

Zimbabwe's Economic Crisis and the Shebeen Sector in Bulawayo, 2007-08

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Abstract: Between 2000 and 2008 Zimbabwe experienced an economic crisis that reached its peak in 2007 and 2008. Africanists who have written about the informal sector in general and those who have written about the informal sector during periods of economic crises in particular have emphasized the inverse relationship between the formal economy and the expansion of informal sectors: that economic problems in the formal sectors of the economy led to the expansion of the informal sectors. This meta narrative, however, obscures the experiences of other sectors of the economy during the same period. Using primarily interviews with shebeen owners, patrons, and newspaper reports, this article argues that the same crisis that led to the expansion of other sectors of the economy destroyed the shebeen sector in Bulawayo. This was because the crisis reduced many people's disposable income, a development which forced many imbibers to change their drinking habits and patterns as they turned to cheaper illegally imported spirits with high alcohol content and to drugs - commodities then not sold in shebeens.

Key words: informal sector, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, alcohol and shebeens

Introduction

From 2000 Zimbabwe experienced a crippling economic crisis that reached its peak in 2007-08. The country's inflation rate reached 11 million by the end of May 2008, and by July of the same year, it had reached 231 million percent. By November 2008 it had reached "89.7 sextillion (i.e. 9 followed by 22 zeros) percent."¹ Some authors put the figure at 6.5 quindicillion novemdecillion percent (i.e. 65 followed by 107 zeros) by December 2008.² By then Zimbabwe's inflation rate had become the second highest recorded after post WWI Germany. During this period, businesses closed and many of those that remained open could not operate at full capacity. Consequently, large numbers of workers experienced retrenchment. Many of those joined the informal sector. As a result, the sector expanded exponentially, "as more and more Zimbabweans resorted to the informal sector for survival."³ While an estimated 50 percent of

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the national labour force was in the informal sector in 2000, by 2004 the figure had risen to 76 percent, and it reached over 80 percent in 2008.⁴

Bulawayo, the country's second largest city, experienced the same trend, if not at a faster rate.⁵ According to Mlambo, the rapid deindustrialization of the city during the post-independence period led to the "stratospheric rise in the informal sector in Bulawayo."⁶ Thus, the crisis that decimated the formal sectors of the economy led to the expansion of informality in Bulawayo in particular and in the country in general. This is how most scholars have explained the trajectory of the informal sector in Zimbabwe.⁷

This, however, did not occur in the informal alcohol sector (*shebeens*) in Mabutweni, Bulawayo. On the contrary, most *shebeen* operators in Mabutweni faced financial ruin from the same crisis that led to the expansion of other areas of the informal sector. According to oral sources, more than 50 percent of Mabutweni *shebeens* closed during the 2007-2008 economic crisis.⁸ This development puts into question the orthodox explanation of the relationship between formal and informal sectors during economic crises, an explanation that emphasizes the inverse relationship between the two sectors—that the informal sector expands when the formal sector is in crisis. Interviews with former *shebeen* owners, *shebeen* patrons, and newspaper reports suggest that the 2007-2008 economic crisis reduced many *shebeen* patrons' disposable income, a development that forced many of them to change their drinking habits and patterns. They turned to cheaper illegally imported spirits with high alcohol content, such as Diamond, Tentacao, and Double Punch as well as to hard drugs.⁹ Mabutweni *shebeen* owners failed to change with the shifting circumstances, as they continued selling locally produced (mostly by Delta Corporation Limited) beers such as Lion lager, Castle lager and Eagle lager that many of their *shebeen* patrons could no longer afford.

Was the experience of Mabutweni *shebeen* sector unique during this period? Situated 5km west of the city centre, Mabutweni is like any other low-income urban residential area in Zimbabwe. Initially established to accommodate Africans during the colonial period, its population is mostly low-income people. By the time of this crisis, most of the homeowners survived on small-scale businesses. Few were still in formal employment. We acknowledge, like many other scholars, that the informal sector expanded exponentially during this period. However, the narrative that simply emphasizes expansion of the informal sectors does not tell the whole story (stories). While other branches of the informal economy expanded, the *shebeen* sector shrank. Nor was the *shebeen* sector the only sector to experience this trajectory. Anecdotal evidence suggests that similar developments occurred in the informal basketry sector, a sector whose main clients—members of the middle class—were hard hit by this crisis.¹⁰ Likewise, food vending in industrial sites collapsed with the near total demise of the manufacturing sector. The same is true of food vending in municipal-owned bars that closed at the height of the crisis, not only in Bulawayo, but in other towns as well. Nor was this trend unique to Zimbabwe during the 2007-2008 economic crisis. Some branches of the informal economy in Ghana, for example, shrank in the 1980s when the country was experiencing an economic crisis.¹¹ What this suggests is that as the disposable income of the low-income earners in general and the working class in particular declined, so did the informal sectors in which cheaper alternatives replaced main commodities and where main clients were the low-income groups.

In writing about these years of the Zimbabwean crisis and the ways crisis forced ordinary people to adjust their drinking habits, we are writing about an environment we were part of and about what we observed in a suburb that is home to one of the authors (Moyo). In 2007-08, she was staying with her grandmother—a shebeen operator from 1992 to 2015. She often participated in the mundane activities of the shebeen such as selling beer. In this capacity, she witnessed the declining profitability of her grandmother's shebeen as well as the general decline of the sector in Mabutweni. Although her grandmother's shebeen survived the economic vicissitudes of 2007-08, many surrounding businesses did not. Many of the informants interviewed for this article were acquaintances from this period and happy to reminisce about the difficulties experienced in 2007-08. As we moved away from this immediate area, we increasingly depended on a network of (former) shebeen owners known by the grandmother. This loose association of shebeen owners organically developed as they shared information about impending police raids, market intelligence, and supported each other in times of trouble, among other things. A visit to one member of this loose association often led to a referral to another owner. Most of the informants shared their experiences with this author, as they regarded her as their own granddaughter too. To protect these women and men who agreed to speak to us, we use pseudonyms throughout the paper.

The article engages two strands of related literature. Scholars who have written on informality in Zimbabwe largely utilize the crisis thesis of informality, which postulates an inverse relationship between the formal sector and informal sector during crisis periods. It contends, "the informal sector expands when the official economy enters a crisis period."¹² One thing that Africanists have unmistakably shown is that since the 1970s, the informal sector has been expanding in most Sub-Saharan African countries. However, scholars assign different reasons for this growth. Scholars with neo-liberal leanings, for example, blame "excessive government intervention and inappropriate macro-policies," to put it in the words of two prominent scholars of Tanzania.¹³ Critics of neo-liberal policies, especially those championed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, blame the hardships caused by such policies for expanding the ranks of those who join the informal sector.¹⁴ Other scholars with a Marxist bent view the informal sector "as much a political as an economic phenomenon...a manifestation of class struggle, as well as of coping strategies to deal with economic exigency."¹⁵

Similarly, those who focus on everyday forms of resistance view the expansion of the informal sector during economic crises as a form of protest. Writing about Tanzania, Tripp describes the informal sector "as a form of noncompliance [a form of resistance] that falls under the Scott's array of 'weapons of the weak' – foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, arson, sabotage, slander and tax evasion."¹⁶ She goes on: "People's persistence in their informal income-generating activities in defiance of government restrictions became a form of opposition." Thus Tripp, like MacGaffey, regards the informal sector as the manifestation of everyday forms of resistance by oppressed people. One common thread in all these works is the belief that a reduction in the real income of people leads to a higher demand for informal goods and services, a development that leads to the expansion of the sector.

This thesis emphasizes the economic environment and does not pay sufficient attention to the nature of goods or services. As a result, with minor differences, the literature on informality in Zimbabwe during the crisis period is schematic—the expansion of the informal sector is

simply a direct result of problems in the formal sector. It views the “informal sector” as a single phenomenon whose expansion or contraction inexorably follow the same path. What this thesis fails to appreciate is that crisis situations force people to change their consumption patterns and habits in ways that differently affect the demand for certain goods sold in the informal sector. While the demand of certain goods might remain the same because they are necessities, or even increase as people shift to buy cheaper alternatives, the demand of other goods might decline as people prioritize their needs and forced to seek cheaper alternatives. The Chair of the Board of Directors of a then major beer retailer in Harare, Rufaro Marketing (Pvt), could not have been more correct in 1994: “Expenditure on luxury products or non-essential goods, such as beer, tends to be marginalised in times of economic hardships.”¹⁷ This is exactly what happened in 2007-08 when Zimbabwe’s economic crisis reached its peak.

The second but related strand of literature this article confronts concerns the influence of economic conditions on beer drinking patterns. For decades, scholars have debated this issue. One group contends that beer is a normal good whose consumption corresponds directly to income.¹⁸ In particular, this group of scholars argues that when income declines, beer consumption also declines. Another group of scholars, mostly psychologists, instead view consumption as cyclical and suggest “economic downturns cause stress-induced drinking.”¹⁹ We do not have relevant data to determine whether the Zimbabwean crisis caused people to drink more or less beer. We do however, contend that the crisis reduced people’s disposable income, a development that in turn reduced the client base of house-based shebeens, forcing many of them to close.

Historical Background: The Genesis and Evolution of the Crisis

Zimbabwe’s economic crisis that peaked in 2007-08 affected the lives of many people. The crisis is traceable back to the Economic Structural Adjustment Program (ESAP) of 1991 that, instead of reviving the economy, eventually destroyed it.²⁰ ESAP resulted in the closure of businesses, especially manufacturing industries. The crisis deepened in 1997 with President Mugabe’s decision to give veterans huge sums of money as compensation for participating in the 1970s war of liberation. According to Coomer and Gstraunthaler, the money given to the war veterans “had the immediate effect of inflating the [1997] budget by 55 percent.”²¹ In 1998, the government compounded the situation by sending soldiers to support the government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in a civil war that also involved several countries. This further worsened the country’s economic problems, including shortages of hard currency.²² In 2000, Zimbabwe started the Fast Track Land Reform Program that confiscated white-owned farms without compensation. This move also played a crucial role in deepening the economic turmoil in the country, as agricultural production dropped drastically since those who took over the land did not have enough capital to run the farms efficiently.²³ These policies and decisions contributed to hyperinflation that affected the livelihoods of ordinary Zimbabweans.²⁴ This crisis reached its peak in 2007-08. As mentioned above, many scholars have demonstrated that as Zimbabwe’s formal economy collapsed the informal sector expanded. This is, however, not what happened in the shebeen sector in Mabutweni as explained in detail below.

The Decline of the Shebeen Industry in Mabutweni, 2007-08

The country's economic crisis reached its zenith in 2007-08. During this period, the unemployment rate reached over 90 percent, and many formal businesses closed or reduced production. Conversely, the informal sectors in general expanded as never before. According to Mlambo, the crisis turned the country into a nation of vendors.²⁵ Yet the crisis of the formal economy and concomitant decline in people's disposable income did not have the same effects across the economy. While many branches of the informal sector expanded as the economy imploded, the shebeen sector in Mabutweni shrank in tandem with the formal sectors of the economy. The 2007-08 crisis resulted in the closure of at least 50 percent of Mabutweni shebeens.²⁶ In the early 2000s, the suburb had at least 31 shebeens but by the end of 2008, only 11 remained.²⁷ So why did the shebeen sector in Mabutweni shrink at a time other branches of the informal sector expanded?

We must first pay close attention to the nature of goods sold in shebeens—that is, primarily alcohol—and to how people behave in crisis situations regarding their demand for different alcoholic beverages. The dramatic decline in disposable income forced many people to realign and reprioritize their needs and wants. For many beer drinkers, this involved shifting from drinking more expensive brands of beers such as Castle Lager and Black Label to less-expensive illegal beverages (both locally brewed and illegally imported) with high alcohol content and/or the use of other drugs. This development forced those shebeens whose main commodities were expensive lager beers to close, as demand of these brands of beers declined.

As has been alluded above, Zimbabwe's economic woes hit salaried people, especially the lower ranks of the middle class, hard. It reduced their disposable income like never before. One anecdote will suffice to illustrate this decline. In 2006, a senior teacher earned about ZW\$13 million (\$US 71) per month.²⁸ By June 2008 a senior teacher earned a salary as low as \$ ZW150 billion (\$US 3), an amount enough to buy just "20 eggs and a 10kg of maize on the black market."²⁹ In this economic environment, beer became a luxury many people could ill-afford.

The crisis also resulted in mass retrenchment. For example, Bulawayo City Council (BCC) Mabutweni branch workers used to visit shebeens after work. Mthethwa echoed the plight of many Mabutweni shebeen owners when she said,

I was left with very few customers as the Bulawayo City Council workers were most of my regular patrons. They used to come after work and spent many hours in my shebeen. When most of them got retrenched, some of them still frequented my shebeen, but they usually took the beer on credit. This left me broke as most of them could not pay back their debts.³⁰

Debra faced the same problem; as a result, her clientele base kept on shrinking.³¹ "Things became so bad so much that I would get only four quarts bought a day, while at the same time the police would come to get their bribe on that little money that I made," she said.³² Many of their patrons could no longer afford to buy locally brewed lager brands manufactured mostly by Delta Corporation Limited.³³

Those who could no longer afford the more expensive brands turned to cheaper and often illicit types of drugs and alcohol. Former shebeen patron Promise said, "we resorted to using *ngoma* [Bulawayo slang for Broncleer, a cough syrup with alcohol and codeine] and *mbanje* [cannabis], which were cheaper than beer, as beer turned to be a luxury for some of us... We

could no longer afford it, especially some of us who were not employed."³⁴ Many of these sold in the streets and in houses under conditions different from the established shebeens.

Under these trying conditions, imbibers had to decide on whether to continue drinking the same brands of beer or not. Many chose to shift to the less expensive brands. As a result, the consumption of lager beers in particular declined. In 2006, for example, sales of lager beers by Delta Corporation Limited fell by 9 percent compared to the previous year.³⁵ In 2007 lager beer sales dropped by 23 percent compared to the 2006 volumes.³⁶ This decline continued in 2008. A 2008 Delta Corporation Limited annual report noted that, "lager beer volumes were down... as consumer spending power came under severe inflationary pressure."³⁷ This decline in consumers' disposable income and the concomitant contraction of the shebeen sector did not start in 2007 but only quickened as inflation peaked. A 2006 report, for example, noted "rising inflation, falling employment and contraction of the informal sector have led to a fall in consumer disposable income."³⁸

It was not only the demand for clear beers that was shrinking, Consumption of opaque (sorghum) beer, a main commodity of Mabutweni shebeens, was also declining. Two major reasons account for this decline. First, while sorghum beer was the cheapest beer sold in shebeens many people did not like it because of its "blotting paper" effect.³⁹ The high solids content plus low alcohol content only made people intoxicated after drinking a lot of beer, which still translated to spending a lot of money. Second, the problem of low alcohol content was then compounded by rampant watering of draught pours which reduced an already low alcohol content. On the part of BCC workers and drivers who supplied the beer, this was part of the *kukiya kiya* economy—"cleverness, dodging, and the exploitation of whatever resources at hand with an eye to self-sustenance" with little regard to morals.⁴⁰

To be clear, the problem of watering draught beer did not start during the crisis but it then reached unimaginable proportions. These factors further reduced the popularity of opaque beer, especially in draught form. Not surprisingly, the market share of Chibuku (an opaque beer commercially brewed in Southern and Eastern Africa) in the country declined from 49 percent to 37 percent between 2007 and 2012.⁴¹ It was against this backdrop that some residents of Mabutweni—especially the young generation—turned to cheaper but more potent alcoholic brands, and to other drugs.

Thus, contrary to the dictum that "[b]everages lower in alcohol content tend to be lower in price, leading to a greater quantity demand," spirits with high alcohol content were not only cheaper in Mabutweni, but were in higher demand.⁴² In a study on the proliferation of illicit Mozambican alcohol in Zimbabwe, Duri explains why some people preferred potent beverages to those with less alcohol content:

Many Zimbabweans who were unemployed or had no regular means of income settled for the relatively less expensive alcoholic spirits of Mozambican origin...[T]hey settled for the highly potent spirits...to get intoxicated within the shortest possible time and at a relatively cheaper cost, given their impoverished condition.⁴³

Writing about alcohol consumption in 1980s Dar es Salaam, Bryceson notes similar developments. According to her, "as the purchasing power of the city's middle-class beer drinking stratum declined, the market for the cheaper alcohol products of the informal sector

expanded."⁴⁴ She further adds that, "the bottled-beer market formerly so prevalent...was shrinking and being replaced by relatively cheap distilled drinks from cottage industries. The higher alcohol content was attractive to drinkers experiencing hard times."⁴⁵

In a study that sought the determinants of alcohol consumption in the United Kingdom between 1957 and 1975, McGuinness echoes similar sentiments. He writes, "as income rises there is on average, a switch to higher quality types of alcohol, and that as income falls there is, on average, a switch towards alcohol in cheaper forms."⁴⁶ McGuinness, however, maintains that income is not a major determinant of alcohol consumption.⁴⁷ Instead, "retail availability is a major determinant of alcohol consumption."⁴⁸ Why was income not a major determinant of alcohol consumption in the UK but a critical one in Zimbabwe in 2007-08? McGuinness' study covers a period of economic upswing in the United Kingdom whereas we cover a period of extreme economic distress when most Zimbabweans struggled even to put food on the table. For most Zimbabwean imbibers, like many Tanzanians in the 1980s, income and alcohol content were primary factors in their choice of the types of alcohol to buy.

The decline in disposable income, together with the extraordinary currency volatility, had direct deleterious effects on shebeen owners. Mazondo, a former owner who closed her operation in 2008, noted that currency volatility forced her to reduce the number of crates of beer she stocked.⁴⁹ Before 2007, she sold a minimum of three crates a day but in 2007-08 she struggled to sell even a single crate of beer.⁵⁰ Debra, a shebeen owner, also echoed similar sentiments. She said, "instead of selling beer and having extra money to grow the business, my business kept on declining. The money that I made kept on losing value every day to an extent that the number of crates I stocked declined."⁵¹

The crisis also led to massive emigration of people, mostly to South Africa.⁵² Harslam and Lamberti note that, "as living conditions deteriorated, countless Zimbabweans solved their economic problem by migrating."⁵³ Mabutweni also experienced this, a development that additionally reduced the size of shebeen clientele. Thandiwe Tshuma, a shebeen owner, explained how some of the people who used to drink at her shebeen, including eight regulars, moved to South Africa during the 2007-08 period.⁵⁴ This development left her business struggling. This experience was a common one.

Emigration also deprived owners of labor, as the family members also joined those who migrated to South Africa in search of greener pastures. The case of Thenjiwe illustrates this point. Thenjiwe depended on family labor for stocking, selling, and the general running of her shebeen. In 2008, she was 70 years old and running a shebeen on her own was becoming increasingly difficult, as she had to handle stock, deal with rowdy customers, and even face police on her own.⁵⁵ Before 2008, Thenjiwe depended on six of her grandchildren to run her shebeen business. At different times during the first five months of 2008, four of her older grandchildren relocated to South Africa.⁵⁶ Left with only two young grandchildren, she closed her shebeen in September 2008.

Economic problems were not the only reasons shebeens in Mabutweni faced viability challenges in 2007-08. Police demands also worsened their plight. Almost all shebeen owners interviewed cited the increased frequency of police raids as one of the reasons that contributed to the closure of their businesses. Many of the raids never led to formal arrests with one taken to a police station to pay a fine.⁵⁷ The raids during that time were driven by corruption and

shebeen owners saw the raids as survival schemes for police officers. Ntombi revealed that arrests happened almost every day, whether the police found people buying beer or not.⁵⁸ Matshabalala aired similar experiences:

While during the previous years there were a few corrupt police [officers] who arrested us to get money and some who genuinely arrested us because we were operating unlawful businesses, during the 2008 crisis, almost all police officers were corrupt. Hunger motivated them to arrest us because I don't remember being arrested and going to the police station during that period.⁵⁹

As Matshabalala suggests, at the height of the crisis in 2007-08 police saw shebeens as easy targets for economic predation since the salary they earned was not enough to sustain their families. A 2007 newspaper report made a similar observation: "with the average police officer earning about Z\$130,000 (\$US 26) after this month's salary adjustment, the police officers say the money is way too little in Zimbabwe's hyperinflationary environment...forcing most of them to resort to crime to survive."⁶⁰ We are not the first to link the increase in corruption to low salaries—Tanzi made the same conclusion in a 1998 study.⁶¹ One shebeen owner explained the modus operandi of police officers,

The police would come and say 'pack your beer on the crates and let us go. You are under arrest.' After packing the beer, you will be taken as if you are being arrested and when you walk for about 200 metres they would say, 'give us money and we will let you go.' Because of the fear of going to the police station you will just give them the money and go back home with your beer.⁶²

This strategy contributed a lot to the losses shebeen owners suffered, as they used some of their profits to bribe police officers.

For shebeen owners, the worst part was police officers raiding their shebeens almost daily. Police officers worked in groups, and they gave each other chances to raid a different shebeen each day. Thandiwe noted that, "It was like they had a schedule to say today this group goes to that other shebeen; today we go to that one. This helped them in that when they arrested us, we could not say 'I bribed you yesterday...' You were still forced to bribe them as they were another group and they even denied knowing each other."⁶³ This affected the day-to-day running of shebeens, as owners diverted both working capital and profits to bribe police officers. Put differently, the decline in the police officers' disposable income directly led to increased incidences of corruption. In this environment, shebeens became easy targets for the police. Police officers could threaten shebeen owners with arrest because they were operating illegal businesses. To avoid arrests, and loss of business, beer, and bottle deposits, shebeen owners resorted to bribing police officers.

One of the strategies that the police used was to pay an individual to buy beer in a shebeen and as soon as that person went out, they pounced.⁶⁴ Owners no longer knew whether someone was a police operative or a genuine customer. Thoko attributed the increase of corruption among police officers during the crisis to lack of resources, particularly police vehicles. For many police officers, lack of vehicles gave them opportunities to engage in rent-seeking behaviours.⁶⁵ According to Thoko, "the police officers who raided us did not have vehicles to transport us and our beer like they used to do before the crisis ... [They] resolved the issue by making us pay bribes."⁶⁶ Shebeens could not effectively operate because the police saw them as

rent-collection opportunities. Additionally, some police officers demanded free beer when they could not get money from the owners. All this affected the profitability of shebeens.

The collapse of urban self-help institutions rooted in beer halls and shebeens, such as burial societies, also contributed to the disappearance of some shebeens. Township beer halls were meeting hubs for burial societies, especially during month-ends. During meetings, members drank beer procured mostly from shebeens because they sold cold beer.⁶⁷ The dissolution of burial societies due to currency volatility and other factors thereby made some shebeen operations unsustainable. Thandiwe told us, "We were hard hit by this problem as it meant that our customers became fewer and fewer because many people who used to flood the beer halls during month ends were also affected by the economy and decided to close their clubs and burial societies."⁶⁸

Electricity cuts also contributed to the closure of many shebeens in 2007-08. The state-owned Zimbabwe Electricity Supply Authority (ZESA) could not consistently supply electricity in part because of the shortage of foreign currency with which to pay neighbouring countries to secure enough electricity supply.⁶⁹ As a result, many industries shut down or reduced production. Shebeens were not spared as they also depended on electricity to keep their beer cold. Tshuma narrated her experience:

The last time I stocked beer, I had 3 crates of bottled beer that I kept in the fridge without customers buying it. The electricity cuts affected me very much because when electricity was there, beer became cold and when [the] electricity went off for almost the whole day beer became warm, when electricity came back the beer became cold, again. When that process was repeated for almost 3 days, beer became 'flat' and those few customers would buy and then bring it back to say it was 'flat' and I was always forced to give them back their money. I later then discovered that almost all the bottles had become 'flat', and I ran a huge loss that time and that was the last time I ran a shebeen.⁷⁰

Many shebeen owners faced the same problem, a situation that led them to close their businesses, as they did not know when such conditions would end.

Why did Mabutweni shebeen owners fail to adapt and start selling the cheaper beers, spirits, and drugs that were now in high demand? Two reasons—moral and economic—explain this failure. First, for many owners, selling lager and opaque beer was one a thing, selling other drugs and illegal high-alcohol spirits was quite another. There was no moral equivalence between the two, so they believed. Second was a lack of foreign currency to import these alternative items.⁷¹ Access to foreign currency determined access to imports and 'traditional' shebeen owners did not have it because they sold their beer in local currency. Owners in Mabutweni also failed to adapt to new trends because most were old women who could not effectively be involved in illicit cross border trade in alcohol.

However, the crisis did not have a homogenous effect on different socio-economic classes. In a 2013 study, Mandikumba showed that between 2007 and 2012 "consumers started shifting from local brands to foreign brands which were perceived to be of high quality, improved taste, fairly priced and considered as the beer type going with their ages and times."⁷² He also noted that the wine and spirit market share in the country increased from 3 percent to 6 percent over these years.⁷³ How do we explain the discrepancy between what happened in Mabutweni and

the situation Mandikumba documents? It could have been a result of increasing inequality during these years. Mabutweni is mostly lower ranks of the middle class especially hard hit by the 2007-2008 economic collapse that compelled some imbibers of this class to change their drinking patterns and habits.

Conclusion

Many scholars have argued that the decline of the formal economy invariably led to growth of the informal sector. There is merit in this argument as the collapse of formal economies usually leads many people to enter the informal sector for survival. This occurred in Latin America during the 1980s, in Asia during the 1990s, and in multiple African countries since the 1970s. Given this backdrop, it is understandable that the prevailing image of the informal sector in Africa is one of continuous, uniform expansion. This image reflects two things about this body of literature. First, it shows the power of a dominant narrative to suppress counter (mini)narratives. Second, scholars have missed these nuances because they have paid too much attention to economic conditions during crisis at the expense of how people change their consumption habits vis-a vis the disposable income and the nature of particular goods or services. If we focus on the demand—or lack therefore—of specific goods and services, we find that economic stresses do not always lead to the expansion of the informal sector. The demand for goods during periods of economic stress differ, depending on utility value and price. During the 2007-08 crisis, when people's disposable income declined, some imbibers shifted to less expensive beer types, beverages with high-alcohol content, and to drugs—a strategy that resulted in the closure of many shebeens in Mabutweni.

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Notes

¹ Hanke, cited in Makombe et al. 2023, p. 17.

² Makochekanwa, cited in Makombe et al. 2023, p. 17.

³ Mlambo 2017, p. 107.

⁴ Mlambo 2017, p. 125.

⁵ Moyo 2018.

⁶ Moyo 2018.

⁷ Some of the scholars who argue along these lines are Mlambo 2017, Jones 2010; Gumbo 2013; Munangagwa 2009, Ndiweni and Verhoeven 2013, Gumbo and Geyer 2011.

⁸ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 30 September 2020; Interview with Siziba, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 5 October 2020.

⁹ Diamond, Tantacoo and Double Punch are the names of the cheap spirits that some drinkers turned to at the height of the crisis. These spirits were imported from countries such as Mozambique and Botswana.

¹⁰ Interview with Dakarai, Mount Pleasant, Harare, 8 October 2022. Dakarai has been working in this sector since the early 1990s.

¹¹ Barwa 1995, p. 12

¹² Capechi 1989, p. 193.

¹³ Bagachwa and Naho 1994, p. 10.

¹⁴ Mlambo et al. 2000, pp. 110-123.

¹⁵ MacGaffey 1987, p. 23.

¹⁶ Tripp 1997, p. 8.

¹⁷ CM, [No file no.], Master File [Closed], N.F.Nhau, Chairman's Report, 1994.

¹⁸ For a summary of this debate, see Vollad 2012. A normal good is a good that experiences increase in demand with the increase of people's income. See, Tremblay 1992, pp. 69-76.

¹⁹ Brenner and Mooney, cited in Vollad 2012, p. 10.

²⁰ Mlambo 2017.

²¹ Coomer and Gstraunthaler 2011, p. 318.

²² "DRC Conflict Comes Back to Haunt Zimbabwe," *The Zimbabwean*, 10 November 2008.

²³ Mutodi 2012.

²⁴ Munangagwa 2009.

²⁵ Mlambo 2017.

²⁶ Interviews with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 30 September 2020; Siziba, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 5 October 2020; Lawrence, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 4 December 2020.

²⁷ The number of shebeens obtained through counting of shebeens in Mabutweni with the help of locals.

²⁸ "Zimbabwe: Schools Hit by a Teacher Exodus", *Institute for War and Peace Reporting*, 13 March 2006.

²⁹ McGreal 2008.

³⁰ Interview with Mthethwa, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 October 2020.

³¹ Interview with Mthethwa, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 October 2020.

- ³² Interview with Mthethwa, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 October 2020.
- ³³ Delta Beverages controlled 80 percent of the market.
- ³⁴ Interview with Promise, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 November 2020.
- ³⁵ Delta Corporation Limited, Annual Report 2006, p.11.
- ³⁶ Delta Corporation Limited, Annual Report 2007, p. 11.
- ³⁷ Mupawose, 2008, p. 8. In a recent book chapter, Jeremy Jones emphasized the company's inability to meet demand. See Jones 2023, p. 150.
- ³⁸ Mupawose 2006, p. 4.
- ³⁹ The blotting paper effect refers to how opaque beer makes people feel very full after drinking which affects the quantity of its intake. Interview with Promise, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 November 2020.
- ⁴⁰ Jones 2010, p. 286.
- ⁴¹ Mandikumba 2013, p. 19.
- ⁴² Ornstein and Hanssens 1985, p. 209.
- ⁴³ Duri 2017, p. 65.
- ⁴⁴ Bryceson 2002, p. 22.
- ⁴⁵ Bryceson 2002, p. 22.
- ⁴⁶ McGuinness 1980, pp. 100-102.
- ⁴⁷ McGuinness 1980, p. 102.
- ⁴⁸ McGuinness 1980. He, however, acknowledges that further research in this area is necessary.
- ⁴⁹ Interview with Mazondo, Mpopoma, Bulawayo, 16 November 2020. A crate of beer contains 12 pints of beer or six quarts.
- ⁵⁰ Interview with Mazondo, Mpopoma, Bulawayo, 16 November 2020.
- ⁵¹ Interview with Debra, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 October 2020.
- ⁵² Coltart 2008, p. 7.
- ⁵³ Harslam and Lamberti 2014, p. 101.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 27 December 2020.
- ⁵⁵ Interview with Thenjiwe, Nkulumani, Bulawayo, 11 October 2020.
- ⁵⁶ Interview with Thenjiwe, Nkulumani, Bulawayo, 11 October 2020.
- ⁵⁷ Interview with Ntombi, Nkulumane, Bulawayo, 11 October 2020.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Ntombi, Nkulumane, Bulawayo, 11 October 2020.
- ⁵⁹ Interview with Matshabalala, Northend, Bulawayo, 11 October 2020.
- ⁶⁰ "Hungry Zimbabwean Police Officers Turn to Corruption for Survival." *ZimOnline*, 29 January 2007.
- ⁶¹ Tanzi 1998, pp. 572-73.
- ⁶² Interview with Sheilla, Mpopoma, Bulawayo, 11 November 2020.
- ⁶³ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 30 September 2020.
- ⁶⁴ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 30 September 2020.
- ⁶⁵ Interview with Thoko, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 October 2020.
- ⁶⁶ Interview with Thoko, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 2 October 2020.

⁶⁷ They preferred beer from the shebeens because it was always colder than that from the beer hall.

⁶⁸ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 30 September 2020.

⁶⁹ Meldrum 2007.

⁷⁰ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 30 October 2020. Flat beer is beer that has lost its carbonation and taste.

⁷¹ Interview with Thandiwe, Mabutweni, Bulawayo, 27 December 2020.

⁷² Mandikumba 2013, p. 20.

⁷³ Mandikumba 2013, p. 19.