



BRILL

## 'The Pots on Our Roads'

### *The Diaspora Fleet and Harare's Urban Commuter System\**

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### **Abstract**

This article explores the role of the 'diaspora fleet' in Harare's urban commuter system. Imported vehicles in the form of haulage trucks and commuter buses were one of the popular and visible forms of diasporic investment over Zimbabwe's difficult decade spanning from 2000 to about 2010. The article argues that this diaspora fleet occupies a significant place in the history of commuting in Harare. Diasporic investment introduced a cocktail of European vehicles that quickly became ramshackle and ended up discarded in scrap heaps around the city. These imports and the businesses based on them destroyed the self-regulatory framework existing in the commuting business. This disruption was facilitated by the retreat or undermining of the state and city council regulatory instruments, which in turn created a role for middlemen, who manoeuvred to perpetuate a new and chaotic system known as '*mshika-shika* [faster-faster]', based on a culture of irresponsible competitive gambling. This chaotic system remains in place today to the chagrin of city council planners and traffic police. Its origins, we argue, lie in the cultures and practices introduced by the diasporan vehicle fleet.

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## Keywords

diaspora investment – urban transport – Zimbabwe – crisis – African cities

## Résumé

Cet article explore le rôle du « parc automobile de la diaspora » dans le système de navette urbaine de Harare. Les véhicules importés sous la forme de camions et de bus navette étaient une des formes les plus visibles et populaires de l'investissement de la diaspora dans la décennie la plus difficile qu'a connue le Zimbabwe de 2000 à environ 2010. Cet article défend l'idée que ce parc automobile de la diaspora occupe une place significative dans l'histoire des transports à Harare. Les investissements de la diaspora ont introduit un cocktail de véhicules européens qui sont rapidement devenus des épaves qui s'empilent aux alentours de la ville. Ces importations et le commerce qui les accompagne ont détruit le cadre autorégulateur qui préexistait dans le secteur des transports. Cette destruction a été facilitée par le retrait voire la contestation des instruments de régulation de l'État et de la municipalité qui ont créé à leur tour un rôle pour des intermédiaires qui se sont arrangés pour perpétuer ce nouveau système chaotique connu sous le nom de « mshika-shika » (plus vite-plus vite), qui repose sur la culture de la concurrence débridée. Ce système chaotique est toujours en place aujourd'hui au grand dam des urbanistes de la municipalité et de la police routière. Dans cet article, nous défendons l'idée que ce système trouve son origine dans les cultures et les pratiques introduites par le parc de véhicules importés par la diaspora.

## Mots-clés

investissement de la diaspora – transport urbain – Zimbabwe – crise – ville d'Afrique

## Introduction: The 'Poto': Scrap Vehicles from the Diaspora

A common sight in Harare's scrap yards today are grounded buses and truck horses bearing logos, advertisements and contact details of mostly British transport companies, as if to tell the story of their long journey to their final resting places in Zimbabwe. These redundant imports rust alongside discarded pots and pans and other metal scrap, which has earned the vehicles the sobriquet '*poto*' or pots. This term, now a euphemism for all ramshackle vehicles in Harare's chaotic urban transport commuter system, has even been adopted in

official police operations launched to bring sanity to Harare's traffic congestion. The congestion problem has become commonly understood to be caused by the untenable number of commuter omnibuses. A suite of debates have ensued in the news media raising concerns about Zimbabwe becoming a dumping ground for used vehicles from overseas, leading the government to contemplate a ban on all second-hand vehicle imports into the country.

This story and the debates that surround this phenomenon are traceable to Zimbabwe's difficult decade between 2000 and 2010 and its attendant political and economic challenges, which resulted in a significant Zimbabwean diaspora abroad. While expatriates explored different countries, the United Kingdom became a prime destination for reasons explained in the growing literature on this subject (McGregor and Primorac 2010). In this hyper-inflationary environment, there was speculation and investment in property, and remittances provided an important safety net for families at home (McGregor forthcoming). Diasporans mostly channelled their remittances through informal circuits that linked countries of settlement with Zimbabwe. Investment in vehicles and the transport business was one such lucrative venture because of the huge profits that could be reaped from selling imported cars in Zimbabwe and the shortage of passenger vehicles. This article argues that although diasporan remittances in the form of passenger and haulage vehicles managed to fill this 'gap' (another term used ironically in Zimbabwean commuter transport lingo), the benefits were both ambiguous and short-lived. Apart from the legacy of ramshackle 'potos' left on Zimbabwean roads, the period of the diaspora fleet introduced far reaching changes to the operational conduct of a previously highly regulated Zimbabwean urban commuter transport system (Jordan 1983), which in turn gave rise to the current chaos characterising the *mshika-shika* [faster-faster] commuter system in Harare. This chaotic system is characterised by illegal operators picking up and dropping off passengers at undesignated points to evade arrest.<sup>1</sup>

This article documents how the presence of such a 'diasporan fleet' has been interpreted by operators in the urban commuter transport sector. We argue that it became depicted as an 'invasion' that was ultimately phased out because of the lack of adaptability of its vehicles to local conditions. In general, there was a preference among diaspora purchasers for bigger vehicles that were not suitable for urban commuting. Over and above these challenges, the

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1 *Mshika-shika* loosely translates to 'faster-faster' a term derived from artisanal diamond miners' hurrying to extract before law enforcements agents and predators arrive. It implies the same in the commuter transport industry where illegal operators 'pick up and drop off' passengers at undesignated points to evade arrests by the authorities.

diaspora fleet was condemned to extinction by the re-emergence of smaller, efficient kombis when the economy returned to a semblance of normalcy. The brief dominance of the diaspora fleet, albeit temporary, changed the rules of the urban commuter game, overturning the prior regulatory regime managed by transport associations, the city council and police in favour of cut-throat competition and an unscrupulous business ethic that was characteristic of Zimbabwe's 'casino economy' in the crisis decade (Gono 2008).

The anti-diaspora fleet sentiments expressed throughout this article reflect the views of the main participants in the industry who provided interviews, and constitute our evidential base. However, these popular explanations for the failure of the fleet, which emphasise the lack of mechanical viability, need some qualification, we argue. Most vehicles did in fact have engines that were familiar to Zimbabwean technical experts. While we acknowledge that the vehicles came with superior technology which often went beyond local expertise, we also explore other factors at play. The derogatory discourse around the foreign imports signified important power dynamics between the principal actors in this industry who created myths and initiated a new *modus operandi* which paved the way for *mshika-shika*. By the time of its demise, the diaspora fleet had changed the role of key players in the commuter business such as the touts or *mahwindi* who gained leverage by promoting disorder to enhance their own networks. Such networks became so well entrenched that, despite repeated 'Operations' by the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and the Harare City council to restore order, the cancer of chaos and ramshackle vehicles left behind by this so-called invasive 'diaspora fleet' has so far been impossible to stem.

## The Historical Context

### *The Emergence of the Informal Urban Transport Sector in Harare*

The early history of the public transport system in Harare offers an exemplar in the failure of the City Council's ambition to establish a monopoly. From 1939, the City had attempted to establish a bus system that guaranteed a cheap and reliable service to communities in central parts of town (Jordan 1983). By 1942, the council bus service was making little headway against rival private companies. This was inherently a loss making venture from the onset, especially as the council elected to run this fleet itself. Other town councils, in contrast, successfully sub-contracted bus services to private companies. But Salisbury town council only came to see the wisdom of outsourcing its bus service in March 1963 when it entered into a partnership with a private company, United Transport Africa (Ltd.), which took over the small fleet, spares and mechanical

workshops. The council, however, remained in charge of the routes schedules and regulated the fares (Jordan 1983). While it continued to insist on a loss-making monopoly, the council successfully made a case for a government subsidy but the combination left it vulnerable to overall changes in the transport market. For instance, an attempt to increase fares by the city council in 1956 provoked a massive bus-boycott by Africans. This effectively crippled the service. Scarnecchia (1996) documents how the African nationalist leaders of the Salisbury-based City Youth League used the bus boycott as both an instrument for challenging the City Council and a rallying point to gain nationalist support.

In 1961 Sir Edgar Whitehead's government decided that the bus service should be subsidised by those directly deriving benefit from African township labour, and the Services Levy Act made local authorities and industrial companies responsible for the costs involved. These are the circumstances in which the Salisbury Omnibus Company thrived in Harare and a similar service grew in the dormitory town of Chitungwiza, operated by Zimbabwe Express Motorways from 1978. This monopolistic but subsidised environment was, however, unable to stop illegal transport operators from offering transport services. Naison Mutizwa-Mangiza (1993: 98) distinguishes three types of such 'pirate taxi' services: those which carried fare-paying passengers on their way to and from work but did not operate outside the context of their own journeys; those in full-time work who ran a taxi service outside working hours; and, lastly those who drove company vehicles using them as pirate taxis when conditions permitted. He notes the increase in the number of pirate taxis in the 1970s and also, more importantly, argues that operators became highly organised in 'underground' networks that determined fare levels, route allocation and successfully outwitted the police. After independence, Zimbabwe simply legalised these operations in November 1982 by gazetting them as 'emergency taxis'. Revised regulations appeared in 1983, which still remain in use today with modifications.<sup>2</sup>

While the legal monopoly of the Harare United Omnibus Company (HUOC) continued, it was strategically restricted to vehicles with a capacity of more than seven people within a radius of 26 km from the Harare Central Post Office (Mutizwa-Mangiza 1993). These regulations of 'emergency taxis' were temporary because Central government saw them as a provisional emergency solution to the problems bedevilling the public transport sector. Meanwhile, the 'emergency taxis' co-existed with the omnibus service and private metered taxis to manage this crisis (Mutizwa-Mangiza 1993: 100). The operators of

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2 For example, by the Presidential Powers (Temporary Measures) in 1986.

'emergency taxis' favoured station wagon vehicles. A University of Zimbabwe Survey in 1988 showed that there were nearly 631 such registered and unregistered taxis, 55% of which were owner-driven. Indeed, 70% of the owners were members of the Zimbabwe Emergency Taxis Association (ZETA) whose role included self-regulation, assisting with 'dispatchers' at main terminal points in the city, and negotiating with local authorities and central government on fares and other issues (Mutizwa-Mangiza 1993). In 1988, the Zimbabwe government acquired a 51% shareholding in the Zimbabwe Omnibus Company and HOUC, as it realised that the transport sector was a key player in the economy. Although the general operational performance and services of the company improved, there was a notable deterioration in the financial viability of its Harare division which failed to renew or expand its fleet in the period 1992/3 (see also Maunder and Mbara 1996; Rakodi 1995).

### *Creating the 'Gap': De-Regulation of Transport and Self-Regulation of Informal Operators*

The government decided to end the Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) monopoly and liberalise the transport sector in August 1993 (the Road Motor Transportation (Emergency Commuter Omnibus) Regulations were passed in 1994). Liberalisation encouraged operators to seek vehicles with higher carrying capacities and commuter omnibuses increased from zero in July 1993 to 1,155 in September 1994, while emergency taxis declined from 2,100 to 1,557 (Kapoor, Mugwara and Chidavaenzi 1997). The rapid expansion of commuter omnibus services not only reduced passengers' waiting times, but managed to redeploy emergency taxis to shorter and intra-urban routes. This allowed them to penetrate areas that previously did not enjoy such services (Kapoor, Mugwara and Chidavaenzi 1997). The success of the commuter service, however, threatened the viability of the ostensibly provisional 'emergency taxi' operators and their opposition was exacerbated when the government moved to ban them altogether. ZETA operators came together to form transport cooperatives to lobby government as a group and obtain concessions to enable them to ease the transition into the commuter omnibus business. In some instances cooperatives were able to get loans from banks or purchase agreements from local motor dealers who supplied them with locally assembled minibuses such as the Mazda Marathon, Ford Spectron and Mitsubishi Spacestar L200.<sup>3</sup> These schemes were costly to service and the general rate at which the vehicles deteriorated hindered the cooperatives' capacity to expand

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3 Interview, Makotsi Vengai Kunaka, Avondale Shopping Centre 21/06/12.

to the point that each member owned a vehicle. Many cooperatives crumbled as a result, especially after the fall of the Zimbabwe dollar in 1997, which made hire purchase agreements unprofitable. Unlike South Africa, expansion in the Harare commuter omnibus sector was achieved not through loan schemes for locally assembled vehicles, but by direct imports of cheaper used Japanese panel vans, which were converted into passenger vehicles by fitting in seats welded locally in the 'home industries'.<sup>4</sup>

This expansion of the commuter omnibus sector partly accounts for ZUPCO's gradual retreat from urban routes in the late 1990s, and passengers welcomed kombi speed and flexibility rather than spending time waiting in queues or on longer routes under restricted ZUPCO timetables. Commuter operators managed this transition by modifying existing instruments of self-regulation. They negotiated with the council for new ranks where 'dispatchers' assumed the new quasi-military designation 'rank marshals' and maintained order by organising passenger queues and the turns for each vehicle to load. The guiding principle was equity and first-come-first-served. The first passenger to arrive should be the first to board, while the first vehicle in the queue should load first. Drivers loaded in turns at both ends of the trip to allow a 'gap' of passengers to accumulate for the next vehicles in the queue, such a 'gap' being obtainable at the rank or while the vehicle was en route. Management of this 'gap' was the defining mark of profitability in the kombi business.

The instrument used to maintain equilibrium around this 'gap' was the 'log book'. The idea of the log book was to maintain a full record. Different sections of the book contained summary entries of a range of required fields (such as the total number of passengers, amount collected, the fuel used for particular journeys as well as the money paid for incidentals such as tyre punctures and fines paid to the police and council). Other entries related to the nature of the contract between an operator and his crew. For instance, some operators offered 'lunch' and 'bus fare' money which was to be entered in the log sheet.

The basic entries allowed the operator to calculate the profitability of his venture, that is, the net income that the vehicle generated after factoring in the operational costs such as licence and parking fees, fuel consumption, and general wear and tear. A kombi was supposed to generate enough profit to buy another one before it was condemned or sold. It also provided a degree of transparency and accountability as the trip entered should correspond with the mileage, while the number of passengers was critical to capture the crew's ability to take advantage of the 'gap' by obtaining what was known colloquially

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4 Interview, Mr. Tomu, Welder and seats supplier, Dzivaresekwa, 10/06/12.

as 'pick and drop' passengers outside rank designations to and from destinations in the 'gap'. Crew members worked with these figures to calculate their wages, usually given weekly on the basis of a 15% commission of the total sum logged (10% for the driver and 5% for the conductor). The commission was negotiable and subject to increase if the crew performed well. In this business discretion was the better part of valour; while cheating was possible it was easily detected because of the predictable patterns of the highly regulated environment. A crew that pocketed extra fares for personal use ran the risk of 'under-targeting' and ultimately losing its job. Vehicles did the same number of trips and crews naturally hit approximately the same targeted daily totals. If a driver tried to cheat by disrupting a 'gap' he bore the brunt of the wrath of his colleagues or risked expulsion from the route and this rule prevented 'poaching' from other routes. The congruence between the operating rules of the commuter associations and the national regulatory framework governing the transport sector is evident. For one to join an association, it was necessary to hold an 'Operators' Licence' and a 'Route Permit' to enable an operator to obtain a 'Rank Disc' and hence legal entry to a rank, enabling one to enjoy full benefits and profitability as a member of the commuter omnibus association.<sup>5</sup>

Under this self-regulation and unity, operators and their crews had huge bargaining power for their industry and lobbied council and government successfully by exercising the right to withdraw the service when conditions did not favour them. Yet this arrangement served operators more than the crews, as the latter were simply labourers with little influence because of the surplus of qualified drivers and the low number of vehicles. Operators became known to the crews and touts as *varungu* (literally 'white people' but meaning 'boss') due to their role as employer, and the term was also used for passengers meaning that without them or their mutual consent to board the kombis, the crews would not be employed (Mawadza 2000). This passed for outright flattery which is the hallmark of the rhetorical discourse of this business. In reality passengers were the lowest priority because for the business to thrive they had to forgo their own right to choose the vehicles they wanted to travel in when they were at ranks – they only had such choice when they were in the 'gap'.

This is the point where touts or *mahwindi* entered the *milieu*. The origins and meaning of this term are unclear, but their role has always been one of *agent provocateur* mediating the interests of the bus crews from whom they charge touting fees. This constituted the primary origin of rent-extraction and extor-

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5 Discussions with Prince Dausi, Dunmore Wanga Chimundowa, 'Spragga' and 'Blah' Duncan Mamingu, Avondale Shopping Centre, 11/09/11.

tion in this industry. Increasing numbers of commuter omnibuses in the late 1990s meant that there were fewer passengers, and touts emerged to persuade or coerce them into kombis that were willing to pay for this service. The *mahwindi* thus earned their place beside the 'rank marshals' who controlled them and the city's ranks. Touting has a longer history in the long-distance bus termini where touts went by the name *majega* (from *jega* or wheeljack), denoting their capacity to lift heavy loads up to and down from bus roof racks or carriers. The *majega* touted for passengers and in some cases formed syndicates that forced passengers into buses or were hired to block passenger access to new or competing bus services.<sup>6</sup> It is our contention that the *mahwindi* emerged in the urban commuter omnibus sector with the same *modus operandi* in an environment that presented new opportunities. Mashiri's study of the linguistic strategies of the *mahwindi* in Harare is illustrative of their increasing agency in this period. He notes their constant use of slang to diminish the social distance between themselves and elderly or 'respectable' members of the passenger community. While their discourse was generally polite on the surface, it was meant to guarantee compliance. So for Mashiri, the politeness of the *mahwindi* was a socio-linguistic package serving a persuasive role rather than a genuine social register (Mashiri 2001: 92). Our research buttresses this analysis of their persuasive strategies, an attribute they emphasise in their own renditions of survival tactics to keep the commuter transport business afloat in Zimbabwe's difficult decade. It is important, however, to draw attention to the fluidity of the composition of the *mahwindi* in the years of hardship. A *hwindi* could double as a crew member if he was 'relieving' a conductor who could not attend work. Equally a conductor or driver could become a *hwindi* while seeking the next opportunity or allowing unemployed colleagues to drive, a procedure known as *kuburukira* (literally to 'come down for'). *Chihwindi* therefore became a fluid occupation as it became the vehicle to explore the new opportunities provided by the urban transport sector. This fluidity defined their agency – in effect, it was their 'gap'.

Meanwhile, as these transformations were taking place, ZUPCO responded to the increase in commuter omnibuses by experimenting with smaller bus units such as 29-seater Toyota Dyna and Mazda T3500 units in 1994. Nevertheless, its lower fares were unable to make it competitive enough to service the urban routes, which it abandoned by the beginning of the new millennium. From 2000 to date, ZUPCO's predicament has worsened through mismanagement and various scandals culminating in the arrest and imprisonment of ZUPCO board

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6 This is still common at long distance bus termini.

chairperson, Charles Nherera, in 2006 on allegations of corruption. This was only one of the many revelations that ZUPCO had become a gravy train haemorrhaged by patronage politics on the part of Minister of Local Government, Ignatius Chombo, who handpicked cronies, relatives and old friends for appointment to the ZUPCO board and management. Earlier on in 2004, one of his alleged relatives, the ZUPCO Chief Executive, Bright Matonga, had been forced to resign from his post after failing to account for the company's finances.<sup>7</sup> Concurrently, the ZUPCO fleet deteriorated from over 1,200 buses in operation in 1993 to less than 200 in 2011. A parliamentary portfolio committee appointed to investigate ZUPCO affairs reported in June 2012 that the ZUPCO board had been chaired by the same person, Chipu Dyanda (another close ally of the Minister) for more than a decade. During her tenure, ZUPCO employees received salaries only erratically while board members doubled as management, drawing salaries and perks from both positions. More money was spent pursuing lawsuits with former employees than was committed to re-capitalising the company.<sup>8</sup>

### The Diaspora Fleet: Origins and Dynamics

The growing literature on Zimbabwe's diaspora has shown the significant role played by diaspora remittances to the shrinking Zimbabwean economy since 2000. Many scholars have decried the unavailability and inaccessibility of data on such remittances because of their informal nature (Tevera, Crush and Chikanda 2010). Few, however, have studied the informal structures and networks that the diaspora remittances were channelled through, the patterns they assumed and the impact they achieved. One such area of neglect was the transport sector. A number of Zimbabweans who ventured into transport were initially attracted to the haulage sector because of the immediate profits it promised. Opportunities emerged alongside the shrinking capacity of National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), which transferred the responsibility for moving the greater part of Zimbabwe's rolling stock to haulage trucks from the late 1990s when the viability of NRZ was severely compromised by competition from the post-apartheid South African railways and the increasing importance of the port of Durban over Beira (Pedersen 2004: 586). This was also a time

7 'Financial Mismanagement at ZUPCO Glaring: Report' *The Standard* 5/03/04.

8 2nd Report of the Portfolio Committee on Local Government, Rural and Urban Development on Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO) 12th June 2012.

when the local fleet of heavy trucks was severely depleted owing to a shortage of spare parts consequent upon the shortage of foreign currency.<sup>9</sup> At this time therefore, any moving bulk haulage truck horse could reap rich profits from contracts with NGOs involved in humanitarian food distribution, as well as from mining and fuel companies, amongst others. Traditionally, this sector was dominated by big companies with high capital investment and often centralised freight and forwarding management systems using expensive American made and locally assembled European truck horses such as International, Freightliner, Peterbilt, Scania, ERF and DAF. United Kingdom-based Zimbabweans especially, quickly established networks targeting local auctions and began shipping home European assembled truck horses. As one informant, Johns Makamure, recalls:

I only worked for two years [in the UK] doing shifts and sleeping less. I went there with the target of buying a *gonyet* (truck horse) or two and return home. I linked up with a group of Zimbabweans in Coventry who told me to watch the auctions of municipalities and the Royal Mail Service and you know, when you get there you can get a truck as cheap as £2,000. They would ship it for you to Durban. I know many idiots who bought stupid trucks that died on the drive from Durban to Zimbabwe or some they could not service at all ... people had no idea which cars were suitable for Zimbabwe, that it's only DAF ERF and Scania. That ERF should be an E14 not the E10 most people sent home. They just die! I bought two DAFs and a Scania. They bought me a house in Kwekwe and a service station.<sup>10</sup>

The haulage sector was not only quickly saturated; it was operationally cost-intensive and required specialised logistical administration, over and above efficient spares and service back-up. The large sums of money involved in transactions were not ideal for absentee owners entrusting such work to family and friends in Zimbabwe with little or no experience of logistics and who demonstrated a high propensity for abusing the profits.

Commuter transport business became a favourite investment for diasporans because of its informal nature, low cost and unspecialised administration.

9 While Pedersen (2004: 594) records rapid growth in the number of trucks in Zimbabwe in the late 1990s due to liberalisation, many of our informants argued that this fleet was increasingly expensive to service in the following decade, and was gradually replaced by cheaper diaspora imports.

10 Interview, Johns Makamure, Greencroft, Harare, 20/06/10. For 'make money quick and invest home' ventures by Zimbabwean migrant care workers, see McGregor (2007).

Here again business acumen was as important as the choice and knowledge of appropriate vehicles for this work in Zimbabwe. In many instances diasporans bought vehicles with high passenger capacities partly to maximise profits by filling the vacuum left by ZUPCO and partly because the Zimbabwean government had, from 2003 onwards, scrapped import duty on buses of all makes with a carrying capacity of 28 passengers and above. Duties were scrapped with the aim of easing the chronic transport woes, chiefly attributable to fuel shortages. Thus, big buses flooded the country, the majority being coaches drawn from UK bus companies, tour operators and kindergartens. Some were European makes such as Mercedes Benz, Bedford, Dennis and some DAFs which were either too expensive to maintain or simply had no spares locally available. Some came with sophisticated technology like air-conditioned (air-tight) cabins, heating and cooling systems, and auxiliary hydraulics that were not user-friendly. It made commuting a nightmare as Gibson Kakono remarked:

Have you ever boarded a *diaspora* from Chitungwiza or even from nearby Glen View coming into town ... with an air-conditioner that does not work, and no windows? ... Inside you will be boiling like you are being cooked in a pot; it has a deep stench of humans ... others not having brushed their teeth ... it has so many breakdowns ... you'll never reach your destination. You lose your job (for being late)!<sup>11</sup>

The operational challenges of the buses were similar to those of the haulage trucks except that buses made quicker but lower profits. They benefited directly from government distribution of scarce diesel, which prioritised farmers' equipment and bigger buses over small commuter omnibuses. But like the haulage truck horses before them, these diaspora buses also found their way to the local scrapyards. The diasporans were compelled to downgrade to smaller vehicles.

In this shift, however, the preference for European makes persisted, leading to the same effects except that they were cheaper and allowed investment costs to be recovered before the mechanical challenges set in. The popular makes were the Ford Transit series, Iveco and various models of the LDV because of their comparatively long chassis compared to the standard Japanese kombis already in use in Harare. But they were hardly fuel efficient in the Zimbabwean context, which was short of nearly all forms of petroleum. Operators

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11 Interview, Gibson Kakono, Rank Marshal, 'Mshika-Shika we Parklane', Mai Faffy's Bottle Store, Avondale Shopping Centre 9/08/10.

tried to bypass the parts problem by cannibalising each other's fleets. They also adapted or modified local engines to these big bodies. The LDV 400 was one such 'adaptable' machine, which came with a familiar engine that had been used on locally assembled Peugeot 504s. Although the engine was not as popular as its petrol equivalent fitted in the station wagons of the 'emergency taxi' era, the 504 diesel pick-up truck had been widely distributed to Zimbabwe's government departments in the 1980s and 1990s. It was still in production from Quest Motors in the late 1990s but a number had been grounded because of the prohibitive costs of its parts from the sole dealer, Messrs Puzey and Payne (Ltd.). While many of these trucks were resurrected via diaspora LDVs in Zimbabwe it was equally true that many LDV buses became mechanical vultures running on scavenged local Peugeot 504 parts.

The inherent mechanical limitations of the diasporan intervention in the commuter business made it a short-term quick profit venture and most diaspora operators moved their investments elsewhere after making profits or failing in transport.

The diaspora intervention in the commuter transport sector was an exercise in self-elimination. In fact many operators and *hwindis* believe it took the commuting business back to the 'stone-age', when profits were as unpredictable as the vehicles, and they were struggling to get the fuel to operate. More importantly, they lament the way the diaspora fleet and changes to business annihilated the organised unionism of transport associations. Established local operators bore the brunt of this disruption, as they were pushed out of business by profit-hunting, fly-by-night diaspora-based operators and their local conduits, which used bigger vehicles that ferried more passengers. These new diaspora players had no historic links with the industry and could not be held to account. On top of this loss, state regulation in the form of traffic police and VID increasingly failed to control the chronic transport problems. It was easy for diasporans (or their local agents) to use foreign currency to bribe VID officials to issue Fitness Certificates on the one hand while roadblocks had been transformed into pay-as-you-go tollgates by corrupt traffic police on the other. One operator Mukoma Walter reasoned:

So how do you think all those *potos* were registered? Do you see any of them passing a fitness test the very day they enter the country? *Madiaspora* paid everything to get the cars on the road.

... The situation was bad ... there was no transport, so for any policeman in those days to be overzealous enough to try and stop a vehicle for its defects was inviting public anger ... people would say "we struggled to get into this vehicle to go home and now you want to stop us? ... Get away!" In

fact the policeman himself will join the scramble to get into that defective vehicle ...<sup>12</sup>

The diaspora fleet could be said to have responded directly to the ZUPCO exit, hence its emphasis on bigger vehicles with high passenger carrying capacities. While their operational challenges persisted, fuel shortages made local long-distance and rural bus companies turn to urban routes to reduce consumption and also take advantage of the market formerly serviced by ZUPCO.

***The Content of the Diaspora Fleet and Why It Collapsed:  
Operators' Interpretations***

While the diaspora fleet was mainly composed of bigger vehicles which served to fill the vacuum created by both the departure of ZUPCO and the difficult operating environment, we are aware that it also contained smaller vehicles. Below is a summary of comments by operators and *mahwindi* on the popular makes of the diaspora fleet compiled from interviews around Harare.

TABLE 1 *Operators' Perceptions of Various Commuter Vehicle Makes*

Vehicle make	Comments
Leyland DAF 400 (1989–1993) LDV Convoy/Pilot	That one is the original Peugeot engine which used to be on our local trucks (popular with the Veterinary Dept.) but it has a bad starter known as a Paris Rhone (from the French component supplier) ... it dies the first week at work and leaves you to push the car all the time ... you even grow muscles from pushing the car.
Ford Transit 2.5l DI Turbo Diesel and 2.0l Petrol (mostly 1991 and 1994 versions)	It carries more passengers for its size because of its long chassis but has a bad back suspension due to less leaf springs; the diesel version has turbo and electrical problems (due to its drive-by-wire engine control technology) ... the petrol version is better.

<sup>12</sup> Interview, Mukoma Walter, Mai Faffy Bottle Store, Avondale Shopping Centre, 8/08/10.

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Vehicle make	Comments
Iveco (Turbo Daily) 2.5l Diesel and 2.5l Turbodiesel (mostly 2nd Generation 1990-models)	It's a fast machine ... basically a Fiat with a turbo (its mechanical predecessor being the Fiat 238); once the turbo dies, you are done, so you are better off covering your gap before the problem catches up with you and you are grounded.
Bedford (VAS) (mostly different models of this version)	It's old school ... and there are no parts available ... the only Bedfords that move are old ones (1958 TJ Models) that (still) carry river-sand for construction in the high density suburbs of Harare or the 1959 TK (or 4x4 MK version) popular in the Rhodesian/Zimbabwean army.
Leyland	That one is a real DAF engine but most of them come with a rear engine (e.g. the 1980s Leyland Royal Tiger version) but somehow it is weaker than our own version (W.H. Dahmer's indefatigable locally assembled AVM 615, 825 and 1120 DAFs servicing long distance and rural fleets) ... but there is one they now call an Ashok Leyland ... it's not good.
Mercedes Benz TN/T1 Series 1977 207D/307D and the 1981 407D, 409D and 410. Engines ranged from 2.4l to 3.0l diesel.	A Mercedes is a Mercedes ... you know for sure it's a durable car but it's also a car for rich people, its expensive to maintain ..., most of them however (TN407 minibus version usually issued to Zimbabwe's air force) came as kindergarten vehicles and some unscrupulous operators forced passengers to sit on the kids' chairs. The old one popular in the diasporan fleet was sluggish but the new Sprinter is a revolutionary invention in relation to speed, comfort and durability.
Volvo	None of all the Volvo imports can ever beat our local B4s.

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Operators' perceptions reflect important power dynamics in the urban transport industry where the *hwindi* had become key agents. This power balance had to be negotiated between established operators of yesteryear associations, their diaspora counterparts and agents, the local technical experts (mechanics, auto-electricians, panel beaters and upholsterers), drivers and statutory regulatory

authorities, particularly the Vehicle Inspection Department. But the *hwindi* was the interlocutor whose power lay in his knowledge of the information of how to manoeuvre between and around these actors' networks. He was also invariably the source of myths about the fleets.

Over and above the issue of the size of diaspora vehicles, the operators' comments summarized in the table show that the diaspora fleet failed to thrive because of its mechanical challenges, i.e. inefficient vehicles with chassis not adapted to the rugged environment of peri-urban Zimbabwe and the potholes of urban Harare. Of course and as some of the comments testify, Zimbabwe has historically been serviced by European engines. Most heavy vehicles in Zimbabwe are powered by common American or British diesel engines such as Cummins and Perkins. Both have long had local distributors in Harare and a significant percentage of ZUPCO's fleet was mounted on Cummins power plants with a modified air-filter system featuring a 'chimney' pulling air from the top of the bus just beside the driver's cabin. These buses were actually known colloquially as 'maCummins'. Perkins engines drive most electricity generators in the country.<sup>13</sup> They were also fitted to the highly successful Bedford AWD truck series popular in Zimbabwe's government fleet, and those of farmers and major companies. This is the same series of engines that came on European diaspora imports such as Bedford, Dennis and some Volvos referred to in the above table. So what does it mean when an operator says, for instance, 'that diaspora Bedford is not mechanically as good as our local version' when they are essentially talking about a vehicle powered by the same engine? The answer lies in the factors that depleted the local fleet of heavy vehicles in the first place. Even if these engines were available locally, their spares remained costly or scarce for the same reasons dictated by Zimbabwe's macro-economic environment. So, mechanically, the diaspora fleet was simply an addition to the number of vehicles needing the same scarce or expensive parts. Its only advantage was that it increased the threshold of mutual cannibalism between vehicles of the same make as in the case of the LDV 400 and the Peugeot 504.

The second tenet of the comparison argument lies in advances in technology. Zimbabwe still lags behind in automotive technology in many respects. To this day it assembles vehicle kits of models released nearly 20 years ago which lack basic technological innovations such as power-steering and other user-friendly or safety packages. This has left some of Zimbabwe's technical experts in limbo, as affirmed by two diesel plant fitters Joseph Kaitano and Thomas Maponga. According to Joseph, he is familiar with the local Leyland and DAF

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13 Interview, former ZUPCO driver who declined to be identified.

engines and their transmission. They are easy and traceable to their predecessors in Zimbabwe, but most Leyland that came from the diaspora came with rear mounted engines and a totally different transmission.<sup>14</sup> Argues Joseph:

Zimbabwe knows the old Albion version of the Leyland and even when the Comet was introduced it was an improved engine, more robust and reliable. You can relate to it ... this one (the Royal Tiger version) ... no! Too many bolts, pipes and wires!

Thomas pushed a similar case for the LDV 400 arguing that, while its Peugeot engine is common to even the most basic mechanic and known to most drivers for its sluggish, noisy but reliable engine, the introduction of an air suspension on the LDV left many of the diaspora versions grounded while their engines were still running. These are the engines that changed hands amongst operators while the bodies were condemned for lack of expertise in handling this new suspension technology.<sup>15</sup>

The trouble with suspensions was not only about technology but the tendency to overload these vehicles given their long chassis. We have already mentioned the preference for bigger vehicles and the circumstances informing this choice, but it must be appreciated that some of these vehicles were never meant to carry passengers. The majority were panel vans, meant for *ad hoc* odd jobs, and required significant modification to carry passengers. In this context of shortage not much attention was paid to such modifications and many vehicles were sent on passenger-carrying missions with devastating consequences.<sup>16</sup>

The electrical components of diaspora vehicles also caused problems, ranging from wiring, air conditioning and lighting to other accessories that were auto-linked such as hydraulics. Most diaspora buses had automatic doors and airtight cabins with air-conditioning or climate control with central command systems managed by the driver or crew. Operationally they had many electrical components designed to ensure driver friendliness. These mostly were computer regulated, and in the event of faults they required computer diagnosis with the relevant software to identify and rectify the faults. In short, technology by-passed the human expertise on which Zimbabwe still relied. The result

14 Interview, Joseph Kaitano ZANU PF Technical Centre, Borrowdale 11/01/13.

15 Interview, Thomas Maponga, Lewisam Service Station, Chisipite, Harare, 16/05/11.

16 Such as the Ford transit, which was usefully roomy, but had poor left springs that usually broke when the van was loaded with passengers. Interview with 'Major' Munyaradzi, Dzivaresekwa, 19/01/11.

was that most of such hi-tech coaches and buses experienced electrical faults and (literally and figuratively) went up in smoke. The evidence of burnt out diaspora wrecks litters Zimbabwe's highways to date.<sup>17</sup>

The third point relates to the economies of scale that the diaspora fleet facilitated, which led to its own self-elimination to local scrapyards. We have already highlighted cannibalistic tendencies, yet more importantly, it boosted the backyard home-industries in such areas as Siya-So in Mbare and Magaba in Highfields by outsourcing conversion jobs to upholsterers, welders and glass-cutters. In turn, these itinerant artisans sought out grounded diasporan buses from which to liberate seats, glass, metal, upholstery and other parts useful to more viable fleets (as well as creating uses beyond the transport industry altogether). Gibson Kakono remarked:

... if you want, go to some households near the home industries and you will find diaspora bus rear-view mirrors as dressing mirrors in bedrooms and bus seats being used as sofas in the lounges ... that's what they were good for ... not for the road ... (laughing)!!

So, in the final analysis the comparison of the diaspora fleet in relation to the so-called 'local' fleet must be unpacked to understand the dynamics at play. The nostalgia that characterises attitudes towards the 'local' fleet is notable, and must also be deconstructed. Although there is some substance to the argument about the suitability of locally adapted chassis built by local coachbuilders like Zambesi Coachworks, Deven, AVM and others that have since folded, it is clear that the same argument cannot be extended to engines which were inadvertently newly supplied by the same European sources that supplied them decades ago. Indeed, the same macro-economic factors affecting the viability of Zimbabwe's local fleet affected the diaspora fleet in the period of the country's 'Casino Economy'. But the diaspora fleet was cast as an invasive fleet that preyed on this economic distortion to make a quick profit before imminent exit or collapse. Urban commuting, at least as far as it had evolved in Harare, was no longer ideal for big, high passenger capacity vehicles. For this reason and other attendant technological deficiencies within Zimbabwe's transport system, it eliminated itself when the viability of smaller vehicles revived in the new multi-currency regime from 2009.

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17 Group interviews with drivers and conductors at Parklane Terminus, Harare led by Gibson Kakono.

The reason why the 'diaspora fleet' was treated with contempt by operators themselves, however, is different. Operators considered these 'foreign' arrivals a nuisance for upsetting the regulatory environment in which they enjoyed relative leverage and control. There was a tactical advantage to diasporans with privileged access to foreign currency, who were disrupting the commuter transport business for purely speculative purposes. Secondly, the diaspora fleet brought in too many stakeholders, particularly technical experts who were interested not only in servicing the industry but wanted to participate as operators with resurrected diaspora 'pots'. Lastly, the diaspora fleet empowered the *hwindi*, previously an underdog but in the search for quick speculative profit, the *hwindi*'s knowledge of lucrative spots, routes and ranks as well the sources of fuel turned him into an agent who could manoeuvre between the key stakeholders to his own advantage. In the long term it was the *hwindi*'s knowledge and the myths he generated about the industry that gave him leverage to make or break any commuter operator's career. This agency however thrived only as long as this state of disorder persisted. Before considering this agency in detail it is important to consider the hiatus before the return of the multi-currency regime under which the *hwindi* agency that developed in the era of the diaspora fleet assumed a catalytic role and smaller Japanese vehicles found their way back into Harare operated by 'foreigners'.

*Killing the 'Gap': 'Foreigner Owned Fleets' and the Rise of  
Mshika-Mshika*

As shown above, the growing number of commuter omnibus operators following liberalisation of the transport sector and the subsequent ban of 'emergency taxis' had gradually embraced mostly Japanese-made minibuses. The limitation was the size of their fleets, most of them hardly ever going beyond five functional units. In this respect a new threat emerged in the form of 'foreigners' based in Zimbabwe, with access to large amounts of foreign currency, who started displaying interest in this sector. Among these were Indian, Pakistani, Nigerian and Eritrean traders operating shops in downtown Harare. The majority were involved in Forex dealing and were in search of a new area to spin their profits. Some were even directly involved in the business of importing and selling reconditioned Japanese cars and supplied local transport operators with vehicles and parts.

Unlike the absentee owners of diaspora fleets with big vehicles, these 'foreigners' lived in Zimbabwe and opted for large fleets of small, fuel efficient vehicles with guaranteed, cheap and readily available parts and back-up service. They worked with unusually high targets and as an incentive they introduced

'take-homes' or 'take-aways', a system where their drivers were allowed to keep the cars at home as long as they reached the agreed target. This caused drivers to work over-time of their own volition, late into the night or early in the mornings. It also encouraged the drivers to maximise the number of trips by speeding, going off-route and picking up passengers at undesignated spots: the essential ingredients to the practice that became known as *mshika-shika*. This *mshika-shika* rendered big buses and the diasporan *potos* redundant as it brought in *Top Gear* competition between engines of mostly ex-Japanese vans and *Formula One* driving antics in search of passengers and evading local traffic authorities.

*Mshika-shika* was about manoeuvrability of both vehicles and passengers as well as the flexibility of the operating rules. This was something that diasporan fleets could not manage because of the sheer size of most of their vehicles and absentee ownership. *Mshika-shika* was predicated on subverting both traffic and council regulations, just as it offered a violation of the code of conduct in what was once a self-regulating urban transport sector. Their conduct destroyed the associational capacities of commuter operators in the following ways. First, the 'log book' which was still very much in use for diasporan fleets was discarded and so were the rules of the 'gap'. *Mshika-shika* drivers were not required to log their mileage or account for their passengers or fuel. They simply accounted by handing in the 'target' money at an agreed time every 24 hours. Failure to deposit the 'target' was met with punitive action such as withdrawal of the vehicle from the driver or reporting the driver to the police for 'driving a vehicle without the owner's consent' – an offence that carried a custodial sentence. Joseph Machingura who worked for an Indian fleet recalled never even meeting his employer after getting the car:

... He simply said it was not necessary; everybody who worked for him dropped the target in the box at the gate of his house and you logged in the time in a book with the security guard. If you do not explain yourself or call when you fail to meet the target, you are criminalised. When I quit I simply went and deposited my target, parked the vehicle and submitted the keys and left after getting my pay. That was it!<sup>18</sup>

Secondly, *mshika-shika* rendered route permits and rank parking discs redundant. Most *mshika-shika* vehicles went anywhere and everywhere; they picked up or dropped off passengers where they wanted. The council lost revenue from

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18 Interview, Joseph Machingura, 4th Street Bus Terminal, Harare, 20/01/11.

the parking discs while Kombi crews competed for 'gaps' instead of giving each other chances. This inversion of rules compelled the practice to rely increasingly on touts rather than on 'rank marshals', because the more one defied the order the higher the chances of obtaining passengers. Thirdly, *mshika-shika* ruined vehicles at a significantly more rapid rate, as the emphasis was on use rather than service or repair. It also increased the chances of abuse of the vehicles by the crews who were not accountable for anything but their 'target'. Ironically, it demanded that such vehicles be in good condition in order to execute turns to evade local authorities or manage the speed to maximise the number of trips in a 'gap' per day. It followed that only those operating fleets with big numbers of smallish vehicles could survive, as they could afford to replace their vehicles as fast as they deteriorated. *Mshika-shika* naturally eliminated all the diasporans and smaller operators who opted to park their vehicles, especially in 2008 at the peak of the economic crisis.

Fourthly, *mshika-shika* put new pressure on public service drivers. In the period of vehicle shortages and the days of the 'diaspora fleet', drivers' skills were tied to operators in a well-regulated environment, but when vehicles were oversupplied (after 2008) it was expected that drivers' bargaining power would improve. However, *mshika-shika* meant that drivers were overworked and highly fatigued in the quest to reach targets, which curtailed their bargaining power. Indeed, they were (and remain) highly mobile, switching jobs not so much in search for higher wages but for favourable working conditions, meeting lower targets and allowing them time to rest. The only benefit drivers derived from the new system was the 'take-away' or 'take-home' facility which allowed the driver to go home with the vehicle after 'cashing' his 'target'. This reduced the time spent going to fetch the car at the *murungu's* preferred parking place and cut the transport costs of both driver and conductor, while enabling them to use the vehicle for their convenience. However, the increased numbers of vehicles and growing corruption in the issuance of driver's licences in Zimbabwe weakened the state authorities' ability to enforce traffic regulations. *Mshika-shika* thus became a community of 'bogus drivers', many of them without the required Class 2 driver's licence, defensive driving and medical endorsements. Accidents involving commuter omnibuses increased as a result.

Lastly, *mshika-shika* brought the principle of 'fadza customer' or the 'customer is king', where the commuters exercised the right to board vehicles of their choice based on their own tastes or the persuasive prowess of specific touts. *Mshika-shika* encouraged competition amongst the kombis. Persuasion and business acumen took precedence over all the variables now informing this industry and the *mahwindi* assumed a new role. They advertised the

kombis and branded them to attract customers. There is a whole ethnography of names of kombis and their meanings to be studied in Harare's urban commuter system, some actually bearing labels such as 'Diaspora' or 'London' to appeal to passengers and testify to the origins of capital that started the business.

*Transforming Mshika-shika in Zimbabwe's Multi-Currency Environment*

It is clear that *mshika-shika* was a game changer. It managed to exclude all the key players who defined and managed the transition of the commuter omnibus business since the de-regulation of the urban transport sector and the end of the ZUPCO monopoly in 1993. Commuter operators and owners, their associations, rank marshals and all the mechanisms of self-regulation were destroyed. What persisted was a culture developed during the crisis period of *chihwindi* which became a survival strategy in Zimbabwe's 'casino economy' (Gono 2008). It was urban and dominated by the youth, it had its own language or 'anti-languages', and it was an ethos born from experience in the practice of *kukiya-kiya* [make do] (Jones 2010). It relied on hyper-mobility (literally and figuratively), revelling in its own fluidity, and was a refuge for people fleeing the effects of state economic interventions.

*Mshika-shika* was, however, also another 'foreign' innovation, which rode over the chaos introduced by the diaspora fleet. 'Foreigners' controlled *mshika-shika* because of other economies of scale such as access to networks to rapidly change Zimbabwean dollars into foreign currency. These networks supplied the vehicles indispensable for the *mahwindi* innovations. Those who financed the system were widely perceived as a necessary evil and already they had gained notoriety as bad employers. However, the introduction of the multi-currency regime took away this advantage as it meant that any vehicle could participate in the business for the appropriate value of the fares paid rather than engage intermediaries to first convert Zimbabwean dollars into foreign currency. The *mahwindi* took this opportunity to launch campaigns against 'foreign' fleets, which were easy to detect because of the geographic semi-monopolies that they had established: Nigerians colonising the Waterfalls area, Rwandese in Mt Pleasant, Pakistanis in Kuwadzana and Warren Park, and so on. These anti-foreigner campaigns were underpinned by a xenophobic discourse, and depended on manoeuvring rather than by outright confrontation. The *mahwindi* turned to local owners who had parked their vehicles with favourable offers of reasonable 'targets' below those demanded by 'foreigners' while leveraging their conditions of service on the basis of how the 'foreigners' had treated them. For instance, a *hwindi/driver* would argue that he could not manage the

US\$100 target he had for a Pakistani fleet but 'perhaps \$70', and he would still want to have the vehicle as a 'take away'.<sup>19</sup> Such an arrangement worked for both the owner seeking re-entry into the business and the *hwindi* requiring flexibility in *mshika-shika* and this slowly undermined the 'foreign' fleets. Equally, several aged *poto* were resurrected as their viability was restored by resumed fuel and spares supplies. In this state of relative normalcy, however, the principles shaping competition worked against the diaspora *poto*, which were eventually condemned to oblivion.

In some instances *mahwindi* sought alliances with local business people and invited them into the business using the 'foreigners' templates of *mshika-shika*. An investor would be encouraged into a quick profit venture of throwing a fleet of say, 20 vehicles at once into *mshika-shika*, and retrieving or selling them after six months having not only recovered his investment but also made considerable profits.<sup>20</sup> Such ventures required guarantees from *mahwindi* in the form of 'protection' from competition and risks such as arrest, impounding or confiscation by authorities. These fleets were also used to displace 'foreigners'. Several *mahwindi* became 'managers' of fleets of this sort and were rewarded with a kombi or two.<sup>21</sup> In this world of competition, product branding was important for winning over a loyal client base, and *mahwindi* were useful again in defining the trendy catch-phrases in popular discourse to label the vehicles – they knew the networks of panel-beaters, spray painters and artists, and upholsters of the diaspora fleet era. More fundamental, however, was their mechanical knowledge of vehicles acquired over years of experience in driving and continued exposure to the performance capabilities of various vehicle models.

*Mshika-shika* thrived on lawlessness and most of the cars were not registered. Former 'money changers' and *magweja* [informal miners] ejected from Chiadzwa's diamond fields brought their cars and joined in. Although many did not survive the *mshika-shika*, some entered into 'driver-owner' arrangements in which they surrendered their cars to drivers after reaching six months or one year's target.

Those *mahwindi* who did not engage their persuasive skills in the actual kombi business turned them to soliciting protection for existing operations. Such protection began with obtaining the necessary papers to operate a commuter omnibus but as these did not matter in *mshika-shika* until one was

19 Interview, Joseph Madawo, Driver, Albion Street Rank, Harare 9/08/10.

20 Interview, Milton Murambiwa, Operator, Westgate, 12/12/10.

21 Interview with Duncan Maminingu, Manager of a Fleet, Parklane Terminal Harare, 27 July 2012.

unfortunate enough to be caught, 'protection' went as far as seeking guaranteed immunity from such inconveniences. This would entail exclusive access to lucrative spots for picking up passengers or evading the long arms of the city and police traffic laws. These privileges could only be granted by the powers that govern Harare's urban space, which from late 2008 was managed by an MDC dominated council and a ZANU PF controlled central state. The persuasive *mahwindi* appealed to both at a time when all saw the urban transport sector as a lucrative source for extracting easy rent. In seeking to re-assert themselves after a decade of deprivation and innovation the *mahwindi* have solicited patronage from the powers that are contesting the same urban space thereby sparking an all-out 'protection war' in Harare (Mazarire and Swart nd).

### Conclusion

Zimbabwean diasporans have aspired to visibility back at home be it for sentimental or other reasons. The motivation is firmly grounded in the belief that one day they would return to enjoy the fruits of their labours abroad in some form of retirement back home. Dreamhouses and expansive fleets of vehicles have been a lived reality for some, while others tell sad stories of failed investments and shattered hopes. In Zimbabwe's difficult decade, diaspora remittance channels had to contend with the world's highest inflation figures and the criminalisation of foreign currency transactions. Initially this put diasporans with foreign currency to spare at an unfair advantage. The most lucrative business was in the transport sector where initially haulage trucks reaped huge profits although the highly specialised operational requirements and the prohibitive costs of spares rendered most haulage businesses redundant in a short while. The commuting business offered more opportunities following the exit of ZUPCO and the inability of smaller commuters to cope with the volume of commuters and fuel shortages. Diasporans sent in big buses which ferried more passengers and had priority in government supplied fuel allocations. Diasporans could also buy fuel directly from external suppliers using the fuel coupon system. However, the diasporan fleet was not best suited to the local conditions and its technology went beyond local expertise. The result was that most of the vehicles broke down and were condemned to local scrapyards or were modified or scavenged to run on Zimbabwean roads as *poto*.

This article argued that the diaspora fleet occupies a significant place in the history of commuting in Harare for introducing a cocktail of European vehicle makes into Zimbabwe that eventually became ramshackle *poto* and which many operators blame for upsetting the self-regulatory framework existing in

the commuting business. This was facilitated by the retreat or undermining of the state and city council regulatory instruments, which in turn created a role for middlemen or *mahwindi*. The *mahwindi* manoeuvred to perpetuate a chaotic *mshika-shika* system, which borrowed much from the culture of irresponsible competitive gambling cultivated during the heyday of the diaspora fleet. *Mshika-shika* remains the pattern and culture of commuting in Harare, to the chagrin of city council planners and traffic police. But its origins lie indelibly in the cultures and practices introduced by the diasporan fleet.

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