EFFECTIVE URBAN CLIMATE ADAPTATION IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH? GOVERNANCE LESSONS FROM LILONGWE CITY, MALAWI

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ABSTRACT

Cities across the world are increasingly at risk of environmental challenges, including extreme weather events. The experiences and therefore the responses to such challenges are highly varied. Through the lens of the southern urban critique, such differences are also evident between cities in the global south and global north since "southern cities are socially, materially, culturally, politically and/or historically different from northern cities". Although this is the case, scholars and practitioners have often ignored such apparent differences when theorising, planning and implementing responses to climate impacts. Oftentimes, such obfuscating of the differences risks maladaptation. This is particularly critical since climate impacts are fundamentally shaped through the processes that create the city. Hence, the differences in the processes across cities vitally entails differences in the impacts experienced and observed, and therefore differences in the responses. This paper aims to demonstrate how adaptation to climate change is governed and implemented in Malawi's cities. Using a postcolonial approach, it firstly discusses the historical and contemporary production of risk to floods in "informal" settlements. Further, it draws attention to how citizen participation is operationalised in policy planning and implementation processes in addressing urban flood risks. Taking a qualitative approach, the research employed document analysis, focus group discussions and interviews with community leaders, officials from both government agencies and departments and non-governmental organisations working on flood risk management in "informal" settlements in Lilongwe city. The findings foreground how responses to climate change and extreme weather events are at once informed and thwarted by historical and contemporary governance processes across spatial scale. This paper, therefore, affirms the need to adopt the southern urban critique approach in theorising, planning and implementing responses to climate change

Keywords: flood risk, governance, informal settlements, southern urban critique.

1 INTRODUCTION

The vulnerability of cities, globally, to environmental challenges is well-known. However, most urban studies have focused on the "global north" cities to theorise and understand how the urban is affected and responds to current and future challenges. This is problematic in myriad ways. Chiefly, cities in the global south "are socially, materially, culturally, politically and/or historically different from northern cities" [1, pp. 7–8]. This, therefore, calls for different and context-specific theoretical and epistemological approaches to be employed to understand different cities.

Flood risks are a social and political construct [3], [4], especially as climate impacts are fundamentally shaped through processes that create the city [2]. In this sense, in southern cities, colonial encounters and succeeding governance processes create the current vulnerabilities to floods experienced by particular social groups in particular locations in cities. This understanding has, thus, led to the call for researchers in climate and disaster risk studies to go beyond focusing on "root causes of vulnerability" by including "root causes of the hazardscape" when researching and managing flood risk in southern cities [5, p. 184]. This invitation is the starting point and the core of this paper.

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This study therefore seeks to foreground how flood risk in Lilongwe city is a product of colonial and postcolonial encounters and the ways in which current governance processes are (in)effective in significantly reducing the risk. Ultimately, the paper attempts to advance the proposition that governance processes seeking to address flood risk must adequately be guided by the experiences of the vulnerable with serious and particular attention on historical political and social processes. In this way, the study responds to the invitation of considering "contexts and practices shaping southern cities" [1, p. 14] and goes beyond this invitation by focusing on the production and governance of urban flood risk. The remainder of this paper, therefore, proceeds by discussing the historical and contemporary political production of flood risk through land marketisation and other land management policies. Then, I discuss how citizens are engaged in governance of flood risks in Lilongwe city and how these affect the implementation of strategies for managing urban flood risk in the city. Before going into this discussion, however, I describe the methodology adopted in this study.

2 METHODOLOGY

This paper draws from empirical work conducted as part of my PhD research. The research focused on Lilongwe city in Malawi (see Fig. 1). The city was chosen because it has been experiencing an increase in the frequency and intensity of floods over recent years. Lilongwe is the capital city of Malawi, since 1975. It has a population of at least 989,318 [6], with over 76% of this population residing in informal settlements [7].

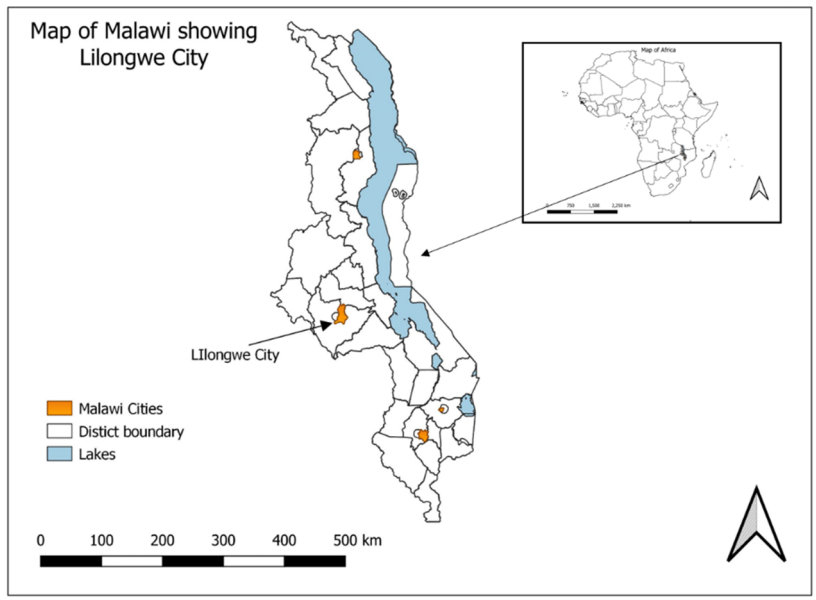

Figure 1: Map of Malawi showing Lilongwe city.

Taking a qualitative approach, this study employed document analysis, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to understand the historical production of risk and citizen participation in the governance of flood risk. Semi-structured interviews targeted officials working with state and non-state institutions at city and national level in addition to community leaders and representatives of Ward civil protection committees in Kawale

settlement. Four focus group discussions were also held with community members in Kawale to understand the shared experiences of flood risk governance processes implemented in their area.

As part of a PhD research involving human subjects, ethical considerations were paramount. Ethical approval was granted by the University of Glasgow. Two key ethical issues were considered: obtaining an informed-consent and ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. All participants involved in this research, therefore were well-informed about the project and how the data is going to used and their right to pull out of the study at any point. Further, their anonymity was guaranteed. Thus, in order to protect the identity of research participants, pseudonyms are used to refer to all participants in this paper.

3 HISTORICAL AND CONTEMPORARY PRODUCTION OF FLOOD RISK: OF SEGREGATIVE LAND MANAGEMENT POLICIES AND PROCESSES

The production of flood risk in Malawi can be traced from governance processes during the colonial period. This is mainly through the unequal access to land and the eventual settlement of the poor in parts of the cities more vulnerable to floods. It is important to mention that urban development in Malawi was slightly different from other African countries due to low interest from the colonialist owing to the lack of minerals [8]. For clarity and brevity, in this paper, I focus on two main processes that I argue led to the production of flood risk in urban Malawi: the marketisation of land and the state's adoption and advancement of segregative policies.

3.1 Marketisation of land

Prior to the arrival of the white settlers and the colonialists, land was managed through traditional systems. In traditional African systems, selling land is alien because they believe land belongs to not only the present but also the future generation [9]. Thus, though land was seen to be managed by the Chiefs, they were mere custodians of the land. Their role was limited to allocation of land and settling land disputes; neither did they have the powers to sell nor evict people from their land [10]. Thus, the white settlers who came in the 1800s introduced the sale of land concept which was alien but also incomprehensible for the native. This system of accessing land, therefore, favoured the white settlers unlike the Black natives.

In order to drive his agricultural commercialisation agenda, Harry Johnstone, the first Commissioner and Consular General of Nyasaland (Malawi's name during the colonial rule), decided to legally allocate land to white settlers through issuance of a "certificate of claim" as evidence of land ownership. This issuance of certificate of claim marked the "the inception of the private land system" [11, p. 31] in Nyasaland. The process of issuing these certificates, however, was marred with fraud as some claims were based on shady deals and limited documentation evidence [12, p. 77], effectively alienating native from their land.

Besides the private land ownership, the colonial administration also introduced the public land ownership under which all land managed by chief before the colonisation was ceded to the Crown. The Crownland made up 85% of all land in Malawi. With most of the land designated as either private or crown land, there was minimal land left for the majority-Black natives. Owing to this, colonisation inevitably introduced tenancy. By 1958, for instance, annual rent fees for natives on private estates were about 52 shillings and 6 pence, triple the statutory monthly wage of unskilled labour [11]. Through orders and contested claims, Africans were reduced to tenants in their own land. Although the two land systems were technically different, they served the same purpose: to benefit the capitalist agenda of the non-natives.

This marketisation of land continued post-independence. As soon as the Malawi gained independence led by President Hastings Banda, the state adopted new legal instruments in land management. On one hand was the Customary Land Act (Cap 59.01) of 1967 whose goal was to improve agricultural productivity in order to "accelerate the transition from a subsistence to a cash economy" [13, p. 695]. Thus, the purpose of the Customary Land Act (Cap 59.01) of 1967, was to promote and facilitate the conversion of customary land to private land. On the other hand, the Registered Land Act provides for the "registration of title to land and for dealings in land so registered and for the purposes connected therewith" where registration as conceived in the Act "confers the right of ownership as private land". The synchronous enactment of the two acts, in principle, encouraged private ownership of land, as opposed to customary use. This move, therefore, enabled a development of classes based on "ownership" of land, as few people (elite) could afford to "own" land. Reinforcing these acts is the Land Acquisition Act of 1965 which was designed to facilitate the transfer of land from smallholder farmers to large estate farmers [14]. These estate farmers included cabinet ministers, members of parliament, party functionaries and senior civil servants, most with direct support from President Banda [15, p. 10]. The implementation of the Land Acquisition act therefore accentuated the dispossession of the poor while enabling the rich, in post-colonial Malawi.

3.2 Policies and socio-spatial segregation

Besides the marketisation of land, other policies explain the political and social construction of flood risk enunciating the root causes of the hazardscape viz why poor people are located in vulnerable locations in Malawi's cities such as Lilongwe. After the first World War, there was noticeable growth in urban population due to rural–urban population fuelled by economic growth. The Township ordinance of 1931 provided for the establishment and composition of townships. Although this was done, councillors did not represent the "indigenous people" or Africans (Chiweza 2007, as cited in [16]). The welfare of Africans, in contrast, was under the jurisdiction of traditional governance systems. This arrangement meant that "the little urban planning that existed was not intended for indigenous needs" [16, p. 446].

Further, in urban settlements, the spatial organisation during the colonial rule revealed clear fragmentation. John McCracken succinctly summarises the extent and significance of this colonial fragmentation:

> In their different ways, the settlements like Blantyre, Limbe, Zomba and Lilongwe epitomised the colonial imagination at its most vivid in the way that urban space was ordered into precisely designated functions, normally involving the segregation of the European zone from Asian and African sections [12, p. 282].

In Lilongwe, in 1924, the natives were ordered to move and to live on the eastern bank of the Lilongwe River located in the Southern part of the town, while the wealthy lived on the western bank, North and Central part of the town [17]. The western bank was the higher ground considered free from malaria vectors and diseases, therefore safe for the Europeans. The Southern part of the city consisted of unplanned settlements which were excluded from crucial infrastructures such as water supply, in favour of the Northern and Central part of the town [18]. On the eastern bank of Lilongwe River, the Asian-occupied area acted as a buffer between the African and European settlements. Further, on the same Eastern bank of Lilongwe River, African civil servants in the colonial government were housed in temporary

structures made of mud and thatched with grass [17]. More small permanent houses for native civil servants were only developed in the 1950s, on the eastern bank of Lilongwe River in the Falls Estate area [17]. After independence, the European zones were taken over by civil servants and high-income people while low-income groups remained in the African zones of the urban areas.

Such socio-spatial segregation was continued post-independence. The adoption and continuation of zoning in urban planning seemed to follow the class-racial lines apparent during the colonial times. The Lilongwe outline zoning scheme of 1986 (Fig. 2), informed by the Lilongwe Master Plan of 1969 clearly illustrates this.

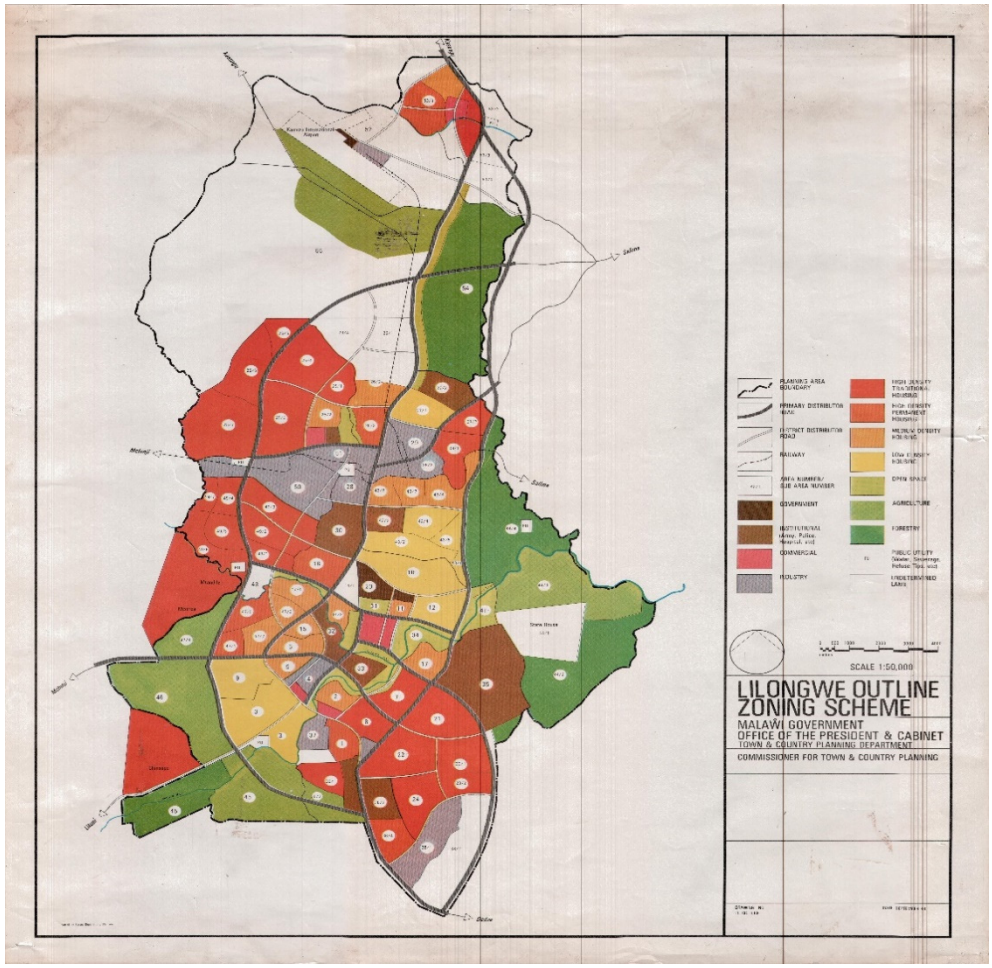

Figure 2: Lilongwe city Outline Zoning Scheme of 1986. *(Source: Town and Country Planning Department.)*

Clearly, the above Outline Zoning Scheme and the Lilongwe Master Plan on which it was based, reproduced the segregation of residential zones as evidenced by the location of low income settlements in the periphery of the city [8]. In this regard, the policy instruments

visibly demarcated Lilongwe into three main sections: European, Asian and African sections, with low-income settlements located away from the city centre making Lilongwe "a true replica of the spatial configuration of an apartheid city" [17, p. 100]. Worth noting, too is the demonstration of prejudices of the government as seen in the Outline Zoning Scheme, for instance, through the siting of the police headquarters between the Capital hill (area housing all government ministries and department headquarters – marked 20 on the Outline Zoning Scheme) and the largest traditional housing area (Marked 25 on the Outline Zoning Scheme) which was arguably due to "a somewhat suspicious attitude towards the low-income urban population" [8, p. 285]. Such racial and class exclusionary underpinnings in the land planning instruments are a vivid continuation of colonial era land management processes and extremely similar to, and are a continuation of, land planning approaches from the colonial era.

The case of Lilongwe illustrates the extent of socio-spatial segregation that has defined urban life and how different people experience the urban differently. This was similarly experienced in Nairobi which had Asian, European and African zones "distinguishing their economic status, lifestyle and the political power each zone welds" [19, p. 20]. The effects of ignoring the African migrant/resident in urban areas have prevailed and unfortunately, informed current urban governance strategies to the present day. The present day has seen the inequalities from the colonial era lead to "a disproportionate amount of land, infrastructure and services benefit a few while the majority are congested with few or no services" [20, p. 50].

Additionally, there were differences in the availability of infrastructure across the country. The bulk of infrastructure, particularly road and transportation networks, was developed in the southern region [21] where most European owned estates were located. This infrastructure was to service the White minority settlers and the cash crop industry. This is unlike in the central region and northern region which had minimal white settler population. Both the socio-spatial segregation and infrastructural inequalities have therefore led to differentiated vulnerability to floods the Lilongwe city.

As experienced in the past flood events, the most affected in Lilongwe city, the floods of 2015 mostly affected residents of Kawale and Mtandire, informal settlements. High and middle-income areas neighbouring these settlements i.e. Area 2 for Kawale and Area 47 for Mtandire did not experience the same effects of the floods. The main reason for this disparity, as research participants reported, is that the informal settlements do not have access to drainage and waste management services provided by the city council. Thus, the poor drainage and waste management systems increases the vulnerability of the residents as in case of heavy rainfall event, management of flood waters a challenge. Following these flood events, national and city authorities have been engaging the public in urban flood risk management.

4 TRACING CITIZEN PARTICIPATION IN URBAN FLOOD RISK GOVERNANCE

4.1 Participation in governance processes

The governance of flood risk management in Malawi is led by the Department of Disaster Management Affairs. However, governance at city level is spearhead by the local government structure through which citizen participation, ideally, is mobilised. However, citizen participation in governance of flood risk in Lilongwe is limited. The limitation is mainly due to the governance structure and engagement processes adopted.

To begin with, following the decentralisation policy, citizens' involvement in governance processes is often through their elected representatives to the local council. The councillor is assumed to represent the will and aspirations of the people they are representing. According to the Local Government Act of 1998 and its amendment act of 2010, the council includes the following members from within the local government area: (1) elected member from the ward (Ward Councillor), (2) Members of Parliament, (3) Traditional authorities; and (4) five people appointed by the elected members to cater for the interests of special groups as the Council may deem necessary (see Fig. 3).

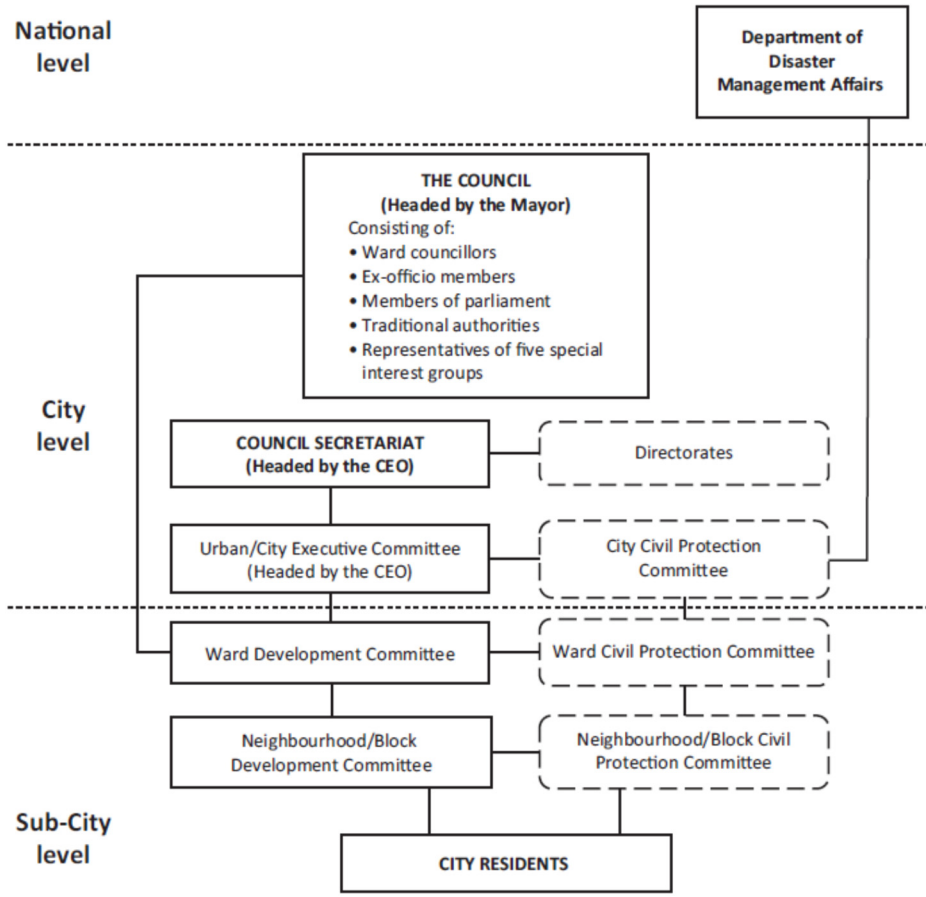

Figure 3: Local government structure [24].

However, besides the council, the local government structure has the council secretariat which is the main "liaison" between the council and the central government and of particular mention here is the DoDMA. The secretariat provides technical and administrative support to the council. This element of the local government system is therefore considered "subordinate to local councillors" as it is there to implement the decisions and policies made by the councillors [22]. Worth noting is that the secretariat is headed by a Chief Executive Officer who also heads the Urban/City Executive Committee constituting heads of

departments/sector offices, and in some instances representatives from NGOs. It is this part of the council that leads in the governance of the resilience to floods in the city through the City Civil Protection Committee (CCPC), a subcommittee of the Urban/City Executive Committee. The CCPC is the main body coordinating the implementation of disaster risk management plans and policies in the city in conformity to the prevailing national policies and frameworks. The CCPC, among its numerous responsibilities, advises the City Executive Committee on disaster risk management issues and submits reports to DoDMA [23]. At ward level, the CCPC works with the Ward Civil Protection Committees (a subcommittee of the Ward Development Committee) and further below at Block/Neighbourhood level, the CCPC works with Block Civil Protection Committees (subcommittee of the Block/Neighbourhood Development Committee).

The way the governance local governance structure is laid out, particularly at city and sub-city levels, brings to the fore a critical loophole for effective participation and this is problematic as most stakeholder engagements in urban Malawi target local government structures [24]. By virtue of the CCPC being under the secretariat, it reduces the power of the elected council members in managing the resilience-enhancing activities implemented in the city. These elected council members, are supposed representatives of the people, hence demanding their participation in the governance of urban resilience. The eventual handling of all disaster risk management issues by the CCPC, therefore, effectively marginalises the voice of the people and recentralizes power to the state in the implementation of resilience-enhancing activities at the city level.

4.2 Participation in policy prioritisation and its successes/failures

Direct citizen participation in governance processes is also limited. With respect to direct citizen participation, Arnstein's [25] typology is useful to understand the extent of participation and extrapolate the benefits thereof. For Arnstein, participation has different levels which can be represented by eight (8) rungs of a ladder, with the lowest level/rung being Manipulation and the highest level/rung being direct Citizen control. The level of participation increases with "the extent of citizens" power in determining the end product [25, p. 217]. Using Arnstein's [25] typological lens, therefore, participation of citizens in the governance of resilience-enhancing mechanisms is largely at rung 4; Consultation or below. This is manifested in myriad ways. Indicative is one of the responses of a Focus Group Discussion participant on how they, as citizens, are involved in the planning and implementation of resilience-enhancing activities:

> The problem that the government has, not only the current government but even the previous government, is that they do not use decentralisation approach. They do not use democratic principles…What is needed is that before the construction work begins, they should invite community members to get their input on how best the construction could be done. The communities should give their input and so too the engineers. Then they should balance what the community members are saying and what they read in books to decide on what they should do… But they don't listen! (Yohane, 19-11-2019).

These sentiments are echoed by an official working with an NGO while commenting on the development of the National resilience strategy:

> Full of nonsense. It's full of nonsense. I can't even read that one, it's a waste of time because it has been developed by people sitting in the offices. It hasn't

> been developed by the communities. It has been developed by people who sit in the offices… Those people cannot develop policies that would reflect the needs of people in Mtandire (Chisomo, 25-10-2019).

While the respondent acknowledged that the Lilongwe city council had involved communities in the development of the city resilience strategy, they attributed the move to the fact that the programme was funded by the UN-HABITAT. As such, the respondent implies the approach to involve communities was purely due to the donor's influence. This is unsurprising as donors have been found to influence participation in governance processes in developing countries [26], [27], mostly through conditionalities attached to aid.

Nevertheless, for the limited participation activities that are conducted, citizens are often invited by state or non-state organisations to such participatory spaces. The successes of such invited spaces is limited. A good example of this is a case where city council officials were reported to urge and promote relocation as the most effect way of dealing with the flood incidences and its effects. Some of the representatives of the community reported how they agreed to the proposition when invited to a meeting organised by the city council with the hope to be able to convince their communities when they return. This proposition was vehemently rejected by the communities and such opposition was also registered in one focus group discussion:

> There is a threat that the government just wants to relocate all those that stay near riverbanks and that's what is making us wonder that where are they taking us to? We don't like the idea. Their role is that the issues that we've told you here, about tree planting, they should just help us with that but about relocation, where are we going to go? (Phiri, 19-11-2019).

The use and limitations of invited spaces of participation has been extensively discussed in literature [28]–[30]. This case, however, highlights two fundamental theoretical points. First, the limitations of invited spaces. The invited spaces are choreographed and framed by the initiating party while the invited party conforms and goes along with the pre-determined setup. This limits the effectiveness of such engagements and the benefits thereof. More spaces created by the community members themselves would strengthen their voices and possibly be sources of effective strategies to reduce flood risk in informal settlements. Second, the case reflects the different ways in which contestation is done in this informal settlement. Rather than confrontational approaches prevalent in northern cities, residents here adopt a rational way to contest the top-down policies adopted by authorities to manage urban flood risk; non-engagement. They do not cooperate besides agreeing, albeit through their representatives, to undertake particular flood risk management strategies. The case of Kawale residents therefore demonstrates a form of political contestation which highlights the "unseen forms of agency and resistance" [31, p. 223] advanced by the southern urban critique.

5 CONCLUSION

The findings foreground how flood risk is a product of colonial and postcolonial social and political processes. In Lilongwe city, the causes of the prevalent flood hazardscape are well-understood when colonial encounters and postcolonial processes are read together to inform strategies for managing urban flood risk. The current governance strategies for ensuring citizen participation in flood risk management, however, are limited by structural and processual factors. While the governance structures by their design recentralise power to the state, the particular engagement strategies do not adequately give the power to citizens to significantly influence policies. Ultimately, the successes of responses to climate change and

extreme weather events like floods are compromised. While this research centred on political and social processes producing flood risk in Lilongwe city, further research on how other contextual processes such as religion, ethnicity and culture would bring in critical nuances in understanding the production of urban flood risk at a microscale.

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