

Zimbabwe: *Gukurahundi* Victims' Monologues, State Silences and Perpetrator Denials, 1987-2017

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Abstract: The Zimbabwean government instigated *Gukurahundi* massacres resulted in the death of around 20 000 people. The majority of the victims belonged to the Ndebele ethnic group while the Fifth Brigade, a Shona dominated military outfit, were the main perpetrators of the mass killings. The atrocities ended with the signing of the Unity Accord of December 1987 between the ruling ZANU (PF) party, which had masterminded the atrocities, and the opposition (PF) ZAPU, whose supporters had borne the brunt of state highhandedness. After the cessation of hostilities the Zimbabwean government frustrated open conversations and public commemorations of the massacres. What conversations on *Gukurahundi* that took place were largely victims' monologues. To interrogate this state instigated silencing of exposure and remembrance the article suggests an exigency for counter-narrating erasures of memories of harm and impunity. In the aftermath of massacres, I argue, harmed communities embolden themselves and coalesce their fractured senses of self by openly memorialising their collective suffering through open conversations about their shared victimhood, commemorations, and the assembling of monuments. The Robert Mugabe led government's foreclosure of such avenues for public acknowledgements of mass injuries that are supposed to serve as visceral registers of what societies should remember to avoid in the future reveals its disregard for the wounded humanity of the constitutive political other. Thus, *Gukurahundi* as an historical episode reveals the pathology of mass harm silenced and rendered insignificant by the state.

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**Introduction: Silences and Denialism
beyond Mass Killings**

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Zimbabwe's state instigated *Gukurahundi* mass killings resulted in the death of around

20 000 people between 1983 and 1987 in the Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces (Catholic Commission for Peace and Justice [CCJP], 1997; Auret, 1992; Phimister, 2008). The overwhelming majority of the *Gukurahundi* victims belonged to the Ndebele ethnic group while the North Korean trained the Fifth Brigade, a Shona people dominated military outfit, were the main perpetrators of the mass killings. The Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front – ZANU (PF) – led government ostensibly established the brigade to quell dissident activities being perpetrated by renegade soldiers from the national army who were allegedly affiliated to the main opposition, the Patriotic Front-Zimbabwe African People’s Union – (PF) ZAPU.

The *Gukurahundi* massacres ended with the signing of the Unity Accord between then Prime Minister Robert Mugabe and the (PF) ZAPU leader, Dr. Joshua Nkomo, on 22 December 1987. The government declared a blanket amnesty for the protagonists, especially the armed combatants on both sides of the divide. The accord was an elite bargain that disregarded the wounded humanity of the constitutive political other. It side-lined the aspirations and ignored the pains of the ordinary Ndebele men and women in the villages who had borne the brunt of the *Gukurahundi* violence mainly because after the cessation of hostilities the government refused to have open and community initiated conversations on the massacres. Key state political actors implored society to let bygones be bygones by considering the Unity Accord to be an unimpeachable peace-building act.

Subsequent to the Unity Accord, official responses to the *Gukurahundi* massacres became an amalgam of silence and denial. Some state security establishment members that masterminded *Gukurahundi* either downplayed the massacres by claiming the killings were an inevitable but unfortunate outcome of conflict or out-rightly denied culpability for the killings. Thus what conversations on *Gukurahundi* that took place in the country between 1988 and the end of President Robert Mugabe’s rule in November 2017 were eclectic victims’ monologues. The police regularly arrested artists that attempted to represent the *Gukurahundi* massacres through songs, paintings and plays for trying to disturb what the state arbitrarily defined as public peace and morality. These obstructions disregarded survivors’ wounded humanity because in the aftermath of massacres harmed communities embolden themselves and coalesce their fractured senses of self by memorialising their collective suffering through commemorations, songs, dramas, paintings and the assembling of monuments. Halbwachs (quoted in Beristain, Paez, & González, 2000, p. 128) aptly argues that remembering is a normative process that allows people to have a personal and social identity. Thus by means of memorials, commemorations and rituals, reviving bonds with the deceased confirms a person’s social identity and is a step towards re-appropriation of the past which supports a moral self-definition. The police and state security agencies also refused *Gukurahundi* survivors to properly inter their dead. These inhibitions disorient a people because “...participation in funeral rites and social sharing not only helps to enhance social

integration and restore one's self-concept and self-esteem, but also to foster collective memory" (Beristain *et al.*, 2000, p. 119).

The Zimbabwean government's concerted efforts at silencing and obstructing *Gukurahundi* memorialisations re-traumatised survivors, I argue, by forcing them to sublimate their pains instead of letting them off through memorialisations, renditions and re-narrations. Silence and denial over atrocities are time buying strategies by the perpetrators which would make survivor claims lose affirmative potency (Ricouer, 2006). Denialism is a technique of erasure, a default mode for negating the sense-making function of memory and other commemorative processes.

In interrogating the *Gukurahundi* silences and denialism, this article is informed by David Moshman's four-phase theory on genocide which posits denial as the last stage of mass killings. In fact, "denial accompanies and follows genocide so routinely as to constitute its normative final phase" (Moshman, 2007, p. 126). The methods of genocide denial range from total rejection of the facts to more subtle means such as reluctance to investigate and unpack the intricacies of massacres; selective remembering of the past; re-contextualizing historical circumstances to render culpable actions normal, understandable, or inevitable; and educating children with textbooks selectively aimed at instilling rectilinear patriotism. Perpetrators and participants in acts of mass harm oftentimes deny their culpability because of the inherent desires of human beings to self-define and self-present as moral agents. Oftentimes, these perpetrators, especially when ensconced in the portals of state power, expect victims to overlook the pains of the past in the spirit of national unity and progress. In reality, for survivors the past is never past because they continue a tormented or anguished existence lived along side death, pain, destruction and denial. Thus, if possible, a sense of tragedy should be allowed to linger on in survivor communities.

The following parts of this article are divided into several sections. The first two sections, interrogate the historical and political dimensions of *Gukurahundi* and explain how it unfolded in the Matabeleland and the Midlands provinces. The subsequent sections analyse state strategies of silencing the memories of the *Gukurahundi* atrocities that range from denials, obfuscation, intimidation, and legal restrictions from compensating and recognising victimhood. The Mugabe government frustrated the *Gukurahundi* harmed communities by denying them space and opportunities to re-member and re-heal their communities. In the aftermath of massacres harmed communities embolden themselves and coalesce their fractured senses of self by memorialising their collective suffering through commemorations, songs, dramas, paintings and the assembling of monuments.

The *Gukurahundi* Massacres in Historical Context

The *Gukurahundi* massacres were symptomatic of the pervasive incapacity of post-colonial African states to manage and withstand political diversity. Driven by the cal-

culus of destroying political opponents, the ZANU (PF) led government unleashed the Fifth Brigade into the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces a mere three years after independence in 1983. This intervention was ostensibly meant to quell dissident activities perpetrated by disgruntled ex-Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) fighters deserting from the national army due to fears of persecution caused by the biased reintegration process into the new post-colonial Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA). The ZIPRA men who did not escape from the country were either killed or endured ill-treatment in the ZNA especially after the expulsion from government of their (PF) ZAPU leadership in 1982 and 1983. These expulsions followed the discovery of arms caches on (PF) ZAPU properties and farms.

There is controversy on the circumstances leading to the presence of the aforesaid arms on (PF) ZAPU properties. Perhaps these arms were left over from the liberation struggle era because in the penultimate stages of the struggle, both Robert Mugabe's ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU "wanted to hide some of their arms during the period following the implementation of the Lancaster House deal, in case the Rhodesians renege on the ceasefire. These weapons were held back by agreement between the two groups" (Jonathan Moyo quoted in Holland, 2008, p. 190). The two liberation movements mistrusted each other and they left residual forces and arms in the bush to maintain positions in the event that things did not work out in their favour in the build up to independence or soon after. There is also some speculation that the arms cache belonged to the African National Congress' (ANC) liberation army, *Umkonto weSizwe*, and that they were *en route* to South Africa for the prosecution of the anti-apartheid struggle (Chan, 2003, p. 22). The ZANU (PF) led government was aware of these multiple dimensions surrounding the arms cache.

Nevertheless, the government took the arms cache and advertised them as evidence of domestic security risk; as evidence that disgruntled ZIPRA fighters were preparing for insurrection in the Western part of the country, "that Nkomo's ZAPU party was untrustworthy and had withheld knowledge in bad faith and that it was now necessary to stamp out the internal enemy" (Chan, 2003, p. 22). The government further claimed that the dissidents were disgruntled ex-ZIPRA men who could not countenance the overwhelming loss of their party, (PF) ZAPU, to ZANU (PF) in the inaugural 1980 independence elections.

It also seems that the *Gukurahundi* massacres were a spill over from the unresolved liberation war era rivalries between the country's twin independence struggle movements of ZAPU and ZANU. These rivalries were exacerbated by the prevailing political mono-logic, especially in ZANU circles, whereby opponents were treated as "enemies of the people" who had to be pulverised into compliance at the slightest opportunity. According to Masipula Sithole, in spite of defeat at the 1980 elections that ushered the post-colonial dispensation (PF) ZAPU was still a well organised potent threat to the

fledgling ZANU (PF) government in the formative days of independence. Thus,

...with an arsenal of arms buried in various places in Matabeleland, and a cadre of young men aching to fight, ZAPU had not only the will, but also the capacity to test both Mugabe's will to rule and ZANU's capacity to survive. Post-independence dissident activity then must be seen in terms of this decisive test. It is a test that those intimately connected with the development of the liberation struggle could see coming, and that must fade away as Mugabe's will and ZANU PF's capacity are effectively demonstrated (Sithole, 1988, p. 240).

Essentially, the dissidents, engaged in low intensity and sporadic attacks on foreign tourists, isolated white farmers and government properties a situation that triggered jitters in the country's security circles. Some of the so-called hard-core dissidents, identified as Super ZAPU, were backed by apartheid South Africa as part of its sabotage campaigns or regional destabilization efforts against the newly independent Frontline States that were supportive of the anti-apartheid insurgents and all vestiges of colonialism in the region (CCJP, 1997; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003). These South African backed dissidents while posing as protectors of the people did everything in their power to alienate the people from the government. They attacked and destroyed government properties such as district and council offices, dip tanks and irrigation systems. In consequence, the Government renewed the Emergency Powers (Maintenance of Law and Order) Regulations which automatically invalidated aspects of the Declaration of Rights enshrined in Chapter 111 of the national constitution which guaranteed personal liberty, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association and freedom from government discrimination (Auret, 1992). The government also continued renewing Rhodesian era laws that indemnified in advance members of the security for unlawful acts committed against innocent or even suspected persons.

In spite of the state's highhanded response to the presumed dissident menace, it seems most of the dissidents had no intention of overthrowing the new Mugabe government. Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, (2000) claim they were largely insecure individuals compelled back into the 'bush' by "the life-threatening pressures of what they called 'the situation' and their abandonment by their leaders, who were often in jail or actively disassociated themselves from them and condemned their activities" (p. 192). The ZANU (PF) led government capitalized on the dissident phenomenon by exerting disproportionate force to annihilate (PF) ZAPU as an oppositional agent so that it could realise its hegemonic goal of establishing a one party state. In the 1980s, one party stateism was in vogue in much of the socialist aligned Global South. In some instances state security operatives also committed violations against the people and deliberately ascribed them to the dissidents in order to justify and escalate their retributions against a populace they accused of harbouring the dissidents.

Besides the regular army units and the police the government complemented the punitive Fifth Brigade mission by deploying other partisan forces such as the Central Intelligence Organisation operatives, ZANU (PF) Youth Brigades, the Police Internal Security Intelligence (PISI), and the Zimbabwe People's Militia. Because of the regional nature of the dissident phenomenon these forces indiscriminately "lumped together (PF) ZAPU as an opposition party, (PF) ZAPU leadership, (PF) ZAPU supporters, the demobilized ex-ZIPRA combatants and all Ndebele speaking people as 'dissidents' and as a security threat" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003, p. 116). Top government leadership resorted to exterminatory rhetoric against (PF) ZAPU, its perceived supporters and the dissidents who claimed tenuous loyalty to ZAPU in spite of strong denials of such links by the ZAPU leader, Dr. Joshua Nkomo. In April 1983, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe revealed the indiscriminate nature of the *Gukurahundi* campaigns by stating that "Where men and women provide food for dissidents, when we get there we eradicate them. We don't differentiate when we fight, because we can't tell who is a dissident and who is not..." (The Telegraph, 2008, April 2). At a rally in Matabeleland in 1983, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the Minister of State Security threatened perceived and real (PF) ZAPU supporters by saying "Blessed are they who will follow the path of the government laws, for their days on earth will be increased. But woe unto those who will choose the path of collaboration with dissidents for we will certainly shorten their stay on earth" (The Zimbabwean, 2016, March 23). In the same vein, Enos Nkala, then Minister of Home Affairs and, paradoxically, a member of the Ndebele ethnic group also deployed similar rhetoric against (PF)ZAPU and its supporters in the formative stages of *Gukurahundi*. He once said "...we want to wipe out the ZAPU leadership. You've only seen the warning lights. We haven't yet reached full blast ...the murderous organization and its murderous leadership must be hit so hard that it doesn't feel obliged to do things it has been doing" (The Telegraph, 2013, October 17). All this exterminatory rhetoric triggered a frenzy of violence and political murders in the Midlands and Matabeleland provinces.

The *Gukurahundi* Campaign: A Reign of Carnage

The Fifth Brigade did not fall under the normal army chain of because its top brass reported directly to Prime Minister Robert Mugabe (Eppel, 2008, p. 3). From the moment of its initial deployment in January 1983 the Brigade, whose members were easily identifiable by their red berets and unique Chinese vehicles, deployed brutal tactics against civilians. People who experienced the wrath of the Fifth Brigade recall it, "through their ordeal stories, as merciless and an unmitigated evil even greater than the colonial Rhodesian Army" (Webner, 1992, p. 157). The Brigade and aligned militias resorted to draconian Rhodesian era emergency powers of collectively punishing communities through arson, roadblocks, occasional house-to-house searches without search warrants, looting of cattle, curfews and indiscriminate food embargoes

or starve-out-thy-enemy strategies (CCJP, 1997; Eppel, 2008). In some instances “the Fifth Brigade bayoneted pregnant women, saying ‘Let’s kill these dissidents before they are born’; they buried people alive and threw them into disused mine shafts; they forced some to do demeaning things to each other in public sex acts” (Moyo quoted in Holland, 2008, p. 186).

The Brigade complemented the foregoing egregious violence by reviving the *pungwe*, liberation war time night-time rallies popular with ZANLA. The *pungwe* was a platform for mobilising peasants for the war effort through guerrilla led consciousness raising lectures and songs. The re-enactment of *pungwe* during *Gukurahundi* was meant to discipline and humiliate people perceived as political renegades. According to Richard Webner (1995) people in Matabeleland regions,

...had to learn Shona songs, although few spoke Shona, and they had to clap while singing them in rallies that lasted the whole day. For the sake of making the people submit to her discipline, which also entertained the soldiers as something of a sport to watch, they pitted women from the chorus against each other as if they were gladiators. The women had to beat each other down, using poles. If the *pungwe* had taught some people the lessons of nationalism, the revival of the *pungwe* was political education of another kind entirely; it was a parody further alienating the people from their own state and raising their consciousness of quasi-nationalism and their awareness of the role of their own state in the polarisation of Shona and Ndebele (p. 199).

This quotation shows that the Fifth Brigade wanted to render politically pliable all the people in their operational areas.

Chan (2003) also claims that Fifth Brigade’s “...primary function was to deny any possible base in the Matabeleland regions to the dissidents, and this denial was accomplished by scorched earth policies and plain murder of citizens in suspected locales of dissident activity” (p. 24). Able bodied young men and ex-combatants who had fought for the country’s liberation under the banner of the Zimbabwe People Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) were haunted out of their villages by the Fifth Brigade, they had to seek refuge in the urban areas. Others went into exile to neighbouring countries such as Botswana and South Africa. These attacks, tortures and killings seemed “to fulfil the objective of purifying and cleansing the body of the nation” (Webner, 1992, p. 160) by smothering out all vestiges of political opposition.

Apart from forced disappearances thousands were trans-located to detention centres in 1984. As the 1985 national elections approached, hundreds of key community leaders, especially those long established nationalists that led local level ZAPU structures, received nocturnal visits from state operatives in cars without number plates and took them away never to be seen again. Mugabe also warned people prior to the elections

that a vote for Nkomo's party would be interpreted as a vote for dissidents. Ultimately, after the elections he urged his people to remove the stumps in their backyards. ZANU (PF) youths and women took to the high density areas of Harare and elsewhere, looting, attacking and killing some ZAPU supporters and destroying their properties. A hotel in Shurugwi was destroyed together with Joshua Nkomo's farm (Todd, 2007). As noted above, the *Gukurahundi* massacres officially ended with the signing of the Unity Accord in December 1987. The accord, like all other post-conflict mechanisms in post-colonial Zimbabwe, was an elite bargain that disregarded victims' pains and traumas.

The Architecture for Silence and Denial in Post-Conflict Zimbabwe

The lack of empathy for the physically and socially wounded individuals and communities in the aftermath of Zimbabwe's ever recurring episodes of politically motivated violence is deeply etched in the country's political firmament. From the attainment of independence in 1980, the government initiated a culture of pardoning perpetrators of human rights violations by resorting to state controlled instruments for achieving catharsis in the aftermath of mass politically motivated injuries. Such institutionalized processes for peace-building include unconditional reconciliation pronouncements, clemency orders and national amnesties (Mashingaidze, 2010; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Benyera, 2015, pp. 21-22). Prime Minister Robert Mugabe's once vaunted reconciliation pronouncement of 1980 essentially called for Zimbabweans to overlook the violence of colonial rule and the anti-colonial struggle. The post-colonial government allowed white Rhodesians who had harmed black communities through wanton violence, mass incarcerations, property destruction and dispossessions, as well as collective punishments such as curfews during the liberation struggle of the 1970s to move on with their lives without censure. Like in 1980, after cessation of the *Gukurahundi* massacres through the signing of the Unity Accord the government instituted Clemency Order Number 1 of April 1988 which granted unconditional amnesty to all protagonists.

State desires to silence public conversations on Zimbabwe's multiple cycles of violence shows that every post-conflict scenario in the country has been characterized by fragile social harmony within communities because, assuming they can be perceived as instruments for healing, clemency orders and amnesties are narrowly legalistic. Besides showing perpetrators that politically motivated violence is not punishable, they also prevent them from expressing remorse and seeking the forgiveness of their victims. In the following sections the article unpacks and interrogates the rhetoric that has been appropriated and deployed by government officials to silence memorializations and deny culpability for *Gukurahundi* Massacres.

“Just a War” or “A moment of Madness”:

***Gukurahundi* Deflections**

Government and ZANU (PF) leaders were reluctant to show remorse and acknowledge culpability for the *Gukurahundi* massacres, a majority of them claimed that “it was war” in order to neuter their individual and collective culpabilities. When asked by a journalist about his involvement in the *Gukurahundi*, Enos Nkala, the former minister of home affairs and defence during the massacres stated that “...when there is conflict, the grass suffers, innocent people suffer” (Shortwave Radio, 2011, October 19). Through this statement Nkala was insinuating that the Fifth Brigade and other security forces’ attacks on civilians were inadvertent, an inevitable consequence of armed conflict whereby civilians got caught up in the middle of a conflict situation. In this case, Nkala’s posturing was misleading and it was a *post facto* re-presentation of *Gukurahundi* facts. During *Gukurahundi*, Nkala, who had a well-established history of animus towards (PF) ZAPU and its leadership, was a feared minister well known for his incendiary rhetoric against (PF) ZAPU supporters. From the 1960s heydays of African nationalism in Zimbabwe Nkala had always promised to crush ZAPU and its leader Joshua Nkomo. According to Daina Auret in 1980, Lord Soames, the country’s transitional leader in 1979/80, banned Nkala from standing in the independence election because of his inflammatory campaign. In 1985 Nkala stood as a ZANU (PF) candidate in Matabeleland South, his home province, but received less than 10 percent of the vote (Auret, 1992, p. 164). He was only rescued from political oblivion by his ZANU (PF) allies who allowed him to fill up a parliamentary vacancy created in the Karoi District. Again in September 1985, as the Minister of Home Affairs, he spoke of his intention to crush ZAPU by declaring: “Let me assure the nation that the policy of reconciliation toward ZAPU has been withdrawn” (p. 164).

In October 1999, Nathan Shamuyarira, the former Minister of Information in a paean of praise for President Robert Mugabe carried in the *Financial Gazette* also revealed his lack of contrition for *Gukurahundi* by indicating that “If such a situation were to arise in any part of the country today, the government may be forced to resort to the same measures again as soon as it feels that law and order are being threatened” (quoted in Todd, p.405). Indeed, as Shamuyarira implied in the foregoing statement, the Zimbabwean government replicated mass human rights violations when confronted with determined opposition to its stranglehold on power between 2000 and 2008. It waged, without compunction, vicious campaigns against civilians through Operation *Murambatsvina* (Clean-out-the-filth) in 2005 and Operation *Makavhotera Papi* (Whom did you vote for?) against the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) opposition in the aftermath of the heavily contested 2008 elections.

The closest that the country’s erstwhile long-serving President Mugabe himself ever came to a *Gukurahundi* apology was in July 2000, at a memorial service for Joshua

Nkomo, when he described the massacres as “an act of madness, we killed each other and destroyed each other’s property. It was wrong and both sides were to blame. We have had a difference, a quarrel. We engaged ourselves in a reckless and unprincipled fight” (quoted in Phimister, 2008, p. 206). Some leading former (PF) ZAPU cadres accused Mugabe of downplaying the Gukurahundi Massacres as “moment of madness” because they happened over a long and sustained period. Cephas Msipa, ZAPU’s last Secretary General, argued that “Gukurahundi was not a days’ event or a ‘moment madness’ because it began in 1981 and continued until 1987 when the unity accord was signed” (The Daily News, 2015b November 27).

At different times, other leading security cluster ministers at the time of *Gukurahundi* tried to apportion all blame for the massacres on Robert Mugabe as the Commander-in-Chief of the armed forces during the *Gukurahundi* massacres. Enos Nkala, the same well-known rabid opponent of (PF) ZAPU mentioned above denied responsibility for the massacres in 2011 by telling off a reporter:

You are peddling lies which you cannot prove. You ask Robert Mugabe about who formed *Gukurahundi*? Who deployed *Gukurahundi* in Matabeleland? Who gave them instructions to do what they did? It wasn’t me. Its people who are ill informed who pick things from the press. You ask Mugabe, he owned *Gukurahundi* (Shortwave Radio, 2011 October 19).

Another alleged architect of the massacres, Emmerson Mnangagwa, now the President of Zimbabwe since November 2017, who was the Minister of State Security and had a proclivity for hate speech against (PF) ZAPU supporters at the time of *Gukurahundi* threatened to sue David Coltart whose autobiography captured quotes from some of his offensive speeches (The Zimbabwean, 2016 March 23). He also denied culpability by claiming he was not responsible for the deployment of the army by arguing that “How do I become the enforcer during *Gukurahundi*? We had the President, the Minister of Defence, Commander of the Army and I was none of that. My own enemies attack me left and right...” (Newsday, 2016 December 19). Through such deflections Mnangagwa was implying that it was Prime Minister Robert Mugabe in his capacity as the commander-in-chief of the armed forces, the Minister of Defence and the commanders of the army who exclusively planned *Gukurahundi*. These claims of non-involvement in *Gukurahundi* operations by someone who was the serving Minister of State Security at the time do not seem quite plausible. The Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO) which was managed and controlled by the State Security Ministry was heavily involved in the massacres. The government considered the dissident menace to be an internal security matter which neatly fell within the CIO’s operational mandate.

Other former high ranking officials such as Didymus Mutasa, a former State Security Minister, attempted to exonerate Mnangagwa by claiming the planning of the massacres

was a collective responsibility:

...actually I don't see why he is the only one blamed for *Gukurahundi*. The whole Cabinet during that time must be blamed... There was JOC (the Joint Operations Command) which had [many] people, why are they not blamed? You keep blaming Mnangagwa anenge ane jambwa, ngaabike doro (he is cursed, he must be cleansed) (The Daily News, 2017 December 3).

Mutasa's statement was designed to downplay individual responsibility for the massacres by emphasising on collective and bureaucratic accountability. In the following section I interrogate Zimbabwe's culture of silencing and disregarding conversations about past political disturbances and harms.

The Painful Past is Unhelpful

Zimbabwe's post-colonial state leaders also 'compelled' citizens to forget, forgive and sublimate their pains after each of the ever recurring cycles of violence. This amnesia riven peacebuilding praxis forced citizens to "move on under the nation-in-recuperation banner of 'unity, progress and development'" (Mashingaidze, 2017). This forbidding approach to peace and reconciliation was expressed by Christopher Mutsvangwa, a former presidential adviser, in December 2017 when he insensitively argued against continued conversations on *Gukurahundi*:

...talking about the *Gukurahundi* issue ... is simply unhelpful and irresponsible... *Zimbabwe needs a break. To continuously re-dig its past, to settle scores from the past, as if it cannot grasp the future ... It diverts energy away from what should be done. Every country followed a tortured history ... You make mistakes. You make false starts* (Nehandatv.com, 2017 December 17).

Emmerson Mnangagwa, then Minister of Defence and one of the presumed masterminds of *Gukurahundi*, also claimed in 2011 that the nation should not open old wounds as this was retrogressive. "We do not want to undermine efforts by our national leaders to reunite the people. If we try to open healed wounds by discussing such issues, we will be undermining and failing to recognise the statesmanship exhibited by President Mugabe and his counterpart, Dr. Nkomo when they signed the Unity Accord" (The Herald, 2011 July 19). Former ZIPRA cadres such as Silas Nkala opposed these exhortations by arguing that it was a provocation to claim that *Gukurahundi* was now a closed chapter because "...people in the region were still grieving the loss of relatives hence the matter was still fresh in their minds" (Newsday, 2011 August 12).

Several studies affirm that *Gukurahundi* survivors in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces still require justice, truth and healing. Ngwenya and Harris observed that participants in their research "were clear that a lack of healing carried negative consequences for an individual, their community and the country in general" (Ngwenya &

Harris, 2015). Murambadoro and Wielenga (2015) made similar observations during their focus group interviews in Nkayi on the *Gukurahundi* survivors' expectations from the government. Their respondents defined a number of preconditions for genuine and deep seated reconciliation which included: acknowledgement *Gukurahundi* abuses; truth-telling; dialogues between victims and perpetrators; the release of the findings of several commissions of enquiry; and an apology by government to the victims. Most of these participants did not favour criminal prosecutions for the *Gukurahundi* perpetrators because trials would focus on determining culpability rather availing an empathic platform for the rendition of the victims' testimonies.

Silencing the Past: Art and Commemorations

Outside the legislative realm, the government censored renditions of the *Gukurahundi* massacres through art and drama by invoking censorship laws under the guise of protecting public peace and morality as well as maintaining law and order. Such silencing of disturbing aspects of the past cripples a people's capacity to articulate their sense of injury and this constitutes *memoricide*. Edgardo Civalero (2007) observed that "to destroy memory means to dispossess an individual or a group of their main tool for giving sense to their present. Because human beings need to extract, from their past, the necessary answers for understanding their current state and acting in the building of their future" (p. 2). This *memoricide* was apparent in 2008 when the award winning playwright Cont Mhlanga's protest play "The Good President" which critiqued President Robert Mugabe's rule, especially his highhanded approach to oppositional citizens in *Gukurahundi* era, was banned from being performed in Bulawayo. The play had only been staged a few times in the capital, Harare (Bhebe, 2011, p. 101).

Perhaps the most iconic representation of these crude gag tactics was the banning and dismantling of Owen Maseko's *Sibathontisele* exhibition at the National Art Gallery in Bulawayo in August 2010 (Maseko, 2011). *Sibatonitisele* means "lets drip on them" in the local Ndebele vernacular and "refers to of the most notorious torture techniques employed by the Fifth Brigade – dripping hot, hot, melted plastic on victims" (p. 95). Maseko and Vote Thebe, the Gallery's Curator were initially arrested for violating Section 33 of the Criminal Codification Act which punishes anyone who undermines the authority of the President. Ultimately, the state's prosecution efforts failed in the High Court of Zimbabwe because the police later tried to charge Maseko under Section 31 of the Criminal Law and Codification Act which prohibits the "publishing or communicating false statements prejudicial to the state" (Newsday, 2014 September 14). The collapse of the state's case against Maseko shows that the reasons for prosecution were weak from the onset. In fact, this confirms that the state's well worn out strategy of arresting political opponents on flimsy grounds in order to cast aspersions on their *bona fides* and to politically disable them by making sure that they spend inordinate amounts of

time and resources while trying to defend themselves in the courts of law. In most cases people arrested on these spurious grounds were acquitted. Other laws that frustrated *Gukurahundi* disclosures included the Public Order and Security Act's (POSA, 2002) Section 15 (10-11) which proscribed people from communicating falsehoods that had the potential of inciting public chaos, cause economic ruin or impugn the image of the government and undermine the image of the President. This section of the Act implied that if a person were to speak of the *Gukurahundi* massacres, claiming that the government and the ruling party were involved, and stirring up chaos, even though they were telling the truth, they could be prosecuted (Newsday, 2014, September 14).

In addition to frustrating any renditions of the massacres through art and drama the state tried to impinge any commemorations of the massacres. Groups such as Ibhetshu Likazulu, a Bulawayo based pressure group was barred by the police from commemorating the massacres (Daily News, 2015a February 17). In 2016 the commemorations proceeded at Stanley Square in Bulawayo only after appealing to the courts of law. These state instigated frustrations of commemorations is unfair to harmed communities because "memorials are symbolic reparations" (Hopewood, 2011, p. 6).

The Paradoxical Inconvenience of Victimhood

Perhaps a bit intriguing were the responses of former (PF) ZAPU members who decided to be silent about the massacres or simply harped on the import of unity and development at the expense organising and supporting *Gukurahundi* related commemorations, cleansing and truth telling activities. Alexander, MacGregor and Ranger (2000) noted that soon after the Unity Accord "senior members of the former ZAPU (who were now in government) made a quick conversion to the merits of silence, maintaining that 'old wounds should not be opened" (p. 257). This was mainly because "the violence of the 1980s had become embarrassing, troublesome, an obstacle to the consolidation of a new myth unity" (p. 257). For example, when confronted with the discovery of human remains at Antelope Mine in Kezi District, his home area and political stronghold Vice President Joshua Nkomo told assembled crowds that he could not answer any questions in the absence of his colleagues and co-Vice President, Simon Muzenda (Parade, 1992). High ranking ZAPU officials who joined government after the Unity Accord have also attempted to gag *Gukurahundi* conversations for the sake of unity and national development. In 2011, Vice President John Landa Nkomo angered former ZIPRA combatants when he claimed that "...quite often, those who talk about it [*Gukurahundi*] were never victims or were born yesterday and are too young to comprehend what happened and why. President Mugabe and Dr. Nkomo agreed that *Gukurahundi* was a closed chapter" (Newsday, 2011 July 4).

Former Vice President Mphoko, a former (PF) ZAPU cadre who was also arrested during the *Gukurahundi* days when he was serving in the intelligence services, stirred a hornet's nest in 2013 and 2014 when he argued on numerous occasions that Mugabe

was not responsible at all for the massacres. Rather, he claimed it was a conspiracy network of apartheid South African elements bent on destabilising the nascent post-colonial state, Western government seeking to prevent the spread of communism in the region, especially in South Africa, and ex-Rhodesian state security agents working in post-colonial government who wanted to create enmity between the Shona and the Ndebeles who fomented the massacres (Newzimbabwe.com, 2018 August 6).

The former (PF) ZAPU leadership's contradictory reluctance to confront the foreboding *Gukurahundi* legacies shows the possible recanting of positions and loyalties that leaders of victim groups of state repressions and exponents of 'rebellious political positions' go through when they become co-opted into the portals of power by their former adversaries and persecutors. It also shows that clearly articulating and negotiating the victim/perpetrator position is sometimes difficult in post-conflict situations where the perpetrators are not the losers. Victims can only condemn perpetrators and litigate against an egregious past in post-conflict situations where they simultaneously acquire state power and by association legislative traction and the moral high ground.

***Gukurahundi* Entanglements: The Rhetoric of Subterfuge and Obfuscations**

A comprehensive and non-partisan resolution of the *Gukurahundi* massacres was impeded by a complex intermingling of divergent political ideals, divided memories, conflicting ethnic-politico histories, contesting definitions of political harm, and legal loopholes that allow perpetrators of violence to go unpunished such as statutes of limitations. Such entanglements of contesting definitions of political harm, for example, were well encapsulated by the country's co-Minister of the Organ on National Healing, Integration and Reconciliation (ONHR), Moses Mzila-Ndlovu who critiqued the country's abortive national healing efforts by observing that:

ZANU (PF) today is in denial of the [*post-colonial*] atrocities, they say its water under the bridge but they want to talk about the atrocities of Smith's [*colonial*] regime. This is very hypocritical for them to want to wish away fresh crimes because they will never die. When it is election time, they talk about the liberation massacres. If you are to talk about crimes let us not choose because *Gukurahundi* is so fresh and the organ needs to deal with this...This is so because ZANU (PF) rule is premised on the divide and rule [*sic*]. They want to divide us on tribal lines. If people cannot talk about *Gukurahundi*, how then can we then establish healing and reconciliation? People during the *Gukurahundi* debacle were murdered for their Ndebele language. How then do we heal and integrate people without addressing this issue? (Daily News, 2012 March 12).

The intermingling of largely in-congruent interests towards national healing embedded in the foregoing quotation frustrated the establishment of comprehensive national peace

building projects and all-inclusive state making. President Mugabe also attempted to downplay calls for *Gukurahundi* investigation as mere political posturing:

It's just political. It's just politics that people try to gain out of it. *Gukurahundi*- as it happened- what was it? You had party with a guerilla force that wanted to reverse democracy in this country. And action was taken. And, yes, there might have been excesses, on both sides. True, it's not the fact that there was *Gukurahundi* which was wrong. It's the fact that there have been excesses that have caused some people to suffer. But we'd have to start with the excesses of Smith – and the colonialists, the British, who were still in charge – because lots of people disappeared; lots of people died (Holland, 2008, pp. 240-241).

Some state functionaries reduced any talk about *Gukurahundi*, especially by survivors, political parties and civil society to crass opportunism designed to shoring up grievance rather ideologically driven political agendas. For example, Nathaniel Manheru, a prolific media columnist who was believed to be the George Charamba, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and also the Presidential Spokesperson, once argued that *Gukurahundi* “has become a real blackmail, an unchallenged vehicle for pursuing ignoble interests while using guilt and tribal sentiment to claim immunity from rigorous scrutiny and challenge” (The Herald, 2010 August 28). After the 2013 harmonised election, Manheru again opposed what he thought were the Movement for Democratic (MDC) formations’ vacuous *Gukurahundi* driven politics by acerbically noting that:

The two MDCs’ failure to produce any credible manifestos was quite indicative. Their failure to rouse the masses, to move the masses beyond bitter criticism of 2008, towards their own vision of society, clearly showed how unreal they are as a political force. Much worse, their fascination with devolution and *Gukurahundi*, all against a society long evolved to new, modern forms of socio-economic foci, showed how antiquated and out of touch their politics are (Manheru, 2013).

Manheru’s critiques of any public conversations on *Gukurahundi* amounts to some gagging of memorialisations of the massacres and a disregard for the wounded humanity of the constitutive political other.

Conclusion

This article which suggests an exigency for combating memorial atrophy on the *Gukurahundi* massacres has revealed that there was a deeply ingrained lack of political will in the Zimbabwean body politic to appreciate, acknowledge and rehabilitate the wounded humanity of the *Gukurahundi* victims in the Mugabe era. To date, as in the tension ridden 1980s, the extent to which the abuses of the Fifth Brigade were sanctioned

by the Zimbabwean government remains an underexplored question. The government never acknowledged that members of the Fifth Brigade were responsible for the large number of the dead and wounded civilians. This silence vapours off any sense of scandal in the aftermath of the deployment of disproportionate violence against perceived opponents. The government's silences on the *Gukurahundi* massacres was a potent and painful weapon against survivors because it denied them the status of officially recognised victims. Disregarding people's injuries and losses pushes survivors into ever diminishing cycles of being. This insensitivity was abetted by laws that prevented victims of violence from seeking compensation from the state through the courts of law. In spite of the fact that the traumas of the past still resonated in the present through the survivors' constant clamouring for reburials, and commemorations the perpetrators of the massacres preferred a selective reading of the country's catalogue of violence by harping on colonial injustices against blacks while being silent on post-colonial violence. Artists that attempted to either paint or stage plays relating to *Gukurahundi* were obstructed and arrested by the police for trying to disturb public peace and morality. All this showed that *Gukurahundi* perpetrators preferred survivors to sublimate their pains and 'move on' without healing and cleansing their wounded social bodies. The Perpetrators claimed that open and public reburials could tear the nation apart, thus the nation had to be silent about the massacres. This stance negated the veracity of victim and survivor narrations of the massacres. Finally, besides the deliberate silences and denials on the massacres by high ranking state security officials noted in the foregoing, there are no accessible official documents about what transpired during *Gukurahundi*. The findings of key government commissions set up concurrent to the massacres remain sealed in state vaults. This lacuna of state generated evidence on the *Gukurahundi* massacres creates a partial understanding of the atrocities.

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