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

Ndlovu, M.B.

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2. Analytical Framework

Introduction

Following the discussion of disadvantage in Chapter 1.1, this chapter zooms out again to develop the analytical framework that underpins the entire thesis. Its purpose is to explain how political settlements, understood as bargains among elites that determine access to power and resources, provide a lens for analysing the compounded disadvantage experienced by Bulawayo. By foregrounding this framework in the main research question, the chapter outlines the concept of political settlements and how it is applied in this study, with attention to elite bargaining, clientelism, and the distinction between narrow and broad settlements. The chapter goes on to consider Khan's (2005, 2010, 2018a, 2018b) model of horizontal and vertical power distributions, showing how these patterns of dominance complicate framings of the "elite" in Zimbabwe to include informal networks such as securocrats (or military bureaucrats) and business elites. The discussion turns next to the ways exclusionary settlements have shaped Bulawayo's disadvantage through violence, industrial decline, and ethnicised exclusion, before expanding to a critique of modernisation theory and its limitations for understanding African urban contexts. Building on this, the chapter analyses how urban citizenship, ethnic competition, and colonial legacies intersect to sustain exclusionary governance. A further section examines how the state's fixation on "order" has reinforced stagnation and disinvestment in Bulawayo. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the strengths and limits of the political settlements framework and its relevance for urban futures studies which this thesis will engage with in Chapter 8.

Justification

The political settlements framework (Khan, 1995, 2010), is a necessary tool in this thesis because it captures dynamics of power that are often missed by institutionalist approaches. Analyses rooted in the "good governance" agenda or institutionalist theories of development (World Bank, 1992) are often assumed as solutions for African contexts, and tend to emphasise the design of formal rules, property rights, and state capacity as the foundation for growth and stability. While valuable, such approaches risk overstating the importance of formal institutions and neglecting how informal networks, patron-client relations, and militarisation actively shape political and economic outcomes. The "good governance" paradigm in particular assumes that institutional reform and capacity-building will translate into equitable outcomes, but in Zimbabwe such reforms co-exist with entrenched patronage and repression, limiting their effectiveness, and indeed the reach of reform (M.B Ndlovu, 2020). Political settlements analysis is therefore better suited because it centres on the bargains and exclusionary practices through which elites actually sustain rule. In Zimbabwe, where elite power is nurtured as much through coercion and informal bargains as through legal frameworks, such models are insufficient (Dawson & Kelsall, 2013). Khan's (1995, 2010, 2018a, 2018b) framing, with its emphasis on the distribution of organisational power and the interaction between elites, patrons, and citizens, provides the clarity needed to explain why Bulawayo's disadvantage persists despite successive leadership changes and policy reforms that appear institutionally sound on paper.

Political Settlements and Elite Bargaining

As an intellectual undertone of this thesis, it must be understood that every political regime is based on a political settlement (Bratton, 2016: 14). As Bratton (2016: 15) notes, a political settlements approach to analysis underscores “the actual division of power established by leading actors... [and] offers the possibility of understanding both the sources of political instability and the challenges of enduring institutions”. This approach supports threading the pre-colonial, colonial, and independence narratives of disadvantage through history to account for the present and future. This study employs Khan’s (2005, 2010, 2017, 2018a, 2018b) political settlements framework to analyse the structural disadvantages experienced by Zimbabwe’s second city in independent Zimbabwe. Political settlements refer to the “social orders characterised by distributions of organisational power that, together with specific formal and informal institutions, effectively achieve at least the minimum requirements of political and economic sustainability for [a given] society” (Khan, 2018b: 670-671). This concept highlights the role of elites in structuring both formal and informal institutions to sustain their dominance, often at the expense of inclusivity. While Di John and Putzel (2009: 4) present political settlements as “consensual understandings of the best interests of all actors”, in practice, bargaining among elites often occurs asymmetrically, particularly in contexts marked by historical inequalities. This situates the study’s use of political settlements as the main analytical framework for assessing disadvantage in Bulawayo.

In Zimbabwe, political settlements institutionalise access to power, resources, and development through patron-client networks rooted in neopatrimonialism. These structures exclude groups lacking bargaining power and entrench elite dominance (Khan, 2005: 11; Parks & Cole, 2010: 6). Historically inherited from the colonial period, this framework of governance has persisted, favouring ZANU-PF elites over ZAPU elites, particularly in Bulawayo and the broader Matabeleland region. ZANU-PF’s political survival has depended on the deliberate narrowing of political settlements, leaving cities like Bulawayo at a disadvantage. As extensively discussed by M.B. Ndlovu (2020), power cannot be simplified to merely centring on the protection and operation of formal institutions (Khan 2010: 5). Political networks extend beyond formal state and party systems, encompassing groupings outside these structures that hold disruptive potential (Kelsall, 2018; Khan, 2010: 5). Analysing both vertical and horizontal resource distributions provides a more nuanced understanding of clientelism. When clientelism involves the “extensive use of state resources for political purposes”, economic justice is undermined by the privileging of specific beneficiaries (Van de Walle, 2001: 52). In the Zimbabwean context, the interplay between horizontal distribution within the ZANU-PF elite and vertical distribution to auxiliary networks should not be viewed as mutually exclusive (Behuria, et al., 2017: 512; Khan, 2010: 64-65; Van de Walle, 2001: 51-53). The understanding of ruling elite power, and its influence on the institutions that sustain it, is not, of course, limited to the urban domain of governance. The organisation of elite power seeks to order both “formal and informal institutions effectively [to] achieve at least the minimum requirements of political and economic sustainability for [a given] society” (Khan, 2018b: 670-671). Political settlements are then further buttressed by “powerful actors, operating in pursuit of their own interests, leading to the establishment or reshaping of institutions” (Parks & Cole, 2010: 6).

Though the qualification of “elites” is debated within political economics, at a very elementary level, they can be identified through their ability to sustainably organise masses to influence social, political, and economic change (Parks & Cole, 2010: 6). This gives them their bargaining power at an elite level. Kelsall (2016: 3) adds to this by noting elites’ unique ability to coordinate “a sustained campaign of disorder or violence”. Though Di John and Putzel (2009: 14-15) have criticised Khan’s (1995, 2010) initial overestimation of the legitimacy of those who seemingly wield power in political formations, I argue that Khan’s insights remain useful for a system like Zimbabwe’s, whose governance structures are continuously dominated by elite formations, whose formidability is in turn rooted in the tenets of right-wing militarism as a source of inspiration for governance. Where militarisation is “the bedrock for ZANU-PF in political governance” (Mutisi, 2011: 4), the culture to breed successful political settlements through a liberal social contract-type model as suggested by Di John and Putzel (2009: 45) or “broad social foundations” for inclusivity as defined by Chinsinga, et al. (2022: 2), simply does not exist at present.

Limitations on access to power in Zimbabwe do not equate to the country operating under a limited access order. While powerful elites retain social tools to maintain their dominance, and access to rents and resources remains concentrated within elite networks, the system of accumulation does not manipulate the economy to generate rents as a mechanism for mitigating violence (North, et al., 2007: 3). Instead, the absence of systematic rent creation and the extraction of the limited rents and resources available for elite enrichment exacerbate violence and undermine social protections. This refers to a dynamic distinct from the logic of the limited access order: rather than using rent-creation to contain violence, Zimbabwe’s elites preserve authority through fear, structural violence, and militarisation, which destabilises rather than stabilises the political settlement. This is further complicated by the militarisation of Zimbabwe’s elite space as a tool of accumulation. Understanding this divergence is crucial for the analytical framework of this thesis, as it illuminates how Bulawayo’s disadvantage stems not only from exclusionary political settlements but also from the violent modalities of elite preservation.

Where bargaining actors should include everyone in society through a social contract-type formation of governmentality, the ZANU-PF ruling elite has created exclusionary bargaining structures that help it secure political power and rents (Di John & Putzel, 2009: 4; Hickey, 2015). Here, clientelism is exchanged for access to political and economic accumulation (Alexander, 2013: 811-812). Before proceeding, it is important to highlight the elements that distinguish rents from resources.²⁶ Dawson and Kelsall (2013) provide this distinction:

Rents are excess incomes that accrue to factors of production in uncompetitive markets, for example, the rents that accrue to a government-created monopoly, or to economic actors in pre-capitalist settings. In neo-classical economic analyses, rents and the effort expended on securing them (rent-seeking) are regarded as unproductive and inefficient. Partly in consequence, the term “rent” has acquired a generally pejorative connotation in development circles. (p.50)

Exclusionary tenets of political settlements within securocrat leadership also appear to be detrimental within narrow, horizontal political settlements. For instance, “secrecy and denialism

²⁶ See the discussion on *ukubamba zonke* in Chapter 6 for examples on resource appropriation.

around accountability by both domestic and regional elites reveals a protectionism that validates clientelist agreements over citizens' lives" (M.B. Ndlovu, 2020: 48). This characteristic of narrow political settlements is reflective of an exclusionary social foundation, which is not conducive to geopolitically inclusive growth and development at a national level (Chisanga, et al., 2022). It ensures legitimacy within governing elites rather than within the confines of a social contract. As Chinsinga, et al. (2022: 2) note, "in 'narrow' political settlements, only a comparatively small segment of the population has that power; or, a large segment has disruptive potential but the leadership responds mainly with repression". In this, advancements in governance are seen solely through the legitimacy, effectiveness, and security of the elite (Eppel, 2013; Kriger, 2012). The grievances of average citizens, especially those residing in areas deemed as areas of dissent, are not acknowledged when available rents and resources are distributed amongst loyalists (Hickey, 2015). The protectionism of elite interests further manifests in *ukubamba zonke* [trans. "hoarding of all good things or resources" or "to have your fingers in all good things"] once again (Gelot & Sandor, 2019; Musemwa, 2003). As noted in Chapter 1, this central concept will be framed and applied to the case study extensively in Chapter 6. Notably, for political settlements, the concept reflects patron-client hoarding, pointing to the need for accumulation to ensure ZANU-PF survival. Such a political culture, however, is not tenable (Bratton, 2016: 205-209). It shifts the balance in asymmetric power relations to favour political elites and their patrons.

The legacy of exclusionary settlements is evident in Bulawayo, where the city's marginalisation is rooted in three significant historical and political developments. First, the Entumbane Uprisings (1981) and the Gukurahundi Massacres (1983-1987) used militarised violence to label the Matabeleland region as a national security threat under the 1983-1990 State of Emergency.²⁷ These actions reflected inherited colonial strategies, such as the 1965 State of Emergency,²⁸ when law and force were previously used in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces to protect ruling elites and their interests, resulting in legalised injustices (Bratton, 2016: 50, 220; CCJP, 1997: 30; Coltart, 2016: 149-155; Eppel, 2013: 213). Second, the post-ESAP industrial decline in the 1990s further weakened Bulawayo. The city never recovered from the closure of nearly 100 formal industries and the loss of over 20,000 jobs, which forced a shift towards informal economic activities (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011: 57).²⁹ This was done deliberately as a display of power – "when you own industry, you own power" – for ZANU-PF ruling elites seeking to weaken Matabeleland's economic base.³⁰ Finally, the spatial-political-ethnic nexus perpetuates Bulawayo's exclusion. The concentration of political power among Shona-identifying elites reinforces "official nationalism" that marginalises Matabeleland, erroneously linking ethnic identity and political power in exclusionary ways (Larmer & Lecocq, 2018: 901; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011a).

²⁷ For detail on the effects of the 1983-1990 State of Emergency, see Bratton, 2016: 50; Coltart, 2016: 149-55; as well as CCJP, 1997. Also, see Chapter 5 of this thesis.

²⁸ This is a reference to the Smith regime's 1965 State of Emergency, during which citizens in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces were subjected to curfews, targeted murders, torture, rape, starvation, and other human rights abuses.

²⁹ Some of the companies listed are: Zimbabwe Engineering Company, Hubert Davies, Radar Metal Industries, National Blankets, G&D Shoes, Merlin, Tregers Group, Stewarts & Lloyds, Hunyani Holdings, and Cold Storage Company (see Gumbo & Geyer, 2011).

³⁰ Interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

Horizontal and Vertical Distributions of Power

Political settlements as a typology is both complex and contextually applicable (Khan, 2018b: 692). Khan's (2010: 64-65) horizontal and vertical axes of power distribution are vital to understanding the manipulation of power in this regard. Patron-client networks among ruling elites operate through horizontal and vertical distributions of power (Khan, 2010: 64). These structures shape how elites engage not only with one another but also with clients and ordinary citizens. Horizontally, power lies in excluded factions that can challenge the ruling elite as well as in the internal balance among elites themselves. When excluded coalitions are weak, incumbents feel secure in office; theoretically this should encourage developmental policy, but in practice it entrenches politics of accumulation and loyalism (Chitiyo, 2009; Khan, 2010: 64-65; Tendi, 2013). Vertically, coalitions are tiered between those with executive access and those without. Although lower-tier actors generally depend on those above, they can at times mobilise leverage and obstruct elite agendas if excluded from benefits (Khan, 2010: 65). As peripheral groups gain influence, elites with executive power typically act to neutralise them (Khan, 2010: 65).

These formal distributions are complicated by informal networks. Security actors and business elites exert influence where civil servants should function as neutral bureaucrats. In Zimbabwe, securocrats within ZANU-PF exemplify this blurring of party, state, business, and military power (Khan, 2010; Tendi, 2013; Zimbabwe Institute, 2008). Khan's (2010: 64-66) model can be adapted to analyse citizen-state relations in Zimbabwe's clientelist system. Here, horizontal relations reflect elite bargaining, while vertical relations describe how ruling elites extend influence into society through alliances (Kriger, 2012: 13). Exclusive horizontal rent-sharing among elites denies broader socio-economic justice, while vertical patronage networks reinforce these exclusions through loyalty to the regime. Instead of enabling widespread prosperity, vertical allocations have been skewed toward elite loyalists, entrenching anti-developmental outcomes. Horizontally, across citizen-state relations, power is often manipulated through a "cult of violence" to justify the legitimacy of rule (De Waal, 2002: 76). Such "vulnerable authoritarian coalitions" require the exclusion of competing political narratives and are reflective of both the fragile political settlements and militarised governance found within ZANU-PF, as inherited from the Rhodesian state (Khan, 2010: 64; see also Chapter 4 and 5 of this thesis). Here, "[u]nchallenged political cultures... have assisted in the accumulation of resources and power for securocrats [to] propel the abuse of state institutions" (M.B. Ndlovu, 2020: 90). Formal institutions alone cannot bring about regime change in this context. However, the effectiveness of militarism as a tool for narrow political settlements as a governing doctrine could be challenged if citizens, despite elite resistance, were to shift the narrative. This shift would involve a move towards a more vertical power structure, allowing for greater power-sharing. In such a system, elites would extend their rule by distributing rents more broadly and gaining wider support for ruling coalitions (Khan, 2010: 65). This of course remains aspirational in the case of Zimbabwe as the ruling elite benefits from maintaining narrow settlements, where rents and coercion are more easily controlled, and thus has little incentive to embrace the risks of broader power-sharing.

An important strength of the framework is its ability to address the interaction between formal rules, such as constitutions and laws, and informal practices, like patronage and clientelism, that often dominate in many societies. This makes it particularly useful in contexts where informal institutions significantly influence governance outcomes (Leftwich, 2010). Additionally, its adaptability allows it to be applied across various settings, from fragile states to stable democracies, to explore how power relations and governance structures evolve over time. However, the framework is not without limitations. Its emphasis on elite bargaining can lead to an over-focus on power brokers while neglecting non-elite actors. Further critique notes the complexity of the political settlements framework's context-specific nature, which can make it challenging to generalise findings or translate insights into actionable policies (Hickey, 2013). This is where the importance of empirical contributions focused on urban citizens and a visioning of a future that integrates all of these aspects is critical to this study. From the viewpoint of futures engagement on Bulawayo, this is an opportunity to rewrite the narrative of disadvantage. When combined with complementary approaches, the political settlements framework provides a robust analytical lens for unpacking the complexities of urban governance and development in Bulawayo.

Expanding the Critique of Modernisation Theory

This research builds on existing critiques of modernisation theory, acknowledging the extensive intellectual debate surrounding the concepts of modernity versus modernisation. Scholars like Harvey (1997), Kamete (2013a, 2013b), and Murray (2017) have challenged the assumptions embedded in modernisation theory, which typically promotes industrialisation, urbanisation, and economic empowerment as the primary paths toward achieving equality. These critiques argue that such frameworks overlook the legacies of colonialism, which continue to shape urban spaces and governance in post-colonial contexts. Rather than adding new critiques to this well-established body of thought, this research seeks to expand on these discussions by focusing on urban citizenship in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, and using the political settlements framework to explain the city's urban governance and economic survival. Urban citizenship in Bulawayo is influenced by the historical and ongoing political settlements that define the city's governance and urban space. As Harvey (1997) argues, the modernist approach to urban governance often fails to account for the fluid and contested nature of urban life. Urban spaces, particularly in Bulawayo, are marked by socio-economic, cultural, and political variances that push back against the rigid, one-size-fits-all assumptions of modernisation theory. These variances are crucial to understanding the complexities of urbanisation in the city. Rather than being a simple outcome of class privilege or economic growth, the dynamism of urban space in Bulawayo is determined by the political settlements that limit citizens' access to power, resources, and opportunities. As Kamete (2013a, 2013b) suggests, class accumulation alone cannot adequately explain urbanisation processes; the socio-political dynamics embedded in political settlements must also be considered. The fluidity and complexity of urban citizenship in Bulawayo, therefore, require a more nuanced analytical framework than the traditional models presented by modernisation theory (Bratton, 2016; Khan, 2010; Murray, 2017; Ranger, 2007).

As Bratton (2016) and Khan (2010) argue, urban spaces are not passive environments but are deeply affected by the political settlements that govern the allocation of resources and power. As per Kamete's (2018: 170) observation, the national government is deeply invested in creating modern subjects to sustain its own political survival, often at the expense of more inclusive urban development. This is reflected in the government's Vision 2030 as discussed in Chapter 8. The government's attempt to recapture urban spaces like Bulawayo, framed as development of urban territories, rests as control and extraction masked under the guise of modernisation. As Ranger (2006) notes:

Robert Mugabe, instructing his party youth congress early in 2004 to recapture the cities for ZANU/PF, told them: "Bulawayo is called the City of the Kings. But who is King in Bulawayo?" (p.200)

This statement highlights the basis of a spatial-political-ethnic nexus representative of control under the guise of a liberal modernisation mandate. However, it must be understood as an expression of power politics, indicating the limitations to accessing bargaining power and rents towards ruling elite survival (Alexander & McGregor, 2013; Bratton, 2016).

However, the contradictions within the ZANU-PF's governance strategies highlight the limitations of the modernisation framework. While informal economies have become an essential aspect of urban survival, ZANU-PF has consistently demonised informality and imposed strict controls over it through operations like Murambatsvina, which targeted informal settlements across the country (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011). This assertion is supported by empirical findings, which will be explored in detail in chapters 5 to 8 of this thesis. Despite the informal sector's importance to the citizen's economic survival, ZANU-PF's operationalisation of "order" has exacerbated urban poverty and marginalisation (Alexander, 2013; Dawson & Kelsall, 2013; Kamete, 2013a, 2013b, 2018; Mbiba, 2017: 221-230; McGregor, 2013). As Zaaier (1998) argues, informal economic enterprises and the small-scale economic sector represent the only viable source of new jobs in Zimbabwe. Yet, the state's policies undermine this potential, favouring an order that consolidates elite power rather than promoting inclusive economic growth. This irony is particularly pronounced in the context of Bulawayo, which had boasted a well-organised informal sector even before the destructive Operation Murambatsvina (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011: 57). These policies of repression, rooted in a culture of "repressive tolerance" (Marcuse, 1969, in Kamete, 2013: 21), continue to serve elite interests while undermining economic empowerment and inclusive development. This ongoing cycle of repression highlights the government's continued reliance on securocratic governance to maintain control and limit the role of informality in urban economies. This is particularly true for the city of Bulawayo, which carries the mythicised label of a city of "dissent".³¹

Bulawayo is historically a symbolic centre of opposition, and framed in popular ZANU-PF narrativised memory with the label of "dissent" (see Chapter 5 of this thesis). In this framing, people and economies on the periphery are not treated as sites of livelihood but as potential sites of political subversion, thereby legitimising securocratic governance as the mechanism to contain them. As Chapter 4 shows, this militarised logic of governance is inherited from Rhodesian state

³¹ This analysis of said mythicisation is discussed further in chapters 5-8 of this thesis.

practices for African political economic life, while Chapter 6 demonstrates how the narrative of dissent is reproduced in the everyday policing, precarity, and patron-client relations affecting street vendors as a tangible site for justifying the restoration of order.

This chapter shows that modernist approaches to urban governance, with their emphasis on economic growth and industrialisation, cannot adequately explain Bulawayo's marginalisation. Instead, drawing on the political settlements framework, it has demonstrated how urban disadvantage is rooted in structural dynamics of elite accumulation, clientelism, and militarised governance that restrict the possibilities for inclusive development (Harvey, 1997; Kamete, 2013a, 2013b). Situating Bulawayo within these dynamics highlights how political settlements institutionalise exclusion and reproduce disadvantage across colonial and post-independence periods.

Finally, by placing Bulawayo's experience within global debates on neoliberal urbanism, this chapter underscores the wider relevance of the case. As Low and Smith (2006) and N. Smith (1998, 2001) argue, neoliberal urban governance frequently entrenches elite interests while neglecting ordinary citizens. Bulawayo exemplifies this, as the preservation of political settlements that privilege elite survival over inclusivity continues to obstruct more equitable urban trajectories. The political settlements framework therefore provides both the conceptual grounding and historical context for addressing the 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?*

Urban Citizenship, Ethnicity, and Colonial Legacies

Further answering the main research question, the ongoing tragedy of Bulawayo lies in its gradual decline as a city that has been sacrificed to the mechanisms of elite political accumulation over time, serving the interests of political survival rather than inclusive development. The composition of this political elite has shifted across eras from the Rhodesian settler state, to ZANU-PF's post-independence leadership under Robert Mugabe, and now to the Mnangagwa era. Despite these shifts, there is a marked continuity in elite behaviour: ZANU-PF politicians, securocrats, and aligned business actors have consistently prioritised regime survival, extraction, and control over inclusive development. This continuity across colonial and post-independence settlements illustrates how political settlements reproduce exclusionary structures despite leadership change. This dynamic persists even in the Second Republic under President Emmerson Mnangagwa, where development strategies like Zimbabwe's Vision 2030, to be discussed in chapter 8, continue to focus on elite-driven approaches that exclude the broader population from meaningful progress (M. Moyo & Motsi, 2023: 143). This demonstrates the continued dominance of the political elite over urban spaces, restricting opportunities for inclusive development and perpetuating the marginalisation of ordinary citizens.

As Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007: 288) add, the tensions between Shona-speaking and Ndebele-speaking communities in urban centres like Bulawayo revolve around the competition for limited resources such as employment and education, with the latter accusing former people of taking "their jobs and vacancies at teacher and nurse training colleges" (Muzondidya &

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: 288). These politicised ethnic tensions, shaped by the scarcity of opportunities in urban spaces, add another dimension to the urban governance challenges in Bulawayo. Ethnic-based competition for resources, as Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007) point out, is an integral aspect of the political settlements that shape the city. This further complicates the issue of urban citizenship, as political elites often exploit these divisions to consolidate their power and maintain control over urban spaces – always to their own benefit.

Pursuant to noted ethnic-based tensions, the historical context of urban governance in Zimbabwe cannot be ignored. The legacies of colonial bureaucratic structures and urban planning systems, as discussed in Chapter 4 of this thesis, continue to influence how urban spaces are managed in the post-independence era (Kamete, 2009: 898-899; Ranger, 2006, 2007). These colonial-era governance systems were designed to maintain control through repressive and centralised forms of management, focused on rigid urban regulations that aimed to suppress dissent and maintain the ruling administration's idea of order. This was particularly true for African residents who, for the most part, operated outside the political bargaining parameters of the settler colonial state. Harvey (1989) as well as Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith (1991) argue that such systems were not about fostering inclusive urban development but rather about maintaining order and stability for the benefit of the colonial state. These colonial structures have continued to shape the way urban spaces in post-independent Zimbabwe, including Bulawayo, are governed. The continued reliance on these asymmetric bureaucratic systems, even after independence, highlights the persistent influence of modernist governance models that prioritise ruling control and regulation over progressive and inclusive urban planning.

Order, Informality, and Developmental Stagnation

Despite the availability of legislation designed to combat patron-clientelism and promote urban development, the lack of political will and weak institutions have hindered meaningful progress. As Chinjova (2019: 643) and Lall et al. (2017: 157) point out, local governments in Zimbabwe have struggled to implement policies that genuinely address urban poverty and inequality, due to the ongoing dominance of elite political interests. Kamete (2013b: 17) aptly describes the government's fixation on "order" in urban governance, which often leads to a rigid, top-down approach that fails to address the real needs of the urban poor. In Bulawayo, this fixation is visible in recurrent demolitions of informal trading sites, evictions, and policing operations that disrupt livelihoods without offering alternatives (Kamete, 2013a, 2018; McGregor, 2013). Such measures erode the city's adaptive informal economy, while state investment continues to bypass Bulawayo in favour of Harare (Gumbo & Geyer, 2011). The result is a cycle of developmental stagnation and disinvestment (Masiye Phambili, 1994; see also Chapter 6 of this thesis).³² This emphasis on order over inclusivity contributes to the decline of cities like Bulawayo, which, once a thriving industrial hub, now suffers from stagnation and political neglect. Ironically however, this stance is contrary to ZANU-PF's continued collusion with patrons in urban spaces who challenge local authorities' quest for organising the urban sphere, thus showing the operationalisation of self-serving urban governance across the country. Bulawayo is not unique in this.³³

³² Alluded to in an interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

³³ Focus interview with BCC, 22 September 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

A legitimate question is however raised: if urban collapse, informality, and state fixation on ‘order’ are common across Zimbabwe’s cities, *what justifies treating Bulawayo as a case study rather than as one instance of a national pattern?* The answer lies not in claiming that Bulawayo’s material conditions are unique, but in what this thesis’ case-centric process-tracing design is built to do: trace how a specific causal mechanism operates within a particular case, rather than establish that case’s uniqueness in the outcome itself (see Methodology, Chapter 1). What is specific to Bulawayo is not urban decline as such, but the historical mechanism through which that decline has been produced and sustained. This would be a political settlement narrowed by the city’s historical association with ZAPU, compounded by the unresolved trauma of Gukurahundi, and ultimately reproduced through the ethno-political mythicisation of Bulawayo (see Chapters 4, 5, and 7). It is true that other Zimbabwean cities experience comparable economic and institutional strain, but not through this same historical architecture. Bulawayo is therefore best understood not as a *uniquely* disadvantaged city, but as a case in which a generalisable pattern of governance is *compounded* by a distinct history, thus making the mechanisms of disadvantage unusually visible and its consequences unusually severe. It is this compounding, traced causally rather than assumed, that justifies the single-case city design.

Conclusion

This chapter has established the analytical framework that underpins the thesis. By applying the political settlements approach, it has shown how Bulawayo’s disadvantage is not incidental but structurally embedded in exclusionary bargains that prioritise elite survival over inclusive development. This perspective makes it possible to move beyond surface explanations of economic decline and demonstrate how governance structures themselves reproduce systemic marginalisation.

The framework provides the conceptual anchor to the 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?*, showing how political settlements generate disadvantage (through narrow bargaining, militarisation, and clientelism), why this persists across colonial and post-independence contexts (through continuity of elite behaviour), and where the implications are most visible (in urban governance, citizenship, and economic life). The chapter has also begun to answer the first sub-question: *In what ways have ZANU-PF’s post-independence political settlements shaped the socio-political and economic marginalisation of Bulawayo?*, by historicising how ZANU-PF’s settlements institutionalised Bulawayo’s marginalisation, while also preparing the ground for sub-questions two and three, which examine how disadvantage is lived, negotiated, and remembered.

These linkages ensure that the chapters that follow can situate lived experience, memory, and futures thinking within a coherent analytical framework. Chapter 3 below explores the intellectual utility of the concepts of denial, trauma, and silence; myths and metaphors; and militarisation, in relation to Bulawayo.