

Ethnicity, narrative, and the 1980s violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe¹

Musiwaro Ndakaripa, Centre for Africa Studies, University of the Free State, South Africa

Narratives of ethnicity about the pre-colonial era tended to strain colonial and post-colonial relations between the two main ethnic groups in Zimbabwe, the Shona and the Ndebele, and their largely ethnically defined political parties, the Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) respectively. The colonial state exaggerated the militant nature of the Ndebele people during the pre-colonial period and blamed them for victimizing the Shona. This contributed to ethnic violence that reached a climax in the 1980s when the colonial white settler regime was replaced by ZANU-PF. This article argues that, while political factors were at play, the political and social power of narratives of ethnicity fuelled the 1980s violence and continues to shape contemporary politics in Zimbabwe.

Introduction

Studies on Zimbabwean² history have forwarded various arguments to explain the 1980s violence in the Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces³ of Zimbabwe (see Map 3). These different explanations are still a subject of debate in

¹ I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Ian Phimister in the Centre for Africa Studies at the University of the Free State, South Africa and my colleagues Itai Muwati, Government Phiri, Nyasha Mboti, Joseph Mujere and Ushewedu Kufakurinani at the University of Zimbabwe for their comments and constructive criticism to the earlier version of this article. I also want to thank the editor and two anonymous reviewers for this journal who gave useful suggestions. I, however, bear full responsibility for any weaknesses in the article.

² The country under discussion was called Southern Rhodesia from 1895 to 1963, Rhodesia from 1965 to 1978, Zimbabwe-Rhodesia in 1979, and Zimbabwe since 1980. For the purpose of this paper the author shall refer to the country as Zimbabwe in all instances unless where other names need to be mentioned for emphasis.

³ Here Matabeleland refers to the provinces of Matabeleland North, Matabeleland South and Bulawayo province. The Ndebele people are the majority in these provinces. The Midlands province also has Ndebele people but the majority are the Shona.

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contemporary Zimbabwe. Scholars like Eliakim Sibanda argue that ethnicity is the major factor that caused that violence.⁴ During the liberation struggle, the leaders of both the Zimbabwe African National Union – Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF)⁵ and the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU)⁶ used ethnic rhetoric to gain political mileage. Ordinary Shona and Ndebele people who were exposed to narratives of ethnicity tended to support a party with a leader from their ethnic group. The purpose of this article is to show how narratives which invoke the alleged traditional hostility between the Ndebele and the Shona since the pre-colonial past widened the ethnic conflicts between them. Although the Shona and the Ndebele could join and support a political party of their choice, the majority of the Shona tended to support ZANU-PF and while the majority of the Ndebele tended to support ZAPU. This enabled narratives of ethnicity to be more divisive. These narratives, in print and oral form, led to suspicion, divisions, and violence between the Shona and the Ndebele within the anti-colonial nationalist movement. Ethnic violence reached a climax in the post-colonial period, particularly in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces. This article complements existing interpretations of the 1980s violence by arguing that ethnic consciousness during the colonial and the post-colonial period was fossilized within narratives which were later used as a charter to commit atrocities against the Ndebele people by the Shona dominated army.

The social and political function of narratives: A conceptual framework

In this study, narratives refer to bodies of verbal or written accounts of connected events in which fiction or stories occupy a significant place. According to Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews, the nature of narratives is often influenced by relations between the narrator/writer and the audience/readers.⁷ Thus a

⁴ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People’s Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005), 244.

⁵ ZANU was formed by a split from ZAPU in August 1963. In the 1970s ZANU divided into two. The main faction led by Robert Mugabe was later renamed ZANU-PF. The smaller formation led by Ndabaningi Sithole was later renamed ZANU – Ndonga. In 1987 ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU united to form ZANU-PF.

⁶ Towards, during and after the 1980 elections ZAPU adopted the name Patriotic Front – Zimbabwe African People’s Union (PF-ZAPU). The party contested the 1980 general elections as Patriotic Front (PF).

⁷ Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews, “Introduction”, in *Considering Counter-Narratives: Narrating, resisting, making sense*, ed. Michael Bamberg and Molly Andrews (Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Co, 2004), x.

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storyteller/writer is likely to leave or add some information depending on whether the audience/reader like or dislike it. Broadly narratives can be put into two major categories, namely first-order narratives and second-order narratives. First-order narratives are stories that people tell or write from their own experiences while second-order narratives are stories which people recount after getting them through social interactions, formal education, media and research.⁸ Scholars generally concur that first-order narratives are more accurate and reliable, and have more internal validity than second-order narratives because narrators use their own vocabulary and conceptual framework.⁹ This study examines the role played by both first-order and second-order Shona and Ndebele narratives in the 1980s violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe. This study will also attempt to explain the resilience of new first and second-order narratives associated with the violence which developed in these provinces since the 1980s.

Most scholars agree that narratives greatly affect human behaviour as they influence people's emotions, memory, and how they interpret their lives.¹⁰ Narratives have social, political and economic functions in the societies in which they are transmitted. Community narratives can be shared through orature, pictures, social performances, and rituals. These narratives inform communities about themselves and their history and play an important role in designing their future.¹¹ A group of people living together can have a community narrative with which they identify with and can play an important role in uniting them.¹² Lewis Williams also asserts that sharing of narratives in a community can uncover new ideas and knowledge, build trust, strengthen relationships, bring people together and contribute to identity formation.¹³ But narratives can play a darker role as well, perpetuating misunderstanding, othering, and even violence. As shall be illustrated below, in addition to culture and heritage, narratives have also played

⁸ Jane Elliot, *Using Narrative in Social Science Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2005), 12-13.

⁹ Ibid, 23.

¹⁰ Julian Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative: Listening to Stories and Creating Settings" in *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 23(5) (1995): 796.

¹¹ Ibid, 803.

¹² Ibid, 804.

¹³ Lewis Williams, Ronald Labonte and Mike O'Brien, "Empowering social action through narratives of identity and culture" in *Health Promotion International*, 18(1) (2003): 36.

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an important role in defining the Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups in Zimbabwe and contributed to violence between them.

Most societies have dominant or master narratives which are mostly second-order narratives. These master narratives are usually spread by the state through mass media and public education institutions.¹⁴ More often, alternative narratives are overshadowed by master state narratives unless there is a new government which finds it useful to adopt new narratives, usually for political expediency. As shall be explained in the forthcoming sections, both colonial and the post-colonial governments in Zimbabwe sought to disseminate their own master narratives through formal education institutions and to suppress those narratives which were and are contrary to their political interests. But according to Lewis Williams, *et al.*, storytelling is also a tool which can be used by groups of people who are culturally and economically marginalised to challenge dominant or master narratives and offer alternative worldviews.¹⁵ These sentiments have also been echoed by Julian Rappaport who asserts that social, economic and political change is difficult to achieve without the support of narratives.¹⁶ In the same vein, Joseph E. Davies contends that protest stories that narrate how a group of people has been oppressed give hope of liberation and have the capacity to persuade the public to resort to violence to achieve social change.¹⁷ Broadly, the above views attest that in some societies narratives can be intertwined and interwoven with social protest and demand for political change.

According to R. D. Benford social movements and those who oppose them use narratives and even myths to mobilize support, hence social narratives are sites of contestation.¹⁸ The existence of narratives and counter-narratives in social movements is ample evidence to prove that narratives are contested. Joost Fontein has argued that in Zimbabwe, oral histories and narratives give ordinary people the opportunity to challenge not only master narratives from the government but

¹⁴ Julian Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative: Listening to Stories and Creating Settings", 803.

¹⁵ Lewis Williams, Ronald Labonte and Mike O'Brien, "Empowering social action through narratives of identity and culture", 34.

¹⁶ Julian Rappaport, "Empowerment Meets Narrative: Listening to Stories and Creating Settings", 796.

¹⁷ Joseph E. Davies, "Narrative and Social Movements. Power of Stories", in *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, ed. Joseph E. Davis (Albany, NY, University of the New York Press, 2002), 3.

¹⁸ R. D. Benford, "Controlling Narratives and Narratives as Control", in *Stories of Change: Narrative and Social Movements*, ed. Joseph E. Davis (Albany, NY, University of the New York Press, 2002), 55.

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also those of academic historians.¹⁹ Gerald Cromer advances the idea that narratives can be used by both state and non-state actors to legitimate social action, including violence.²⁰ This argument is also shared by Benford, who argues that myths can buttress the ideology, philosophy, and notion of social and political correctness that justify the struggle for change.²¹ Cromer argues that narratives of violence are retrospective because they revoke past experiences to justify present and future designs.²² For example, Shona members of the army who carried out atrocities in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, often cited 19th century Ndebele atrocities on the Shona as a justification for their actions. Succinctly, the above views show that narratives are socially and politically contested by the ruling elites and ordinary people, and can be used to take violent action.

For societies emerging from violence, there are usually contestations between governments and civil society to control and disseminate narratives relating to the atrocities committed. Governments often develop a broader and single narrative which suits its political interests.²³ Consequently, government narratives are usually challenged by civil society, which often creates a multiplicity of narratives that are more nuanced and have the capacity to initiate a broad debate.²⁴ However, Sebastian Brett warns that the overzealousness and intolerance usually associated with a multiplicity of narratives from civil society can be divisive and lead to violence.²⁵ In such cases, governments can play an important role in developing balanced and non-partisan official narratives which unite the society. Joost Fontein has articulated how the ZANU-PF government in Zimbabwe controls narratives associated with commemoration of the dead to suit its version of the nation's history. The ZANU-PF government determines what should and should not be commemorated and in the process there is selective remembering and forgetting of the past in order to legitimize the views and

¹⁹ Joost Fontein, "The politics of the dead: Living heritage, bones and commemoration in Zimbabwe", in *Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and Commonwealth*, asa online, 01(2) (2009): 1-25. http://www.theasa.org/publications/asaonline/articles/asaonline_0102.htm. Accessed on 18/03/2014.

²⁰ Gerald Cromer and Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "Introduction to the Special Issue of Violence" in *Qualitative Sociology*, 24(2) (2001): 164.

²¹ R. D. Benford, "Controlling Narratives and Narratives as Control", 62.

²² Gerald Cromer and Robin Wagner-Pacifici, "Introduction to the Special Issue of Violence", 165.

²³ Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Šev enko and Marcela Rios, *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*, (Santiago: Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), 2007), 24.

²⁴ Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Šev enko and Marcela Rios, *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*, 24.

²⁵ Ibid, 29.

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actions of the government.²⁶ According to Fontein, resurfacing bones of people murdered by the army during the 1980s in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces forced affected communities to demand the right to commemorate the dead. However, the government always objects because the narratives associated with those commemorations are contrary to its narrow version of Zimbabwe's post-colonial history.²⁷ In conclusion, narratives play an important role in defining a nation's past, determining the relations between the state and civil society, and managing relations among ethnic groups.

Historical background to the pre-colonial Shona-Ndebele relations

The role played by narratives in escalating the Matabeleland and Midlands violence can be better understood if one has some historical background of the Shona and the Ndebele people. The Shona people occupied what later became known as Southern Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe, for centuries prior to the arrival of the Ndebele. However, the term 'Shona' was not used to refer to the people who lived in the present day Zimbabwe before the nineteenth century. According to David Beach, before 1700 it was a common practice for the people in this region to call themselves after their territories such as Teve or Manyika.²⁸ Gerald Mazarire has looked at the origins of the term 'Shona'. He argues that the term was derogatory and was coined for the people living in Southern Zimbabwe by the Sotho and Nguni people of Southern Africa in the 1830s, and was gradually applied to the rest of the Shona speakers by the Europeans throughout the nineteenth century.²⁹ Still, all the Shona speaking peoples gradually accepted the name for themselves. Most historians agree that various sub-ethnic groups of the Shona like the Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika and Korekore had similar languages, economic, political and religious systems. It must be noted that before 1931 there was no uniform and homogenous language or ethnic group called Shona. George Kahari has articulated the role played by missionaries and linguists such as Clement Martin Doke in the unification of Shona dialects and emergence of

²⁶ Joost Fontein, "The politics of the dead: Living heritage, bones and commemoration in Zimbabwe", 1-25.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ David Beach, *The Shona and their Neighbours* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 31.

²⁹ David Beach, *The Shona and their Neighbours*, 29-31. Gerald C. Mazarire, "Reflections on Pre-Colonial Zimbabwe, c. 850-1880s" in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history from pre-colonial period to 2008*, eds. Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009), 2.

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standard Shona language between 1890 and 1931.³⁰ It was only after 1931, then, that all people who spoke similar dialects such as Karanga, Zezuru, Manyika and Korekore were labelled 'Shona'.

The Ndebele people, on the other hand, consisted of a breakaway group of the Nguni people in present-day South Africa who were led by Mzilikazi and his Khumalo people (see Map 1). The rise of the Zulu state under Shaka's leadership during the first quarter of the nineteenth century was followed by widespread wars and general disturbances among the Nguni people. This resulted in violence and insecurity in many parts of Southern Africa. The Nguni people remember these times of great trouble as *mfecane* (literally 'great crushing' or 'grinding').³¹ Mzilikazi, who was Shaka's trusted general and adviser refused to hand over the cattle which he had obtained through raiding the Sotho-speaking people.³² After two battles with the Zulu army Mzilikazi and his Khumalo people had no hope of protecting themselves from Shaka's wrath except by leaving their land.

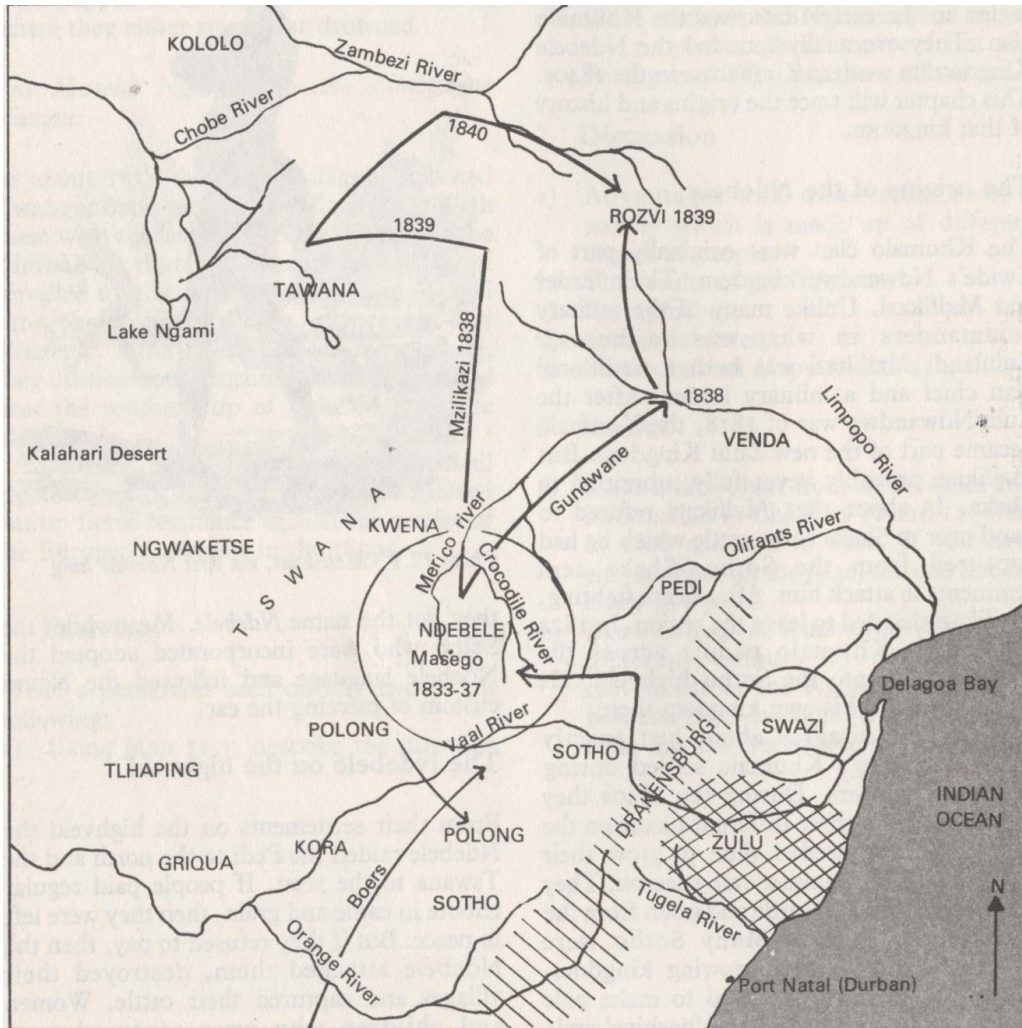
³⁰ George P. Kahari, "The Development of Contemporary Shona Narratives, 1890 – 1984", Volume 1 (Harare: PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 1989), 1-24.

³¹ David Beach, *The Shona and their Neighbours*, 29.

³² Julian R. D. Cobbing, "The Ndebele under the Khumalos, 1820-96" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lancaster, 1976), 14.

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Map 1. Ndebele migration to the north. Source: H. Bhila and K. Shillington, *A Junior Certificate History for Zimbabwe, Book 1* (Harare: Longman, 1986), 102.

In 1822, Mzilikazi led his Khumalo people northwards across the Drakensberg escarpment into western Zimbabwe.³³ The superior military methods of the Khumalo enabled Mzilikazi's army to defeat most groups in their northward

³³ Ibid, 14

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migration. The Khumalo, on their way to and settlement in western Zimbabwe, incorporated different groups of people, including the local Shona.

The nature of the Shona-Ndebele relations was largely determined by the way in which the Ndebele state had been founded and established in western Zimbabwe. The internal and external threats to the security and stability of the nation made defence a priority in Mzilikazi's government. Mzilikazi and his Khumalo people succeeded in creating a strong state because they had a strong army. At that juncture, the major challenge to the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe was a Shona state called the Rozvi Changamire.³⁴ However, by the time of the Ndebele arrival, the once powerful Rozvi state was very weak as a result of attacks by other *mfecane* migrants as well as succession disputes. This made it easier for the Ndebele to dominate and exert their influence in western Zimbabwe and beyond.

Pre-colonial Shona-Ndebele relations can be better understood by a close examination of Ndebele social organization, religion, and the state's frontier relations. Historians on Zimbabwe concur that the Ndebele society in Zimbabwe was organised into three broad social groups. The first and most powerful group was known as the *Zanzi*. It mainly consisted of the original Khumalo and other Nguni elements.³⁵ This group formed the aristocracy of the Ndebele state. Below them and second in importance, were the *Enhla*, made up of all the people who had been incorporated into the Ndebele nation, either voluntarily or forcibly in the course of their long journey from Zululand to Zimbabwe.³⁶ This group included people such as the Sotho, Tswana, Kora and Griqua. The Ndebele had fought these peoples and captured many young men, women and children. The last group, which was usually looked down upon, was known as *Hole*.³⁷ This group consisted of the Shona and Leya people who were living in Zimbabwe before the Khumalo established the Ndebele state. The Ndebele had a strong army which they used to bring the various groups of Shona people under their control and to raid the neighbouring communities for women and young men who would be incorporated into the Ndebele society.³⁸

³⁴ David N. Beach, "Ndebele raiders and Shona power" in *Journal of African History*, 15(4), 636 – 637.

³⁵ Ibid, 117.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ngwabi M. B. Bhebe, "Some aspects of Ndebele relations with the Shona in the nineteenth century", *Rhodesian History* 4 (1973): 37.

³⁸ Ibid, 37.

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Since the Ndebele did not completely displace the Shona who lived in the area they occupied in western Zimbabwe, there was cultural fusion between these two groups. The Ndebele incorporated Shona youths as captives or volunteers from tributary chiefdoms to be trained as soldiers.³⁹ Shona women were married by Ndebele men but the reverse was discouraged by the Ndebele kings. With time the *Zanzi* and the *Enhla* were outnumbered by the Shona who were incorporated as *Hole*. According to David Beach by 1893 about 60 per cent of the Ndebele were *Hole* and of Shona origin.⁴⁰ It is worth stating that most of the present day Ndebele people are of Shona origin who had adopted the Ndebele language and other cultural practices of the ruling Khumalo people. For purposes of cultural organisation, all the people living under the rule of the Ndebele were encouraged or often required to speak the Ndebele language. There is evidence that some Shona family names were converted to make them more compatible with the Ndebele language. For example, one of the Rozvi families Rukuruva became Lukuluba.⁴¹ Other Shona people adopted Ndebele names and surnames.

The Ndebele people also adopted many aspects of Shona religion. According to Ngwabi Bhebe, Ndebele adoption of Shona high-God *Mwari* was one of the manifestations of the Ndebele-Shona cultural fusion.⁴² The Shona had the advantage of being knowledgeable about local spiritual ecology and physical landscape. It is interesting to note that assimilation of each other's cultural influences constituted an important aspect of the Shona-Ndebele relationship. However, the majority of the Shona people who lived in Zimbabwe were not affected by Ndebele culture. Rather, they merely paid tribute while sometimes experiencing occasional Ndebele raids. Other Shona communities never had a direct encounter with the Ndebele and remained independent throughout the nineteenth century.⁴³ Revisionist scholars on the history of Shona-Ndebele relations have convincingly deconstructed the mythology which gave a picture of a despotic Ndebele military state that brutalised the Shona. Sabelo Ndlovu-

³⁹ NAZ NB 6/1/1, Report by C. N. C. for the year ending 1898. All archival reference codes used in this paper are those of the National Archives of Zimbabwe (NAZ), Harare.

⁴⁰ David N. Beach, *Zimbabwe Before 1900* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1984), 54.

⁴¹ David N. Beach, *The Shona and Zimbabwe, 900 - 1850: An Outline of Shona history* (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1980), 268.

⁴² Ngwabi M. B. Bhebe, "The Ndebele and Mwari before 1893: A Religious Conquest of the Conquerors by the Vanquished", in *Guardians of the Land: Essays on Central African Territorial Cults*, ed. J. Matthew Schoffeleers (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1979), 287.

⁴³ David N. Beach, *Zimbabwe Before 1900*, 58.

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Gatsheni concurs with Bhebe that the Ndebele ruling elite often preferred to establish rapport with their subjects through the use of religion and rituals.⁴⁴ Moreover, the Ndebele military units did not have the resources and capacity to militarily devastate wide areas with numerically superior Shona.⁴⁵

Colonial literature and myths about pre-colonial Shona-Ndebele relations

A study by George Kahari shows that most Shona narratives about the period before the coming of the Ndebele and British colonial rule are romantic in nature.⁴⁶ The old world Shona narratives idealised, sentimentalised, and even idolized the Shona past for its powerful egalitarian values.⁴⁷ Most of these narratives present a past in which the Shona people lived in a panoramic and picturesque environment with beautiful rivers, forests, and mountains. In that period the Shona are presented as moral, sensitive and peaceful people whose lives were centred on livestock and crop production. These narratives have a social role of expressing, popularizing, and preserving religious, cultural, and economic values of the Shona people.⁴⁸ The advent of the Ndebele, and later colonial rule, is largely presented in these narratives as the period when tyranny, despotism, exploitation, and social injustice started. This section focuses on the much narrower topic of the development of narratives about pre-colonial Shona-Ndebele relations and how they have been presented in both oral and written form.

Travellers, explorers, missionaries, literary writers, and colonial historians exaggerated the impact of Ndebele rule and influence on the Shona people. This led to the development of myths about Shona-Ndebele hostility. David Beach argues that since the Ndebele people arrived in Zimbabwe they had been subjected to a process of legend-making that amounts to the creation of mythology.⁴⁹ Most of the exaggeration and mythology relates to raiding (see Map

⁴⁴ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Dynamics of Democracy and Human Rights among the Ndebele of Zimbabwe, 1818 - 1934" (Harare: PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2003), 151.

⁴⁵ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele nation: Reflections on hegemony, memory and historiography* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2009), 104.

⁴⁶ George P. Kahari, "The Development of Contemporary Shona Narratives, 1890 – 1984", Volume 1, 127-128.

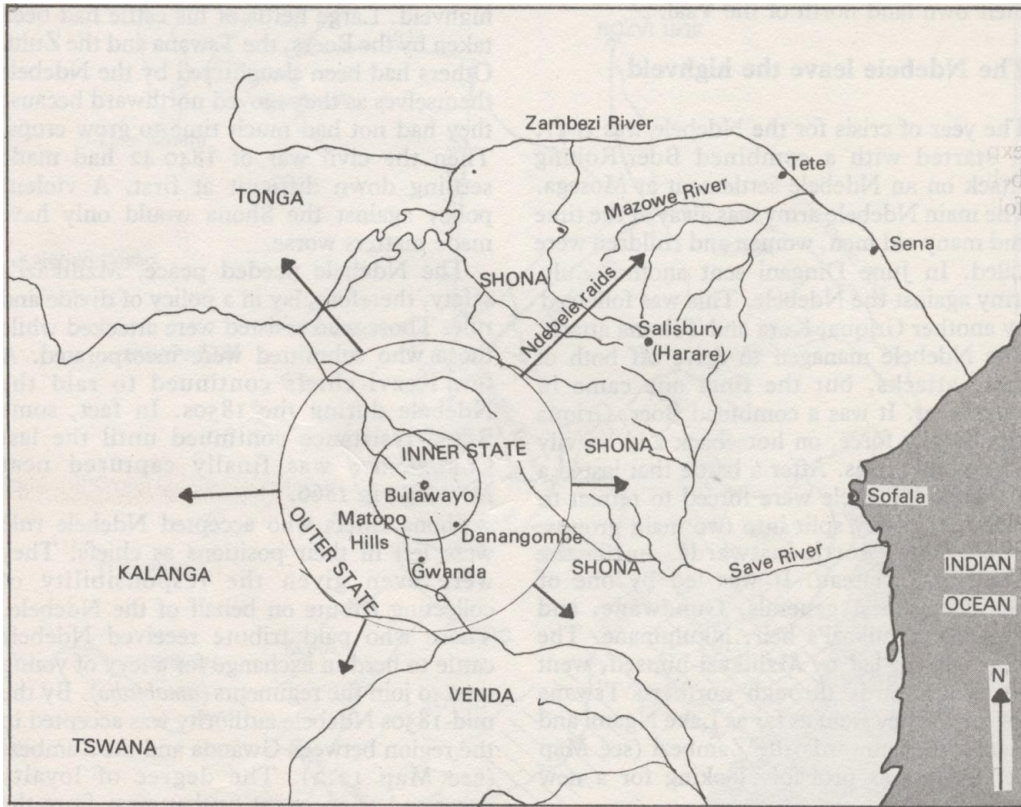
⁴⁷ Ibid, 128.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ David N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1986), 16.

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2). There are a number of reasons why nineteenth century European writers presented the Ndebele as “savages” and the Shona as victims.



Map 2. Ndebele raids, 1840 – 90. Source: H. Bhila and K. Shillington, *A Junior Certificate History for Zimbabwe, Book 1* (Harare: Longman, 1986), 102

Missionary groups that wanted to gain support for their activities presented the Ndebele state as a brutal institution which needed to be destroyed in order to spread the gospel and “civilisation” in Zimbabwe. They encouraged the British to subjugate and colonize the “savage” Ndebele so that they could spread Christianity and “save the souls” of the Shona peoples.⁵⁰ According to Beach, mythology about the Ndebele started with a missionary called Robert Moffat who

⁵⁰ Ibid.

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saw them among the Sotho during the *mfecane* in the 1820s and 1830s.⁵¹ Moffat's perceptions about the Ndebele were shaped by his limited understanding of wars and other military activities in which the Ndebele were involved. As late as 1854, Moffat assumed that the Ndebele were still very violent and were victimizing the Shona.⁵² Robert Moffat's son, John Smith Moffat presented the Ndebele as a cruel people and described Ndebele history as "one long tale of bloodshed and intrigue". He also wrote: "Robbers and freebooters they were and freebooters they are by nature".⁵³ Like his father, John Smith Moffat's memoirs and letters sought to show that the Ndebele were brutal and cruel raiders in spite of the fact that there was little or no evidence to this effect. Moffat junior failed to consider, for example, that the Shona also raided the Ndebele. This presentation and the establishment of the London Missionary Society mission in Matabeleland largely contributed to the genesis of mythology about the Ndebele. Myths about Ndebele brutality on the Shona flourished and were popularized and spread by missionaries. These were passed on by writing or by word of mouth and became oral traditions among both the Shona and the Ndebele people.⁵⁴ These oral narratives still flourish today.

The travellers and traders also exaggerated Ndebele brutality, emphasizing the wildness of the areas they passed through in order to impress readers with their reports. Most literature by travellers on Shona-Ndebele relations suggest that the scorched earth strategy was used by the Ndebele during the raids and caused widespread depopulation in Shona areas around the Ndebele state.⁵⁵ The Ndebele were presented as people who used to terrorize the Shona, killing their men and taking their women, children, and cattle to their kingdom. An example of a colonial writer who presented the Shona people as victims of the Ndebele is Frederick Courteney Selous (31 Dec 1851 – 4 Jan 1917). Selous was a British explorer and hunter who became famous for his exploits in south and east Africa. The following is an extract from his writings:

The poor Mashunas [Mashonas], unskilled in war and living, moreover, in small communities scattered all over the country without any central

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ NAZ NB6/1/1, Annual Report Bubi for year ending 31 Mar. 1898, by V. Gielgud.

⁵⁴ David N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, 16.

⁵⁵ David N. Beach, *Zimbabwe before 1900*, 57.

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government, fell an easy prey to the invader, and very soon every stream in their country ran red with their blood, while vultures and hyenas feasted undisturbed amidst the ruins of their devastated homes. Their cattle, sheep and goats were driven off by their conquerors and their children ... were taken for slaves. In a few years there were no Mashunas left in the open country, the remnant that had escaped massacre having fled into mountainous districts to the south and east of their former dwellings, where they still live.⁵⁶

The above extract portrays the Ndebele as a people who brutalised the Shona with impunity in the pre-colonial era. This version also views the British colonizers favourably as saviours and liberators of the Shona. In 1893 Father Andrew Hartmann, a Jesuit missionary wrote:

If no stop is put to these raids, it will go on until the Mashonas are exterminated ... The Mashonas are a complete wreck physically, intellectually, and also morally. In my constant intercourse with them I hear it often times said that if the white men do not protect them they will emigrate from the country.⁵⁷

The British settlers perpetuated this version of history, which was printed in school textbooks and passed on to latter-day generations. Latter generations of the Shona and the Ndebele appear to have believed many of the distorted perspectives of colonial writers. These myths were gradually developed into narratives of national identity. As shall be shown in the next sections, such narratives played a role in dividing the Zimbabwean nationalist movement on ethnic lines into ZANU and ZAPU, and in instigating massacres in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in the post-colonial era.

One of the European motives for spreading myths exaggerating Ndebele brutality on the Shona appears to have been the need to justify their desire to destroy the Ndebele state and to make territorial claims in Mashonaland. The occupation of Mashonaland in the 1890s began before the crushing of the Ndebele

⁵⁶ Frederick Courteney Selous cited in Terence O. Ranger, "The nineteenth century in Southern Rhodesia" in *Aspects of Central African History*, ed. Terence O. Ranger (London: Heinemann, 1982), 125.

⁵⁷ Father Andrew Hartmann cited in Terence O. Ranger, "The nineteenth century in Southern Rhodesia" in *Aspects of Central African History*, ed. Terence O. Ranger, 125.

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kingdom by the British South Africa Company (BSAC), which was primarily responsible for the colonization of Zimbabwe. The BSAC exaggerated the impact of Ndebele raids on the Shona to justify their conquest of the Ndebele state in 1893.⁵⁸ In 1889 Lobengula, Mzilikazi's successor, signed the Rudd Concession in which the BSAC claimed that the Ndebele dominated the whole of Mashonaland. Terence Ranger has shown that the political pressure that emerged during the scramble for Zimbabwe made the BSAC exaggerate the extent of Ndebele influence in order to substantiate their claim to Mashonaland through the Rudd Concession.⁵⁹ This was done particularly to exclude the Portuguese, who were also making territorial claims over Mashonaland.⁶⁰ The company's perspectives on pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele relations became official state history when a "responsible government" was established in 1923.

As in other colonies, education was used in Zimbabwe to minimise resistance from Africans.⁶¹ The colonial textbooks used by both Shona and Ndebele school children presented the Shona as victims of Ndebele raids. Literary works and official history were used to "divide and rule" the Shona and the Ndebele thereby preventing them from uniting against British colonial rule. According to Matthew Lange, education can contribute to ethnic violence when authorities socialize students in ways that promote ethnic hostility, for example through the use of ethnic stereotypes and claims of historical antipathy.⁶² In addition Lange argues that public schools can encourage and legitimize ethnic discrimination and disfavour when they teach that the country is true homeland of some ethnic groups and by portraying others in negative ways, for example by labelling them as evil, less intelligent and cowards.⁶³ Before 1950, there was very little reading material written in Shona, Ndebele, or other local languages. In the early 1950s, missionaries and the government's Department of Bantu Education noted the need to provide Africans with reading material to maintain their literacy, especially for those who could not further their education beyond the

⁵⁸ NAZ Hist. MSS CO 4/1/1 F. Rutherford to J. W. Colenbrander, 9 Feb. 1982.

⁵⁹ Terence O. Ranger, "The rewriting of African history during the scramble: the Matabele dominance in Mashonaland", *African Social Research* 4 (1967).

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Charles Van Onselen, *Chibaro: African Mine Labour in Southern Rhodesia: 1900 – 1933* (London: Pluto, 1976), 22.

⁶² Matthew Lange, *Ethnic Violence and Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 1.

⁶³ Ibid, 19.

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standard three or grade five.⁶⁴ It was realised that African literature could be richer and more effective if it were written in vernacular languages so that Africans could fully express themselves in the languages of their hearts and thoughts.⁶⁵

The government established the Southern Rhodesia African Literature Bureau in 1954 in order to promote the writing and reading of African literature.⁶⁶ The Bureau worked with mission publishing houses like Mambo Press, Chishawasha Mission, Word of Life Publications, Rhodesia Mission Press and Daystar in publishing literary works.⁶⁷ As a result of the Bureau's efforts, Africans increasingly became interested in literature. The Bureau used creative writing in part to divert the indigenous population from the reality of colonial exploitation such as the acquisition of land, forced labour in farms and mines. As noted by Pavel Gurevich, literary works in colonised societies were often symbolic, using illusory images and signs designed to secure Western dominance over the developing world.⁶⁸ In the case of Zimbabwe, Emmanuel Chiwome, notes that literary works were meant to convince the Shona that their colonization by European settlers was a natural process.⁶⁹ The Bureau promoted literary histories with narratives that portrayed the Shona as hapless victims of the Ndebele. At the same time, however, the Bureau was critical of any writings that depicted Africans as victims of colonial rule or incited Africans to resist colonialism. Such writings were either edited to conform to the imperial worldview or not published at all. This demonstrates how colonial education functioned to maintain the status quo by widening the rift between the Shona and the Ndebele.

⁶⁴ Tommy Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 'The Influence of Folktales and Other Factors on Early Narratives in Ndebele Literature' (Harare: MPhil Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 1994), 31.

⁶⁵ O. T. Mupawaenda, "African Literature and the Possibilities of Opening a Rural Library Service in Rhodesia" in *The Rhodesian Librarian* 1 (1) (1969): 4-8. Also see E. W. Krog, *African Literature in Rhodesia* (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1966), 11

⁶⁶ NAZ I.S. 343. H. G. Baldwin, "The Southern Rhodesia African Literature Bureau" in NADFORM Service Information Sheet.

⁶⁷ E. W. Krog, *African Literature in Rhodesia* (Gwelo: Mambo Press, 1966), 13.

⁶⁸ Pavel Gurevich, *Dialogue of Cultures or Cross-cultural Expansion* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1990), 67. Cited in Emmanuel M. Chiwome, 'Factors that Underserved Shona Literature with Particular Reference to Fiction 1950s - 1980s' (Harare: PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 1994), 38.

⁶⁹ Emmanuel M. Chiwome, 'Factors that Underserved Shona Literature with Particular Reference to Fiction 1950s - 1980s' (Harare: PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 1994), 23.

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Shona writers often referred to the Ndebele with a derogatory term “*madzviti*” which could also mean “*ngozi*” or evil spirits.⁷⁰ The Ndebele were presented as savages and brutal murderers in Shona literary writings. A good example of such writers is Patrick Chakaipa, a product of mission education and an ordained Roman Catholic priest. One of the paragraphs in Chapter 11 of Chakaipa’s novel *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* reads as follows when translated to English:

It was the practice of the Ndebele people to fight the Zezuru [a Shona sub-ethnic group] and raid their grain, cattle and goats. Sometimes they raided their beautiful women and young men who became their slaves. Sometimes when they arrived at a homestead they burnt all huts, murdered all old and ugly women. They were feared such that when one warned, “The Ndebele are coming!” all Zezurus would run away and take refuge in caves in the mountains. When Zezurus harvested their grain they hid it in the caves, together with their goats.⁷¹

This is a typical example of the extent to which the Ndebele people were presented as barbaric by Shona literary writers. These writers instilled hateful feelings in the hearts of most Shona readers against the Ndebele. Ironically, the above novel by Chakaipa won the first fiction prize in 1956. The novel was said to be “enjoyed by school children.”⁷² Since reading fiction was compulsory and certain novels were recommended in primary and secondary schools, school children formed the bulk of the reading public.⁷³ In this context, narratives of ethnicity in Shona novels used in colonial schools played an important role in creating the ethnic rift in the younger generations of the Shona and the Ndebele.⁷⁴ It must be noted that these novels are still used in Zimbabwean schools. Nothing has been done to correct the gross misrepresentations of Ndebele brutality on the

⁷⁰ David N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, 39.

⁷¹ Patrick Chakaipa, *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* (Salisbury: Longman Zimbabwe (Pvt) Limited, 1958), 33.

⁷² In a report of the circuit inspector of Manicaland Central, E. S. Mazaiwana, dated 11 August 1964. Cited from Emmanuel M. Chiwome, ‘Factors that Undereveloped Shona Literature with Particular Reference to Fiction 1950s - 1980s’, 78

⁷³ Emmanuel M. Chiwome, ‘Factors that Undereveloped Shona Literature with Particular Reference to Fiction 1950s - 1980s’, 25.

⁷⁴ Interview with SG, Former Education Officer, 09/09/2012. Two capital letters unrelated to actual names are used in this article to ensure anonymity of all respondents interviewed.

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Shona despite the fact that revisionist historians have convincingly challenged them as exaggerations.

The first Ndebele literary writings to be published were unique in Zimbabwe because they were based on known historical events. The writers of Ndebele narratives seemed to have explicitly avoided antagonizing the Shona in their works. Ndabaningi Sithole, who later became a veteran Zimbabwean nationalist and first president of ZANU, published the first Ndebele narrative *Amandebele KaMzilikazi* in 1956. This narrative focuses on how the Ndebele state was defeated by the BSAC in 1893 and the causes of the Ndebele uprising in 1896.⁷⁵ Sithole's work was influenced by the winds of nationalism which were sweeping across Africa in the 1950s and 1960s.⁷⁶ The novel makes use of oral traditions, songs, and chants and incites the Ndebele to fight against colonial rule. As noted by Tommy Matshakayile-Ndlovu, *Amandebele KaMzilikazi* was published in Ndebele and its contents leave the reader with the feeling that the target audience is an Ndebele person.⁷⁷ The contents were meant to invoke heroic memories, revive the spirit of Ndebele nationhood, and demand Ndebele independence. By and large, the portrayal of a rich Ndebele history reinforces a particularistic Ndebele ethnic identity in Zimbabwe which, as will be shown below, makes national unity difficult.⁷⁸

Although most Ndebele literary writings did not directly denigrate the Shona, the manner in which a proud, rich, and heroic Ndebele history was presented irked the Shona. Narratives in the first Ndebele literary writings were largely a reflection of the nature of Ndebele oral traditions which projected a warrior tradition and hegemonic ideologies. Since their arrival in Zimbabwe, the Ndebele people had played a significant role in the development of their own mythology. They had created a myth about their migration from Zululand. For instance, according to Beach, there are legends about how, under the leadership of their great king Mzilikazi, they defeated Shaka's army; incorporated the Sotho, Xhosa and Griqua; defeated various Rozvi houses and incorporated the local

⁷⁵ Ndabaningi Sithole, *Amandebele KaMzilikazi* (Cape Town: Longmans Green and Company, 1956).

⁷⁶ Tommy Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 'The Influence of Folktales and Other Factors on Early Narratives in Ndebele Literature', 37.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 59.

⁷⁸ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *The Ndebele nation: Reflections on hegemony, memory and historiography* (Amsterdam: Rozenberg Publishers, 2009), iii.

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Shona people.⁷⁹ These stories exaggerated their military power, success in battles, and influence over the Shona people.⁸⁰ The Ndebele also exaggerated the extent of the geographical area under their influence. For example, they claimed their tributary area extended as far as the Save River in the south even though that area was under the influence of the Gaza, one of the states which originated as a result of the *mfecane*.⁸¹

The above narratives were reflected in Ndebele literary writings. Peter Mahlangu published the second Ndebele narrative *Umthwakazi*, which is a legendary historical novel in 1957. The title literally means “The Owner of the State” and it describes the migration of Mzilikazi and the Khumalo people from South Africa and how they established the Ndebele state in Zimbabwe.⁸² The novel praises the statesmanship of Mzilikazi who welded together various ethnic groups - including the Shona - to create the Ndebele nation. Shona readers must have been irked by literary works that praised heroic Ndebele history and presented them as losers, victims, and subjects in their ancestral land,⁸³ especially as oral narratives portraying Shona-Ndebele relations as perpetrator-victim were already flourishing.

Exaggerations about Ndebele brutality on the Shona were largely supported by recommended textbooks in the Cambridge studies history syllabi. Syllabus 2160 is a typical example of a colonial history syllabus that served to widen the Shona-Ndebele ethnic rift. This syllabus, introduced in the mid-1970s,⁸⁴ recommended history textbooks which placed emphasis on Europeans rather than Africans in central Africa. Most of the history textbooks it recommended regarded pre-colonial African states such as the Ndebele as embodiments of despotic cultures. Surprisingly, this syllabus was used up to 1991; eleven years after the country attained independence.⁸⁵ A notable example of a recommended history textbook that gave a despotic picture of the Ndebele

⁷⁹ David Beach, *The Shona and their Neighbours* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 133.

⁸⁰ David N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, 17.

⁸¹ Francois Coillard, *On the threshold of Central Africa* (London: Hodder, 1897), 36.

⁸² Peter Mahlangu, *Umthwakazi* (Cape Town: Longmans Green and Company, 1957).

⁸³ Interview with JC, Male, School Head, Masvingo, 07/12/2012.

⁸⁴ Teresa Barnes, “‘History has to Play its Role’: Constructions of Race and Reconciliation in Secondary School Historiography in Zimbabwe, 1980 – 2002” in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 33 (2) (2006): 633-651.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

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kingship and a monstrous image of the Ndebele army is P. E. N. Tindall's book *A History of Central Africa*. Chapter 4 describes the Ndebele army as follows:

The king's power was backed by the warriors, who were a special class; they did no ordinary work, and were allowed more meat than the other classes. They looked very fierce in their war-dress: capes of black ostrich feathers and kilts of monkey skins, white cattle tails fastened at elbows, knees and ankles, and crests of feathers on their heads. They carried assegais, knobkerries and ox-hide shields. They were strictly disciplined, and were not permitted to marry until they had proved themselves by 'dipping their spears in blood' – usually by raids on the Shona or the people of the Barotse Valley.⁸⁶

The Shona seemed to have either deliberately or unconsciously accepted both the Ndebele and European mythologies about the impact of the Ndebele on them.⁸⁷ These mythologies were passed from one generation to another through oral narratives and sowed the seed of ethnic conflict between the Ndebele and Shona that continued into post-independence Zimbabwe. It is also possible that the Shona accepted such a mythology portraying them as pre-colonial victims of the Ndebele in order to justify their vendettas against the Ndebele during the colonial and post-colonial periods.

However, it is worth mentioning that some of the textbooks recommended at Cambridge Advanced Level History are critical of the version of Ndebele rule over the Shona as extremely destructive. In Chapter 3 of his book *An Introduction to the History of Central Africa*, for example, Alfred John Wills gives his views on pre-colonial Shona-Ndebele relations as follows:

Most [Shona] avoided the harshest fate by agreeing to pay tribute; others resisted, usually to suffer loss of life and cattle, occasionally as in the case of the Hungwe to defeat the raiders; while some, in eastern Mashonaland, never experienced Ndebele raids at all. Here much of the religious and industrial character of Shona society was preserved. At the outset of Lobengula's reign in 1868 there was an intensification of raiding activity,

⁸⁶ P. E. N. Tindall, *A History of Central Africa* (New York: Praeger, 1967), 65.

⁸⁷ David N. Beach, *War and Politics in Zimbabwe 1840-1900*, 17.

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but subsequent expeditions never reached far into Shona territory. While there is no question that the Ndebele continued as a disciplined military despotism to live by raiding round all points of the compass, later European accounts, aiming to justify the occupation of Mashonaland by claiming to have rescued the Shona, tended to exaggerate the extent and savagery of Ndebele power.⁸⁸

The above extract is somewhat balanced because of the following reasons. Firstly, it admits that Ndebele raids on the Shona were a reality. Secondly, it shows that the Shona had developed methods of avoiding dire consequences of Ndebele raids by either complying with their demands or taking refuge in the natural environment. Thirdly, it shows that sometimes the Shona defeated the Ndebele raiders. Lastly, it shows that Ndebele raids were not very destructive because Shona cultural and economic institutions remained as they were, and some areas were not even affected. With these arguments one can safely agree with Wills that the impact of Ndebele activities was grossly exaggerated to justify the colonization of Zimbabwe.

In general, the Shona and the Ndebele reacted to the entrenchment of settler rule with mutual suspicion. According to Ranger, at the end of the 1920s Shona farmers were still recalling the Ndebele raids of the nineteenth century and using these memories to justify their suspicions of Ndebele politicians.⁸⁹ Similarly, there were ethnic fights between the Shona and the Ndebele in Zimbabwe's major cities, Harare and Bulawayo during colonial rule.⁹⁰ Thus the white settlers had successfully developed a version of pre-colonial Shona and Ndebele relations which divided these ethnic groups and deflected critique of colonial rule. However, it must also be noted that this representation of the Ndebele as "*madzviti*" or "savages" in Shona traditions is based on the oral narratives of Shona ancestors who experienced Ndebele rule and raids. These

⁸⁸ Alfred J. Wills, *An Introduction to the history of Central Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 65.

⁸⁹ Terence O. Ranger, *The African Voice in Southern Rhodesia, 1898-1930* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 185.

⁹⁰ See Ian Phimister and Charles van Onselen, "The Political Economy of Tribal Animosity: A Case Study of the 1929 Bulawayo Location 'Faction Fight'" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 6(1) (1979): 1-43; Enocent Msindo, "Ethnicity, not Class? The 1929 Bulawayo Faction Fights Reconsidered" in *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 32(3) (2006): 429-447 and Enocent Msindo, "Ethnicity and Nationalism in Urban Colonial Zimbabwe: Bulawayo, 1950 to 1963" in *Journal of African History*, 48(2) (2007): 267-290.

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narratives were passed by word of mouth to the present generation and throughout the colonial period, the Shona referred to the Ndebele as “*madzviti*” in ordinary conversation. As explained above, literary writings and school textbooks also presented acrimonious relations between the Ndebele and the Shona people. Notions of belonging, autochthony and heritage were put into context during the genesis of mass nationalism in the 1960s. The Shona regarded themselves as the autochthons, rightful heirs of the country and regarded the Ndebele as outsiders, invaders and the first colonizers.⁹¹ This made unity difficult during the nationalist movement and in the post-colonial period as the Shona found it difficult to unite with the descendants of the people who were said to have brutalized their forefathers.

Ethnic divisions in the nationalist movement

The demand for African majority rule in Zimbabwe began with the formation of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1957. Joshua Nkomo, a Kalanga, led the ANC and the National Democratic Party (NDP) which was founded in 1960 after the banning of the ANC. Here, it is important to mention that the Kalanga are a Shona sub-group in Western Zimbabwe with strong cultural affinities with the Ndebele.⁹² When the NDP was also banned, the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) was formed in 1962, again, with Joshua Nkomo as the leader. Divisions within African nationalism became apparent when ZAPU split in July 1963, leading to the formation of a splinter party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) in August of the same year. ZANU was formed by high-ranking Shona personalities from ZAPU such as Ndabaningi Sithole, Leopold Takawira and Robert Mugabe.⁹³ The 1963 ZAPU/ZANU split is regarded by most historians and political scientists on Zimbabwe as the mother of all splits because it led to ethnic conflicts between the Shona and the Ndebele both during the liberation struggle and after the attainment of independence in 1980. Besides

⁹¹ Interview with MS, Male, Former ZIPRA guerrilla, Harare, 5/06/2010.

⁹² Teresa Barnes, “Reconciliation, ethnicity and school history in Zimbabwe 1980-2002”, in *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation*, eds. Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage (Cape Town, Institute for Justice and Reconciliation, 2004), 143.

⁹³ Masipula Sithole, “State Power Consolidation in Zimbabwe: Party and Ideological Development”, in *Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy*, eds. Edmond J. Keller and Donald Rothchild (London, Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987), 86.

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ZANU and ZAPU, there were other factions of the African nationalist movements that formed in the 1970s such as the National Democratic Union (NDU), the National Front of Zimbabwe (NFZ), the United National African Council (UNAC) and the Zimbabwe Democratic Party (ZDP). These political parties declined after independence, leaving ZANU and ZAPU as the dominant parties on the country's political landscape.

Several hypotheses have been put forward to explain what caused the ZAPU split of 1963, resulting in the formation of ZANU and these includes: the leadership question⁹⁴; ideology;⁹⁵ and ethnicity. This article argues that ethnicity, which had been solidified by narratives depicting hostile relations between the Shona and the Ndebele in the pre-colonial era, was largely responsible for the 1963 ZAPU/ZANU split and the subsequent conflicts. ZAPU leadership and some of its members claimed that the split was caused by the tribalism of the founders of the new party.⁹⁶ At its inception in 1963, ZANU, which was led by Ndabaningi Sithole, was dominated by Shona, and some scholars regarded it as an ethnic and regional oriented party. ZANU is said to have exploited ethnicity, and its appeal was characterized by ethnic statements drawn from narratives about pre-colonial relations between the Shona and the Ndebele. Statements made by ZANU activists such as “AmaNdebele are sell-outs”, “they are strangers in Zimbabwe as much as Whites are,” or “AmaNdebele used to plunder our forebears’ land,”⁹⁷ did a lot to divide the Shona and the Ndebele people. Masipula Sithole noted that in its early years, ZANU was strongest in Manicaland, Masvingo, and partly the Midlands Province. ZAPU, on the other hand, retained its strongest support in Matabeleland, as well as Harare and its surrounding areas.⁹⁸

The 1963 ZAPU/ZANU split introduced ethnic violence within the nationalist movement in Southern Rhodesia. ZAPU supporters who were mainly Ndebele and ZANU supporters who were mainly Shona fought against each other. The colonial governments, especially the Ian Smith regime, were excited by the animosity between the two rival nationalist parties and sometimes withdrew night

⁹⁴ Masipula Sithole, *Zimbabwe: Struggles within the struggle* (Harare: Rujeko Publishers, 1999), 39-40.

⁹⁵ Masipula Sithole, “State Power Consolidation in Zimbabwe: Party and Ideological Development”, 87.

⁹⁶ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 141.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Masipula Sithole, “State Power Consolidation in Zimbabwe: Party and Ideological Development”, 87.

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police patrols in black townships in the urban areas, abetting ethnic violence which resulted in injuries and sometimes deaths.⁹⁹ The liberation war in the 1970s was characterized by fighting between guerrillas belonging to ZANU and ZAPU's armed wings, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) respectively and this ultimately weakened the struggle against colonial rule. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni, ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas killed each other when they were put together in the same camps in Libya.¹⁰⁰ He argued that this was because the leaders of these movements denounced each other to justify their party's separate existence.¹⁰¹ This shows the extent to which narratives of ethnicity poisoned Shona and Ndebele relations during the liberation struggle.

Independence and violence

After protracted guerrilla warfare in the country, the ZANU and ZAPU nationalist leaders were tired of the war. Their guerrilla armies, ZANLA and ZIPRA respectively, were both strained logistically and short in supplies.¹⁰² Furthermore, frontline states, especially Zambia and Mozambique, which had served as training grounds for ZIPRA and ZANLA guerrillas, wanted the war to end to avoid further socio-economic strain and loss of life in their own countries. Inside Zimbabwe, the Ian Smith regime was seriously concerned with the economic and socio-political damage of the war.¹⁰³ The Rhodesian government was also under international pressure to pave the way for majority rule. All these pressures culminated in the 1979 Lancaster House Conference in Britain, which sought to find a lasting solution to the war. The conference was attended by Robert Mugabe as leader of ZANU-PF; Nkomo, the leader of ZAPU; Muzorewa, the leader of the

⁹⁹ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 95.

¹⁰⁰ Ngwabi Bhebe, *Simon Vengayi Muzenda and the Struggle for and Liberation of Zimbabwe* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 2004), 45. Cited in Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Nation Building in Zimbabwe and the Challenges of Ndebele Particularism". <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/viewFile/39430/29632>. pdf format, Accessed on 20/02/2012.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Joseph Mtisi, Munyaradzi Nyakudya and Teresa Barnes, "War in Rhodesia 1965-1980" in *Becoming Zimbabwe: A history of Zimbabwe from the pre-colonial period to 2008*, eds. Brian Raftopoulos and Alois Mlambo, 164.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

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United African National Council (UANC) which included Ian Smith; and Ndabaningi Sithole, the leader of the smaller splinter faction of ZANU.

A ceasefire was negotiated and the parties agreed to hold elections within three months to choose the new government of independent Zimbabwe. The period in the run up to the February 1980 election, however, was marred by interparty intimidation and ethnic violence. In Mashonaland, ZANU-PF made it clear that ZAPU could not campaign freely because its guerrilla army, ZIPRA, did not operate in the area during the days of the liberation war.¹⁰⁴ Tribal statements such as “The Ndebele ruled (in the pre-colonial period), the British ruled (in the colonial period), it’s now our turn”¹⁰⁵, were often made by the people who campaigned for ZANU-PF.

Despite the violence, the elections went ahead in February 1980. Out of 100 parliamentary seats ZANU-PF won 57, ZAPU 20 and United African National Council (UANC) won 3 seats. On 18 April, 1980 Zimbabwe was declared an independent state with Canaan Banana as President and Robert Mugabe of ZANU-PF as the Prime Minister.¹⁰⁶ A government of national unity was formed with ministers of some important ministries appointed from leaders of the Rhodesian Front (RF) and ZAPU. Denis Norman, an RF leader was appointed Minister of Agriculture.¹⁰⁷ Joshua Nkomo was appointed Minister of Home Affairs, with jurisdiction over the police and law and order.¹⁰⁸ Other ZAPU leaders who were appointed ministers are Joseph Msika, John Nkomo, Josiah Chinamano, Jini Ntuta, Daniel Ngwenya, Cephass Msipa and Clement Muchachi. However, according to Eliakim Sibanda, tribalism was still a factor, even immediately after independence. Sibanda noted that of the twenty-eight ZANU-PF ministers and deputy-ministers, only one, Enos Nkala, who was the Finance

¹⁰⁴ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People’s Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 238.

¹⁰⁵ Interview with NM, Male, Former ZANLA guerrilla, Harare, 06/06/2010.

¹⁰⁶ Canaan Banana was the President of Zimbabwe from 1980 to 1987. Although the President was the head of state his role was largely ceremonial and less visible in the country’s affairs. Prime Minister Robert Mugabe who was the head of government had real executive powers. Mugabe has been the President since 1987 when the office of Prime Minister was abolished and fused together with that of the President. The post of Prime Minister was created again in 2009 to accommodate Morgan Tsvangirai and the MDC parties in a coalition government after inconclusive presidential elections in 2008. The office of the Prime Minister was abolished and fused with that of the President after the 31 July 2013 elections and it was retained by Mugabe.

¹⁰⁷ Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 63.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 63.

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Minister, was Ndebele.¹⁰⁹ Out of thirty ZANU-PF central committee members there were only two Ndebeles.¹¹⁰

Despite the government's policy of reconciliation, post-independence Zimbabwe was a politically and militarily volatile country. A number of factors accounted for such a situation. Firstly, ZAPU believed it had lost the elections partly because they had not been free and fair. The party felt that it lost many seats in Mashonaland because ZANU-PF intimidated their campaigners and supporters.¹¹¹ Thus ZAPU challenged ZANU-PF's legitimacy as a ruling party. Secondly, ethnic narratives that had helped determine the voting patterns in the 1980 general elections continued to destabilize the country. During the elections the major nationalist parties ZANU and ZAPU had been reduced to tribal and regional organizations.¹¹² Although ZANU-PF won almost three times as many parliamentary seats as ZAPU, voting patterns followed ethnic lines. Willie Musarurwa, ZAPU's Publicity Secretary claimed that "Shonas wanted to vote for Shonas and the Ndebele wanted to vote for Ndebeles."¹¹³ Professor Stanlake Samkange, a Zimbabwean intellectual and a candidate for the Zimbabwe Democratic Party (ZDP) in the 1980 general election viewed the results as "clear tribalism, there is no other way to explain it. The Mashonaland people will never have Nkomo and Matabeleland will never have a Shona."¹¹⁴ Lord Soames, the British Governor for Zimbabwe during the 1979-80 transitional period, testified that during the election campaign period, Nkomo had tried to cast himself as a national leader but tribalism proved too strong for him.¹¹⁵ This shows that ethnicity was a major factor in determining the results of the 1980 elections and was to be a serious problem in post-colonial Zimbabwe.

¹⁰⁹ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, p. 241. Also see Canaan Banana, ed. *Turmoil and Tenacity* (Harare: College Press, 1989), 230.

¹¹⁰ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 241.

¹¹¹ *Ibid*, 239.

¹¹² *Ibid*, 242.

¹¹³ Willie Musarurwa cited in Tony Rich, "Legacies of the Past? The Results of the 1980 Election in Midlands Province, Zimbabwe," in *Past and Present in Zimbabwe*, eds. J. D. Y. Peel and T. O. Ranger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 43.

¹¹⁴ Tony Rich, "Legacies of the Past? The Results of the 1980 Election in Midlands Province, Zimbabwe," in *Past and Present in Zimbabwe*, eds. J. D. Y. Peel and T. O. Ranger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983), 43 - 44.

¹¹⁵ "Bases: No change likely, says Soames", in *The Chronicle*, 7 July 1980.

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Another factor that explains why the country remained volatile is that the two guerrilla armies, ZANLA and ZIPRA, were largely regional in the patterns of their recruitment and operation during the 1970s liberation struggle.¹¹⁶ These patterns left ZANLA forces predominantly Shona speaking and ZIPRA dominated by Ndebele speakers. ZIPRA forces, some of whom were still outside the country, were believed to have the capacity for conventional warfare.¹¹⁷ Since there was a history of animosity between ZANU-PF and ZAPU it was suspected that ZAPU would use ZIPRA forces to overthrow the ZANU-PF government. Mugabe himself expressed concerns about a possible coup and pledged that the government would respond to violence with violence.¹¹⁸ This also became a source of friction between ZANU and ZAPU officials in the coalition government.

Soon after independence there were incidences of violence in the Guerrilla Assembly Points (APs) across the country. Some guerrillas left APs and started rural banditry. After the 1980 general election armed men on the loose in Matabeleland were called “dissidents” by the government.¹¹⁹ ZANU-PF claimed that ZAPU supported the dissidents to overthrow the government because it had lost in the 1980 elections. Enos Nkala, a ZANU-PF minister, asserted that dissidents were Ndebeles who were calling for a second war of liberation. He called ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo, the “self-appointed Ndebele King” and a tribalist who should be crushed.¹²⁰ On the other hand, ZAPU leaders blamed ZANLA guerrillas for starting fights in the APs and in the north eastern part of the country. In late 1980, ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas were involved in more serious clashes in Chitungwiza and Entumbane in Bulawayo.¹²¹ In mid-October 1980 there were gun battles between ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas in Chitungwiza. After these and other clashes, the political relations between ZANU-PF and ZAPU deteriorated. Mugabe demoted Joshua Nkomo from

¹¹⁶ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford: James Currey, 2000), 181.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ “Mugabe pledges violent action against revolt”, in *The Herald*, 5 March 1981, 1.

¹¹⁹ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, 186.

¹²⁰ Chronicle Reporter, “Nkomo, 15 MPs must go”, in *The Chronicle*, 7 July 1980, 1.

¹²¹ Chronicle Reporter, “City fighting claims 43 dead, 400 wounded: Situation tense but ceasefire holds firm”, in *The Chronicle*, 12 November 1980, 1.

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Minister of Home Affairs to Minister without Portfolio.¹²² ZANU and ZAPU were becoming increasingly suspicious of each other in the government. State media controlled by ZANU-PF downplayed ZAPU and ZIPRA's role in the liberation struggle.

The failure of the state to integrate some former ZIPRA cadres into the National army also contributed to the 1980s violence. It was agreed at the Lancaster House Conference that former liberation forces, that is ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas, should be integrated into the Rhodesian Security Forces (RSF) which was to form the nucleus of the national army.¹²³ The process of integration started at the time of election under the supervision of the British military personnel. Despite the relatively smooth process of integration there was deep mistrust between former ZANLA and ZIPRA guerrillas.¹²⁴ Seeking army loyalty, the ruling party ZANU-PF, protected ZANLA from ZIPRA competition for officers' positions. Mugabe himself approved all posts above lieutenant-colonel, and some ex-ZIPRA officer corps were excluded on political grounds. When the integration process ended, ZANLA constituted 60 per cent of the army, ZIPRA 30-35 per cent, and former Rhodesian soldiers, the remaining 5 per cent.¹²⁵ Some ZANLA cadres refused to acknowledge the promotion of ZIPRA cadres or recognize their authority. ZIPRA cadres also felt they were being excluded from further training in foreign countries and they started to complain openly.¹²⁶ ZIPRA combatants also alleged that violence was directed against them within the army. They were disarmed, segregated, beaten, killed, or disappeared.¹²⁷ Due to increased persecution in the form of discrimination and arbitrary arrests it was reported that four thousand ZIPRA cadres deserted the Zimbabwe National Army.¹²⁸ In most cases, deserters went with their weapons and cases of banditry increased in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces where most Ndebele people

¹²² Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984), 220.

¹²³ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 243.

¹²⁴ *Ibid*, 244.

¹²⁵ Norma Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics, 1980-1987*, 131.

¹²⁶ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 293.

¹²⁷ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, 189.

¹²⁸ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 254.

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live. Other scholars hold that the apartheid regime in South Africa sponsored the insurgency by army deserters in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces in order to cause anarchy in newly independent Zimbabwe. South Africa had also recruited and trained a small group of fighters who masqueraded as guerrillas of the 1960s and 1970s liberation war and committed atrocities in Matabeleland South. This was part of its destabilization policy towards independent states in southern Africa to justify the denial of majority rule to blacks in South Africa.¹²⁹ According to Joseph Hanlon the apartheid regime took advantage of the strained relations between ZANU-PF and ZAPU in government over the dissidents in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces to destabilise the country.¹³⁰ Since it was difficult to prove the role played by South Africa in dissident activities, ZANU-PF largely accused ZAPU, thus further straining the relations between the two political parties.

Arms caches found on property either owned or controlled by ZAPU in February 1982 only worsened the relations between ZANU-PF and ZAPU¹³¹ and the government's reconciliation policy was torn apart. Mugabe argued that these arms caches were a definite proof that ZAPU had planned to stage a military coup to overthrow the ZANU-PF led government. He took punitive actions against ZAPU. Nkomo and his senior ZAPU colleagues such as Josiah Chinamano, Joseph Msika, and Jini Ntini, were expelled from cabinet on 17 February 1982.¹³² The government launched a crackdown on former ZIPRA military leaders. These included Dumiso Dabengwa, Lamech Lookout Masuku, Nicholas Nkomo, Tshaka Moyo, Masala Sibanda and Misheck Velaphi.¹³³ Mugabe and ZANU-PF justified

¹²⁹ See David Martin and Phyllis Johnson, 'Zimbabwe: Apartheid's Dilemma'; Joseph Hanlon, *Apartheid's Second Front: South Africa's War against its Neighbours* (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986); Ulf Engel, *The Foreign Policy of Zimbabwe* (Hamburg: Institut für Afrika-Kunde, 1994). Cited in Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, 180.

¹³⁰ Joseph Hanlon, *Apartheid's Second Front: South Africa's War against its Neighbours* (London, James Currey, 1986), 180.

¹³¹ Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Zimbabwe Wages of War: A Report on Human Rights* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1986), 20. For more details about arms cache in Zimbabwe during the 1980s see Emmerson D. Mnangagwa, "Post-Independence Zimbabwe: 1980-1987", in *Turmoil and Tenacity*, ed. Canaan Banana, 237. E. M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 248 - 50.

¹³² *Ibid*, 250.

¹³³ *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, 1980- 1988*, (Harare: Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, 1997), v.

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their actions by arguing that ZAPU was involved in caching of arms and supporting the dissidents. The expulsion of ZAPU cabinet ministers and the arrest of former ZIPRA military leaders angered most ZAPU supporters especially in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions.

Narratives of ethnicity and state sponsored violence

In June 1982 the government sent a unit of the Zimbabwe National Army called the Task Force led by a former RSF Lieutenant-Colonel Lionel Dyke to Matabeleland North (see Map 3) to fight against the dissidents.¹³⁴ Villagers were detained and tortured as the Task Force demanded to be told the whereabouts of the dissidents. The government did not distinguish between dissidents and those it alleged were their supporters. In April 1983, Mugabe stated that if troops failed to identify dissidents in rural areas where the government was quite sure of their presence, they would simply eradicate everyone for the national interest.¹³⁵ Other ZANU-PF government Ministers made similar statements and complaints about abuses of civilians grew.

When the Task Force failed to achieve its aims in Matabeleland North, Mugabe replaced it with the politically trained Fifth Brigade in January 1983. The Brigade was a product of an agreement signed with the North Koreans in October 1980.¹³⁶ It was politically and militarily trained by the North Koreans. Moreover, it was exclusively loyal to Mugabe and was not controlled through the normal chain of command of the Zimbabwe National Army. The Fifth Brigade was Shona-speaking and its leadership positions were dominated by former ZANLA guerrillas, though some former ZIPRA guerrillas who were Ndebele were kept for the purpose of including soldiers who were familiar with the Ndebele language and Matabeleland terrain.¹³⁷ However, certain units had no Ndebele speakers and found interpreters in the field. Scholars such as Sibanda argue that the Fifth Brigade was essentially founded on tribalism and its mission was to eliminate any

¹³⁴ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 257.

¹³⁵ *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, 1980- 1988*, 8.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, 191.

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Ndebele person who did not want to join ZANU-PF.¹³⁸ There is clear evidence to show that ethnicity influenced the brutality of the Fifth Brigade operations in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces.

The Fifth Brigade's military campaign was code-named *Gukurahundi*, a Shona term which literally means "the rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains".¹³⁹ Operation Gukurahundi was meant to eliminate all dissidents in Matabeleland and those who supported them. The atrocities committed during Fifth Brigade's operations are now generally referred to as Gukurahundi. The Fifth Brigade was first deployed in Matabeleland North in late January 1983. The government introduced a strict curfew with no one allowed to enter or leave the area and no movement permitted in the region from dusk to dawn.¹⁴⁰ According to Jocelyn Alexander, the Fifth Brigade justified its violence in tribal and political terms.¹⁴¹ She also argues that the way in which it operated in the early weeks shows it had clearly been trained to target civilians. It attacked ZAPU and other community leaders, chiefs, teachers, nurses, other Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) units and the police.¹⁴² Many former ZIPRA combatants were killed. In many cases the Brigade rounded up civilians and forced them to sing Shona songs praising ZANU-PF while beating them with sticks.¹⁴³ These gatherings usually ended with public executions. Those killed would be ex-ZIPRAs, ZAPU officials, or anybody chosen at random, including women. The largest number of dead in a single massacre involved the deliberate shooting of 62 young men and women on the banks of the Cewale River, in Lupane, on 5 March 1983. Seven survived with gunshot wounds; the other 55 died.¹⁴⁴ The Fifth Brigade also committed mass killings by burning large groups of people alive in their huts. This was also done in Tsholotsho and in Lupane districts.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁸ Eliakim M. Sibanda, *The Zimbabwe African People's Union 1961-87: A Political History of Insurgency in Southern Rhodesia*, 258.

¹³⁹ *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, 1980-1988*, 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴¹ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, 217.

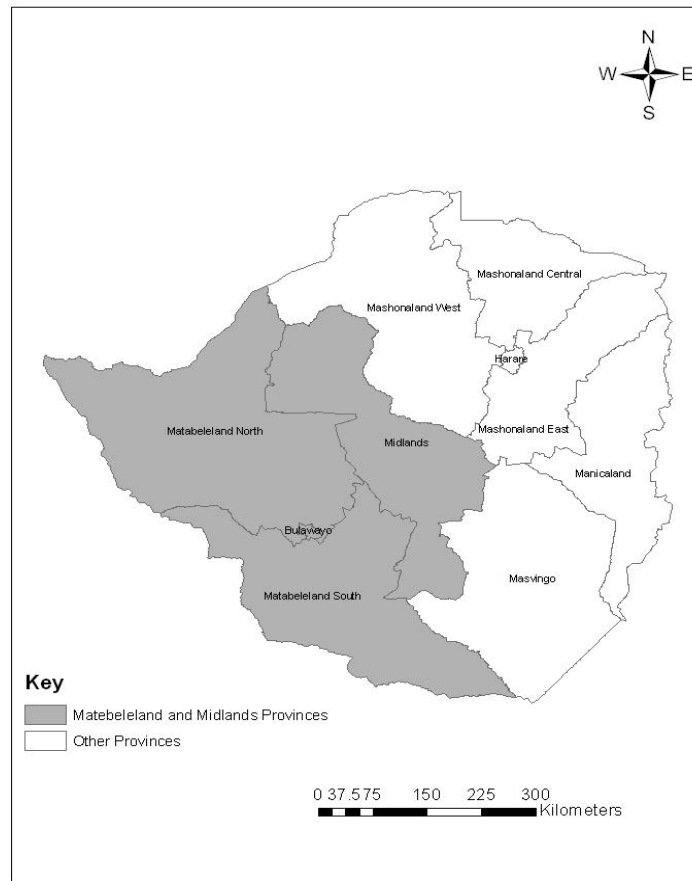
¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 218.

¹⁴³ *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, 1980-1988*, 9.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

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Map 3. Zimbabwe's Provinces. Map drawn by author.

The Fifth Brigade was deployed in Matabeleland South in January 1984. In addition to restriction on human movement, a strict ban was introduced on food supplies.¹⁴⁶ Despite the fact that it was a third successive year of drought and people were in desperate need of food, drought relief was stopped and all stores

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 10.

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were closed. The government's reasoning was that food shortages would starve the dissidents.¹⁴⁷ However, it was the civilians who suffered most from food shortages and they were soon on the brink of complete starvation. As in Matabeleland North, journalists were prohibited by the government from the area to avoid publicity of the atrocities. Thousands of civilians were detained and transported to large detention centers where they were tortured and sometimes killed. In 1986, the Fifth Brigade was finally withdrawn and had conventional military training under the British Military Advisory Team.¹⁴⁸ The Brigade was then disbanded and its members attached to other brigades.

Narratives of ethnicity were used to justify the atrocities committed by the Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland in ethnic and political terms. Most people of Matabeleland believe that the 1980s violence was unleashed against them because they were Ndebele and they supported ZAPU, not because they were believed to support the dissidents.¹⁴⁹ As mentioned earlier, the Fifth Brigade was almost entirely Shona-speaking. Its killings seemed to have been indiscriminate because its victims included people met on patrol who simply could not speak Shona.¹⁵⁰ They also often claimed that all Ndebele people were dissidents who must be wiped out.¹⁵¹ Moreover, the geographical pattern of the operations of the Fifth Brigade makes many scholars believe that the violence was ethnically motivated. Shona-speaking regions which shared borders with Ndebele regions were not attacked even when the dissidents were operating in those areas.¹⁵² Furthermore, the Fifth Brigade also forced people to attend ZANU-PF meetings and ZANLA-style night gatherings (*pungwes*) at which people sang and danced. Here, the Ndebele people were forced to sing ZANU-PF songs in Shona and chant ZANU-PF slogans in Shona denouncing ZAPU.¹⁵³ Many Ndebele people believe that this was done to humiliate them by showing the dominance of the Shona people who were the new rulers. This is one of the reasons why the violence has been

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Interview with EN, Male, Village Head, 30/06/2010.

¹⁵¹ Interview with TT, Female, Former ZAPU member, Bulawayo, 25/06/2010.

¹⁵² Ibid, 223

¹⁵³ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the 'Dark Forests' of Matabeleland*, 222.

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explained as an attempt by ruling ZANU-PF¹⁵⁴ to use the insurgency in the early 1980s as a pretext to crush the main opposition political party, to ensure its total dominance in the country¹⁵⁵ and to introduce a one party state system.

The Fifth Brigade cited ethnic narratives to justify acts of violence. Some members of the Fifth Brigade made it clear that they were taking revenge for the nineteenth century Ndebele raids against the Shona people saying: “The child of a snake is also a snake”;¹⁵⁶ “Your forefathers ate our cattle – where are they?”¹⁵⁷; “You have been killing our forefathers, you Mandebele.”¹⁵⁸ References were also made to the raiding of women and the capture of young men by the Ndebele in the pre-colonial period. Rapes of Ndebele women by members of the Fifth Brigade were justified as an attempt to create a Shona generation to compensate for the young women and men who had been raided by the Ndebele.¹⁵⁹ Scholars such as Muchaparara Musemwa claim that during the Gukurahundi period, there was no effort by the government to develop the region because it was regarded as a haven for dissidents. Musemwa has explained how the central government in Zimbabwe showed an unwillingness to assist the local government in Bulawayo to alleviate water shortages and mitigate famine between 1980 and 1987.¹⁶⁰ All this left the people of Matabeleland believing that the neglect and violence targeted them as Ndebele people and ZAPU supporters.

The violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions came to an end with negotiations. From 1985, with the mediation of President Canaan Banana, the representatives of ZANU-PF and ZAPU had long negotiations in which they grappled with issues such as the name and structure of the united party they intended to form. After agreement on these issues, Mugabe and the leader of

¹⁵⁴ ZANU was formed by a split from ZAPU in August 1963. In the 1970s ZANU divided into two. The main faction led by Robert Mugabe was later renamed ZANU-PF. The smaller formation led by Ndabaningi Sithole was later renamed ZANU – Ndonga. In 1987 ZANU-PF and PF-ZAPU united to form ZANU-PF.

¹⁵⁵ Joshua Nkomo, *The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984). Cited in Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matabeleland*, 180.

¹⁵⁶ Jocelyn Alexander, Joann McGregor and Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One hundred Years in the ‘Dark Forests’ of Matabeleland*, 222.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

¹⁵⁹ *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and Midlands, 1980- 1988*, 11.

¹⁶⁰ Muchaparara Musemwa, “Disciplining a ‘Dissident’ City: Hydropolitics in the City of Bulawayo, Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1980 – 1994”, in *Journal of Southern African Studies* 32(2) (2006): 241-254.

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Are the wounds healed? The resilience of narratives in post-Gukurahundi Zimbabwe

Despite the unity between ZANU-PF and ZAPU, resentment over the atrocities committed in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces is far from over. Unsurprisingly, there has been a deliberate and concerted effort by the ZANU-PF government to downplay the Gukurahundi massacres and reduce the proliferation of narratives about the period. Ndlovu-Gatsheni has correctly postulated that in Zimbabwe's nationalist historiography, the state, rather than people, has acted as the primary agent, main promulgator, and interpreter of history.¹⁶³ Recommended secondary school history textbooks such as *People Making History*¹⁶⁴ Book 1 to 4 and *Dynamics of History*¹⁶⁵ Book 1 to 4 were heavily censored in favour of ZANU-PF. They refer to Gukurahundi in relative terms as, "Matabeleland and Midlands disturbances" and discuss the period only in passing. The role of the Fifth Brigade is not discussed at all. Be that as it may, the atrocities left an indelible mark on people in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions and narratives of ethnicity hardened. A report compiled by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum in 2010 noted that most surviving victims of Gukurahundi are not coping well with the trauma as they did not receive apologies, counselling, or rehabilitation.¹⁶⁶ Survivors of Gukurahundi still have fresh memories and stories of how some of their family members disappeared and remain unaccounted for.¹⁶⁷ Some people have physical scars and others are permanently incapacitated. The atrocities are now affecting the offspring of people who were killed or maimed as they are finding it difficult to acquire identity documents required to enroll in school, access public health services, find jobs, open a bank account, own property, or register marriages and deaths.¹⁶⁸ This has created a problem of insecurity, uncertainty, and even statelessness among some individuals.

¹⁶³ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Do 'Zimbabweans' Exist? Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity Formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2009), 4.

¹⁶⁴ M. Prew, J. Pape, R. Mutwira and T. Barnes, *People Making History Book 4* (Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House, 1st Edition, 1993).

¹⁶⁵ S. Mukanya, *Dynamics of History Book 4* (Harare: College Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁶ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Trauma haunts Gukurahundi victims – Report", in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 6 to 12 August 2010, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Mugabe should apologise for Gukurahundi – Khupe" in *The Standard*, 28 May 2010.

¹⁶⁸ Interview with KM, Male, 16/01/2013.

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The above difficulties have resulted in radical politics in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces which perpetuate narratives of ethnicity. A new political movement, ZAPU 2000 was formed as an attempt to revive ZAPU after the death of Joshua Nkomo in July 1999. This party seeks a repudiation of the Unity Accord which it interprets as a sell-out agreement that did not benefit the ordinary people who suffered the 1980s violence.¹⁶⁹ ZAPU 2000 has accused former ZAPU leaders of betraying the people of Matabeleland for personal gain. The 1980s violence also resulted in the formation of radical Ndebele pressure groups such as Ibhetshu LikaZulu, Umhlalo Wesizwe, Patriotic Union of Matabeleland (PUMA), Zimbabwe Liberators Peace Initiative (ZLPI), Matabeleland Constitutional Reform Agenda, and Matabeleland Empowerment Service Association. These pressure groups sustain the narratives about Gukurahundi through their various initiatives, objectives, and demands.

The resentment of the Ndebele against ZANU-PF has been expressed through the voting patterns in Matabeleland and some parts of Midlands since 2000. Until the July 2013 harmonised elections, most constituencies were won by a new party formed in 1999: the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). The MDC entered into a coalition government with ZANU-PF between 2009 and 2013. Although many factors may have contributed to the voting patterns from 2000 to 2008, two factors are certain. Firstly, top officials of the MDC party are regarded as people with ‘clean hands’ in Matabeleland as compared to some in ZANU-PF who are blamed for the 1980s atrocities. Secondly, ZANU-PF, which has been in power since independence, is accused of marginalising Matabeleland by not bringing any tangible development into the region especially during the Gukurahundi period. The perceived marginalisation of the Ndebele is an important electoral issue in contemporary Zimbabwean politics.¹⁷⁰ Senior MDC politicians in Matabeleland, notably Thabitha Khumalo, have been advocating for government affirmative action such as the construction of schools and hospitals.¹⁷¹ In 2012 the Matabeleland region received the largest budget

¹⁶⁹ See Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, “Nation Building in Zimbabwe and the Challenges of Ndebele Particularism”, 48. <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/viewFile/39430/29632>. pdf format. Accessed on 20/02/2012.

¹⁷⁰ Kholwani Nyathi, “Gukurahundi ghost rattles Zanu PF”, in the *Standard*, 28 August 2011, <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2011/08/28/gukurahundi-ghost-rattles-zanu-pf/>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

¹⁷¹ Herbert Moyo, “Zimbabwe: Address Gukurahundi Concerns – Khumalo”, in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 8 December 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201112091214.html>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

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allocation totalling over US\$136 million after the MDC pressured the Treasury.¹⁷² On its part, ZANU-PF, has accused MDC for being irresponsible by politicising Gukurahundi to gain political mileage during elections.¹⁷³ This shows the transfiguration of narratives of ethnicity into electoral politics in Zimbabwe. In recent years, Gukurahundi narratives have been sustained by commemorations of the victims by the civil society in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces.¹⁷⁴ According to Sebastian Brett *et al*, memorialisation activities are the second most important form of showing remorsefulness after material reparations.¹⁷⁵ In addition, Brett *et al* states that commemoration and memorialisation of past human rights abuses and atrocities enable young generations to learn from past mistakes and help in democracy building over the long term.¹⁷⁶ Memorialisation also gives people the opportunity to think deeply about how to prevent a repetition of past atrocities, and enables people to connect the past, present and future in a positive way.¹⁷⁷ Moreover, memorialisation has the capacity to prevent future human rights abuses and is also regarded as a way of promoting a common national identity based on human rights and dignity.¹⁷⁸ Consequently, avoiding memorialisation, truth-telling and justice can be detrimental to stability and peace in the present and future. Brett reiterates that failure to commemorate past human rights abuses can contribute to the emergence of other forms of atrocities.¹⁷⁹ Despite the positive role commemoration can play in peace building and reconciliation, the Zimbabwean government has never officially commemorated Gukurahundi victims but instead attempts to prevent such commemorations by civil society.

¹⁷² “Minister Biti sets aside US\$136m for Matabeleland region”, in *The Real Change Times: The Official Mouthpiece of the MDC*, Issue 138 2013, 6 February 2013, 1.

¹⁷³ “Gukurahundi: Chiefs appeal to government” in *Newsday*, 14 June 2012, <http://www.newsday.co.zw/2012/06/14/2012-06-14-gukurahundi-chiefs-appeal-to-government/>. Accessed on 10/03/2013. Also see Sunday Mail Reporter, “Only Zanu-PF can resolve Gukurahundi”, in *Sunday Mail*, 13 August 2011, http://zw.zimpapers.co.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=4845:only-zanu-pf-can-resolve-gukurahundi&catid=37:top-stories&Itemid=130. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

¹⁷⁴ “Memorial planned for Gukurahundi victims”, in *Newsday*, 18 January 2012, <http://www.newsday.co.zw/2012/01/18/2012-01-18-memorial-planned-for-gukurahundi-victims/>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

¹⁷⁵ Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Šev enko and Marcela Rios, *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*, 1.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 2.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 2, 7.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 20.

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Commemorations of the victims of the 1980s violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces are organised by pressure groups such as Ibhetu LikaZulu and are held in public halls or church buildings.¹⁸⁰ The organisers usually invite lawyers, political parties, civic organisations, church groups and the ordinary people.¹⁸¹ At these commemorations discussions are held on what really happened during Gukurahundi, how to compensate and rehabilitate the victims, and what must be done to the perpetrators.¹⁸² (see Fig. 2.) What happens during commemorations in Matabeleland fits well into Brett's assertion that memorial projects are part of a wider campaign for truth, justice and reparation.¹⁸³ In fact, Brett argues that memorialization should be part of broader transitional justice efforts and must not promote impunity by becoming a substitute of justice or the prosecution of the perpetrators.¹⁸⁴ There have been calls by some pressure groups, non-governmental organisations, traditional chiefs, and top government officials for President Mugabe to make an unconditional public apology. Former Deputy Prime Minister Thokozani Khupe and legislator Thabitha Khumalo, both senior MDC officials from Matabeleland, urged Mugabe and some of the top military officials involved in the Gukurahundi atrocities to apologise.¹⁸⁵ Despite this, Mugabe has never publicly apologised for the atrocities but only acknowledged them when he referred to the period as "a moment of madness" at the burial of Joshua Nkomo at the National Heroes Acre in Harare in 1999.¹⁸⁶ A 2010 report by the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum after extensive interviews in Matabeleland avers that the wounds of Gukurahundi are kept fresh by Mugabe and other perpetrators' refusal to publicly apologise for the atrocities.¹⁸⁷ On the other hand, it should also be noted that there is a radical perspective from some Shona people that Mugabe and other Shona accused in the Gukurahundi genocide must not apologise until the Ndebele themselves apologise for King Mzilikazi and

¹⁸⁰ "Memorial planned for Gukurahundi victims".

¹⁸¹ Interview with DB, Male, Bulawayo, 26/11/2012.

¹⁸² "Memorial planned for Gukurahundi victims".

¹⁸³ Sebastian Brett, Louis Bickford, Liz Šev enko and Marcela Rios, *Memorialization and Democracy: State Policy and Civic Action*, 24.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 29.

¹⁸⁵ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Mugabe should apologise for Gukurahundi – Khupe". Also see Herbert Moyo, "Zimbabwe: Address Gukurahundi Concerns – Khumalo", in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 8 December 2011, <http://allafrica.com/stories/201112091214.html>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

¹⁸⁶ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Mugabe should apologise for Gukurahundi – Khupe" in *The Standard*, 28 May 2010.

¹⁸⁷ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Trauma haunts Gukurahundi victims – Report", in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 6 to 12 August 2010, 6.

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his son Lobengula's raids on the Shona people in the pre-colonial era.¹⁸⁸ While this argument is extremely difficult to rationally and publicly sustain in Zimbabwe and the rest of civilised world, it serves to show how some Shona relativize Gukurahundi atrocities by making reference to the pre-colonial era using narratives of ethnicity.



Picture 2. Banners such as the one above are usually displayed during Gukurahundi commemorations.

Downloaded from:

https://www.google.co.za/search?q=gukurahundi+pictures&biw=1280&bih=624&tbm=isch&imgil=tL6_nVOZv6LmGM%253A%253Bhttps%253A%252F%252Fencrypted-tbn3.gstatic.com%252F. Accessed on 22/03/2014.

¹⁸⁸ Admore Tshuma, "Gukurahundi, Lobengula raids worlds apart", in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 20 to 26 August 2010, <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2010/08/20/gukurahundi-lobengula-raids-worlds-apart/>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

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Public criticisms of ZANU-PF about its role in the Gukurahundi atrocities have not gone without backlash. In order to contain Gukurahundi narratives, the ZANU-PF government has long tried to silence the nation from discussing the atrocities in public through arrests or intimidation. Most victims of Gukurahundi are still scared of publicly discussing their emotive ordeals fearing backlash from the government.¹⁸⁹ In March 2010, the internationally renowned artist Owen Maseko was arrested in Bulawayo for exhibiting paintings depicting the Fifth Brigade killing civilians during Gukurahundi.¹⁹⁰ (see Fig. 3) Maseko was a second runner up for the Freedom to Create Prize in 2010, for his exhibition of the Gukurahundi atrocities.¹⁹¹ This Prize was introduced in 2008 and it support and recognise artists who strive for social change in countries with repressive governments.¹⁹² In April 2011, a senior MDC official and the co-Minister in the Organ of National Healing and Reconciliation, Moses Mzila-Ndlovu, was arrested when he addressed a memorial service for Gukurahundi victims where he condemned top government officials accused for the atrocities.¹⁹³ A prominent pressure group, Ibhetshu LikaZulu, was blocked by police from commemorating Gukurahundi victims on 26 January 2013, which was also the World Genocide Day.¹⁹⁴ The event had been planned to take place in the Presbyterian Church in Bulawayo. The police claimed that the agenda of the meeting was likely to cause disharmony and division in the society.¹⁹⁵ This angered Ibhetshu LikaZulu activists, Gukurahundi survivors, and human rights defenders. These conflicting positions of Gukurahundi activists and the state which attempts to silence them show how issues of reconciliation and national healing remain salient in contemporary Zimbabwe.

¹⁸⁹ Fortune Moyo, "Gukurahundi era still haunts residents", in *Newsday*, 10 August 2010.

¹⁹⁰ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Mugabe should apologise for Gukurahundi – Khupe" in *The Standard*, 28 May 2010.

¹⁹¹ Owen Maseko. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owen_Maseko. Accessed on 22/03/2014.

¹⁹² Freedom to Create Prize. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_to_Create_Prize. Accessed on 22/03/2014.

¹⁹³ Caiphas Chimhete, "Gukurahundi splits cabinet", in *The Standard*, 1 May 2011, <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2011/05/01/gukurahundi-splits-cabinet/>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

¹⁹⁴ "Anger as police blocks Gukurahundi event", in *The Legal Monitor*, 11 February 2013, 2.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

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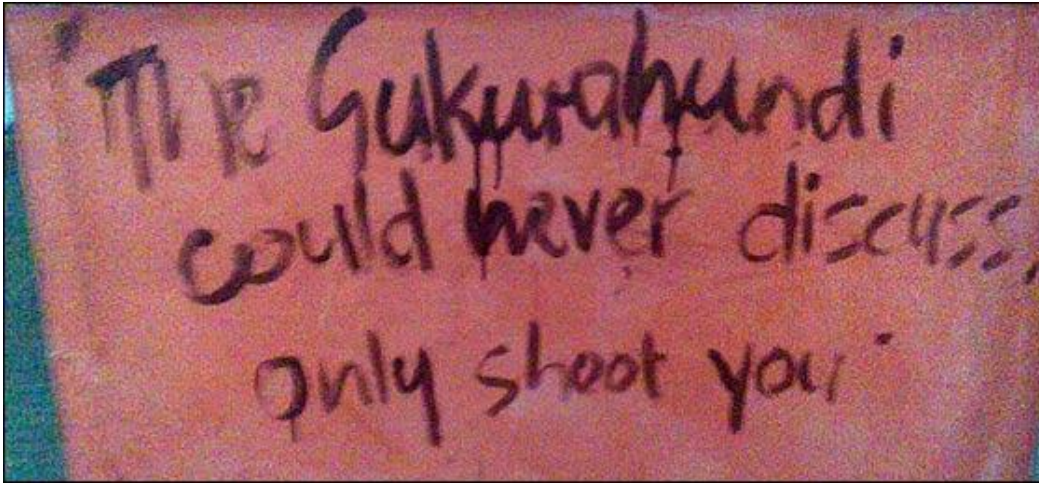


Fig. 3. A painting in Owen Maseko's Gukurahundi exhibition in Bulawayo. It reads: "The Gukurahundi could never discuss. Only shoot you."

Downloaded from:

<https://www.google.co.za/search?q=owen+maseko+art&tbm=isch&tbo=u&source=univ&sa=X&ei=Q3ktU56wE4nF7Aai5oCYBg&ved=0CCUQsAQ&biw=1280&bih=624#facrc=&imgdii=&imgrc=NniVGBZITGD4ZM%253A%253A>. Accessed on 22/03/2014.

Pressure groups, non-governmental organisations, and politicians from Matabeleland urge the government to compensate Gukurahundi victims. The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (CCJP) report recommended compensation packages for those affected.¹⁹⁶ Some senior ZANU-PF politicians, mostly from Matabeleland such as Jonathan Moyo, whose father was killed by the Fifth Brigade, and Joshua Malinga have broken rank with their colleagues and joined the growing demand for an investigation into the atrocities and compensation for the victims.¹⁹⁷ However, most ZANU-PF officials have repeatedly refused to entertain any public discussion or calls for compensation for

¹⁹⁶ Herbert Moyo, "Zimbabwe: Address Gukurahundi Concerns – Khumalo".

¹⁹⁷ Kholwani Nyathi, "Gukurahundi ghost rattles Zanu PF", in the *Standard*, 28 August 2011, <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2011/08/28/gukurahundi-ghost-rattles-zanu-pf/>, Accessed on 10/03/2013. Njabulo Ncube, "Moyo bombshell: Gukurahundi killed my father", in *newzimbabwe.com*, 11 December 2009, <http://www.newzimbabwe.com/pages/sky59.12193.html>, Accessed on 17/03/2014.

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the victims of the conflict.¹⁹⁸ ZANU-PF explicitly stated that there is no law to provide compensation to the victims of “political disturbances” in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces.¹⁹⁹ According to ZANU-PF, the only existing statute that deals with compensation of victims is the War Victims Compensation Act Chapter 11.16, which covers only the victims of the liberation struggle between 1 January 1962 and 29 February 1980.²⁰⁰

Consequently, there have been efforts by some politicians in Matabeleland to craft a legal framework to compensate Gukurahundi victims.²⁰¹ In February 2007, the then independent Tsholotsho MP Jonathan Moyo, who had been dismissed as Information minister and expelled from ZANU-PF for alleged insubordination, drafted the Gukurahundi Memorial Bill and tabled it before parliament.²⁰² The Bill sought to criminalise denial of the existence of Gukurahundi and set provisions for compensation for those affected by the genocide.²⁰³ The Bill caused dismay in government circles with the state media labelling Moyo an opportunist seeking cheap publicity.²⁰⁴ The then ZANU-PF national chairman and speaker of parliament, John Nkomo, said bringing up the issue would open healing wounds and attacked Moyo as a bitter person after he was dismissed from both ZANU-PF and government.²⁰⁵ While the Bill was supported by most MDC legislators, it was blocked from becoming an Act because ZANU-PF had the majority in parliament. This substantially reflects the extent to which the need for recognition and compensation of Gukurahundi victims is both a social and political issue in Zimbabwe which cannot be easily swept under the carpet. The fact that the issue of compensation for Gukurahundi victims has not been resolved contributes to the persistence and proliferation of narratives of ethnicity in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces.

¹⁹⁸ Herbert Moyo, “Zimbabwe: Address Gukurahundi Concerns – Khumalo”.

¹⁹⁹ “No compensation for Gukurahundi victims”, in *The Chronicle*, 7 June 2012, http://www.chronicle.co.zw/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=36015#.UTiOZ1dHXWU. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ “Gukurahundi victims confront Nkomo” in *The Standard*, 29 November 2009, <http://www.zimbabwesituation.org/?p=4067>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

²⁰² Loughy Dube, “Gukurahundi era back to haunt tormentors”, in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 16 February 2007.

²⁰³ Ibid.

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

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The debate over whether to establish a truth and reconciliation commission has also kept Gukurahundi narratives flourishing. There have been calls from non-governmental organisations, pressure groups and politicians from Matabeleland that a truth and reconciliation commission be established. Zimbabwe's coalition government established the Organ on National Healing, Reconciliation and Reintegration to deal with national healing on all issues of violence which took place in the post-colonial period.²⁰⁶ This Organ was co-chaired by three ministers from three political parties in the coalition government: ZANU-PF; MDC led by the then Prime Minister Morgan Tsvangirai; and MDC led by the then Industry and Commerce Minister Welshman Ncube. However, this Organ has faced credibility questions because top government and military officials who directed Gukurahundi are reluctant to participate or apologise publicly.²⁰⁷ Sithelo Mpala states that instead of denial and deception by perpetrators, reconciliation over Gukurahundi should happen in an environment of truth, frankness and genuine remorse.²⁰⁸ Human rights activist, Effie Ncube, himself a survivor of Gukurahundi, posits that surviving victims are not ready to forgive when perpetrators are not willing to apologise wholeheartedly.²⁰⁹ He postulates that victims cannot forgive when they do not know the perpetrators and the crimes they want to be pardoned for.²¹⁰ Senior ZANU-PF member Joshua Malinga, who differs with his party over Gukurahundi, reasons that the issue will never be resolved until full investigations over the atrocities are conducted and victims get compensation.²¹¹ Since it is difficult for ZANU-PF leaders to make political capital out of Gukurahundi, it can be argued that the call for full investigation by its senior officials from Matabeleland such as Moyo and Malinga reflects the pressure from their constituencies. This illustrates the resilience of Gukurahundi narratives even though the atrocities were committed over two decades ago.

The lack of accountability for Gukurahundi crimes has kept the narratives in the public domain. Most people in Matabeleland are irked by the fact that

²⁰⁶ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Mugabe should apologise for Gukurahundi – Khupe".

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

²⁰⁸ Sithelo Mpala, "Propaganda war won't diminish Gukurahundi" in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 18 to 24 January 2013, 15.

²⁰⁹ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Mugabe should apologise for Gukurahundi – Khupe".

²¹⁰ Ibid.

²¹¹ Kholwani Nyathi, "Gukurahundi ghost rattles Zanu PF", in the *Standard*, 28 August 2011, <http://www.thestandard.co.zw/2011/08/28/gukurahundi-ghost-rattles-zanu-pf/>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

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instead of being arrested, tried, and imprisoned for the atrocities, some leading figures of the Gukurahundi campaign in government and the military have either retained their influential positions or have been promoted.²¹² According to the 2010 Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum report, which is a result of transitional justice outreach report, most participants in Nkayi district in Matabeleland concurred that people involved in the Gukurahundi massacres should face justice.²¹³ Ndebele pressure groups such as Imbovane Yamahlabezulu want to see the perpetrators of the 1980s atrocities, who are in ZANU-PF, the defence forces and state secret service held accountable for their crimes.²¹⁴ Ibhetshu LikaZulu wants to see the perpetrators tried by the International Criminal Court for their crimes against humanity.²¹⁵ This shows that although the government has tried to bury the issue of Gukurahundi, memory and narratives about the atrocities are still flourishing.

By and large narratives of ethnicity in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces have been principally amplified by secessionist ideas and movements in the region. As noted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni the culture of violence in post-colonial Zimbabwean politics lies at the core of statecraft and has contributed to the accumulation of anger, grievance and resentment across the society.²¹⁶ This has largely contributed to the polarization of the society and makes transitional politics and nation building difficult. The 1980s violence resulted in radical Ndebele politics that undercut the idea of a unitary Zimbabwean statehood.²¹⁷ One of the most radical secessionist movements is the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF) which was formed in South Africa in 2010.²¹⁸ This movement is led by

²¹² Interview with BD, Male, Bulawayo, 28/11/2012.

²¹³ Nqobile Bhebhe, "Trauma haunts Gukurahundi victims – Report", in *Zimbabwe Independent*, 6 to 12 August 2010, 6.

²¹⁴

http://www.inkundla.net/ubbthreads7olde/ubbthreads.php/topics/36888/Imbovane_YaMahlabezulu_Weekly. Accessed on 21/02/2012.

²¹⁵ "Memorial service for Gukurahundi victims", in *The Standard*, 21 January 2007.

²¹⁶ Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, *Do 'Zimbabweans' Exist? Trajectories of Nationalism, National Identity Formation and Crisis in a Postcolonial State* (Bern: Peter Lang AG, International Academic Publishers, 2009), 4.

²¹⁷ See Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, "Nation Building in Zimbabwe and the Challenges of Ndebele Particularism", 48. <http://www.ajol.info/index.php/ajcr/article/viewFile/39430/29632>. pdf format. Accessed on 20/02/2012.

²¹⁸ Kholwani Nyathi, "Gukurahundi rattles Zanu PF".

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Fidelis Ncube, a former ZIPRA commander during the liberation war.²¹⁹ MLF garners support in Matabeleland using memories and stories of Gukurahundi atrocities as a rallying point. This movement advocates for a separate and autonomous Matabeleland state called United Mthwakazi Republic (UMR) independent from Shona dominated Zimbabwe.²²⁰ This movement chiefly cites the 1980s killings²²¹ and the general underdevelopment in Matabeleland to show that people in the region have never been regarded as part of a unified Zimbabwe.²²² In January 2013 another secessionist movement, Matabeleland Liberation Organisation (MLO) was formed.²²³ This movement is led by Paul Siwela who broke away from MLF. MLO advocates forming the Republic of Matabeleland by 2018 and claims that it is currently drafting the constitution which will be used to govern the region.²²⁴ However, this objective will be difficult to achieve because most Shona people regard Matabeleland as part of their ancestral land which was colonised by the Ndebele people in the pre-colonial period. On the whole, the fact that Gukurahundi atrocities are cited to justify secessionist tendencies attests to the centrality of contrasting narratives of identity and belonging in Zimbabwean politics.

Conclusion

This article has attempted to complement previous explanations of the 1980s violence in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of Zimbabwe by focusing on narratives of ethnicity. Ethnicity and oral narratives derived from the pre-colonial period by word of mouth or through reading colonial literature widened the rift and perpetuated violence between the Shona and the Ndebele. That rift became more apparent during the anti-colonial nationalist movement when these two ethnic groups fought each other. Despite the encouragement of national unity by the government and the existence of political parties which cut across ethnic

²¹⁹ Ndebele Nationalists Launch Mthwakazi Liberation Front in Zimbabwe, <http://www.voazimbabwe.com/content/ndebele-nationalists-launch-new-zimbabwe-party-112669609/1458975.html>. Accessed on 10/03/2013.

²²⁰ <http://www.inkundla.net/indaba/2005/Lwezi/umr-mgabel.php>. Accessed on 21/02/2012.

²²¹ Kholwani Nyathi, "Gukurahundi rattles Zanu PF".

²²² Ibid.

²²³ "Siwela leads new secessionist group", in *Newsday*, 10 January 2013, <http://www.newsday.co.zw/2013/01/10/siwela-leads-new-secessionist-group/>. Accessed on 14/03/2013.

²²⁴ Ibid.

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divisions such as ZANU-PF and the MDC, the Ndebele people who experienced the 1980s violence have adopted new narratives which cast the Shona people as murderers. Such notions are held by many Ndebele people even though the majority of Shona people were not involved in the atrocities. In the absence or failure of pan-ethnic nationalist narratives, the fact that Gukurahundi atrocities are used as a justification for secession and have been a critical electoral issue in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces attest that narratives of ethnicity continue to have powerful social and political influence in contemporary Zimbabwe.

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