



Universiteit
Leiden

The Netherlands

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

Ndlovu, M.B.

Citation

Ndlovu, M. B. (2026, September 23). *Myth, memory, and political settlements in the city: compounded disadvantage and a path for plausible futures*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4310091>

Version: Publisher's Version

License: [Licence agreement concerning inclusion of doctoral thesis in the Institutional Repository of the University of Leiden](#)

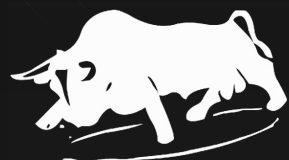
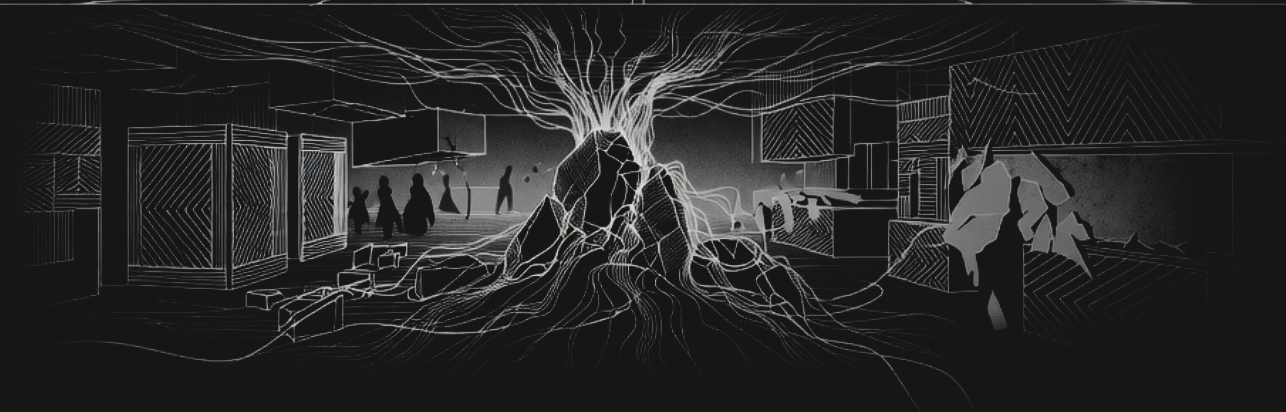
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/4310091>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

“UNEASY PEACE”:



UNRESOLVED TENSIONS AND VEILED HISTORIES



CHAPTER

07

7. “Uneasy Peace”: Unresolved Tensions and Veiled Histories²³¹

Introduction

The socio-political memory of the city of Bulawayo is of central focus to this chapter. The city's quest for peace epitomises the tensions and unresolved traumas of independent Zimbabwe. The city of Bulawayo has been a centre of both resistance and repression, where unresolved historical grievances overshadow an *uneasy peace* for its residents. The legacies of state-sponsored atrocities under Zimbabwe's ruling ZANU-PF party have perpetuated an *uneasy peace* within the Matabeleland region and in Bulawayo as the largest city in the region. Central to this chapter's argument is the critique of liberal peacebuilding frameworks that they often fail to address the complex intersections of historical trauma, cultural identity, and socio-economic inequalities unique to post-independent Zimbabwe (Richmond, 2009). This critique is framed through the lens of *uneasy peace* – a term that encapsulates the precarious stability observed in Bulawayo, marked by systemic denial, collective silence, and mythicised narratives. The chapter treats *uneasy peace* as operating simultaneously as a descriptive condition, an analytical framework, and a set of sustained practices, a distinction made explicit later in this chapter. In doing so, the chapter directly engages the overarching sub-question: *What forms of silence, memory, and myth have emerged as tools of both repression and resilience in Bulawayo's inhabitants' pursuit of peace?* The analysis demonstrates that silence in Bulawayo is neither merely imposed nor wholly passive. Instead, it operates as a layered social practice: at once a mechanism of state repression and a strategy of communal survival through which residents navigate unresolved violence, political exclusion, and everyday insecurity.

To elucidate these tensions, the chapter is structured around five key areas. First, it contextualises Bulawayo's history of marginalisation, particularly the impacts of the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi Massacres and subsequent political narratives. This historical context sets the foundation for exploring how myths and silences emerge as mechanisms that shape collective memory and sustain fragile peace. Second, it explores the role of myths, metaphors, and silences in shaping collective memory and sustaining fragile peace, building upon the historical marginalisation discussed earlier to show how these narratives contribute to the city's socio-political dynamics. Third, it seeks to explain the posited concept of *uneasy peace* and highlight its key tenets. Fourth, it critiques the liberal peace framework, arguing for a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach to peacebuilding, linking this critique to earlier discussions of historical marginalisation and the shaping of collective memory through silences and myths. Finally, it buttresses community as imperative to maintaining the fragile balance of *uneasy peace* with intergenerational insights. By examining these themes, the chapter contributes to the broader discourse on the state of peace, challenging normative assumptions of stability and justice within liberal paradigms in independent Zimbabwe.

²³¹ Major parts of this chapter are published in: Ndlovu, M.B. (2026). Uneasy Peace: Unresolved Tensions and Veiled Histories in Bulawayo. In: Tom, P., Tabalaka, A. & Kuo, S.C.Y. (Eds), *Critical Perspectives on Global Peace and Peacebuilding* (pp. 185-210). Cham: Springer Nature Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-17458-1_9

The chapter also interrogates a second guiding question: *How does Bulawayo's mythicised status as a 'dissident city' intersect with everyday practices of citizenship, survival, and affective agency?* The findings show that this mythicisation is not simply a top-down political label, but a lived condition that shapes how residents negotiate belonging, dignity, and survival. This is often through informal solidarities, strategic disengagement from the state, and affective attachments to place.

In examining Bulawayo's *uneasy peace*, this chapter situates Rubin's (2013) query about how memory shapes "new kinds of politics, publics, and feelings of national belonging" (as cited in Eppel, 2020: 279) within the city's lived realities in 2025. Methodologically, the chapter employs qualitative research drawn from fieldwork conducted between 2021 and 2024, including semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. These methods foreground the voices of Bulawayo's residents, whose experiences reveal the complex interplay between state-led denialism, community-driven resilience, and the lingering shadows of structural violence. The chapter critically juxtaposes the liberal peace paradigm with Bulawayo's lived experiences, illustrating the inadequacy of top-down peacebuilding models that neglect local histories and cultural dynamics (Pugh, 2005; Richmond, 2005).

Reflecting on positionality and participant gendered bias, as noted in Chapter 1, fears of political victimisation constrained women's participation. This makes the section "*Locating Silence: Spotlight on a Conversation with MaDhlamini*" particularly significant, as her reflections introduce a crucial gendered perspective into the analysis. At the same time, my positionality as a Ndebele-speaking researcher with an established social network in Bulawayo afforded particular advantages, enabling access to nuanced insights that are often less available to "outsider" researchers.

This chapter carries a particular analytical weight in delineating what is specific to Bulawayo's architecture of disadvantage. Where Chapter 6 engages conditions common to informal economies across Zimbabwe, this chapter returns explicitly to the historical and affective particularities that compound those generic pressures in Bulawayo: the unresolved trauma of Gukurahundi, the mythicisation of the city as 'dissident', and, as the testimonies revisited below make clear, an enduring Ndebele/Shona tension that surfaces even in the seemingly generic terrain of street vending. It is this layering of ordinary economic hardship experienced through the specific lens of historical and ethno-political exclusion that this chapter positions as the compounding mechanism at the heart of the thesis. Central to the historical backdrop of unresolved tension and *uneasy peace* are the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi Massacres.

Contextualising and Conceptualising Trauma and Peace in Bulawayo

A defining period framing unresolved tensions and veiled histories was that of the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi Massacres – a campaign of violence by the Fifth Brigade against perceived critical threat of dissidents in Matabeleland and the Midlands. Ostensibly targeting perceived ZAPU-linked dissent, the campaign was marked by atrocities against the people of Matabeleland, including mass killings, rapes, disappearances, and human rights abuses. The attack stemmed from suspicions over Joshua Nkomo's (ZAPU) involvement in the Vorster-Kaunda détente in

1975 (Bratton, 2016: 46). Further, the rise of “Super ZAPU”²³² posed a significant threat to ZANU’s political position (Meredith, 2002: 64, 2014: 628-629). However, Nkomo (1984: 154-162) contends that meetings with Sithole (ZANU), Muzorewa (ZAPU), President Kaunda of Zambia, Rhodesian Prime Minister Ian Smith, and South African Prime Minister Vorster, among others, were peace talks aimed at power-sharing and regional military cohesion. He considers the threat of ZAPU as a deflection from internal crises within ZANU and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (Nkomo, 1984: 158; Bratton, 2016: 50). The blitzkrieg-level²³³ use of blanket and overwhelming force concentration resulted in over 20,000 lives lost and a reported 400,000 people being displaced (Bratton, 2016: 50; CCJP, 1997: 30; Coltart, 2016: 149-155; Eppel, 2020: 260; Malunga, 2023: 127-132).

During the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi violence, approximately 20,000 ZAPU supporters were coerced into surrendering their ZAPU cards and purchasing ZANU-PF cards as a form of protection, consolidating ZANU’s power (Coltart, 2016: 150). This coercion mirrored human rights abuses under Ian Smith’s 1965 State of Emergency, when Midlands and Matabeleland citizens faced curfews, targeted killings, torture, rape, starvation, and other violations (Coltart, 2016: 149-155). The state’s denial of these atrocities through the 1987 Unity Accord and the Clemency Order (1) of 18 April 1988 under Section 3(1) of the Constitution, which were meant to foster elite peace (between ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU) and restore national security, only served to “conquer the last frontier of resistance to ZANU-PF hegemony” (Bratton, 2016: 55). Moreover, there was a further entrenched culture of silence, leaving survivors grappling with grief and systemic erasure. This political culture has fostered an *uneasy peace* in the Matabeleland region and its largest city.

The 8-12 February 1981 Entumbane Rising²³⁴ had presaged Gukurahundi (see Chapters 4 and 5 in this thesis). The violent clashes in Bulawayo’s Entumbane suburb between ZANU’s ZANLA and ZAPU’s ZIPRA forces further exposed post-independence tensions between ZANU and ZAPU. These clashes, dismissed as isolated incidents of indiscipline, revealed the fragile peace in Matabeleland and set the stage for the aforementioned violence, which was unleashed during 1983-1987.²³⁵

²³² This group of ex-ZIPRA and black Rhodesian Front dissidents opposed Mugabe’s rule in the Northern Transvaal region. “Super ZAPU” was orchestrated by Rhodesian Criminal Intelligence Organisation officers who had launched Operation Mute, in 1982, to cause further disruption in Matabeleland and aggravate existing tensions in a newly independent Zimbabwe (see Chapter 5 of this thesis for full framing of their positionality and influence).

²³³ ‘Blitzkrieg-level’ is used here descriptively, to convey the speed, overwhelming concentration, and shock of the Fifth Brigade’s initial deployment into Matabeleland, rather than to claim formal equivalence with the specific German military doctrine of rapid, mobile, combined-arms offensive warfare. An alternative suggested in examination was *Der totale Krieg* (‘the total war’); however, this term carries its own historically specific connotations by conventionally denoting symmetrical interstate conflict involving the full mobilisation of a nation’s economy and population toward a war effort. This maps no more precisely onto Gukurahundi’s operation as an asymmetric campaign of state violence against a largely unarmed civilian population. While both terms are, strictly, imperfect historical analogues; ‘blitzkrieg-level’ is retained here for its immediate legibility in conveying the sudden and overwhelming force concentration that characterised the Fifth Brigade’s operational approach.

²³⁴ For a detailed discussion on the effects of the Entumbane Risings of the 1980s on the city of Bulawayo, see chapter 5 in this thesis.

²³⁵ See Chapter 7 in this thesis for discussion on peace dynamics in Bulawayo.

The trauma caused by the Gukurahundi Massacres has shaped a socio-political landscape defined by fear and silence. Survivors fear reopening wounds or retribution, yet silence perpetuates marginalisation. Denial by the state, which downplays Gukurahundi and similar events, hinders reconciliation and reinforces regional inequalities. Official narratives often frame such violence as necessary for the sake of creating unity, while tactically alienating Bulawayo from the national polity (Eppel, 2020: 279-280). As N. Ndlovu (2019) notes, Gukurahundi was not just a historic perpetration; rather, it has now been entrenched as a system. Moreover, *iGukurahundi* [trans. “the Gukurahundi”] as a continuum refers to the system of “Gukurahundism” as a long-lasting effect of the Gukurahundi Massacres, where the structural violence seen by the victims reminds them of this historic perpetration (N. Ndlovu, 2019: 76, 140, 230). This is the systemic violence of marginalisation and mythicised “dissent” that hampers theoretically ideal pathways to healing and peace for the residents of Bulawayo even in 2025.

Locating Silence: Spotlight on a Conversation with MaDhlamini

In Zimbabwe, national denialism shapes urban citizenship, particularly among marginalised communities (Brown & Ní Aoláin, 2014: 143; Eppel, 2013: 213). This would be what Rieff (2016) refers to as a *pacto del olvido* [trans. “a pact of forgetting”] under authoritarian or military governance; an act of entrenching silence to benefit ruling elite survival. In Bulawayo, the denial of the violence in the region and the city in the 1980s reflects what Cohen (2001) calls “conscious denial through deliberate deception” of the state in the eyes of the people. The people of Bulawayo are well aware that this *pacto del olvido* stifles memorialisation (N. Ndlovu, 2019: 148) and fosters distorted collective memory for political leverage.

Among the interviews conducted, one woman’s testimony stands out not only for its depth and candour but also for its representativeness of a broader social sentiment in Bulawayo. MaDhlamini, a 53-year-old Bulawayo native, adds a deeply personal and socially resonant, foreground, and gendered perspective to the analysis, which is largely absent from the other empirical narratives presented in this thesis. This should be read as a single, in-depth conversation, rather than a full life-history interview. As her broader biography is not developed at length here; the weight placed on her testimony reflects its interpretive and representative value, rather than a claim to a comprehensive personal narrative. It should also be noted that MaDhlamini’s allusion to strategic, pragmatic silence is not the only mode through which Bulawayo and Matabeleland’s residents engage the unresolved legacy of Gukurahundi. Eppel’s (2025) account of community-led exhumations and reburials in rural Matabeleland documents a markedly more confrontational method with families and communities working, often under direct threat from state actors, to physically recover the dead, hold hours-long public ‘truth-telling’ engagements at gravesides, and inscribe the facts of Gukurahundi-era killings onto tombstones in explicit defiance of continued state denial and communal silence. Protective silence should therefore be read as capturing one register of response among several, rather than as representative of how Bulawayo or Matabeleland’s residents more broadly, relate to this history.

MaDhlamini's account offers insight which is otherwise limited in this thesis into how women negotiate the intersections of economic insecurity, urban governance, and everyday survival. She laments:²³⁶

Abasiboni. Ubuhlungu ngobethu. Sesize sazifundisa ukuthi intoleyana ayikhulunywa. Yikho ukuthi inqondo zingaphambani.

[Trans.] They [in reference to the ruling ZANU-PF party] do not see us. The pain is ours alone to feel. Over time, we have taught ourselves that we do not speak about that thing/time period [in reference to the Gukurahundi Massacres]. It is an imperative so that we do not go crazy.

The national silencing of Gukurahundi²³⁷ reflects the structural violence that cyclically traumatises victims and perpetuates myths as coping mechanisms (Rwafa, 2012: 319; N. Ndlovu, 2019: 140). As Das (2007: 38) highlights, “silence re-creates the [mythicised] world in the face of tragic loss”. Through this, silence emerges as a deliberate pathway towards agency in Bulawayo, offering psychological healing and community-level peacebuilding. MaDhlamini explains:²³⁸

Sikhulumelani? Ukuthi kuthini? Siyaziphilela kuphela thina. Asikudingi kodwa lakho asifuni bumbulu. Ukuthula kwethu akusikh'ukuthi siyizithutha. Sifun'ukuziphilela nje siphila labantu bethu. Okunye lokhu akulani lathi.

[Trans.] Why would we speak? To what end? We just move on with life and get on with it. We seek nothing, but also, we do not want to be demeaned. Our silence does not mean we are stupid. We just want to live [allusion to making an honest living] and foster peace within our communities. The rest has nothing to do with us.

This pragmatic silence contrasts with oppressive national narratives. ZANU-PF's erasure of Bulawayo's historical agency leaves residents disengaged from national politics but focused on community stability. As MaDhlamini said to me, when I asked if the revival of the political vibrancy of Bulawayo was something worth considering:²³⁹

Vele singabe sidingani ezintweni zelizwe? Bayekele, kuleliny'ilanga eliyis'thutha. Until then, sizaqhubeka siphila. Asisweli lutho emasimini.

[Trans.] In any case, what would we [the people of Bulawayo] be looking for in the affairs of the country? Leave them [alluding to ZANU-PF's continued rule], there is one day that is a fool [a Ndebele idiom which mirrors the English “every dog has its day”]. Until then, we will continue living. We lack nothing in our farm fields [reference to the belief that the people of Matabeleland are content with a simple life in community unlike the people of Mashonaland].

²³⁶ Interview with MaDhlamini, 29 January 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²³⁷ Cited as a leitmotif of ZANU-PF by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013, in Tarusarira, 2019: 210), the Gukurahundi Massacres serve as a traumatic interface with the state and its violent apparatus. This is further seen where Gukurahundi means “sweeping away the [chaff and] rubbish” (Meredith, 2002: 66). The warning against opposition or “dissent”, which has traditionally come out of Bulawayo, is mandating itself as “a harbinger of death” in the concept of a Gukurahundi – a warning regarding any perceived dissent to ZANU-PF rule, as the ruling elite survives off legacies of geo-ethnic and political segregation. See Rwafa, 2012: 315, 318-319.

²³⁸ Interview with MaDhlamini, 29 January 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²³⁹ Ibid. 238

For many residents of Matabeleland, Gukurahundi recurs as a continuum of memories of traumatic ZANU-PF-led state repression (Alexander, 2021: 763; Eppel, 2020: 272-273). Often the language of Gukurahundi as a continuum, as noted by N. Ndlovu (2019: 140), limits “citizens’ remembrance whereby they may feel that the government does not care enough about their day-to-day existence and struggles, in the same way that the government did not care about their fate at the hands of the Fifth Brigade”. In MaDhlamini’s account, however, there is a defiant sense of “*Sasivele sizimele*” [trans. “We [as a people of Bulawayo] were always [politically and militarily] self-organised”].²⁴⁰ *Uneasy peace* is the reflection of communal safeguarding against re-traumatisation through the silencing of instances of perpetration to preserve the sanity needed to engage in a ZANU-PF-led state, whose rent-seeking and elite survival by repression patterns do not correspond to the values of the people of Bulawayo. This is not a sign of weakness but, in fact, repressed anger (Eppel, 2020: 280). Playing to the duality of silence – at national and individual levels – is then a deliberate pathway towards agency for the people of Bulawayo, rather than one of subversion.

Silence in Bulawayo reflects an *uneasy peace*, rooted in stability rather than justice or nation-building. N. Ndlovu (2019: 149) warns that silence erases memory, diminishing civic engagement and undermining full citizenship. Yet, as MaDhlamini’s account shows, this silence is a strategic tool for survival within an oppressive system, prioritising psychological and communal stability over national reconciliation. Her account, which reveals the tangible benefits of the anthropological approach to embodied research, illuminates a third dimension of “understated” silence (chosen silence as a function of peace, political disenfranchisement, and limited access to justice), to expand on Eppel’s (2020: 270-271) intuitive “unspeakable” and “unspoken” observations. The embodied experience of doing research here is particularly useful as the interview with MaDhlamini was not only the result of a successful “snowball effect” from leveraging my network (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011) but also the only interview in which a participant gave voice to what was otherwise only murmured or at best, fleetingly mentioned, in informal conversations, based on “thick descriptions” and “situated knowledge” within the field (Geertz, 1973; Haraway, 1988).

Defining Uneasy Peace

The term *uneasy peace*, as conceptualised in this chapter, captures the discomfort and instability underpinning the city’s apparent tranquillity, highlighting the latent tensions and unresolved histories that shape its socio-political landscape. This concept reflects the multifaceted nature of peace in Bulawayo, where silence, denial, and resilience converge to create a fragile and precarious stability. *Uneasy peace* encapsulates the coexistence of calm and conflict, underscoring the challenges of sustaining peace in the absence of meaningful reconciliation. It aligns with the notion of peace as a dynamically contested process, deeply rooted in divisive socio-political histories and shaped by ongoing struggles over justice and memory.

²⁴⁰ Ibid. 238

Uneasy peace operates in this chapter at three distinct but connected levels, and it is worth making this explicit. First, it names a descriptive condition: the actual, observable state of fragile non-conflict in present-day Bulawayo, in which overt violence has ceased but its underlying causes remain unresolved. Second, it functions as an analytical framework – a lens through which this thesis reads that condition's internal tensions, rather than accepting the state's own designation of the post-1987 period as 'peaceful' or 'reconciled' at face value. Third, and most importantly, *uneasy peace* is not simply a static condition that happens to Bulawayo's residents, but one actively produced and sustained through practice – the silence, stoic endurance, and deliberate strategies of insulation from harm documented throughout this chapter. These three levels are connected causally, not just descriptively. Silence and stoicism produce and reproduce the condition of fragile non-conflict, rather than mistaking the resulting condition for genuine peace. In anticipating critiques of the concept, one might argue that *uneasy peace* could be perceived as an obvious condition for those navigating stability within the constraints of the peace available to them – regardless of its challenges. Indeed, attaining peace is rarely, if ever, an easy endeavour. In anticipating critiques of the concept, one might argue that *uneasy peace* could be perceived as an obvious condition for those navigating stability within the constraints of the peace available to them – regardless of its challenges. Indeed, attaining peace is rarely, if ever, an easy endeavour.

The choice of 'peace' as the operative term, rather than simply 'stability' or 'coping', is deliberate. The Zimbabwean state, since the 1987 Unity Accord, has consistently framed the post-Gukurahundi period in the language of peace and reconciliation, a claim this chapter directly interrogates. *Uneasy peace* therefore functions as a disruptive term. It accepts that Bulawayo is not in a state of open conflict, while insisting that what exists in its place is not the resolution the state's language implies. This matters directly for this thesis' central argument about historically produced and compounded disadvantage. *Uneasy peace* is both a symptom and a mechanism of that compounding and is produced by the historical exclusion and violence traced in Chapters 4 and 5. Further, due to its reliance on silence, *uneasy peace* blocks the truth-telling and accountability that might otherwise interrupt exclusion, thus it ends up reproducing the very disadvantage it seeks to grow out of. Ultimately, *uneasy peace* is not a separate concept sitting alongside compounded disadvantage, but one of the specific mechanisms through which disadvantage in Bulawayo compounds itself over time.

Tenets of Uneasy Peace

The first tenet acknowledges the fragility of stability. It brings to life Morley's (1922: 128) observation that "[all]" cities are mad: but the madness is gallant. All cities are beautiful: but the beauty is grim" – capturing the delicate and unstable nature of peace in Bulawayo, which is maintained through unspoken social contracts rather than substantive reconciliation. This peace, while present, is fragile and can easily be disrupted by underlying tensions that have never been fully addressed. The silence around historical traumas, particularly events like Gukurahundi, contributes to a tension that masks the unresolved issues simmering beneath the surface. In relation to Bulawayo, this signifies historical fragility as exemplified by the Entumbane shootings in the 1980s, which foreshadowed the violent fractures that would later escalate into the Gukurahundi Massacres. These early rivalries between ZANLA and ZIPRA troops demonstrated

the precariousness of Bulawayo's post-independence peace. The unresolved tensions from these initial skirmishes eroded stability and laid the groundwork for further violence.

Sustained *uneasy peace* is symbolic of the concept's framing as seen through the eyes of the people of Bulawayo, a historically, visually beautiful city with wonderful people – yet underscored by a grim past. The phenomenon must be understood from the departure point that Alexander (2021) elaborates on:

Silence sat in between an official, justificatory account of Gukurahundi on the one hand and the fearful, silenced memories of individuals on the other. It occupied a productive middle ground where collective, creative efforts delineated and demanded new political possibilities and terms of belonging through truth-telling, re-imagined and mourned nations and cross-generational attempts to heal and hold perpetrators to account. (p.763)

Read this way, silence is not only an absence but also a contested space. In Bulawayo, it has simultaneously concealed trauma and enabled acts of resilience, creating room for truth-telling and alternative visions of belonging. Yet, as this chapter argues, the persistence of such silences also masks deeper wounds, sustaining only a surface-level tranquillity while leaving historical grievances unresolved. This tenet acknowledges that peace in Bulawayo is more about the absence of visible conflict than the resolution of past grievances. This surface-level peace is built on a societal and ZANU-PF imposed silence that functions as a veil over deep-seated trauma with respect to episodes of human rights mismanagement for many in Zimbabwe (Scarnecchia, 2011: 93). The failure to confront these past injustices has prevented people from achieving true healing, leaving the wounds of history unresolved. In relation to Bulawayo, a unique enforced amnesia has created a façade of tranquillity in which a form of peace exists, one that remains unanchored in truth or justice. This has been affected by the mythicisation of Bulawayo's apparent²⁴¹ threat to the ruling elite in independent Zimbabwe over time (McGregor & Chatiza, 2020: 21; see Chapter 5 of this thesis). In the eyes of the ruling elite of newly independent Zimbabwe, Bulawayo became the *de facto* city of dissent that required "discipline" (Museumwa, 2006a, 2006b). The lack of truth-telling and continued mythicisation around this has ensured that trauma continues to be ignored, thus maintaining an equilibrium that prevents genuine healing (Alexander, et al., 2000).

Third, the concept goes on to challenge the idea of "no justice, no peace" (Travers, 2024), by proposing that a lack of justice can co-exist with peace, as silence can serve as a deliberate strategy for fostering social cohesion among victims. This brings to light the notion of stoic community preservation in understanding *uneasy peace*. In this tenet, there is a consciously constructed plan to insulate the residents of Bulawayo from further harm, even while they remain under the governance of the same elites who labelled the city at the national level. At its core, this

²⁴¹ Noticeable through the political influence of ZAPU in the 1980s and the MDC in the post-2000 era, which saw the emergence of the major cities of Harare and Bulawayo as opposition strongholds (McGregor & Chatiza, 2020: 21). The opposition was born during the economic downturn, which led to a decline in formal working conditions and gave rise to the labour movement in urban areas (Mlambo, 2017: 106; Ndlovu, 2020: 70). Bulawayo, a city that had been labelled as one of dissent, was the place in which the MDC was born. This further antagonised the relationship of the city with ZANU-PF. Noted in an interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

peace is underpinned by a dignified collective understanding that though the currency of access to political bargaining power is unattainable, the memories of state violence must nonetheless be honoured in silence. Through the practice of *uneasy peace*, the communities of Bulawayo demonstrate a stoicism that asserts agency in the face of mythicised narratives designed to delegitimise their identity. This stoic resistance enables the people of Bulawayo to navigate daily life, balancing coexistence with an unaddressed historical mistrust of the national ruling elite.

All participants from, and living in, the city of Bulawayo, displayed a sense of *ubuqolo* [trans. “stubbornness”, in isiNdebele], postured towards maintaining the dignity of the city of Bulawayo and its people in relation to the ruling elite.²⁴² This stance is particularly significant in resisting the ZANU-PF’s mythicised narratives of survival, which alienate those who do not conform to its agenda. The stoic nature of this *uneasy peace* serves as a powerful form of agency, countering the derogatory label of ‘dissident’ historically used to justify genocidal repression and systemic violence in Matabeleland (Eppel, 2020; Tarusarira, 2019). In this context, the use of the Ndebele language (as well as other indigenous Nguni languages) itself becomes an act of peaceful yet resolute resistance – a noticeable act of resistance for people whose identity is rooted in Matabeleland all over the country, not just in Bulawayo.²⁴³ As Eppel (2020: 260) reminds us, the association of ‘Ndebeleness’ with ‘dissident’ behaviour or collusion during the Gukurahundi Massacres remains a key element of this history, the present, and the shaping of futures. For the people of Bulawayo, this resistance is often expressed through the phrase *asifuni bumbulu* [trans. “we do not want nonsense”],²⁴⁴ a colloquial phrase used to reject any perceived undermining of those who identify both as being rooted in the city of Bulawayo and as Ndebele-speaking. Furthermore, at the national level, this is illuminated in places where the ZANU-PF government has posited a counter-memory of the liberation war, which politicises the narrative of *chimurenga* [trans. “liberation struggle”, in ChiShona]. This is a deliberate erasure of Bulawayo’s political base in the national political narrative.²⁴⁵ There is then no avenue at the national level to amplify the agency and historical importance of the city of Bulawayo in Zimbabwe’s political history.

The fourth tenet is supported by the dualism of denial as dependent on the dualism of silence (Alexander & McGregor, 1999: 249-253). This is illustrated in how both state-driven and societal denialisms have helped to uphold this fragile balance (Mani, 2008, in Eppel 2013: 221). By avoiding open discourse about the atrocities of the 1980s, like Gukurahundi and the Entumbane shootings, the collective memory of these events is suppressed. Denial is reinforced through policies and narratives that prioritise veiled national unity over addressing injustices, thus perpetuating a distorted view of history (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003: 31-33). Examples of this limited reach of accountability can be seen in the Unity Accord of 22 December 1987 as well as the

²⁴² Field notes, 6 December 2021 and 26 August 2024.

²⁴³ Ibid. 240

²⁴⁴ This phrase was popularised in the city of Bulawayo by the Highlanders Football Club (Highlanders FC, a Zimbabwean football club based in Bulawayo), more commonly known as iBosso or Amahlolanyama, whose fans used to chant it as a war cry against opponents. Widely supported by the people of Bulawayo, the club was founded in 1926 by the grandsons of King Lobengula, Prince Rhodes and Prince Albert Khumalo. It continues to be a formidable force in the Zimbabwe Premier Soccer League even in 2025.

²⁴⁵ See Ndlovu, 2020: 38-41; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011a: 1-21; and Tendi, 2013: 829-843, for an elaboration on nationalist agendas that remain steeped in wartime *chimurenga* ideologies.

“Gukurahundi Amnesty”²⁴⁶ (Coltart, 2016: 149-155; N. Ndlovu, 2019: 144; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003: 32; Scarnecchia, 2011: 93). The official narrative of national unity continues to marginalise the Matabeleland people’s experiences and further institutionalises the denial of their historical grievances. This narrative frames the region’s struggles as irrelevant to broader national progress, further entrenching the silence around its trauma (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009). The epicentre of this tension is seen most in the region’s capital and largest city, Bulawayo.

The final tenet of *uneasy peace* highlights the silent ethno-political burden carried by survivors, their communities, and their descendants. These burdens, expressed through transferred narratives of trauma, force individuals to navigate socio-political identities in a national context that denies their version of history. This silence impacts not only individuals but also the broader socio-political dynamics of the city. It creates a façade of harmony while deepening alienation and marginalisation, particularly between Shona-speaking and Nguni-speaking²⁴⁷ residents (Msindo, 2007: 267). One Bulawayo resident, a Ndebele-speaking vendor, remarked:

Umuntu lomuntu kazidingele imali yakhe kuphela. Kodwa nomabedinga imali, kabasebenzele lapho abakhuluma ulimi lwabo khona basitshiye thina.

[Trans.] Everyone must just look for their money [to survive and leave the topic of politics alone]. But in that quest for money, they [Shona people] must work where they can speak their language and leave us alone.²⁴⁸

Another added:

Ingcekeza ayiveli kithi

[Trans.] The filth does not come from us [insinuating that it comes from the Shona-identifying/speaking vendors].²⁴⁹

In contrast, a Shona-speaking vendor countered:

Nyika ndeyedu tese. Hakuzi kuti paneBorder kuBulawayo

[Trans.] The country is for all of us. There is no border to demarcate entry into Bulawayo.²⁵⁰

Njabulo, a 31-year-old male vendor from Bulawayo, reflected on these tensions:²⁵¹

AbeHarare kumbe bangcono? Thina asikwanisi lokubamba imali efananayo. Bayathengisa ngapha besebehamb'ukuyathengisa ngale. Ukungakhulumi ulimi lwabo khonoku kuyasilimaza. Siphiliswa nje yikuthi omakhelwane bathenga kithi. Ngakasibambananga njengabantu beBulawayo, ngangokunye.

²⁴⁶ In reference to Clemency Order (1) of 18 April 1988 under Section 3(1) of the Constitution, which pardoned the perpetrators of the Gukurahundi Massacres.

²⁴⁷ Despite the participants whom I spoke to all identifying as Ndebele, there are many Sotho, Xhosa, and other Nguni-speaking people who have historically lived in Zimbabwe’s Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. These minorities have never been a source of tension for the people of Matabeleland. In fact, they have always seamlessly integrated into the social fibre of the city of Bulawayo and must not be negated when articulating the narrative.

²⁴⁸ Interview with Njabulo, 10 September 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe; interviews with vendors, 21 September 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²⁴⁹ Vendor C (Ndebele-speaking), interviews with vendors, 21 September 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²⁵⁰ Vendor B (Shona-speaking), interviews with vendors, 21 September 2023, in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²⁵¹ Interview with Njabulo, 10 September 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

[Trans.] Maybe those from Harare are better [seemingly questioning whether those from Harare²⁵² have better access to citizenship rights than residents of Bulawayo]? We have never held/made the same money [as they do]. They can sell here [in Bulawayo] and then they go and sell there [Harare]. This thing of not speaking their language [Shona] is hurting us [financially/economically]. We survive merely because our community buys from us. If we were not united as Bulawayo residents, it would be something else [alluding to the worst kind of economic precarity].

Njabulo's account underscores how Gukurahundi continues to shape urban life, with language serving as both a barrier and a reminder of unacknowledged past violence. This tension reflects the intersection of *perceived space* – the lived urban reality shaped by governance – and *lived space* – the intersection of individual experiences and urban history (Lefebvre, 1991, in I. Moyo & Gumbo, 2021: 98-99). Here, people construct realities about the main spatial capitals of the country (Harare and Bulawayo) in line with their beliefs of ethno-political strongholds. Bulawayo residents construct realities based on these spatial and ethno-political dynamics that are further complicated by a ZANU-PF “political project”²⁵³ that systematically marginalises Bulawayo by negating its urban history.

Njabulo's statement confirms that the languaging of a continued Gukurahundi²⁵⁴ allows for more than a cognitive understanding of the gravity of the perpetration, suffered in light of the lack of acknowledgement at the national level. Further, it articulates a tension that is representative of the spatial-political-ethnic nexus that troubles the urban residents of Harare and Bulawayo. Backed up by reflections from Ncube and Chikwangura-Gwatirisa (2023: 114-115), these tensions are intergenerationally relevant and carry both emotional and spatial weight. Even Shona families who used to reside in Matabeleland migrated from Bulawayo to Harare and its surrounding high-density areas, such as Chitungwiza, as they did not feel safe during the 1983-1987 Gukurahundi Massacres.

Further, as J. Moyo (2023: 161) notes in his survivor's account, complications arose for many people from Matabeleland who faced admission discrimination in higher education and apprenticeship programmes. Even if they overcame the challenges and managed to enrol in a programme, even in Mashonaland, many were at risk of being dismissed from their programmes, as they could not produce certified copies of their qualifications, which had remained in Bulawayo and were inaccessible. J. Moyo (2023: 161) recalls that of the 28 students in his class, “only two were Ndebele-speaking”. Such accounts not only represent present spatial-political-ethnic tensions but also highlight Lefebvre's (1991, in I. Moyo & Gumbo, 2021: 98) ideation of perceived space as the perception of the governed with respect to shaping their urban lived reality and lived space as the intersectional representation of their lived experience (I. Moyo & Gumbo, 2021: 99). Here, there is a construction of realities about Harare and Bulawayo as the main spatial capitals and ethno-political strongholds of the country, based on “a political

²⁵² This is meant in reference to all Shona people. There was a notable thread of conflating “Shonanness” with “Harareness” amongst participants, as dismissive of anyone or anything which was not familiar to their community.

²⁵³ Interview with Andrew Mlalazi, 6 December 2021, Harare, Zimbabwe.

²⁵⁴ See for an elaboration on Gukurahundi as a continuum, N. Ndlovu (2019: 76, 140, 230).

project” used by ZANU-PF to systemically disadvantage the people of Bulawayo by complicating the governance and access to urban citizenship in its fullest form. This is most evident in the expression of language barriers and government administration silos that affect economic opportunities across provincial lines in Zimbabwe.

The tensions between Shona- and Ndebele-speaking vendors reflect the psychological toll of silence, which contributes to an undercurrent of unease in Bulawayo and its surrounding communities. Even within the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission,²⁵⁵ complaints persist about Shona, “the language of the oppressor”, being the medium of instruction in government offices and schools (Eppel, 2020: 272-273). Ethnic tensions linger, with many recalling that Nguni-speaking people were killed during Gukurahundi for “failing to speak Shona” (Eppel, 2020: 273). These memories highlight the enduring structural, cultural, and economic violence rooted in Gukurahundi as a continuum which continues to manifest in urban spaces.

The absence of formal recognition of this historical trauma leaves a psychological void, where silence fosters collective blame and unease, as seen in the empirical reflections above. This state of mind prevents true healing, enabling a regression of peace that serves elite political interests at the systemic level while perpetuating psychological biases (myths and metaphors of survival) at the individual level. Ultimately, this dynamic affects entire communities and hinders sustainable reconciliation and healing (Alexander, et al., 2000).

Defining Uneasy Peace *vis-à-vis* Positive and Negative Peace

Positive and negative peace both exist in the absence of physical violence but differ fundamentally in their characteristics. Positive peace represents a sustainable and just social order marked by the absence of structural and cultural violence and the presence of social justice, inclusivity, and accountability in leadership (Galtung, 1969, 1990; Mani, 2002, 2008). In contrast, negative peace refers to the mere absence of overt conflict, despite the persistence of systemic inequality and structural violence, making it inherently unsustainable.

Neither concept fully captures the reality in Bulawayo, where *uneasy peace* emerges as a distinct framework. Unlike positive peace, *uneasy peace* lacks the justice and structural reforms required for sustainable social cohesion. Yet it also departs from negative peace by being more than a passive absence of violence – instead, it is an adaptive state that prioritises survival within a narrow political settlement shaped by silences, myths, and localised strategies for coexistence. This murky in-between exists where structural trauma and socio-political constraints make achieving positive peace aspirational but impractical (Di John and Putzel, 2009; Khan, 2018a, 2018b).

²⁵⁵ Established on 18 August 2013, under Sections 251, 252, and 2531 of the Constitution of Zimbabwe, Amendment (No. 20) Act, 2013. It replaced the Organ of National Healing, Reconciliation, and Integration, which was established in April 2009, under Article 7 of the Global Political Agreement that mandated the Government of National Unity and its 100-day plan. Further national peace efforts have resulted in the 22 May 2013 Constitutional Amendment, and the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission under the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission Act of 5 January 2018. For a detailed framing of the contemporary state of transitional justice in Zimbabwe, see Ndlovu (2020: 19-33, 2019: 13-15, 203-207).

For Bulawayo's residents, peace is shaped by community bonds, local economic opportunities, and a reliance on silences that serve both as protective and destructive mechanisms. This fragile state is maintained under a national political system in which perpetrators of past violence have remained in power, perpetuating marginalisation and limiting the possibility for transitional justice (Mani, 2008, in Eppel, 2013: 221). Bryden and Olonisakin's (2010: 6-7) critique cautions about the push for reform and transformation before the political circumstances allow for change. This further underscores that reforms that require local ownership and conducive political conditions are often carried prematurely, leading to cyclical violence and stagnation.

In this context, *uneasy peace* functions as a compromise – acknowledging tokenised social cohesion over aspirational justice to enable survival within a constrained socio-political environment. It reflects the coexistence of structural trauma and contextualised peace as the building blocks of a tenuous stability, defying the binary of positive and negative peace. This observation aligns with Bulawayo's lived reality, where *uneasy peace* offers a pragmatic, if imperfect, alternative to idealised theoretical models.

The Unsuitability of Liberal Peace Models²⁵⁶

This chapter's argument sits in tension with, though it is not addressed to, the liberal peace paradigm that has shaped international peacebuilding and transitional justice discourse since the 1990s (Paris, 2004; Richmond, 2009). This is not a paradigm used by Zimbabwean state or civil society actors in addressing Gukurahundi, nor could it be, given Zimbabwe's own distance from the liberal democratic order the paradigm presumes. Rather, it is the implicit framework of the international donors, peacebuilding practitioners, and transitional justice scholars who might otherwise be expected to prescribe solutions to Bulawayo's fractured peace through solutions premised on democratisation, institutional reform, and public truth-telling (Mac Ginty, 2010). *Uneasy peace* clarifies why such prescriptions do not apply in a straightforward manner. Where the perpetrating party remains in power four decades on, and where public truth-telling valorised by the liberal peace models continues to carry real political risk, strategic silence becomes a rational and protective response rather than a failure of peacebuilding. This is not to claim that liberal peace paradigms are being applied in Zimbabwe and failing, but that the case demonstrates why they would fail if applied – and why a locally-grounded concept such as *uneasy peace*, rather than an imported framework, is needed to make sense of the city's fragile stability.

²⁵⁶ An earlier and considerably fuller version of this discussion, including more extensive engagement with liberal peace scholarship, appears in the published version of this chapter: Ndlovu, M.B. (2026). *Uneasy Peace: Unresolved Tensions and Veiled Histories in Bulawayo*. In: Tom, P., Tabalaka, A. & Kuo, S.C.Y. (Eds), *Critical Perspectives on Global Peace and Peacebuilding* (pp. 185-210). Cham: Springer Nature Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-032-17458-1_9

The Imperative of Community

The imperative role of the community in maintaining *uneasy peace* in Bulawayo is clear. For Njabulo, his survival as a vendor hinges on the loyalty of his local community.²⁵⁷ As MaDhlamini explained:²⁵⁸

Whatever the case, *sizahlupheka siqubeka. Asisoze sisuke lakho asizoze silahlane. Sivela kude thina. Njalo sibambene.*

[Trans.] Whatever the case, we will struggle whilst moving forward. We will not leave [Bulawayo], and we will not betray each other. We have come a long way together [clarification: alluding to the history of traumatic violence, healing within the community, and the loss of the national ZAPU party as a prominent factor in the national political arena, which meant a complete lack of representation for many people in Bulawayo]. Likewise, we are united.

The trauma of the past persists in narratives that bond people through shared memory and resistance. As Rieff (2016) notes, silence can offer relief while nurturing counter-memories and resistance identities. This can be seen in the *Mthwakazi* movement,²⁵⁹ which challenges national myths and creates localised political-cultural settlements headquartered in the city of Bulawayo. Notably, such identities did not strongly exist in the past (Eppel, 2004; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a, 2008c). While silence can aid healing, it also reinforces resilience. For many in Matabeleland, identity is tied to tribal distinctiveness, allowing for political-cultural navigation amidst structural violence. As Das (2007: 38) observes, “silence re-creates the [mythicised] world in the face of tragic loss”. This silence, coupled with communal memory, fosters peace by legitimising localised coping mechanisms. As aptly put by Rieff (2016, para. 23), “some memories are seen as too precious for human beings to give up... especially [in] societies and groups that... feel themselves to be under existential threat”. Here, an identity is built as a way to legitimise the micro-level settlements within the political space of the city, which no longer has viable representation by a home-grown ZAPU on the national stage.

The systemic silencing of past perpetrations translates to a feasible form of socio-political expression protected by the community’s navigation of the economic, social, cultural, and political spheres of life within the city. Further, for a city labelled as one that supposedly enables ‘dissident’ behaviour, it is necessary to take the trauma and myths of perpetration to recreate, as Das (2007: 38) notes, new realities by constructing and subsequently navigating an *uneasy peace*. This application of peace is under no illusion that national post-conflict justice efforts will remedy pain. As BenEzer (1999: 30) asserts, traumatic events “are related to the norms of society and to what is spoken about and what is kept silent in public”. It is not a “stupid” or oblivious peace.²⁶⁰ This communally built *uneasy peace* remains intimately linked to the formation of identity as an achievable form of stability (Antze & Lambek, 1996).

²⁵⁷ Interview with Njabulo, 10 September 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²⁵⁸ Interview with MaDhlamini, 29 January 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²⁵⁹ See Chapter four of this manuscript, and Ndlovu (2019), for a full elaboration on the Mthwakazi Republic and the role the Mthwakazi identity plays in inclusive politics in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe.

²⁶⁰ Interview with MaDhlamini, 29 January 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

The Next Generation

Oftentimes, as Nandy (1995: 47) notes, “human beings just cannot afford to remember everything and non-essentialised memories are understandably discarded”. This form of silence maintains peace in communities as it “helps a person to reconcile with and live in the world” (Nandy, 1995: 47). Peace and trauma are complex – and this is particularly true across generations. Speaking to young people in the city,²⁶¹ there was an awareness of the trauma experienced by the previous generation. However, the respondents I spoke to were less concerned about their transferred emotional burdens, as urban residents with ample opportunities within the city and in the digital realm, given their responses to the question of whether they were willing to engage with the memories of the past. Thami (aged 22) said:²⁶²

I don't really understand what all the activists on Twitter [in reference to the social media platform X, formerly Twitter] are fighting for. Yes, this happened to our parents, but sha, there are more important things than living in the past. Siding'imali [trans. “We are looking for money”] guys. There are so many opportunities all around us. Why are we focused on something [trauma and memory of perpetration] we know is not going to change?

Noma (aged 24) then went on to say:²⁶³

It sucks that we have to live with the memory of something we never witnessed because our parents tell us about it all the time. Sometimes me and my cousins don't believe it even happened because nobody talks about it but once every 5 years or something, abadala [the older generation – in reference to parents, aunts, uncles, or grandparents] will say something about it and you can see the pain in their eyes. I guess we [Noma's generation] fight back in other ways. For me, it's through music and deliberately singing in isiNdebele to reclaim where I am from – this hasn't caused me any trouble like people said it would. In fact, I've won awards for my songs. We [younger generation living in Bulawayo] will never forget that we are different [clarification: in comparison to Shona people] but we live in a country where things are tough for everyone. Zimbabwe has happened to everyone, guys [in reference to widely acknowledged socio-economic and political woes in Zimbabwe]. There is no room to be bitter about the past. [Again] it doesn't mean we've forgotten, you know? But we make it work – a war is the last thing we need.

Though the extent to which collective amnesia is a form of selective silence and “myth-making” is unclear in Zimbabwe, a generational pattern of varying degrees of memories and counter-memories of violence is noticeable. On one hand, Eppel (2020: 279-280) observes that the older generation in Matabeleland expresses gratitude for the bravery of the younger generation's pressure groups in challenging silenced memories and advocating for the recognition of marginalisation, particularly in relation to Gukurahundi. On the other hand, a nuanced dynamic is revealed based on the empirical insights noted above: while many older individuals – survivors or those who lost close family members during Gukurahundi – appreciate these efforts, they are also thankful for the younger generation's focus on economic progress rather than political

²⁶¹ Focus group interview with youth, 30 January 2023, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe.

²⁶² Ibid. 262

²⁶³ Ibid. 262

agitation. Participants in my focus group noted that their parents valued their decision to steer clear of “the politics of Matabeleland”, prioritising their safety over political engagement.²⁶⁴ Within the context of the Holocaust, Wiseman, et al. (2006) note that:

An intergenerational communication pattern referred to as the “conspiracy of silence” is a nonverbal agreement in the family of keeping some traumatic experiences unspoken and detached from everyday life. It emanated not only from the parents’ need to forget and to adjust to new social contexts, but also from their belief that withholding information about the horrors of the Holocaust was crucial to their children’s normal development. (p.77)

N. Ndlovu (2019: 149) cautions on the generational impacts of silencing:

There is ample evidence in which survivors choose not to pass down trauma to the next generation and so remain silent – as a means to protect their children and grandchildren from the emotional burdens. While many parents have this protective desire, not talking about their memories of violence and its aftermath *does not* prevent the transmission of trauma or other emotional legacies across generations.

Given empirical accounts such as Noma’s, I am of the view that this type of localised peacemaking within communities must be considered as a morally just way of coping with endemic violence. This silence, though marked by unspoken truths, serves as a fragile foundation upon which healing and resilience can gradually be nurtured, offering a pathway for future generations to navigate their shared history with hope and strength.

Conclusion

Bulawayo’s history and present realities encapsulate the tensions inherent in navigating post-independence governance, unresolved historical trauma, and socio-political marginalisation. The city’s *uneasy peace*, a term conceptualised in this chapter, reflects a fragile stability that transcends the binary of positive and negative peace as theorised by Galtung (1969). Unlike positive peace, which implies the presence of justice and social equity, *uneasy peace* in Bulawayo is underpinned by systemic inequalities and unaddressed grievances. Yet, it also departs from negative peace by embodying a dynamic, albeit precarious, state of adaptation and resilience among the city’s inhabitants.

Read alongside Chapter 6, this chapter’s argument clarifies the thesis’ central distinction between the generic and the specific. The precarity of urban life, in itself, is not unique to Bulawayo; what is specific is how that precarity is inflected by the tensions surfaced in *uneasy peace*, and by the deeper historical grievance this chapter has traced. Disadvantage in Bulawayo is thus compounded, not simply additive, where generic urban hardship experienced through, and amplified by, a distinctly Bulawayo-specific history of exclusion.

The legacies of violence from the 1980s resulted in mass killings, displacements, and the enduring socio-political exclusion of Matabeleland, underscoring the persistence of *uneasy peace*. This highlights how historical violence continues to shape present socio-political dynamics in the

²⁶⁴ Ibid. 262

region and in the city of Bulawayo. Central to this chapter, therefore, was the research sub-question: *What forms of silence, memory, and myth have emerged as tools of both repression and resilience in Bulawayo's inhabitants' pursuit of peace?* The analysis showed that state denial of atrocities such as Gukurahundi, enforced through mechanisms including the 1987 Unity Accord, has entrenched cultures of erasure and marginalisation (M.B. Ndlovu, 2020). This denial manifests in multiple forms: literal, interpretive, and implicatory, each contributing to the perpetuation of structural violence and the alienation of Bulawayo's residents (Cohen, 1996). Moreover, the use of myths and metaphors, such as the city's label as an apparent 'dissident' stronghold, reinforces these dynamics by framing Bulawayo as perpetually oppositional to national unity (Alexander, 2021).

Despite these challenges, the city's residents have developed coping mechanisms rooted in community solidarity and strategic silences. The empirical data reveals how silence functions both as a protective strategy against retribution and as a means of preserving psychological stability. This silence, while often criticised as complicity or passivity, is reinterpreted in this chapter as a form of agency – a deliberate choice by Bulawayo's native residents to prioritise communal peace over national reconciliation. Such practices highlight the limitations of liberal peace frameworks, which frequently overlook the significance of localised strategies and historical contexts in peacebuilding efforts (Richmond, 2009).

The liberal peace paradigm, with its emphasis on democratisation and market liberalisation, fails to address the deep-seated socio-political and cultural dynamics that underpin conflicts in post-independent Zimbabwe (Paris, 2004). These frameworks are particularly ill-suited to Bulawayo, as they often disregard the region's unique historical burdens and the systemic exclusion perpetuated by centralised governance (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). Instead of fostering genuine reconciliation, liberal peace models risk reinforcing existing power structures and inequalities, as evidenced by Bulawayo's continued economic and political marginalisation.

This chapter calls for a reimagining of peacebuilding approaches that centre local histories, cultural contexts, and the lived experiences of marginalised communities. For Bulawayo, this entails acknowledging the enduring traumatic impacts of Gukurahundi as a continuum and addressing the structural inequalities that sustain *uneasy peace*. Truth-telling, reconciliation, and the amplification of local voices must form the cornerstone of such efforts. Additionally, recognising the duality of silence – as both a coping mechanism and a barrier to justice – is crucial in crafting sustainable pathways to peace.

Bulawayo's *uneasy peace* serves as both a critique and a challenge to the liberal peace thesis. It underscores the need for peacebuilding frameworks that move beyond the superficial cessation of violence to engage with the deeper, systemic issues that perpetuate instability. By situating Bulawayo's experiences within broader debates on peace and its theoretical nuances, this chapter contributes to a deeper understanding of peace as a contested, dynamic process, rather than a static end-state. Chapter 8 extends this analysis by examining how futures are imagined and articulated in a city historically cast as peripheral. It considers how aspirations, refusals, and speculative politics take shape both within, and in resistance to, entrenched conditions of abandonment and denial.