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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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CHAPTER

04



HISTORICISATION

4. Historicisation

Introduction

This chapter traces how Bulawayo's historical trajectories have produced the conditions that underpin its post-1980 experience, as the thesis explores conceptualisations of the city's disadvantage. The aim is not to offer a comprehensive urban history, but to show how successive political settlements embedded militarisation, marginalisation, and exclusion into the city's memory and governance structures. Historicisation is therefore deployed as a methodological tool. This is done by foregrounding the emergence of concepts and narratives⁴⁵ in specific historical conjunctions and their reworking across time. This approach highlights both continuities and ruptures in the logics of rule, demonstrating how practices of militarised governance and racialised exclusion were embedded in the colonial state and reconfigured in subsequent political settlements. By de-naturalising the present through its historical antecedents, historicisation makes visible the processes through which inequality and marginalisation have been normalised. At the same time, it enables a critical engagement with memory, silence, and myth, drawing attention to the ways in which contested historical narratives continue to structure political legitimacy and urban imaginaries in Zimbabwe. The chapter therefore highlights how pre-colonial identities, colonial urban planning, liberation war cleavages, and post-independence state strategies are interconnected in shaping Bulawayo's position in Zimbabwe in 2025 and beyond.

The analysis proceeds in six sections. The first explores the formation of the Ndebele state under Mzilikazi and Lobengula, not as a linear chronology, but as a symbolic inquiry into the construction of 'Ndebeleness' in Zimbabwe. This matters because later colonial and post-independence regimes mythologised Ndebele identity to justify territorial conquest and surveillance. The second examines the concessions and colonial interventions of the late nineteenth century, showing how asymmetric political settlements and mining interests destabilised African polities and embedded early patterns of economic extraction. The third section turns to the conquest of the Ndebele state and the fractured 1896-1897 risings. Here the focus is on how narratives of violence were exaggerated, how rebellion was more fragmented than nationalist mythology allows, and how these accounts seeded long-lasting discourses of ethnicised militarism that continue to shape memory.

The fourth section analyses Bulawayo under settler colonial rule, highlighting how racially segmented labour structures and segregationist planning reinforced exclusion while paradoxically making the city a hub of African nationalist organising. The fifth section examines the intensification of militarisation in the Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) era, the contradictions of the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR), and the emergence of Bulawayo as a centre of ZAPU mobilisation. This section links directly to events in the 1980s, namely: the Entumbane clashes and the Gukurahundi Massacres, by showing how liberation war fissures were incubated in urban space. The sixth and final section turns to memory and myth, using

⁴⁵ These include, but are not limited to: Bulawayo's inferiority to Harare, the militarism of Bulawayo's people, constructed ethnic divides, myths of tribalism, mythicisation of historical truths, silence and denial, memory and trauma, disadvantage, and urban marginality.

Zerubavel's concept of "time maps" to show how episodes such as the 1893 conquest, the 1923 referendum, and the Gukuruhundi Massacres are remembered as turning points in narratives of betrayal.

Through this structure, the chapter demonstrates how Bulawayo's compounded disadvantage after 1980 cannot simply be understood in isolation from these earlier political settlements. Each section contributes to answering the thesis research question by showing how governance structures and historical narratives have cyclically produced disadvantage, and how Bulawayo's residents have remembered, contested, and reimagined these exclusions over time.

Framing Arguments



Figure 4.1 Map of independent Zimbabwe (1980), source: Hills, 1981: 9.

The arguments and analysis in this PhD project focus primarily on Bulawayo in

post-independence Zimbabwe (see Fig. 4.1 for a visual map of the country at independence). However, there is strong merit in historicising these arguments to adequately contextualise the systemic legacies of marginalisation and militarisation hypothesised within Bulawayo's urban spaces. Historical tensions dating back to pre-colonial and colonial periods continue to shape present-day realities, particularly around governance, resource allocation, and spatial equity. In this light, the historicisation of Bulawayo serves a dual purpose.

Firstly, it enables an unpacking of how Bulawayo was historically constructed as a civilising node, framed by colonial ideologies as a “merchant capital in replacing [perceived Black African] savagery with [perceived Eurocentric] civili[s]ation” (MacMillan, 1931: 237-239, in Ranger, 2010: 32). This framing is crucial for understanding how the city's economic role has been conceptualised over time – an idea that re-emerges in future-oriented analyses of Bulawayo's economic viability, which are taken up in Chapter 8. Secondly, historicisation offers insight into Bulawayo's positioning as Zimbabwe's “second city”, having systemically evolved to being subordinated to Harare (formerly Salisbury) – especially after independence (Musemwa, 2006a, 2006b; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a; Ranger, 2007). This subordinate positioning has contributed to Bulawayo's experience of limited political leverage, restricted access to national resources, and neglect in development planning.

Historically, Bulawayo, which was granted city status in 1943, was a major urban hub in Southern Rhodesia. By the 1940s and 1950s, it had become the largest and most urbanised centre in the region, as well as the headquarters of Rhodesian Railways (Ranger, 2010). Meanwhile, Salisbury (now Harare) was being intentionally nurtured by the colonial government as the administrative capital, consolidating its political and bureaucratic centrality (Helmsing, 1999: 7; Zaaijer, 1998: 34, 105). These early colonial urban trajectories laid the foundation for the divergent paths of the two cities and continue to inform contemporary disparities in state investment, governance, and access to infrastructure.

The political-economic structure of present-day Bulawayo must therefore be understood in relation to these foundational political settlements. Urban form and function, which are shaped by colonial planning logics, remain central to how the city is experienced today. In Bulawayo, the city centre, industrial zones, and African residential townships were historically designed to be distant from white settler suburbs. This segregationist planning model was based on the logic of industrial efficiency: workers were to be located near the factories, but not near the privileged residential spaces. By contrast, Harare's design prioritised proximity to power and commerce. The city centre, serving also as the administrative and commercial core, was easily accessible from residential areas, reinforcing the city's role as the political heart of the colony.

These distinctions matter. Even in 2025, the urban footprints of Bulawayo and Harare reveal how colonial spatial planning continues to shape the lived realities of urban citizenship. For Bulawayo, industrial activity remains spatially central, but its infrastructure has deteriorated due to long-term underinvestment. Harare's spatial logic, rooted in administrative convenience, continues to attract state resources and attention. Thus, the historical design of these cities still influences who benefits from the urban environment and who remains marginalised within it. Likewise, physical urban form cannot be separated from political and economic inequities.

On Political Settlements, Methodology and Urban History

Drawing from the argument presented in Chapter 2, this thesis adopts the political settlements framework, which emphasises the division of power among dominant actors as the foundation of every regime (Bratton, 2016: 14–15). Such an approach enables the tracing of pre-colonial, colonial, and post-independence trajectories to make sense of present and future dynamics. Notably, the approach of the PhD project is not that of a *longue durée* study even though it begins in 1836. Rather, it takes a long historical perspective,⁴⁶ recognising that the story of Bulawayo dates back to pre-colonial times and traces events that make sense of modern-day dynamics. More specifically, this approach identifies and tracks key events that are symbolic of militarised cultures in pre-colonial, colonial, and independent times. Likewise, these cited dynamics serve to integrate the legacies of these narratives into modern-day urban dynamics within Bulawayo.

All this supports the process-tracing methodology that is employed as the methodology of choice for its strength in the efficacy of qualitative, case study-based research (D. Collier, 2011; D. Beach & Pedersen, 2013). Outlined by D. Collier (2011: 823), process-tracing is to be understood as “the systematic examination of diagnostic evidence selected and analy[s]ed in light of research questions and hypotheses posed”. Process-tracing’s longitudinal method of analysis enables one to pinpoint key events and subsequent conditions that lead to the outcome of the case study over time. The methodology also allows for an in-depth consideration of a case study’s causal effects without the need for comparative lenses (George & Bennett, 2005). Even as I conducted my exploratory research (August–December 2021), I found the applicability of process-tracing as a methodology to be pivotal in this regard.

Originally, the PhD project timeline started by tracing the urban history of Bulawayo and its framing of disadvantage from the 1920s, peaking in colonial times during the 1940s,⁴⁷ and moving on to understand the story of lived realities in independent Zimbabwe. The purpose of providing the “colonial backdrop” to modern-day structural issues in urban governance in Bulawayo was to tell of spatial productions and their impact on socio-political dynamics (Ranger, 2007: 162). However, empirical data revealed that the historicisation of Bulawayo needed to be traced further back to the Ndebele state under King Mzilikazi, from 1837 onwards, to truly track the causation of political and economic outcomes and the entrenched legacies of militarism in Bulawayo across pre-colonial, colonial, and, indeed, post-independence regimes.⁴⁸ Extending the analysis to the Ndebele state allowed for a more nuanced understanding of how enduring patterns of power, violence, and exclusion have defined Bulawayo’s urban and political identity.

Nuancing Differences: Constructed Ethnicity and the Initial Myth of Tribalism

Having established political settlements as the analytical frame for tracing Bulawayo’s historical

⁴⁶ With regard to the long historical perspective approach taken in this PhD project, the narrative thread is justified by the need to draw from events relevant to the concepts being presented and their outcomes. With regard to a *longue durée* study, the data outcomes of the time period from 1836 to present-day Zimbabwe are too expansive to compress into the PhD project.

⁴⁷ For a conclusive study of the politics of this era, see Scarnecchia, 2008: 29–93.

⁴⁸ Interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

disadvantage, the discussion now turns to how constructed ethnic identities and the myth of tribalism were mobilised within those settlements to entrench divisions between Ndebele and Shona, shaping Bulawayo's marginalisation across colonial and postcolonial regimes. Historians Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a), Phimister (2009), and Ranger (2010) emphasise the importance of avoiding simplistic interpretations of Ndebele and Shona identities, urging recognition of their complex and long-standing socio-political formations. This approach contrasts with reductive understandings that define the two groups primarily by language or by their association with the geographic centres of Bulawayo and Harare, which would unjustly limit their historical and cultural breadth (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 35). The latter limiting approach buttresses the line of thought posed by Raftopoulos and Savage (2004), and in so doing, as N. Ndlovu (2019: 9) argues, shows that "the governance and leadership transitions in present-day Zimbabwe continue to reflect calculated geo-politics and ethnic dominance (and/or marginalisation), which stem from way back in history". In this regard, ethnicity is a socially constructed phenomenon that is shaped by inherently systemic and culturally biased historical events. As narratives continually evolve across time, so do the consciousness, influences, and interests of the people who are actors within those time frames. Ethnicity must therefore not be a rigid principle adapted to Shona or Ndebele identity, as it is complex in its application to the changing political alliances of people, as well as their socio-political environments (Comaroff, 1987). Moreover, it must never be forgotten that ethnic origins are steeped in what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a: 32) refers to as "the asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings [often] into a single political economy". This is most evident during the pre-colonial era in Africa.

Where pre-colonial peoples migrated, settled, and integrated as nations, the concept of a "tribe" is also to be understood as a social construct, used mainly for the maintenance of colonial (and/or, in postcolonial contexts, dominant) control over a group of people. This is done by encouraging antagonism amongst them to prevent a united opposition to often illegitimate power structures who were after political dominance (Vail, 1989). Authors such as Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a) stress the need to refer to "nations" to retain accurate depictions of peoples, given the complexities of migration and colonial interference during pre-colonial periods.

The tension between Ndebele and Shona identities must be understood within the context of retaining colonial divisions and dominant rule (Vail, 1989). It is therefore unsurprising that formal historical accounts of events during the domination of the Ndebele nation have been written and widely shared not only by non-Ndebele people, but by European settlers as observers⁴⁹ and others who tend to miss nuances due to their lack of oral and cultural relatability

⁴⁹ Historicised trauma, as a remembered event of previous violation, manifests as structural trauma when it is socialised into affected communities through the limitations of different memories and politicised narratives (LaCapra, 1999: 725). With time passed as an additional variable, the complication of various narratives is "mythicised" as the memories in the mind are fluid, as is their transferability (Hirsch, 2008; Pickering & Keightley, 2009: 238). It is perpetuated by generational absence of truth-telling, which is then mirrored in the lives of subsequent generations and can thus be found throughout all sects of society dependent on contextual traumatisation (Hirsch, 2008; LaCapra, 1999: 721-722). This anticipation both paralyses and reimagines the loss experienced during the events that culminated in historical trauma. This serves as a coping mechanism for humans –who do not appreciate grey areas in life –in the aftermath of violent clashes where national cultures and narratives of truth and acknowledgement are absent. Denialism or deliberate amnesia towards traumatic events remains as transferable as political cultures allow it to be (Cohen, 1996, 2001; LaCapra, 1999; N. Ndlovu, 2019: 215). This psychoanalytical level of analysis is important to

(Hadebe, 2007). Essentially, facts have been mythicised⁵⁰ and beliefs “distorted...in order to justify the [conquest] of the Ndebele” with regards to “liberating” the indigenous Kalanga, Rozvi, and Venda, mythicisation has been integrated as a broader narrative for the facilitation of political settlements and economic gain in both the settler colonial Southern Rhodesia state and the independent Zimbabwe state.⁵⁰

As Ranger (2010) highlights, the Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika, Korekore, Rozwi, and Ndau clans did not refer to themselves as Shona until the colonialists spread the metanarrative as a politically divisive tactic to build further mythicisations against the Ndebele state in the 1930s. Even in the present day, they remain grouped as a constructed Shona people. Similarly, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a: 37) refers to Ndebele identity as it is known in Zimbabwe today as “a product of complex constructivist processes that span pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs”. Hadebe (2020: 158) notes that the inclusive nature of “disparate linguistic and cultural groups” such as the Venda, Sotho, Kalanga, and Tswana peoples is seen through the term *Umthwakazi* – a name for the Ndebele nation, used for those originating from Northern Ndebele and/or Matabele migrants from KwaZulu [trans. “the home of the Zulu kingdom”] in modern-day South Africa (Hadebe, 2007: 83-84; Mahlangu, 1957). Their geographic locations in Zimbabwe can be seen in Fig. 4.2 below.



Figure 4.2 Map of the *Mthwakazi* geographical area (highlighted in red), source: Google Images, “Mthwakazi Nation”.

understand the power of mythicised narratives and the legacies of their manifestations within tribal identities as they have become politicised for elitist gain both in Southern Rhodesia and Zimbabwe, as will be seen throughout the discussions in this thesis.

⁵⁰ This has often been executed through the political savviness of the opportunistic leadership of people such as Cecil John Rhodes, Ian Smith, and Robert Mugabe.

As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a: 35) notes, it would be “most narrow and ill-informed [to accept a narrative of Ndebele identity] that reduces being Ndebele to being members of the K[h]umalo clan that constituted itself as the ruling elite under Mzilikazi and [subsequently] Lobengula K[h]umalo”. This is reaffirmed by N. Ndlovu (2019: 10), who stresses that current constructions of “Ndebeleness” should not be narrowed to geography, with Ndebele identity having been, historically, “a cultural process of assimilation and consolidation stretching back to pre-colonial times... [including] reinvention... for political reasons or governance” by various administrations over time. Likewise, even as the term bears cultural and political weight in favour of the self-determination of the people of Matebeland, in 2022, “political and pressure groups [still] have a fuzzy conceptuali[s]ation of *Mthwakazi* and even have no consensus on its geographical demarcation” (Hadebe, 2020: 159). This shows the reach and the extent of the successful integration of the Ndebele nation.

A Brief Note on Detail

The detailed account of the conquest of the Ndebele state that follows is not intended as a comprehensive history, but as an exploration of the symbolic inquiry into ‘Ndebeleness’ as a form of political identity in Bulawayo *vis-à-vis* ‘Shonanness’ and white settler colonialism. This focus is important because later colonial and post-independence regimes mythologised these origins to justify conquest, exclusion, and securitisation. Framing the section in this way provides coherence, since the account becomes a deliberate narrative device rather than an overly detailed history. This shows how Ndebele identity is historically constructed, politicised, and mythicised, rather than purely chronological. It also aligns directly with the wider thesis themes of myth, memory, and political settlements, rendering this detailed engagement with Ndebele state formation to be integral rather than excessive. At the same time, a lack of detail risks misinterpretation and a reinforcement of mythicised narratives, thus dispelling concerns of a front-loaded chapter with detailed attention to the Ndebele state overshadowing later and equally significant dynamics to be discussed.

Militarised Myths of the Ndebele State

Colonial commentators have often overwritten Mzilikazi’s legacy by reducing him to his military exploits. As such, the monolithic portrayal of the Ndebele state as inherently militarised owes much to colonial mythmaking. Yet, the early history of Ndebele settlement reveals a far more complex trajectory shaped by mobility, integration, and processes of state formation. Overemphasis on Mzilikazi’s martial prowess obscures his parallel role as a nomadic leader seeking a permanent home for his people. These dual truths about Mzilikazi, both the formidable military strategist, and the migrant king, must co-exist. The Ndebele nation’s first settlements were in the Matopos Hills, where King Mzilikazi, or *induna yakoKhumalo* [trans. King and Commander-In-Chief of the Khumalo Clan], had fled with a group of Khumalo Militants⁵¹,

⁵¹ The remaining group of the Khumalo clan is still in modern-day South Africa and remain there today as royalty. The name, ‘amaNdebele’ evolved about 15 years later when the state grew as Mzilikazi moved through the southern African territories to finally settle in Bulawayo.

following discontentment with King Shaka's leadership. Over the course of a decade, the Matabele⁵² expanded into the Bechuanaland territory and solidified themselves as a viable army. King Shaka was assassinated and succeeded by his brother Dingane in 1828. In 1836, as the Boer voortrekkers⁵³ journeyed to the Orange Free State and the southern Transvaal to escape the British Cape Colony, they clashed with the Matabele who had moved North (Hole, 2018: 31-33). At the same time, Dingane sent fighters, who fell upon Mzilikazi and the Matabele "at a time when he was endeavouring to re-organise his forces, already somewhat demoralised" by the Boers (Hole: 33). According to Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Marshall Hole (2018):

Mzilikazi made no fresh attempt at settlement until he had crossed the Crocodile River and reached the high veld on the watershed of that and the Zambezi River [in 1837], where he called a halt near the hill now known as Thabas Induna, twelve miles from the modern town of Bulawayo. In this locality he made his headquarters. (p.33)

Here, Mzilikazi sought to undertake a complex nation-building process grounded in territorial expansion and social integration, rather than conquest and control (Hadebe, 2007: 80; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 35; Ranger, 1987: 160). This was achieved "by incorporating the various groups they came into contact with" (Hadebe, 2007: 80), with little "resistance from the indigenous tribes" who sought protection under the military strength of Mzilikazi's rule (Hole, 2018: 33). Mzilikazi was described by Hole (2018: 31)⁵⁴ as the "Napoleon of the amaZulu peoples, a man of great military genius". This account is validated by Mahlangu (1957: 54), who writes of *ubuqhawe bukaMzilikazi* [trans. "Mzilikazi's heroism"]. However, unlike Napoleon, despite his military prowess, the founder of the Ndebele nation was "careful not to disturb

⁵² Denoted from the Ndebele under the leadership of *Induna* Mzilikazi (Hole, 2018: 31-33). In an informal conversation with Dr Nompilo C. Ndlovu in Harare in December 2021, it was revealed that the name "Matabele" is believed to also have been derived from the use of the *bele* – the Sotho name for the shield that they used in combat. In this case, the "Matabele" would translate to "the people of/ who use the *bele* shield in combat". Field notes, 16 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

⁵³ "Voortrekker" is an Afrikaans term for a "pioneer, leading migrant", or "those who go ahead" (Britannica, n.d.). The Boers – later called the Afrikaners as they are known in South Africa today – were such Dutch settlers or their descendants. The group had "left the British Cape Colony in Southern Africa after 1834 and migrated into the interior Highveld north of the Orange River" (Britannica, n.d.). As such, the "Voortrekkers" are specifically labelled as the "Boers who participated in the organized migrations of systematic colonization" - more commonly known as the Great Trek. They are different from the 'trekboers,' who were "Boers who had moved into the interior prior to the mid-1830s but on an individual or temporary basis" (Britannica, n.d.).

⁵⁴ Lieutenant-Colonel Hugh Marshall Hole, CMG, was Government Secretary for Matabeleland and Civil Commissioner of Bulawayo, appointed by Cecil John Rhodes, PC to the British South Africa Company (1889-1965). The company had been formalised by the Southern Rhodesia Order in Council – the country's first Constitution in 1898 (Bratton, 2016: 37). By 1891, the Lieutenant-Colonel had become private secretary to Sir Starr Jameson, First Baronet, KCMG, CB, PC in Mashonaland (Baxter & Burke, 1970). His other notable appointments included the following: Secretary for Matabeleland; Civil Commissioner of Bulawayo (1901-1908); Chief Secretary of Southern Rhodesia; and Chief Native Title Commissioner for Matabeleland. He was best known for issuing the Marshall Hole currency in Bulawayo from 1 August to 1 October 1900, which were the first Rhodesian banknotes. The Marshall Hole currency was authorised for the issue as small trade tokens or emergency currency cards, often referred to as card money or voucher tokens, during periods of currency shortage. They were the only known banknotes to be issued by the British South Africa Company (BSAC) and "£20,000's worth of [pence denomination] stamps were used... [with] £1,000... profit to the Administration" (R.C. Smith, 1967: 332). The £1,000 was later given to Hole in recognition of his efforts (R.C. Smith, 1967).

existing structures” when settling and integrating local people into their governance system (Mazarire, 2009: 33).

A Narrow Political Settlement: Concessions and the Colonial Interference

The reign of Mzilikazi, founder of the Ndebele state, ended with his death on 9 September 1868 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b: 77). His son, Lobengula, was appointed regent in 1870. Shortly after his investiture, colonial interest in the region intensified following the discovery of gold in Mashonaland in 1867. White settlers began pursuing mining concessions as a pathway to political settlements and economic expansion as illustrated below in Fig. 4.3 (Keppel-Jones, 1960: 75).

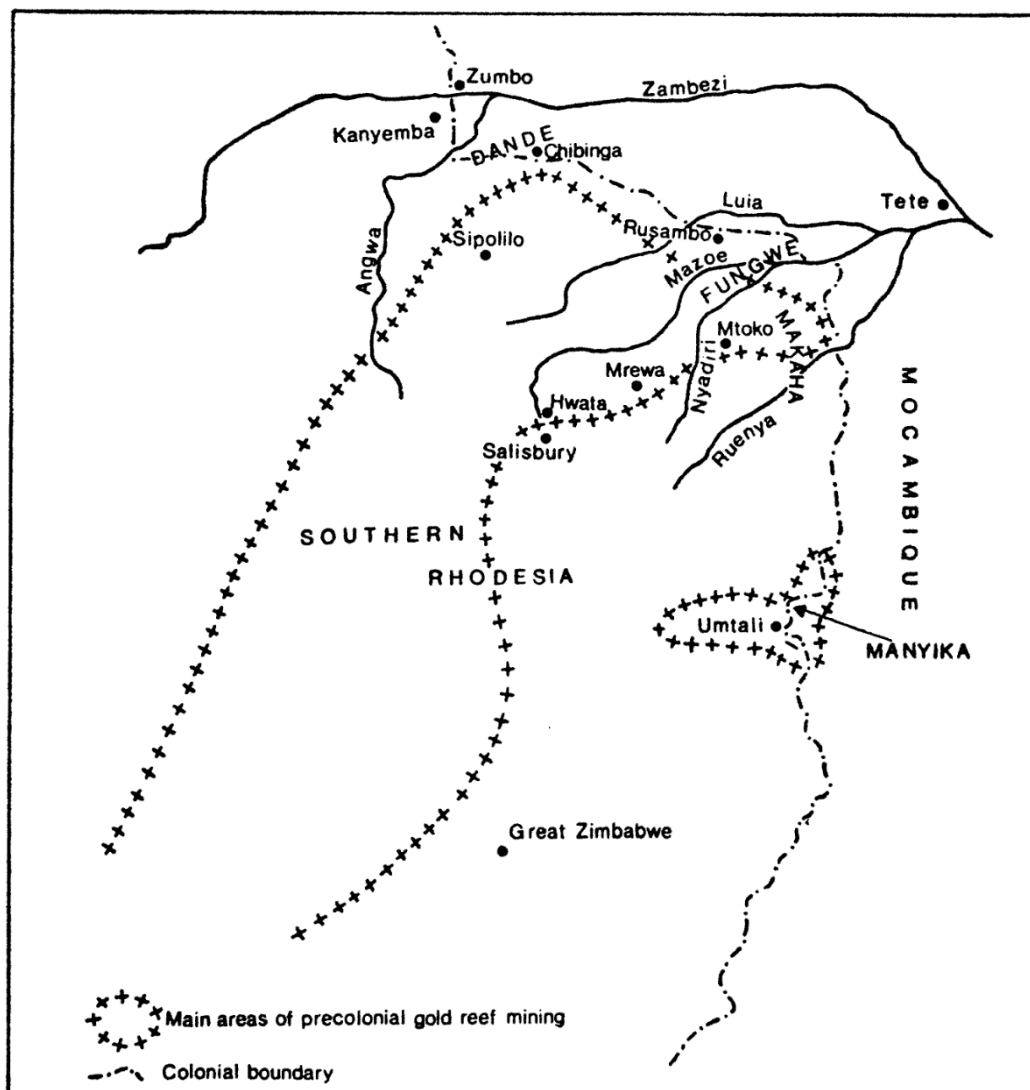


Figure 4.3 Map of the pre-colonial gold mining area, source: Phimister, 1974: 446.

Fig 4.3 is relevant here as it visually situates the economic motives that underpinned early colonial interference. Popular memory would insist that Lobengula “sold” the country; however, this map refutes the common claim By showing where gold deposits and mining sites were concentrated, the map⁵⁵ highlights why Mashonaland became the focus of settler interest after 1867 and why concessions with Lobengula were so aggressively pursued, illustrating the spatial connection between resource wealth and the negotiation of political settlements. In doing so, it reinforces arguments by Phimister (1974) and Beach (1974) that the gold trade catalysed both regional economic integration and African rearmament. At the same time, it demonstrates how resource endowments shaped the geography of colonial interest, directing infrastructure, capital, and settler presence towards Mashonaland. This early privileging of Mashonaland’s goldfields laid the foundations for the structural subordination of Bulawayo: while Bulawayo emerged as a military and administrative target of conquest, it did not benefit from the same scale of resource-driven development and state investment. Instead, its role was increasingly framed through conquest, militarisation, and control rather than extraction-led growth, reinforcing its long-term positioning as Zimbabwe’s “second city” and embedding politicised disadvantage into its political economy. In this sense, Fig 4.3 does more than illustrate geography: it makes visible how territorialised resources shaped the trajectory of colonial expansion and the fragile political economy of the early settlement.

One of the earliest attempts to secure such a concession was made by Thomas Baines⁵⁶, who visited Lobengula almost immediately after his rise to power. As Lieutenant Colonel Hole (2018) notes:

Baines, who had been waiting for [Lobengula to become king], immediately visited him to prefer his demands for a concession... [He] had discovered old “Mashona” workings in many parts of the adjacent country, as well as some ruined buildings... On learning that the question of the succession had been determined, he thought to secure the grant of a mining area from [Lobengula]. (p. 5-6)

Lobengula was wary of conceding sovereignty to white settlers (D.N. Beach, 1974: 649; Bratton, 2016: 37; Hole, 2018: 6). Initially, he made a verbal promise to Baines for the right to dig for gold within a bounded district (Hole, 2018: 6), though he was aware that Portuguese traders had long been active in the region, signing agreements and exchanging goods with the Mashona since the 1860s (Phimister, 1974: 450). The Baines Concession was formalised in 1871, affirming that no part of Lobengula’s kingdom was alienated and that his sovereignty would be recognised (Hole, 2018: 6). Baines pursued his mining rights relentlessly, driven by British economic interests.

The gold trade catalysed both regional economic acceleration and rearmament (Phimister, 1974: 450-451). Simultaneously, Shona groups played a central role as intermediaries in Lusso-Shona trade⁵⁷, especially in firearms (D.N. Beach, 1974: 647; Phimister, 1974: 450). The 1867 opening

⁵⁵ See Phimister, 2023 for the full context of this claim.

⁵⁶ Thomas Baines was an informal agent of the British empire, who played an early intermediary role in colonial concession-seeking in Southern Africa, including attempts to secure mineral rights from King Lobengula.

⁵⁷ This began in the 1860s.

of the Kimberley diamond fields accelerated this armament, enabling Shona strongholds to be armed (D.N. Beach, 1974: 647)⁵⁸. As Beach (1974) explains:

The expansionist ambitions of Britain and the Afrikaners and Portuguese counter-moves all tended to aid the Shona in the short run... The sale of gold and ivory and the labour opportunities of Kimberley and the Rand made it possible for the Shona... to re-arm. (p.647)

The gold trade thus served a dual purpose: it supported regional economic integration and enabled African polities, especially the Shona, to acquire weaponry (Phimister, 1974: 450). In exchange for gold, they received goods ranging from guns and gunpowder to cloth and beads (Phimister, 1974: 450-451). By the late nineteenth century, some Mashonaland sellers even used scales and weights to determine gold value (Phimister, 1974: 451).

Colonial Claims and Expansion

Although Lobengula had granted the Rudd Concession of 30 October 1888, its terms were widely misunderstood. Colonialists assumed his consent was voluntary and absolute, while Lobengula believed it would restrict gold-seekers (Bratton, 2016; Phimister, 1974). As Lieutenant-Colonel Hole (2018) recounts:

Lobengula was always obsessed by a dread that his country would be overrun by gold-seekers if he once allowed them a foothold... he was suspicious of all new-comers... and cherished a special hatred for the Boers. (p.7)

This divergence in interpretation lay at the heart of the concession's controversy: where Lobengula sought to limit incursion, Rhodes and the BSAC treated the document as a *carte blanche* for territorial and economic domination. As settler interest in controlling gold intensified, the British South Africa Company (BSAC) was granted royal charter and incorporated in October 1889 to consolidate British economic and imperial power (Bratton, 2016: 36-37). Rhodes' imperial ambitions long predated the establishment of the Bechuanaland Protectorate in 1885. The push for profit, particularly to recover investments in infrastructure, encouraged further colonial expansion (Bratton, 2016: 37). By 13 September 1890, the advancement of the Pioneer Column into Mashonaland, and the Union Jack being hoisted at Fort Salisbury (modern day Harare) marked the beginning of major territorial expansion – even as the Ndebele state under Lobengula remained intact (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 40). This was the start of an asymmetrical political settlement between Africans and colonial powers (Bratton, 2016: 36).

The Rudd Concession had further emboldened both the British government and the BSAC to adversely manipulate Ndebele–Shona relations through misinformation (D.N. Beach, 2017: 2). When Lobengula ordered raids on Fort Victoria in July-August 1893 (Bratton, 2016: 37), the British used this as pretext for full-scale military intervention. As Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009) explains, settler domination depended on suppressing the Ndebele. They presented the

⁵⁸ This was not unique to the Shona. Lourenço Marques (modern day Maputo), was popularised for arms distribution throughout southern Africa during the *Mfecane* period of the early to mid-1800s.

pre-colonial state as inherently violent, authoritarian, and undemocratic, thereby justifying a civilising mission that limited rights to “responsible”⁵⁹ Africans only (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009).

Conquest of the Ndebele State

This section examines how colonial conquest and the conquest of the Ndebele state were framed through militarised mythologies, how the subsequent 1896-1897 risings⁶⁰ unfolded as fractured rebellions, and how these events were later reinterpreted to produce enduring narratives of conquest and violence that continue to shape Zimbabwe’s historical memory even in 2025.

Militarised Mythologies and Colonial Justifications

In a bid to conquer the “dissenting” Ndebele State, pliant chiefs⁶¹ were co-opted into colonial governance structures as salaried agents, while missionaries and settlers mythologised Ndebele violence to rationalise conquest (Bratton, 2016: 39; D.N. Beach, 2017: 2). Lieutenant-Colonel Hole (2018: 44) and other colonial administrators pushed back, noting that raiding was fundamental to Ndebele livelihood, but such narratives often served the strategic ends of the colonial administration (Hadebe, 2007). In truth however, both Shona and Ndebele societies engaged in raiding, often provoked by cattle epidemics or localised power struggles (D.N. Beach, 2017: 2). Raiding had multiple causes ranging from economic hardship due to cattle diseases, to localised banditry among all ethnic groups. Notions of Ndebele “violence” were reinforced both by the exaggeration of their military exploits and by Shona “compliance” in reproducing colonial myths that portrayed the Ndebele as inherently aggressive (D.N. Beach, 2017: 2). Mzilikazi and Lobengula, in fact, discouraged indiscriminate raids due to the risk of retaliation (D.N. Beach, 2017: 2).

Further noted in Fig. 4.4 below, the Ndebele state, contrary to colonial claims, was governed through consultative structures rather than chaotic conquest and violence. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008b: 76) describes the *umphakathi* – an inner council similar to Britain’s House of Lords – as central to decision-making. Provincial leaders (*izigaba*), often military commanders, were answerable to the people (*amahlabezulu*) and not merely to the king (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b: 77). As Huntington (1996: 4) argues, such display of civilian influence over military affairs contradicts claims of Ndebele tyranny.

⁵⁹ Referring to those in Mashonaland under colonial control.

⁶⁰ This is in reference to the Gadade of Zimbabwe, the War of Shangani, or the First Chimurenga [trans. “first revolutionary war against colonial oppression”, in chiShona] or *Umvukela* [trans. “The Rising/Revolution of the Ndebele People” in isiNdebele]. Historians such as D.N. Beach (1979: 406) cite it as a failed “revival of the Rozvi empire” by the Shona.

⁶¹ These were African traditional leaders who cooperated with, and were co-opted by, the colonial administration.



Figure 4.4 Author's interpretation of the pre-colonial hierarchies of power and governance within the Ndebele state (adapted from Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b: 77).

The conquest of the Ndebele state resulted more from interlocking cycles of cross-raiding and colonial interference than from any intrinsic violence. Yet, these militarised mythologies of the Ndebele people have persisted to advance post-independence ZANU-PF elite control in 2025 as will be discussed throughout the thesis. Mythicised and hyperbolised Matabeleland militarism can then be said to be foundational to the metanarratives surrounding the historical geography of the Ndebele state, and to how Bulawayo as its capital is portrayed over administrative epochs. This is an important caveat when understanding the foundational arguments of disadvantage throughout this thesis.

Fractured Rebellions and Colonial Response

The Ndebele state was conquered in the 1893 First Matabele War when Lobengula was captured and deposed following a violent clash with British South Africa Company (BSAC) police and settler militiamen near Fort Victoria during the Shangani Patrol (D.N. Beach, 2017; Bratton, 2016: 37; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 40). However, the organisation of the Ndebele state did not dissolve entirely with the removal of King Lobengula. Governance structures, underpinned by religious and political leadership, persisted well beyond the formal collapse of the state in colonial records, complicating Ranger's (1967) nationalist framing of the 1896-97 risings as a

coordinated rebellion (D.N. Beach, 1979: 398; Cobbing, 1977). . Ranger (1987: 159), reflecting on the Matopos Hills, considered the spiritual and political heartland of communities indigenous to Matabeleland, observed that there was “[h]ardly a hill or cave existed... which did not have a religious or political historical significance”. Even in 2025, Matopos continues to host shrines such as Njelele⁶² and Dula⁶³ which remain spiritually significant for people of different tribes and ethnicities. It was based on this that the indigenous religious leader, *Mlimo*, was believed to have had the power to ignite anger, thus fuelling a military uprising by the Ndebele in March 1896 against British colonial administrators (D.N. Beach, 1979).

While often interpreted as a unified African rebellion, the 1896-97 risings, also known as the War of Shangani, the Gadade of Zimbabwe, or the First Chimurenga, were far more fractured. Colonial accounts differ and embellished accounts, which played upon settler fears of “Kaffir deceit”, suggested that a supposedly disorganised and “politically divided Shona countryside” had been “beguiled” by the Ndebele into executing a “simultaneous assault on Europeans” (Hole, 1897, in D.N. Beach, 1979: 395). Such fears were amplified by a broader settler colonial awareness of their own maladministration (D.N. Beach, 1979: 395). From an historical standpoint, D.N. Beach (1979: 398) questions the credibility of attributing complex military coordination to the Shona, who at that time lacked a unified political structure. The Ndebele, by contrast, had operated a functioning political and military system since 1840 (D.N. Beach, 1979: 398; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b: 74). Moreover, divisions among Shona-speaking communities undermined any broad-based unity. Some Shona chiefs aligned themselves with the colonial administration, leveraging the conflict to settle local scores (D.N. Beach, 1979: 395-420). Cobbing (1977: 77) supports this, noting that only around 30% of Shona communities in the eastern territories joined the 1896-97 Risings, and these were primarily areas already exposed to intense European pressure. In contrast, areas with minimal colonial interference, such as the Sabi Valley or the area south of Victoria, remained largely neutral or inactive (Cobbing, 1977: 77). As Ranger (2010: 99-100) further notes, non-Ndebele communities in the Matopos Hills during the mid-1890s not only felt distinct from their Ndebele neighbours, but were actively hostile towards them. By May 1896, Bulawayo was encircled by Ndebele forces, and Colonel Beal’s troops faced setbacks – first from Rozvi and Ndebele resistance near Gwelo (modern day Gweru), then again during the Battle of Nxa on 22 May 1896. Cobbing (1977: 78) argues that such reversals likely emboldened the resistance of the Shona, who may have read them as Ndebele victories and therefore as an opportune moment to rise. This historiographical debate carries stakes beyond the 1896-97 risings themselves. Phimister (2012) argues that Ranger’s (1967) nationalist account of the risings as a unified proto-nationalist uprising later helped shape what Phimister calls ZANU-PF’s patriotic history as a state-sanctioned narrative that presents the liberation struggle as one continuous nationalist story leading to ZANU-PF’s post-independence rule. The same historiographical tradition this thesis draws on for its account of early anti-colonial resistance was later used, reflecting Phimister’s argument, to help build this kind of state myth-making. It is worth noting that even scholarly histories are not fully separate from the political struggles they describe. Diverging scholarly interpretations of events underscore how historicised interpretations of Shona resistance oscillate between symbolic dominance to show assertions of identity, and pragmatic, acquisitive calculations aligned with benefitting from shifting colonial

⁶² A UNESCO World Heritage site known as a rain-making shrine.

⁶³ A shrine historically preserved for war.

power dynamics.

Legacies of the Colonial Narrative

The architecture of colonial rule in Southern Rhodesia was steeped in violence from its inception, setting the stage for a lasting polity whose very foundations rested on elite self-preservation and governance by coercion. The very foundations of the colonial state were “forged in conflict and conquest” (Bratton, 2016: 37). Keppel-Jones (1983: 8-11) and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a) succinctly capture the difference in the colonial experience: while Mashonaland was “occupied”, Matabeleland was “conquered”. This theme of conquest and violence continued well beyond the 1890s. The colonial period, spanning 1890 to 1979, was marked by the persistent presence of political violence as the colonial state sought to entrench and justify its authority. Bratton (2016) notes that,

especially after World War II, the colonial history of Southern Rhodesia became a marathon series of attempts to renegotiate the political settlement and reconcile divergent interests of the British metropolitan authority, the white settlers, and the increasingly radicalised African nationalist movements. (p.34)

Even the Internal Settlement of 1978⁶⁴ failed to dismantle the militarised governance structures of the settler state; rather, it was “a last-ditch effort by white settlers to govern through conservative black agents” (Bratton, 2016: 34).

Despite shifts in administration and leadership, colonial narratives – especially those surrounding the Ndebele state – persisted in ways that confined the state within a framework of militarism and violence. D.N. Beach’s (1974, 1979, 2017) writings, though often nuanced, have been critiqued for reinforcing portrayals of the Ndebele state as a historically violent Mfecane state, resistant to fluid reinterpretations. Similarly, Msindo’s (2004, in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b: 74) doctoral thesis on Ndebele-Kalanga relations from 1860 to 1990, has been criticised for its reliance on outdated depictions of the Ndebele state as militaristic and authoritarian. Such accounts often overlook the significant transformations that took place post-1840, when the Ndebele state began to consolidate power through consensual governance mechanisms. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008b: 74), the Ndebele state’s political culture, once settled in present-day Zimbabwe, increasingly prioritised “means of production over violence”, with governance shaped around rights and consultation that placed “the centre of the state[‘s] politics” in accumulation and consent rather than conquest. These legacies of colonial myth-making continue to shape historical memory and discourse. Understanding the endurance of the Ndebele state, its internal structures, and the complexities of rebellion and collaboration in the late nineteenth century is essential to deconstructing the simplified binaries of colonial conquest narratives.

Closing Commentary on the Politics of the Ndebele State

The interrogation of the Ndebele state presents the construction of “Ndebeleness” as having

⁶⁴ The 1978 Internal Settlement lasted until the 1979 Lancaster House Agreement which facilitated Zimbabwe’s independence. The 1978 Internal Settlement had resulted in the hybrid state of ‘Zimbabwe-Rhodesia’ (see Bratton, 2016: 46-47).

emerged through processes of migration, incorporation, and consultative governance. Subsequently it has been refracted through colonial concessions, conquest, and a racially segmented labour economy that privileged Mashonaland and undercut Bulawayo's position. The story of the Ndebele State and its capital are a far cry from the simple tale of endemic violence in the state as posited by colonial administrators. The asymmetries inaugurated by the Rudd and Baines concessions, consolidated through BSAC expansion, and deepened by colour-bar labour regimes, produced a political settlement sustained by mythologised accounts of Ndebele militarism that rationalised repression and misrepresented the fractured character of the 1896-1897 risings. Matabeleland's experience as a conquered, rather than merely occupied, territory, crystallised these hierarchies and fed a durable repertoire of securitised governance and subsequent urban marginality (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a: 40). This historical layering of identity-making, imperial extraction, and discursive distortion, provides the necessary groundwork for analysing how Bulawayo's urban order was subsequently planned, and policed during the settler eras and is remembered in the post-independence period. It is against this backdrop that the emergence of colonial labour structures in Matabeleland must be understood, for it was through these racially segmented economies of work and exclusion that the African liberation movement was formed and the perceptions of urban socio-political life are entrenched in Bulawayo.

Structures of Exclusion: Urban Life Under Settler Colonial Rule

As BSAC operations expanded into both Mashonaland and Matabeleland, a racialised and geographically uneven labour economy took shape. Mining became the backbone of the settler economy. White miners, who made up just 4% of the labour force, monopolised skilled and supervisory positions, while the 96% of African workers were confined to low-paid, unskilled labour (Phimister, 1977: 187). This bred racialised job segmentation placed the position of the white settler colonialists under constant threat (Phimister, 1977: 187-190). Inequality was most stark in Matabeleland. Bulawayo, which was once the capital of the Ndebele State, was not initially integrated but remained outside BSAC infrastructural investment until after its conquest in 1893-94 and the subsequent subjugation brought on by the 1896-1897 risings. This relegated the city to infrastructure investments and labour reforms favouring Mashonaland. By 1895, Southern Rhodesia was already described by colonial administrators as "a black man's country" due to the sheer volume and cheapness of African labour (Phimister, 1977: 188). Though early European miners were often unskilled recruits from South Africa and Europe, white workers in Bulawayo refused unskilled jobs, reinforcing racial divisions in mining employment (Phimister, 1977). The job colour bar⁶⁵ guaranteed white control over skilled work while African miners remained locked into menial roles and protected white wages from African competition (Phimister, 1977: 200).

The fragility of white labour became visible in the 1908 wage reduction when a general 10% wage reduction was enforced without resistance (Phimister, 1977: 191). This was seen again with

⁶⁵ The job colour bar served as a protective mechanism for white workers, ensuring their employment and wages were not undercut by cheaper African labour. This system was supported by mining companies, which benefited from the division of labour and the lack of solidarity between white and non-white workers. This was later entrenched by the Industrial Conciliation Act of 1934 (See Phimister, 1977: 198-200).

the 1919 formation of the Rhodesia Mine and General Workers' Association (RMGWA), which collapsed in 1923 (Phimister, 1977)⁶⁶. Notably, although African workers across Southern Rhodesia were excluded from formal unions, the effects were regionally uneven. This exclusion had sharper consequences in Matabeleland. Unlike Mashonaland, which benefited earlier from BSAC infrastructural investment and labour reforms, Bulawayo had been deliberately sidelined until after the Ndebele state's conquest in 1893. By January 1922, over 200 Europeans were unemployed in Bulawayo, up from 100 in July 1921 (Phimister, 1977: 195).

Respite was brought by the 1923 Southern Rhodesia Constitution, which entrenched settler colonial rule, transferring control from the BSAC to a self-governing settler regime as a British colony. On 27 October 1922, a 59.43% majority had voted for responsible government, and on 1 October 1923 Southern Rhodesia became a self-governing colony with Salisbury as its capital (Lee, 1977: 78; Mlombo, 2017). The formalisation of the 1923 referendum followed and marked a decisive turning point in Southern Rhodesia's political trajectory.⁶⁷ The expiry of the BSAC charter required the white settler electorate to choose between incorporation into the Union of South Africa, or adopting responsible self-government under continued British colonial oversight. This outcome consolidated settler political control, entrenched the centrality of Salisbury (modern day Harare), and laid the institutional foundations for Bulawayo's structural subordination. This shift formalised a political settlement premised on racial exclusion, economic extraction, and militarised containment of African populations (Bratton, 2016). Bulawayo, despite being a major industrial and railway hub, was enveloped into this settler project not as a site of equitable development but as a segregated zone for racially stratified governance and labour exploitation. It is important to note that such exclusion was not unique to Matabeleland. Across Southern Rhodesia, African workers were systematically barred from union representation, segregated into poorly serviced townships, and subjected to labour controls. What distinguished Bulawayo's case, however, was the city's symbolic status as the former Ndebele capital and its rapid industrial growth, which made the contradictions of settler planning and African exclusion especially visible.

Subsequent efforts to re-establish white labour representation culminated in the creation of the Associated Mine Workers of Rhodesia in 1938, which was officially recognised as the sole trade union (Phimister, 1977: 197). While this organisation allowed for wage increases – rising by 68% between 1939 and 1950 – it excluded African workers and reinforced the economic marginalisation of African labour nationally (Phimister, 1977: 197). This exclusion was no accident. White mineworkers in Matabeleland collaborated with mining companies to suppress African grievances, frequently acting as strike breakers and resisting any moves towards racial inclusion (Phimister, 1977: 198). By the late 1940s, some white mineworkers began to recognise the necessity of including African workers within their union, a shift motivated less by solidarity

⁶⁶ Following World War I, the return of white soldiers further saturated the labour market. In response, white miners formed the Rhodesia Mine and General Workers' Association (RMGWA) in 1919, demanding a 25% wage increase and a 48-hour workweek (Phimister, 1977: 194). Yet the RMGWA collapsed by 1923 following internal conflict, predominantly within the Umvuma branch (18% of the union's membership), and a general lockout in 1921 (Phimister, 1977: 196).

⁶⁷ For clarity, while the vote happened in October 1922, the responsible government only came into force in 1923. The reference to the 1923 referendum marks the constitutional moment, not the balance itself as 1922 is the decision, and 1923 is the political settlement.

than by fears of losing control over African grievances and of the emergence of independent African unions (Phimister, 1977: 202). However, even then, white unionists opposed proposals to allow Africans to use explosives (Phimister, 1977: 200-203). While tentative discussions on multiracial unionism began after the 1945 African railway workers' strike, to reiterate, these were driven more by white fears of losing control than by genuine solidarity (Phimister, 1977: 202). For African workers in Matabeleland, particularly those connected to the historically significant Ndebele state, the colonial labour structure thus codified economic exclusion and social disenfranchisement.

The colonial administration deployed a series of legislative instruments that systematically dispossessed Black urban residents of land and rights. The 1930 Land Apportionment Act legally encoded racial segregation, setting aside prime land for white settlers and marginalising Africans to "Native Reserves" (Phimister, 2009). This framework was applied across the colony, forming the backbone of racialised spatial planning in both Salisbury (Harare) and Bulawayo. The Native Urban Areas Act (1923) and the Native Land Husbandry Act (1951) further entrenched the logic of spatial and economic containment. This legislation transformed African residency into a privilege rather than a right, allowing municipalities to evict, control, and discipline African workers through passes, curfews, and permit systems (Musemwa, 2006).

Urban African residents in Bulawayo were subject to spatial planning rooted in racial segregation. Access to housing was deliberately racialised. European suburbs were spacious and well-serviced, while African townships were overcrowded and under-resourced (Hutton, 2018: 102-103). This system mirrored the broader colonial project of segregated urbanism, visible in Salisbury (now Harare), Gwelo (now Gweru), and Umtali (now Mutare), though Bulawayo's geography and industrial scale meant its African suburbs became distinctive centres of political and cultural organisation. Municipal housing schemes were not neutral provisions of welfare but instruments of surveillance and control. Lease agreements included behavioural clauses, and housing allocations were closely tied to political compliance and labour discipline. Policies such as the Native (Urban Areas) Accommodation and Registration Act and subsequent urban renewal projects in the 1950s-1970s displaced African populations under the guise of sanitation and modernisation (Hutton, 2018: 293-294). Africans were relocated into high-density suburbs like Phelandaba and Tshabalala, often situated far from economic centres, which contributed to economic and social exclusion.

Bulawayo's oldest African suburb, Makhokhoba, illuminates how, despite the fact that settler colonial planning placed African workers in tightly controlled, surveilled spaces near industrial zones but distant from settler suburbs, Bulawayo became a critical centre for socio-political interaction among Africans. Located close to Renkini bus terminus, and the smokestacks of Bulawayo's factories, Makhokhoba became the symbolic and practical hub of African urban life (Hutton, 2018: 230). Makhokhoba's "Big Bhawa" was more than the township's main *watering hole*. Reputedly the largest beer hall and garden complex in Southern Africa, municipal records⁶⁸ noted over 52,000 patrons passing through its gates on a single Saturday in 1970 (Ndubiwa, 1974: 78, in Hutton, 2018, 230). Situated next to the Renkini bus terminus (~2.3 km apart), it served as

⁶⁸ See M. Ndubiwa, *Urban Community Study* (Bulawayo, Housing and Amenities Department, 1974), p. 78/BCCA.

a crossroads where rural visitors, daily commuters, and township residents converged (Hutton, 2018: 230). This interaction of ideology, class, and lived experience, was a brewing pot for politically charged exchange. “Big Bhawa” was not only a social hub and has been memorialised by Bulawayo’s residents as a symbolic political and cultural site in the fight against colonial oppression. Often demonised by the colonial administration, beer halls in Bulawayo functioned simultaneously as sites of recreation, surveillance, and mobilisation (Hutton, 2018: 22-23, 258). As Hutton (2018: 22) notes, “heavy-handed crackdowns on shebeens and illicit brewing tended to provoke moral and political struggles between authorities and residents in many urban areas. These battles were waged along class and anti-colonial lines”. They provided an environment through which municipal authorities sought to monitor African urban life, even as they became spaces of cultural expression, networking, and at times, nationalist organising. Unsurprisingly then, Makhokhoba was the site of early trade union activity and African nationalist organising. Its spatial placement reflected the settler regime’s dual objective: to house and discipline African workers while minimising their visibility and influence in settler urban life.⁶⁹

Paradoxically, Bulawayo’s role as an industrial centre made it a focal point for both colonial paranoia and investment. By the 1940s and 1950s, the city attracted large numbers of African workers to the textile, railway, and manufacturing industries. However, their political mobilisation was regarded as a threat to white minority rule. The Rhodesian state thus amplified its urban militarisation apparatus. The British South Africa Police (BSAP), municipal security departments, and later the Special Branch, were deployed to monitor, suppress, and fragment Black political organisation (Ranger, 2007). Public assemblies were closely surveilled; political meetings were banned or infiltrated; and activists were detained without trial. African urban residents were seen primarily as a labour pool for the colonial economy. Their tenure in the city was conditional on employment status. Thus, as industrialisation in Bulawayo intensified, so did the need for tightly regulated urban African labour. This involved pass laws, movement restrictions, and employment-linked residency permits as central tools of control (Hutton, 2018: 73).

From the 1950s, as a wave of decolonial consciousness swept the continent, settler anxiety in Rhodesia metastasised into a heavily securitised state. Policing was reinforced not only through the British South Africa Police (BSAP) –the colonial paramilitary force –but also through new legislation such as the Public Order Act (1955) and the Law and Order (Maintenance) Act (1960) which criminalised “dissent” and allowed for indefinite detention (Alexander et al., 2000). In Bulawayo, African township locations such as Makhokhoba and Mzilikazi became targets of daily surveillance and nocturnal raids under the pretext of “maintaining order”. Informant networks were cultivated, and curfews were periodically imposed, especially during national protests or labour strikes (Scarnecchia, 2008). Municipal authorities, under pressure from Salisbury, collaborated closely with security forces to contain Bulawayo’s perceived “hotbeds” of political activity and “dissent”. This coercive infrastructure blurred the lines between urban governance and militarised containment (Hutton, 2018).

⁶⁹ This logic of segregationist planning, replicated across Rhodesian cities such as Salisbury in Mbare which is 3.5km from industrial Southerton, and Highfield which is 1.5km from industrial Willowvale. This reinforced racial hierarchies in urban space and produced enduring spatial inequalities that remain visible in Zimbabwe today.

Urban planning also became a key instrument of securitisation. Bulawayo's spatial design was adapted to isolate African townships from white suburbs, with buffer zones, limited transport access, and controlled permits for African movement into commercial districts (Museumwa, 2006). These measures were not merely for administrative convenience; they were deeply embedded in the settler imaginary of African urbanism as an inherently destabilising force. Further, the introduction of Native Councils (allegedly to represent African interests) was, in reality, a tool for decentralised surveillance. Chiefs and headmen were co-opted as state collaborators in maintaining "peace" within their constituencies (Ranger, 2007). Those who refused were either forcibly removed or politically neutralised.

Urban Exclusion Parallel to Liberation Tensions

I. Racialised Militarisation and the Rhodesian African Rifles

From the 1940s onwards, the settler colonial state in Rhodesia had been marked by an intensification of militarisation and securitisation, especially in urban centres such as Bulawayo. As the second-largest city and industrial heart of the colony, Bulawayo was simultaneously critical to Rhodesian economic ambitions and feared by the settler regime for its African political organising potential (Bratton, 2016; Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2010). What emerged was a paradoxical security framework where Bulawayo was both policed as a potential site of subversion and harnessed as a manpower reservoir for settler defence ambitions. Schools, churches, and trade unions were infiltrated. Several youths were forcibly conscripted or monitored. Paranoia surrounding the growing armed liberation struggle, particularly ZAPU's alignment with ZIPRA, led to a zero-tolerance approach towards any signs of mobilisation (Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2010; Mlambo, 2009).

The establishment and use of the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) serves as an anchor for understanding settler militarisation as both a tool of control and colonial expediency. Founded in 1940, the RAR was a unit of Black African soldiers under white command, ostensibly established to support the British Empire during the Second World War (Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2010: 22-24). Many soldiers were recruited from Matabeleland and surrounding districts, entrenching the perception of the Ndebele region as a militarily reliable but politically subordinate reserve (Moorcraft & McLaughlin). Although these soldiers served with distinction in campaigns in Burma and Malaya, the position of the African soldiers of the RAR's return to Rhodesia was marked by exclusion: they were denied pensions, land, and social status accorded to white veterans. This contradiction of military service excellence abroad followed by disenfranchisement at home, seeded resentment and sharpened political consciousness among returning veterans and their communities in Bulawayo (Mlambo, 2014). Given the race and class conditions at the time, thinking in hindsight, this disenfranchisement was not at all surprising. As an interpretive caution, it is important to resist drawing a direct or deterministic line between the RAR and ZIPRA, since doing so risks reproducing narratives in popular memory that cast ZAPU/ZIPRA's subsequent political marginalisation through the reductive lens of "betrayal" or "selling out". While some former RAR soldiers did contribute their skills to nationalist

organisations, the more immediate antecedents to pre- and post-independence violent encounters between ZIPRA and ZANLA cadres (including the clashes of Mgagao in 1976 and Entumbane in 1981) lay in earlier fissures between ZANU and ZAPU in the 1960s and especially in the 1970s. The RAR legacy should therefore be understood as one element in a broader landscape of militarised governance and contested loyalties: a reminder that colonial militarisation both constrained African agency and, paradoxically, created experiences that later fuelled mobilisation against the state.

These contradictions further heightened political consciousness, particularly in Matabeleland where the discrepancy between wartime service and peacetime disenfranchisement bred resentment, thus laying the groundwork for political mobilisation and, later, uprising. While Salisbury (now Harare) remained the administrative capital, Bulawayo emerged as the epicentre of early African nationalist politics. By 1957, the Southern Rhodesia African National Congress (SRANC), often referred to simply as “the ANC”, and later becoming ZAPU, was formed in Bulawayo on 17 December 1961 (Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2010: 24). It was the first modern African nationalist party under the leadership of Joshua Nkomo⁷⁰. Its formation marked the convergence of mounting African frustration with the rigid resistance of the white settler regime – an encounter that culminated in widespread political unrest. The contradictions of Bulawayo’s colonial condition deepened with the rise of African nationalism. It was in Bulawayo that trade unions gained strength and nationalist movements such as SRANC had their most active bases (Scarnecchia, 2008). In response, white authorities moved swiftly to suppress internal advocates for reform – most notably through the ousting of liberal Prime Minister Garfield Todd in 1957 – and intensified efforts to restrict African political mobilisation.

Ironically, despite constraints, African education and literacy levels increased, especially among Bulawayo’s youth. This produced a generation of politically conscious residents, some of whom later formed the backbone of ZIPRA and urban nationalist organising (Hutton, 2018: 76). Urban residents engaged in symbolic and material resistance, including boycotts, subversive publications, and informal organising in community spaces. The resulting racialised military hierarchy, where loyalty was assumed but political agency was denied, would have enduring consequences.

The period between 1959 and 1960 marked a pivotal moment in Bulawayo’s urban governance, revealing sharp tensions between municipal pragmatism and centralised repression. While local administrators like Dr Hugh Ashton⁷¹ attempted a more conciliatory stance, occasionally engaging African residents and acknowledging socio-economic grievances, the central Rhodesian state conversely consistently undercut these efforts through repressive interventions

⁷⁰ Joshua Nkomo was elected as the president of the Bulawayo-based chapter of the ANC in 1952. The organisation later evolved into the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU).

⁷¹ Hugh Ashton served as Bulawayo’s Native (later African) Commissioner during the late colonial period and later as Chief Native Commissioner for the Southern Rhodesian government. Known for his attempts to mediate between settler demands and African grievances, Ashton adopted what Hutton (2018) terms “pragmatic paternalism”, often seeking dialogue while remaining loyal to settler governance logics. His writings and administrative reports provide rare insight into the internal contradictions of colonial urban management, as well as the limits of municipal reformism under an increasingly militarised state. See Hutton (2018) for detailed insights.

(Hutton, 2018: 73-74). The state did not let up and responded with intensified suppression imposing township curfews and police raids, whereas the monitoring of churches and civic associations became normative. The suppression was however met with pushback. This was particularly evident during the *zhii* riots of July 1960⁷², which caused over £80,000 in damage to Council property and were sparked by a last-minute state ban on a National Democratic Party meeting Ashton had initially approved (Nehwati, 1970; Ranger, 2010). Ashton downplayed the political nature of the riots which persisted until 1964 when the African nationalist movements moved to the countryside to fight in the national armed struggle (Hutton, 2018: 75). Ashton attributed the socio-political unrest instead to unemployment, drought-induced migration, and intra-community tensions over housing and services (Hutton, 2018: 75). Nevertheless, the scale of unrest exposed the inadequacy of the city's local policing infrastructure without funding from the central government (Hutton, 2018: 75-76).

More telling, however, was Ashton's belief that African political mobilisation stemmed primarily from peer pressure and intimidation rather than genuine ideological commitment, a view that underestimated the depth of the African grassroots nationalist sentiment. As Karekwaivanane (2017: 81) incisively observes, settler governments in the 1950s expanded their arsenal of repressive legislation to include: the Subversive Activities Act (1950), Public Order Act (1955), Unlawful Organisations Act (1959), Preventive Detention Act (1959), and the notorious Law and Order Maintenance Act (1960). These were not simply installed to regulate public order, but to criminalise African political expression under a thin veneer of legality. In independent Zimbabwe, this trend has continued with the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) of 2002, and the Maintenance of Peace and Order Act (MOPA) of 2019, which are assented to as politically legitimating provisions of violence within the law, and maintain cyclical legacies of colonial repression (Bratton, 2016: 237). In Bulawayo, these colonial and post-independence laws have functioned symbiotically with racialised urban planning and overstretched policing to reframe African dissent as deviance, thereby entrenching a legacy of a political culture of securitisation in the name of stability.

II. The Militarised City on the Eve of UDI

With Ian Smith's Unilateral Declaration of Independence (UDI) in 1965, Rhodesian securitisation entered a more aggressive phase, escalating militarised governance across Southern Rhodesia. Bulawayo, due to its proximity to Zambia and Botswana, became a strategic military zone, with the regime fearing that its location made it vulnerable to external insurgency and internal collaboration (Mlambo, 2009; Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2010). In response, the BSAP and the Rhodesian Special Branch expanded their presence in the city, implementing dragnet arrests and mass interrogations, and suppressing political organisations like ZAPU which had deep roots in Matabeleland. Entire districts were labelled "subversive zones", and by the 1970s Bulawayo had become one of the most militarily patrolled urban spaces in Rhodesia (Moorcraft & McLaughlin, 2010). More broadly, under UDI the state was increasingly governed through emergency

⁷² These riots took place in Bulawayo and marked an early manifestation of confrontational African nationalism, driven by economic hardship and political repression, revealing an urban solidarity which transcended tribal divisions and escalated nationalist confrontation with the state in Rhodesia. Notably, the riots led to the destruction of shops and beer halls.

legislation, enforced by an expanding security apparatus. While the armed liberation war was largely fought in the countryside, urban areas such as Bulawayo served as critical logistical and symbolic spaces. The state heavily patrolled urban peripheries, monitored potential guerrilla sympathisers, and enacted economic sanctions that further marginalised urban Africans (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a). Racial capitalism in this era was violent not only in its economic structures, but also in the symbolic silencing of dissenting urban voices.

III. The Beginning of the End: A Regional Détente

In 1974, Rhodesia became the focus of a regional détente effort, with Prime Minister Ian Smith holding secret talks with nationalist leaders such as Joshua Nkomo and Ndabaningi Sithole, encouraged by South Africa and neighbouring states. Though intended to secure a political settlement, the initiative collapsed amid deep divisions and competing claims to power (Coltart, 2016: 38-70). The 1974 détente in Rhodesia was a short-lived attempt at a negotiated settlement, driven largely by regional and South African pressure. By the early 1970s, the liberation war was intensifying, with the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA)⁷³ operating from Zambia and Angola under the Soviet Union, while the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA)⁷⁴ operated from Tanzania and Mozambique under China. Apartheid South Africa's Prime Minister B.J. Vorster, seeking to ease international isolation and regional instability, partnered with President Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia to initiate talks with Southern Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith. By December 1974, the détente produced a ceasefire and the creation of the African National Council (ANC) under Bishop Abel Muzorewa, which sought to unite nationalist leaders, including Joshua Nkomo (ZAPU) and Ndabaningi Sithole (ZANU). A key outcome was Smith's release of detained nationalists, among them ZANU leaders Robert Mugabe, Edgar Tekere, and Enos Nkala, who had been imprisoned since 1964. However, the ceasefire quickly disintegrated, as guerrilla fighters refused to disarm and tensions between ZANU and ZAPU undermined the ANC.

The initiative collapsed by 1975, particularly after Mozambique's independence in June of that year provided ZANLA with secure operational bases from which to escalate the war. Although the détente failed to achieve a political settlement as a result of Rhodesian intransigence, nationalist disunity, and weak external guarantees, it inadvertently revitalised the liberation struggle, especially that of ZANU, whose newly released leaders reorganised and intensified the armed campaign. However, the détente efforts led by Kaunda and Vorster in 1974, together with the arrest in 1975 of much of ZANU's High Command⁷⁵, significantly disrupted ZANLA's guerrilla campaign, which was largely suspended from April 1975 to January 1976. Following the détente, ZANLA operations were paralysed, with fighters confined to camps such as Mgagao in Tanzania (Tendi, 2020b: 68). Notably, any examination of Zimbabwe's political and civil-military history is incomplete without reference to the events that unfolded at Mgagao, a key ZANLA training camp. It is therefore important to pause and reflect on its legacies.

⁷³ The armed wing of ZAPU.

⁷⁴ The armed wing of ZANU.

⁷⁵ Following accusations of involvement in the assassination of Herbert Chitepo – a founding member of ZANU. See Tendi, 2020b.

IV. Mgagao as a Site of Ideological Reconfiguration

Mgagao camp became a focal point of dissent against Ndabaningi Sithole's presidency of ZANU⁷⁶, stemming from his perceived indifference to the suffering of guerrillas and civilians, as well as his lack of commitment to pursuing the armed struggle. Dissatisfaction among cadres was fuelled by Sithole's failure to press for the release of imprisoned ZANU leaders and his reluctance to articulate a clear strategy for prosecuting the war (Tendi, 2020b: 68-69). The camp's significance lies in the pivotal role it played in reshaping the liberation movement, most notably with regard to the rejection of Sithole's leadership and the subsequent rise of Robert Mugabe as ZANU leader in March 1975 (Tendi, 2020b: 72).

By October 1975, ZANLA cadres at Mgagao drafted the Mgagao Declaration⁷⁷, which denounced Ndabaningi Sithole's leadership, proposed Robert Mugabe as an alternative leader, and reaffirmed their commitment to the armed struggle. The Declaration was subsequently leaked to the media, creating tensions but also generating renewed support for its authors, particularly from Mozambique's President Samora Machel, who had initially backed Sithole (Tendi, 2020b: 72-75). The events at Mgagao underscored the deep divisions within ZANU and ZANLA. These tensions persisted and later shaped critical developments, including the collapse of ZIPA⁷⁸ and subsequent purges (Tendi, 2020b: 80). Mgagao thus became both a symbol of resistance against ineffective leadership and a rallying point for the liberation struggle. The transition from Sithole to Mugabe in 1975 proved pivotal for ZANU's cohesion and renewed focus on the armed campaign. The activities at the camp, and the Declaration itself, helped secure crucial backing from Tanzania, Mozambique, and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU)⁷⁹ Liberation Committee, strengthening the momentum of the war effort (Tendi, 2020b: 75).

The OAU Liberation Committee, together with leaders of the Frontline States⁸⁰, strongly pressed for the unification of the Zimbabwean liberation movements. Frustrated by the divisions and infighting among nationalist groups, they regarded such disunity as undermining the broader objective of defeating Ian Smith's Rhodesian regime (Tendi, 2020b: 74-75). Dependent on the OAU and the Frontline States for logistical support, ZIPRA and ZANLA were compelled to enter what Tendi terms "the unity of illusion", agreeing to form the Zimbabwe People's Army (ZIPA)

⁷⁶ Sithole was President of ZANU from 1963 to 1975.

⁷⁷ The Mgagao Declaration also appealed for support from Tanzania, Mozambique, and the OAU Liberation Committee. The Declaration criticised the Zambian authorities for the shootings and mistreatment of ZANLA fighters at Mboroma, while also sharply rebuking nationalist politicians for their factionalism. Copies of the Declaration were dispatched to the OAU Liberation Committee, to Julius Nyerere, and to the Mozambican embassy in Dar es Salaam. A further copy was sent to Chiwara, ZANU's representative in Britain, as a safeguard, with instructions to make it public if any hostile measures were taken against the movement. See Tendi, 2020b: 72.

⁷⁸ ZIPA (Zimbabwe People's Army) was a short-lived guerrilla force formed in 1975 after the collapse of the détente. It emerged mainly from ZANLA (ZANU's armed wing) cadres, especially the younger generation of fighters trained in Tanzania and Mozambique. ZIPA sought to unify and revitalise the armed struggle, but it remained essentially ZANLA-dominated and was never truly merged with ZIPRA (ZAPU's armed wing). By late 1976, ZIPA was sidelined as Robert Mugabe consolidated his leadership of ZANU and reasserted control over ZANLA forces.

⁷⁹ The OAU refers to the Organisation of African Unity (established in 1963) which preceded the African Union (established in 2002).

⁸⁰ In particular, President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and President Samora Machel of Mozambique.

under the overall command of Solomon Mujuru, known by his *nom-de-guerre* Rex Nhongo (Tendi, 2020b: 75). ZIPA was conceived as a joint military structure, with leadership positions divided between ZANLA and ZIPRA. ZANLA had 570 untrained men at Morogoro while ZIPRA had 137 men with two years of training at Mgagao (Tendi, 2020b: 79). The mix of trained and untrained men with differing ideologies and training techniques was bound to cause tension. Further, as Tendi (2020b: 79) rightly observes, the unity between the two guerrilla forces was neither organic nor sustainable, and thus unlikely to endure.

ZIPRA and ZANLA were divided by fundamentally different military doctrines and political ideologies. Influenced by Soviet training, ZIPRA was structured as a conventional force, while ZANLA, inspired by Maoist guerrilla warfare, emphasised peasant mobilisation and protracted insurgency. These contrasting orientations were symbolised in their appearances: ZIPRA's smart uniforms and formal marching drills contrasted sharply with ZANLA's guerrilla-style simplicity, fuelling mutual resentment. At Mgagao, the situation was exacerbated by the presence of Chinese military instructors, who aligned with ZANLA and openly criticised ZIPRA's Soviet-backed approach, further straining relations between the two groups (Tendi, 2020b: 78-80). Despite mediation efforts by the Tanzanian government and the OAU Liberation Committee, the divisions between ZIPRA and ZANLA proved too deeply entrenched to be overcome by external pressure (Tendi, 2020b: 71-75).

V. Enduring Political Legacies: Mgagao as a Precursor to Post-Liberation Violence

Tensions between the two forces escalated at ZIPRA's Morogoro camp in April 1976 and then more explicitly at ZANLA's Mgagao camp in May 1976 (Tendi, 2020b). While accounts of these clashes vary, this thesis emphasises that these incidents deepened mistrust and animosity among the opposing guerrilla armies. Responsibility for the Mgagao incident shifts between ZANLA and ZIPRA, depending on the source; however, Tendi records an illustrative testimony from a ZANLA fighter recalling the trigger of the earlier confrontation:

We were watching Joshua Nkomo's talks with the Rhodesians and as they began to break down we [ZANLA] would sing, Nkomo riya ratswa. Nhasi ratswa. Nkomo nhasi ratswa. Makorokoto Nkomo nhasi ratswa [That Nkomo has been burned. Today he was burned. Congratulations, Nkomo was burned today]. The ZIPRA guys got fed up with this song and said, "This is our camp, today we will not give you food because you are singing nonsense all the time." An argument started over food. We were not going to tolerate going without food. We stormed the food storage house and took all the food. One of the ZIPRA instructors fired at us. I blame him for making the situation worse. The ZANLA comrades started running away shouting *tapera tapera* [trans. "we are finished"] (p.79).

The mocking chant, "*Nkomo has been burned. Today he was burned. Congratulations, Nkomo was burned today*", sung by ZANLA cadres at Mgagao, shows how songs – an everyday part of guerrilla training, mobilisation, and morale-building⁸¹ – were also deployed as weapons of rivalry

⁸¹ Scholars have long noted the centrality of song in African liberation struggles. Ranger (1985b) highlighted how Chimurenga songs in Zimbabwe functioned as vehicles of history and political education; Alexander et

within the two liberation movements. While guerrilla songs often served to mobilise, unify, and articulate ideology, this chant belittled Joshua Nkomo, the emblematic leader of ZAPU and ZIPRA, portraying him as defeated and politically irrelevant. For ZIPRA fighters, many of whom drew identity and loyalty from Nkomo's leadership and the broader constituency he represented, the taunt carried both deep political and ethnic insult, provoking open confrontation. The song illustrates how cultural practices within the opposing guerrilla armies entrenched division and disunity, thus heightening simmering ethnopolitical suspicions between ZANLA and ZIPRA. These divisions were not only military and ideological (Maoist guerrilla war for ZANLA versus Soviet conventionalism for ZIPRA) but also cultural and ethnic, foreshadowing the post-independence marginalisation of Bulawayo and Nguni-speaking political agency under ZANU-PF. In this sense, the Mgagao incident shows how the liberation struggle incubated practices of symbolic and material exclusion, with songs such as the aforementioned helping to create conditions that anticipated the ethnicised violence of the Gukurahundi in the 1980s and the enduring fractures in Zimbabwe's nationalist politics.

The shootings that followed deepened animosity and distrust between ZIPRA and ZANLA, fatally undermining the externally imposed unity project of ZIPA. The Tanzanian authorities intervened, arresting ZANLA ringleaders and branding them as "sell-outs" (Tendi, 2020b: 79). A joint ZIPRA-ZANLA tribunal, overseen by the Tanzanian army, was eventually disbanded following negotiations between guerrilla leaders and President Julius Nyerere. The aftermath of these events accentuated the ideological and operational divisions between the two armies. The clashes at Mgagao demonstrated the difficulty of imposing unity on two structurally and ideologically divergent liberation forces, entrenching a rivalry that has persisted beyond independence and has continued to shape post-independence politics in Zimbabwe.

VI. Clashes at the Camps

The Mgagao Massacre of May 1976⁸², which remains a source of indignation among ZIPRA veterans, saw fifty unarmed ZIPRA trainees shot dead (Alexander & McGregor, 2020: 628; Sibanda, 2024). In an interview featured in the *Sunday News*, Cde Tapson Ncube, *nom-de-guerre* Makhula Thebe, refers to the incident as "a sad chapter in our armed struggle" (*Sunday News*, 2019). These killings intensified hostility and mistrust between ZIPRA and ZANLA, contributing to the weakening of ZIPA's unity project. The shootings at Mgagao deepened divisions between the two forces, fuelled by ideological differences, mutual distrust and competition for dominance, and they further fractured the unity efforts (Tendi, 2020b: 80). These developments are often retrospectively framed as ethnic conflict spilling into the post-independence period. For instance, commonly referred to as the Battle of Bulawayo, the 1981 Entumbane Risings (see Chapters 5-7 of this thesis) are described by Luise White (2007: 619) as a "mutiny" and illustrate how liberation-war cleavages, which are often framed as Ndebele/Shona ethnic tensions, spilled into the immediate post-independence period (L. White, 2007: 623).

al. (2000) have pointed out that songs could also reinforce exclusion, mock rivals, or express dissent; and Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009b: 72, 103, 135) speaks to the importance of song in nation building, social commentary, and in the Ndebele state under King Mzilikazi. The Mgagao chant against Nkomo must be read within this broader historiography: as a cultural form that both mobilised fighters and entrenched factional and ethnic divisions.

⁸² Some accounts cite this incident as having occurred on 6 June 1976. See *Sunday News*, 2019.

Scholars however caution against such simplistic readings of political history, emphasising instead intra-liberation rivalries and political loyalties, within which ethnicity operated implicitly rather than overtly. Alexander and McGregor (2004: 80, 81-82, 90) emphasise the cadres' avoidance in discussing ethnicity and social divisions, even though these were significant factors in the liberation war and its aftermath. Instead, ZIPRA accounts focus on political loyalty and the conflicts within the liberation movement, particularly with ZANLA and its external backers. This silence with regard to ethnicity contrasts with other analyses of the liberation war, which highlight ethnic tensions, such as ZIPRA's association with the Ndebele-speaking regions of Matabeleland and ZANLA's focus on Shona-speaking areas. The omission of ethnicity in ZIPRA narratives reflects an effort to emphasise their (ZAPU's) professionalism, political commitment, and shared experiences as soldiers, rather than the divisive ethnic dynamics that shaped the liberation movement and the post-independence politics of ZANU-PF. Alexander and McGregor (2004) acknowledge that the ethnic dynamics spoke significant volumes in the midst of silent articulation, and particularly, in the post-independence repression of ZIPRA veterans and civilians associated with ZAPU. The dominance of ZANU-PF and ZANLA in post-independence Zimbabwe led to the marginalisation of ZIPRA and ZAPU in the official history of the liberation war, which will be discussed throughout this thesis. As will be explained, ZIPRA guerrillas were persecuted after independence, not only as political opponents but also as representatives of the Ndebele-speaking minority (Alexander & McGregor, 2004: 81-82). This exclusion reinforced ethnic divisions, as the liberation contributions of ZIPRA guerrillas and the Matabeleland regions were downplayed in favour of a narrative centred on ZANLA and Mashonaland (Alexander & McGregor, 2004: 81, 96).

Mgagao is a representation of the foundational difficulty of imposing unity on two fundamentally different liberation armies, and of the rivalry between ZIPRA and ZANLA which has continued to shape post-independence politics in Zimbabwe. Their ideological and operational divisions became even more entrenched, and were later reflected in Zimbabwe's political settlements (Tendi, 2020b: 75-80). These were particularly evident in the 1987 Unity Accord which eventually dismantled ZAPU, and they are still visible in 2025 under the dominance of a ZANU-PF-led government (Bratton, 2016: 46-47; Moyo, 2015: 161; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003: 31-33; Rupiya, 2003: 252).⁸³

VII. An Urban Legacy of Professionalism and Betrayal

Examining the military training of ZIPRA soldiers is essential to understanding the post-independence politics of disadvantage between ZAPU and ZANU, particularly in relation to Bulawayo. Military formation shaped not only wartime identities but also post-independence hierarchies of inclusion and exclusion for the purposes of ZANU-PF's survival. Bulawayo remains the urban site where memories of military professionalism and betrayal are intertwined, reinforcing its symbolic position as a locus of systemic marginalisation in the first decade of Zimbabwe's independence settlement (see Chapters 5-7 of this thesis).

⁸³ See Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 of this thesis for a discussion of how the 1987 Unity Accord institutionalised ZANU-PF dominance.

During the late 1970s, ZIPRA cadres trained by Cuban and Soviet instructors in Angola developed a distinct “military imaginary” grounded in discipline, mastery of Soviet weaponry, and internationalist solidarity (Alexander & McGregor, 2020: 626, 638-639). Veterans often recalled this as a pathway to “professionalism”,⁸⁴ thus encompassing technical skill, political education, and an ethic of resistance against an exploitative system. ZIPRA’s training ethos stood in deliberate contrast to ZANLA’s methods, which were frequently caricatured as poorly disciplined (Alexander & McGregor, 2020, 2020: 626, 650).

Oral histories further suggest that Angolan-trained veterans distinguished themselves from both earlier guerrilla recruits and cadres trained in Zambia, claiming superior tactical preparation and stronger cohesion (Alexander & McGregor, 2020). This confidence occasionally generated tensions within ZIPRA, yet these soldiers were still regarded as the “backbone” of the movement’s military capacity (Alexander & McGregor, 2020: 648). The divergent training regimes across ZIPRA and ZANLA deepened wartime suspicions and became central to post-1980 interpretations of loyalty and legitimacy.

These militarised experiences later translated into political hierarchies and ideological exclusion which was determined by the spatial strongholds of the two guerrilla armies. ZIPRA’s Soviet-inspired doctrine of discipline and command was perceived as threatening by a ZANU-led state, reinforcing suspicions that ZIPRA and ZAPU were political strategists rather than partners in the liberation project. For many veterans and Bulawayo residents, the memory of wartime purges such as Mgagao, and later Gukurahundi, as a structural continuum of the Massacres of 1983-1987 (Ndlovu, 2019; see Chapter 7 of this thesis), was interpreted by many ZIPRA veterans and Bulawayo residents as the continuation of wartime hostilities, repackaged through state-sanctioned disadvantage. Together, these experiences and perceptions reinforce Bulawayo’s position as a symbol of betrayed nationalist aspirations and enduring regional inequality.

Distinguishing Ideological, Ethnic, and Operational Conflict in ZIPRA-ZANLA Rivalries

The position of this thesis is that while the conflict between ZIPRA and ZANLA is often interpreted through an ethnic lens (see Alexander & McGregor, 2020) - particularly in post-independence narratives for the benefit of mythicised exclusionary political agendas as noted above - the sources of tension between the two liberation groups remain multifaceted (L. White, 2007). The dynamics of training, identity, and memory point to the core of the liberation movement’s internal fractures. In essence, the ZIPRA-ZANLA tensions were never simply ethnic, but instead rooted in intersecting ideological and operational divides. Ideological conflict emerged from the competing political visions of ZAPU and ZANU (Alexander & McGregor, 2020; Sibanda, 2024). ZIPRA adopted a conventional warfare doctrine emphasising military discipline, hierarchical command, and urban-centred revolution (Alexander & McGregor, 2020). ZANLA, by contrast, embraced principles, privileging protracted rural insurgency, mass mobilisation of the peasantry, and ideological indoctrination as part of its war strategy. These divergent revolutionary paradigms shaped not only battlefield tactics but also conceptions of

⁸⁴ This was characterised by skill in weapon handling, survival in nature, mastery of fear, strict discipline and the cultivation of a political consciousness that framed the war as resistance against an exploitative system rather than simply a struggle against white minority rule (Alexander & McGregor, 2020: 626).

legitimacy, loyalty, and what constituted “proper” revolutionary conduct (Alexander & McGregor, 2020).

Operational conflict arose from the incompatibility of these doctrines in practical terms (Tendi, 2020b). The attempted merger under ZIPA forced both armies into shared spaces without reconciling their training methods, command structures, or levels of preparedness. ZIPRA’s preference for disciplined drills, formal attire, and strategic restraint clashed with ZANLA’s emphasis on improvisational guerrilla action and symbolic defiance (Alexander & McGregor, 2020). This tension was further exacerbated by uneven troop readiness between ZIPRA’s Morogoro base and ZANLA’s Mgagao base. Operational discord, including disputes over resource control, leadership hierarchy, and rules of engagement, thus reinforced existing suspicions.

Mistrust, much of which carried over from precolonial and British (pre-Rhodesian state) colonialism, while often denied by nationalist leadership, is seen between the two forces (Tendi, 2020b). Though both parties espoused pan-African nationalism, and both parties’ leadership blurred ethnic lines, ethnic identities were reactivated through song, symbolism, and spatial practices such as language-based grouping in camps and the targeting of individuals aligned with specific leaders. However, these boundaries were not rigid. Ethnic insults were often embedded within ideological denunciations; operational disagreements were interpreted through ethnicised frames; and military rivalries were sustained by deeper political agendas (Tendi, 2020b). The convergence of these tensions, for example during the Mgagao massacre, reveal that what appeared as ethnic antagonism, was often the surface expression of deeper ideological and operational fissures which were exacerbated by the strain of exile, pressure from external patrons, and unresolved questions of leadership within the liberation movement.

Understanding these distinctions and their entanglements is crucial to avoid reductive analyses that see the ZIPRA-ZANLA conflict solely as “tribal”. Instead, it should be read as the product of a fractured liberation trajectory in which different revolutionary models, strategic logics, and socio-political identities collided under the weight of external pressures and internal contestation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011b; Scarnecchia, 2025). These layered conflicts did not end with independence but were carried into the institutions, exclusions, and symbolic geographies of post-independent Zimbabwe, and are particularly relevant when unpacking the concept of disadvantage in Bulawayo and Matabeleland.

It was in this context that the manipulation of Shona-Ndebele tensions for political gain became a central strategy of ZANU-PF’s consolidation of power after independence. As Scarnecchia (2025: 263-265) argues, the claim that ZAPU and ZIPRA represented “Ndebele interests” while ZANU and ZANLA spoke for those of the Shona, was a dangerous adopted political myth, rather than a historical fact. This myth allowed the ruling party to delegitimise ZAPU’s national political claims by ethnicising political contestation, reducing it to tribal rivalry and rendering it inherently subversive. In doing so, ZANU-PF justified the marginalisation of Matabeleland and the purging of ZIPRA combatants and ZAPU supporters during Gukurahundi, redirecting scrutiny away from the state’s central role in orchestrating violence (Scarnecchia, 2025: 264-265).

This myth was weaponised both internally by ZANU-PF and externally by Western diplomats,

who framed the atrocities of the 1980s as ethnic conflict – thus avoiding accountability and reinforcing Cold War narratives of “tribal wars” in African states (Scarnecchia, 2025: 264). By recasting state repression as ethnic animosity, the regime concealed its political motives under a veneer of ethnic inevitability, allowing historical revisionism to take root in postcolonial national memory.

From Military Instrument to Political Flashpoint: RAR to Entumbane and Beyond

Though the 1978 Internal Settlement nominally gestured towards Black majority rule, it did not alter the core colonial political economy. Ironically however, the very instruments of settler militarisation would later become catalysts for its undoing. Many ex-RAR soldiers, disillusioned by Rhodesian betrayal, secretly aligned with nationalist movements, with some eventually joining ZIPRA’s ranks. The settler state persisted in its ethnicised securitisation, exploiting tensions between Ndebele and Shona groups for political gain (Eppel, 2013). In Bulawayo, this meant continued marginalisation under a governance system that feared the city’s historical identity as a site of resistance.

After independence in 1980, the former RAR soldiers’ military expertise and historical marginalisation made them both assets and liabilities to the new Zimbabwean state. Scarnecchia (2025: 265-266) emphasises that post-1980 ZANU-PF’s characterisation of ZAPU as a tribal rather than a national movement was instrumental in justifying political purges, military targeting, and the denial of full citizenship to Nkomo’s supporters after independence. The weaponisation of ruling party popular memory narratives, such as the reductive “sell-out” label against President Nkomo and ZIPRA veterans, rooted in ZANU’s liberation war propaganda, was repurposed post-independence to silence dissent and consolidate power. The legacies of this settler colonial era are imprinted in Bulawayo’s urban infrastructure, its political memory, and its marginal positioning in independent Zimbabwe.

This historical thread culminated in the Entumbane Risings of 1981, when ZIPRA and ex-RAR combatants clashed violently with the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), dominated by former ZANLA forces aligned with ZANU-PF. The conflict, situated in a former RAR and ZIPRA stronghold suburb of Bulawayo, exposed unresolved tensions rooted in colonial military co-option and postcolonial political betrayal (Kriger, 2003). As Scarnecchia (2025: 267-268) notes, this eruption of violence cannot be divorced from ZANU-PF’s long-standing strategy to eliminate ZAPU as a political threat. Mugabe had begun to posit this rhetoric in a 1979 speech, invoking “Gukurahundi” as the People’s Storm which “must come with thunder, heavy rain and irresistible blasting gusts that will ransack the enemy strongholds”. He continued: “... [W]e want total power. And this we shall have” (Scarnecchia, 2025: 266). Mugabe’s intention to use state power to dismantle Nkomo’s political base was evident well before the onset of Gukurahundi in 1982. The Entumbane Risings (see chapter 6 of this thesis) were thus more than a military confrontation; they were a symbolic rebellion against decades of securitised neglect and militarised governance. The state’s violent suppression of the Risings foreshadowed the Gukurahundi atrocities. In this sense, Bulawayo was not merely a battleground but a living archive of the long arc of militarisation from settler imperialism to post-independence authoritarianism.

Time Maps: The Politics of Remembrance, Memory, and Myths

Zerubavel's (2003) concept of time maps offers a compelling lens through which to examine how societies mentally organise and interpret historical time. Rather than conceiving of the past as a continuous, objective chronology, time maps represent collectively constructed frameworks that "chunk" time into discrete, symbolically charged episodes (Zerubavel, 2003: 23, 31-33). These mnemonic structures such as "the pre-colonial era", "the colonial era" or "the liberation struggle" simplify historical complexity and anchor collective memory in emotionally and morally resonant events (Zerubavel, 2003: 41-44). Zerubavel (2003: 55-67) rightly argues that these narratives are rarely neutral; rather, they are curated to produce a coherent sense of identity and legitimacy, often by privileging some memories while silencing others. Crucially, time maps also involve strategic silencing and forgetting, selecting some pasts for remembrance while relegating others to oblivion in service of present social or political goals (Zerubavel, 2003: 71-72, 83-84). This conceptualisation is particularly useful for understanding how memory, myth, and marginalisation are intertwined in the ongoing politics of Ndebele nationalism in Zimbabwe.

Applied to the Ndebele experience, key moments such as 1893, the 1923 referendum, and the Gukuruhundi Massacres of 1982-1987⁸⁵ become inscribed as turning points within nationalist time maps of political dispossession and ethnonational betrayal⁸⁶. The 1893 conquest of the Ndebele state continues to be remembered not merely as a colonial episode but as the beginning of a national rupture that severed the imagined Mthwakazi from its sovereignty (M. Ndlovu, 2025: 189-190). This symbolic loss continues to structure nationalist claims to restoration and secession in contemporary discourse, with collective and digital platforms serving as conduits for reclaiming and amplifying such memory in 2025 (M. Ndlovu, 2025: 189-200). Similarly, the 1923 referendum, which united Matabeleland with Mashonaland under a settler-dominated Southern Rhodesian government, is recalled by Ndebele nationalists as a foundational moment of forced assimilation and political silencing that disregarded distinct historical trajectories (M. Ndlovu, 2025: 190). The outcome of the 1923 referendum reflected a wider political choice between settler self-government and union with South Africa, a dimension often muted in Ndebele nationalist memory, which instead reframes the episode as one of ethno-national betrayal and coerced incorporation.

For Bulawayo, the impact of the 1923 referendum was therefore twofold. Materially, it entrenched Salisbury (Harare) as the administrative and political capital of Southern Rhodesia, embedding state centralisation in a geography that structurally subordinated Bulawayo despite its industrial significance. Symbolically, the referendum has been reframed in Ndebele nationalist memory as a moment of betrayal and forced assimilation, reinforcing a sense of dispossession that continues to shape Bulawayo's identity (M. Ndlovu, 2025: 189). In this way, the episode exemplifies how political settlements and selective memory converge to produce both the material and symbolic dimensions of Bulawayo's long-term disadvantage. These settler-era milestones are retrospectively charged with meaning in ways that reflect Zerubavel's idea of

⁸⁵ See Chapter 7 of this thesis.

⁸⁶ See M. Ndlovu (2025: 179-204) for an account of how online regional separatism in 2025 draws upon key historical moments such as this.

moralised memory: they are not remembered for their historical occurrence alone but for what they have come to represent in the present, namely the erosion of Ndebele autonomy and the illegitimacy of Zimbabwe's post-independence territorial unity, particularly after the Gukurahundi Massacres (discussed briefly in Chapter 5 and extensively in Chapter 7 of this thesis). This temporal reframing not only contests the dominant historical narrative but actively forges an alternative national imaginary that repositions the settler period as the origin point of enduring marginalisation and resistance.

These turning points must also be read alongside symbolic moments of dispossession, particularly the treaties and concessions associated with King Lobengula. Drawing on both her fieldwork and Hilton-Barber's (2013) insights, N. Ndlovu (2019: 62-63) reflects on the power asymmetries embedded in practices such as signatures on paper, which evoked deep vulnerability and historical associations with colonial manipulation. The Moffat Treaty of Friendship (11 February 1888) and the Rudd Concession (30 October 1888) provide salient examples. Lobengula was convinced to cobble an "X" signature onto documents he understood as granting limited mineral rights, only for these to be manipulated into expansive concessions of his entire kingdom (N. Ndlovu, 2019: 62-63)⁸⁷. This act of symbolic dispossession reveals how miscommunication and legalistic manipulation became foundational to the colonial project in Zimbabwe, echoing Zerubavel's insight that selective memory and forgetting are central to the construction of political legitimacy. These episodes of coerced concession-making are therefore not only historical anecdotes but foundational to understanding Bulawayo's long-term disadvantage, as they symbolised the first moments in which sovereignty was undermined through deception rather than consent. In the context of this thesis, they exemplify how myths and memories of dispossession continue to shape political settlements and reinforce the marginalisation of Matabeleland within Zimbabwe's national trajectory.

Bringing these strands together, scholarly debates on ethnicity highlight how such mythicised events were not only remembered but also instrumentalised to fix identities that had historically been fluid. Notably, Ranger (1985, in Bratton, 2016: 36) underscores that incorporation into a centralised colonial state was not an everyday norm but rather a sporadic exception. He argues that cultural identities, particularly at the margins, remained fluid – countering colonial portrayals of rigid ethnic antagonism. The identities of "Shonanness" and "Ndebeleness" only began to crystallise in the late nineteenth century, shaped more by the movements, raids, and intermixing of pre-colonial societies than by intrinsic antagonism. Msindo (2010: 123-125) adds further nuance by challenging Ranger's (1970) earlier conception of the "African voice" and calling for a layered reading of how politicised ethnic identities continue to shape Zimbabwe's socio-political terrain today.

⁸⁷ As Keppel-Jones (1960: 75) highlights, Assistant Commissioner to Sir Sidney Shippard, John Smith Moffat, received instructions to arrange a treaty with King Lobengula. The king, however, wanted no more treaties and refused. Moffat, however, hoodwinked Lobengula into drafting his refusal in writing, and it resulted in him undertaking "not to enter into any correspondence or treaty with any foreign state, on any subject whatsoever, without the knowledge and sanction of Her Majesty's High Commissioner for South Africa". This was the Moffat Treaty of 11 February 1888, through which the British government received a competitive advantage over all foreign competitors despite it having no direct interest in Matabeleland at the time.

Within this frame, Bulawayo emerges as a critical site where these layered memories and myths converge. The political economy of the city remains deeply imprinted by efforts to rebut historical mythologies that continue to inform national power arrangements. The post-independence centralisation of power in Harare, the administrative stronghold of an ethnicised ZANU-PF, exemplifies this dynamic (Eppel, 2013). Competing mythicisations (some genuinely believed, others strategically exaggerated) have been woven into Zimbabwe's nation-building discourse. The structural trauma experienced by the Shona during colonial rule, and the historical resentments it engendered, continue to influence perceptions of Matabeleland and Bulawayo. Once the capital of the Ndebele kingdom and later an industrial stronghold of Southern Rhodesia, Bulawayo remains symbolically significant in these contested narratives. This thesis continues to unpack these historical legacies and their imagined futures in Chapters 5-8, particularly as they pertain to the evolution of political settlements and state-making in Zimbabwe.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Bulawayo's post-1980 marginalisation cannot be understood outside its long historical trajectory. The construction of the Ndebele state, later recast through colonial discourses of violence, provided the symbolic ground on which narratives of exclusion were built. Further, they paved the way for the asymmetrical political settlements that positioned Matabeleland as a conquered territory and reinforced Bulawayo's disadvantage.

Under settler colonialism, racially segmented labour regimes and segregationist urban planning deepened exclusion while paradoxically fostering African political mobilisation in townships such as Makhokhoba. During UDI (Unilateral Declaration of Independence), Bulawayo became simultaneously an industrial hub and a securitised space, where militarisation, surveillance, and the contradictions of the RAR incubated nationalist organising and sharpened fissures within the liberation movement. The liberation war, a microcosm of the Cold War⁸⁸, drew on divergences that later underpinned the mythicised narratives of 'dissent' that escalated into the Entumbane clashes and the violence of Gukurahundi as a continuum (N. Ndlovu, 2019; see Chapters 5 and 7 of this thesis).

Understanding the successive political settlements embedding compounded disadvantage into Bulawayo's governance and urban political order is foundational to engaging with the upcoming empirical chapters. The formative exclusions discussed in this chapter are not only material but symbolic, sustained through colonial and post-independence myths that cyclically resurface in memory, shaping how Bulawayo's residents remember, contest, and reimagine their beliefs, marginalisation, and dreams for prospective futures.

⁸⁸ See N. Ndlovu, 2019: 83-86 for the framing of Gukurahundi as an extension of Cold War politics.

