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

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CHAPTER

03

3. Concepts

Introduction

This chapter develops the conceptual framework through which Bulawayo's political, social, and historical trajectories are analysed. The concepts of silence, denial, trauma, myth, and militarisation are central to understanding the ways in which disadvantage has been produced, narrated, and sustained in the city across colonial and postcolonial periods. These are not simply abstract categories. Rather, they are lenses that bring into sharper relief the continuities and ruptures in Bulawayo's experience of marginalisation, and illuminate how the unresolved legacies of violence, memory, and exclusion have crystallised into enduring patterns of political settlement.

The intellectual utility of these concepts lies in their ability to connect the micro-level dynamics of lived experience with the macro-structures of governance and power. In particular, they provide a way to make sense of how citizens are positioned within systems of repression, memory, and resilience. This is an issue that sits at the heart of this thesis. Silence and denial provide analytical entry points into how both state and society navigate violent pasts. They help explain why the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi Massacres remain shrouded in muted memory, how communities internalise repression as pragmatism, and how denial within the ZANU-PF elite structures is silently refuted by individual coping strategies. In Bulawayo, silence functions not only as a survival mechanism but also as a political condition that simultaneously sustains *uneasy peace* and entrenches exclusion.

Myth and metaphor deepen this understanding by showing how citizens narrate disadvantage and resilience, appropriating and reworking dominant narratives even as they are shaped by them. They demonstrate how historical trauma is transformed into political discourse and collective memory. The mythicised portrayal of Bulawayo as a "dissident city", or of the people of Matabeleland as inherently militant, are not mere distortions but powerful instruments of political mobilisation and marginalisation (see Chapters 4-6). They collapse history into narratives that legitimise ZANU-PF's dominance, obscure the pluralities of the liberation struggle, and cement the city's position as a space of perpetual disadvantage. In this sense, myths operate as both coping strategies for the traumatised and as hegemonic tools of governance, highlighting their dual capacity for resilience and repression.

The concept of militarisation completes this analytic triad by foregrounding the mechanisms through which exclusionary political settlements are enforced. From the precolonial Ndebele state, through Rhodesian settler colonialism, to the post-independence ZANU-PF regime, militarisation has provided both the language and the infrastructure of governance. It explains how coercion, surveillance, and securitisation underpin state-citizen relations, and why Bulawayo, despite its industrial promise, became structurally subordinated within Zimbabwe's national economy. Militarisation ties the symbolic and psychological registers of silence, denial, and myth to the material practices of political economy and state survival.

These concepts map the entanglement of historical memory, socio-political repression, and institutionalised violence in ways that conventional urban or political economic frameworks cannot fully capture. They underscore the premise of the thesis that Bulawayo's disadvantage cannot be explained by economic neglect alone, but must also be understood as the outcome of Matabeleland's silenced histories, institutionalised mythicised narratives, and legacies of militarised, exclusionary political settlements. By situating Bulawayo within this conceptual constellation, the chapter not only deepens the analytical grasp of Zimbabwe's political culture but also contributes to wider debates in political settlements theory, memory studies, and urban political economy. In this way, the chapter establishes not only the conceptual scaffolding of the thesis but also the foundation for considering how Bulawayo's citizens are portrayed as constrained by structural disadvantage, yet active in negotiating silence, memory, and survival.

Denial, Trauma, and Silence

Silence operates at both the state and the individual levels as a mechanism to suppress trauma, granting impunity to perpetrators and denying justice to victims. This silence, often perceived as loyalty or pragmatism, entrenches societal indifference and fuels asymmetric power dynamics (Lawther, 2013, in Tarusarira, 2019: 221; Bratton, 2016). In Zimbabwe, these forms of denial are not abstract; they directly shape how Bulawayo's citizens process trauma and interact with the state. Denial both silences victims and constrains their ability to claim justice, reinforcing their experience of marginalisation. Denial manifests in three forms: literal, interpretive, and implicatory. Literal denial involves outright rejection of culpability (Cohen, 1996: 522), while interpretive denial manipulates known truths through deceit, concealment, or self-deception, sustaining patron-client relationships and silencing moral responsibilities (Cohen, 1996; Cohen, 2001). Implicatory denial seeks to justify perpetration, labelling whistle-blowers and dissenters as traitors (Cohen, 1996: 535; Hirschman, 1970: 30-34; Lawther, 2013, in Tarusarira, 2019: 221).

At the individual level, silence reflects fragmented memories of traumatic events, which, combined with structural trauma, hinder transitional justice efforts (LaCapra, 1999: 721-727). Trauma, as a fluid concept, arises from both historic and systemic violations, internalised by individuals but socialised into societal norms (Pickering & Keightley, 2009: 238; LaCapra, 1999: 725). This fosters mythicised narratives that cope with violence but perpetuate fear and potential for further perpetration (N. Ndlovu, 2019; LaCapra, 1999: 721-727). Repression of memories, driven by fear of state retaliation, complicates peace and transitional justice processes by distorting facts and erasing perpetrators from the narrative (N. Ndlovu, 2019: 228-232; Tarusarira, 2019: 221).

The unconscious dimension of denialism is an additional layer of complexity, as it functions as a psychological defence mechanism in the face of violent perpetration. According to Hamm (2002: 178), denialism shields individuals from unbearable anxiety or fear by relegating traumatic information to an inaccessible region of the mind. This psychological barrier can lead to repression, where perpetrators and witnesses alike unconsciously bury memories of violence to preserve mental stability. Wherever there has been violent perpetration at the hands of the ruling ZANU-PF elites and their security patrons in Zimbabwe, this unconscious denial is evident in the

societal silence surrounding violent histories, where trauma is compartmentalised rather than confronted. This silence can be interpreted as “passivity, loyalty, or pragmatism” (Lawther, 2013, in Tarusarira, 2019: 221), especially in rural areas where state-sponsored mobilisation ensures compliance. The duality of denialism is to be understood as a reinforcing factor of cycles of violence, thus allowing perpetrators to evade accountability while victims continue to bear the psychological and systemic burdens of unresolved trauma.

Silence becomes a “post-condition” of denialism, defined by Hamm (2002: 178) as an unconscious defence mechanism or deliberate mental block against an unbearable truth. At the national level, silence manifests in amnesties. At the community level, it manifests in fear of state reprisals, and at the individual level, in trauma-induced withdrawal after violence and denial of justice. Eppel (2020: 270-271) distinguishes between the “unspoken” (chosen silence due to fear or shame) and the “unspeakable” (enforced silence by authorities or social conventions), both perpetuating trauma by stifling healing and recognition. This *uneasy peace* illustrates how citizens are positioned ambiguously as victims of unresolved trauma and active agents of survival who deploy silence as a strategy (see Chapter 7). N. Ndlovu (2019: 149) warns that silence erases memory, diminishing civic engagement and undermining full citizenship.

Liberal Peace: A Context-Blind Framework

Liberal peace frameworks emerged during the Cold War and its immediate aftermath, shaped by Western assumptions that political stability could be secured through elite pacts, institutional order, and market-oriented reform, often overlooking structural violence, historical trauma, and uneven power relations (Pugh, 2005; Richmond, 2009). These logics influenced negotiated independence settlements across the Global South, including Zimbabwe, where political accommodation prioritised state consolidation and geopolitical stability over accountability for violence and structural redress. In Zimbabwe, the independence settlement paired with a limited reconciliation framework entrenched elite compromise while deferring justice for atrocities, particularly in Matabeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). This logic was later reinforced through the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), which deepened socio-economic precarity and accelerated Bulawayo’s industrial decline without addressing regional inequality or historical trauma (World Bank, 1981; Gumbo & Geyer, 2011; Moyo, 2018). Rather than producing reconciliation, liberal peace operated as a mode of containment. Stability was achieved through silence, amnesty, and political settlements that preserved power hierarchies, allowing peace to exist in form but not in substance as will be discussed in Chapter 7 of this thesis (Pugh, 2005; di John & Putzel, 2009; Khan, 2018).

Myths and Metaphors

Collective memory continually negotiates between available historical records and current social and political agendas – Eviatar Zerubavel (1995: 5)

A myth, can be defined as a historical trauma,³⁴ or denial thereof, that has been communally accepted as a structural trauma narrative that is believed within society, with omitted or hyperbolised detail, thus dislodging truth. A mythicisation is then a systemic application of the myth, often for the purposes of political gain or legitimacy within a given group of the affected community (LaCapra, 1999: 721-725; Pickering & Keightley, 2009: 238). Hegemonic knowledge production systems dictate this transferability within the home, wider society, and, by extension, nation-states as operationalised by leaders. Cyclical cognitive biases are then the remaining legacies that are enforced (Prager, 2016: 18). With every generation, these socialised myths remain transmissible traumatic memories, which can be dangerous if mythicisations become weaponised for political power or for the socio-economic alienation of one grouping over another in a community (LaCapra, 1999: 725).

Over time, narratives remain transferrable not only vertically through generations but also horizontally across societies, where narratives of truth run the risk of being further distorted. For Bulawayo, this transferable intergenerational trauma means a cyclical inheritance of disadvantage not only materially but also symbolically, as myths reinforce their perception of exclusion and limit the horizons of political possibility. Rather than revisiting history to uncover the truth of narratives, the postmemory generation becomes complacent in the warped truths of these socialised mythicisations (Hirsch, 2008; LaCapra, 1999). In this regard, Hirsch (2008: 106) describes the “post-” in postmemory as “defining the present in relation to a troubled past rather than initiating new paradigms”. New paradigms here are acts of truth seeking and acting based on uncovered truths. Though the postmemory generation is widely understood as the second generation of aggrieved persons, or the generation after those who were directly affected by violence, in the disciplines of psychiatry and social science, for the purposes of this thesis, this definition will be extended to include participants who are still affected by the collective memories of perpetration. This generational transferral of mythicised narratives has, on the one hand, become so widespread that it is synonymous with national policy discourse and political culture, which has been actualised for ZANU-PF political gain. On the other hand, it has become so widespread that it is believed to signal disadvantage in Matabeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011a).

In Bulawayo, myths and metaphors play a critical role in shaping the city’s socio-political discourse, often distorting historical truths and reflecting both collective trauma and marginalisation. A myth can also be defined in this context, in reference to a communal narrative based on distorted or omitted details that becomes accepted as a truth, often for political purposes (Das, 2007: 38; N. Ndlovu, 2019: 140). These myths, particularly those stemming from the Gukurahundi Massacres and the broader political history of Zimbabwe, serve as structural trauma narratives that perpetuate a culture of denial and bias (LaCapra, 1999: 721-725; Pickering &

³⁴ For a definition of historical and structural trauma, see Chapter 7 in this thesis.

Keightley, 2009: 238). Scholars such as Nandy (1995: 47) argue that myth-making is a moralisation process that links the past to present-day ethical meanings, often obscuring the complete and objective remembering of historical events. While mythicisation can provide a way for survivors of violence, such as those affected by the Gukurahundi Massacres, to process their silenced experiences (N. Ndlovu, 2019: 26), it also becomes dangerous when it is weaponised for political gain, contributing to the perpetuation of negative peace and societal division (Alexander & McGregor, 2013: 758; Scarnecchia, 2011: 93). In Bulawayo, the metaphor of *ukubamba zonke* [trans. “hoarding of all good things or resources” or “to have your fingers in all good things”] encapsulates the city’s sense of exclusion and exploitation by Zimbabwe’s ruling elite, who monopolise economic opportunities (Musemwa, 2003).³⁵ This metaphor feeds into the survivalist myth, compounded through political narratives and historical events to be articulated throughout this thesis, that Bulawayo is a city destined for neglect. This survival is driven by cognitive justifications, as Van der Laan (2008: 24) explains, where “images of the future” are formed based on current realities or imagined projections, shaping actions and decisions. Further, these mythicisations, rooted in both colonial and post-independence narratives, legitimise the city’s socio-economic and political marginalisation within the political culture of the ruling ZANU-PF party (Bratton, 2016; Coltart, 2016; Eppel, 2020).

Despite these challenges, Bulawayo’s resilience is framed as a form of resistance to state-led exploitation, positioning the city as a symbol of defiant survival in the face of adversity. The colonial myth of Bulawayo as a “dissident city”, a label entrenched during the Gukurahundi era, remains a dualised narrative (Musemwa, 2006b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). On the one hand, it reflects the ZANU-PF narrative of Bulawayo’s people as dissenters, but on the other hand, it represents a silent defiance from the city’s inhabitants (Alexander, 2021: 768-769; Rwafa, 2012).

Senior urban planner Andrew Mlalazi explained that the labelling of Bulawayo as a ‘dissident city’ is ‘a retaliation based on a mythicisation’ of Bulawayo and its people, tracing this back to the formation of ZANU in 1963 and continuing through the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi Massacres. He noted that this ‘retaliation based on a mythicisation’ has “appeared again in the post-ESAP era [and] has become a political project” to systematically disenfranchise the residents of Bulawayo vis-à-vis the residents of Harare, safeguarding a position constructed in relation to ZAPU’s longer-standing authority³⁶ (see also Alexander, 2021). This labelling perpetuates the marginalisation of the city of Bulawayo, eventually personifying the myth of its enduring disadvantage. As M. Moyo and Motsi (2023: 143) suggest, this creates a ‘chimera’ of devolution under the Second Republic,³⁷ further entrenching the power dynamics that continue to marginalise Bulawayo. From empirical insights between 2021 and 2024, prevalent myths in Bulawayo include the city’s imposed identity as supposedly “dissident”, marked by both oppression and defiance; the belief that Bulawayo is destined for perpetual disadvantage due to *ukubamba zonke* or rent-seeking political culture; the resilience of Bulawayo’s people despite the narrative of marginalisation; the perception that economic and political success is linked to

³⁵ For a further discussion on *ukubamba zonke* in Bulawayo, see chapter 6 in this thesis.

³⁶ Interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

³⁷ The Second Republic is a reference to the Mnangagwa regime, which has served as the ruling government since the 2017 coup d’état that removed the late President Robert Gabriel Mugabe from office, ending his 37-year hold on power (1980–2017). See Tendi, 2020a.

alliances with ZANU-PF; and the myth that Bulawayo is a city destined for neglect, reinforcing a “survivalist” mindset. These myths and metaphors do not only shape the collective memory of Bulawayo’s residents but also the political and economic dynamics that continue to define the city’s role in Zimbabwean society.

The process of “myth-making” itself is one that is contested within social science. Mythicisations have been condemned as misrepresentations of oral history by scholars such as Jessee (2011); however, they have been lauded for opening a dialogue for the discussion of available oral histories and memories by scholars such as Field (2008). For Nandy (1995), mythicisation is a practice of “moralisation”, where there is,

a refusal to separate the remembered past from its ethical meaning in the present. For this refusal, it is often important not to remember the past, objectively, clearly or in its entirety. (p.47)

This type of mythicisation has been highlighted as important by oral historians such as N. Ndlovu (2019: 26) who cites the importance of “myth-making” for the survivors of the 1983-1987 Gukuruhundi Massacres as they make meaning of otherwise silenced experiences. For the purposes of this thesis, the view taken by Jessee (2011) is adopted for two reasons: first, to highlight the harm socialised mythicisations can cause over eras when weaponised for political survival (Alexander & McGregor, 2013: 758); and, second, as a nod to the oral accounts of the Ndebele state, and subsequent early foundations of Bulawayo from an indigenous point of view, which remain largely overshadowed by substantial written accounts by colonial administrators (Hadebe, 2007, 2020).

Breeding Myths

Myths are fundamentally born out of the concepts of silence and denialism. Both “moral indifference” and the refuting of knowledge shape denialism (Cohen, 1996: 522, 2001: 77). Bred from “an unconscious defense mechanism for coping with guilt, anxiety and other disturbing emotions aroused by reality”, as noted by Hamm (2002: 178), denialism must be understood as a psychological coping mechanism that unconsciously barricades information that is deemed harmful to hegemonic power structures. Here, memories as well as conscious information are lodged in “an inaccessible region of the mind” (Hamm, 2002: 178). The danger in this is that where collective historical trauma is experienced, societal knowledge of trauma-based narratives is remembered (memorialised) to varying degrees at the individual and micro-social levels as evasion from, and distortion of, absolute truth deters (or derails) one from accountability and knowledge (Pickering & Keightley, 2009: 238; Tarusarira, 2019: 223). Anxiety too can be used as an analytical lens to make sense of temporal and geographical sites of trauma through physical, visceral, somatic, and imagined spaces, though this may be weaponised as what I would like to coin as “aggressive reverse anxiety” by those in power (Grant & Pringle, 2020). Here, anxious citizens are held hostage by the real fear of being provoked by systemic trauma. This is particularly true when the habitual inflictors of historical trauma are the ruling elite, or at least those who hold asymmetric hegemonic power within society (Mani, 2008, in Eppel, 2013: 221).

Resultantly, as is common in national narratives, aggression is present where repression and silencing must ensue.

Denialism, as it feeds silencing and subsequent mythicisations, is multifaceted. Cohen (1996: 522) frames denialism using three lenses. First, literal denial is shown through the falsely accused who did not commit the offense. Second, interpretive denial shows an intentional deceit to conceal the known actions of perpetrators by those who are loyal either to oneself or another. In Zimbabwe, dislocated “positivity, loyalty, or pragmatism” (Lawther, 2013, in Tarusarira, 2019: 221) act as silencing mechanisms to advance rent-seeking. Lastly, implicatory denial is exhibited by the justification of perpetration through what Hirschman (1970: 30-34) deems the “unconscious loyalism” of insider actors, who represent elites in refuting whistle-blowers as agents of dissent against the denialist narrative. This is the direct opposite of intentional deceit. Implicatory denialism, as an act of mentally shelving perpetration, is important to understand structural mythicisation as a systemic form of denialism, but more importantly, to comprehend silencing, which forms the foundation on which the ruling securocrat³⁸ elite culture engages in processes of governance in Zimbabwe (De Waal, 2002: 74-78).

Notably then, the concept of victimhood and the potential for its drawn-out expression are subject to investigation where (un)conscious mythicisations exist as narratives to form victimhood within dysfunctional, structurally traumatised political landscapes. As LaCapra (1999) notes,

“Victim” is not a psychological category. It is, in variable ways, a social, political, and ethical category. Victims of certain events will in all likelihood be traumati[s]ed by them, and not being traumati[s]ed would itself call for explanation. But not everyone traumati[s]ed by events is a victim. (p.723)

In this thesis, Bulawayo’s citizens are understood in precisely this nuanced way: not only as victims of historical and systemic violence, but also as individuals and communities who navigate, reinterpret, and sometimes resist these imposed narratives. As such, victimhood, and indeed victim-centric retribution, becomes blurred in political cultures that systemically disadvantage Bulawayo as a second city, in an economic as well as socio-political manner. Recognising avenues to restorative justice and development in independent Zimbabwe must be first understood, at its roots, as the predominantly Shona ruling elite wanting to embody a false narrative about history from colonial administrators who distorted facts for their own political gain (D.N. Beach, 1979: 395).

The first myth lodged in implicatory denial is cited in a rebuttal to the work of Msindo (2004). Here, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008b: 74) refutes the notion that the Ndebele state was authoritarian and militant, as it has been painted in existing national narratives to date. The national unification process undertaken by the Ndebele state under Mzilikazi was one where “regional differences and specific local cultures [were] replaced with a homogenous national identity, not only in discourse but in lived practice” (Larmer & Lecocq, 2018: 899). Mzilikazi was always careful not to disturb existing structures and ruled over a consolidated state in the pre-1840 period post the Mfecane

³⁸ Securocrats here refers to military personnel who have become civilianised in executive bureaucratic government structures as technocrats and command the operationalisation of all governance structures within the state.

era.³⁹ Here, production rather than violence was prioritised, and human rights remained at the “centre of state politics” (Mazarire, 2009: 33; see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b: 74). Weber (1976) likens this process of state formation to a form of colonialism, a narrative of pre-colonial times that has been adopted by the Zimbabwean ruling elite. It must, however, be stressed that the process of pre-colonial nation-building, which respected existing customs and sought to integrate them, cannot be likened to the European model of conquest, which was solely for accumulation purposes and sought to impose new ways of living for the purposes of “civilising” African communities (D.N. Beach, 2017: 2; Bratton, 2016: 39). The documented myth of “self-generated black-on-black” tribal violence has been highlighted by M. Ndlovu (2017: 101) as internalised racism⁴⁰, as it pushes a colonial narrative of primitive African people needing civilising. The irony, however, is that colonial efforts at such “advancing” often resulted in excessive mining, slavery, and spatial segregation for indigenous people in Africa (M. Ndlovu, 2017: 100-101). This works to buttress the interpretive denialist nature of the colonial agenda that remains present in Zimbabwe today (Cohen, 1996: 522).

The second myth born out of interpretive denial is that the Shona-identifying people existed as a strong opposing nation to the Ndebele state in the 1800s. The truth is there was no comparison. First narrated by Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Marshall Hole, this mythicised narrative was a direct attack on the governing structures of the pre-colonial Ndebele state (D.N. Beach, 1979: 398). Likewise, it must be reiterated, as seen in chapter four of this thesis, that the Shona people did not refer to themselves as such until the identity was introduced to group the Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Korekore, Rozwi, and Ndau clans for the purposes of political control in the 1930s (Ranger, 2010). The Shona-identifying people’s lack of political organisation is evidenced in their short-lived political longevity across regions and institutions – as per colonial design (D.N. Beach, 1979: 398). During the colonial Rhodesian era, this legacy of fragmented indigenous states led to “the white minority [dominating] the police, the armed forces, the judiciary, the civil service and other key institutions” (Zimbabwe Emergency Campaign Committee, 1979). Myth-based tactics of a metanarrative of consolidated “Shona” political and military strength continued to be employed in political campaigns to discredit Matabeleland’s history in both post-independence regimes.

The third myth lies in the ruling elite’s false metanarrative of the Shona strength during several *chimurenga* [trans. “revolutionary struggle(s)”] for political gain. First of all, the notion of a *chimurenga* is not synonymous with “Shonanness”. This is implied by using the Shona word for war to elaborate national history in mainstream media and political campaigns, thus silencing alternative narratives to ruling elite mythicisations for survival that carry political clout. The First Chimurenga is also known in isiNdebele as *Umvukela* or the Second Matabele War of 1896-1897.

³⁹ Mfecane [trans. “crushing”, in isiZulu, or “where one has become thin with hunger”, in isiXhosa] was a period of extensive migration amongst the Zulu and Nguni people caused by environmental changes in Southern Africa from 1815 to 1840. Socio-political unrest resulted in conflicts that have been characterised by Eurocentric historians as primitive and for the sole purpose(s) of conquest (for an extensive commentary on this era, see M. Ndlovu, 2017).

⁴⁰ See S. Hall (1996) on how racialised identities are shaped, contested, and sometimes internalised, and S. Hall (1997) to understand how stereotypes work and how subjects come to “take on” or internalise racialised meanings.

The hyperbolised role of the Shona-identifying people's involvement in this war cannot be overstated.⁴¹ The Second Chimurenga, or the Rhodesian Bush War of 1966-1979 against Zimbabwe's two liberation forces, is conflated into the Shona stronghold narrative as a victory of ZANU and its Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) for the ordinary Zimbabwean today. The erasure of the ZAPU and its Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) perpetuates a narrative of Mashonaland heroism and military strength "regained" from the Ndebele state situated in Matabeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003).

The liberation struggle was led by ZAPU – trained by the former Soviet Union – whose stronghold was in Matabeleland. This stronghold was, however, systemically broken down by ZANU – trained by the People's Republic of China – whose stronghold was in Mashonaland. The exclusion of ZAPU was cemented through the 1987 Unity Accord in a political settlement that conquered "the last frontier of resistance to ZANU-PF hegemony" (Bratton, 2016: 55). An example illustrating the enforced narrative within the *chimurenga* metanarrative in the post-independence state is provided by the beneficiaries of the politically motivated 1997 War Victims Compensation Act. These were largely ZANLA fighters aligned to the ruling party; the same courtesy was not extended to ZIPRA fighters. This Z\$1.8 billion⁴² payout brought about Black Friday on 14 November 1997. Black Friday's crash saw the inflation rate reach 45% in early 1999, a rise of 30% from just prior to the financial crash. Additionally, the current ZANU-PF ruling elite insist on referring to themselves as "comrades" to semantically concretise the party's "authoritarian nation building strategies" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003: 32). The implicatory denial of a voter base that follows the party's mythicised narrative results in "unconscious loyalism" (Hirschman, 1970: 30-34). Though Alexander (2013: 811) highlights the period after 1997's Black Friday as the legitimisation of widespread militarisation, scholars such as Tendi (2013, 2016), Rupiya and Chitiyo (2005), and Eppel (2013) dub this the Third Chimurenga, as the post-2000 period links to escalations in state-sponsored violence, intimidation, and surveillance of any "threat" seeking to challenge the state's exclusionary narrative.

Militarisation

Tactics of militarisation must be seen as a tool to execute political settlements that maintain ZANU-PF hegemonic power. The normalisation of militarism in Zimbabwe has entrenched a system in which military personnel occupy pivotal governance roles, leading to the civilianisation of the military and an implicit societal acceptance of militarised governance (Gelot & Sandor, 2019: 523). Militarised governance, as defined by De Waal (2002: 73), characterises regimes that emerge from conflict or perceive themselves as threatened by instability even if the threat is exaggerated or fabricated. This dynamic has persisted across the pre-colonial Ndebele state, the colonial Rhodesian administration, and the post-independence ZANU-PF era, creating a continuum of militarised governance.

⁴¹ For a detailed account, see Chapters 4 and 7 in this thesis.

⁴² To roughly understand the value of the money at the time, the conversion rate to the British pound sterling sat at Z\$61.73 to £1 in November 1999 (Rule, 2017).

The Zimbabwean state has therefore been unable to disentangle itself from a militarised mindset, which prioritises the survival of the state, territory, and ruling elite. This survival is rooted in primal instincts, framed as a matter of life and death, and has evolved to encompass elite control and rent-seeking, as outlined by Alexander and McGregor (2013: 758). This evolution reflects the fluidity of militarisation, shaping governance across successive epochs. Yet, despite the centrality of militarisation to Zimbabwe's governance culture, there remains limited scholarly engagement with its fluid and evolving application across different historical and political contexts. By examining how militarisation functions as a tool of exclusionary political settlements in Bulawayo, the thesis contributes to addressing this underexplored dimension, extending the broader gap in scholarship identified in Chapter 1. For Bulawayo, this focus reveals how militarisation is not only a national governance dynamic but a lived urban reality that has systematically deepened the city's disadvantage.

Militarism, as De Waal (2002: 74) observes, imposes severe constraints on social groups, limiting their ability to mobilise and pursue their interests. It serves as a tool of political settlements to secure elite interests. Bulawayo's history highlights the irony of a city built on militaristic foundations, being marginalised by the very system that shaped it. Within the pre-colonial Ndebele state under Mzilikazi, the Ndebele state's survival centred on assimilation and state formation through nation-building. Territorial consolidation involved the "asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings" into a unified political economy (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 32). Language, rather than coercion, acted as a unifying force, reflecting inclusive governance principles (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 35; 2008b; 2009).

The colonial Rhodesian administration emphasised the survival of territory, intertwining race, class, industrialisation, and urbanisation. Bulawayo's urban identity was celebrated as a symbol of modernity, while its industries, powered by the labour of Black natives, reinforced the colonial economy (Ranger, 2010). However, this system excluded indigenous populations from meaningful participation.

In independent Zimbabwe, ZANU-PF's governance culture has prioritised self-preservation and accumulation. Initially, the expansion of services to the Black majority reflected progress, but this was undermined by survivalist politics and rent-seeking (Alexander, 2013: 810). The 1987 Unity Accord marked a consolidation of power, entrenching a unipolar governance system (Masunungure, 2006: 6). Over time, militarisation facilitated patronage networks and economic exploitation, exemplified by the Zimbabwe Defence Forces' involvement in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) (Sachikonye, 2011: 23).

The entrenchment of militarisation's tenets in Zimbabwe's governance structures perpetuates economic stagnation (Alexander, 2013). In independent Zimbabwe, militarised governance in Zimbabwe's governing structures can be seen in terms of Alexander's (2013: 811-813) conceptualisation of militarisation, which evolves beyond De Waal's (2002) framing of servicemen with wartime combat experience in positions of political power. First, Alexander notes the policing of elections as a permanent feature of militarised governance.

Second, neopatrimonialism serves lucrative networks of accumulation and patronage, ranging from the awarding of government contracts and tenders to businesses owned by military and party leaders to more direct control of production and trade (Alexander, 2013: 812). Notably, this can be pinpointed to the post-1980 involvement of the ZDF in the DRC to support Congolese President Laurent Kabila against an insurgency (supported by Rwanda and Uganda) in the First Congo War. Here, there was the personalisation of accumulative rent-seeking by senior military personnel, and the involvement cost Zimbabwe US\$1 million a day in 1998-1999 (Sachikonye, 2011: 23). Kriger (2012: 22) shows that the key beneficiaries included current President Emmerson Mnangagwa, the late General Solomon Mujuru, and other senior members of the then Joint Operations Command (JOC). These actors then went on to solidify the “security-military business” complex, which has played a vital role in the process of militarisation and subsequent accumulation within Zimbabwe’s elite political settlements (Zimbabwe Institute, 2008).

Third, Alexander (2013: 811) notes the strategic inclusion of military personnel and war veterans in senior state and parastatal positions – roles that, in principle, should be occupied by technocrats through merit-based appointment. This integration served to reinforce a partisan state apparatus. Following the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme in Zimbabwe, the 1994 Affirmative Action Group (AAG)⁴³, co-founded by Harare-based elites Phillip Chiyangwa and Peter Pamire, received direct backing from the Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe under the banner of indigenisation. While the initiative was framed as a vehicle for Black economic empowerment, in practice it disproportionately favoured elites aligned with the ruling party.⁴⁴ This skewed distribution of resources reinforced the marginalisation of Matabeleland, as Bulawayo’s industrial and business actors were excluded from access to capital, networks, and state-backed opportunities. Instead of redressing regional inequalities, indigenisation reproduced them, deepening the economic disadvantage of Bulawayo and entrenching the city’s position on the periphery of Zimbabwe’s political economy. A similar pattern continues through institutions such as the Industrial Development Corporation of Zimbabwe, where state-backed investments and contracts are channelled through partisan networks with little transparency or accountability, exemplifying the opaque economic governance that sidelines regions like Matabeleland from meaningful participation. This is key evidence of Matabeleland’s disadvantage, showing how policies framed as inclusive empowerment in fact entrenched exclusion through partisan, ZANU-PF distribution of state resources.

Furthermore, the operationalisation of political order through the professional military –used to police civilians and suppress dissent – has become a persistent feature of Zimbabwe’s postcolonial governance. As early as 1980, with covert plans such as Operation Quartz (initially prepared under the Rhodesian regime to block Black majority rule), the state has deployed military force as a mechanism of control. Military involvement in state enterprises has facilitated prebendalism, where political loyalty is rewarded with appointments that are neither transparent nor meritocratic, thereby eroding institutional efficiency and public accountability (Tendi, 2013: 841). This militarised model of governance has had tangible consequences for cities like

⁴³ See Chapter 6 for a full quote from the interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

⁴⁴ See Chapter 5 for a discussion of how ethnopoltics within ZANU-PF’s selectorate has shaped the exclusionary accumulation of rents and resources in Zimbabwe.

Bulawayo, where central government policy decisions have stifled industrial growth and local economic development. Without decoupling military influence from civilian state structures, meaningful transformation and equitable development remain out of reach (De Waal, 2002: 72-73; Diamond, 1988: 26-27).

There has always been a militarily entrenched need for survival by elites across administrative eras in Zimbabwe. Militarisation in Zimbabwe serves as a mechanism for advancing exclusionary political settlements. Its fluid application across historical and administrative contexts has reinforced governance systems that prioritise elite survival, and has evolved to favour this political culture over that of inclusive development. Addressing this legacy requires dismantling militarised structures and fostering decentralised, meritocratic governance.

Conclusion: Positioning Citizens in this Thesis

This chapter has outlined the conceptual tools of silence, denial, myth, trauma, and militarisation as the lenses through which Bulawayo's political and socio-historical trajectories are analysed. Taken together, these concepts illuminate not only the structures of repression and marginalisation but also the ways in which citizens themselves are positioned within them. In this thesis, Bulawayo's residents are not portrayed as passive victims alone, nor as wholly autonomous agents, but as people negotiating complex socio-economic and political circumstances, doing their best to navigate trauma, silence, and exclusion while forging an *uneasy peace*. Silence and denial reveal both constraint and strategy; myths and metaphors show how disadvantage is narrated, resisted, and transmitted; trauma underscores the deep psychological scars yet also highlights the resilience of memory; and militarisation exposes the coercive structures of governance even as citizens adapt, resist, and endure. These concepts highlight that Bulawayo's citizens inhabit a paradoxical position: structurally marginalised and disciplined by memories of militarised political settlements, yet continuously exercising agency through silence, myth, memory, and everyday survival. This positioning is not static but dynamic, shaped by both historical inheritances and contemporary struggles. It will also be further illustrated and critically engaged within the thesis' empirical Chapters (5-8). The following historicisation chapter takes this framework forward by examining how the legacy of these dynamics has been embedded over time and continues to shape Bulawayo's political, social, and economic realities.