

Disciplining a 'dissident' city: Hydropolitics in the City of Bulawayo, Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1980 – 1992.

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Abstract:

Post-independence Zimbabwe experienced three severe droughts within ten years, that is, 1982-84, 1986-87, and 1991-92. The impact of these droughts was particularly severe on the urban poor as well as the overall economy of Bulawayo because of the perennially arid conditions that the city experienced since its establishment in 1894. This paper explores three central propositions. First, that although independence theoretically ended restrictive and racialised access to water for the people of residents of Bulawayo region, it did not necessarily bring about increased water security. Second, that water crises persisted on a recurring basis. Third, that to a large extent these crises were man made and linked to intense struggles over access to, and management of water resources in post-colonial Zimbabwe. The paper documents the intense competition between the central government and the Bulawayo City Council over water and explores the social, economic, and political basis of this conflict between 1980 and 1992.

Introduction

Much of the debates about struggles over water and how the resource has been appropriated as a political and social control instrument have tended to focus on global and inter-state conflicts.¹ Yet such struggles have oftentimes also occurred at local sites, for example, in Bulawayo, the second largest city in Zimbabwe. Post-independence Zimbabwe experienced three severe droughts within ten years, i.e. 1982-84, 1986-87, and 1991-92. The impact of these droughts was particularly severe on the urban poor as well as the overall economy of Bulawayo because of the perennially arid conditions that the city experienced since its establishment in 1894. Conceding that environmental factors such as low rainfall, high temperatures, and poor run-off certainly played a critical role in the creation of water scarcity in Bulawayo, I contend that sufficient rainwater could not be the sole guarantor of water security for the people of Bulawayo. Water scarcity, just like famines, has as much to do with the command over the distribution of scarce resources, as it has to do with the environment.² In post-colonial Zimbabwe, as was the

¹ See, for example, T. Allan, *The Middle East Water Question: Hydropolitics and the Global Economy* (London, I. B. Taurus Publishers, 2001), or A. Turton, *et al*, *Trans-boundary rivers, sovereignty and development: Hydropolitical drivers in the Okavango River Basin* (University of Pretoria, and Green Cross International, Switzerland, Geneva, African Water Issues Research, 2003)

² There is a striking parallel between the causes of water scarcity, and food scarcity as expounded by Amartya Sen. He has persuasively argued that famines are not merely 'natural' disasters. Food shortages are man-made. They are largely the result of the power and politics of food distribution. He argued that famines occur not because there is no food available, they occur because of man-made policies, and who is in command of the resources. For more discussion on this discourse see *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement*, Oxford, 1981. For more on a sustained discussion of the impact of colonial capitalism on food security see also A. Isaacman, *Cotton is the Mother of Poverty: Peasants, Work, and Rural Struggles, Colonial Mozambique, 1938-*

case in colonial Zimbabwe, the reluctance by the central state to allocate adequate resources for urban water development in Bulawayo was a political decision.

The paper argues that the central government used its power to allocate resources, such as scarce foreign currency, as a weapon to 'discipline' what it perceived to be a wayward city located in the politically errant province of Matabeleland. By so doing, it forestalled the development process in the province. The genesis of this punitive mindset is complicated by the long-standing historically tenuous, if at times cordial, relationship between ZANU and ZAPU.

Roots of the Post-Colonial Conflict in Zimbabwe: 1962-1987

The immediate aftermath of the war of liberation in Zimbabwe and the general elections of 1980 was characterized by escalating political conflict and violent attacks between the armed wings of the two main nationalist parties, ZANU's Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), and ZAPU's Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) settled in Assembly Points (APs) in Chitungwiza, Harare, and Entumbane in Bulawayo. The social and political origins of the violence can be traced back to 1963 when a group of young leaders in ZAPU broke away to form ZANU, which was eventually led by Robert G. Mugabe. These 'Young Turks' were disgruntled with Joshua M. Nkomo's (ZAPU's president) liberal approach to the nationalist struggle. Whilst Nkomo desired a non-confrontational approach to the struggle, at least in the early years, the young leaders wanted direct confrontation that involved guerrilla warfare.³ When ZAPU was founded in 1962, it was a party for both the Ndebele-speaking and Shona-speaking peoples but with the break away of ZANU, the membership of both parties followed the Ndebele-Shona ethnic divide.⁴ This created divisions, inter-party strife, and violence. Thus the membership of the two parties generally assumed the Ndebele-Shona conflict of the 1890s to the late 1940s.

The ethnic chasm between the Shona and Ndebele-speaking peoples began at the point when the Ndebele led by Mzilikazi settled on the southwestern Zimbabwe Plateau in about 1840. Ndebele settlement led them into open confrontation with the indigenous Shona-speaking groups – the Karanga, Nyubi, Nhanzva, Venda, Ndau, Manyika, etc. leading to the spawning of various forms of relations ranging from co-operation to subjugation, and incorporation of the latter groups after defeat by the Ndebele. Inter-tribal warfare was not the be-all and end-all of political relations between the Ndebele and the Shona.⁵ In critical moments of crises such as droughts, they relied on each other to cope with the stresses of the calamities.⁶ The invasion of the British colonial settlers and their

1961 (Portsmouth NH, Heinemann, 1996) pp. 150-152; M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine* (Cambridge, 1987).

³ Nkomo and his party, ZAPU, later formed one of the most formidable guerrilla armies in Zimbabwe, the Zimbabwe People's Liberation Army, while ZANU also formed a similar guerrilla army both of which engaged the white Rhodesian national army in the struggle for independence.

⁴ R. G. Mugabe, 'The Unity Accord: Its Promise for the Future,' C. S. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890-1990*, (Harare, The College Press, 1990), p. 337

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ For more details see Chapter 2 in M. Musemwa, 'Struggles over water: The History and Politics of Urban Water Supply Services in Makokoba Township, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, 1894-1992.' (PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 2003) pp. 25-61

subsequent occupation of Mashonaland (i.e. areas occupied by the Shona-speaking groups) and the defeat of the Ndebele under Lobengula in 1893, and the imposition of a brutal settler colonial rule in 1890, both the Shona and the Ndebele were compelled to confront the invading force in what has now been labeled the first *Chimurenga/Umvukela* (war or uprising in Shona/Ndebele respectively) in 1896-1897 as a united front on one side for their common survival. Relations between the Ndebele and the Shona, especially where charges of ethnicity in terms of allocation or withholding of resources is concerned have to be seen in a proper historical context for it was not always conflict that characterized relations between the two groups.⁷

Political co-operation between the Ndebele and the Shona against the brutal colonial regime, and the need to form a political organization that would articulate their aspirations became a paramount objective. However, efforts to achieve this goal in the first four decades of the 20th century did not take up a national character. By 1957, however, various leaders had begun to censure the existence of many political groups, which instead of promoting unity, fostered divisions among the African people. This realization led to the formation of a single national political organization that transcended ethnic partisanship, the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress, (ANC) in September 1957. From this year onwards, nationalist politics was organized on the basis of national rather than regional or ethnic considerations in colonial Zimbabwe. After its proscription in 1959, the ANC was succeeded by the National Democratic Party, also banned a year later by the Rhodesian Government, after it had successfully organized the urban riots in Bulawayo and Salisbury in 1960, threatening white settler security. The banning of the NDP left a political hiatus in the nationalist struggle, which was plugged with the formation of the Zimbabwe National People's Union (ZAPU) in 1962, from which Ndabaningi Sithole and Herbert Chitepo among others, broke away to form the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU).⁸

The tribal character of both ZANU and ZAPU has been ascribed to the 'remnants of loyalties emanating from old feudal social formations, which revolved around the authority of the tribal king.'⁹ A school of thought that emerged in the post-1987 Unity Accord between ZANU and ZAPU, attributed the drifting of the Shonas to ZANU and the Ndebeles to ZAPU, as having been a coincidental outcome of the split and that the leader of ZANU just happened to be Shona and that of ZAPU, Ndebele. This split was said to have played into the hands of these residual feudal tendencies.¹⁰ These tendencies encouraged a swing towards ethnic loyalties and affinities. The continuation of inter-party violence and friction (between ZAPU and ZANU) in urban areas between 1963 and 1964, as well as the escalating violence and harshness of the colonial state policy and security intelligence officials brought about more calls for national unity among

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ J. N. Nkomo, 'The Significance of National Unity and the Future,' in C. S. Banana, (ed.) *Turmoil and Tenacity*, p. 301. The ethnic basis of the membership of both parties should however, not be taken as a given as there were within the echelons of the parties Ndebele leaders who joined ZANU (e.g. Canaan Banana – who became the first ceremonial President of Zimbabwe – and Enos Nkala), while some Shona leaders (e.g. Josiah Chinamano, and Joseph Msika – now Vice-President of Zimbabwe) joined ZAPU. For that matter, Joshua Nkomo himself was not Ndebele, although he grew up and worked in Bulawayo for most of his life before he became engaged in active national politics. He is Kalanga, a small minority group in Matabeleland. It is therefore erroneous to simply equate ZANU with Shonas, or ZAPU with Ndebeles.

⁹ Mugabe, 'The Unity Accord,' p. 338

¹⁰ *ibid.*

nationalists. This ultimately led to the formation of the Patriotic Front of ZANU and ZAPU in 1976 to promote the 'need for a single united voice for black Zimbabweans.'¹¹

Conflict was also built on the guerilla armies' forms of recruitment and geographical areas of operations, and the long history of hostility and mistrust between ZANLA and ZIPRA, and their respective political leaderships.¹² These recruitment patterns saw ZIPRA dominated by Ndebele speakers from Matabeleland, while ZANLA was largely Shona-speaking. In their study on the voting patterns of the Zimbabwe electorate in 1980, Cliffe, Mpofu, and Munslow noted that voting principally followed the operational areas, loyalties, as well as ethnic and regional divisions. This pattern created the potential for a clash along these lines.¹³ After winning the elections with a landslide majority in February 1980, ZANU (PF) was uncomfortable with ZIPRA's potential capabilities to wage a conventional warfare. The ZANU (PF) government was concerned with the probability that 'the clearly surprised and disappointed ZAPU would use these forces, which were still based largely outside the country, to obtain victory by other means.'¹⁴ The outbreak of violence in the Assembly Points (APs) and the emergence of a *corterie* of disgruntled former soldiers and ZIPRA ex-combatants labeled 'dissidents' by the central government confirmed the latter's fears. Because of fears against reprisals and punishment for the revolts, some guerillas left the APs in early 1980.¹⁵

Both the ZANU (PF) and PF ZAPU political leadership castigated the runaway combatants and invariably labeled them as 'outlaws,' 'unruly elements,' 'bandits,' or 'renegades'.¹⁶ However, among these men were those who were on the loose and armed in Matabeleland, and came to be referred officially as 'dissidents.' The attacks and pronouncements that dissidents made came to be viewed by the Government in political terms. ZANU (PF) politicians argued that dissidents were predominantly ZIPRA forces and were spurred to fight because they could not accept that ZAPU had been defeated at the ballot box.¹⁷ Indeed, according to President Robert Mugabe: 'The events after 1980, especially the years 1982 to December 1987 did not, however, show that PF ZAPU took kindly to the rule of ZANU (PF).'¹⁸

The discovery in February 1982 of vast arms caches on properties owned by NITRAM, a ZAPU company and in areas surrounding ZIPRA APs was for the Government the final proof that ZAPU was planning to overthrow the ZANU-PF led Government. Once again, the ZANU (PF) government saw this as confirmation of its fears that ZAPU was preparing to wage a war or a military coup to overthrow the state. The government not only seized the properties of ZAPU, but also fired Nkomo and other

¹¹ ZANU and ZAPU eventually went to the two major conferences on Zimbabwe's future, at the Geneva Conference in 1976 and the Lancaster House Constitutional Conference under the banner of the Patriotic Front.

¹² J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, (Portsmouth NH, Heinemann, 2000), p. 181

¹³ L. Cliffe, J. Mpofu, and B. Munslow, 'Nationalist Politics in Zimbabwe: The 1980 Elections and Beyond,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 18, (May-August 1980), pp. 44-67.

¹⁴ Alexander, *et al*, *Violence and Memory*, p. 181

¹⁵ Assembly Points were camps designated for the temporary settlement of former liberation guerrillas from both ZANLA and ZIPRA as part of the UN monitored ceasefire program.

¹⁶ *ibid.* p. 185

¹⁷ *ibid.* p. 185

¹⁸ Mugabe, 'The Unity Accord,' p. 343

ZAPU ministers from government.¹⁹ The political rift between the two parties became wider and deeper when in June 1982 ZIPRA guerillas were incriminated in an attack on the Prime Minister's residence, and soon afterwards six foreign tourists were abducted and killed in Matabeleland North by dissidents.²⁰ Tensions intensified in communal areas as the government dispatched the national army's Fifth Brigade into Matabeleland to quell the dissident problem. The activities of the Fifth Brigade resulted in heinous human-rights violations, including rape torture and death, and displacement as people fled from the repression of government troops.²¹ The activities of the Fifth Brigade left the Ndebele population with so much disdain for the Shona-dominated ZANU (PF), so that in the 1985 general elections, the latter failed to make any momentous inroads in Matabeleland where PF-ZAPU made a clean sweep of all the parliamentary seats – the only seats it won in the election.

Between 1982 and December 1987, the year when the Unity Accord to merge ZANU and ZAPU into a single party, latter known as ZANU-PF, was signed, government developmental projects came to a standstill.²² Although the parties officially united in 1987, the ethnic split continued to be a significant factor in resource distribution matters. It is within the context of the retaliatory actions of government against banditry in Matabeleland, the brutal attacks on Ndebele speaking civilians by the Fifth Brigade, and the failure by ZANU (PF) to win control of Matabeleland that it has been presumed that ethnic considerations influenced national resource allocation decisions.²³ Since the conclusion of the December 1987 Unity Accord between the ruling ZANU (PF) and PF-ZAPU, which generated peace and an end to the dissident anarchy, people in Bulawayo and the province of Matabeleland expected that development would be speeded up than had been hitherto the case.²⁴ But a crisis of expectations soon developed among the people in both urban and rural areas in Matabeleland, as strong perception of past and present neglect became apparent.²⁵

This abandonment was felt more around the issue of water supply scarcity in the City of Bulawayo. The post-independence conflict ran concurrently with the first two droughts of 1982-84 and 1986-87, so that the combined effects of both the natural and man made disasters (the dissident and Fifth Brigade terror) resulted in the displacement and dislocation of rural people in areas such as Lupane in Matabeleland North. Those who chose to escape from the wrath of both the dissident and Fifth Brigade menaces tended to move to Bulawayo which was a lot safer but not immune to water scarcity. Water scarcity during the first drought in 1982-84, and subsequent droughts, was

¹⁹ E. D. Mnangagwa, 'Post-independence Zimbabwe: 1980-1987,' in Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity*, pp. 237-238. After the 1980 elections ZAPU, as part of a government of national unity, was offered four ministerial posts, and two for deputy ministers. These went to Joshua Nkomo, Joseph Msika, George Silundika, and Clement Muchachi, and the deputies were Cephas Msipha and Jini Ntuta. In the army, Lookout Masuku was appointed Lieutenant General and Jevan Maseko Major General etc.

²⁰ Alexander *et al*, *Violence and Memory*, pp. 188-189

²¹ More data on human-rights violations in the Matabeleland province can be found in Alexander, *et al*, *Violence and Memory*; Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Zimbabwe: Wages of War*, New York, The Committee, 1986

²² W. Ncube, 'The Post-Unity Period: Developments, Benefits and Problems,' C. S. Banana (ed.), *Turmoil and Tenacity: Zimbabwe, 1890-1990* (Harare, The College Press, 1990), p. 305

²³ J. Herbst, *State Politics in Zimbabwe*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1990), p. 168

²⁴ Ncube, 'The Post-Unity Period,' p. 305

²⁵ Alexander, *et al*, *Violence and Memory*, p. 235

exacerbated by the reluctance of the central government to revamp existing water delivery systems in Bulawayo, and to build more dams to ease present and future water demands. We need to document the recurring water crises, and how they were linked to the region's aridity.

Water Crises: 1982-1992

Between 1982 and 1992, Zimbabwe suffered three severe droughts, i.e. 1982-84, 1986-87, and 1991-92. The impact of these droughts was particularly acute on the urban poor in Bulawayo. Unlike other parts of the country, Bulawayo is a perennially arid area in which water is often a scarce resource. In addition to the natural causes in the south-western city, water scarcity in Bulawayo during the periods of drought was also the result of systemic and bureaucratic inertia in developing sustainable water reservoirs for the city.

The geographical conditions in and around Bulawayo are such that the area receives low rainfall in terms of quantity. The precipitation is unreliable, run-off is poor, and so is the catchment capacity as the rivers in most of Matabeleland are also perennially dry.²⁶ These ecological constraints necessitated the regular development and planning of water sources to keep water supplies to the city flowing, as dependence on nature's rainfall alone could not guarantee a lasting solution to the city's water needs. Moreover, rising population density in Bulawayo during this period also increased demand for water but the supply was inadequate. Population figures for Bulawayo according to the 1982 Census were: 495,317 (80% of this figure was those in the high density or formerly Western Areas townships); 1985 – 535,800; 1986/87 – 623,000, by 1992 the figure was about one million. However, the central state systematically refused to sanction and fund the development of additional water sources for Bulawayo such that when the series of droughts occurred the BCC, let alone the poor residents in townships such as Makokoba, was least prepared for the consequences. Given the short intervals within which the droughts occurred, their social effects on poor people tended to be incremental.²⁷

The First Water Crisis: 1982-84

Coming after the bountiful rainy season of 1980/81, which is remembered in Zimbabwe as the year of the country's agricultural revolution, the drought of 1982-84 was so severe that it dampened the euphoria of independence for the majority of Zimbabweans in urban and rural areas.²⁸ The whole country went through a long dry spell with near devastating social, economic, and environmental consequences. Nevertheless, as in all the subsequent droughts, Bulawayo was severely affected because of its long-standing history of aridity, i.e. low rainfall, hot temperatures, poor vegetation, and soils. The gravity of the drought was underscored by the City Engineer of Bulawayo, who in his annual report noted that the combined totals of annual rainfall recordings for

²⁶ See chapter 2 in, Musemwa, 'Struggles over water'.

²⁷ For a comprehensive discussion on the social and environmental consequences of these water crises see Chapter Seven in M. Musemwa, 'Struggles over water,' pp. 310-378

²⁸ M. Rukuni and C. K. Eicher (eds.) *Zimbabwe's Agricultural Revolution* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1994).

the three years, 1981 to 1984, was in fact 'the lowest experienced since records were first kept in 1896.'²⁹

Pitted against the minimum sum of rainfall recorded in two consecutive years at Goetz Observatory in Bulawayo of 688, 3 mm between 1912 and 1914, and 747, 9 mm between 1932 and 1934, the gross annual rainfall recorded in 1981/82 was down by less than half to 306, 5 mm, and in 1982/83 287, 9 mm – a total of 594, 4 mm. In other years, 1963/64/65 for example, run-off into municipal reservoirs added up to 43% of the long-term mean annual run-off.³⁰ However, run-off in 1981/82 was 12% of the mean annual run-off and in 1982/83 a further 12% making 24% of the mean annual run-off for the two years. Consequently, this 'extraordinary low run-off' over a period of two consecutive years, coupled with escalating water consumption levels (an average upsurge of 9% over the first seven months of 1983) brought about the severe depletion of the Council's Ncema and Umzingwane Dams.³¹

Concurrently, Inyankuni Dam remained the Bulawayo's largest existing source of raw water, but the process of conveying the water to the different departmental treatment works was acutely limited by the size of the delivery pipeline.³² The new pipeline to link Lake Cunningham to Ncema which the BCC expected to be completed by August 1983, and hopefully to ease the water delivery problem as well as the looming water shortage, hardly materialized due to the Government of Zimbabwe (GOZ) constant vacillation on the provision of foreign currency for the project. With the total volume in the City's dams standing at 74, 854 cubic meters as at June 30, 1982/83 (compared to 185,323 cubic meters in 1980/81 and 128,302 cubic meters in 1981/82) the water levels were at their lowest. The demand for water was also high as consumption figures indicate. For the year 1982/83, water consumption levels stood at 129,046 cubic millimeters (higher than the 106,741 figures in 1980/81, and 125, 342 cubic millimeters in 1982/83.³³

The incremental rise in the urban population in the early 1980s stimulated an increase in the demand for water in Bulawayo. This demographic expansion was the result of a convergence of diverse factors such as; the influx of Africans to the towns after the repeal of restrictive laws, particularly the African (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act and the Vagrancy Act; the worsening environmental conditions in the communal areas; and the dissident menace. The Fifth Brigade, which also terrorized people as it searched for dissidents and their sympathizers created problems of insecurity so that people mostly in Lupane, and Nkayi left their homes to seek sanctuary in the City. Water services and municipal housing programs failed to meet the accelerating demand.³⁴

The much hoped for rains from October 1983 through to January 1984 were sparse and did not yield any significant inflows into the supply dams leading to acute low dam levels. By the end of December 1983, the five municipal dams were overall less than

²⁹ *Bulawayo Municipal Council Minutes (Hereinafter referred to as BMC. These minutes were, from the 1940s, referred to as the Bulawayo City Council Minutes when the Bulawayo Municipality was granted City status. They are located at the Bulawayo City Hall) Annual Report of the City Engineer, July, 1984*

³⁰ BMC Minutes: *Annual Report of the City Engineer, July, 1984*

³¹ *ibid.*

³² *ibid.*

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ S. Moyo, P. O'Keefe, and M. Sill, *The Southern African Environment: Profiles of the SADC Countries*, (London, Earthscan Publications, 1993) p. 311

30% full. Compounding the natural causes of this imminent water shortage was the state's two-year delay in initiating the Ncema-Criterion pipeline project, which had been expected to augment the City's water supply because of foreign currency shortages.³⁵

The Second Water Crisis: 1986-87

The drought was greater in magnitude as well as its effects on the people than the 1982-1984 drought. This drought and the consequential water rationing 'adversely affected the development of the city and the living conditions of the people in the year 1986/87.'³⁶ On June 30, 1983 the volume of water in municipal dams, at 74, 854 cubic meters, was the lowest it had ever been. However, on June 30, 1987 the dams held a much lower volume of water at 53,449 cubic meters. The subsequent rainy seasons in 1987/88, 1988/89, and 1989/90 overcame the drought conditions that had become a characteristic of Makokoba Township, and Bulawayo's desolate landscapes. This was followed by the suspension of water rationing restrictions, and the improved water supply in the municipal dams 'brought a ray of hope that the depressing hard times may soon be over.'³⁷ This lull was to be followed by the water crisis of 1991/92, which affected the whole country but had devastating consequences for the people of Makokoba in particular, and Bulawayo in general.³⁸

The Third Water Crisis: 1991-92

The drought of 1991/92 that afflicted the whole of Zimbabwe in particular and southern Africa in general was generally portrayed as the worst in the 20th century.³⁹ Occurring in a city in which aridity was historically a perennial feature of Bulawayo's landscape, some residents described the drought as the 'worst drought in living memory' in Bulawayo. Consequently, no city in Zimbabwe can surpass the City of Bulawayo in the number of water rationing schemes, and other water control measures passed within one decade, 1982-1992.⁴⁰ Margaret Kriel who, in the wake of the 1991/92 drought, spearheaded the 'Bulawayo Must Live' campaign spoke for many residents when she said of the severity of the drought:

We have had droughts and water shortages ever since I can remember, but none quite so bad as that of 1992. Droughts in past years had been easier to comprehend, there had never been enough water in Matabeleland, but it was not as awful a specter in the past when the City was a manageable size.⁴¹

³⁵ *The Chronicle*, 2 February 1984.

³⁶ Bulawayo City Council (BCC): *Report of the Director of Housing and Community Services, 1987/88*, p. 2

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ In my doctoral thesis, I argued and demonstrated that the challenges of water scarcity were particularly acute in Makokoba Township than in any other African suburbs of the semi-arid City of Bulawayo. Founded in 1894 – the same year that the colonial town of Bulawayo was established as a segregated shantytown to accommodate mainly male migrant workers, Makokoba was, and has remained to this day, the poorest and most underdeveloped of Bulawayo's townships. For a sustained discussion on this, see Musemwa, 'Struggles over water'.

³⁹ B. Kinsey, K. Burger, and W. Gunning, 'Coping with Drought in Zimbabwe: Survey Evidence on Responses of Rural Households to Risk,' *World Development*, 26, 1, (1998), pp. 89-110

⁴⁰ Between 1982 and 1992, the Bulawayo City Council implemented severe water restrictions in 1983, and subsequently, water rationing provisions in 1984, 1987, and 1991.

⁴¹ *Masiye Pambili*, Vol. 14, May 1994, p. 27

Lungisa Manzini, a longtime resident of Makokoba Township in Bulawayo recalls some of the affects of the water shortages:

Things got to a point where – because of recurrent water shortages – for as long as there was 'enough' water in the house to drink and cook people would care less about water to bath. One would simply wake up and begin the day's work without worrying about bathing – only bathing in the evening, at the end of the day. You wouldn't even feel that there was a shortage of water. This became a way of life here in Makokoba. Water would be cut off in the morning and restored in the evening as long as you had enough water to drink and cook with in the day, it was okay.⁴²

The magnitude of the previous cycles of droughts, including the 1983/84 and 1986/87 pale in significance and impact when compared to the 1991/92 drought. The City's water storage at 25,748 cubic meters as at June 30, 1992 was the lowest ever since 1980/81. A growing number of people moving from the drought affected rural areas to the city Bulawayo exacerbated the water shortage crisis. The population of the City of Bulawayo, according to the 1982 Census was 495,317. By the second water crisis of 1986/87, the population had risen to an estimated 623,000. In 1989, the population had gone up to 719,260. By 1992, the population had reached the one million mark.⁴³ This demographic expansion had a significant impact on water consumption patterns as people squeezed into areas such as Makokoba where housing was already scarce to live with their kith and kin.

Background to State Control Water Policy

In the 1980s, frequent struggles occurred between the GOZ and the BCC over how to prioritize potential water infrastructure projects particularly dams and the expansion of existing water delivery systems. The basis of this conflict was the revised Water Act (No. 41 of 1976), which shifted the policy on water development from the hands of urban municipalities to the jurisdiction of the state. Passed by the colonial state just four years before Zimbabwe's independence, the Water Act redefined water as a 'national asset'. Prior to its enactment, urban local authorities had been responsible for planning and implementing their own supply augmentation projects such as constructing dams, thus assuming full responsibility for the provision of water to their citizens, as well as commercial and industrial establishments within their jurisdiction.⁴⁴ With the growth of both, the urban population, and industry competition for water between and among multiple users, e.g. urban areas, mining, and agricultural interests, the Rhodesian colonial state feared that this could result in the sub-optimal use of water resources from a

⁴² *Interview with Lungisa Manzini, Makokoba, May 13th, 2002*

⁴³ BMC Minutes: Minutes of the General Purposes Committee Meeting, 4 April 1993. The 1 million population estimate was the figure given by the BCC after it had disputed the 1992 Census figure of 620,936 and accused the Census Bureau of undercounting the people in Bulawayo for political reasons, namely to give Bulawayo fewer resources.

⁴⁴ P. B. Robinson, 'Financing Sustainable Water Use in Zimbabwe: Institutional Barriers to Applying Economic Solutions' Presented at the *Expert Group Meeting on Strategic Approaches to Freshwater Management*, (Harare, 27-30 January 1998) Harare. Paper No. 16

national perspective.⁴⁵ Under the revised Act, the Government assumed, through the Ministry of Energy and Water Resources and Development (MEWRD), the sole responsibility of developing bulk water resources i.e. the funding and construction of all dams for the urban and agricultural sectors. Urban municipalities' roles were reduced to the provision of basic infrastructure to transmit, store, purify, and distribute water to their respective urban citizens.⁴⁶ Thus, by nationalizing water, the resource ceased to be a commons where hitherto other social actors including urban municipalities had always appropriated water, and constructed dams to cater for existing and future demands to fulfill the process of modernization and capitalist development.

The closure of the commons did not necessarily nullify what the BCC perceived to be its mandate. The Bulawayo local authority continued to operate on the principle that it had an obligation to fulfill the normal domestic demands of the urban population for potable water, as well as provide adequate water to sustain the industrial and commercial development of the city.⁴⁷ However, from 1976 onwards the local state could no longer fulfill this mandate on the basis of its time-honored policy of proactively embarking on preemptive water resource development projects in order to maximize supplies for urban growth further into the future. Under its established 'future water supply' program, the BCC had between 1928 and 1976, managed to construct, on average, a dam nearly every twelve years and 'each time a new source was added it was bigger and catered for at least 10 years growth demand,' noted Ndubiwa, the former first African Town Clerk of the BCC.⁴⁸ These dams were built mostly to serve the white settler community to create a luxuriant environment for their comfort and not for Africans in Makokoba Township.⁴⁹ The BCC built the following dams between 1928 and 1976: Khami (1928), Lower Ncema (1943), Mzingwane (1956), Inyankuni (1965), Upper Ncema (1974), Insiza (formerly Mayfair and also known as Lake Cunningham) (1975).⁵⁰

The BCC's dam-building schemes are illustrative of the meaning and dynamics of what Donahue and Johnston called 'project culture.'⁵¹ The hallmark of this culture is that such development projects, whether public or private, often involve the distancing of bureaucratic institutions from some of the people in whose name the programs have been initiated. Hydro-development often involves dreams and promises, as well as potential political and economic prospects.⁵² The suite of municipal dams in Bulawayo did not

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

⁴⁶ *ibid.*

⁴⁷ BMC Minutes: 'Future Water Supplies for Bulawayo,' Town Clerk's Letter to the Deputy Director of MEWRD, 19 December 1990.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*

⁴⁹ Chapter 3 in M. Musemwa, 'Struggles over water,' offers a detailed discussion on how the white settler community carved out a racially segregated luxuriant green environment, while at the same time no resources for the development of a garden suburb for Africans were provided.

⁵⁰ BMC Minutes: 'Future Water Supplies for Bulawayo,' Town Clerk's Letter to the Deputy Director of MEWRD,' December 19, 1990.

⁵¹ J. M. Donahue and B. R. Johnston, 'Conclusion,' in J. M. Donahue and B. R. Johnston (eds.), *Water, Culture, and Power: Local Struggles in a Global Context* (Washington D. C., Island Press, 1998), pp. 342-343

⁵² *ibid.* Isaacman and Sneddon, and Thabane have also shown how the project cultures in the building of Cahora Bassa Dam in Mozambique, and the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme respectively, both had profound social and ecological consequences for the local communities residing where the schemes were sited. The significant point here is that during the colonial period local communities were neither involved in the decision-making

necessarily lead to abundant water provision for the residents of Makokoba, nor could they use the dams even for leisure or other livelihood purposes such as fishing or urban agriculture because of restrictive and racialized access to these water sources.⁵³

Given the shift in policy, the central state did not provide a single dam for Bulawayo between 1976 and 1992.⁵⁴ The state's failure to build additional dams had severe long-term consequences for the people of Bulawayo and the urban economy. State induced water scarcity gave rise to water restrictions which were imposed on June 1st, 1983, and subsequently to three water ration programs within a decade (1984 - 1985, 1987-1988, and 1991-1993), an unusual high number in the history of the City's water conservation measures.⁵⁵ State ineptitude also led to a critical water crisis in 1992, which was exacerbated by a severe drought. One, Paurino Thomson Mhlanga of Makokoba, a resident of Makokoba Township saw the gravity of the post-independence water crises as the product of nothing more than state incompetence:

The 1970 drought was better than that of 1992. This may be attributed to, a shift of governments, from that of colonial to that of black majority. If you look at the 1970s, there was no significant water shortage. However, when it came to the 1980s, there- about, people starved, water shortages began to occur more often, as well as water rationing.⁵⁶

He was right. The crises were largely man-made scarcities, a product of struggles over the control of the water commons and use of the resource as a tool to browbeat the City of Bulawayo into political submission.

How a government creates water shortages: Struggles over the Control of Water in Bulawayo, 1982-1987

Two scourges afflicted the region of Matabeleland and the City of Bulawayo between 1982 and 1987 – one was the two droughts in 1982-84 and 1986-87, and the other was the havoc caused by both the armed 'dissidents' disgruntled over the outcome of the elections in 1980, and the activities of the Fifth Brigade on mostly rural peasants in western Matabeleland. Set against this backdrop of water scarcity and political conflict was also an evolving conflict between the BC C and the GOZ over water control and distribution to the City of Bulawayo. The conflict over water development during this period centered on two contentious issues; first, the reluctance by the central government to fund the duplication of the Ncema-Criterion water pipeline; and second, the development of Mtshabezi (Mwanakuridza) Dam. The GOZ was bent on frustrating

processes, nor benefited from the project schemes. M. Thabane, 'Shifts from Old to New Social and Ecological Environments in the Lesotho Highlands Water Scheme: Relocating Residents of the Mohale Dam Area,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 4, (December 2000), pp. 633-654. A. Isaacman and C. Sneddon, 'Toward a Social and Environmental History of the Building of Cahora Bassa Dam,' *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 26, 4, (December 2000), pp. 597-632

⁵³ For a detailed discussion Chapter 5 in Musemwa, 'Struggles over water.'

⁵⁴ *100 Years of Industry in Bulawayo*, Compiled by the Matabeleland Chamber of Industries for the Centenary Celebrations: 1894-1994, 61

⁵⁵ Bulawayo – Matabeleland – Zambezi Water Supply Feasibility Study: Final Report, Executive Summary, Government of Zimbabwe, Matabeleland Zambezi Water Trust, and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency, September 1996.

⁵⁶ *Interview with Paurino Thomson Mhlanga, Makokoba, 3 July 2002*

almost every effort by the BCC to initiate water development projects for the City of Bulawayo. This section examines the conflicts, as well as the political and economic basis of the struggles over water in Bulawayo.

The conflict and violence that followed independence in western Matabeleland in 1980 had an adverse impact on development programs in Matabeleland. Caught up in the escalating violence were the water resource development agendas of the Bulawayo City Council, which did not receive any recognition from the state. The marginalisation of the City of Bulawayo's water development projects by the ZANU-PF government was part of a systematic assault on the PF-ZAPU dominated City Council, which it viewed as an extension of the main opposition party. The first project to be caught up in this politicization of the water requirements of the City of Bulawayo, concerns the distribution of water from Insiza Dam to the City.

Since its construction in 1975, as a joint project between central government and the BCC in which the former held only 20,5% ownership and the latter, 79.5%, the water in the Insiza Dam lay idle owing to the lack of pipes to connect it to the Ncema Waterworks for purification and distribution. Despite the invitation of tenders for the supply of the pipes to link Lake Cunningham to Ncema Waterworks in October 1980, the delivery of pipes only began in February 1983 with completion of the project scheduled for October 1984.⁵⁷ However, the pipeline project was delayed because the BCC faced difficulties in obtaining foreign currency from the central government to pay for imported steel piping components, thus prolonging the completion of the project by more than one year.⁵⁸ This project could not be completed in time to help keep at bay the effects of the 1982-1983 drought that had afflicted Bulawayo in particular, and other parts of Zimbabwe in general.⁵⁹ By the end of 1984, the construction of the water pipeline from Ncema Dam had not begun because the GOZ failed to marshal the needed foreign currency resources for the augmentation scheme until 1991.⁶⁰

These delivery limitations coupled with the non-availability of water from Insiza Dam, and above all the delayed allocation of scarce foreign currency resources by the state speak to the notion of water scarcity, which like famine, is largely a man made phenomenon. The water shortage in 1982/1983 in Bulawayo was not just the result of a natural cycle of drought but also the result of the reluctance of the state to make investments into the water transmission systems for Bulawayo a top priority. Any debate about the political economy of water shortages, as well as their probability for causing conflict, must therefore, necessarily entail an interrogation of the role of the state in producing conditions that cause scarcity.

Given the political and economic climate that prevailed in 1983, there are several possible explanations for central government's reluctance to allocate foreign currency to Bulawayo City Council. On the political level, considering the longstanding political animosity between ZANU (PF) and PF-ZAPU, it is highly probable that the central government withheld foreign exchange in order to fix a Bulawayo City Council that it

⁵⁷ BMC Minutes: Box No. 2185, BCC Bye-Laws: Water Restrictions, 'Water Restrictions – Appeal By Mayor to Public to Reduce Consumption.' (No Date)

⁵⁸ *The Chronicle*, 2 February 1984

⁵⁹ BMC Minutes: Box No. 2185, Water Restrictions – Appeal by Mayor to Public to Reduce Consumption (no date).

⁶⁰ *The Financial Gazette*, 20 June 1991, and 1 August 1991.

perceived to be sympathetic to the former. ZAPU had been accused by the government of challenging the legitimacy of the state through unconventional means. At the economic level, the economic recession of 1982-1984 in Zimbabwe manifested through production bottlenecks, job losses, sharp reductions in government revenue resources, and a dwindling of its foreign currency reserves resulted in a severe inability to sustain imports of essential inputs.⁶¹ Because of limited foreign currency resources, it may well be that the GOZ did not define and categorize the Bulawayo City Council's water augmentation schemes as priorities as much as the local authority perceived them to be.

A third explanation is that at about the same time, the central government pronounced its preferences for rural rather than urban water resource development. In 1982, the GOZ unveiled a *Transitional National Development Plan* (TNDP), 1982-1985. This plan declared the central government's commitment to a centralized and controlled planning and management of the country's water resources. Among the range of goals embodied in the TNDP was the GOZ's aim to redress the social imbalances in the provision of water between rural and urban areas that had characterized the colonial political order:

The previous neglect in the provision of water supplies in the communal areas is to be corrected. The majority of people living in the communal areas have no adequate access to clean drinking water. Government will formulate a water development and management strategy. An integral part of the master plan for rural water supply under which existing domestic water supplies (including underground water in communal areas) will be surveyed, guidelines, priorities and strategies for the provision of water supplies established.⁶²

The central government was, therefore, less committed to water development issues in urban areas than in rural areas where it concentrated more on expanding popular access to water and sanitation services to the communal areas (formerly reserves). Communal areas were ZANU (PF)'s crucial constituency because it was the peasants who had rendered support to the guerillas, which proved influential in their winning the liberation struggle and ZANU (PF)'s ascendancy to power in 1980.⁶³ In a region in which political strife was rampant and ZAPU and ZANU were engaged in a diatribe over the causes of the dissident problem, it is plausible to suggest that the state used power and politics to withhold development resources, including water.

This very process of politicising and commodifying a scarce natural resource was precisely the same role that the central government, invoking the powers invested in it by the Water Act (1976), sought to arrogate to itself. The absence of a substantive and proactive action on the part of central government may be explained by the political climate during 1984 and 1985 that clouded relations between the central and local governments. Relations between the BCC and the GOZ became particularly frosty in 1984 when the local government elections were postponed from August to October on

⁶¹ X. M. Kadhani, 'The Economy: Issues, Problems and Prospects,' in I. Mandaza, (ed.) *Zimbabwe: The Political Economy of Transition, 1980-1986* (Senegal, Codesria Book Series, 1986), pp. 108-110

⁶² *Transitional National Development Plan: 1982/83-1984/85*, Vols. 1-2, pp. 61-62

⁶³ For more on this see, N. Kriger, *Zimbabwe's Guerrilla War. Peasant Voices*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992).

flippant charges of 'alleged irregularities in the registration of voters.'⁶⁴ Once again, PF-ZAPU won the municipal elections, much to the chagrin of the ZANU (PF) government. Even more telling than the municipal elections, the general elections in 1985 failed to improve ZANU (PF)'s slumbering fortunes in Matabeleland. PF-ZAPU which the government consistently harangued with military threats supposedly for aiding and abetting dissidents, overwhelmingly won for the second time in its stronghold in Matabeleland, as it had done in 1980. It won 15 parliamentary seats.⁶⁵ In this politically charged atmosphere, both political and economic factors influenced the lack of development for Bulawayo.

The combined effects of politically motivated urban neglect and the economic recession complicated by the shortage of foreign currency resources, and a severe drought saw the economy of Bulawayo progressively declining. In the 1983/1984 financial year total government involvement in municipal development amounted to 'a mere Z\$110,000.'⁶⁶ In 1984/1985, signs of decline in Bulawayo were vivid as the Mayor indicated:

What is of major concern to every resident of this city is its continuing economic decline. Almost helplessly the residents of this city watch as its industrial and commercial sectors, once the pride of many emerging countries, shrink. Bulawayo, once the home of the manufacturing sector and heavy industry, could soon be relegated to a second rate city unless a major rescue operation is mounted soon.⁶⁷

Implicating the government in the role it had played in contributing to this economic downturn, the Mayor appealed: 'It is hoped that the Government, in particular, will play a leading role through its public sector investment program and by a deliberate policy of directing and decentralizing industry.'⁶⁸ The lack of development was very much a product of the conflict and power play between the erstwhile political foes. It was not until the beginning of 1987 that the long-standing political rivalry began to recede and gave some space for the government to engage in an exercise of what was at best political expedience and at worst an unsustainable water solution for Bulawayo.

By the end of 1986 and from the beginning of 1987, the water supply situation in Bulawayo had become so critical that the City Council appealed to consumers to begin conserving water urgently in order to stretch the remaining reserves.⁶⁹ After making further appeals to the GOZ for new alternatives to alleviate the impending water shortages, despondent BCC officials were finally heard. For the first time in eight years, the Minister of Local Government publicly acknowledged in May 1987, that the Government was 'fully aware of Bulawayo's' problems, and the seriousness of the situation.⁷⁰ The Minister expressed the GOZ's changed stance on the water situation and

⁶⁴ BMC: Minute of Mayor (His Worship Councilor E. Mdlongwa) for the Year Ending July 31st, 1983/1984

⁶⁵ J. N. Moyo, *Voting for Democracy: A Study of Electoral Politics in Zimbabwe* (Harare, University of Zimbabwe Publications, 1992), p. 27.

⁶⁶ BMC: Minute of Mayor, 1983/1984, p. 6. In 1983/84, the Zimbabwe Exchange rate to the US\$ was US\$1 to about Z\$2

⁶⁷ BMC: Minute of Mayor (His Worship Councilor E. Mdlongwa) for the Year Ending 31 July, 1984/85, p. 5

⁶⁸ *ibid.*

⁶⁹ BMC: Minutes of the 2,157th Meeting of the Bulawayo City Council, 2 February 1987

⁷⁰ BMC: Minutes of a Special Meeting of the Bulawayo City Council, Friday, 22 May 1987

announced that he 'now agreed that priority should be given to the City of Bulawayo,' and promised to expedite investigations into the various projects that had been proposed by the BCC over the years.⁷¹

What explains this turn-around, and did Bulawayo's appeals for sustainable water supplies receive top priority, at all? The answer is to be found in the political developments regarding the on-going unity negotiations that began in 1985 between ZANU PF and PF-ZAPU culminating in the Unity Accord of 22 December 1987. During the political process leading to the Unity Accord, the open hostility that had characterized relations between ZANU and ZAPU during the period 1982 and 1987 began to gradually diminish as the GOZ started making promises to develop the neglected rural and urban areas of Matabeleland as a gesture of goodwill and demonstration of its seriousness to the merger of the two parties.⁷² The GOZ promised to give precedence to Bulawayo's water needs by immediately instituting a feasibility study of a few potential sites for an additional water source, and chose to construct a dam on the Mtshabezi (also known as Mwanakuridza) River to the south of Bulawayo. The Government's offer to construct Mtshabezi dam was made within the context of the on-going Unity talks between ZANU-PF and PF ZAPU, as a 'benevolent' gesture to underscore the seriousness of the merger of the two parties to a skeptical Bulawayo public that needed tangible proof to validate the legitimacy of the talks. Ironically, however, this project that the GOZ had flaunted as a metaphor for peace, became just another site of the on-going struggles over water and government supremacy in the region of Matabeleland. Central and local government interests and priorities clashed over the determination and meanings of what was appropriate for the City Council.

Conflict over the Construction of Mtshabezi Dam

In the continuing struggles over water control between the central state and the BCC, the dispute over the construction of the Mtshabezi Dam was a contestation over power and resource allocation. It was about who had the power to determine where dams were to be sited, how they were to be financed, and what size they ought to be. When the BCC rejected the construction of Mtshabezi, it was protesting against the politics of imposition and control for the BCC had not been consulted about the mechanics of laying out the dam i.e. the design, survey, and selection of dam sites. However, the struggle was also about showing that Unity or the merger between ZANU and ZAPU was not necessarily about giving up positions or powers over resource control and allocation. In fact, I would argue that the Unity Accord was about the renewed entrenchment of political power by the ruling party, manifested through the manner in which the GOZ imposed projects on the BCC on a 'take it, or leave it' basis, as was the case with the Mtshabezi Dam.

For the first time since independence, the GOZ responded favorably to the BCC's requests for the provision of a new water supply source. In October 1987, the Government offered to build a dam on the Mtshabezi River, south of the City, as it was, in its view, the least expensive supplementary source of water supply. Despite the appeal of the offer, the BCC rejected it for a number of reasons, not the least of which was the cost it was going to bear for its share of the construction. Under the Water Act of 1976,

⁷¹ *ibid.*

⁷² Ncube, 'The post-unity period', p. 307

the BCC was responsible for the construction of the water pipeline to deliver water to the Umzingwane Dam to boost its supply at a cost of Z\$35 million, while the state would only pay Z\$21, 5 million for the construction of the dam.⁷³ This, according to the BCC was an expensive operation, which could not quench the City's thirst for water in the long term. The City Council was also wary about overburdening the residents in the City. Apparently concerned about the reactions of its political and ratepayer constituency, the BCC was not prepared to risk its 'popularity' by attempting to hike the tariff to cover the project costs 'especially in the present political and economic circumstances':

Council's financial base is limited by the factor of willingness to pay by its consumers. Willingness to pay, for domestic consumers, depends on income, and for industrial and commercial users it depends on the ability to absorb or pass on the costs. At the end of the day the individual ratepayer bears the harshness of tariffs.⁷⁴

Second, the Council opposed the construction of the dam on the Mtshabezi River because it was to be constructed in the same Mzingwane catchment area thereby intensifying water inflow problems to an area that was already receiving low inflows, as the BCC Town Clerk argued:

From a practical point of view it is considered unlikely that this dam would receive inflow if Mzingwane dam was not already receiving inflow since these two are located in the same rainfall region.⁷⁵

The dam's limited capacity was also a source of contention between the two parties. Some councillors posited that the proposed dam with a 4% yield of 26,500 cubic meters per day was below the minimum specification of at least 68,500 cubic meters per day that the Council needed. Others, contended that the dam had a limited volume offering only two to three years growth in consumption at a time when the City was poised for an 'unprecedented industrial and commercial development,' expected after the conclusion of the Unity talks. Fourth, the Council was opposed to the construction of Mtshabezi dam because the local authority would have access to only a fraction of the dam. The yield of 20,800 cubic meters per day, which was to be Bulawayo's share of the water, could not sustain the existing and anticipated increased demand.⁷⁶

The BCC's proposed alternative to Mtshabezi represented a challenge to the power of the state, its ability to allocate scarce water resources, and the authority to define and dictate what was sufficient for the City Council. Council proposed that in light of the spiraling construction costs, the development of a major supply source such as Glass Block Dam by the year 1993, apart from being cheaper, would provide other social and financial benefits, such as fishing, boating, camping etc.: 'The bigger the dam the higher the potential for revenue collection as the large surface area and volume will

⁷³ BMC: Feasibility Study for Additional Water Supply for the City of Bulawayo, attached to the Minutes of the Report of the Water Rationing Action Committee, 6 July, 1987

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ *ibid.*

⁷⁶ *ibid.*

enhance recreational activities.⁷⁷ Furthermore, unlike Mtshabezi which had an expected short lifetime, the Council argued that Bulawayo would be guaranteed lasting supplies of water 'virtually into the next century.'⁷⁸ The Council viewed the construction of a huge dam, as it had done in the past, as a boon to the declining economy of the City:

By building a major dam like Glass Block the city will be able to provide additional water to industry and commerce and thus sustain local employment. Potential investors will also be assured that their water demand short and medium term would be met.⁷⁹

Given the benefits that would accrue to the City of Bulawayo, and in light of the 'political and institutional circumstances that limit the local authority's financial base,' the BCC resolved on two occasions to reject the construction of Mtshabezi (Mwanakuridza) Dam as a source for its water supply. It also demanded that a major source such as Glass Block Dam be built by 1993 to be available for use by 1995.⁸⁰

The GOZ did not take kindly to this challenge and simply went ahead in August 1991 to provide funds for the construction of the Mtshabezi Dam despite the BCC's objections.⁸¹ A directive from the Ministry of Energy, Water and Rural Development (MEWRD) urged the BCC to act with speed in light of the existing water scarcity conditions:

In view of the present drought and political situation with regard to water for Bulawayo, it would now be an auspicious time to prepare for the construction of the pipeline from Mtshabezi and so avoid the delays that were experienced on your present Ncema pipeline."⁸²

The City Council restated its previous objections to the dam relating to costs, location, size and yield of the dam. The BCC was left with the option to either take its share of the water from the dam or leave it for 'if Bulawayo turned it down, it would not be a white elephant and its yield would be beneficially used downstream.'⁸³ Instead, the BCC emphasized its preference for a much bigger dam which had to be built in the northern catchment area to reverse the concentration of development resources only in south Matabeleland as the Government sought to do with Mtshabezi. The Council proposed the Gwayi-Shangani dam site for Bulawayo's future water supply— a proposal that manifested conflict and contradictions in the agendas of the City Council and the central state leading to the water crisis in Bulawayo.⁸⁴ It was time for the MEWRD to go on the offensive against the proposal of the BCC, which it rejected for two main reasons.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ *ibid.*

⁸⁰ BMC: Minutes of the Special Joint Meeting of the Engineering Services Committee and the Water Rationing Action Committee, 4 January 1988. See also Town Clerk's Letter to the Deputy Director of the MEWRD, 17 December 1990

⁸¹ BMC: Minutes of the Future Water Supplies Sub-Committee, 4 November 1991.

⁸² BMC: Letter from the Secretary for the Ministry of Energy, Water Resources, and Development to the Bulawayo City Council, dated August 28th, 1991, cited in the Minutes of the Future Water Supplies Sub-Committee, 4 November 1991.

⁸³ BMC: Minutes of the Future Water Supplies Sub-Committee, 4 November 1991

⁸⁴ BMC Minutes: Report of the Engineering Services Committee Meeting, 8 January 1991

The BCC perceived the state's unrelenting intransigence on its position i.e. its preference of Glass Block and Mtshabezi River sites to the Council's Gwayi-Shangani dam as a vivid indication that it did not take 'Bulawayo's plight seriously.'⁸⁵ Councilors collectively agreed that the state's past record on matters related to the improvement of water facilities for the City of Bulawayo was sufficient evidence. Councilor Mdlongwa, for example, noted that, 'it had taken nearly ten years to process the Council's application for a duplicate pipeline.'⁸⁶ He argued that the consequences of not building a 'new, reliable dam' were that 'all development, including the new University, would grind to a halt.' Echoing Councilor Mdlongwa's sentiments, Councilor J. M. Ndlovu criticized the state's insensitivity and lack of knowledge about the profundity of the water situation in Bulawayo. Because of the progressive decrease in seasonal rainfall, Ndlovu argued that the situation necessitated that a large dam be built. Alderman Constandinos urged the Council to openly debate the matter in order to demonstrate to the Bulawayo residents that the BCC was not only concerned about the plight of the City but also that it was not scared of facing up to the Government 'when the survival of the city was at stake.'⁸⁷

Such candid criticism against the GOZ was a sign of changing times, as the political climate was becoming one of increasing tolerance than had been hitherto the case. In this contestation over dam-building the GOZ eventually managed, by virtue of its powers and control over financial and legal resources, to have Mtshabezi built and completed in 1995, years after the drought of 1991-92, thereby missing another chance to save the residents from the grip of a water crisis. The politics and struggles over water did not subside in spite of the resolution of the political conflict.

The Politics of Water during the Unity Period: 1987-1992

The signing of the Unity Accord between Zimbabwe's two major political parties – the ruling ZANU PF and PF ZAPU on December 22nd, 1987, as well as the amnesty granted to dissidents both created a climate of 'peace, tranquility, and stability.'⁸⁸ These developments were 'greatly welcomed by the residents of Bulawayo' and generated high expectations and renewed optimism for the future.⁸⁹ Residents in general hoped that the development that had eluded them at independence would finally be effected, as Alexander *et al*, have written: 'Many in the region expected to be rewarded for accepting Unity, and anticipated a program of reconstruction to compensate for the years of violence.'⁹⁰ This, however, was not to be as the old leadership in the pre-unity ZANU (PF) did not recognize the Unity as a justification for recompense, except only as far as the absorption of senior ZAPU leaders into central government was concerned.⁹¹ It would seem that ZANU (PF) believed that once the ZAPU leadership had been co-opted and given influential positions in government, they could then prevail upon their former followers not to dissent. Indeed, a few years later people in Bulawayo publicly stated that the Unity was just for the *chefs* of the two parties, as a local cab driver wryly summed it

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

⁸⁷ *ibid.*

⁸⁸ BCC: Report of the Director of Housing and Community Services, 1987/88, p. 2

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

⁹⁰ Alexander *et al*, *Violence and Memory*, p. 232.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

up: 'People here do not identify with ZANU (PF). Yes there was unity, but people say it was between Nkomo and Mugabe and they have not benefited anything.'⁹²

These ascriptions to the superficiality of the Unity Accord led to calls from the Bulawayo City Council officials, in 1989, for the Government to embark on development projects in Bulawayo that would stand as monuments to a 'practical demonstration of unity.'⁹³ Prime in their requests were the construction of a pipeline to bring the Zambezi River water to the drought-prone Matabeleland province, and the building of the second national university in Bulawayo. In 1989, the Government approved the latter and not the former.⁹⁴ The state had always used the question of prohibitive costs to build the pipeline as a pretext for not revamping and expanding Bulawayo's archaic water delivery system, but, as we shall see later in the ensuing discussion, there were other underlying reasons. Ironically it was lost on the GOZ that a mega project such as the construction of a university would put further stresses on the diminishing water resources of a City already reeling from the effects of the drought spell of 1986-87.

In this section, I discuss the effects the Unity Accord had on access, administration, and distribution of water, and its impact on new investments on water. I argue from the outset that Unity as well as the end of the dissident problem in the region of Matabeleland resulted in a significant rise in industrial development in Bulawayo after almost eight years of stagnation. The industrial buoyancy in the City was noticeable by the development or expansion of industries such as the Grain Marketing Board (GMB), the Dairy Marketing Board (DMB), and the Cold Storage Commission (CSC).⁹⁵ However, these few bullish industrial developments created more demands for water and exerted more pressure on inadequate water resources leading to the apt proclamation by the BCC that the significant issue in the post-unity era was that 'Bulawayo is thirsty.'⁹⁶ Naturally, therefore, this condition, in the BCC's scheme of things, necessitated the provision of an additional bulk water reservoir for sustaining the on-going industrial and economic growth in the City. What was needed, argued the BCC officials, was planning that anticipated future growth: 'Planning for the future dictates that a large dam should be built by 1993 to assure the people of Bulawayo, potential investors, etc. that their water demand, short and medium terms, would be met.'⁹⁷ Industrial growth reinvigorated the BCC's calls for action from the GOZ resulting in conflict and friction in the process.

As the euphoria of Unity dissipated, it became increasingly clear that the Government's commitment to finding a permanent solution to Bulawayo's water problems was not on the agenda of the post-Unity dispensation. There were increasing fears among Municipal officials that continuing water shortages could prematurely lead to the termination of building developments in the City. The Government's indifference to the water situation in Bulawayo was disconcerting to none other than the Mayor of Bulawayo, A. L. Ncube who observed:

⁹² 'Unity Benefits Leaders, Not the People,' SAPA-IPS, December 21, 1996.

www.anc.org.za/anc/newsbrief/1996/news1223

⁹³ *The Chronicle*, 16 February 1989

⁹⁴ *Masiye Pambili*, 5, (December 1989)

⁹⁵ BMC: Minutes of the Engineering Services Committee, 12 June 1990

⁹⁶ *ibid.* The water demands for these construction projects accounted for 16,000 cubic meters daily, which according to the BCC was incidentally about 74% of the expected yield from the Mtshabezi Dam, rendering it an unsuitable source of water.

⁹⁷ BMC: Minutes of the Engineering Services Committee, 12 June 1990

Bulawayo, more than ever seems poised for development and it would indeed be a shame if the developments currently taking place were to be halted due to what seems to be Government's inability to appreciate the gravity of the city's water problem.⁹⁸

The principal concern for the BCC was that with the upsurge in urban development, the City's consumption 'was now reaching capacity' and water reserves were not sufficient. Despite initial promises from the GOZ, no assistance was forthcoming. The BCC feared that it would be forced to impose water rationing 'even if there was water in the dam' if it was to manage the water shortage crisis that would arise.⁹⁹ As a result of this state of affairs, the Council argued that it was high time it exonerated itself from blame by alerting the public as to who was responsible should matters get to the point of rationing water: 'the public had to be informed that the Council was trying the best it could but that it was not getting any assistance from Government.'¹⁰⁰

A downside to the Unity between ZANU and ZAPU was that the cooptation of the ZAPU leadership into government positions did not necessarily bring about a change in the government's attitude towards the development of water resources for Bulawayo. Although Joshua M. Nkomo became a very senior minister in the President's Office, and was entrusted with the specific task of transforming Matabeleland North and South provinces, he did not pay much attention to Bulawayo's water needs and did not have much leeway in influencing the determination of lasting solutions to Bulawayo's water problems.¹⁰¹ He may have been a Bulawayan, first and foremost, but he was now part of the state that had withheld resources for the construction of dams during the high point of the political conflict, which ended in 1987. The same central state did not provide a single dam between 1987 and 1992. After Unity conflicts over the control of water between the central state and the local state continued as before. The ZANU-PF began to act as though it was a *de jure* one-party state, without fear of opposition. The City Council's attempts to appeal to Nkomo on 2 August 1989, to use his newly found political leverage to get their applications for water projects and foreign currency expedited and approved did not yield any positive outcome.¹⁰²

The reactions from the BCC councilors to these delays are symptomatic of the perceptions prevalent before the Unity Accord that there was a deliberate attempt by the Government to hold back the development of the City. For instance, Councilor Mbedzi was concerned about the delays from the Ministry of Local Government, and noted that seven years had now lapsed since the matter was first referred to the Ministry: 'This was retarding the development of the city.'¹⁰³ Councilor Lumsden voiced similar concerns that as Zimbabwe's second largest city, 'Bulawayo deserved better attention from Government.'¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ Masiye Pambili, 5, (December 1989)

⁹⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ T. Ranger, 'Matabeleland since Amnesty', *African Affairs*, 88, (1989), p. 167

¹⁰² *ibid.*

¹⁰³ BMC: Minutes of the 2220th Meeting of the Bulawayo City Council, 18 October 1989

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

General political unity did not resolve struggles over water between the state and the BCC. Instead, it seems that Unity rendered more power to the state to dictate to the City Council on matters pertaining to access to water for the City. As the water problems in Bulawayo continued unabated towards the end of the 1980, the state became increasingly involved in the day-to-day control over water management. This stance came about after the state's realization that the situation on the ground was reaching near-crisis proportions. At the same time, the state which had, in the past, scoffed at the idea of developing the water pipeline from the Zambezi River to Bulawayo swiftly became interested in, and eventually high-jacked the Matabeleland Zambezi Water Project (MZWP), a grassroots response to the recurring water crises in the City in 1991.¹⁰⁵ The water scheme was a highly politicized affair as the GOZ sought to whittle away what it perceived as a challenge to its power over the distribution of resources by municipal and business interests, working with residents in Bulawayo. The GOZ delayed the endorsement of the Zambezi Water scheme and asserted that the activities of the MZWP were threatening to usurp its authority.

Political posturing and infighting between the central government and the local authority slowed down the raising of international aid, and ultimately hindered the construction of the Matabeleland Zambezi Water pipeline. The Government detested the independent stance that the MZWP displayed particularly where the raising of funds and commissioning of feasibility studies was concerned. From its inception, the GOZ was poised to circumscribe the power and influence of the MZWP for as long as it purportedly remained a non-political pressure group.¹⁰⁶

Towards the end of 1991 and the beginning of January 1992, there were clear signs that the City was in the throes of a water crisis. Numerous building plans that had been approved in 1990, exceeding Z\$65 million (US\$16 million) such as serviced stands for residential, commercial and industrial purposes were suspended because of their pressure on water resources.¹⁰⁷ By June 1992, reports on dam-levels were bleak. Three dams, out of five, had 'any abstractable water left'.¹⁰⁸ The Council had lost use of the Umzingwane and Upper Ncema Dams due to excessive depletion. Worse still, in December 1992 water levels in dams were down to less than 5% and the water available for consumption would only last for forty days. However, rainfall during that month provided some temporary respite to the City, and stretched available supply by about nine months.¹⁰⁹

Since 1992, more droughts have continued to recur in the City of Bulawayo and no long-term solution has been provided by the state. Bulawayo's quest for sustainable water supplies continues to be haunted by the specter of past politics. The image of Bulawayo as a recalcitrant city has not yet been deleted from the minds of central state officials. ZANU PF's loss of Bulawayo to the new opposition party, the Movement for Multiparty Democracy (MDC), in the 2000 parliamentary elections and the 2001

¹⁰⁵ BMC: Minutes of the Engineering Services Committee Meeting, 5 December 1989

¹⁰⁶ For a fuller discussion on the genesis of this grassroots initiative and how it was seized by the state, see Chapter 7 in Musemwa, 'Struggles over water'.

¹⁰⁷ BMC: Minutes of the 2259th Meeting of the Bulawayo City Council, 19 June 1991

¹⁰⁸ BMC Minutes: Minutes of the Future Water Supplies and Water Action Committee, 12 October 1992

¹⁰⁹ E. L. Nel and B. B Berry, "'Operation Pipeline' – Bulawayo's Search for Water", p. 314

municipal elections has revived images of the dissident city.¹¹⁰ ZANU (PF)'s loss of this political constituency to the MDC has led to fears among the residents in Makokoba Township of a recurrence of the politics of water and that they may never be a permanent solution to the water woes of the City. Since 1991 when the government-created MZWPT took over the management, fundraising, and implementation of the MZWP, a litany of promises were made about the date on which it was going to begin, as Sainot Sithole of Makokoba remarked:

Up until now, we are still at square one. We're told they are coming. They are starting next week. They have been starting next week for the last 4 or 5 years. We've been hearing the consultants are here about a year ago there were some rituals undertaken at Gwaai-Shangani confluence where the dam is being proposed. Rituals took place the people from the area went there, gathered there but up until now nothing has happened.¹¹¹

For some residents, the MZWP is as good as dead a project which politicians resuscitate only at election time in the hope of winning votes in the City. Complaining about the use of the MZWP for purposes of political expediency, Simela opined:

For some unknown reason, this project has always been faltering. It is only talked about towards elections, when moving towards elections – "Oh! Matabeleland Water Project we've got so much money set aside for you. Once elections are over, it dies a natural death. So you see, they're now using it for political gains and once they gain what they've got, they forget. So we're hoping when you, Mucha, come to power, when you are the President, you implement this project (*joke*).¹¹²

Popular concerns about the GOZ's lack of political commitment opened up a huge public debate in Bulawayo particularly in 1993 as to why the state has systematically continued to deprive Bulawayo of resources for the City's water development. The prospects for the implementation of the MZWP have become even more remote following the unexpected victory of the MDC in both parliamentary elections (2000) and municipal elections (2001).¹¹³

Conclusion:

Although, Zimbabwe's independence in 1980 theoretically ended restrictive and racialized access to water for the poor residents of Makokoba Township other townships in particular, and Bulawayo in general, it did not bring about increased water security. Water crises in the City of Bulawayo persisted on a regular basis, first because of natural ecological conditions, and secondly, because the post-independence state in Zimbabwe

¹¹⁰ The MDC won all the urban parliamentary seats, and almost all the municipal wards in the 2001 elections that saw a Mayor from the opposition party being appointed as head of the Municipality.

¹¹¹ Interview with Sainot Munapo Sithole, Makokoba, July 6th, 2002

¹¹² Interview with Edward Simela, BURA, Bulawayo, June 27th, 2002

¹¹³ P. Alexander, 'Zimbabwean Workers, the MDC and the 2000 Election,' *Review of African Political Economy*, 85, pp. 385-406. The MDC won elections successfully in the three most populous urban areas (Harare, Bulawayo, and Chitungwiza), and all the completely urbanized constituencies of Zimbabwe.

was locked in incessant struggles with the Bulawayo City Council over water control from 1980 to 1992. As these struggles evolved over time they led to severe man-made water scarcities, which in turn extended and exacerbated the impact of the natural recurring water crises on the lives of the urban poor of Makokoba and other townships.¹¹⁴ The first two water crises in 1982/84 and 1986/87 recurred concurrently with the outbreak of a post-colonial conflict initiated on one hand, by a group of "dissidents" accused by the central government of having linkages with ZAPU, and sought to overthrow a "legitimately" elected Government. In response, the ZANU-PF Government sent the "notorious" Fifth Brigade to quash the dissidents. This political and military conflict had far-reaching consequences for the City of Bulawayo between 1982 and 1987.

First, the central government began to perceive the province of Matabeleland, which was the theater of this conflict, as a 'recalcitrant' region, which had to be 'disciplined' and 'punished' to emasculate its real and imagined threat to the new social order. Water became the chief political weapon that the central state employed to effect this discipline on Bulawayo, in particular, and Matabeleland in general. The central state used various mechanisms to ensure that the Bulawayo City Council's requests for additional sources of water did not materialize. To begin with, the state simply used its power to allocate resources, especially scarce foreign currency by withholding or taking its time to approve any form of funding for the BCC water development projects. The Insiza Dam, constructed in 1975, continued to lie idle in the post-independence era because of the lack of foreign currency to procure supply pipes to link Lake Cunningham to Ncema Waterworks. Despite securing tenders in 1980, the pipes only started arriving in 1983, and then stopped again owing to foreign currency shortages. The project could not be finished in time to counteract the impact of the 1982-1983.

Second, the state used bureaucratic constraints, as well as political and administrative controls as part of its agenda to 'discipline' the Bulawayo City Council. Government departments such as the Ministries of Water, and Local Government made interventions and decisions that often shot down the proposals of the BCC concerning the water position.

Third, to control the BCC's claims for access to water, the central state invoked the Water Act of 1976 which empowered it to build and own all future major storage works in the country, as well as dams intended for water supply to the cities. The state often imposed on the City Council its own dam building proposals that were not in line with established municipal policy of long term planning of future projects. The Government's offer to build the Mtshabezi dam was not only a usurpation of the privilege of proposing the site, surveying, layout, and design of the dam, but a challenge to its knowledge systems about dams produced over time especially in the colonial era. The result of these struggles over which institution had the power to manage and control water resources was that not a single dam was ever built between 1982 and 1987. Furthermore, the Unity exercise had very superficial positive implications for the water development needs of Bulawayo for, between 1987 and 1992, not a single dam was provided as a 'practical demonstration of unity' despite compelling evidence that Bulawayo's recurring water crises required a sustained long term planning for additional water sources. Political unity, I have argued, did not resolve the persistent struggles over

¹¹⁴ The social consequences of water scarcity on these residents, is the subject of Chapter 7 in Musemwa, 'Struggles over water.'

water between the state and the BCC. Instead, unity had the effect of enhancing the powers of the state as well as its legitimacy to exercise its control over future decisions on the BCC's access to water. As the water crisis intensified in 1991 and 1992 the state directed the BCC to submit all decisions with regards to water issues and emergencies before implementing them, thus effectively disempowering the BCC over water matters in an area it had always regarded as its jurisdiction.