Situating Morality in the Housing Debate in Harare: Case of Matapi Hostels

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Much of the bad manifestations in urban development [in Africa] are flowers and fruits of the bad policy seeds planted and developed in history [3].

ABSTRACT: *The urban housing question in Zimbabwe has been debated for a long time yet without paying adequate attention to the plight of the life experienced by hostel dwellers in the former 'bachelor' hostels. These, in Mbare, Harare, now accommodate thousands of families. Such ambivalence to discourse has denied the inhabitants stake in a number of social well-being aspects, morality included. Morality emanates largely from both religious and cultural footings. It must be noted that almost three decades of such gendered-but-loose living has exposed these poor urban dwellers to serious challenges, not only moral but health, access to credit, and related socio-economic plights. The habitation has been nothing but a heinous experience. Yet, the hostellers have become so sucked up in the abnormality that to them it has become the norm. Most of the children have never experienced life except this kind. The question is: Why has it happened in this world where there is great sermonization about adequate housing, sustainable development, human rights and upright living? Matapi - like most old hostels in Mbare - harbours several hundreds of thousands of households living in complete disjunction of the postulations of the gospel preachers, human rights advocates and cultural custodians of the time. The rampancy of moral decadence and consequential demise of the people-hood of the dwellers is a total headache to any serious social scientist. The paper is a short treatise to describe, explain and critique the living conditions in the hostels. It is largely qualitative with very little inclination to quantitative data.*

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3 Chirisa, 2008

OVERVIEW OF THE ACCOMODATION CRISIS IN ZIMBABWE

Housing and accommodation challenges in Zimbabwe emerged in full force about three decades ago [4]. They are a direct product of the policy framework attainment of the country's independence. Before independence in 1980, colonialist policies were muscularly intolerant to surfeit and excess African populations in urban centres [5]. Africans were left with only two mutually-exclusive options, either to be in employment to qualify to be in the urban centres but on a semi-permanent basis, or to be in the rural areas (called 'reserves' or 'tribal trust land' (TTLs)) for life. In addition, it must be noted that the majority of women were found outside the bracket of those who qualified to be in the towns [6]. Consequently, the city was a prerogative of the whites and very few African men. As for the African females, the city was for those but fewest who chanced to get employment as housemaids and nannies (in the lower bracket) or those who got places to train in urban hospitals as nurses or clerks (in the higher bracket). It must, as well, be stressed that the colonial Afro-insensitive laws ascertained that the African was so apron-tied to the rural communal tribal land that he or she could never voice for equal rights to get to parity with whites[7[. Though these policies and regulations were that repellent, oppressive and inhibiting, meanwhile irrationally skewed towards European interests, they assisted much to discourage 'invasion of the city' by Africans for a good number of years and decades. However, in the 1970s, with the growing pressure in the rural areas of the war for independence (1966 to 1979), rural populations sneaked into the urban zones because the space promised peace, security and prosperity. This trickling into urban space, at that time (especially the mid- and late 1970s) was at a very petite rate. It was not hurried yet indicative of the un-inhabitability of the TTLs and the eye-catching glamour of the city [8]. The push factors of the rural areas, levelled against the seemingly good pull factors of the city, produced a miasmic atmosphere for the poor migrants. Until independence, the dual economy between whites and blacks made it conspicuously noticeable that the racial divide was not along social lines but also physical for the European areas were too unreachably better than the African residential areas [9].

OPENING OF THE FLOODGATES: AN USHERING IN OF DISASTER

The coming of the country's independence was a point to unfold hitherto unknown realities. The people who had formerly not known freedom now got it in its 'abundance'. The new

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4 Cf. Mubvami, n.d.; Hall, n.d.
5 Chirisa and Munzwa, 2008)
6 Very few women came to town to find work as domestic servants for the whites.
7 Mubvami, n.d.
8 Cf. Patel and Adams,1981
9 Cormack, 1983

government in power was munificent and bighearted enough to guarantee that the people reap the fruits of the promises it had made, albeit, wartime propaganda. Walls that once divided between the white area and the African area (the 1930 Land Apportionment Act replaced by the 1969 Land Tenure Act; the 1951 Land Husbandry Act; the vagrancy and pass laws) were, in a way, broken down. Floodgates were opened. That glimpsed golden future time of the promise became a close habitable reality. Milk and honey became drinkable veracities in the likeliest of possibility. It was now not so much a matter of desire but having the means (commensurate fares for transport and wielding the highest of hopes for the city) to take anyone to the once sacrosanct and predominantly white-only city. In this vein, there grew a huge influx of blacks in the urban areas. The few jobs in the city got jam-packed [10]. The few houses in the black townships got fully occupied; in effect, there developed a preponderance of the "lodger"population than had been witnessed before in these areas.

The city, formerly predominantly for African men, became city for the family (as women and children became more accommodated) – what can be termed the familisation of urban centres in Zimbabwe. Added to that, the reconciliation policy adopted by the new government also tolerated the beauty of multi-racial and multi-ethnic mix than more than in the days of colonial mastery and hegemony. What a 'melting pot position' cities and towns were placed in! It must be noted that the gendering and familisation of the city also came with their own challenges. Personal interactions increased at a more tremendous rate relative to colonial days. These interactions, one can observe, were happening not in the most spacious of places but in the over-urbanising black townships. Harare, for instance was a city created but for a small population [11]. That inelasticity implied that any growth would exert untold pressure on the existing resources hence a float above the carrying capacity of the city. It logically follows that crime (thefts, mugging, larceny, prostitution, to mention these few) was to grow as an opportunity cost of employment; that over crowdedness with its indicators (slum dwelling, squatter developments and backyard developments) would make its place in lieu of conventional housing [12]. By way of proxy indicatorism one can say that the happening of these inhuman activities in the urban territory of Zimbabwe are a reflection of the deep decadence of morals in the persons harboured in it.

It is unfortunate that a few years into Zimbabwe's black independence the above-stated scenario got into picture – a reflection of the frustrating city. During the same time HIV and AIDS emerged on the horizon. In those 1980s and early 1990s, the majority was caught unawares by this disease (refer to Figure 1a [13]. The number of people, predominantly the able-bodied

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10 This has given way to the rise and expansion of the informal city as people have had to create self-employment by informal sector means.
11 Zinyama, Cumming and Tevera, eds. 1983
12 Cormack, 1983
13 adapted from MOHCW and NAC, 2004

young and middle-aged men and women (Figure 1b [14], who got decimated by the deadly pandemic, grew by day. It is gloomy to learn that during this time (when prostitution and drug abuse) grew that rife, stigmatization of victims and secretisation of HIV and AIDS were also very widespread. As such many died; many were anathematized, ostracized and left to 'bear the brunt of their sexual sins.' But innocent children died too. Yet, promiscuity continued. There was little, if any, knowledge about ante-retroviral (ARV) drugs, only rumours of some traditional healer here or there who had discovered the 'medicine' – the African potato, 'let the infected sleep with a newly born baby', 'let them sleep with their sister of broth', to mention but a few. What a false gospel entrenched in the cesspools of misery, selfishness, debauchery, and incest!

One can blame moralists for the cost of lives that continued unabated because a 'spade was never called a spade'. Yet, it is also blameworthy on the housing conditions to which the majority of African urban dwellers were subjected to[15]. The once sparsely distributed rural dwellers were now in concentrated enclaves of which hostels and flats, as well as the mushrooming backyards shacks, were the biggest types [16]. The former rural free, in terms of human interactions, were now caged with increased informal interactions, especially of opposite sexes. This is not to limit morals to sexuality alone or to attribute the astronomical rise of AIDS cases to it only, but, to try and narrate how the morality problematique evolved and the epiphenomenal effects it might have brought to the social fabric we now have in urban Zimbabwe. As already alluded, the problem is largely embedded in the housing problem [17].
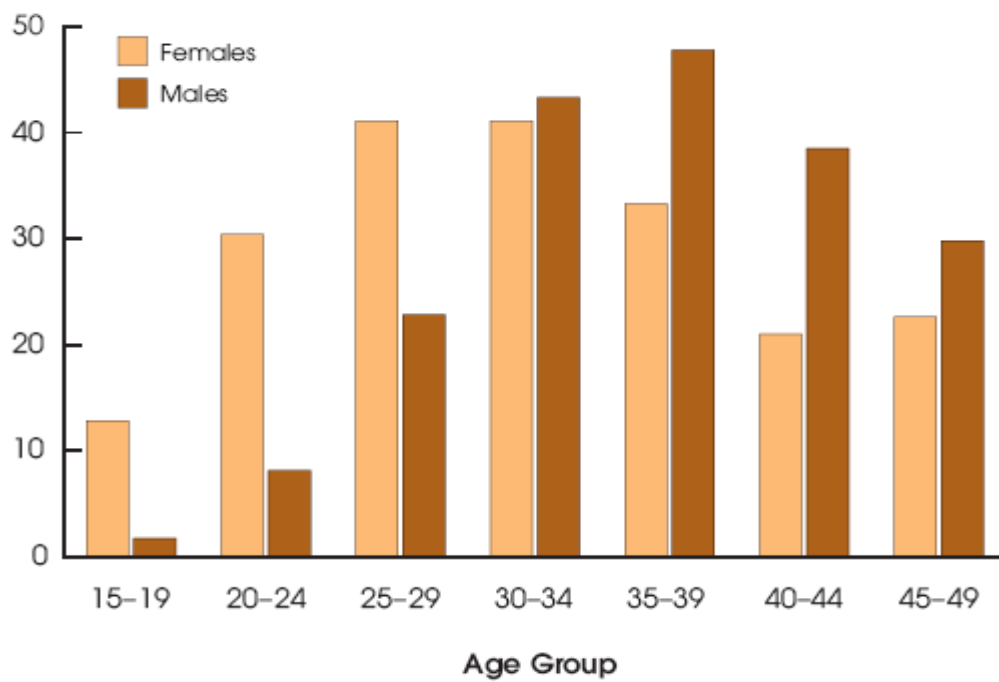

Figure 1a: Estimated HIV Prevalence, Ages 15–49, 1983–2003

Source: AIDS Impact Model, 2003.

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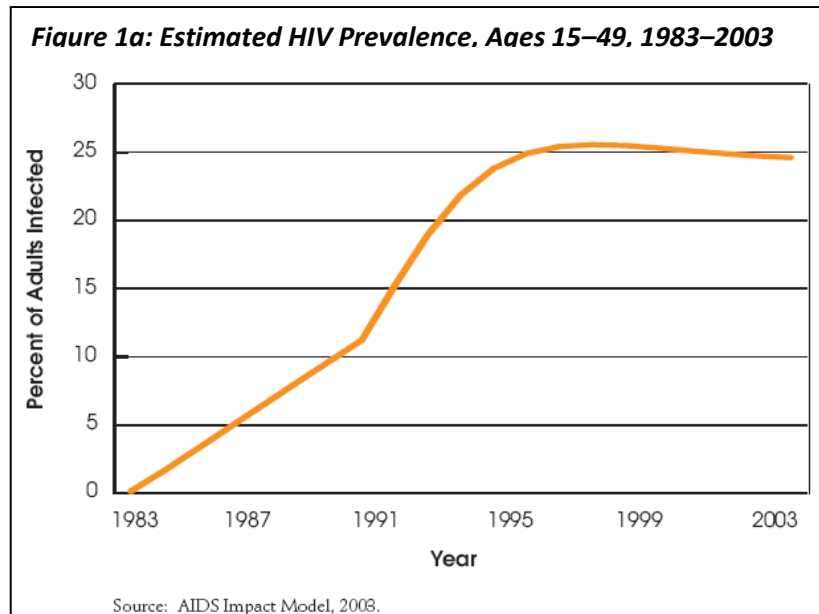
14 ibid.
15 Cf. Kamete, 2006
16 Tevera and Chimhowu, 2000
17 Kamete (2006), Chirisa and Munzwa, 2008

Figure 1b: Age-Sex Distribution of Infected Persons 15 to 49, 2003

Source: AIDS Impact Model, 2003.

The following paragraphs will focus on the case of Matapi Hostels in Mbare in light of this discourse. Regarding the causal links of the morality problematique, many explanations are possible; like, the increase of urban interactions in confined urban space, the increase in the disposable income of some households with the father of the house keeping much to himself and then hiring out lovers (including commercial sex workers, pimping school girls, and the like), and the prevalence of many idle housewives (what else could they do in the absence of their working husbands), to name these few. But, one can see that these issues revolve around the home, which element is a housing issue. Some may not see how the two issues (housing and morals) directly interlink and downplay the debate as a 'hoof-ear' talk but the implications to society are large. They define the sustainability of urban centres and the subsequent health status of the population concerned [18]. A city and human habitat that ignores the civic debate of life stands on sandy ground and it will not withstand stormy times [19]. Morality is the foundation of the civility.

There are a number of definitions to the word 'morality' from which some 'measurement' can be derived [20]. One definition is morality as responsibility. This involves acting in accordance with other people's concerns, rights and expectations. That means not only refraining from doing things that cause harm to others, but also actively pursuing their welfare – it implies the imperative to do as we say and believe. In light of this definition one can see residents expressing mercy upon each other hence accommodating them 'in their lives' and at a fee. This is an aspect of community reciprocity and comradeship. The local authority, the City of Harare, as the property owner has continued to accommodate these home-hungry in its hostels. It has done so as a subsidiary and arm of government. But such benevolence has failed to address the issue of cultural and religious morality so that children are brought up in a culturally and religiously acceptable environment. Even the elderly and religious sections have taken it as the norm.

The next definition is morality as concern for others [21]. This involves understanding how others experience a loss. It compels avoidance of imposition of a loss on another. This definition is in congruence with the first definition. It explains what happens in time of adversity, for example how households accommodated each other during the time of Operation Murambatsvina, and the aftermath. One observes how somebody must choose to be irrational and just decide to stay with others at whatever cost. In this regard to be humane and irrational are synonymous. The third definition is morality as reason [22]. They argue that in this aspect morals should be justifiable according to an objective set of criteria. Next, morality is viewed as

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18 Nsiah-Gyabaah Kwasi, n.d.
19 Cf. Davidson, 2007
20 Robinson and Yeh, 2007
21 ibid.
22 ibid.

consistency whereby analogous cases are treated similarly without double standards [23]. Finally morality is taken to mean universality [24]. This means that the same conditions must be applied to all concerned, a kind of social justice when dealing with matters affecting community. These definitions are applied variously according to the situation at hand.

Matapi stands out as a 'wounded' ground due to the accommodation crisis in urbanity [25]. It is not the only place but one exhibiting challenges of social break up due to effects of change in government policy, as well as, individual choices of the inhabitants. Matapi is a Shona term for a type of veld mice found near wet areas (dambos). The term is in plural form. The blocks of flats are found on the banks of Mukuvisi River. The waters of the river are heavily polluted but residents have - in the recent years - embarked on serious stream bank cultivation. They grow all sorts of crops and vegetables including maize, sugarcane, potatoes, tomatoes, cabbages and onions hence greening the banks throughout the year. The parcelisation of this land is contrary to statues and regulations. The laws stipulate that no activity of cultivation should take place for some thirty metres from the river. De facto, this is breached resulting in a number of environmental hazards. Flooding is one of the challenges in the rain season. Tall grasses also grow and they normally go uncut for more than six months. It is not unusual to pick corpses of people who have been killed by muggers. Mbare, of which Matapi is a segment, is labelled as a place of robbers, thieves, muggers, prostitutes, con-artists, and all kinds of evil. The place is also known to harbour all types of ethnic groups especially those from Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe. Such a picture gives a strong impression of cultural mixigenation and susceptibility to high morals erosion.

THE CASE OF MATAPI HOSTELS IN MBARE: THE PLIGHT AND THE BLIGHT

Matapi flats are a creation of the colonial local government policy of having unmarried males who came to the city in search of employment be housed. The hostels were sister developments to other hostels constructed in Mbare like Matererini, Mbare, Nenyere (Magaba) and Shawasha hostels. Each 'bachelor' was allocated one room. Toilets, bath and kitchen were designed for communal use. Illegality or informality in habitation occurs when a house designed for occupation by a single family ends up in usage by more than that intended use. After, independence the issue of lodger accommodation has increased in the wider cityscape of Harare, let alone Matapi [26].

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23 ibid.
24 ibid.
25 Cf. Mubvami, n.d.
26 Regional, Town and Country Planning Act, 1976, revised 1996

Matapi hostels comprise fourteen blocks of three storey floors [27]. The average number of rooms in each floor is seventy, implying that each block constitutes about two hundred and ten rooms, hence the total number of habitable rooms in the area is about two thousand nine hundred and forty. However in some blocks the ground floor was shared between accommodation rooms and shops, beer halls and gyms. This is typical of Block 1, 7 and 5, respectively. However due to viability challenges to these ventures, there have been conversions of use with these spaces being further partitioned for housing the excess population. Important to note is how the population in Matapi hostels has surged from a static population size of about three thousand males in 1980 to a fluctuating population of between twenty four thousand and thirty thousand (a mixture of men, women and children). This is a case of outright overpopulation [28]. Needless to say are the issues of vandalism of the housing blocks such that the majority no longer have shower tapes. Residents believe that it has been thieves who have stolen these items only to sell them in the nearby markets like the former Siyaso, in Magaba. Toilets are messy and half the time blocked. The kitchens have, as well been partitioned to house more people. The squalor and compromised environments [29] are a health and moral hazard. What the general habitat looks like is of little doubt the greater reflection of what the morals are like. The obsolescence of the building is a direct outcome of the abuse of space by residence and the failure by the local authority (since its rented accommodation) to maintain the hostels (cf. Plate 1-9).

It should be noted that the habitat of Matapi has never been largely marred by the challenge of informal settlements (though an infinitesimal number of households can up to date be observed on the banks of Mukuvisi River, which flows by the place). In other words, illegal occupations of the space outside hostels, has never been endemic to the settlement but that of cohabitation and multi-habitation [30]. But the problem of illegal dumping also threatens the health of the hostel dwellers. Children are the most vulnerable. Sometimes they practice scavenging of items thrown away by different households. The question is, what kind of items are usually these? Do the children have the discretion to discriminate between dangerous and 'worth' items. Some of the dangerous materials include both used and unused condoms, opened tin cans and the like. Thanks that dangerous weapons like hand grenades and land mines are rare in Zimbabwe at large. This is largely to describe outdoor experiences of Matapi. Not only that, it is also widely thought that the majority of street children found in central business district of Harare, emanate from such places as Mbare and Epworth, where the slum conditions impel children to seek alternative better livelihood sources in the 'bright lights areas'. Yet, in those places they engage in harmful activities like drug abuse, prostitution, bag snatching and pick-pocketing [31]. The indoor living is tormenting to the inhabitants. Some kind of lodging arrangements subsist in the

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27 Mangombe, 2005
28 Chirisa, 2008
29 Cf. Nsiah-Gyabaah Kwasi, n.d.
30 Cohabitation and multi-habitation refer to the staying together of one or more households in the same room or prime rooms on an informal (if not illegal) basis
31 UMP, 2000

hostels. Conventionally, this is some form of illegal tenancy. A lodger is usually a person who gets accommodated in a single family housing arrangement and lives as a separate household [32]. He or she pays rent to the house owner or head-tenant in custodianship of the residence premises. The lodger has to live within the stipulations and conditionalities [33] that he or she receives from the owner of the house or room or the head-tenant/responsible tenant.

PLATES 1-9: The State of Matapi Habitat, Hostel Buildings and Lifestyle of the Dwellers

PLATE 1. An informal dumpsite in Matapi area. A child is seen sitting on the dump.	PLATE 2. A child at the entrance of one of the hostel blocks. The hostel is in a messy state.	PLATE 3. Hostel dwellers use washing lines in commonality. Cases of stolen clothes are many.
PLATE 4. Another dumpsite just behind hostel block. The ablution area of the block is the worst vandalized. The responsible authorities (City of Harare) has cited financial and fuel problems for failure to discharge the waste collection service.	PLATE 5. Children play on the dumpsite. See satellite antennae hanging on the walls. The dwellers may be poor in other respects but they thrive to be information-rich. But what is also the challenge of the media	PLATE 6. A building in a worst state of deterioration. As residents share the communal ablutions, they quarrel, gossip, preach the gospel one to another and share the latest news. What an admixture of activity and involvement!

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32 With own eating and sleeping arrangements

33 Some of the common sanctions include: when rent payment must be made; who may visit the lodger; duration the visitor may stay; time the gate or main door should be closed; and, indoor behavior of the lodger including the volume to which he or she may raise his or her radio or television. This letting of rooms to lodgers works better in detached and semi-detached houses with more than four rooms but this has been extended to hostels like Matapi which former 'bachelors' have brought their families – familisation of the single-occupant roomed hostels.

| PLATE 7: See the parked cars and the road - full of potholes with water. | PLATE 8. A child-friendly environment? | PLATE 9. Compare with Plate 3. |

In the years of economic reforms, period of Economic Structural Adjustment Programme – ESAP (1991-1995) [34] households faced increasing costs of living. This forced many households to find alternative sources of income as many breadwinners were retrenched [35]. One coping strategy adopted by residents in the hostels was to commoditize the small space of their rooms in return for rent as income [36]. As economic hardships have increased from the 1990s, commoditization of rooms and increased 'lodger' recruitments has been noted. This has also been done for mercy and sympathy, especially for victims of Operation Murambatsvina. But, the squeezing of people within a small space and above its carrying capacity had brought about a serious damage to the environments (in the exterior) and morals (in the internal fabric of community being).

The government's ambitious and ill-focused campaign in 2005, for restoring urban Zimbabwe to the heydays of aesthetically pleasing 'planned' cities and towns was, to a great extent, a misfired bullet. The crusade which was code-named Operation Restore Order or Operation Murambatsvina [37] (see map, Figure 2), left many urbanites homeless. It was targeted at 'unsanctioned' housing developments, slums and informal micro-enterprises. The subsequent campaign effort, after the 'clean up' crusade, was termed Operation Garikayi/Hlalani Kuhle, meaning 'live well' and it aimed at relocating the adversely affected populations by the earlier campaign (Operation Murambatsvina) into public built houses mainly constructed in identified peri-urban areas.

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34 GoZ,1991a
35 GoZ, 1991b
36 Mangombe, 2005
37 Tibaijuka, 2005

Figure 2: Map of Zimbabwe showing areas that were affected by Operation Murambatsvina

Only very few houses were built relative to the now increased homeless population. Those who could not find the government-constructed accommodation, and could not go back rural (for opportunistic or ethnic reasons), found themselves either streaming to low-density residential areas (like Avondale, Malbereign, Greendale, Marlborough, Mount Pleasant, Waterfalls) to occupy former white servants quarters' room (rented accommodation) or 'finding a place to lay their heads' in the same high density residential areas they had been staying in like Mbare, Highfield, Glen Norah, Mufakose, Kambuzuma and Budiriro (refer to map, Figure 3).

Those who remained in Matapi Hostels, as in any other places of the city, had no other options but to 'squeeze in the small room space available. The outcome was such that most rooms now accommodated between eight and ten occupants (and an average of three households, a household being a group of persons who partake from the same pot and have collective sleeping arrangements). The post-Murambatsvina accommodation arrangement in the hostels

has been worse than ever before, hence the situation constitutes a housing crisis[38]. On the whole, it is morals which have been the worst shredded due to this negative development.

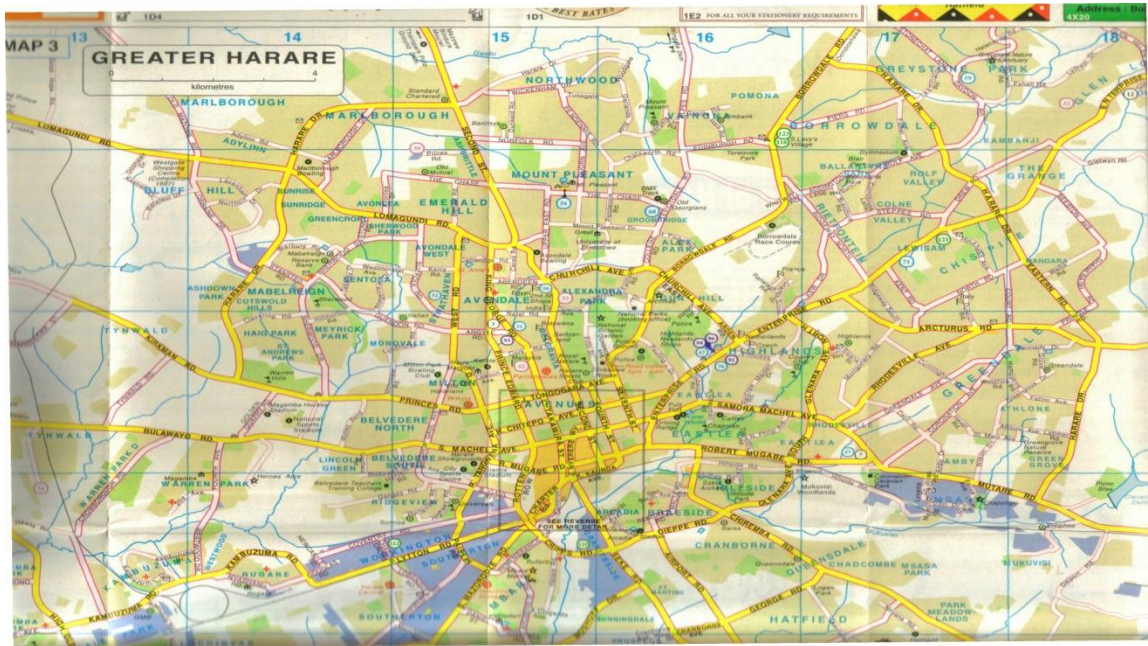*Figure 3: Map of Harare showing the different residential zones*

Table 1 shows a summary matrix of objectively defined morals according to Matapi residents. It shows the disjunction, the de jure and the de facto arrangements. As can be noted, the negatives outweigh the positives. This shows how the principles of morality are difficult to follow and adhere to, especially where a motley of people of different beliefs, backgrounds and standing are forced, by circumstances beyond their control, to stay together.

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38 The households which found refuge in LDRAs should be better off, at least morally than those who remained in the hostels, however they now face the greater challenge of raising rent in foreign currency (with a room being charged between fifty South African rand and three hundred rand). If the pressure continues to mount the chances of these households coming back to high density areas or proceeding to rural areas are very high. In effect, it is generally now agreeable that life in the rural areas (or in the rural-urban fringe) has become better, cheaper and more moral than that offered by the town. Perhaps history is just repeating itself in Zimbabwe so much so that the population is turning homo ruralis. From an intentionalist point of view this is by no means by choice or design but by the pressure exerted by the vagaries of urban living, particularly housing challenges. As pressure mounts humankind groans, meditates, devises and optimizes.

Table 1: A summary matrix of objectively -defined morals according to Matapi residents.

Criterion for morality (de jure arrangement)	What is on the ground? (de facto arrangement)
• Residents should greet each other when they meet each other in the corridors, the bath, and the streets. Elders should set a good example so that the youth may learn and do the same.	• Greetings one another is confined to those who are known to each other. • Sometimes there are more quarrels than harmony in the communal places. • Not all elders are good examples to follow in conduct. Some are known for bad practices including drunkenness and witchcraft.
• Residents should not practice promiscuity and adulterous behaviour.	• The youth and able-bodied are the worst in terms of promiscuity. • 'Kubika mapoto' which is having some spare 'housewife is commoner than rare. A new version to this is the 'small house' [arrangement. This is a new form of kubika mapoto, whereby a husband has an informal conjugal arrangement with a woman or many and may stay for weeks or months to the home of the formal marriage. Unlike the 'kubika mapoto' arrangement, the extra-marital relationships are usually intra-urban or inter-urban. This is tantamount to 'conventionally known' prostitution. We can call it prostitution in close proximity with home. The chief reason cited for the engagement is increased affluence or too many resources (normally cash, groceries and other flash commodities like cars) to cater for two or more houses with sexism as the battering price.
• Residents should shun stealing and robbery and try to leave by means of own sweat	• Some households thrive on stealing, mugging and larceny. They may avoid practising it within Matapi but they are seen doing these malpractices in the CBD, or other places of the city – good within community but bad elsewhere.
• Residents should shun use of vulgar and obscene language.	• Vulgar language is very common in the corridors and communal areas. Most walls of the communal areas are scribbled with words of obscenity. • Pornography is rampant.
• Children should respect elders	• The majority do not even respect their parents how much more with strangers?
• Everyone is entitled to practice his or her self chosen religion	• This happens to a great extent.
• Residents should be peaceful	• This is not always true of the place. Violence intensifies in election times as well as public holidays.
• Residents must keep public toilets and baths clean	• This is a mammoth task. These places are used by a multiplicity of actors – children, adults and elders. Control and monitoring are not easy.
• Grievances must be brought to the hostels' tribunals so that no one takes the law into his or her own hands.	• This is sometimes done. Some of the cases are not civil in nature (but criminal) and they are handled by the police.
Other: • Residents should not dump garbage everywhere. • Children should not scavenge. • Residents should avoid noise (from TVs, radios) and other anthropogenic sources.	• The true opposite of this posits usually happens

Due to these constraints, the majority of the home-seekers are left with no option but to 'adapt, adhere, and accord' to the confines and prisons of the enclaves of the slum environments, like Matapi. These areas are usually nothing but places of immense moral decadence and drifting into the unknown dungeons of social depravity.

CONCLUSION AND WAY FORWARD

Accommodation remains one great challenge that urbanity has produced to humanity. With more of reactive planning than proactive and pre-active planning, it continues to daunt urban centres with no clear light about its resolution at the end of the tunnel. For Harare the problem is worsened by the primacy the city has. For Matapi, in particular, morals have continued to nose-dive into the dungeon of misery and helplessness. It is not easy to prescribe for social behaviour but a stewardship approach can form the basis for habitability of Matapi. The principle involves stakeholders seeing the problem with the same eye, debating towards consensus about it, and agreeing on the panacea package. This is not easy but it is practically possible at community level. The government should also strive to engage effort in finding suitable land for relocating residents, financing or seeking finance partners to the housing development projects, encouraging households to do self-help housing and revise its housing policy so that crosscutting issues of gender, HIV and AIDS, environment, and morals are clearly defined for implementation. Yet mainstreaming morals into policy seems more abstract than pragmatic. The local authority should also thrive to monitor its properties and make strict controls in the usage of the hostels. Comprehensive renewal of the buildings may not be easy especially in difficult times such as the country is going through. Indeed, hostel accommodation in Matapi is greatly problematic. Practical solutions are always there if there is political will, community commitment and shared visioning.

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