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Colonial heritage and urban development: a critical study of Zimbabwe's local government system

Sylvester Marumahoko¹  , Norman T. Nhede² 

¹Zimbabwe Open University, Harare, Zimbabwe

²University of Pretoria, Gauteng, South Africa

 marumahokos@gmail.com

Abstract. The study engaged on the question of, how have colonial legacies shaped the contemporary local government system in Zimbabwe, and what implications do these historical influences have for urban development and governance in the country today? This question allowed for an exploration of the ways in which colonial policies and practices have influenced current governance structures, urban planning, and development challenges, providing a critical framework for analyzing the ongoing impacts of colonialism in Zimbabwe. The study was informed by qualitative and archival research methodologies. It also drew from post-colonial, dependency, inclusive urbanism, sustainable urban development, urban political ecology, globalization and urbanization, informal economy and urbanization livelihoods and decolonization of urban planning theories. The study found that the colonial past of Zimbabwe has indeed left a complex tapestry of enduring challenges, including spatial segregation, economic inequalities, and tensions within local urban governance systems.

Keywords: colonialism, Africa, urban local government, politics

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Колониальное наследие и городское развитие: исследование системы местного самоуправления Зимбабве

С. Марумахоко ¹, Н.Т. Нхедзе² 

¹Открытый университет Зимбабве, Хараре, Зимбабве

²Университет Претории, Гаутенг, ЮАР

 marumahokos@gmail.com

Аннотация. Показано, каким образом колониальная политика и практика повлияли на современные структуры управления, городское планирование и проблемы развития, обеспечив важную основу для анализа продолжающихся последствий колониализма в Зимбабве. В основу исследования положены качественные методы и использование архивных материалов. Также были использованы следующие подходы и концепции: постколониальный, зависимое развитие, инклюзивный урбанизм, теории устойчивого городского развития, городская политическая экология, глобализация и урбанизация, неформальная экономика, а также теории деколонизации городского планирования. Отмечено, что колониальное прошлое Зимбабве действительно оставило после себя сложный след из постоянных проблем в местных системах городского управления, включая пространственную сегрегацию, экономическое неравенство и напряженность.

Ключевые слова: колониализм, Африка, городские органы местное самоуправление, политика

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Introduction and Statement of the Problem

Zimbabwe's urban landscape is a complex tapestry woven from threads of history, politics, and socio-economic dynamics. The remnants of colonial governance have left an indelible mark on the country's local government systems and urban development practices. From the spatial segregation enforced during colonial rule to the persistent inequalities that characterize contemporary cities, the legacy of colonialism continues to shape the urban environment in Zimbabwe. Despite the significance of these issues, the critical influence of Zimbabwe's colonial past on its urban development has not been thoroughly examined in academic literature. Most existing studies tend to focus on broader post-colonial transitions or specific urban policies without delving into how historical governance structures inform current practices. This oversight limits our understanding of the challenges facing local governments in addressing urbanization, service delivery, and social

equity. The article seeks to fill this gap by critically analyzing how colonial heritage has influenced the current local government system in Zimbabwe and its implications for urban development. By exploring specific case studies and drawing on theoretical frameworks, the research aims to uncover the underlying mechanisms that perpetuate colonial legacies in urban governance. Ultimately, it argues that a deeper understanding of this relationship is essential for formulating effective policies that promote inclusive and sustainable urban development in Zimbabwe.

The article flows as follows: introduction and statement of the problem, historical context of colonialism in Zimbabwe, early colonial encroachment, establishment of control, resistance and conflict, socio-economic impact, existing research, disruption of traditional governance structures, racial segregation and urban planning, economic inequality and urban poverty, theoretical considerations, the development of urban local government during the colonial era, early colonial period (1890s–1910s), mid-colonial period (1920s–1940s), late colonial period (1950s–1970s), post-independence transition (1980–2024), research methodology, findings, discussions and impact of colonial policies, comparison of local government systems, and concluding remarks.

Historical Context of Colonialism in Zimbabwe

Colonialism in Zimbabwe, formerly known as Southern Rhodesia, began in the late 19th century and profoundly transformed the country's social, political and economic landscape. The arrival of British settlers under Cecil John Rhodes led to the appropriation of land and resources, displacing indigenous communities and disrupting traditional ways of life [1]. Economically, the colonial regime established a dual economy: a modern sector benefiting settlers and a subsistence economy relegating local populations to labor-intensive roles on farms and in mines. Politically, the imposition of colonial rule marginalized African voices and governance systems, culminating in a racially discriminatory political framework. This oppression spurred resistance movements, notably the nationalist struggles of the mid-20th century, which sought to reclaim sovereignty and rights. The eventual liberation war and independence in 1980 marked a significant turning point, but the legacies of colonialism continue to influence Zimbabwe's challenges, including issues of land reform, economic inequality, and social division.

Early Colonial Encroachment

In the 1880s, European powers, particularly Cecil John Rhodes and the British South Africa Company (BSACo), began their incursion into Zimbabwe, claiming land and resources [2]. The 1888 Rudd Concession was a pivotal agreement that granted Rhodes and his British South Africa Company (BSACo) extensive rights to extract minerals in what is now Zimbabwe. Negotiated with King Lobengula of the Ndebele, the concession was ostensibly framed as a treaty for cooperation and development. Rhodes, seeking to expand British interests in Southern Africa, used

the agreement to secure mining rights across vast territories. The concession was, however, marred by ambiguity and misunderstandings, as King Lobengula later claimed he had not fully comprehended its implications. The BSACo subsequently exploited the agreement to establish a colonial foothold, leading to the displacement of local communities and intensified mining activities, particularly in gold and copper. The Rudd Concession marked the beginning of a colonial enterprise that would profoundly impact Zimbabwe's economic landscape and set the stage for ongoing tensions between indigenous populations and colonial authorities. This exploitation of resources laid the groundwork for future conflicts and contributed to the enduring legacies of colonialism in the region.

Establishment of Control

By the early 1900s, the British South Africa Company (BSACo) solidified its control over Southern Rhodesia, leading to widespread displacement of indigenous populations [3]. The imposition of colonial rule disrupted traditional land use and social structures, as vast areas were appropriated for settler farms and mines. This displacement not only stripped communities of their land but also their livelihoods and cultural ties to the land. The Land Apportionment Act of 1930 further entrenched racial segregation, institutionalizing policies that favored white settlers at the expense of black Zimbabweans. This legislation allocated the most fertile and productive land to white farmers, while black populations were forced into arid and less arable regions, severely limiting their agricultural potential and economic opportunities. This systematic dispossession sowed deep social and economic inequalities that persisted long after the colonial era. It laid the groundwork for widespread discontent and resistance movements, which would later gain momentum during the mid-20th century as nationalist leaders rallied against colonial rule. The impact of these policies can still be felt today, as land ownership and access remain contentious issues in Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape.

Resistance and Conflict

Indigenous resistance to colonial rule in Zimbabwe manifested prominently during the First Chimurenga (1896–1897), a significant uprising against British colonial authorities [4]. Sparked by widespread discontent over land dispossession, forced labor, and the erosion of traditional governance structures, the Chimurenga united various ethnic groups, including the Shona and Ndebele, in a collective fight for sovereignty and cultural preservation. The uprising was characterized by guerrilla warfare and local mobilization, as leaders like Nehanda Nyakasikana and Kaguvi inspired resistance against the colonial forces. However, the British response was brutal and repressive. They deployed a well-equipped military, employing tactics such as scorched earth policies and mass executions to quash the rebellion. This violent suppression not only resulted in significant loss of life but also reinforced the colonial regime's authority, instilling fear within indigenous communities [5].

The aftermath of the First Chimurenga saw the imposition of stricter controls and increased militarization of the colony. Colonial authorities implemented harsher laws and intensified surveillance, further marginalizing the local population. Despite the defeat, the spirit of resistance endured, laying the groundwork for future liberation movements and symbolizing a continuous struggle against oppression that would ultimately culminate in the second Chimurenga in the 1960s and 1970s. The legacies of these uprisings continue to resonate in Zimbabwe's ongoing quest for social justice and equality.

Socio-Economic Impact

Colonial policies in Zimbabwe profoundly disrupted traditional governance structures and social systems [6]. The British South Africa Company (BSACO) imposed a centralized authority that sidelined local leaders and traditional chiefdoms, undermining indigenous governance systems that had effectively managed communities for generations. This marginalization not only diminished the authority of local leaders but also eroded cultural practices and communal bonds. Economically, the colonial regime favored white settlers, who were given access to the most fertile land and lucrative resources. This exploitation created a stark economic divide, with black Zimbabweans relegated to poorly resourced areas and forced to work as laborers on settler farms and in mines under harsh conditions. The resulting poverty and disenfranchisement were widespread, as indigenous populations were stripped of their rights to land ownership and self-determination. As a consequence, many black Zimbabweans faced limited access to education and healthcare, perpetuating cycles of poverty and inequality. The loss of land and autonomy fueled resentment and resistance, sowing the seeds for future uprisings. The enduring impact of these colonial policies is evident in contemporary Zimbabwe, where issues of land reform, economic disparity, and the struggle for political representation continue to resonate, reflecting a legacy that challenges the nation's path toward equity and justice.

Existing Research of Colonial Impact on Urban Governance

This is engaged under three subheadings, (1) disruption of traditional governance structures, (2) racial segregation and urban planning, and (3) economic inequality and urban poverty.

Disruption of Traditional Governance Structures

Through his scholarship, Mlambo provides a comprehensive analysis of how colonialism fundamentally altered governance structures in Zimbabwe, emphasizing the long-term implications of these changes for contemporary society and governance [7]. His work is essential for understanding the historical context of current governance challenges in the country. Mlambo emphasizes that colonial authorities systematically

marginalized local leaders and traditional governance systems. By replacing indigenous governance with centralized colonial administration, the colonial regime dismantled established power structures, leading to a loss of community cohesion and authority. Mlambo emphasize that the imposition of centralized colonial authority disrupted established social hierarchies and governance practices, creating a disconnect between local populations and governing bodies.

Racial Segregation and Urban Planning

According to Chikanda, urban planning during colonial rule enforced strict spatial segregation, with designated areas for white settlers and separate, often substandard, areas for black Zimbabweans [8]. This meant that white communities had access to better housing, services, and infrastructure, while black communities were relegated to less desirable, overcrowded areas with inadequate facilities. The segregation was supported by various laws and policies, such as the Land Apportionment Act of 1930, which formalized land divisions along racial lines. This act allocated the most fertile land to white settlers while restricting black populations to marginal, less productive land. The segregation not only affected physical space but also reinforced economic inequalities. Black Zimbabweans were largely limited to low-paying labor jobs and had restricted access to economic opportunities, which further entrenched social and economic divides. Racial segregation fostered social isolation between communities, creating a divide that affected interactions and relationships among different racial groups. This separation contributed to a lack of mutual understanding and increased tensions that persisted even after independence.

Economic Inequality and Urban Poverty

Ranger argues that the economic policies implemented during colonial rule systematically disadvantaged black Zimbabweans. These policies favored white settlers in terms of land ownership, access to resources, and employment opportunities, creating a stark divide between racial groups [4]. He details how black Zimbabweans were largely confined to low-wage labor in mines and on settler farms. The economic structures established during this time perpetuated cycles of poverty, as many families struggled to meet basic needs while working in exploitative conditions. Ranger examines the rapid urbanization that occurred as black populations migrated to cities in search of better opportunities. However, he notes that this influx often resulted in overcrowded, informal settlements with inadequate infrastructure and services, further entrenching urban poverty. His work highlights how racial segregation not only affected where people lived but also their economic prospects. Black communities were often relegated to the outskirts of urban centers, facing limited access to jobs, education, and healthcare. Rodney emphasizes that the economic inequalities created during the Southern Rhodesia era have had lasting impacts, influencing post-independence economic policies and contributing to ongoing challenges in addressing urban poverty and inequality in Zimbabwe today [9].

Theories Related to Urban Development in Post-Colonial Contexts

Urban development in post-colonial contexts is shaped by several key theories and models that address the unique challenges and legacies of colonialism. The post-colonial theory critiques the lingering impacts of colonialism on former colonies [10]. It examines how colonial histories influence urban identity, governance, and spatial organization. Scholars like Edward Said and Homi Bhabha highlight the need to deconstruct colonial narratives and promote indigenous perspectives in urban planning and development. Dependency theory posits that former colonies remain economically dependent on former colonial powers [11]. This model suggests that the structure of global capitalism perpetuates inequality, limiting economic opportunities in post-colonial cities. Urban development strategies must focus on reducing dependency and fostering self-sustaining economies.

Inclusive urbanism theory emphasizes the importance of inclusive and participatory planning processes that consider marginalized communities [12]. It advocates for policies that promote social equity, access to services, and community engagement in urban decision-making. Inclusive urbanism seeks to address the disparities created by colonial practices. Sustainable urban development framework focuses on integrating environmental sustainability with social equity and economic viability [13]. In post-colonial contexts, sustainable urban development seeks to address the environmental degradation often exacerbated by colonial exploitation, while promoting resilience and sustainability in urban planning. Urban political ecology approach examines the relationships between political, economic, and environmental factors in shaping urban spaces [14]. It highlights how power dynamics influence resource distribution and environmental policies, particularly in post-colonial cities where historical injustices may affect current urban environments. Globalization and urbanization theory explores how globalization affects urban development in post-colonial contexts [15]. It examines the ways in which global economic processes impact local urban growth, infrastructure, and social structures, often leading to uneven development and gentrification.

The informal economy and urban livelihoods theory recognizes the significant role of informal economies in post-colonial cities [16]. This model focuses on the contributions of informal workers to urban livelihoods. It advocates for integrating informal sectors into urban planning to enhance economic resilience and social inclusion. Decolonization of urban planning theory calls for rethinking urban planning practices to prioritize local knowledge, cultural heritage, and community needs over colonial legacies [17]. It emphasizes the importance of understanding historical contexts and integrating indigenous practices into modern urban development. These theories and models collectively highlight the complexities of urban development in post-colonial contexts, emphasizing the need for inclusive, equitable, and sustainable approaches that address the historical legacies of colonialism. By integrating these frameworks, urban planners and policymakers can work towards more just and resilient urban environments. The article can assist scholars and policymakers develop more

comprehensive strategies that not only address current governance challenges but also work towards dismantling the lingering effects of colonialism in urban local government systems in Zimbabwe.

The Development of Urban Local Government During the Colonial Era

The development of urban local government in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) during the colonial era was shaped by a mix of British colonial policies, economic interests, and social dynamics. These are discussed below under the sub-headings, early colonial period (1890–1910s), mid-colonial period (1920s–1940s), and late colonial period (1960s–1970s).

Early Colonial Period (1890s–1910s)

As mentioned earlier, the British South Africa Company (BSACo), led by Cecil John Rhodes, played a crucial role in establishing the colony and the urban local government system in Zimbabwe [3]. Initial settlements were primarily military outposts and administrative centers, with limited local governance. Key urban centers like Salisbury (now Harare) and Bulawayo were founded during this period. These towns primarily served European settlers and were structured to support mining and agriculture. The Salisbury Sanitary Board, established in 1897, was significant as one of the first structures resembling a municipal council in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). Founded during a period of rapid urban development, Salisbury was primarily a settlement for European settlers. The BSACo focused on establishing infrastructure and services to support the growing population. With the influx of settlers and the associated public health challenges, there was an urgent need for effective management of sanitation and hygiene in Salisbury. The board was created to address these issues.

The Salisbury Sanitary Board was composed of appointed members, primarily from the European settler community. It was characterized by appointed officials rather than elected representatives. The BSACo exerted tight control over local administration, prioritising the interests of white settlers. This reflected the colonial government's approach of limiting representation to white settlers. The board's main responsibilities included managing waste disposal, maintaining public health, and overseeing sanitation facilities [3]. It played a critical role in developing infrastructure, such as water supply systems and sewage disposal. The board implemented various health initiatives, responding to outbreaks of diseases such as typhoid and dysentery. Its focus on sanitation and health laid the groundwork for future urban governance. The Salisbury Sanitary Board is often viewed as a precursor to the more comprehensive municipal governance structures that would follow. In 1914, Salisbury was officially declared a municipality, reflecting the evolution of local governance in the region. While the board marked progress in urban management, it was limited in its scope and representation. Indigenous populations were excluded from governance structures, which would have lasting implications for social equity and access to services.

Mid-Colonial Period (1920s–1940s)

In the 1920s, as urban populations grew, the government established municipal councils. Salisbury was officially designated a municipality in 1897, with Bulawayo following in 1907. These councils were tasked with local governance, including infrastructure, sanitation, and public health. In 1923, the minority government of Southern Rhodesia adopted a constitution that gave limited self-governance to white settlers, enabling the establishment of elected municipal councils [18]. However, this was exclusive to the white population, as Indigenous peoples had no representation in these bodies. The booming mining and agricultural sectors prompted local governments to invest in infrastructure, such as roads and housing. This economic focus reinforced the importance of local governance in urban development. The Urban Councils Act of 1930 was a significant piece of legislation in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) that established a framework for local governance in urban areas. The Act was introduced during a period when the colonial administration sought to formalize and standardize local governance in urban areas, particularly as cities like Salisbury and Bulawayo grew rapidly. The Urban Councils Act aimed to create a more organized system of local governance by establishing urban councils that could manage municipal services and local administration. The Act provided for the establishment of urban councils composed of elected members, although this was primarily limited to the white settler population.

The councils were responsible for local governance and decision-making. Urban councils were granted a range of powers, including: the ability to levy taxes for funding local services, oversight of public health, waste management, and sanitation facilities, and responsibility for maintaining and developing infrastructure such as roads, water supply, and housing [19]. The Act empowered councils to enact by-laws governing various aspects of urban life, including zoning, public health regulations, and building codes. The Urban Councils Act helped standardize local governance across different urban areas, providing a clear legal framework for councils to operate within. While the Act introduced elected councils, it reinforced racial segregation by limiting voting rights and representation to the white population, thereby marginalizing the Indigenous majority. The Act was a precursor to further reforms in local government, particularly as calls for broader representation and equality increased in the post-World War II era.

Late Colonial Period (1950s–1970s)

The 1950s saw the entrenchment of racial segregation in urban planning and governance [20]. Local governments were organized to maintain separate facilities and services for white settlers and Indigenous peoples, culminating in policies that marginalized Black urban residents. Townships for Black residents, such as Mbare and Highfield in Salisbury (Harare) and Makokoba and Njube (Bulawayo), were developed. The establishment of townships like Mbare and Highfield in Salisbury, as well as Makokoba and Njube in Bulawayo, was deeply rooted in the racial policies of colonial Southern Rhodesia. Originally established in the 1930s, Mbare became

one of the first townships for Black residents in Salisbury. It was characterized by overcrowded living conditions and inadequate infrastructure, reflecting the colonial government's neglect of non-white communities. Established around the same time, Highfield was another township designated for Black residents. It faced similar issues regarding infrastructure and public services, serving as a focal point for social and political activism. Makokoba township in Bulawayo was established in the 1940s as a response to the increasing urban Black population. Like its counterparts in Harare, it experienced significant neglect and poor living conditions. Another township created for Black residents in Bulawayo, Njube was designed to house workers and their families, reflecting the colonial labor system that sought to control and exploit Black labor.

The creation of these townships involved legal and administrative measures to prevent Black individuals from settling in white areas. By restricting access to better neighborhoods, the colonial government reinforced economic and social inequalities [21]. The townships were often poorly serviced in terms of infrastructure, sanitation, and public amenities. This lack of investment reflected the colonial administration's view that Black residents were not entitled to the same quality of services as white settlers. In 1973, Southern Rhodesia adopted another Urban Councils Act [22]. It was a significant piece of legislation that aimed to restructure local governance in urban areas. The 1973 Act was introduced during a period of heightened political tension and conflict in Southern Rhodesia, particularly as nationalist movements were gaining momentum. The colonial government sought to maintain control over urban governance while facing increasing demands for political representation from the Black majority. The Act built on earlier legislation, including the Urban Councils Act of 1930, which had established municipal councils but had primarily served the interests of the white population. The 1973 Act formalized the structure of urban councils, which were responsible for local governance in designated urban areas. It aimed to create a framework for managing urban development, public health, and services. The Act allowed for the establishment of elected councils in urban areas. However, like previous laws, it maintained racial segregation by limiting voting rights and council representation primarily to white residents, further marginalizing the Black population.

While there was a provision for Black representation in the 1973 Urban Councils Act, it was minimal and often tokenistic, failing to reflect the demographic reality of the urban population. Urban councils were granted powers to manage local services such as: waste management, water supply, public health, and housing development. The Act outlined the administrative framework for urban councils, including the appointment of town clerks and other officials to oversee operations. Despite the introduction of elected councils, the 1973 Act perpetuated existing racial divisions and inequalities in urban governance, reinforcing the exclusion of the majority Black population from meaningful political power. The focus on maintaining white interests in urban planning and service provision resulted in significant disparities in infrastructure and public services between white neighborhoods and Black townships [23]. The limitations of the Urban Councils Act contributed to growing

dissatisfaction among the Black majority, fueling support for nationalist movements that sought greater political rights and independence from colonial rule. The Act was part of a broader context of colonial governance that faced increasing challenges in the 1970s. It laid the groundwork for the eventual push toward political change, culminating in independence in 1980.

Post-Independence Transition (1980–2024)

Following Zimbabwe's independence in 1980, urban local government underwent significant changes influenced by political, economic, and social factors. The new government of Prime Minister Robert Gabriel Mugabe aimed to empower local authorities, allowing for more self-governance in urban areas. This was intended to promote participation and address local needs more effectively. As a component of the reorientation of local government and making it more democratic, the government of Zimbabwe passed the Prime Minister's Directive on Decentralization in 1984 [24]. The key points of the directive included, granting local authorities greater decision-making powers, allowing them to address the specific needs of their communities more effectively, improving the delivery of essential services, such as education, health, and infrastructure, by enabling local governments to manage these resources directly, encouraging citizen participation in local governance processes, promoting transparency and accountability in decision-making, ensuring that resources were allocated more equitably to urban and rural areas, helping to address historical imbalances, and training local officials to improve their capabilities in governance and administration. The 1984 decentralization directive in Zimbabwe had several weaknesses that limited its effectiveness in reversing the inequalities inherited from the colonial era. Despite intentions to empower local governments, the central government retained significant control over resources and decision-making, limiting local authorities' autonomy. Appointments and resource allocation often favored political loyalty over merit, leading to inefficiencies and further entrenching existing power dynamics rather than addressing historical inequalities.

The Provincial Councils and Administration Act of 1985 aimed to establish a framework for decentralized governance in Zimbabwe, focusing on the administrative structures of provincial and local governments [25]. Key elements of the Act are that, it established Provincial Councils to oversee regional development and ensure that local needs were addressed, it enhanced the powers of local authorities, enabling them to make decisions on local matters, including planning and resource allocation, it outlined the administrative framework for provincial and local governments, defining roles and responsibilities to improve governance efficiency and facilitating better management of local resources and services, and allowing councils to address specific community needs. While the Provincial Councils and Administration Act of 1985 laid the groundwork for decentralization and aimed to address colonial legacies, its effectiveness was constrained by ongoing centralization, resource limitations, and political dynamics.

The political environment often hampered genuine participatory governance, as appointments and resource allocations were sometimes based on political loyalty rather than local needs.

In the late 1980s, Zimbabwe transitioned to a de facto one-party state under the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF). This centralized control limited the political diversity of urban local governments, often sidelining opposition parties. Local governance increasingly became tied to party loyalty, with appointments and resources often distributed based on political allegiance rather than merit. The 1990s and early 2000s saw economic instability, leading to reduced budgets for local governments. This hampered their ability to provide services and maintain infrastructure. Economic hardships prompted a rise in informal settlements and informal economies, challenging local governments to adapt their planning and service delivery approaches. Rapid urbanization without corresponding investment in infrastructure led to inadequate housing, water supply, and sanitation services. Local governments struggled to meet these demands due to limited resources [26]. Declines in the quality and availability of public services became prevalent, prompting protests and demands for accountability from urban residents. The 1990s saw increased activism and the emergence of civil society organizations advocating for better governance, transparency, and service delivery in urban areas. With domestic resources dwindling, NGOs became involved in urban development, often filling gaps in service delivery and providing funding for projects. Pressure from civil society organizations led to discussions around policy reforms aimed at enhancing governance and service delivery in urban areas.

The Urban Councils Act of 1996 was a significant piece of legislation in Zimbabwe aimed at reforming urban governance. The Act aimed to provide greater autonomy to urban local authorities, allowing them to make decisions on various local matters, including planning, budgeting, and service delivery. It established provisions for the election of local councilors, promoting democratic representation and participation in local governance [2]. The Act introduced frameworks for financial management, allowing councils to generate their own revenue through local taxes and fees, thus reducing dependence on central government funding. Urban councils were given explicit responsibilities for delivering essential services such as water, sanitation, waste management, and housing [27]. The Act encouraged community involvement in local decision-making processes, aiming to enhance accountability and responsiveness to citizen needs. Despite its potential, the Urban Councils Act faced several challenges in effectively reversing the colonial legacy. The central government maintained significant control over urban councils, which sometimes undermined the intended autonomy and local decision-making [28]. Many urban councils struggled with inadequate funding and resources, limiting their capacity to deliver services and implement policies effectively. The political environment often influenced local governance, with opposition parties facing challenges in many urban areas, which affected the democratic process.

In 2013, Zimbabwe adopted a new Constitution that elevated local government to be one of the three systems of government, alongside provincial/metropolitan

councils and national government [29]. Before that it existed at the whims and caprices of national government. This formal recognition underscored the importance of local governance in the overall political structure. The Constitution provided for the devolution of powers and responsibilities to local authorities. This aimed to enhance local autonomy, allowing councils to manage their own affairs more effectively. It explicitly protected local government structures and outlined their roles, functions, and powers. This legal backing aimed to prevent arbitrary interference from the central government [30]. It mandated that local authorities be elected, reinforcing the principle of democratic representation. This meant that citizens would have a direct say in their local governance through regular elections. The Constitution emphasized the need for community participation in local governance, promoting transparency and accountability in decision-making processes. Local governments were given a clear mandate to provide essential services to their communities, including health, education, and infrastructure [31]. Despite these advancements, implementation faced challenges, such as limited resources, political interference, and bureaucratic inertia. Implementation was also affected by the entrenched inequalities and disparities that arose during the colonial era.

Research Methodology

The article adopted qualitative research methodology. The methodology significantly enhanced the inquiry in the study by providing in-depth insights into the complexities of colonial heritage and its effects on urban development and local governance. Qualitative research allowed for detailed exploration of the historical, social, and cultural contexts that shape urban development in Zimbabwe. It was useful in revealing how colonial legacies influence current local government practices. It enabled the article to identify recurring themes related to colonial impact on urban development. This analysis revealed patterns in governance practices, community responses, and development challenges. Understanding the narratives surrounding colonialism and its legacy provided insights into how these stories influence current policies and community attitudes. Qualitative research enabled the researcher to track changes in local governance and urban development over time, helping to understand how colonial legacies evolve and impact contemporary practices.

Archival research provided a wealth of historical data and insights. It drew data by identifying relevant archives in Zimbabwe, such as the National Archives of Zimbabwe, which house documents related to colonial administration, land policies, and urban planning. It also explored university libraries and archives that contain theses, dissertations, and research reports focusing on colonialism and urban development. It also accessed archives in other countries, such as the British National Archives, which holds records related to colonial governance in Zimbabwe. The article looked for official documents from colonial administrations, such as policy papers, land allocation records, and urban planning documents that outline governance structures and practices. It also gathered reports and White Papers from

colonial and post-independence governments that discussed urban development strategies and challenges.

The article also studied historical maps and urban planning documents that illustrate land use changes and urban development patterns over time. In addition, it scrutinized letters, diaries, and personal accounts from colonial officials, local leaders, and residents that provided insights into the socio-political context. A systematic approach to reviewing archival materials, categorizing documents based on themes relevant to the research questions (e.g., governance, land policies, and community responses), was adopted. The article analyzed the gathered documents for recurring themes, patterns, and narratives related to colonial heritage and its impact on urban development. This was followed by historical contextualization which involved placing findings within the broader historical context, linking specific archival materials to contemporary issues in local governance. By systematically identifying, collecting, and analyzing archival materials, the researcher gained deep insights into the historical roots of current local government practices and urban challenges.

Findings, Discussions and Impact of Colonial Policies

One of the findings of the research is that racially segregated settlements existing in urban Zimbabwe today are a continuation of colonial era policies that shaped the country's socio-spatial landscape. As it was discussed in the cases of Mbare, Highfield, Makokoba and Njube townships, the colonial authorities encouraged separation of races by residence. Decades after the end of colonial administration, urban planning in Zimbabwe continues to suffer from colonial era policies fostering racial segregation. Many of the spatial and social divisions established during colonial rule persisted. The inherited urban planning frameworks continued to favor existing racial and economic divisions. For instance, although the policy of racially segregated settlements was officially abolished with the advent of majority rule and independence in 1980, it persisted in subtle forms.

It was somehow replaced by urban planning that promotes more affluent suburbs equipped with better infrastructure, services and amenities. Known for its spacious homes, green spaces, and modern amenities, Borrowdale suburb in Harare, for example, was developed during the colonial period and continues to be a sought-after residential area. Chisipite in Harare, is another affluent area with large homes and good schools, reflecting the colonial preferences for suburban living among the white community. Suburbs like Hillside and Malindela in Bulawayo are characterized by larger plots and better housing, attracting higher-income residents. Their development was linked to colonial policies that favored white settlers. The disparities between affluent suburbs and poorer townships continue to present challenges for urban planners and policy-makers in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

While the new government aimed to promote inclusivity, systemic issues such as poverty, unemployment, and inadequate housing persisted in areas originally designated for black residents. This has fostered the colonial legacy of the twin

city concept in which urban planning and development continued to reflect the inequalities established during colonial rule. A related observation is that racially segregated settlements have resulted in unequal access to education, healthcare, and unemployment opportunities. Communities in historically black areas often face marginalization. The legacy of segregation has contributed to social tensions and divisions within urban communities, affecting intergroup relations and community cohesion. As if this is not enough, rapid urbanization has exacerbated the challenges faced by racially segregated neighborhoods, leading to informal settlements and increased demand for housing and services. Efforts to address these historical injustices include policies aimed at urban renewal and the provision of affordable housing, but progress has been slow and often met resistance.

Comparison of Local Government Systems

Understanding the evolution of local government systems in Zimbabwe requires examining the distinct characteristics of each period: pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial. This requires comparative analysis (Table). In pre-colonial Zimbabwe, local governance was decentralized and based on traditional authority. Communities were often organized around clans or tribes, each led by a chief or headman. Chiefs had significant power, serving as both political leaders and custodians of cultural practices and social norms. Decisions were made through consensus and communal participation, with elders playing a significant role in deliberations. Land was held communally, with collective ownership and use being central to agricultural practices and resource management. Social structures were primarily based on kinship and community ties, with strong emphasis on cultural traditions and practices.

Summary of key differences of local government systems in Zimbabwe

Aspect	Pre-colonial	Colonial	Post-colonial
Governance structure	Decentralized/Traditional	Decentralized/Traditional	Mixed with attempts at democratization
Decision-making	Consensus-based	Top-down, limited participation	Aimed for participation but often influenced by politics
Land use	Communal ownership	Racially segregated, privatized	Redistribution efforts, contentious
Social organization	Kinship-based	Undermined traditional structures	Integration of traditional and modern governance

Source: completed by S. Marumahoko, N.T. Nhede.

The colonial administration imposed a centralized, hierarchical governance model. Local government was largely controlled by colonial authorities. The introduction of the Land Apportionment Act (1930) and other legislative measures marginalized black local governance structures and enforced

racial segregation. Decision-making processes were top-down, with limited or no input from indigenous populations. Local councils, if they existed, were often dominated by white settlers. Land was privatized according to racial lines, leading to displacement of black communities and the establishment of separate residential areas for whites and blacks. Traditional leadership structures were undermined, and chiefs were often co-opted to serve colonial interests, reducing their authority and role within communities.

In post-colonial Zimbabwe, the government aimed to create a more inclusive local government system. However, it retained some centralized elements from the colonial era. The introduction of elected local councils aimed to democratize governance, although political interference and central control persisted. While there was an emphasis on participatory governance, in practice, decision-making has often been influenced by political parties, particularly the ruling party. Land reforms were implemented particularly in the early 2000s, aiming to redistribute land from white settlers to black Zimbabweans. However, the process has been contentious and fraught with challenges. Traditional leaders have been reasserted in some areas, but their roles are often contested within the framework of the new political system. Efforts to integrate traditional governance with modern local government structures have been made, though with mixed results.

Conclusion

Scholarly attention to the enduring effects of colonial heritage on contemporary urban development in Zimbabwe remains limited. The article sought to critically examine this relationship, highlighting the need for a nuanced understanding of how colonial legacies inform contemporary challenges in Zimbabwe's urban development. It found that the impact of colonialism on urban development in Zimbabwe is evident in the spatial and infrastructural configurations of its cities. Urban areas were often designed to facilitate the extraction of resources and labor, leading to the establishment of industrial zones that were disconnected from the residential areas of the black majority. This segregation has persisted long after independence in 1980, as many cities continue to reflect the inequalities entrenched during colonial rule. The lack of adequate infrastructure and services in these historically marginalized areas has contributed to ongoing challenges in urban governance, including inadequate housing, limited access to clean water, and high unemployment rates. The article also found that the local government system in Zimbabwe has undergone significant transformations from pre-colonial to post-colonial periods. Each phase reflects broader social, political and economic changes, with lingering effects of colonial practices still shaping governance practices today. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for addressing contemporary challenges in local governance and development. It is suggested that policymakers recognize and incorporate historical and cultural contexts into urban development plans, ensuring that the heritage of all communities is respected and preserved. Future studies

can focus on addressing socioeconomic inequalities through targeted programs aimed at enhancing economic opportunities for marginalized communities in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

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Information about the authors:

Sylvester Marumahoko — Doctor of Public Law, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Commerce, Zimbabwe Open University, 8th Floor, Corner House, Corner of Samora Machel Avenue and Leopold Takawira Street, Harare, MP 1119, Zimbabwe (ORCID: 0000-0001-8256-8828) (e-mail: marumahokos@zou.ac.zw).

Norman T. Nhede — Doctor of Administrative Sciences, Senior Lecturer at the School of Public Administration University of Pretoria, Corner of Lynnwood Road and Roper Street Hatfield, Pretoria, 0028, Republic of South Africa Gauteng, South Africa, Hatfield, Pretoria, 0028 (ORCID: 0000-0001-9285-3075) (e-mail: norman.nhede@up.ac.za).

Информация об авторах:

Марумахоко Сильвестр — доктор публичного права, старший преподаватель факультета коммерции, Зимбабвийский открытый университет, Зимбабве, МР 1119, Хараре, угол проспекта Самора Машела и улицы Леопольда Такавира, здание Corner House, 8-й этаж (ORCID: 0000-0001-8256-8828) (e-mail: marumahokos@zou.ac.zw).

Нхедэ Норман Т. — доктор административных наук, старший преподаватель школы государственного управления, Университет Претории, Южно-Африканская Республика, 0028, Претория, пересечение дорог Линнвуд и Ропер Хатфилд (ORCID: 0000-0001-9285-3075) (e-mail: norman.nhede@up.ac.za).