

# Zimbabwe: Relational Peacebuilding Amidst Protracted Social Conflict. Strategies and Significance of Endogenous Approaches

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**Abstract:** Independent Zimbabwe has experienced continual episodes of mostly violent intra-state conflict that have left the country polarised and divided along mostly ethnic, racial, and class lines. In the aftermath of each conflictual episode, peacemaking attempts have been implemented to secede hostilities, however, these attempts have only built peace at the superstructure while neglecting the grassroots, which has been the microcosm of conflict wherein most of the actors are, be they perpetrators, victims and survivors. State-led attempts at reconciliation have failed to address the after-effects of conflict, and it is the argument of this paper that endogenous approaches to relational peacebuilding cannot continue to be ignored as they can potentially address some of the fault lines. Respondents to the study were purposively selected from three provinces in the country. Findings indicate the relevance and efficacy of these approaches in building peace at the family and community levels.

**Keywords:** Relational peace, conflict, endogenous, tradition, Zimbabwe.

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## **Introduction**

This article discusses strategies of relational peacebuilding in a largely polarised context underwritten by various epochs of largely unresolved conflictual episodes dating back to the post-independence period in 1980 to date. Independent Zimbabwe's body politic has been characterized by high levels of intimidation, violence, and intolerance of divergent political views. Zimbabwe acquired its independence in 1980, and the expected peace dividends did not accrue due to a false start-up. Sachikonye (2011) observes that while liberation forces employed violence as a pivotal tool in securing Zimbabwe's independence, this violence subsequently became its most significant detriment for a considerable period of its independent history. Immediately following the attainment of independence, the newly established black majority government exhibited a lack of concern regarding the establishment of a transitional justice framework that would guarantee that Zimbabwe would never again endure human rights violations. Rather, the new administration perpetuated an unsustainable approach characterized by a see-no-evil approach, akin to a state of amnesia.

The absence of accountability exacerbated the scale of violence in post-independence Zimbabwe. Upon his ascension to office, the then-Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Robert Mugabe, failed to establish a formal national healing initiative to address prior human rights abuses. Rather, in his victory address in 1980, he called for reconciliation a reconciliation process that was devoid of a holistic framework, urging individuals to 'forgive and forget' (Mashingaidze, 2010; Eppel & Raftopoulos, 2008). In what is largely perceived as a drive to cement political hegemony and to contain political dissent, Robert Mugabe dispatched an army unit named the 5th Brigade to the southern parts of the country, namely the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces in what became infamously known as 'Gukurahundi' genocide.

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and Legal Resource Foundation (LRF) (1997), in their report, put the figure of people killed during the Gukurahundi genocide at approximately 20,000 mostly unarmed and defenseless citizens. The Gukurahundi massacres only ended with the signing of the Unity Accord in 1987, which is largely viewed as an elite unity pact between two former protagonists (Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) parties) (Chimhanda, 2003; Munemo, 2016). Notably, there was no restorative justice program implemented for the grassroots people who had borne the brunt of the Gukurahundi conflict.

At the turn of the new millennium, the Fast Track Land Reform Programme (FTLRP), initiated in 2000, the parliamentary elections held in June 2000, and the presidential election of 2002 were significantly characterized by high levels of political violence (Mutanda, 2013; Sachikonye, 2011). This violence was, in part, a reaction to the establishment of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) in 1999, which emerged as a formidable opposition party that posed a considerable threat to the political dominance of ZANU PF. In 2005, Operation Murambatsvina (a government program wherein the authorities

contended that they were eliminating filth from urban areas), which is widely perceived as a strategy of political retribution aimed at undermining the urban political stronghold of the opposition, was implemented in the urban areas, resulting in the displacement of close to 700,000 individuals (Tibajuka, 2005).

The period leading up to the presidential election run-off in June 2008 marked the height of electoral violence in Zimbabwe, compelling the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) to convene a joint Summit in July 2008, wherein they recommended the establishment of a Government of National Unity (GNU) in Zimbabwe. In April 2008, cases of politically motivated violence escalated to 4,359 from 795 incidents during the pre-election phase, signifying an increase of 470% in monthly records. By May 2008, the figures had surged to 6,288 incidents encompassing assault, murder, malicious damage to property, intimidation, abductions, and torture, among other manifestations of political violence (Zimbabwe Peace Project, May 2008).

More recently, following the military-assisted transition in November 2017, which has been argued by some to be a coup, there has been an increase in cases of politically motivated violence, which has further polarised the nation. Following the 2018 elections, 8 protesters were shot for protesting against the delayed announcement of election results (Mungwari, 2019). In January 2019, there were demonstrations against the rising cost of living, and the state response was heavy-handed, with 12 citizens killed and a number maimed and arrested (Makombe, 2021).

Importantly for this paper, formal state-led attempts at reconciliation have not yielded the expected results. In 1980, the reconciliation policy was in word only, as was the Unity Accord of 1987. Following the consummation of the GNU in 2008, an Organ for National Healing, Integration, and Reconciliation (ONHRI) was instituted. However, the ONHRI was not successful largely because of a lack of political goodwill, political interference, and lack of funding (Bhebhe, 2013; Masunda *et al.*, 2019). The adoption of the new constitution in 2013 came with the promulgation of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), which had a 10-year lifespan (2010–2023). The NPRC has recently folded, and like its predecessor, it suffered the same fate and failed to achieve the intended objectives as specified in the constitution, again largely because of a lack of political will on the part of politicians that are serving in government, who themselves stand accused of having been at the forefront of previous epochs of violence (Bhebhe, 2013). It is, therefore, the intention of this paper to explore endogenous approaches of relational peacebuilding and how these could, from a policy perspective, be tapped into, given that formal and largely Western approaches have not yielded the desired results.

## Literature review

Endogenous approaches to reconciliation refer to methods and practices that originate from within a system or community, leveraging internal resources, cultural practices,

and intrinsic capabilities to address conflicts or achieve reconciliation. These approaches are often contrasted with exogenous methods, which rely on external interventions or frameworks (Minozzi, 2013). One example of endogenous reconciliation is found in the context of conflict resolution within African societies. Traditional endogenous conflict resolution practices are deeply rooted in cultural and religious systems, providing culturally sustainable outcomes for the parties involved. Despite their historical significance, these practices are increasingly marginalized by modern governance systems. However, there is a trend towards integrating traditional and modern approaches, creating a hybrid system that incorporates relevant and acceptable practices from both paradigms (Minozzi, 2013; Philpott, 2009).

Endogenous approaches play an important role in political reconciliation, where they emphasize justice as a right relationship, often drawing from religious traditions and contemporary restorative justice movements. These approaches aim to address the wounds inflicted by political injustices through practices that restore human flourishing and increase the legitimacy of governing institutions. They integrate punishment and forgiveness as compatible practices within a restorative justice framework, highlighting the potential for endogenous reconciliation to contribute to peace and justice (Chang & Luo, 2017).

In post-conflict settings, such as Rwanda, endogenous approaches to justice and reconciliation were evident in the use of Gacaca courts, which operate alongside international and national judicial systems (Raitten, 2015). This tripartite framework reflected a complex interplay between global, national, and local approaches, challenging the dichotomy between relativism and universalism, as well as retribution and restoration. The Rwandan experience underscores the importance of endogenous methods in achieving justice and reconciliation, despite political tensions and contradictions (Rettig, 2008). Endogenous approaches to reconciliation are characterized by their reliance on internal resources and cultural practices, offering sustainable and contextually relevant solutions to conflicts and injustices. They highlight the potential for integrating traditional and modern methods to create effective reconciliation frameworks that are both culturally resonant and adaptable to contemporary challenges.

Endogenous approaches to peacebuilding, which emphasize local knowledge, practices, and interactions, significantly contribute to relational peace by fostering sustainable and culturally relevant conflict resolution mechanisms. These approaches are rooted in the understanding that peace is not merely the absence of war but a complex web of interactions and relationships that evolve over time and across different levels of society. Relational peace involves recognizing peace as a dynamic process characterized by multiple interactions among actors over time and space (Brigg, 2016; Davenport, 2018; Joseph, 2018). This perspective allows for a more nuanced understanding of peace, emphasizing the importance of actor-centric and processual studies to capture the evolving nature of relationships and the practices that sustain them. The relational approach to peacebuilding highlights the importance of mutual recognition, trust, and cooperation between actors,

which are essential for achieving a quality peace characterized by mutual respect and integration (Llewellyn, 2012). Endogenous approaches, particularly in the context of hybrid peacebuilding, emphasize the integration of local knowledge and practices into broader peacebuilding efforts.

For instance, in Aguablanca, Colombia localized peace trajectories and endogenous knowledge have been shown to strengthen collaboration among various actors, both within and outside the community (Taborda & Riccardi, 2019). This approach encourages the incorporation of local peacemaking knowledge and infrastructures into sustainable peacebuilding strategies, thereby addressing some of the limitations of liberal and hybrid peacebuilding models. Moreover, endogenous conflict resolution practices, particularly in African societies, have historically been nurtured by cultural and religious systems, ensuring culturally sustainable outcomes (Malunga, 2014). Although modern governance systems have challenged the relevance of these practices, there is a growing recognition of the need to merge traditional and contemporary approaches to conflict resolution. This integration ensures that peacebuilding efforts remain relevant and acceptable in modern contexts while retaining the cultural sustainability of traditional practices.

Indigenous practices of reconciliation in Africa are deeply rooted in the continent's diverse cultural, religious, and social traditions. These practices often emphasize community involvement, restorative justice, and the healing of relationships rather than punitive measures. One prominent example is the concept of "sulh" in Algeria and Sudan, which refers to amicable conflict resolution methods outside formal judicial systems (Hanafi & Thoriquttyas, 2019). Sulh is grounded in Islamic normative texts and customary practices, highlighting the importance of restoring relationships and collective responsibility rather than focusing solely on individual punishment (Pruitt, 2001). In South Africa, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) is a notable example of integrating indigenous worldviews into formal reconciliation processes. The TRC emphasized interconnectedness, a key aspect of the African worldview, which facilitated the creative execution of its mandate without resorting to revenge (Fullard & Rosseau, 2008). This approach rejuvenated concepts of healing, amnesty, and reconciliation, demonstrating the potential of indigenous perspectives in transitional justice.

The African Union Transitional Justice Policy (AUTJP) further illustrates Africa's innovative approach to reconciliation by broadening the scope of transitional justice to include socio-economic and psychosocial issues, beyond the traditional civil and political focus. This policy reflects Africa's role as a thought leader in developing reconciliation processes that address the continent's unique challenges (Nalin, 2018). In addition to formal mechanisms, traditional African reconciliation practices often involve rituals and community gatherings. These practices are informed by African traditional religion, philosophy, and anthropology, which provide a conceptual basis for reconciliation. Rituals, in particular, play a significant role in social reconciliation by facilitating dialogue and understanding between conflicting parties (Waterson, 2009). The integration of art and cultural expressions

also plays a crucial role in reconciliation. For instance, in Angola, Kuduro music and dance serve as cultural performances where individuals and communities negotiate trauma and reconciliation (Moorman, 2014). These artistic expressions allow for the embodiment of healing and the negotiation of past traumas in a shared cultural context.

## **Methodology**

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore in-depth some of the traditional mechanisms of peacebuilding in the three provinces of Zimbabwe namely the Midlands (Gokwe South district), Mashonaland Central (Muzarabani district), and Mashonaland West (Zvimba district) provinces. The research aimed at explaining data about individuals' experiences, sentiments, and emotions. A total of sixty-eight participants engaged in face-to-face interviews, focus group discussions, and questionnaires from the designated regions. The population was purposefully selected from various social strata to ensure that the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders regarding endogenous approaches to peacebuilding were adequately represented. The stakeholders comprised four representatives from political parties, four representatives from civil society organizations, ten victims, ten perpetrators, six traditional leaders, and thirty ordinary citizens. From each stratum, an equal number of male and female participants were chosen. Among the sixty-eight respondents, thirty-two were female, whereas thirty-six were male. The imbalance in gender representation can be attributed to the predominance of men within traditional leadership roles.

## **Findings**

Findings from interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions confirmed that Zimbabwe has continually experienced politically motivated violence, especially electoral violence, since the turn of the millennium. Whilst respondents did not necessarily agree with the settings, degree, and actors of the politically motivated violence, all respondents alluded that it indeed occurred. The recognition of political violence as an issue that adversely impacts development by all participants across the political spectrum was arguably a noteworthy occurrence that signified the initial move towards united efforts to tackle the challenge. Notably, as well, most of the respondents expressed ignorance when asked about the formal state-led processes aimed at reconciliation that were led by the ONHRI and the NPRC during the period 2008–2023. The few respondents who professed to know about these two bodies did not know of any tangible programs they implemented. Several traditional approaches to relational peace-building were acknowledged by the selected respondents. These ranged from the micro (family) to the meso (community) level and they are discussed below.

### **The Role Played by ‘Sahwira’ (Family Friend) and ‘Munyai’ (go-between) in Peacebuilding**

Respondents identified the role played by ‘sahwira’ (family friend) and munyai (go-between) as crucial in building and mending relations. Each family in the African culture has a friend who, in cases of conflict, people may approach to get an audience with that particular family. In this case, vanasahwira (the family friends), are the link between the outside world and the family. These are individuals who are not only acceptable within a particular family but are highly respected and can say anything without ruffling feathers. This particular quality allows them to speak on sensitive matters including conflicts. Munyai (go-between) was identified by some respondents as a crucial person in peacebuilding as he or she often negotiates between families (shuttle diplomacy) in both preventative and mitigation circumstances.

### **Family Court (Dare remumusha)**

Respondents, especially in in-depth interviews and focus group discussions identified the family court (dare remusha) as a traditional mechanism of peace building that is employed at the family level. Under customary law, the head of the family, who is the father, is the first to attempt to resolve family conflicts. In the case that the father is not available; the eldest son assumes that responsibility. The objective of this court is to keep the family united and in harmony with each other. The family derived authority from the fact that, in the local culture, the actions of one member of the family have ramifications for the whole family; hence, every family member was responsible for the well-being of the whole family. For example, when one commits murder, the whole family is affected by the avenging spirit and not just the offender.

### **Dare (Traditional Court)**

Respondents also identified the traditional court presided over by the sabhuku (village head), sadunhu (headman), and mambo (chief) as a traditional mechanism of peacebuilding in the African context. The researcher had an opportunity to observe Chief Njelele of Gokwe presiding over his court. Dare makes use of customary law or tradition to preside over conflicts in communities. Disputes over land and marriages under customary law are presided over by this court. The chief presides over the court with his cabinet (machinda amambo) Nevertheless, the chief makes monthly reports to the magistrate court that either endorses or nullifies the outcomes of the traditional court. A case is first presided over by the sabhuku (village head), who, in instances where he or she feels the matter is beyond her or him, refers the case to the sadunhu (headman) and ultimately to the chief (mambo). These courts preside over civil cases whilst criminal offenses are reported to



the police and presided over by the formal judiciary system. Traditional leaders who were interviewed all concurred that political violence was a criminal offense whose cases they had no jurisdiction over.

Nevertheless, in instances of serious criminal cases such as rape and murder, whilst the criminal offenses will be presided over by the formal judiciary system, the traditional court could summon a person to appear before the traditional court for what traditional leaders who were interviewed in this research called 'kuita chiga' (taboo) or 'kukanganisa nharaunda/kudeura ropa munyika yamambo' (spilling blood). The thinking behind this was that murder and rape had consequences for the whole community, for they went against African norms and values of 'Ubuntu'. The consequences ranged from droughts and mysterious happenings to deaths. In such cases, the offender and his family were tried and asked to pay compensation (kuripa), and a cleansing ceremony to clean the land was held.

Respondents indicated that in the majority of politically motivated cases of violence, traditional leaders refused to deal with such and referred victims of political violence to the police. One respondent, a victim, who was taken to a 'political base' and assaulted and had her goats taken from her, reported the case to the local village head, who refused to do anything even though she knew her assailants. In her words:

'... our village head is also afraid, when I reported my case, he simply referred me to the police and said he could not do anything, although I knew the people who took my goats...'

Other respondents indicated that they could not report their cases to traditional leaders as most of them were card-carrying members of a certain political party and also participated in violent activities. Narratives from victims generally showed citizen's lack of trust and confidence in the traditional leadership.

### **The Protective Role of the Traditional Leaders**

The findings of the research reveal that the office of traditional leaders is revered in communities. Traditional leaders are seen as the custodians of customs and traditions. A representative of the Legal Resources Foundation noted that conflict and political violence hurt the community as a whole; hence, the traditional leadership structure plays a protectionist role in preserving the culture and customs of the community as well as from harm. One of the village heads in Mashonaland Central interviewed narrated how she was victimized on political grounds for protecting her subjects. She argued that some youths wanted to burn her house to protect known opposition activists in her area. She was taken to a political base together with her subjects by some youths, who demanded her people surrender and join their political party. She, however, stopped the process and argued that it was the right of every citizen under her jurisdiction to belong to a political party of their



choice. In her words:

‘If you are a village head and your subjects are at each other’s throat, your role is to ensure that they leave in harmony.’

It was the resoluteness and courage of this village head that protected her subjects from political violence. Nevertheless, it was evident that the village head feared for herself and her community as Zimbabwe came close to yet another plebiscite as evidenced by her following words,

‘Election time is once again before us ... we are extremely afraid because of the experiences we had in 2018 ... we do not know if the government put in place strategies to ensure that the next election is not a replay of 2018’.

In light of Lederach’s (1997) assertions on the need for multiple peace-building players who are well coordinated, such fears reveal that community strategies to combat political violence must be married with a broader national vision and initiatives for sustainability.

### **Kuripa Ngozi (Appeasement of an avenging spirit)**

Respondents identified kuripa ngozi (appeasement of an avenging spirit) as a peace-building mechanism that is employed in cases where murder occurred. Respondents highlighted that killing a person in their local culture was a serious offense that had ramifications for the offender’s family as a whole. The avenging spirit would cause mysterious happenings and deaths as a way of prompting the family to pay compensation. It is only through ‘kuripa’ (appeasement) that the avenging spirit would rest and cease causing suffering for the offender’s family. If not appeased, the avenging spirit may wipe out or kill the whole family and would continue to do so generation after generation until it is appeased. One village head in Mashonaland West observed that:

‘even if one goes to the formal courts, the perpetrator will have to pay compensation for the matter to be resolved’.

A head of cattle and a young virgin woman are paid to appease the avenging spirit. The payment is an admission of guilt and a gesture to ask for forgiveness on the part of the offender’s family, whilst the acceptance of payment is a gesture of forgiving and accepting to bury the past and share a common future on the part of the deceased family. A ceremony where food and beer are shared by the two families is held to signify reconciliation, and the rest of the community is invited to celebrate with the affected families.

A popular case that was narrated by most respondents was the case which involved Moses Chokuda, who was killed by a group of ZANU PF youths led by the then Midlands Governor’s son, Farai Machaya. Following a visit which was made by the then First Lady Grace Mugabe, the youths had been given food items to distribute but it is alleged they chose to divert the goods for their benefit. Whilst some of the respondents argued that

the deceased, Moses Chokuda, and his friend, who both worked for the Machaya family, stole the goods, some respondents equally argued that Moses Chokuda was innocent but was targeted and killed for his political views. Moses Chokuda was raided in his home and taken, beaten, and killed. According to his father, he broke three ribs, and his back was fractured.

The deceased family approached Chief Njelele for arbitration and wanted ten cattle for compensation so that they could bury their son, but the Machaya family refused. The information that was obtained from a relative of the perpetrators, was refused because they did not want to jeopardize the case, which was already before the courts, by accepting guilt and paying compensation. As a result of their refusal, the Chokuda family refused to bury their son for close to three years. All respondents, including the Chokuda family and the Machaya family, acknowledged that there were mysterious happenings that befell the perpetrator's family that forced them to return to Chief Njelele and ask him to negotiate between the two families two years after the death of Moses Chokuda.

Respondents of focus group discussions and in-depth interviews with Tavengwa Chokuda (father to Moses Chokuda) revealed that the Machaya family tried on several occasions to use their political muscle to bury the deceased without success until they had to appease the avenging spirit of Moses Chokuda. On one occasion, respondents claim that the Machaya family tried to take the deceased body out of the police coffin into another coffin but the deceased body 'refused' to leave the police coffin. It is also claimed that later, Governor Machaya ordered the deceased body to be buried in the police coffin but the undertakers 'failed' to move the body out of the mortuary. Respondents also claimed that one of the magistrates who attempted to charge Tavengwa Chokuda (father of the deceased) of extortion since he openly argued that he needed compensation during the murder trial and a police officer who attempted to facilitate for the disappearance of the case file at the behest of the Machaya family developed mental challenges in mysterious circumstances.

It was these mysterious circumstances and the resolution of the criminal case in the High Court that forced the Machaya family to approach Chief Njelele to negotiate between the two families. At first, the Chokuda family wanted seventy cattle and US\$35,000 to facilitate the burial of their son, but after negotiations, they settled for US\$25,000 and thirty-five cattle. The Chokuda family also wanted a young virgin woman but Chief Njelele refused on the basis that in their tradition and culture, it was not for the living to demand a wife but it was the responsibility of the deceased to pick the woman he wanted, who will in turn come on her own to the deceased family.

It is important to note that the question of a young virgin woman was hotly contested in this research. Whilst Chief Njelele did not accept the Chokuda family's request for a young virgin woman, some traditional leaders in the same area believed that the young virgin woman was supposed to be given to Moses Chokuda's family as per tradition. One village head argued that it was necessary for people in Gokwe South to strictly observe their culture. In his observation, in the local culture 'mukadzi aitungamira mombe dzekunoripa'

(a young virgin woman would lead the herd of cattle to the victim's home). Another village head, whilst lamenting the new order of human rights, had the following to say:

‘... in our culture, males would play around with their wives’ sisters in what was called ‘chiramu’, but today we are told it is domestic violence’.

These statements from various respondents illustrate the disputes that prevail in Gokwe South concerning the traditional methods of peacebuilding. While a segment of the population perceived traditional peacebuilding mechanisms as evolving and adapting to contemporary circumstances, another segment regarded these mechanisms as fixed and immutable.

Ultimately, a sum of US\$25,000 along with twenty cattle was paid to the family of the deceased before the interment of Moses Chokuda, while the remaining balance was settled in full after the burial. Although the offenders were sentenced to a term of eighteen years in prison, they remained obliged to appease the avenging spirit. Regardless of their social and economic stature, the Machaya family had no alternative but to appease the avenging spirit. In the words of Tavengwa Chokuda, (father of the deceased):

‘kugona ngozi huiripa’ (the one and sure way of addressing an avenging spirit is to appease it).

### **Bira (cleansing ceremonies)**

The ‘Bira’ (a ritual of purification) was recognized by respondents as a significant indigenous strategy for peacebuilding. They explained that when acts such as murder, arson, and rape occur within a community, there arise collective repercussions; therefore, there exists a communal obligation, and every individual within the community bears responsibility for the welfare of that specific community. Such transgressions invoke the ire of the ancestors, consequently resulting in the land potentially enduring droughts as a form of retribution. In the words of a respondent from Heal Zimbabwe Trust:

The cleansing ceremony ‘seeks not to label the perpetrators but looks at the whole community as guilty’.

The cleansing rituals are conducted to honor the ancestors and to cleanse the territory of negative omens and evil spirits that may arise from acts such as homicide. The traditional authorities and spiritual leaders typically preside over the rites in the presence of community members.

In a notable incident that garnered significant media attention and was recounted by various respondents, mysterious circumstances associated with mermaids resulted in a water crisis in Gokwe, as a local water facility failed to supply water. Consequently, the responsible Ministry of Water Resources, along with local traditional authorities, felt compelled to conduct a traditional ritual during which beer was prepared to appease both

the ancestors and the mermaids. The findings of the research indicated that a majority of respondents perceived a connection between this incident and the post-2018 electoral violence, suggesting that the actions of the local populace had incited the displeasure of the ancestors. Following the completion of the ritual, the water pump resumed its normal operation.

### **Nhimbe /Humwe**

#### **(Practice of working together as a community to help each other)**

Nhimbe, or Humwe, was recognized by respondents across the three provinces as a traditional mechanism for fostering peace. This practice was historically employed to mobilize labor to mitigate the effects of droughts and to cultivate harmony and unity within communities. The essence of nhimbe is rooted in the African philosophy of Ubuntu, which underscores the ideals of unity, solidarity, collective action, and a sense of belonging. Traditional leaders within the provinces are utilizing nhimbe as a means to foster cohesion within their communities and ensure that individuals collaborate towards a shared objective, transcending political affiliations. A respondent from Heal Zimbabwe also opined that their civic organization is collaborating with traditional leaders in the Midlands and Mashonaland provinces through the nhimbe concept, to reunite the populace and restore the social fabric. The entire community is invited to assist in the plowing or harvesting of a fellow member's fields, after which the beneficiary reciprocates by providing sustenance and beverages to the community members. In modern contexts, nhimbe is being employed to assist victims of political violence in both cultivating and harvesting their fields as well as in reconstructing their homes that were destroyed due to such violence.

### **Discussion**

Endogenous approaches can assist in building relational peace in Zimbabwe, as evidenced by the findings of this paper that highlight the potential of locally-driven strategies in addressing the country's complex socio-political conflicts. Relational peace mostly takes place at the grassroots, a context that is detached from politicians who tend to focus more on dealing with structural issues of peacebuilding. The endogenous approaches highlighted above emphasize the importance of local knowledge, cultural practices, and community involvement in reconciliation efforts. Following the widespread cases of politically motivated violence, Zimbabwean society has largely resorted to traditional and homegrown coping mechanisms in addressing trauma and broken relationships, due to the government's inaction in establishing a comprehensive national healing agenda, or lethargy in the case where these were instituted (ONHRI and NPRC).

The traditional approaches, while not formally structured, reflect a grassroots-level adaptation to conflict resolution, suggesting that local communities have inherent mechanisms

for dealing with conflict, albeit not always effective in achieving long-term peace given that the cycle of violence continually arises due to failure or inaction by politicians with regards to addressing the root causes of the political problems in Zimbabwe. A very important endogenous strategy is the use of restorative-based interventions. These interventions focus on building capacity for reconciliation through participatory and collaborative processes that are centered on local communities.

Such approaches have been shown to transform relationships and promote peaceful interactions, even in the absence of effective state interventions. This method integrates elements of reconciliation, restorative justice, and conflict transformation theories, highlighting the potential of community-driven initiatives in fostering reconciliation. Furthermore, the role of traditional reconciliation practices, such as spirit-oriented systems, is also recognized as a valuable component of endogenous reconciliation efforts. These practices, although marginalized during colonial rule and to some extent in independent Zimbabwe, have a long history in Zimbabwe and can contribute to healing and reconciliation by drawing on cultural and spiritual resources that resonate with local communities.

However, as has been observed, the effectiveness of endogenous approaches to relational peacebuilding in Zimbabwe is limited by external factors, such as state capture of reconciliation processes and the politicization of state-led truth and reconciliation commissions. These challenges highlight the need for a hybrid approach that combines endogenous strategies with institutional support to address the root causes of conflict and ensure sustainable peace. We argue that endogenous approaches, characterized by local participation, cultural relevance, and community empowerment, hold significant potential for assisting in the reconciliation process in Zimbabwe. These strategies can complement formal reconciliation efforts by addressing the unique needs and contexts of local communities, thereby fostering a more inclusive and sustainable peace. However, for these approaches to be fully effective, they must be supported by broader institutional frameworks that address systemic issues and promote genuine reconciliation.

## **Conclusion**

The grassroots serves as the microcosm of conflict, wherein its effects are felt the most. This has been the case in Zimbabwe where people at the grassroots are mostly the perpetrators, victims, and survivors of conflict. Whilst peacemaking at the national level can secede hostilities, endogenous approaches become pertinent in terms of addressing relational peacebuilding between community members. Endogenous strategies, which are community-driven and culturally rooted, offer promising alternatives for reconciliation in Zimbabwe. These methods emphasize community involvement and cultural practices, which can be more effective in addressing local grievances and fostering reconciliation than state-led initiatives. Restorative-based interventions also show potential in building reconciliation capacity. These interventions focus on participatory and collaborative

approaches, engaging affected individuals in dialogue and symbolic gestures of reconciliation. Such methods can transform relationships and promote peaceful interactions, even in the absence of effective state interventions. Endogenous strategies such as traditional justice mechanisms, restorative interventions, and education for reconciliation offer viable pathways for reconciliation in Zimbabwe. These approaches emphasize community involvement, cultural relevance, and participatory processes, which are crucial for addressing the limitations of state-led efforts. However, for these strategies to be effective, they must be supported by political reforms and inclusive participation, ensuring that reconciliation efforts are not only symbolic but also transformative and sustainable.

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