industries. All houses in Ruwa except for those built under the Government Garikai Scheme<sup>85</sup> had privately designed building plans. Although the building plans were approved by the Local Planning Authorities, the designing of the housing structures was carried

---

82 M Nyandoro, (Personal Collection), interview, E Chidhakwa (Ruwa town Planner), RTC Offices, 5 June 2014.

83 I Chirisa, "Housing and stewardship in peri-urban settlements in Zimbabwe..." (PhD, University of Zimbabwe, 2013), p. 134.

84 I Chirisa, "Housing and stewardship in peri-urban settlements in Zimbabwe..." (PhD, University of Zimbabwe, 2013).

85 Operation Garikai/Hlalani Kuhle was a national housing programme implemented by the Government in order to compensate people who had been rendered homeless by a cleansing exercise (Operation Murambatsvina) which was carried out by the Government in 2005.

out by private architects, namely B. Saich Land Surveyors and Architecture Company, Tama Architects and CNM and Partners.<sup>86</sup> The RLB only enforced regulations on building sizes allowed on different plot/land sizes and on the type of building material required by the *Regional Town and Country Planning Act*. A field survey of Ruwa high density residential suburbs showed that most of the houses had an average of seven rooms which would comfortably accommodate an average nucleus family.

Council service delivery in the town was influenced by the councillor election system rather than any form of class and race stratification as was the case in the colonial period.<sup>87</sup> Residents in the high density suburbs received more quality services in road maintenance, water and sewerage system rehabilitation and refuse collection than those in the low density suburbs. In 2009 residents of Chipukutu Park low density residential suburb actually complained to the RTC that they were receiving sub-standard service delivery compared to residents in high density residential areas.<sup>88</sup> The residents' major grievance was that their roads had potholes while refuse collection was erratic in their suburb.<sup>89</sup> They wanted to receive quality services as their sister high density suburbs in the town. The RTC favoured the high density suburbs because they had a larger population constituting a bigger political electoral constituency compared to the low density residential suburbs. In Chipukutu Park there were only 600 homes while its high density suburb had over 1 700 homes.<sup>90</sup> The RTC councillors prioritised suburbs with a higher number of voters in order to increase their chances of being re-elected into the Council. The Ruwa scenario is different from Bond's description of South African suburbs where the low income earning groups in high density suburbs received poor quality services compared to residents in affluent suburbs.<sup>91</sup> In Zimbabwe, the colonial racial based stratification in urban space and service delivery was replaced by economic based stratification. However, in Ruwa the gap between the rich and poor in service delivery was reduced as a result of the RTC councillors' need to secure votes in local council elections.

---

86 RTC, Permit for the subdivision of land: Mashonaland Holdings Ltd, 1993.

87 For details on the councillor election system, see TT Muzorewa, M Nyandoro and VZ Nyawo, "Bargaining for a better town: A tripartite struggle in Ruwa town, Zimbabwe, 1986-20015", *The Dyke Journal*, 10(2), 2016, pp. 145-160.

88 M Nyandoro, (Personal Collection), interview, G Gwaradzimba (Chipukutu Park Resident), Ruwa, 24 January 2010.

89 RTC, Letter: Chipukutu Park Owners Association / Ruwa Local Board secretary, 23 December 2009.

90 Anon., "Ruwa Local Board turns 16", p. 5.

91 P Bond, *Cities of gold, townships of coal: Essays on South Africa's new urban crisis* (Asmara, Africa World Press inc, 2000).

Decoloniality of urban space in Ruwa is also reflected in the way the town defied the colonial system of poor service delivery and geographically locating African high density residential suburbs to the south-western part of the industrial areas as the case of Harare illustrates. Our field study of Ruwa shows that low density suburbs such as Old Windsor and Windsor Park are located at the south-western side of the Ruwa Industrial Area while most of the high density suburbs which include Cranbrooke Park, Barochit Park, Damofalls Park, Fairview Park and Springvale Park are located at the north-eastern side of the industries. Old Windsor was the first residential suburb to be established before Ruwa was accorded urban status by the Government in 1986.<sup>92</sup> Old Windsor houses the only remaining White population in a Ruwa town which is now dominated by a growing class of affluent Black people. Hence, the geographical location of suburbs had nothing to do with the direction of wind from the north-east to the south-west as was emphasised in the colonial established towns.

Quite different from satellite towns of major cities in Zimbabwe, Ruwa was established as an independent town from Harare. It was based on manufacturing industry. Although most literature on urban development in Zimbabwe classifies Ruwa as a satellite town of Harare, an analysis of the development of the town demonstrates that it is an independent town which is only close to Harare. The town developed one of the largest light industrial sectors in the country.<sup>93</sup> Unlike colonial established towns such as Chitungwiza and Ntabazinduna which were deliberately established as satellite towns and labour pools for Harare and Bulawayo respectively, Ruwa was established as a self-sustaining town. The Ruwa Local Planners when creating the local plan envisaged the manufacturing industry to be the cornerstone of the area's local economy.<sup>94</sup> Despite the fact that the country at large was facing economic challenges resulting from a diminutive manufacturing industry, by the year 2003 the Ruwa Industrial Area was employing more than 7 000 people while only 2 700 of its residents were employed in Harare.<sup>95</sup> Since satellite towns are defined as areas that rely on bigger towns for employment and services like shopping and public amenities, Ruwa cannot therefore be classified as a dormitory town, but as an independent town based on the manufacturing industry.

---

92 I Chirisa, "Housing and stewardship in peri-urban settlements in Zimbabwe..." (PhD, University of Zimbabwe, 2013), p. 100.

93 Anon., "Ruwa Local Board turns 16", *The Herald*, 23 October 2007, p. 5.

94 RTC, Ruwa Local Development Plan, follow up to a report of study prepared in 1991 and its addendum 1996, 1998, p. 2.

95 K Odero, "Local Authorities' response to restructuring" (Paper presented at the 39<sup>th</sup> ISoCaRP Congress, 2003), p. 5.

Ruwa did not emerge out of the need to exploit natural resources from mining and agriculture like most of the colonial established towns such as Kadoma, Kwekwe, Chegutu, Chinhoyi, Shurugwi and Zvishavane to name a few. Gunder Frank argues that the colonial established towns were created to siphon raw materials from the colonies to different metropolitan centres in Europe.<sup>96</sup> He notes that the communication infrastructure in colonial towns was designed to ferry raw material exports out of the areas to Europe and the infrastructure was not meant to benefit the indigenous people.<sup>97</sup> In such colonial-oriented towns, proceeds from primary resource based ventures such as agricultural produce and minerals were channelled towards local business supporting structures which included commercial facilities, road networks, education, health facilities and other social amenities. While mining and agriculture influenced the growth of several other towns in the country like Shamva, Bindura, Mhangura, Mvuma, Gokwe and Marondera, Ruwa had no natural resources that could warrant and sustain the growth of a town. Although it had a small farming hinterland, its resource base was too small to sustain the growth of supporting commercial infrastructure such as roads, electricity and buildings. In light of this, Ruwa emerged out of a need to industrialise the nation in the independence era and not out of colonial imperial intentions.

Ruwa exhibited predominantly peculiar urban development tendencies in the post-colonial era, hence our shift in attention from colonial established urban areas to new towns such as Ruwa. Experiences in Ruwa demonstrate that urban development can be achieved in a totally different way from how it was implemented in the colonial era. The decolonisation of urban space in Zimbabwe therefore can only be achieved through establishing new towns like Ruwa whose planning and growth are influenced by indigenous factors. This is so because the town offers new insights to urban studies in Zimbabwe in general and to the decolonisation discourse of urban space in particular.

## **Conclusion**

The emergence of Ruwa town demonstrates how the decolonisation of urban space can be achieved in Zimbabwe. The article finds that whilst it is imperative in the independence period to decolonise urban spaces and the institutions that work in the urban planning field, it is impossible to change

---

<sup>96</sup> AG Frank, *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America* (London, Zed books, 1976).

<sup>97</sup> AG Frank, *Capitalism and underdevelopment in Latin America...*, p. 135.

the morphology of the colonial built urban areas/environment partly due to the costs involved, but the only way to decolonise urban space is through establishing new towns without linking them to the old colonial planning system. It has arrived at this conclusion by demonstrating that the European settler Government in Zimbabwe established urban centres influenced by an imperialistic ideology which maximised the exploitation of resources and African labour. Racial segregation in particular determined the spatial structure of the colonial established towns. To impose and maintain its hegemony over Africans, the colonial Government thus set up urban structures which were meant to control and monitor the movement of Africans in the urban areas. In an endeavour to restrict Africans from entering European-designated areas, the colonial administration created African urban centres through the Growth Point and Peripheral Development policies. This resulted in the establishment of dormitory towns like Chitungwiza as labour pools for huge metropolitan centres like Harare. Having gained independence in 1980, however, it has been found that the spatial form of the colonial established urban areas in Zimbabwe remained the same due to funding challenges among other things, but Ruwa moved in a significant way away from the Growth Point Policy to embrace a private-public sector partnership in the promotion of urban development.

The article has, therefore, illustrated how Ruwa moved away from its erstwhile colonial urban planning tradition thereby becoming a model for planning decoloniality. In fact, the town broke the state and municipalities' almost century-old monopoly in leading urban development by employing PLDCs in its growth and expansion. This was a unique development as residents in the local council area were given the power to design their homes as they wanted. Contrary to the famed centralisation theories of the past, Ruwa actually decentralised public amenities and ensured that every developer facilitated the establishment of community service infrastructure such as education, health and recreational facilities. These amenities were easily accessible to residents. Thus, the town was established as an autonomous urban area (to Harare) based on a rapidly expanding local manufacturing industry which, in its own right, contributed to the growth of the national economy. Indeed, the growth of Ruwa was premised on the needs and culture of the indigenous people who inhabited this urban space. Hence, Ruwa fits the model of an African developed urban area after colonialism rather than a town developed for Africans.

Given the foregoing, the article therefore recommends that academic scholarship, planning and urban policy in Zimbabwe should shift attention from colonial established towns and focus on emerging towns in the post-colonial era in the hope of using these observations from history to achieve practical and innovative post-independence urban growth influenced by indigenous planning ideology and knowledge. Indeed, the Ruwa case study and people's lived experiences offer important lessons on the decolonisation of urban space and how that can be achieved in the post-colonial era.