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Myth, memory, and political settlements in the city: compounded disadvantage and a path for plausible futures

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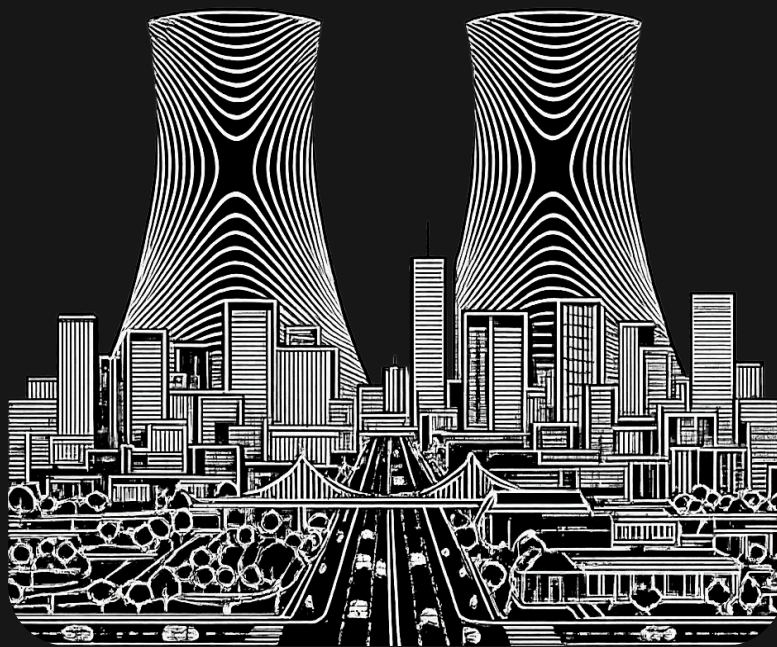
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CHAPTER

01



INTRODUCTION

1. Introduction

Bulawayo, once celebrated as the industrial hub of Zimbabwe and a bastion of regional economic strength, has undergone a dramatic transformation over the decades. The city's trajectory from prosperity to the periphery reflects broader socio-political and economic dynamics that have defined Zimbabwe's post-independence era. Existing scholarship¹ has examined Bulawayo's decline through a range of lenses: the economic (industrial collapse, deindustrialisation, unemployment, and informality), the political (ethnopolitical exclusion, state repression, and identity politics), and the institutional (urban governance failures, reconciliation, and participatory planning). However, these approaches remain fragmented, often treating these dynamics in isolation, and few explicitly centre Bulawayo's trajectory through the lens of citizen-defined, complex, and historicised disadvantage. Limited attention has been paid to the symbolic and affective processes² through which disadvantage is narrated, remembered, and normalised, or to how these interact with structural and political exclusion over time. This study addresses that gap by critically examining the perceptions and realities of disadvantage in Bulawayo at the intersections of urban governance, economic policies, political settlements, and collective memory. At its core, it contributes a conceptualisation of *disadvantage*³ as a layered process, reflecting structural, symbolic, and affective elements that are both reproduced and resisted. Methodologically, the research rests on secondary sources and privileges citizen narratives across generations and positionalities, thus situating Bulawayo not only as a city on the periphery to the centre of power and access in Harare, but also as a place of resilience and future imagination. The analysis culminates in a futures-oriented exploration, deploying Inayatullah's Causal Layered Analysis (1998, 2004, 2005) and the Futures Triangle (2008, 2023) to envision "Bulawayo 2.0", an inclusive and justice-oriented urban trajectory.

The contextualisation of Bulawayo within the larger tapestry of Zimbabwe's socio-political landscape, is marked by the enduring legacies of colonialism and the consolidation of power by the Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) post-1980. Post-independence economic policies, shaped by responses to the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) and its successors, catalysed deindustrialisation and urban precarity.⁴ Once the country's industrial hub, Bulawayo's share of national manufacturing employment declined from over a third in the early 1980s to less than 10% by the early 2000s (Chinjova, 2019: 640; Helmsing, 1999: 7; Thondlana, 2020). The analysis builds on such economic trajectories and political shifts

¹ See footnotes 4-11.

² In Futures Studies, an affective future foregrounds emotions, moods, and embodied feelings (such as hope, fear, or anxiety) that orient people toward the future and shape action - often prior to or alongside conscious imagination. An affective process then refers to the ongoing production and circulation of these embodied feelings through which people become oriented toward certain futures. By contrast, imagination relates to cognitively constructed visions of what the future could or should be. Essentially, imagined futures are *thought about*, while affective futures are *felt into*, often provoking action and change.

³ The italicisation of 'disadvantage' here is to denote the full conceptualisation when alluded to within the thesis. Thus, as a point of clarity, outside of this instance the italicisation of 'disadvantage' only occurs in Chapter 1.1 and the concluding Chapter 9 despite the conceptualisation occurring throughout the thesis. See also footnote 16.

⁴ See Chinjova, 2019; Dube & Chipumho, 2016; Gumbo & Geyer, 2011; Kamete, 1999; Ndakaripa, 2020.

to examine the interplay of economic restructuring, historical grievances, ethnopolitical divides, and systemic governance challenges in examining the city's disadvantaged position. Anchored in political settlements theory, the study interrogates the distribution of power and resources in shaping the outcomes of disadvantage. It also investigates the agency of Bulawayo's residents in navigating these challenges, focusing on urban informality, community resilience, and strategic silence as survival strategies. In doing so, the thesis engages with the limitations of modernisation paradigms, while integrating insights from urban citizenship, political economy, and futures studies to propose alternative pathways for transformation.

A methodological caution guides this analysis throughout: not every hardship documented in Bulawayo is unique to it. Urban informality, economic precarity, and strained relations between citizens and local government are, to varying degrees, common across Zimbabwe's cities, and indeed much of urban Africa (see Chapter 1.1). Where this thesis discusses such generic conditions, particularly the landscape of informal vending in Chapter 6, it does so as necessary contextual grounding rather than as the study's central claim. What this thesis argues is specific to Bulawayo is the compounding of these otherwise common conditions with a distinct historical and ethno-political architecture: the city's association with ZAPU and Ndebele identity, the enduring afterlife of Gukurahundi, and the deliberate, decades-long narrowing of its political settlement (see Chapters 4, 5, and 7). It is this convergence of generic urban precarity layered onto Bulawayo's particular history of political exclusion, that produces the compounded disadvantage this thesis theorises, and each empirical chapter signals, where relevant, which generic or contextualised register a given discussion belongs to.

In guiding the reader, this introductory chapter first identifies the gaps in existing scholarship on Bulawayo's disadvantage. It proceeds to outline the study's conceptual and empirical contributions. Next, it presents the research questions and proceeds to provide an overview of the thesis' chapter structure. Finally, it introduces the methodological approach, positionality, and data limitations that frame the study. Chapter 1.1 follows to develop a multidimensional conceptualisation of disadvantage in Bulawayo and demonstrates, through both comparative statistics and qualitative analysis, how the city's contemporary marginalisation emerges not from numerical disparities with Harare but from historically compounded political, spatial, economic, and affective processes that shape lived urban realities.

Identifying and Filling the Gap(s)

Work on how citizens in Bulawayo engage with disadvantage tends to be dispersed across studies focusing on urban governance, community engagement, and participatory planning. Insights from the literature include, but are not limited to, issues pertaining to socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, urban informalisation, and deindustrialisation⁵; marginalisation and identity⁶;

⁵ See Chirisa, 2009; Chinjova, 2019; Dube & Chipumho, 2016; Gumbo & Geyer, 2011; Kamete, 1999; I. Moyo, 2018; Ndakaripa, 2020; Pikovskaia, 2022.

⁶ See Alexander, 2021; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a, 2008b, 2011; Msindo, 2007, 2010; M. Ndlovu, 2025.

urban history⁷; digital innovation and youth engagement⁸; migration and devolution⁹; and reconciliation and inclusive development¹⁰. While these and other studies on citizen perspectives and future pathways exist, they are often limited in scope or primarily concerned with broader urban or national trends. Few explicitly centre Bulawayo's urban trajectory through the lens of citizen-defined, complex, and historicised disadvantage to comprehensively examine how structural exclusion is cyclically produced, affectively experienced, and politically maintained. This thesis fills that gap, offering a deeper account of how disadvantage is lived, narrated, and resisted in Bulawayo across different generations, spaces, and positionalities.

This work connects historical analysis, political settlements theory, and affective urban experiences to interrogate disadvantage not as a fixed condition but as a layered process. By situating Bulawayo within Zimbabwe's broader political economy – particularly elite-driven settlements, cycles of militarisation, and persistent regional imbalances – disadvantage is framed as both structure and narrative. This framing enables a more expansive account of how exclusion is reproduced and how people endure it. The intellectual contribution lies in connecting this structural reading with grounded insights from residents who continue to live with the psychological, political, and economic aftershocks of historical violence within spatial parameters.

The theoretical synthesis deployed is deliberate and layered. Drawing from political settlements theory, urban political economy, trauma and memory studies, as well as futures methodologies such as the CLA and the futures triangle, the thesis builds a framework that is diagnostic and offers new ways of transformatively thinking through governance and developmental progress. It adds to critiques of the limitations of modernisation theory in an independent African state while also offering tools to imagine alternative urban futures. The conceptual integration allows for a grounded yet forward-looking approach that understands Bulawayo as more than a “dissident city” (Alexander, 2021; Musemwa, 2006b) defined by loss and marginalisation. Instead, the city becomes a site of memory, myth, resilience, and potential. The conceptualisation of “Bulawayo 2.0” is not a utopian exercise but a contextualised framework grounded in the city's affective realities, structural constraints, and latent capacities. It reflects a commitment to visioning as both a policy practice and a methodological innovation. This is simultaneously a meaningful contribution to urban futures studies in Africa.

Empirical contributions surface marginalised knowledge which is often silenced or sidelined in formal planning and academic literature, particularly through testimonies of vendors, councillors, youth, the diaspora, and professionals. The lived experiences captured offer an intimate understanding of how disadvantage is contested, reframed, and, in some cases, strategically navigated. By centring disadvantage, its manifestations and its perceptions, as the research problem, one is then able to holistically examine its effects as related to historical and political marginalisation, particularly for Matabeleland-based communities. While scholars (see Alexander et al., 2000; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003, 2011; I. Moyo & Gumbo, 2021) have documented how

⁷ See Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003, 2015; Ranger, 1970, 1985.

⁸ See Karekwaivanane & Mare, 2019; I. Moyo, 2023.

⁹ See Hammar, 2017; Mtombeni & Matiza, 2022.

¹⁰ See Alexander, et al., 2000; Alexander & McGregor, 1999; Eppel, 2004, 2009, 2013, 2020.

violence and historical injustices have shaped contemporary urban identities in Zimbabwe, their analyses emphasise different dimensions of this process.¹¹ There is a strong case for framing historical violence and its ongoing structural adaptations as mechanisms of elite accumulation that are uniquely visible in Bulawayo. Recognising this opens the door to reimagining the city's future around participatory urban governance, economic resilience, and socio-political agency.

Research Questions

This study is guided by one overarching main research question:

How have political settlements and governance structures historically produced and compounded disadvantage in post-1980 Bulawayo, and how is this disadvantage cyclically remembered, contested, and reimagined?

All sub-questions are interlinked with the contextualising and historical basis of Chapters 2-4 providing the foundations for their exploration. Rather than stand-alone questions, they build on, and mirror, one another to inform the conceptualisation of disadvantage: from tracing structural roots, to unpacking political dynamics, to analysing lived practices of urban survival, to interrogating memory, silence, and myth; and finally, to reimagining plausible futures. The questions ultimately circle back to the main research question, reflecting the thesis' framing of disadvantage not merely as outcome but as process and structure, simultaneously historical, contemporary, and prospective. The guiding sub-questions are:

Firstly: *In what ways have ZANU-PF's post-independence political settlements shaped the socio-political and economic marginalisation of Bulawayo?* This sub-question, addressed in Chapter 5, engages directly with the historical and structural underpinnings of the conceptualisation of disadvantage, interrogating how elite bargaining, clientelism, and militarised governance have institutionalised exclusion in Bulawayo.

Foregrounding the lived experience of urban governance, revealing how disadvantage is actively negotiated and contested through everyday practices of survival and local-level engagement, the second sub-question examined Chapter 5 asks: *How do Bulawayo's urban residents and local officials articulate, navigate, and resist urban economic (in)security in the context of informalisation and weakened local governance?*

Thirdly, it is necessary to interrogate how disadvantage is remembered and embodied, especially through silences and symbolic framings that both mask and preserve trauma, hence the sub-question developed in Chapters 5 and 7: *What forms of silence, memory, and myth have emerged as tools of both repression and resilience in Bulawayo's inhabitants' pursuit of peace?*

¹¹ Alexander et al. (2000) trace how the legacies of the liberation war and the Gukurahundi violence left deep scars on citizenship and belonging in Matabeleland, embedding regional identities within a history of repression. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2003, 2011) develops this further by showing how postcolonial state-building reproduced colonial logics of exclusion, reinforcing Bulawayo's identity as a "dissident city" (Musemwa, 2006b). More recently, Moyo and Gumbo (2021) highlight how everyday practices of resilience and informal survival continue to be shaped by these histories of marginalisation, demonstrating the persistent interplay between structural violence and urban livelihoods.

The fourth sub-question again contributing to framing Chapter 7 - *How does Bulawayo's mythicised status as a 'dissident city' intersect with everyday practices of citizenship, survival, and affective agency?* - extends the analysis of memory and identity, highlighting how disadvantage is constructed discursively, and how residents actively resist and redefine their relationship to power and place.

The fifth sub-question, in framing Chapter 6, links the empirical findings with normative considerations, by interrogating what forms of political and institutional change might be necessary to transcend historical disadvantage and enable more equitable urban governance. Here, the probe is: *How can participatory, justice-oriented urban governance challenge narrow political settlements and open pathways for inclusive development in Bulawayo?*

Shifting to a reimagination of the current state of affairs, the last sub-question, pivotal to unpacking Chapter 8, considers how alternative urban trajectories might emerge from critical engagement with past and present challenges by asking: *What futures are both plausible and actionable for Bulawayo when historic grievances, current governance failures, and grassroots resilience are brought into dialogue?*

Together, these questions provide an exploratory map to engage with the multifaceted nature of disadvantage in Bulawayo; situating it as both a product of structural power and a dynamic site of memory, resistance, and possibility.

Chapter Outline

Following this introduction, Chapter 2 lays out the analytical framework of political settlements as well as pushing back on the appropriateness of modernisation theory for thinking about the future of the city of Bulawayo. The chapter applies Mushtaq Khan's political settlements approach to the case of Bulawayo, arguing that systemic disadvantage in the city stems from exclusionary elite bargains, legacies of militarised governance, and clientelist networks that prioritise political survival over inclusive development. The framework provides the conceptual basis for understanding how these dynamics have historically produced and compounded Bulawayo's marginalisation.

Chapter 3 develops the conceptual framework for the thesis by examining how silence, denial, myth, trauma, and militarisation shape Bulawayo's experience of disadvantage. It argues that these concepts reveal how repression, memory, and survival intersect both at the national level, and in everyday life, linking psychological, cultural, and political dimensions of exclusion. Through these lenses, Bulawayo's compounded marginalisation is understood not merely as economic neglect but as the outcome of silenced histories, mythicised narratives, and legacies of militarised governance. The chapter concludes by positioning Bulawayo's citizens as neither passive victims nor fully autonomous actors, but as agents navigating the enduring structures of disadvantage.

Chapter 4 provides a historical grounding of the city of Bulawayo. It traces the historical foundations of systemic disadvantage in Bulawayo by examining how successive political

settlements, dating back to the Ndebele state and ending at the beginning of the 1980s, have shaped the city's governance blueprint. Unfolding over more than 140 years, these political dynamics reveal how Bulawayo's marginalisation is both historically produced and continuously reimagined through memory, myth, and contestation. The four empirical perspectives, gathered from secondary data and empirical sources, are analysed in chapters 5-8, followed by concluding remarks and reflections.

Chapter 5, "*Surviving the City: Political, Economic, and Psychological Considerations of Urban Citizenship in Bulawayo*", engages with the empirical perspective that urban citizenship in Bulawayo is constituted through everyday strategies of survival under conditions of political exclusion, historical violence, and economic neglect, rather than through formal rights or inclusion. The chapter explores how urban citizenship is shaped by strategies of survival under systemic political and economic inequality. It highlights the enduring legacies of colonial exclusion and post-independence governance, situating Bulawayo's marginalisation within broader patterns of authoritarian rule and resistance (Balaton-Chrimes, 2016; Coquery-Vidrovitch, 2020). Events such as the Gukurahundi Massacres and the 1987 Unity Accord reinforced the city's marginalisation, cementing its mythicised label as a "city of dissent" (see Alexander, 2021; Musemwa, 2006b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011a; Rwafa, 2012).

Chapter 6, "*Siyabancenga – Navigating Economic (In)security in Bulawayo*", analyses the second empirical perspective that Bulawayo's economic insecurity is not an unintended outcome of crisis, but a structural condition produced by the interaction of informality, political patronage, and constrained municipal authority. The chapter examines urban economic (in)security through the lens of informality, political patronage, and weakened local governance. It traces the legacies of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme and subsequent crises (Chinjoa, 2019; Kamete, 1999; Thondlana, 2020), showing how these dynamics pushed many into informal livelihoods and generated tensions among vendors, the Bulawayo City Council, and ZANU-PF. The chapter also develops the concept of *ukubamba zonke*¹² to analyse the interplay between economic survival and political contestation.

Chapter 7, "*Uneasy Peace: Unresolved Tensions and Veiled Histories*" analyses the third empirical perspective to show that Bulawayo's post-conflict condition is best understood as an *uneasy peace*, where even though violence is absent, unresolved historical trauma continues to structure socio-political memory. Characterised by silence, denial, and collective resilience, the chapter introduces the concept of *uneasy peace* to explain how myths, memories, and trauma shape socio-political life (Eppel, 2020). The chapter shows how Bulawayo's mythicised status as a "dissident city" both entrenches exclusion and symbolises defiance, while silence operates as both repression and agency (Alexander, 2021; Musemwa, 2006b).

Chapter 8, "*Affecting Futures Towards a Productive City*", argues that revitalising Bulawayo requires transformative approaches that tackle systemic barriers, empower local governance, and align policy with the city's collective identity. Using futures methodologies to provide a blueprint for policymakers and further research, the chapter develops the fourth empirical perspective

¹² Trans. "to hoard or have your fingers in all good things". The concept will be extensively discussed in Chapter 3 and applied in Chapter 6.

arguing that meaningful urban revitalisation in Bulawayo depends on future-making practices that are affective, participatory, and grounded in lived experience, rather than technocratic or growth-led models. The result is a proposal for the vision of “Bulawayo 2.0” for 2040, contributing to debates on African urban futures by highlighting the value of participatory, context-specific approaches rooted in residents’ experiences.

Methodology

The Methodological Approach: Case-Centric Process-Tracing and Theory Development

The aim of adopting an overarching process-tracing approach in this research was to determine the causality of disadvantage in the case of the city of Bulawayo and its residents.¹³ As Mahoney (2012) and D. Collier (2011) emphasise, description remains vital when laying out and subsequently analysing causal relationships. In this sense, causal mechanisms must be recognised as more than just empirical events – they are embedded, systemic legacies that shape observed outcomes.

This descriptive process must not, however, be conflated with a purely empirical one, wherein there is a historical sequencing of “events occurring between X and Y but where the causal mechanism linking them is in effect black-boxed” (Bunge, 1997, in D. Beach & Pedersen, 2013: 33).¹⁴ Whereas empirical narratives often involve this black-boxing of mechanisms, conducting process-tracing research directs attention to systemic legacies and underlying mechanisms – in this case, the historical and institutional structures through which X contributes to producing outcome Y. This logic underpinned the methodological design of this thesis.

Within the project, engagement with process-tracing methods was case-centric, focusing on accounting for the outcome within a single case rather than attempting to generalise. This stands in contrast to a theory-centric approach, which seeks to develop broader generalisations across multiple cases (D. Beach & Pedersen, 2013: 69-70). My use of a case-centric design aligns with D. Beach and Pedersen’s (D. Beach & Pedersen, 2013: 12, 69-70) process-tracing stages:

1. **Theory-testing:** investigates whether proposed causal mechanisms based on existing literature are present in the empirical case.
2. **Theory-building:** constructs new causal mechanisms informed by empirical findings when existing ones are insufficient.
3. **Elaboration of case-centric outcomes:** deepens understanding of specific findings within the unique context of the case.

Each of these stages is underpinned by a shared theoretical assumption: that systems, or “mechanisms”, are invariant – they either exist or they do not (D. Beach & Pedersen, 2013: 13).

¹³ See chapter 1.1 of this thesis for a full discussion situating *disadvantage*.

¹⁴ This refers to a type of explanation that identifies a *sequence of events* (X leading to Y), but does not explain *how* or *why* X causes Y. In process-tracing, the point is to *open the black box* in order to look inside and trace the causal logic or legacy that connects initial conditions to outcomes. This helps build deeper, more valid explanations rather than surface-level descriptions.

This assumption was particularly useful because it directed attention to whether specific mechanisms of exclusion and disadvantage were present in Bulawayo, rather than debating their degree or intensity. It allowed me to trace how entrenched legacies of disadvantage – such as militarised governance, clientelism, and economic marginalisation – consistently operated as causal mechanisms shaping the city’s post-independence urban experience.

As Mahoney (2012: 12-13) further points out, sequencing plays a critical role in identifying how necessary conditions trigger a series of dependent developments. He notes that sequencing “provide[s] a good opportunity for the analyst to carry out a smoking gun test... [to] show how an initial cause was essential to put the overall sequence in motion, culminating in the outcome.” This emphasis on causal sequencing required me, as the researcher, to pose relevant questions about the formulation and interaction of independent, interfering, and dependent variables (D. Collier, 2011: 823; Mahoney, 2012: 12).

In organising these variables within the framework of process-tracing, D. Beach and Pedersen (2013) identify the three aforementioned process-tracing stages as key for amplifying the rigour and depth of data collection. This framework guided not only the structuring of the study but also the ways in which evidence was collected, interpreted, and integrated across the analytical phases of the research.

Clarifying Causality Across the Four Empirical Chapters

The causal mechanism discussed in Chapter 5, examines the survival strategies, identity formation, and shifting agency of Bulawayo’s residents within ongoing political and economic constraints. It is shaped by historical and structural marginalisation, ethnocratic power dynamics, the ZANU-PF’s clientelist governance aimed at rent-seeking and political survival, and psychological negotiations of identity.

In Chapter 6, causal mechanisms are rooted in urban insecurity, in the dynamic interplay between the political, economic, and social factors that influence the city of Bulawayo’s residents. The chapter specifically attributes urban insecurity to the following interconnected causal factors: political settlements and patron-client networks; economic structural adjustment and prolonged national economic crises; urban informality and subsequent governance challenges in Bulawayo; interventionist ZANU-PF national politics that bypass local government authorities; as well as historicised ethno-political divides between Harare and Bulawayo. These elements collectively create a cycle of urban economic insecurity, shaped by historical legacies, current national governance practices, and socio-political structures.

The causal mechanism reflected in Chapter 7, operates through interconnected processes: historical trauma as a catalyst of deep psychological scars and entrenched socio-political divisions, where the state’s use of violence against a perceptively overwhelming amount of dissidents in Matabeleland by ZANU-PF solidified a legacy of fear and mistrust; state-led denial and myth-making aimed at suppressing collective memory; structural violence and socio-political exclusion; community resilience and strategic silence in response to systemic denial; and youth pragmatism and intergenerational dynamics that shape community survival.

To draw out causality in Chapter 8, the interconnected layers are guided by the futures triangle's emphasis on the weight of history, which addresses historical and structural factors; the push of the present, which addresses current competing challenges; and the pull of the future, which addresses ways of affecting aspirations towards plausible futures. These causal mechanisms are interwoven through systemic governance, economic challenges, and socio-cultural narratives, providing a multilayered explanation for the city's current state and potential futures.

Testing hypotheses and the existence of assumed causal mechanisms was necessary to unpack the existing generalisations between the independent and dependent variables in the case to bring forth an outcome (Mahoney, 2012: 1). Thus, describing social, psychological, political, and economic phenomena by evaluating causal claims (the conditions that enable key events) within the study, remained vital to unpacking causal process observations. These served as critical procedural facets and outcomes of the qualitative research process (D. Collier, 2011: 823). The conceptual use of causal process observations throughout the thesis was key to buttress broader information about both urban citizenship contexts and systemic legacies regarding Bulawayo's interaction with, or potential aversion to, past, present, and future interpretations of disadvantage (D. Beach, 2017: 3; D. Collier, et al., 2010; Mahoney, 2012: 2).

Integrating Futures Methodology

The value of this thesis is found in the richness anchored by its approach. The additional methodological use of mapping and visioning tools such as CLA (Inayatullah, 1998, 2004) and the Futures Triangle (Inayatullah, 2008, 2023) was effective to extend the process-tracing design. The methodological tools offer a comprehensive framework for understanding both the city's current trajectory and its potential future. The futures triangle helps explore the forces shaping the imagined future, allowing for an examination of the past, present, and future simultaneously. CLA delves deeper into underlying causes, unveiling the layers of discourse, systemic structures, and unconscious mythicised assumptions that influence decisions. This dual approach offers a perspective that is both broad and deep, enabling a nuanced understanding of Bulawayo's complexities.

The futures triangle maps three dimensions shaping pathways to thinking through Bulawayo's plausible futures: the weight of history, the push of the present, and the pull of the future. CLA deepens this analysis by identifying four layers:

1. Litany: Visible issues like economic insecurity, high unemployment, and political exclusion.
2. Systemic causes: Centralised governance, political patronage, and the failure of economic programmes like ESAP.
3. Worldviews: Narratives framing Bulawayo as a marginalised, resilient city and its identity as an opposition stronghold.
4. Myths and metaphors: Deep-rooted stories, such as Bulawayo as a "dissident city", that perpetuate exclusion but also foster collective resilience.

Where process tracing uncovers the historical and institutional mechanisms that have produced disadvantage, CLA and the Futures Triangle enable the re-imagination of trajectories beyond

those mechanisms. In this way, the methodologies complement each other. This combination ensured that the methodological robustness of the thesis could move from explaining past and present causality to exploring alternative futures in a systematic way.

Methodological Note on Translation

All translations from isiNdebele and ChiShona texts and interviews presented in this thesis are my own. As a fluent speaker of both languages, I undertook direct translation rather than relying on intermediaries or professional translators. This linguistic proficiency proved advantageous in two key respects. First, it allowed for a more careful rendering of participants' narratives by capturing not only the literal meanings of words, but also the implied meanings embedded in idiomatic expressions, tonal subtleties, and culturally specific turns of phrasing. Nuances conveyed through humour, hyperbole, or metaphor were therefore retained as integral parts of both the inferred and literal communicative texture, rather than being flattened through standard translation. Second, my ability to engage participants in their preferred language fostered a deeper sense of trust and reciprocity during interviews and allowed for more referrals to participants. Speaking directly in isiNdebele or ChiShona created a shared cultural space in which respondents often drew on expressions that might not surface in translated dialogue.

Methods of Data Collection

I. Interviews and Focus Groups

This study employed a qualitative research and futures methodology approach, combining desk-based research with empirical methods. The empirical component involved 16 participants in total; 11 focus group interviews and 5 individual interviews were conducted. The full age range covered was from 20 to 70 years (See Annex A and B). Fieldwork was conducted in Bulawayo and Harare (Zimbabwe) and Cape Town (South Africa) between 6 December 2021 and 26 August 2024.

The choice between individual interviews and focus groups was not incidental but tied to the nature of the data sought. Individual interviews were used where depth, sensitivity, or seniority made group settings inappropriate. MaDhlamini's account of Gukurahundi-related trauma, for instance, or conversations with senior BCC Councillor's and technocrats where candour required privacy. Focus groups were used where dialogic, relational testimony was the point itself to capture how participants negotiated shared narratives in real time, including points of disagreement between them. Participants were selected to represent variation across age, gender, occupation, and, where relevant, ethnic and linguistic identity, though as detailed in Section IV on Data Limitations below, this variation was constrained by who was willing, and safe, to speak.

II. Validity, Reliability, and Triangulation

The validity of the field observations was amplified by the systemic way interviews were carried out. Participants were selected through a snowball sampling process (Creswell & Plano Clark,

2011), which drew on my cultural familiarity with Bulawayo and referrals from trusted community networks. This approach not only broadened access to participants but also created opportunities for sustained immersion in the field. As a result, the research combined reflexive participant observation in everyday community spaces with field notes recorded after each interview and interaction. This follows Burawoy's (1998) extended case method, which connects everyday experiences to broader social and political structures grounded in historical context, and Hammersley and Atkinson's (2019) emphasis on systematic immersion, reflexivity, and detailed field notes as central to valid analytical insight. In this way, the project was grounded in an embodied experience of research, where validity rested on the integration of direct testimony with observation and reflexive engagement.

In designing this study, I anchored the research in the lived realities of Bulawayo, which forms both its empirical and conceptual core. The Bulawayo-focused participant pool was therefore deliberate and methodologically appropriate. Drawing on narratives from youth activists, informal vendors, councillors, and professionals was critical in surfacing the textures of urban governance, surveillance, and everyday resistance that characterise the city. This embeddedness allowed me to listen closely to how residents articulate their challenges and aspirations in a place historically marked by exclusion and neglect. At the same time, I integrated technocratic, academic, and diaspora voices from Harare and Cape Town not as comparative cases but as contextual anchors. Harare, as the capital, shapes national policy discourse, resource flows, and urban imaginaries, making it important to capture how centralised governance is experienced beyond Bulawayo. A Bulawayo-born scholar now based in Cape Town added a diasporic lens, offering reflections on memory, distance, and transnational perspective. Together, these additional voices positioned Bulawayo not as an isolated case but as part of a wider constellation of urban and political meaning.

In addition to interviews, the study drew on a wide range of documents, such as government policy papers, parliamentary debates, legislation, municipal bylaws, party manifestos, census data, donor and NGO reports, and local and national newspapers. Archival material from the National Archives of Zimbabwe and annual reports of the Bulawayo City Council were particularly useful in tracing institutional and policy changes over time. Considered alongside the empirical material, these sources made it possible to cross-check evidence and identify recurring patterns of disadvantage. Informal conversations with residents and local government officials in Bulawayo and Harare also added context, helping to situate official accounts within everyday understandings of disadvantage.

The study benefitted significantly from triangulation, which I employed not only as a methodological device but also as an ethical imperative. Given the complex terrain of colonial continuities, contested governance, and urban agency, I was intentional in bringing together diverse forms of data, modes of engagement, and analytical entry points. This operated on three levels:

- **Methodological triangulation:** I used both individual interviews and focus groups. Individual interviews created space for depth and introspection, especially with senior experts, business leaders, and external observers. Focus groups enabled more dialogic and relational forms of storytelling, particularly valuable with youth, vendors, and

councillors who often experience governance collectively rather than individually. These methods did not only bring differing narratives to the surface but also silences, tensions, and overlaps.

- **Data triangulation:** I spoke to participants across varied age ranges, professions, and social positions. These included informal vendors, public officials navigating constrained mandates, and technocrats. Data collection across Bulawayo, Harare, and Cape Town at different points in time further enriched the analysis. I also worked with fellow researchers to discuss parts of the data.¹⁵ These sessions helped cross-check my interpretations, reduce the influence of personal bias, and strengthen the reliability of the analysis.
- **Theory triangulation:** I analysed the data through a composite lens that drew from political settlements, political economy, memory studies, and urban studies. This allowed me to unpack both the structural logics of exclusion and the embodied experiences of agency, marginality, and resistance.

The result is an analysis that honours complexity rather than reducing it, and that grounds validity in the convergence of multiple forms of evidence. Together, these forms of triangulation supported the process-tracing design by providing layered evidence for identifying the causal mechanisms that have produced and sustained disadvantage in Bulawayo.

III. Positionality, Reflexivity, and the Wider Context

My positionality as a researcher offered significant advantages. I am fluent in isiNdebele and ChiShona and I have a well-established social network in Bulawayo. This provided me with unique access to dualised perspectives that is often difficult for external or monolingual researchers to obtain (see Patulny, 2004). Insights were particularly valuable given the community's entrenched sense of marginalisation in relation to ZANU-PF and its patron-client networks. My cultural capital proved particularly useful in obtaining data for the visioning tools when thinking through the future of the city. Being present in the city allowed me to engage fully in its cultural, social, and physical contexts, shaping the direction of fieldwork and my interpretation of it. Such immersion resonates with Geertz's (1973) concept of "thick description", where the researcher's own experience becomes integral to understanding cultural practices, and with Haraway's (1988) notion of "situated knowledge", which highlights the embodied and contextual nature of research.

Standpoint Theory further amplified this approach. As Collins (1989: 749; 1990) argues, unequal power produces unequal access to knowledge and resources. Standpoint Theory therefore provided a framework for amplifying marginalised voices while recognising pockets of agency. In this study, it complemented the overarching process-tracing methodology by situating testimonies within wider historical and institutional contexts and by organising how national,

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local government, and civilian positionalities were interpreted. Particular attention was paid to standpoint, positionality, and the ethical demands of working in a politically sensitive terrain. The research design balanced empirical insights with methodological reflexivity to capture the granular realities of urban life. Reflexivity was essential, given the risks, silences, and affective weight surrounding discussions of governance, identity, and violence in Bulawayo, and indeed Zimbabwe.

IV. Data Limitations

An immediate limitation of the study is the gender imbalance among participants, with a disproportionate number of male respondents. This imbalance was not intentional but arose from contextual factors. First, local and national government civil servants available to engage with the study were predominantly male. Second, the research period notably encompassed Zimbabwe's 23-24 August 2023 elections, a time marked by heightened national political tension and the ruling party's historical reliance on organised violence and torture to suppress opposition (Bratton, 2016). Many women were hesitant to engage with me, fearing that publicly expressed views might be politicised and place them at risk. This was especially evident during the election season. Across the fieldwork, all interviews with women took place either in their own homes or in the homes of trusted acquaintances as spaces where they felt safe enough to speak openly about politically sensitive issues. This imbalance has direct implications for the thesis' claims. Where the analysis draws on collective or majority-male testimony (such as in the BCC and vendor material in Chapter 6), its conclusions should be caveated as most robust for male experiences of economic insecurity and governance negotiation. Women's perspectives are present but concentrated in a small number of accounts, meaning examination into how gendered perspectives shape urban citizenship in Bulawayo are more exploratory in comparison the thesis' examination about the political economic landscape more broadly.

A related limitation concerns limited interviews with formal organisational representatives, such as leaders of Bulawayo's residents' associations or vending associations, and the lack of a systematic mapping of these organisations' terrain. This was not a deliberate exclusion but a consequence of the snowball sampling method itself: referrals tended to surface individuals embedded in informal networks rather than office-bearers willing to speak in an official capacity. Several potential contacts declined to engage with the subject matter of this research altogether, citing a sense of detachment from decisions made centrally in Harare and, in some cases, the lingering trauma of past violence discussed in Chapter 7. This reluctance was compounded by the timing of fieldwork, much of which coincided with the lead-up to and aftermath of the August 2023 general election, with such political limitations cemented in fear and heightened tensions aforementioned. In election cycles, government representatives are especially more visible and more exposed than individual residents or vendors, and understandably maintain particular reasons for caution. Future research would benefit from a dedicated mapping of Bulawayo's civic and vending associational landscape, ideally undertaken outside an electoral cycle, to complement the individual-level testimony privileged here.

In practice, the snowball method of garnering participants meant that access was mediated by trust rather than sampling frame. Contacts who declined to participate, or who were approached

but ultimately not interviewed, are not systematically recorded here, which is itself a limitation: it means the study cannot fully account for the views of those who chose silence, even though that very silence is a theme this thesis takes seriously (see Chapter 7). Individuals with formal institutional standing proved harder to access than residents embedded in informal networks, which skews the empirical material toward lived, informal accounts of governance rather than official or organisational perspectives.

V. Ethical Considerations and Reflections

Given the sensitivity of researching trauma, political violence, and state repression in a context of ongoing fragility, ethical care shaped every stage of this research. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, given the political risks associated with signed documentation in this context; participants were informed of their right to withdraw, to decline any question, and to have their identities concealed. Pseudonyms and coded identifiers were used throughout for participants whose safety could, or felt they could be compromised by identification, particularly given that fieldwork coincided with a period marked by heightened political tension (see Section IV). Discussions of Gukurahundi and related trauma required particular sensitivity where participants were never pressed to continue if visibly distressed, and interviews were allowed to end or redirect at the participant's discretion. My own positionality as a Ndebele-speaking researcher with community ties in Bulawayo created both access and ethical obligation. The trust extended to me by participants is honoured through careful, non-sensationalised representation of testimony and translation, particularly where it concerns unresolved violence. Ethical approval to conduct research was approved by Leiden University's African Studies Centre Research Ethics Review Board on 17 August 2021.

