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‘MBARE MUSIKA IS OURS’: AN ANALYSIS OF A FRESH PRODUCE MARKET IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

The functioning of markets is premised on the creation of collaborative relationships and networks. Food markets in Zimbabwe are evolving in response to state interventions that aim to restructure the marketplace and the flow of produce. This article explores Mbare Musika, the oldest and largest marketplace in Harare supplying the city with fresh fruit and vegetables. We analyse Mbare Musika from the perspective of the interactions among farmers and retailers, vendors, transporters, intermediaries, officials, and customers, in creating and sustaining a specific enduring market. We use actor narratives to understand the ordering and (re)ordering of people and produce in the context of informalization, shifting polycentric relationships, and market infrastructure to sustain livelihoods anchored on the circulation of large volumes of diverse fresh produce. The market is overtly economic in outlook but, intrinsically, it is a social arena where discourses are continuously reconstructed, reproduced, and expressed through daily interactions. We situate Mbare Musika in past and present sociopolitical processes of transformation in Zimbabwe.

THIS ARTICLE EXAMINES THE ORGANIZATION of the largest fresh produce market in Zimbabwe, Mbare Musika¹ in Harare. We explore the processes that shape and reshape the marketplace during times of great economic upheaval and social transformation. We draw upon the sociology of markets literature for conceptualizing the market as constituted social-materially and as emergent and dynamic. We also examine Mbare Musika through the lens of *informality*, a perspective that focuses on the

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1. *Musika* is chiShona for ‘market’. We use the terms *musika* and market interchangeably throughout the article to identify with the popular appellation for the market by those who make a living there.

self-organizing capacity of social actors and the institutions and relationships they have constructed over time. We seek to answer the question of how the social actors involved in the day-to-day marketing of fresh fruit and vegetables query and challenge the organization of Mbare Musika and give new directions to its development. We argue that Mbare Musika thrives because of its embeddedness in the ongoing transformation of the economy towards informality and the contestation of urban space that this transformation entails.

The significance of the analysis goes beyond Mbare Musika and Zimbabwe and is relevant for analyses of markets in the global South. The article adds to a growing research interest in the importance of ‘informal’ markets in food provisioning in Africa.² Earlier sociological and anthropological studies in Africa³ and contemporary studies⁴ show that the assumed predominance of corporate retail chains, which have been projected to play an ever greater role in feeding the cities⁵, have not fully materialized. Mbare Musika illustrates perfectly that informal markets co-exist and interact with supermarkets⁶ and in this way play a major role in food provisioning. The tenacity of the continued existence of informal trade and markets, we believe, is nested in distinct organizational dynamics and social–material infrastructure that allow Mbare Musika and similar markets across the continent to occupy a strategic position in the rural–urban food economy. ‘Mbare Musika is ours’ expresses that there is a specific logic, a certain way of organizing affairs at the marketplace by taking possession of it. Mbare Musika’s logic does not follow a predetermined track but rather is the

2. Marc Wegerif and Paul Hebinck, ‘The symbiotic food system: An “alternative” agri-food system already working at scale’, *Agriculture* 6, 3 (2016), pp. 40; Caroline Skinner, ‘The struggle for the streets: Processes of exclusion and inclusion of street traders in Durban, South Africa’, *Development Southern Africa* 25, 2 (2008), pp. 227–242; Jane Battersby and Vanessa Watson (eds), *Urban food systems governance and poverty in African cities* (Earthscan, London, 2019).

3. Paul Bohannan and George Dalton (eds), *Markets in Africa* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston Ill., 1962); Polly Hill, ‘Markets in Africa’, *Journal of Modern African Studies* 1, 4 (1963), pp. 441–453; Jane Guyer (ed) *Feeding African cities: Studies in regional social history* (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1987).

4. Rachel Black, *Porta Palazzo. The anthropology of an Italian market* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2014); See also Paul Hebinck, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, and Sergio Schneider (eds), *Rural development and the construction of new markets* (Routledge, London, 2015).

5. This process is more or less assumed in modernization and development discourses. See for a review of positions: Deborah Potts, *The state and the informal in sub-Saharan African urban economies: Revisiting debates on dualism*, in *Crisis States Working Paper Series* (Crisis States Research Centre, London, 2007); See also Caryn Abrahams, ‘Transforming the region: Supermarkets and the local food economy’, *African Affairs* 109, 434 (2009), pp. 115–134; Jonathan Crush and Bruce Frayne, ‘Supermarket expansion and the informal food economy in southern African cities: Implications for urban food security’, *Journal of Southern African Studies* 37, 4 (2011), pp. 781–807.

6. South African-owned Pick n Pay, Spar, and Shoprite are the biggest of the foreign supermarkets chains. Locally owned chains are Afrofoods, Batanai Supermarkets, OK Zimbabwe, TM Supermarkets, and Savemore Supermarkets.

negotiated outcome among the sociopolitical and material elements that together constitute the market.

As in the past, fresh produce trade is currently booming, making Mbare Musika and similar markets into spaces of opportunity for diverse groups of actors (e.g. medium- and small-scale producers from all over Zimbabwe, wholesale traders, retailers, consumers, mobile petty traders, truck drivers, municipal controllers, and police officers).⁷ These actors form coalitions through which they effectively defend the market from attempts by the state and municipality to restructure and modernize the marketplace. Mbare Musika in principle may be managed by the Harare Municipality, but in practice it is a space communally owned by those who control and negotiate the complex interactions within the market.

Mbare Musika also occupies a central place in the struggle for political power in the city. From 2000 onwards, ZANU(PF)'s dominant position in urban spaces was weakened by opposition gains, but the party fought to reclaim space through a violent campaign that affected Mbare Musika.⁸ During our research, we noted, however, that, despite intimidation and surveillance, political affiliations have shifted from ZANU(PF) in favour of the opposition party Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The traders we interacted with spoke in covered terms about this shift.

The article begins by situating Mbare Musika in Zimbabwe's history. We then conceptualize markets and describe the process of data collection and case selection. The sections after this portray Mbare's sociomaterial infrastructure, the spatial ordering, its materialities, and how actors situate themselves among several market segments. Thereafter, we elucidate the differentiated ways of relating to the produce market to co-create shared understanding, to compete, and to mutually benefit from the market. This treatment helps explain the continuity and endurance evidenced in produce markets such as Mbare Musika. In the conclusion, we situate the article in the theoretical literature about informality. We also reflect on the meaning of the social relationships shaping the market discourses in Mbare Musika, who really controls Mbare Musika, and the struggles of identifying with Mbare while responding to broader economic and social struggles in Zimbabwe.

7. ZimTrade, 'Zimbabwe horticulture rebounds'. News release 13 October 2016, <www.tradezimbabwe.com/newsrelease/zim-horticulture-rebounds/protect%relax> (13 October 2016); see also the website of eMKambo: www.eMKambo.co.zw.

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

Situating Mbare Musika in Zimbabwe's history

We situate our analysis in the interplay between past and current processes of transformation in the country with a specific focus on the struggles among the state, segments of the peasantry, petty commodity traders, and corporate capital. The racially segregated outcome of colonial urban planning and the 1930–1960s' industrial boom expanded African townships and increased the demand for cheap food.⁹ Mbare Musika has since that time evolved as a site where low-income consumers satisfy their demand for fresh food. During the colonial period, farmers and notably women¹⁰ from nearby communal areas¹¹ and as far afield as Mutoko and Nyamaropa sold at Mbare Musika produce that they could not market locally.¹² Also, white commercial farmers occasionally sold their surplus produce at Mbare.¹³ The post-independence land and agrarian reforms are also keys to understanding the expansion and flourishing of fresh produce markets. The reforms play a significant role in the transformation of Zimbabwe's agrarian structure in which they dramatically transformed the land ownership pattern through land redistribution and land resettlement.¹⁴ The reforms and notably the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP) of 2000 and onwards also prompted the near demise of white commercial farmers who supplied produce to Mbare and the emergence of a new group of producers, who—fuelled by an expanding transport infrastructure—were looking for marketing opportunities for their produce. Just as the earlier economic structural adjustment programme (ESAP) of the 1990s did,¹⁵ the FTLRP generated an economic meltdown with massive job retrenchments. Bill

9. Innocent Chirisa, 'Social capital dynamics in the post-colonial Harare urbanscape,' in Joseph D. Lewandowski and Gregory W. Streich (eds), *Urban social capital: Civil society and city life* (Routledge, London, 2012), pp. 221–242.

10. See Nancy E. Horn, *Cultivating customers: Market women in Harare Zimbabwe* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 1994) p. 23. Horn describes how from the early 1920s onwards, female African farmers brought their produce to town on the rural–urban buses and sell it in Mbare wholesale market; female vendors purchase and resell these in Harare's townships.

11. See Angela Cheater, 'The production and marketing of fresh vegetable produce among blacks in Zimbabwe', *Zambezia* 7(1979), pp. 1–41; Jose A. Smith, 'Transport and marketing of horticultural crops by communal farmers into Harare', *Geographical Journal of Zimbabwe*, 20 (1989), pp. 1–15; Volker Wild, 'Competition or white resentment? African retailers in Salisbury 1935–1953', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 17, 2 (1991), pp. 177–190; Horn, 'Cultivating customers'.

12. Smith, 'Transport and marketing'.

13. *Ibid.*

14. See for an overview of land reform in Zimbabwe: Ian Scoones et al., *Zimbabwe's land reform. Myths & realities* (James Currey, Oxford, 2010); Prosper Matondi, *Zimbabwe's fast track land reform* (ZED Books, London, 2012); Sam Moyo, 'Changing agrarian relations after redistributive land reform in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, 5 (2011), pp. 939–966; Marleen Dekker and Bill H. Kinsey, 'Contextualizing Zimbabwe's land reform: Long-term observations from the first generation', *Journal of Peasant Studies* 38, 5 (2011), pp. 995–1019.

15. Peter Gibbon, *Structural adjustment and the working poor in Zimbabwe: Studies on labour, women informal sector workers and health* (Nordic Africa Institute, Upsala, 1995); Pádraig Carmody and Scott Taylor, 'Industry and the urban sector in Zimbabwe's political economy', *African Studies Quarterly* 7, 2 (2003), pp. 53–80; Rupak Chattopadhyay, 'Zimbabwe: Structural

Kinsey, Nancy Horn, and Innocent Chirisa found in the early 1990s that changes in the economic environment had an extremely adverse impact, due to both the devaluation of the Zimbabwe dollar and the relaxation of urban vending regulations under structural adjustment.¹⁶ Not only did changes in the value of the dollar impoverish urban workers and increase the prices of foodstuffs but also the loosening of vending regulations produced an explosion in the number of informal street vendors throughout Harare, each competing to earn an income to meet basic needs.¹⁷ However, as with the earlier interventions stemming from liberalization,¹⁸ recent interventions have been met with resistance and reappropriations. The cascade of unemployment, the hyperinflation of 2007–2008, and recurrent cash crises triggered deepening of what is commonly understood as the informal economy, with great numbers seeking refuge in street markets¹⁹ and small firms.²⁰ The unplanned effects had a dramatic impact on the organization of food markets. Former configurations of power and order at the Mbare marketplace were challenged by newcomers with diverse economic and social heritages, transforming Mbare Musika into a space of opportunity and contestation. While beneficiaries of land reform begun selling in urban markets,²¹ unemployed workers and more petty traders than ever before also start to make use of street markets in the central business district and markets like Mbare Musika to make a living.²² The role of the market and its organization have, however, been given little attention in the post-agrarian reform literature on Zimbabwe.²³ Similarly,

adjustment, destitution and food insecurity', *Review of African Political Economy* 27, 84 (2000), pp. 307–316

16. Bill H. Kinsey, 'Parallel markets, private traders, liberalization and food security in Zimbabwe', *Working Paper Series Department of Rural and Urban Planning, University of Zimbabwe* (1991), pp. 1–34; Horn, 'Cultivating customers'; Innocent Chirisa, 'The geography of informal sector operations: A perspective of urban Zimbabwe', *Journal of Geography and Regional Planning* 2, 4 (2009), pp. 66–79; Chirisa, 'Social capital'.

17. See also Hamadziripi Tamukamoyo, 'Survival in a collapsing economy: A case study of informal trading at a zimbabwean flea market' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2009).

18. Kinsey, 'Parallel markets'.

19. Deborah Potts, 'Making a livelihood in and beyond the African city: The experience of Zimbabwe', *Africa* 81, 4 (2011), pp. 588–605.

20. Kingstone Mujeyi et al., 'Technical efficiency of informal manufacturing sector enterprises: Evidence from the informal metal industry of Zimbabwe', *African Journal of Science, Technology, Innovation and Development* 8, 1 (2016), pp. 12–17.

21. See Patience Mutopo, *Women, mobility and rural livelihoods in Zimbabwe: Experiences of fast track land reform* (Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, 2014).

22. Deborah Potts, 'Shanties, slums, breeze blocks and bricks', *City* 15, 6 (2011), pp. 709–721; Blessing Chitanda, 'A sociological analysis of vegetable Markets in Dzivarasekwa 3, Harare' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Wageningen University, 2015). Chitanda specifically examined markets in Harare's townships.

23. Exceptions are as follows: Propser Matondi and Shiela Chikulo, 'Beyond land transfers: The dynamics of socially driven markets emerging from Zimbabwe's Fast Track Land Reform Programme,' in Paul Hebinck, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, and Sergio Schneider (eds), *Rural development and the construction of new markets* (Routledge, London, 2015), pp. 149–168; Mutopo, 'Women, mobility and rural livelihoods'.

the state mainly focused on land-related issues and largely addressed only the politically strategic commodities (i.e. maize, meat and tobacco) and largely ignored fresh food markets.

Conceptual framing and data collection

To explore the logic and mode of organization that Mbare Musika displays as nested in informality and embedded in regional and national market relations, we draw on the sociology of markets literature²⁴ to conceptualize markets as evolutionary entities that become differentiated and diversified over time. Markets operate in a reflexive manner: The actors concerned explicitly question their organizations and, based on analysis of their functioning, try to conceive and create new rules of the game and arrangements of the market. Markets are socially and institutionally constituted, governed by regulations that are structured by power relationships, culture and history, as well as by their material infrastructure.²⁵ This framing provides an avenue for exploring markets as being continuously reconfigured and how the social actors and the relationships among them change so that the material elements and interlinkages are rearranged to form new connections and relationships that did not exist previously.²⁶ This approach carries the analytical advantage that markets are treated as constantly evolving in ways that do not always generate new forms, but rather forms that are themselves shifting. The evolution of markets is not grounded in a pre-established logic, implying that markets cannot only and exclusively be understood by referring to the workings of capitalism and the capitalist food system and its development over time.²⁷ Markets are, as Elanor Ostrom²⁸ and others point out, polycentrically organized and governed in ways that are negotiated and shared by those operating at the

24. See Michel Callon, Cecile Méadel, and Vololona Rabeharisoa, 'The economy of qualities', *Economy and Society* 31, 2 (2002), pp. 194–217; Michel Callon, *The laws of the markets* (Blackwell, Oxford, 1998); Michel Callon, 'An essay on the growing contribution of economic markets to the proliferation of the social', *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, 7–8 (2007), pp. 139–163; Koray Çalıřkan and Michel Callon, 'Economization, part 2: A research programme for the study of markets', *Economy and Society* 39, 1 (2010), pp. 1–32.

25. See also Çalıřkan and Callon, 'Economization, part 2'; Hill, 'Markets in Africa'.

26. Tanja Murray Li, 'Practices of assemblage and community forest management', *Economy and Society* 36, 2 (2007), pp. 263–293.

27. See for instance Colin McFarlane, 'Rethinking informality: Politics, crisis, and the city', *Planning Theory & Practice* 13, 1 (2012), pp. 89–108; Colin McFarlane, 'The city as assemblage: Dwelling and urban space', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 29, 4 (2011), pp. 649–671.

28. Elanor Ostrom, 'Beyond markets and states: Polycentric governance of complex economic systems', *American Economic Review* 100(2010), pp. 408–444.

market. These negotiations provide the actors with the means and space to defend their ordering of their marketplace.²⁹

Intrinsic to Mbare Musika is its so-called informal nature. Mbare Musika forms an essential part of the urban commodity economy which, given the extent of the economic crises in Zimbabwe in the wake of ongoing globalization, past structural adjustments, economic meltdown and extensive unemployment, and land and agrarian reform, is increasingly formed and shaped by informal relations.³⁰ Street trading and other forms of petty trade have significantly expanded over the past two decades, in Harare³¹ and elsewhere in Southern Africa,³² providing substantial livelihood opportunities for the urban poor.³³

Informal and *informalization* have dual meanings in our analysis. Informal classically stands for territorial or labour arrangements that fall outside of what is regarded as mainstream and formal, regulated and under the jurisdiction of the state, governed by market forces and neo-liberal discourses. Economic relationships and activities that do not fit within these organizational forms are categorized as informal, with *formal* being the state that they should reach through the linear process of development.³⁴ For Keith Hart,³⁵ who first coined the term *informal sector*,³⁶ the word *informal* represents that which is not visible and operating outside the framework

29. See for instance Black, 'Porta Palazzo'.

30. Potts, 'Shanties, slums'; Deborah Potts, "Restoring Order"? Operation Murambatsvina and the urban crisis in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32, 2 (2006), pp. 273–291; Francis Musoni, 'Operation Murambatsvina and the politics of street vendors in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 36, 2 (2010), pp. 301–317; Christian M. Rogerson, 'Responding to informality in urban africa: Street trading in Harare, Zimbabwe', *Urban Forum* 27, 2 (2016), pp. 229–251; Busani Mpofu, 'After the big clean-up. Street vendors, the informal economy and employment in Zimbabwe', in Keith Hart and John Sharp (eds), *People, money and power in the economic crisis* (Berghahn, Oxford, 2016), pp. 19–41.

31. Horn, 'Cultivating customers'; See also Potts, 'Making a livelihood'.

32. Caroline Skinner, *Informal food retail in africa: A review of evidence*, (eds) Jane Battersby and Vanessa Watson (Cape Town: Consuming Urban Poverty Project Working Paper No. 2. African Centre for Cities, 2016); Skinner, 'The struggle for the streets: Processes of exclusion and inclusion of street traders in Durban, South Africa'; Kate Meagher, 'The scramble for Africans: Demography, globalisation and Africa's informal labour markets', *The Journal of Development Studies* 52, 4 (2016), pp. 483–497.

33. Alice Brown, Michal Lyons, and Ibrahim Dankoco, 'Street traders and the emerging spaces for urban voice and citizenship in African cities', *Urban Studies* 47, 3 (2010), pp. 666–683; Deborah Potts, 'Shall we go home? Increasing urban poverty in African cities and migration', *The Geographical Journal* 161, 3 (1995), pp. 245–264.

34. See Potts, 'The state and the informal'; Norman Long, *Development sociology: Actor perspectives* (Routledge, London, 2001).

35. Keith Hart, 'Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 11, 1 (1973), pp. 61–89.

36. See also Keith Hart, 'The informal economy', in Keith Hart, Jean Louis Laville, and Antonia D. Cattani (eds), *The human economy. A citizen's guide* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 2010), pp. 142–155; Keith Hart, 'Market and state after the cold war: The informal economy reconsidered', in R. Dilley (eds), *Contesting markets: Analyses of ideology, discourse and practice* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1992), pp. 214–227.

of the state.³⁷ The formalization of social and economic relationships that often manifests in the physical and spatial reorganization of marketplaces generally plays out such that states and municipalities are able to increase extraction of revenue from already economically hard-pressed informal entrepreneurs.³⁸ *Informality* is also conceptualized as a practice.³⁹ For James Scott, *informal* represents resistance toward state-led attempts at modernization and control of social life and the economy through, for instance, urban planning.⁴⁰ State-administered urban planning, Ananya Roy and others argue, valorizes and regularizes certain forms of informality and marginalizes, even criminalizes, others.⁴¹ Easter Chigumira and colleagues in a study of Epworth, a peri-urban area near Harare, note the specific nature of urban planning in Zimbabwe: The by-laws and strategic plans emphasize formalization and regulation of trade, a focus incongruent with the largely informal nature of markets. By-laws do little to facilitate informal food systems as they are still shaped by the colonial vision of what an ideal city should be. The current spatial distribution of informal vending activities is thus viewed as ‘disorderly and haphazard’.⁴² This is in sharp contrast to arguments in much of the urban informality literature that stresses how informal activity is hardwired into models of the state to reduce cost, thereby directly and indirectly incentivizing informality. Nicola Banks and colleagues refer to situations in which the state itself is learning from informal service provision; such is certainly not the case in Harare.⁴³ The state and the Harare Municipality have aggressively attempted to clamp down on the way traders and other market actors (re)order the socio-material infrastructure of the urban economy. Informality is for the state and its bureaucracy rather synonymous with illegality,⁴⁴ triggering

37. Kate Meagher, ‘Social capital or analytical liability? Social networks and African informal economies’, *Global Networks* 5, 3 (2005), pp. 217–238.

38. Rogerson, ‘Responding to informality’.

39. McFarlane, ‘Rethinking informality’.

40. James C. Scott, *The art of not being governed. An anarchistic history of upland South East Asia* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 2009).

41. Ananya Roy, ‘The potency of the state: Logics of informality and subalternity’, *The Journal of Development Studies* 54, 12 (2018), pp. 2243–2246, p. 2243; See also Ananya Roy, ‘Why India cannot plan its cities: Informality, insurgency and the Idiom of urbanization’, *Planning Theory* 8, 1 (2009), pp. 76–87.

42. Easter Chigumira et al., ‘Governance of food systems in Epworth, Zimbabwe,’ in Jane Battersby and Vanessa Watson (eds), *Urban food systems governance and poverty in African cities* (Routledge, New York, 2018), pp. 141–153, p. 146; See also Mpofo, ‘After the Big Clean-Up’.

43. Nicola Banks, Melanie Lombard, and Diana Mitlin, ‘Urban informality as a site of critical analysis’, *The Journal of Development Studies* 56, 2 (2020), pp. 223–238.

44. Amin Y. Kamete, ‘Missing the point? Urban planning and the normalisation of ‘pathological’ spaces in southern Africa’, *Transactions. Institute of British Geographers*, 38, 4 (2013), pp. 639–651.

repression⁴⁵ and far from the situations labelled by Banks⁴⁶ as *learning*. The reorganization of markets and the regular clearing of the streets are legitimized because these markets and street vending supposedly are a threat to public health and safety. Mbare actors, despite their differences, resist attempts to reorganize the marketplace through enforcing council by-laws and imposing standards of hygiene because of public health concerns⁴⁷ and politico-economic preoccupations.⁴⁸ Hence, we conceptualize Mbare Musika as an arena of social struggle between the state and the actors that gives form and shape to the market. We derive the concept *arena* from Norman Long, who defines these as social locations or situations where issues, resources, values, and representations contest with each other.⁴⁹

Methodologically, it is important to highlight that a market is not governed by a single hegemonic vision but by multiple discourses.⁵⁰ This feature is essential for the polycentric type of organization that characterizes Mbare Musika. Markets, Michel Callon argues, are also performed by multiple social actors making use of the physical infrastructure that historically has evolved.⁵¹ When at the marketplace, one literally observes—as we did—the coming and going of people with fresh produce, negotiating, and repackaging vegetables at market stalls (i.e. the performing). With close observation, the market comes to life as an assemblage of people and mobile goods, market stalls, the gate that separates the wholesale from the retail section, the police officer guarding the gate, discourses, attitudes, behaviours, interests, practices, rules, and regulations underpinned by personal experiences of buying and selling. The sample of market-based social actors is highly variable in time and place. Together with the fluidity that characterizes the urban, the volatility of situations at market places like Mbare Musika makes it extremely misleading to attempt to quantify such

45. See Clionadh Raleigh, 'Urban violence patterns across African states', *The International Studies Review* 17, 1 (2015), pp. 90–106; Potts, "Restoring Order"? According to a United Nations report, the operation *Murambatsvina* ('drive out the rubbish' in chiShona) carried out in 2005 left 200,000 people homeless and 30,000 vendors jobless (see Anna Kajumulo Tibajjuka, 'Report of the fact-finding mission to Zimbabwe to assess the scope and impact of Operation Murambatsvina' (2005)). The streets of the central business district of Harare and other major cities are regularly swept of street traders, who usually return after 2 or 3 weeks to continue their business.

46. Banks, Lombard, and Mitlin, 'Urban informality' p. 2.

47. *The Herald* 17 July 2014; *The Zimbabwean*, 2014.

48. Ian Scoones, 2015, Booming agricultural markets and the politics of control in Zimbabwe. February 9, 2015. (<https://zimbabweland.wordpress.com/2015/02/09/>).

49. Long, 'Development Sociology' p. 59. Arenas (often) are spaces in which contestations associated with different practices and values of different domains take place.

50. Stuart Mills, *Discourse* (Routledge, London, 2004); Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, *Anthropology and development: Understanding contemporary social change* (Zed Press, London, 2006); Long, 'Development Sociology'. Discourse is not only understood here as narrative, that is, as text, policies, rules, and regulations. Instead, it extends to the broad range of ideas, values, gestures, language, reactions, and actions whose combined expression gives meaning to the daily practices of the actors.

51. Callon, 'The laws of the markets'.

situations. Snowballing informants as part of their social networks was an appropriate method for selecting them and allowed us to construct accounts of their lives at Mbare.⁵²

Between 2014 and 2018, the first author regularly traversed multiple fast-track and communal area production sites in Goromonzi District, a short distance east of Harare, and Mbare Musika to investigate the social relationships and arrangements among producers and others.⁵³ The first phase of data collection from July to September 2014 proceeded from the research and ethical clearance obtained through the Harare City Council and facilitated by a local NGO, eMkambo, that operates from Mbare Musika. Out of a total of 120 officially registered stall owners, 43 in-depth interviews were conducted and each identified through snowballing initiated by the chairperson of the market and a programme officer from eMKambo. Approaching the market chairperson as the initial respondent enabled relatively easier access to the rest of the stall members who are often wary and suspicious of being labelled 'politically active' for participating in interviews in public spaces such as Mbare market. Of the 43 respondents, 22 were part of families that have a continuous presence in the market, passing down ownership of the stall down the family line as elaborated in the findings. The remaining respondents were market actors who secured stall spaces through subletting from the original stall owners. In addition, 13 life history interviews were conducted in October 2014 with traders with a long market presence and market intermediaries. Participatory methods included market stall observations in selected alternate weeks and peak periods (such as public holidays) in the market to monitor activities, record the daily practices of the market actors, and have informal conversations with other traders interacting with the selected respondents. We also partially drew on semistructured interviews with 65 producer–marketers from Domboshava communal area supplying to Mbare and forming part of the wider study on the emerging food systems in Zimbabwe. The second phase of data collection from March to May 2015, October to December 2016, and July to August 2017 composed of follow-up interviews with the 43 respondents focusing on their perceptions of the market networks, experiences with other actors, and market dynamics (e.g. prices, gossip). The central location and proximity of Mbare Musika just outside Harare Central Business District allowed for the multiple return visits. However,

52. Snowball sampling is a well-recognized method of selecting informants. See Herbert Russel Bernard, *Research methods in anthropology: Qualitative and quantitative approaches* (AltaMira Press, Lanham, Md., 2006); See also Kath Browne, 'Snowball sampling: Using social networks to research non-heterosexual women', *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, 1 (2005), pp. 47–60.

53. The research for this paper originates in an NGO-driven capacity development and empowerment project and evolved into the first author's PhD project, which was supervised by the second author.

during the course of fieldwork, we also interacted with other actors who shared resources with the identified families such as transporters and suppliers of packaging materials and food. The data—interview transcripts, rich market observation descriptions, and informal interview notes—were collated and analysed thematically around the central research questions related to market ordering and reordering, gender dynamics, and broader issues of informality in market spaces.

Mbare, the place

Conveniently located within a 5 km radius of manufacturing industries and at the hub of transport networks, Mbare links commuters to other high-density suburbs. Two administrative wards, 3 and 4, make up Mbare, home to some 37,400 inhabitants.⁵⁴ Mbare (formerly *Harari* township) is the oldest high-density suburb (developed in 1907) in Harare (then Salisbury).⁵⁵ It was constructed to accommodate the largely black labour force employed in the industries of pre-independence Zimbabwe. Residential hostel blocks were originally intended for individual male migrant workers but are now shared by families in crowded circumstances. Mbare exhibits an enormous array of economic enterprises. Two home-industry hubs, Magaba and Siyaso, employ several hundred men, women, and youths engaged in welding and carpentry. Mupedzanhamo ('finisher of troubles') is the textile section of the market frequently visited by low- and middle-income earners seeking cheap clothing from as low as US\$0.50 each or \$1 for two items.⁵⁶ There is also a traditional curios and souvenirs section that attracts locals and tourists, while another features cures proffered by traditional healers. The bus terminus is the public transport hub for people and goods.

The three sections that constitute Mbare Musika are separated by a gate guarded by municipal officers to ensure that only paid-up farmers and transporters access the wholesale selling space (Kuvarimi—'where the farmers are'). Farmers are required to sell their bulk produce from the Kuvarimi section, which they pay \$6 per day to access. The wholesale market cannot accommodate all farmers and traders, thus they line up their trucks outside and along the market walls where other traders and

54. GOZ (Government of Zimbabwe), *Census 2012. Preliminary report* (eds). Zimbabwe National Statistics Agency (Harare: Government Printing Office, 2012).

55. Muchaparara Musemwa, 'From 'sunshine city' to a landscape of disaster: The politics of water, sanitation and disease in Harare, Zimbabwe, 1980–2009', *Journal of Developing Societies* 26, 2 (2010), pp. 165–206, p. 176.

56. Interview with second-hand clothes trader, Harare, 10 October 2016. The US\$ became the preferred currency after the demise of the Zimbabwe dollar in 2009. Next to the US dollar, South African Rands circulate widely. It should be noted that the ongoing currency crisis in Zimbabwe constantly triggers fluctuations in the exchange rate between the US dollar and the local Real-Time Gross Settlement (RTGS) dollar currency presently in use.

consumers buy their produce. While commonly identified as farmers, not all are. Some are middlemen who either own a truck or have hired one to purchase and collect goods from farmers to sell in Mbare.⁵⁷

At times, the middlemen prove to be useful agents, particularly when unanticipated volumes of fresh produce flood the market. The middlemen specialize in marketing specific products. Maketo and Blackie,⁵⁸ for instance, are known as ‘the cabbage guys’, who possess fingertip knowledge about production trends for cabbage, changes in the price of cabbage, and potential customers to guarantee quick sales during the Kuvarimi marketing hours. In the same wholesale section, there are ‘firemen’,⁵⁹ whose role is to tout energetically for vendors and customers in the wholesale section.

With the hustle and bustle, noise and commotion in Mbare Musika, one could easily dismiss the market as a chaotic, unorganized place. Yet the more time one spends in the market, observing and engaging the actors, multiple layers of order begin to emerge. Service providers who sell packaging materials are obliged to sweep the pavements between the stalls as ‘rental’ for using the market. Transporters in the market distinguish themselves by wearing work suits of different colours. The head-porters often attend to customers purchasing family groceries. A sectional leader chosen among the service providers is responsible for keeping a register of all the loaders employed in the market and assigning a number to each to maintain order and, importantly, to permit traceability in the event of theft, harassment, or intimidation.

Once the wholesale market is closed, activity shifts to retailers working to repackage bulk produce and distribute it across almost 200 stalls. Currently, more than 77 fresh fruit and vegetable varieties sourced nationwide and through imports mainly from South Africa are sold in the retail market.⁶⁰ Traders are organized at stalls where they sell grains, legumes, processed vegetables, insects, household goods, and African traditional herbs. Strict adherence to the trading hours, which end at 6 pm, is required to allow wholesalers and retailers to sell their produce.

Stall allocation and payment of rentals in Mbare Musika are done through the Harare City Council, which has suboffices at the market. Yet, some elderly retailers leaving the market upon retirement pass on use of their stalls to their children or extended family. However, most sublet the stalls for a fee payable to the original municipal-registered stall user. Mai

57. Kinsey, ‘Parallel markets’.

58. Not real names. Throughout the article, all respondents are assigned pseudonyms.

59. The word *fireman* is derived from the chiShona colloquial expression, *kufaya*, which in turn derives from the English word *fire*. In street discourse, *kufaya* means things are going extremely well. Therefore, firemen at Mbare Musika are regarded as the sales agents who ensure produce sells fast and at prices with which farmers will be satisfied.

60. Interview with eMKambo officials, eMKambo office, Mbare, 12 July 2014.

Garikai is one such beneficiary.⁶¹ She pays a monthly rental of \$35 to the registered retailers, who subsequently make their monthly payment to the city council. Mai Garikai has not encountered any challenges even though such unapproved transfers are considered illegal according to municipal by-laws.

While officially the city council has jurisdiction over Mbare Musika, it has limited control over how the market is organized and how traders, service providers, and farmers interact. The traders and, to some extent, the middlemen are the central organizing actors in the market, influencing how the rest of the actors are included or excluded from networks for transactions, social support, and other market processes. This self-regulation reflects the agency exercised by the market actors to distinguish roles, responsibilities, and (un)written rules for participating in the market and by the blurring enforcement of municipal regulations in a context of high *informalization*. Becoming a trader, for example, is not just about getting municipal registration but also requires approval from the market chairperson. The incumbent is elected by a general vote through a collective meeting of all traders and service providers in the market. Mr Chireka, the chairperson, has served in various capacities since 1995 up to his appointment as chairperson in 2010.⁶² With the help of the secretariat and committee members, he tries to resolve tensions and conflicts, cases of theft, disagreements, and fights that erupt in the market. He does not paint an idyllic picture of complete understanding, reciprocity, and collaboration. Personal differences and contestations often trigger disputes among market actors. The perceived role of the secretariat and committee is to make the market a safe place for all who enter.

Meetings are held regularly to deliberate on infrastructural challenges pertaining to service delivery, phytosanitary conditions, and hygiene in the market. Representatives from the city council are invited to respond to concerns about dilapidated infrastructure, erratic water supply, and inefficient service delivery, particularly the provision of adequate sanitation and waste management. During the rainy season, there are drop-in customers coming to the market because they are wary of the poor hygiene and sanitation in the wet and muddy market. Yet, retailers argue that the fees paid to the council to refurbish infrastructure and walkways in the market appear to be underutilized and/or mismanaged.

According to the market chairperson, the fresh produce market last had significant renovations in 1996. Dilapidated infrastructure and the absence of cooling and storage facilities compromise quality of the fresh produce, thus reducing profit margins as produce diminishes in quality. Various

61. Interview at Mbare Musika, 12 January 2017. Mai in chiShona means mother or mama and is often used as a honorary title for an elderly woman.

62. Interview at Mbare Musika, 07 September 2017.

feasibility assessments and investment plans have called for the renovation and upgrade of Mbare Musika in the past. Among the proposals was a \$1.5 million upgrade of infrastructure in early 2017 which the acting town clerk, Mrs Josephine Ncube, stated was to extend roofing over the market and upgrade the stalls, including additional toilets and wash bays.⁶³ Long-term aims were focused on decongesting the market by decentralizing to other wholesale markets, such as Lusaka in Highfields and Chikwanha and Makoni in Chitungwiza. Infrastructural upgrades in the long term would introduce cold chain facilities to allow the storage of produce. Farmers often, for lack of storage, have ended up selling their stock at giveaway prices to reduce losses incurred as a result. In 2016, concerns were raised over a \$45 million dollar deal between Olshevick Investments, a property development firm, and the city council to upgrade Mbare Musika into a business centre with facilities such as a shopping mall, transport platform, hotel, and car park.⁶⁴ Christian Rogerson,⁶⁵ however, characterizes such proposals as negative ‘sanitising’ responses, often rooted in the tradition of modernist urban planning. In an economy like Mbare Musika, such policies seldom succeed as they lack inclusivity and appreciation of the ordering informality entails.⁶⁶

Social relationships and the construction of market discourses at Mbare Musika

Social relationships pattern the market, particularly the flow of fresh produce and related services through time and space. These relationships are directly observable or hidden from the observers’ eyes, simple or complex, loosely fragmented or close-knit, yet all work in specific ways and under specific conditions to enable the derivation of benefits from trade in fruit and vegetables. Here, we discuss the varied means of self-organization, the identification with and belonging to a particular network, in order to collaborate and mutually benefit from produce coming into the market. The negotiation and re(negotiation) of relationships and power dynamics in the market provide insights into understanding interactions in the market and how these give the market a particular order.

Possessing a market stall at Mbare Musika is the entry point in the highly sought-after space for selling produce. None of the families involved in the fresh produce business in the Mbare retail section desire to relinquish

63. Interview Harare Municipality Town Clerk, City Council, Harare, 31 January, 2017. See also *The Herald* 08 November 2016.

64. *The Herald* 24 January 2017. See also <[\\$">https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2018/05/17/facelift-on-cards-for-mbare-musika/protect\\$relax](https://www.dailynews.co.zw/articles/2018/05/17/facelift-on-cards-for-mbare-musika/protect$relax)>\$ (13 February 2013).

65. Rogerson, ‘Responding to informality’.

66. See also Danielle Resnick, ‘The politics of crackdowns on Africa’s informal vendors’, *Comparative Politics* 52, 1 (2019), pp. 21–51.

possession of their stall; rather, they wish to secure the stall in the hands of family members.

Mr Chireka's father started selling produce in Mbare in the 1960s. The family stayed in Chitungwiza, a town located about 40 km outside Harare.⁶⁷ Then a young student, he often came to help out at the two stalls his father paid for at Mbare. He observed that there were good and bad days in the market but, overall, his father managed to support the family and acquire assets from the money he made at the market. Like Mr Chireka, other traders took over stalls that were rented by their parents and are still registered under their parents' names who are regarded as the original landlords of the market. This has assured family members, especially children out of school or seeking employment, an opportunity to make money through trading and by operating a stall at Mbare Musika. Continuity within the family is therefore facilitated by children who learn the trade at an early age as they assist their parents at the stall.

Another retailer, Tapiwa, resorted to his parents' marketing business at Mbare Musika after struggling to stay employed under difficult economic conditions.⁶⁸ Tapiwa, a bubbly and energetic 23-year-old, recounts how he became involved in fresh produce marketing in 2015. Previously, his parents would come to the market, buy produce from the farmers' market, and then sell it at their stall. Tapiwa would assist whenever he was available. After completing his ordinary-level school examinations in 2014, Tapiwa got a clerical job with a grain storage and marketing company. He left this job after 2 months and then worked as a general hand for 6 months. His parents later decided to hand over the stall to him while they stayed at home to build their house. Tapiwa began by selling oranges and butternut squash before introducing garlic and ginger to his range. Over time spent at the market, he realized that fresh onions sold faster and with better returns, so he switched to onions, which became his speciality. Despite stiff competition, Tapiwa observes that the way one relates to customers—through courtesy and offering bargains—influences their decision to buy from a particular stall. As prices are often identical for vegetables and fruits arranged at the stalls, what counts for the customers is the quality, presentation, and extent to which a retailer offers a bargain. Loyal customers are willing to buy from their accustomed stall even in the absence of the stallholder. The accounts of Mr Chireka and Tapiwa reflect the realities of about 50% of the stall owners in the market.⁶⁹ Their accounts highlight the importance of family ownership and continuity in establishing solid networks at the stall. Such

67. Hill considers this aspect essential for the development of markets; see Hill, 'Markets in Africa'.

68. Interview, 5 September 2016.

69. The chairperson of Mbare confirmed in an interview that about half of the 210 registered stall owners transferred ownership to their children.

networks are suitable for business but equally important for growing and maintaining a loyal customer base.

Prior to the FTLRP, fresh produce supplies came from large-scale white commercial farmers, small-scale black commercial farmers, and communal farmers from areas surrounding Harare and beyond. Communal farmers have a long history of supplying Mbare Musika.⁷⁰ Unlike in the new resettlement schemes of the FTLRP⁷¹, there is more visible collaboration among the communal area farmers, who collectively organize to take produce to the market while sharing transport costs. From Domboshava, a communal area about 34 km from Harare, five fruit and vegetable farmers hire a truck to take their produce to the market. Each pays an amount corresponding to the volume of produce. Once marketing is finished, they return home with empty wooden crates, fertilizers, seeds, or other inputs purchased from agro-dealers at Siyaso or Magaba markets. Those with private vehicles at times allow other farmers to share their trucks for a price.

Amos' family is among those who hire trucks to supply tomatoes and leafy vegetables to Mbare Musika. Amos, aged 22, lives with his father, his father's three wives and siblings.⁷² There are 17 children in the family—those who are out of school work in the small plots subdivided from the main plot allocated to Amos' father under customary arrangements. Since their homestead is about 14 km from Showground, the main business centre in Domboshava, Amos and two of his brothers travel to Mbare Musika, where they spend the night with their load of wooden crates filled with fresh tomatoes. When prices are depressed at Mbare Musika or their crop yields are low, Amos and his brothers go as far as the Showground market, one of the most active Harare peri-urban produce markets. Mbare Musika remains their preferred market despite days when there are gluts, theft of produce, and difficult conditions for trading, especially in winter and the rainy season.

Steven is in his forties and a second-generation post-FTLRP farmer.⁷³ He represents the 'new' farmers who came to Mbare Musika. Steven started producing vegetables and cereal crops in 2009 following the death of his father, who was the original FTLRP beneficiary in 2000. As the oldest son, following custom he was given the farm to work on behalf of the family. He grows cabbages, onions, potatoes, green mealies,⁷⁴ and sometimes leafy greens. Steven quickly learnt that it was almost impossible to sell individually because of the way the market is organized: "*How would you know the price of produce without the middlemen? Yes, they can be*

70. Smith, 'Transport and marketing'; Cheater, 'The Production and marketing'.

71. See Mutopo, 'Women, mobility and rural livelihoods'.

72. Interview, 6 September 2016.

73. Life history interview with Steven, 10 July 2015.

74. *Mealies* is the universal term for green, on-the-cob maize in Southern Africa.

unscrupulous at times but they are the real market advisors because they have been in the business longer than I have."⁷⁵ This realization led to forging marketing relationships joining the network within the wholesale market rather than concentrating on being a retailer. This change in focus was a major shift. Steven explains that when the middlemen realized that he was bringing good quality produce, they maintained close contact with him. This relationship is one of mutual understanding, trust, and benefit. By 10 am daily, Steven will have sold a 3.5 tonne truck full of cabbages and paid at least \$10 to each of the firemen. While farmers like Steven go individually to Mbare because of their high volumes of produce, other farmers travel as groups to reduce transport costs and ensure the security of their produce.

Commodities such as cabbages, onions, and mealies are sold according to seasonal production cycles and in three to four stages depending on the crop yield. For instance, Steven harvests at least 15 tonnes of onions from a half to a whole hectare and some 78,000 heads of cabbage during the February to August production period from one or two hectares of his six-hectare plot.

Middlemen at Mbare Musika are regarded as notorious conmen whose only role in the market is to intimidate or manipulate farmers. Farmers, however, partly acknowledge that the middlemen provide an essential informational service regarding market prices and availability of products. The most common type, *makoronyera*,⁷⁶ works to influence prices and facilitate purchases from farmers bringing in fresh produce. Market prices and other information are usually not immediately available to the farmers and constitute the reason farmers engage the middlemen. It takes a considerable time of consistently supplying to Mbare before a farmer can build working relationships with the middlemen and negotiate reasonable prices. However, the farmers interviewed complained that the middlemen merely exist in the market without paying any fee to the council. They are hardly ever arrested because, as the farmers assert, "*They will always bribe their way out of arrest*".⁷⁷ The perception among farmers and retailers who pay fees to the council is that the middlemen should also pay since the council tolerates them in the market. Farmers are divided in their perceptions of the middlemen; there are those who feel coerced to sell their produce at meagre prices and those who find the middlemen a necessary evil in order to achieve quick sales with minimal difficulties. For their part, the middlemen insist that prices are determined by market forces rather than by themselves and suggest that only supply and demand dynamics are at play. Yet, from our observations, it was clear that there is a process of negotiating and factoring

75. Interview with Steven, 10 July 2015.

76. A name that implies farmers miss out if they do not use the services of these middlemen, who are perceived as shrewd and deceitful.

77. This opinion was widely shared among the farmers that were interviewed.

in costs associated with transporting produce from the farms to the market and that internal consultations take place with other farmers, middlemen, and retailers on the final selling price of produce.

Farmers also had to contend with a gang known as Highlanders. These infamous thieves roam the farmers' market pretending to be genuine customers. The Highlanders divide themselves into groups. While some members engage the farmers and divert them by asking about products, the others steal produce while the farmer is distracted.

Another type of middlemen at Mbare Musika is known as *machanga* ('the alert ones'). *Machanga* act as marshals and keep an eye out for customers coming to buy from the retail stalls. The assumption is that most customers are oblivious of prices and the best bargains of the day. The *mahwindi/machanga* operating at Mbare Musika and open-air markets in Epworth⁷⁸ have become a new type of actor in urban food governance. The *machanga* accost and attempt to convince approaching customers that they can assist them in finding the product they want efficiently and at the best prices.⁷⁹ Unknown to the customers, *machanga* connive with wholesale traders to change the price, so that the trader can give the difference to the *machanga* after the customer leaves. In essence, the *machanga* create an income-earning niche for themselves by identifying customers who have not familiarized themselves with the market and the art of bargaining with retailers. Often, they act as brokers and source clients for the buyers and sellers for a fee, sometimes forcefully directing consumers to their preferred market stalls where prior financial arrangements would have been made for their benefit. This practice limits competition among wholesalers as what is in effect a cartel restricts normal market forces.⁸⁰

Horn observed women traders in urban markets from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s and noted how their contribution to the national economy was rendered invisible because of the commodities they traded, because their commercial activities were unrecorded and undocumented, and because of their sex.⁸¹ Women traders in Mbare Musika have unique arrangements defining their relationships and ways of coordinating activities in the market. They comprise the majority of retailers, and unlike in the wholesale Kuvarimi section, where the proportion of women farmers is lower, the women in the retail section of Mbare command a significant segment of the market. Other accounts also describe how women traders

78. Chigumira et al., 'Governance of food systems in Epworth'.

79. Matondi and Chikulo, 'Beyond land transfers'.

80. Chigumira et al., 'Governance of food systems in Epworth' pp. 147–148.

81. Horn, 'Cultivating customers'.

struggle to adjust to economic constraints, save money, and sustain their livelihoods in markets like Mbare Musika.⁸²

Mai Garikai was a housewife for most of her married life and stayed in the location of Mbare.⁸³ After being intrigued by a neighbour who seemed to be doing well through fresh produce marketing, Mai Garikai decided to venture into the trade. The woman assisted her in negotiating the rental of a stall in the market. A sack is spread over a wooden pallet where red apples imported from South Africa, local tomatoes in small conical mounds and about 10 punnets of cut mixed vegetables in season are neatly arranged.

In 2005, life became difficult for Mai Garikai as her husband was retrenched and the market was not paying well. Her husband decided to join his wife in selling fresh produce, and they secured another stall. He used some of his retrenchment package capital to start sourcing and supplying products in scale since the returns from large volumes yielded better profit margins. He soon learnt the role of middleman, travelling as far as Chipinge, almost 300 km from Harare, with hired trucks to bring products such as jam tomatoes to the market. This trade has become his speciality, and he operates with a close network of farmers he sources from and retailers he supplies to. While business was progressing steadily, the 'clean-up' campaign, Operation *Murambatsvina*, was implemented in May 2005, and Mbare was hard-hit.⁸⁴ For almost a week, Mai Garikai could not return to her stall as the municipal and republic police officials destroyed structures around the high-density suburb and marketplace.

Life at the market gradually returned to normal with strict measures to keep the market clean and allow only those with council registrations into the retail section. It was around this time that Mai Garikai and other women traders began to save money and support each other as the economic meltdown continued. The first measure was always to watch a neighbour's stall "*without jealousy or manipulating a customer to buy from your own stall*"⁸⁵. The produce at the stalls is often arranged uniformly with prices displayed on small placards. Sales promotion is subtly packaged in courtesy greetings inviting customers to inspect the produce. When a retailer leaves her stall for an errand or is absent from the market on any day, the general rule of the market, as Mai Garikai explained, is that "*You sell for the one who sells for you*"⁸⁶. Tins at the front of each stall are there primarily for the purpose

82. See Emily Chamlee-Wright, 'Entrepreneurial response to "bottom-up" development strategies in Zimbabwe', *The Review of Austrian Economics* 18, 1 (2005), pp. 5–28; Rodreck Mupedziswa and Perpetua Gumbo, *Women informal traders in Harare and the struggle for survival in an environment of economic reforms* (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet' Research Report No 117, Upsala, 2001).

83. Interview, Mbare Musika, 15 August, 2017.

84. Potts, "Restoring Order?"

85. Interview, Mbare Musika, 15 August, 2017.

86. Interview, Mbare Musika, 15 August, 2017.

of keeping money from sales in the absence of the stall owner. These tins and the reciprocity they entail are concrete manifestations of symbiotic relationships nurturing continued collaboration with neighbouring traders, thus ensuring dependable help when one needs assistance. Not all retailers cooperate however. One woman who sits adjacent to Mai Garikai's stall will not attend to any customers at her neighbours' stalls. She explains that the other retailers realized her habit and quietly decided not to be part of her circle. Such underspoken animosities are not uncommon in the market in one form or another.

Another form of collaboration relates to savings from trading revenues. Mai Garikai contributes to the *marounds* that operate among the retailers. *Marounds* are rotating savings and credit associations where members contribute an agreed monetary amount, or product, before distribution is done within a stipulated time and following a mutually agreed sequence. In this arrangement, Mai Garikai and her fellow members pay \$5 per day, and the accumulated amount is given at the end of each week to the member who is due to receive. Each retailer also contributes \$1 daily toward the purchase of commodities such as sugar, salt, soap, and cooking oil that are distributed weekly. Membership and participation in the group are solely based on trust derived from personal knowledge and willingness to commit to the *marounds* without defaulting. So important are *marounds* to the women retailers that the selling priority for each day is to meet the target contribution before counting additional profit from sales. Reciprocal working relationships and sharing in the market have also helped new and old traders manage their business.

Within Mbare Musika, there are traders who have long established their positions as consistent traders with solid knowledge of market practices. Mai Tendi is one such retailer among a select few commanding strong market influence and financial clout. She is one of the market queens of Mbare Musika. Mai Tendi explained how she keeps a consistent and strong supply base by entering into contract arrangements with farmers struggling to afford inputs and labour.⁸⁷ She does this to ensure farmers produce quality products without cutting corners. Mai Tendi even advances school fees to some contracted farmers, who then pay back through their products. In return, when Mai Tendi is facing financial challenges, the farmers extend 7-hour commodity credit to her. She is then able to collect produce during the farmers' market hours, arrange and sell from her stall, and then repay

87. Interview, Mbare Musika, 10 August, 2017. In the absence of effective credit markets in Zimbabwe, numerous contract farming arrangements have emerged to assist farmers to meet production costs. See for instance Freedom Mazwi et al., 'Political economy of command agriculture in Zimbabwe: A state-led contract farming model', *Agrarian South: Journal of Political Economy* 8, 1–2 (2019), pp. 232–257; Ian Scoones et al., 'Tobacco, contract farming, and agrarian change in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Agrarian Change* 18, 1 (2018), pp. 22–42.

what she owes the farmers by midday. If the borrowed stock is not sold, Mai Tendi borrows cash from fellow traders and then repays the traders at the end of the day. Her good credit track record and trustworthiness have helped build strong relationships, especially with smallholder farmers. These farmers now entrust her with commodity credits up to 7 days, and in some instances, she even pays by a mobile phone transfer after the farmers have returned to their plots. Such arrangements saved her business from collapse at a time when her child was involved in an accident, and she had to use almost all of her business savings (\$10000), but 'her farmers' came to her rescue with commodity credits. Even retailers selling on a large scale, such as Mai Tendi, still retain closely knit relationships with farmers, retailers, and other actors in the market.

During her other produce-sourcing trips, Mai Tendi ended up being the sole buyer of one of Zimbabwe's main producers of bell peppers, at Kintyre Estates outside Harare. For more than 10 years, she was a frequent buyer of bell peppers at the estate and, unknown to her, all her purchases had been captured in the farm's electronic records. Then, upon invitation, she travelled to meet with the owner, who had relocated to South Africa. He expressed his interest in making her the sole buyer of peppers from the estate and offered her a formal contract.

Mai Tendi's creditworthiness and reputation have opened avenues for her to purchase on credit in the event that other suppliers fail to meet her daily requirements. Despite incurring losses at times, Mai Tendi abides by the contracts to avoid problems and to ensure continued cooperation. She was the only female trader with a swipe machine at Mbare Musika offering customers electronic payment options. She also serves customers from as far away as Beitbridge and Bulawayo, but she operates in these markets on a cash-only basis to avoid defaults and costs of pursuing payments. She trusts the local vendors more because they can easily be reached and help her collect cash from the various points where they sell their produce around Harare. Mai Tendi is also part of a high-end internal savings and lending group with seven other women retailers and bulk produce suppliers. Over the last 8 years, together they have consistently contributed between \$500 and \$1,000 per month and pay out the total amount to a member of the group each month. Mai Tendi's case demonstrates the ability among traders with deep experience in Mbare Musika to adapt to new market realities brought about by economic shifts, production and technological changes, and diverse ways of collaborating and forging relationships.

Mbare Musika not only is the place where locally produced commodities are traded. Edson has risen through the ranks of the produce market from a normal retailer to one of the top importers of fresh produce from South

Africa.⁸⁸ A seasoned import trader, Mr Ncube, facilitated Edson's entry into the import world. The period between 2007 and 2008, when basic food commodities including fresh produce were scarce, was an opportune one for Edson. Seasonal commodities such as sweet potatoes were in erratic supply and were no longer proving profitable. On his first trip to South Africa, Edson and four friends joined Mr Ncube on a learning trip. Upon their return, each of the five acquired the documents necessary to import—company registration, Agriculture Marketing Authority certificate, and permits from the Ministry of Agriculture and the Department of Plant Quarantine Services.

The main challenges Edson and his colleagues encounter pertain to registering and obtaining import permits. In addition, requirements for importers shift constantly. There are periodic prohibitions on importing certain commodities as well as open and closed import windows for particular products. Moreover, there are constant hard currency shortages and cumbersome clearance procedures at the border that can result in long delays and spoilage of produce.

Understanding the shifts and endurance in Mbare Musika

Our analysis underlines that the market is a smooth and logically ordered space, providing an effective basis for commodity exchange outside the framework of the state. Informality we argue is an essential ingredient for the analysis of markets like Mbare Musika. Markets are nested in what we understand as informality but simultaneously embedded in and connected with regional and global (food) markets in which also supermarkets operate.⁸⁹ Mbare Musika clearly hinges on a polycentric form of organization with multiple configurations serving different interests—a farmer trying to sell produce, an opportunistic middleman out to make fast money, women concerned about protecting their livelihoods and family well-being, and the unemployed looking for income opportunities in the fluid market. These social actors find some refuge and security in the informal nature of Mbare Musika. Women traders' social capital is well recognized in Mbare Musika.⁹⁰ The case material also reveals the Mbare Musika that has sustained defining economic and sociopolitical moments

88. Interview, 18 August, 2017.

89. See Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, 'Newly emerging, nested markets: A theoretical introduction' in Paul Hebinck, Jan Douwe van der Ploeg, and Sergio Schneider (eds), *Rural Development and the construction of new markets* (Routledge, London, 2015), pp. 16–40; Wegerif and Hebinck, 'The symbiotic food system'.

90. See Horn, 'Cultivating customers'; Chamlee-Wright, 'Entrepreneurial response'; See for a discussion on social capital and social networks: Meagher, 'Social capital or analytical liability?'.

of violence and interference which we relate to the way actors interact in the making of the market and their self-organizing capacity.

One of the ways in which Mbare Musika is constructed and reconstructed over time remains kinship, with the family as the central organizing entity.⁹¹ These relationships provide continuity to the market place. The narratives of Mr Chireka and Tapiwa demonstrate how the family produce business is safeguarded through possession of a market stall. First-generation traders and “landlords” in Mbare understood and protected the potential and benefits of belonging *inside* the market. In all cases, where family traders were interviewed at Mbare Musika, none had relinquished ownership of a stall or desired to do so. As material infrastructure, access to and control over the market stall inculcate a sense of belonging, ownership of space, and influence for the holder. The market is therefore sustained by family businesses that continuously reproduce their presence and exercise agency in the market regardless of prevailing economic conditions or other social and political pressures. The market stall and fruit and vegetable family business resonate as a permanent socio-material infrastructure of the market. Spousal collaborations are common, expanding opportunities and scale of business in the competitive market space.

Our analysis supports our initial assumption that, following the FTLRP, a new and diverse range of actors, including smallholder farmers and people seeking economic livelihoods in the informalized economy, turn to places such as Mbare Musika because of its mode of organization. The capacity to absorb all these newcomers to the market is embedded in the way it is organized. Steven’s story represents the typical smallholder producer identifying Mbare Musika as the preferred market, relatively easy to access with minimal rules and strict adherence to quality checks and flexible entry and exit. The influx of large numbers of smallholders producing fresh produce on their recently acquired land results in new ways of organizing for marketing, new relationships, new behaviours, new expressions, and new market realities. The effect of the changed agrarian structure in Zimbabwe is evident in the market and most visible in the farmers’ section where producers assemble their produce. New strategies for ensuring supply and consistency are demonstrated in the negotiations for middlemen and/or transporters to collect produce at the farm gate; these strategies include entering into written contracts or verbal agreements with retailers at Mbare Musika to finance the production of specific commodities on demand. Reciprocal actions from farmers expressed through extending

91. Similar findings are reported in Norman Long, ‘Commerce and kinship in highland Peru,’ in Richard Bolton and Edward Mayer (eds), *Andean kinship and marriage* (American Anthropological Association, Washington DC, 1977), pp. 153–177; See also Nicola Tassi, *The native world-system. An ethnography of Bolivian Aymara traders in the global economy* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2017); Black, ‘Porta Palazzo’.

commodity credit to traders in times of need are manifestations of new ways of doing business that previously did not exist.⁹² The existence of such arrangements does not imply they are immediately available to everyone; rather, they remain the preserve of active negotiators among the actors, who make the effort to learn, unlearn, and relearn market networks and power relationships.

With the FTLRP, simultaneous ripple effects triggered both the melt-down in productivity and manufacturing and the informalization that largely characterize the nature of the economy. Thus, we see in the market not just one kind of a new actor—the producers—but also multiple actors taking up roles of transport providers, caterers, loaders, packagers, middlemen, salespersons, and intermediaries in a highly informalized economic environment. As shown in the case of Tapiwa, unemployed youths are among those who turn to fresh produce marketing for a livelihood. Mbare Musika has thus seen, in the last decade, an influx not only of young traders taking over from their parents but also of other opportunity seekers motivated by difficult economic challenges. To a large extent, markets in Zimbabwe, such as Mbare Musika, that rely on agricultural production are heavily impacted by the combined effects of the FTLRP and its associated effects on the broader economic and political environment.

The activities of the women traders in Mbare illuminate the role of gender and its influence over some of the strategies adopted. While they feature in the farmers' market as vendors, retailers, caterers, and packers and share in purchasing products and seeking each other out to split costs, the women in the wholesale market productively engage with all the social processes that foster collaboration or symbiosis. Collaborating entailed helping each other out in whatever ways like subletting of stalls, watching over each other business while one was elsewhere to pay school fees for instance. This was arranged in a reciprocal way. Examining and characterizing these reciprocal relations help creating an image of the market as not necessarily shaped by social relations of competition and of class in similar ways as other researchers have argued.⁹³ The fresh produce business allows innovations around livelihood generation which become more relevant in the face of severe liquidity challenges in the economy. The strategies to save and secure income, acquire assets, and provide for other basic needs are expressions of

92. The availability of cash prior to the onset of the current shortages meant traders transacted in cash and worked on the basis of cash upon delivery; however, the current scarcity of and unpredictable access to cash have led to farmers and traders finding means to continue transacting.

93. See for instance Hill, 'Markets in Africa'; Wegerif and Hebinck, 'The symbiotic food system'; Marc Wegerif, 'Feeding Dar es Salaam: A symbiotic food system perspective' (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, Wageningen University, 2017); Marc Wegerif, 'An ethnographic exploration of food and the city', *Anthropology Today* 34, 5 (2018), pp. 16–20; Black, 'Porta Palazzo'.

new interdependencies. A market such as Mbare Musika is both a place and an identity; the attachment and affiliations are highly valued since, in one form or another, Mbare is the centre and enabler of fundamental survival strategies.

Over time, Mbare Musika has been reassembled socially but not so much materially. The physical arrangement and types of commodities traded have remained constant over the years. New actors (i.e. traders, suppliers) struggle with varying degrees of success to occupy a place and space at Mbare. The power and roles of the market queens have shifted and their places are contested by cabals of small traders acting in collaboration. Prior relationships of dependency are actively reworked through negotiation and manipulation of existing market governance bodies, challenging the positions market queens traditionally occupied. Middlemen are increasingly being confronted by farmers wishing to eliminate their role in the marketing process. Yet, it appears that farmers venturing into the fresh produce business for the first time continue to seek out the middlemen as brokers for assistance and market knowledge to gain access and competitive advantages.

Conclusion

Through this article, we have shown that the historical and contemporary changes at Mbare Musika are the results of broader political and socio-economic processes in Zimbabwe rooted in economic decline and shifting agricultural production arrangements following FTLRP and extending into markets such as Mbare. In the highly informalized economy, Mbare Musika is a place where smallholder producers and traders forge new alliances with a plethora of other social actors to strengthen and defend their positions in the urban food economy. Mbare Musika, while experiencing serious infrastructural challenges and promises of refurbishment that never happen, has transformed into a thriving economic centre for fresh produce distribution. The actors involved are conscious of the need to protect the market and prevent the refurbishment of the market that would threaten their livelihoods yet do little to resolve the concerns stemming from poor sanitation and infrastructure. The legacy of Mbare Musika, of repeated ups and downs—structural adjustment, clean-up operations, attempts to clamp down on informality, economic meltdown, hyperinflation, dollarization, liquidity crises—endures with actors who continue seeking ways to keep the market intact and functional for their own benefit. This durability is firmly embedded in the polycentric organization of Mbare and the diversity of produce and knowledge of the market and the commodities traded there. It remains the *lucky* market for consumers and traders, where prices change

continuously and where producers gamble and win or lose depending on subtle market complexities.

The ordering of Mbare Musika reveals rules and regulations that are continuously shaped and reshaped by people's practices and relationships. It is this self-organizing capacity, negotiability and resistance that characterizes the informality of Mbare. The relationships are based on interdependency and common interest around the commodities traded; the key marker to the ordering is not essentially about the rules but how the commodities and money flow to influence the behaviour of the people and how they transact. Slow economic recovery and informalization make Mbare Musika an unpredictable place where actors grapple and negotiate for space and recognition. Livelihood opportunities in fresh produce marketing appear fluid although fraught with unwritten rules and expressions of power and influence. The fluidity that has evolved in Mbare Musika and that characterizes much of the fresh produce production and marketing stands as a defence against state-led technocratic intrusions.

The significance of this article is that it brings together debates about markets and about the dynamics of the urban economy and politics. The focus on informality centring on the self-organizing capacity of social actors in making and ordering their social-institutional-material environment is significant beyond the analyse of Mbare Musika only. Informality and the struggle to maintain the order created through informality constitute an essential part of the urban and urban politics.⁹⁴ The contesting of attempts of municipal governing agencies to restructure the urban environment is met with an alternative ordering of space.⁹⁵ Informality critically interrogates the widely shared (almost teleological) notion predominantly by city planners and policy makers that the city (or the market, or the street, or the economy) is progressively transforming from an informal (i.e. disorganized) to a modern (i.e. well organized) place. Or that planners or the state incorporate the dynamics generated by informality.⁹⁶ In contrast, we argue that the city or the market is an emergent entity that is strongly nested in informality as a mode of economic organization and exchange. The situations that emerge are often open-ended, uncertain, and volatile. It would be a mistake, however, to perceive these as immune, or isolated and disconnected from what is happening elsewhere in the (globalizing)

94. See for an overview of positions and debate: Doctor Edgar Pieterse, *City futures: Confronting the crisis of urban development* (Zed Books Ltd., London, 2013).

95. See for instance the recent literature about similar processes in Johannesburg: Claire Béné-Gbaffou, 'Beyond the policy-implementation gap: How the city of Johannesburg manufactured the ungovernability of street trading', *The Journal of Development Studies* 54, 12 (2018), pp. 2149–2167; Robert Venter, 'Entrepreneurial values, hybridity and entrepreneurial capital: Insights from Johannesburg's informal sector', *Development Southern Africa* 29, 2 (2012), pp. 225–239.

96. See for instance Banks, Lombard, and Mitlin, 'Urban Informality'.

economy. Land reform and the responses to recurrent economic meltdowns in Zimbabwe and elsewhere in the region and crises such as those with cholera⁹⁷ or Ebola⁹⁸ similarly show the theoretical significance of the self-organizing capacity of social actors in dealing with their socio-material environment.

97. Simukai Chigudu, 'The politics of cholera, crisis and citizenship in urban Zimbabwe: 'People were dying like flies'', *African Affairs* 118, 472 (2019), pp. 413–434.

98. Paul Richards, *Ebola. How a people's science helped end an epidemic* (Zed Books, London, 2016).