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The Noisy Silence of Gukurahundi: Truth, Recognition and Belonging

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A period of terrible state repression known as 'Gukurahundi' indelibly marked the foundational years of the Zimbabwean nation. The perpetrators of that period still hold power. It has never been subject to an official truth-telling process, nor have the responsible actors been held accountable. Instead, irreconcilable narratives about this past have interacted and, for those subjected to violence, proliferated, producing what I call a 'noisy silence' at the edges of the nation. This noise rumbles on because of a perpetual failure of public recognition of the violent past, but it does so in highly varied ways and to distinct purposes. I seek to trace the history of this noisy silence from its start in the irreconcilable narratives of the 1980s, themselves powerfully rooted in earlier liberation struggle ideas and relationships, through subsequent decades. Noisy silence sat in between an official, justificatory account of Gukurahundi on the one hand and the fearful, silenced memories of individuals on the other. It occupied a productive middle ground where collective, creative efforts delineated and demanded new political possibilities and terms of belonging through truth-telling, re-imagined and mourned nations and cross-generational attempts to heal and hold perpetrators to account.

Keywords: Gukurahundi; truth; recognition; memory; Zimbabwe; ZAPU; ZPRA

'Gukurahundi' refers to the most terrible period of state repression in Zimbabwe's post-independence history, generated at and by the nation state's foundation and perched at the ragged end of an armed liberation struggle. It indelibly marked this founding moment and has reverberated through public and private spaces ever since. It has done so in a way undisciplined by an official truth-telling forum or process of accountability that might have created and legitimated a shared story, however problematic.[1] Instead, irreconcilable narratives have proliferated and interacted over decades and across generations. The perpetrators of Gukurahundi have retained an only superficially altered account rooted in a wartime politics, while survivors' narratives have reworked content, chronology and causality. The dissonance among stories is expressed in a 'noisy silence' through which those subjected to state violence and its lingering legacies struggle both to make themselves heard and to imagine new political possibilities and terms of belonging.

1 Such stories are always problematic. See, for example, B. Hamber and R. Wilson, 'Symbolic Closure through Memory, Reparation and Revenge in Post-Conflict Societies', *Journal of Human Rights*, 1, 1 (2002), pp. 35–53.

The phenomenon of 'noisy silence' as I use it here refers to a collective, imaginative response to a failure to grant recognition to a violent past. Michael Jackson argues that 'recognition' inheres in the intersubjective nature of storytelling. It enables the return of agency and humanity to individuals when it spans the public and private spheres, restoring relationships with others and affirming collective ideals and goals. In the wake of state violence, recognition is, he argues, specifically required from the authority that is 'held accountable for having "stolen" or "cheated" the victim out of her humanity' – and even then it heals only unevenly, often leaving a troubling political residue.[2] As a large literature explores, there are many obstacles to achieving this kind of inherently political recognition. Stories of violence may be unsayable, untold or distorted and rendered deceptive owing to trauma, shame and fear; they may be unrecognised – or misrecognised – because they are unimaginable or unacceptable to states or other groups owing to the challenge they pose to dominant political or social beliefs.[3] How a repressive state, or any state, may offer recognition is far from obvious. In such situations, silence on the part of those subjected to violence commonly ensues, and, where telling occurs, it may be 'all there is'; that is, it may not produce a public dialogue or redress for past injustice.[4] This is not necessarily an end point, however: it may become a place of political productivity.

A refusal to accept telling as 'just telling' – that is, the persistent demand for recognition from the authority that 'stole' one's humanity – can create the space where noisy silence makes a restless home and demands for action are formulated.[5] Noisy silence does not have a fixed form, nor does its existence imply that fear and trauma do not at the same time maintain silence. It is a painful, fragile product of an ongoing 'narrative asymmetry' created by the alignments of both history and memory with power.[6] 'Asymmetry' is perhaps too antiseptic a term, however, and 'narrative' too divorced from the material. As the novelist Novuyo Rosa Tshuma graphically puts it, for those without power, stories can feel as if they are 'shoved down our throats', imagery that underlines the intimate violence of this process, the material hunger it may feed on, and a metaphorical ingestion.[7] This is not a meal served once: it is a process, in which the stories of those subjected to state violence may assume multiple forms that undermine official narratives (and state power) as well as 'ingesting' and reifying them.[8] The political valence of this noisy silence is thus mutable, derived from a complex process of collectively telling and retelling stories in bad conditions. As the lens of

2 M. Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling: Variations on a Theme by Hannah Arendt* (Copenhagen, Museum Tusculanum Press, 2013), p. 77, 71, and see pp. 57–78. See also L. Weschler, *A Miracle, A Universe: Settling Accounts with Torturers* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1990).

3 There is a vast, multi-disciplinary literature on these questions. See, for example, approaches outlined in A. Thompson, 'Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History', *Oral History Review*, 34, 1, pp. 49–70; P. Summerfield, 'Culture and Composure: Creating Narratives of the Gendered Self in Oral History Interviews', *Cultural and Social History*, 1, 1 (2004), pp. 65–93; Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, pp. 99–112, and *passim*; and the diverse contributions to K.L. Rogers and S. Leydesdorff with G. Dawson (eds), *Trauma and Life Stories: International Perspectives* (London, Routledge, 1999); R. Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power* (London, Zed Books, 1998); N. Argenti and K. Schramm (eds), *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission* (New York, Berghahn Books, 2012).

4 R. Gordon and C. Williams, 'What is Telling "if telling is all there is?"', *Acta Academica*, 47, 1 (2015), pp. 266–73.

5 In emphasising the demand for action as an element of 'noisy silence', I am echoing Avery Gordon's far wider-reaching notion of 'haunting' in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (London, University of Minnesota Press, 2008).

6 See E. Ochs and L. Capps, 'Narrating the Self', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 25 (1996), p. 32.

7 Novuyo Rosa Tshuma, *House of Stone* (London, Atlantic Books, 2018), p. 69.

8 For discussion of this point in Zimbabwe, see G. Karekwaivanane, '"Tapanda Zvamuchese": Facebook, "unruly publics", and Zimbabwean Politics', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, 13, 1 (2019), pp. 54–71; A. Rasch, 'Autobiography after Empire: Individual and Collective Memory in Dialogue' (PhD thesis, University of Copenhagen, 2016); A. Rasch, 'Subversion or Identity Work: Tracing the Reception of Zimbabwean Counter-Narrative Memoirs', elsewhere in this issue.

the present shifts, so too do the demands of the past on the present. This is neither a one-off event nor a one-way street, and it is mediated by institutions and transmitted through a host of media, as we shall see. As such, it requires a history.

My goal is to begin to trace a history of noisy silence and its political effects in Matabeleland over 40 years. I start with an account of Gukurahundi before turning to the origins of perpetrators' authorising stories and contrasting them to the accounts of those subjected to state violence. This was an extreme instance of asymmetric story-making, and it laid the foundations for a long-term interaction of irreconcilable collective narratives in which truth-telling, reimagined nations and efforts to seek cross-generational healing and accountability remade politics.

Gukurahundi: Event and Interpretation

The origins of post-independence violence lay in the dreams and divisions of the liberation struggle. Stories about the violence of the 1980s held a power and complexity that allowed them to linger for decades because of their roots in relationships and ideas for which people had collectively toiled and suffered, and which remained important to their sense of purpose and identity. I begin by setting out a brief historical account of Gukurahundi before turning to the ways in which the past inhabited its different narrations.[9]

The liberation struggle produced powerful political ideals and relationships alongside a history of distrust and violence between and within the two main nationalist parties, the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) and the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and their armies, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA) and the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA).[10] When a group of disaffected ZAPU members formed ZANU in 1963 it led to bitter fighting in Rhodesia's townships. Both parties were subsequently banned and their leaders detained for a decade. The armed struggle moved into exile, which was the most terrible venue of conflict among and within the liberation movements themselves. Divisions had a host of irreducibly complex causes – personality, ideology, ethnicity, education, corruption, infiltration and differences over military and diplomatic strategy among them.[11] They were enacted in exile camps, in diplomatic alliances and tactics and on the battlefield, and they can be seen in ZANU's decision to withdraw from the 'Patriotic Front', which had brought ZAPU and ZANU together to negotiate the terms of independence. The two parties contested Zimbabwe's first elections separately, their names – ZANU(Patriotic Front – PF) and Patriotic Front–ZAPU – vestiges of a never fully realised unity. ZANU(PF) was by this time no longer the smaller, weaker party: ZANLA guerrillas had spread from bases in Mozambique across much of Zimbabwe, leaving ZPRA dominant only in the western and northern regions. One of the fateful consequences of this division was ethnic: much (though by no means all) of ZPRA's operational areas were Ndebele-speaking, while ZANLA's were almost entirely located in the majority Shona-speaking regions. ZANU's ethnic politics primarily sought balance

9 I draw on a large literature based on primary research, most notably CCJP/LRF, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980 to 1988* (Harare, CCJP/LRF, 1997); J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the 'dark forests' of Matabeleland* (Oxford, James Currey, 2000); K. Yap, 'Uprooting the Weeds: Power, Ethnicity and Violence in the Matabeleland Conflict 1980–1987' (PhD thesis, University of Amsterdam, 2000); S. Doran, *Kingdom, Power, Glory: Mugabe, Zanu and the quest for supremacy 1960–1987* (Midrand, Sithatha Media, 2017).

10 ZPRA was the armed wing of ZAPU; ZANLA was the armed wing of ZANU.

11 On the complexities of exile politics see B-M. Tendi, *The Army and Politics in Zimbabwe: Mujuru, the Liberation Fighter and Kingmaker* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020), Chapter 3; J. Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation: The Political Life of Zephaniah Moyo', *Journal of East African Studies*, 11, 1 (2017), pp. 166–87.

among Shona sub-groups; ZAPU's had always had to encompass Ndebele (and its many sub-groups) and Shona too.

A ceasefire formally brought the war to an end in December 1979, but the rumble of violent division did not stop. As soldiers of the liberation armies made their way to 'assembly points', they continued to clash with Rhodesian security forces. Distrust ran deep, and arms – and armed men – were widely hidden and withheld in fear of renewed conflict. ZANU(PF) emerged victorious in the elections of February 1980, winning massive majorities in virtually all of the areas in which its army had held sway, just as ZAPU did in the smaller areas that it had controlled militarily.[12] The integration of all three armies into a Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) began thereafter, and decisively shifted the source of tension to relations between the two liberation movements themselves, rather than between them and the Rhodesian forces. Following the election, ZAPU supporters and politicians were harassed and detained, and violence escalated between armed ZANLA and ZPRA cadres. Major conflicts occurred in Entumbane township in Bulawayo in November 1980 and February 1981 along with sporadic fighting in integrated ZNA brigades. Integration and demobilisation were completed under conditions of deep suspicion. In February 1982, a permanent rift occurred on the back of specious ZANU(PF) accusations that ZAPU had hidden arms in order to seize power. ZPRA commanders were charged with treason; ZAPU ministers were demoted and removed from office. An attempt was made to assassinate the ZAPU president, Joshua Nkomo, and he briefly fled the country. ZPRA soldiers faced violent persecution from their ZANLA comrades inside and outside the army. Thousands were expelled or deserted in fear of their lives. Some took up arms again, becoming 'dissidents'.[13]

Neither side of this conflict was without great complexity. Amid growing repression, there were local ZANU(PF) leaders and members who objected to state and party abuses (and suffered as a result), ZANLA commanders who sought to protect elements of ZPRA in the ZNA, and civil servants who tried to shield civilians from security force attacks.[14] The story of the 'dissidents' was also convoluted. Most were ZPRA soldiers fleeing the ZNA, but the indiscriminate persecution of young men in ZAPU-supporting areas meant that untrained people joined them in search of safety while others used the chaos as cover for crime. Security forces routinely carried out 'pseudo-operations', in which they pretended to be dissidents, typically demanding food from villagers only to return to punish them. For a brief period, some ZPRA dissidents accepted support from apartheid South Africa, though this group was small in number and was rejected by the majority of ZPRA dissidents. The number of dissidents probably never exceeded 400. They were responsible for the destruction of government projects and terrible atrocities, though on a tiny scale compared to state forces. By their own account, they did not have popular support and were often without working arms or ammunition, conditions reflected in their catastrophic casualty rate.[15]

ZPRA dissidents feared above all the highly effective paratroop units and police Support Unit, but by far the deadliest unit was the Fifth Brigade, which targeted civilians. At the

12 L. Cliffe, J. Mpofu and B. Munslow, 'Nationalist Politics in Zimbabwe: The 1980 Elections and Beyond', *Review of African Political Economy*, 7, 18 (1980), p. 46.

13 See J. Alexander, 'Dissident Perspectives on Zimbabwe's Post-Independence War', *Africa*, 68, 2 (1998), pp. 152–9; N. Kriger, *Guerrilla Veterans in Post-War Zimbabwe: Symbolic and Violent Politics 1980–1987* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), Chapter 4.

14 See, for example, accounts in Tendi, *The Army*, Chapter 8; Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, Chapter 9; I.J.K. Sibhona, *Nation Born of Violence: ZPRA's struggle against Rhodesia in Alliance with ANC's Umkhonto we Sizwe* (Middlesbrough, Quoin publishing, 2018), Chapter 32; T.R. Mbofana, 'Perrance Shiri Untimely Death – Evoking My Traumatic Childhood Memories of Witnessing Gukurahundi Genocide', *The Zimbabwean*, London, 29 July 2020.

15 For this account of dissidents, see Alexander, 'Dissident Perspectives', pp. 164–9, *passim*.

time of its deployment, the brigade was made up almost entirely of ex-ZANLA guerrillas; it received North Korean rather than British training, wore distinctive red berets and followed what was at times a chaotic political chain of command that distinguished it from other brigades.[16] In 1983, it massacred thousands of civilians in Matabeleland North. In 1984, it was deployed to Matabeleland South, where it shifted to less visible practices, notably running detention camps with the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). Thousands of people brought from all over the region were tortured and killed. By far the largest death toll occurred in these years at the hands of this brigade. Many thousands more were detained, tortured, beaten and starved under strict curfews in drought conditions before, during and after those terrible years. In and after the 1985 elections, ZAPU members and leaders were attacked and 'disappeared' on a large scale once more.[17] Nevertheless, Matabeleland voted overwhelmingly for ZAPU in 1985, as it had in 1980.

Two more years of intermittent violence ensued until political negotiations led to the signing of the Unity Accord in December 1987. The accord brought an immediate end to violence, the demise of ZAPU and amnesties for both dissidents and state forces.

ZANU's Gukurahundi

'Gukurahundi' is a chiShona term that describes the first rains of a new season that wash away the chaff, a pleasant image of renewal. But its relevant genealogy for the state violence of the 1980s is located in ZANU's wartime politics, where 'rain' is invoked as an elemental, purging force.[18] Gukurahundi was the violent, cleansing response required by threats to leaders' power and the people's will. Scholars have argued that Gukurahundi can be seen as a 'policy' or 'strategy' that entailed 'annihilating' those who opposed ZANU.[19] But it is more than that: its language can be characterised as what Charles Taylor has called 'real' talk as opposed to rhetorical 'froth', 'its goal being to establish that one's own group was carrying out the only legitimate realization of the sovereignty of the people'.[20] This was to be Gukurahundi's most durable meaning.

The term 'Gukurahundi' was first used by ZANLA commander Josiah Tongogara in 1974 in reference to the military response to a rebellion led by ZANLA commanders Thomas Nhari and Simon Badza. Tongogara recruited two companies of newly trained cadres in Tanzania to 'crush the rebellion' – Gukurahundi was the name of both the 'operation' and the units that carried it out.[21] This was a bloody endeavour. Nhari and Badza executed hostages whom they considered sell-outs and were themselves executed along with other rebels on charges of working with the Rhodesians or with a suspected ZAPU-friendly Zambia.[22] The second use of Gukurahundi was as the revolutionary title of ZANU's final year of the war, which linked it directly to the 'people's will'. In a speech in January 1979, Robert Mugabe railed against white Rhodesians, the black 'stooges' who sided with them, and ZAPU for its role in negotiations, in which Joshua Nkomo was accused of supporting an accord 'acceptable to imperialism'. The correct response to these threats was, Mugabe held, a 'People's War':

16 See Tendi, *The Army*, pp. 196–205.
17 CCJP/LRF, *Breaking the Silence* is the fullest account.
18 See P. Kaarsholm, 'Coming to Terms with Violence: Literature and the Development of a Public Sphere in Zimbabwe', in R. Muponde and R. Primorac, *Versions of Zimbabwe: New Approaches to Literature and Culture* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2005), p. 6, on the symbolic work of rain.
19 See discussion in S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 'Rethinking *Chimurenga* and *Gukurahundi* in Zimbabwe: A Critique of Partisan National History', *African Studies Review*, 55, 3 (2012), p. 7.
20 C. Taylor, 'Modern Social Imaginaries', *Public Culture*, 14, 1 (2002), p. 121.
21 See W. Mhanda, *Dzino: Memories of a Freedom Fighter* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2011), pp. 48–9.
22 Tendi, *The Army*, pp. 42–57; pers. comm., Miles Tendi, 5 January 2021.

> [l]et the People's fury break into a revolutionary storm that will engulf and sweep the enemy completely from our land. Let every settler city, town or village, let every enemy farm or homestead, let every enemy post, nook or hiding place be hit by the fury of the *People's Storm*. The *People's Storm* must come with thunder, heavy rain and irresistible blasting gusts that will ransack the enemy strongholds. Let us call this the *Year of the People's Storm – Gore re Gukurahundi*.

Mugabe concluded: '[w]e want total power. And this we shall have'.[23]

The construction of ZAPU as threat had specific form and institutional expression. As Miles Tendi shows, ZANLA's political commissars drilled into trainees the idea that ZAPU was withholding its troops in Zambia, waiting for ZANLA and the Rhodesian forces to exhaust themselves on the battlefield so that it could swoop in and claim victory – and then sell out the revolution.[24] Such stories echoed depictions of Nkomo as a coward and sell-out that dated from ZANU's break away in 1963, which were reiterated during the episodic negotiations of the 1970s. Cliffe, Mpofu and Munslow give a sense of how this politics played out on the ground.[25] They were intrigued by exceptions to the rule that voting reflected the operational areas of each liberation army. One such was Filabusi in Matabeleland South, where ZANLA dominated at the end of the war but which voted for ZAPU. Interviewed in 1980, Filabusi's voters explained that they had willingly supported ZANLA until they had been asked to denounce Nkomo. They asked why they should 'denounce a man who has fought and suffered together with Mugabe for the freedom of their country', especially given that the leaders were then united in the Patriotic Front. Refusal was met with extreme, humiliating forms of violence. ZANLA came to be known as '*O-pasi*', from the slogan 'down with'. Such violence had an ethnic element too. As a Filabusi teacher explained:

> I would have voted for ZANU(PF) if *O-pasi* had treated me and my family properly. But they did not treat us in a good way. They tried to compel us to speak Shona. They were ruthless on those who asked why. All the slogans and songs were in Shona and they were not translated into Sindebele. Everything tended to 'change' us to Shona.[26]

The Gukurahundi of the 1980s extended this wartime logic – both political and ethnic – with no real break. It was conjured in ZANU(PF) narratives that identified a new threat to the 'people's will' in the obstacle that ZAPU posed to a ZANU(PF) one-party state. When ZAPU refused to be subsumed into ZANU(PF), it was associated with armed 'dissidents' and depicted as a 'tribal' party.[27] Soon after the constitution of the new government in 1980, ZANU(PF) politicians began to distinguish between what they termed 'bandits' and 'unruly elements' who plagued the whole country and 'dissidents'. Mugabe referred to dissidents as 'organized bands of Zipra followers' who were 'refusing to recognize the sovereignty of the government'. Minister Enos Nkala added the ethnic gloss, describing them as 'Ndebeles who were calling for a second war of liberation' and warning that, '[t]hose preaching Ndebeleism should stop before we liquidate them'. Nkala promised to 'crush Joshua Nkomo, self-appointed Ndebele king'. By mid 1980, dissidents, ZAPU, ZPRA and the

23 ZANU, '1979 The Year of the People's Storm (Gore re Gukurahundi): New Year Message to the People of Zimbabwe by the President of the Zimbabwe African National Union, Comrade Robert Gabriel Mugabe', ZANU Department of Information and Publicity, Maputo, January 1979, pp. 18–19, 25.
24 Tendi, *The Army*, p. 194.
25 Cliffe *et al.*, 'Nationalist Politics in Zimbabwe', pp. 63–4.
26 *Ibid.*
27 See S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and W. Willems, 'Reinvoking the Past in the Present: Changing Identities and Appropriations of Joshua Nkomo in Post-Colonial Zimbabwe', *African Identities*, 8, 3 (2010), p. 195.

Ndebele had been discursively linked and identified as enemies of 'the sovereignty of the people'. The term 'dissident' served as the metonym suturing them together.[28]

This 'real' talk was rapidly given expression in a deal signed in October 1980 for the North Korean training of the Fifth Brigade. Two years later, the term 'Gukurahundi' appeared a third time, emblazoned on the brigade's flag at its passing-out parade. Mugabe stated that the Fifth Brigade had 'a political orientation which stems from our philosophy as ZANU PF' – its purpose was to 'deal with dissidents'.[29] Its first and most notorious commander, Perrance Shiri, was among those who had been recruited from Tanzania to crush ZANLA's Nhari rebels in 1974, linking in his person the term's usage across nearly a decade.[30]

The Gukurahundi of the 1980s was thus neither anomaly nor excess but an expression of a wartime claim to power, seeded in institutions amid the violence and division of exile and imported into post-independence government. By 1982, ZANU(PF) dominated the public narrative about Gukurahundi through its control of the mass media (radio, television and print) and suppression of alternative views.[31] The story repeated again and again in the direct speech of ZANU(PF) politicians was of a war against 'dissidents' intent on destroying the new nation. ZANU(PF) leaders Robert Mugabe, Enos Nkala and Emmerson Mnangagwa, who were directly involved in directing the Fifth Brigade, justified the thousands of civilian deaths at its hands by asserting the impossibility of differentiating between dissidents and others, an outcome of the prior political elision (dissident–ZAPU–Ndebele) of 1980. Mugabe explained 'we can't tell who is a dissident and who is not', so '[w]e don't differentiate when we fight'. Mnangagwa told rallies that dissidents 'infested' villages like 'cockroaches': the Fifth Brigade was the 'DDT'.[32] Dissidents, capaciously defined, were denied both humanity and belonging.

ZANU(PF)'s Gukurahundi narrative powerfully shaped the views of Zimbabweans who lived beyond the reach of state violence, creating a shared view. Many knew little of the extent of repression. Where news of violence trickled out from beyond the curfews, media clamp-downs and official denials, it was dismissed by people who wanted to believe in the good intentions of the new government and its model of black majority rule as against South Africa's apartheid. For them, ZANU(PF)'s 1980s nationalism promised – and often delivered – democracy and development.[33] A great gulf lay between this world and that experienced by those subjected to the violence of Gukurahundi.

The Experience of Gukurahundi

For those who bore the brunt of Gukurahundi, the direct experience of state violence constituted the raw material of their narratives. This violence was justified in terms that mocked the goals and sacrifices of the only barely concluded nationalist struggle, producing the basis for the elaboration of powerful collective stories at odds with most of the country.

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28 For quotations in this paragraph, see J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'Representing Violence in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe: Press and Internet Debates', in T. Allen (ed.), *The Media of Conflict: War Reporting and the Representation of Ethnic Violence* (London, Zed Books, 1999), pp. 249–50.

29 See Yap, 'Uprooting the Weeds', p. 167; Alexander, 'Dissident Perspectives', pp. 157–9.

30 Pers. comm., Miles Tendi, 5 January 2021.

31 Alexander and McGregor, 'Representing Violence', pp. 250–53; J. Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London, Methuen, 1984), pp. 229–33.

32 For quotations used here, see Alexander and McGregor, 'Representing Violence', pp. 252–3. See also CCJP/LRF, *Breaking the Silence*, pp. 44–5; Yap, 'Uprooting the Weeds', *passim*.

33 See Elinor Sisulu's revealing account, 'Introduction to the 2007 Edition', CCJP/LRF, *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: A Report on the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands 1980–1988* (London, Hurst, 2007), pp. xiv–xv.

At first, state violence was met with shock and attempts to seek help and explanation. ZAPU leaders met Mugabe and other ZANU(PF) leaders, often men they had known for decades, but were rudely rebuffed and accused of Ndebele arrogance.[34] They soon found themselves unable to make representations as they were removed from office, detained, disappeared and killed, from the most senior levels to ward councillors and village chairs. The detailed reports of atrocities compiled by Zimbabwe's Catholic Church, international human rights groups and journalists were similarly dismissed and denounced by ZANU(PF) leaders, while the 'international community' responded feebly, if at all.[35]

In this context, people in Matabeleland and the Midlands came to understand Gukurahundi through violent state performances that placed ZAPU and the Ndebele beyond the bounds of the nation and humanity, most devastatingly by the Fifth Brigade, which systematically constituted a violent theatre in which ethnicity and history were performed. The Shona-speaking former ZANLA guerrillas who dominated the brigade amplified wartime practices similar to those described in Filabusi a few years earlier. They used struggle-era mobilisation strategies – the *pungwe* or all-night meeting, *sungura* music picked up in east Africa, and *O-pasi* slogans – to punish and exclude.[36] Pedzisai Maedza's analysis of a Fifth Brigade *sungura* song, *Mai VaDhikondo*, shows how metaphor and imagery associated with popular notions of 'loose women' were used to link dissidents to South African destabilisation, invoke stereotypes of immoral Ndebele women and charge ZPRA soldiers with abandoning their manly responsibilities in order to become dissidents.[37] People across the western regions recounted Fifth Brigade soldiers' telling of stories of 19th-century Ndebele raids on 'the Shona' as justification for violence. They told of being forced to perform ZANU(PF) slogans and songs in chiShona while friends and family were beaten, tortured and executed. Systematic affronts included the desecration and improper burial of the dead, rape and forced incest. Soldiers made clear the blood link between being Ndebele and being dissident through the killing of children and pregnant women, the justification of rape as a means of producing a 'Shona' generation, and the crushing of men's testicles.[38]

These performances constituted unfathomable cruelty. They were also unfathomable for the caricature they made of ZAPU as a 'tribalist' ally of South Africa. It bears repeating that ZAPU had had support throughout Zimbabwe until ZANU's break away (and in many areas until ZANLA's spread in the second half of the 1970s) and had always had Shona-speakers in its upper echelons. ZPRA had operated in and recruited from the Shona-speaking areas of Mashonaland West and had had an influential Shona-speaking cohort from its inception, evidenced in its chiShona slogans and songs. In addition, many people in Matabeleland did not identify primarily as 'Ndebele'.[39] None of this is to suggest that ZAPU did not struggle with ethnic divisions, but rather to emphasise that ZAPU had never lost its ambition to

34 Detailed descriptions of meetings were given by (former) ZAPU leaders Welshman Mabhena, interviewed by Jocelyn Alexander and Pathisa Nyathi, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008, and Fletcher Dulini Ncube, interviewed by Jocelyn Alexander and Brian Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 1 October 2008.

35 See S. Doran, 'Why the International Community Turned a Blind Eye to the Gukurahundi', lecture delivered for the Centre for Innovation and Technology, Zimbabwe, 16 October 2020, ms; H. Cameron, 'The Matabeleland Massacres: Britain's Wilful Blindness', *International History Review*, 40, 1 (2018), pp. 1–19.

36 See detailed discussed in Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, Chapter 9. We, like others, saw this as a post-1980 corruption of the *pungwe*, but it is more accurately seen as a continuity.

37 P. Maedza, '"*Mai VaDhikondo*": Echoes of the Requiems for the Killing Fields', *Social Dynamics*, 43, 2 (2017), pp. 223–6.

38 See Zenzele Ndebele's documentary film, 'I Want My Virginity Back: A Story of Rape during Gukurahundi' (Bulawayo, 2020); D. Ngwenya, *Healing the Wounds of Gukurahundi: A Participatory Action Research Project* (Durban, Durban University of Technology, 2014); CCJP/LRF, *Breaking the Silence*, Part 2; Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, pp. 217–24.

39 On grassroots ZAPU, see Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, Chapters 4, 7; on ZPRA, see Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation', pp. 9–13, and J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'The Travelling Toyi-Toyi: Soldiers and the Politics of Drill', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 46, 5 (2020), pp. 929–31.

represent the nation: to be an 'Ndebele' party would have consigned it to perpetual minority status. The chasm between this and Gukurahundist stories was starkly marked by ZANU(PF)'s labelling of the ethnically Kalanga, staunchly nationalist Joshua Nkomo as the 'self-appointed Ndebele king' in place of his popular title 'Father Zimbabwe'. The accusation of an alliance with apartheid South Africa likewise mocked ZAPU's decades-long alliance with the African National Congress (ANC) of South Africa and its armed wing. During Gukurahundi and in its aftermath, ZAPU and ZPRA leaders and rank and file angrily pointed to their willing suffering and sacrifice in the name of nationalist and internationalist ideals, and ZANU(PF)'s betrayal of precisely those ideals.[40]

In the 1980s, the violent performance of Gukurahundi provided the basis for a collective story in Matabeleland that was both irreconcilable with the official account and made through intimate interaction with it. Both of these accounts drew their power from the armed struggle's world of relationships, practices and ideas. The tensions among them laid the foundation for noisy silence.

The Unity Accord and Truth-Telling in Matabeleland

The ZANU(PF) story of Gukurahundi dominated public space in the 1990s owing to the deal struck in the Unity Accord at the end of 1987. The accord offered no concessions to the victims of state violence beyond the cessation of violence. Under its terms, ZAPU ceased to exist and its leaders agreed neither to speak of nor – crucially – to listen to Gukurahundi stories. Recognition was explicitly ruled out. In this context, storytelling about state violence met repression but spread none the less, culminating in an authoritative act of truth-telling in the form of a comprehensive human rights report.

Under the Unity Accord, former ZAPU leaders re-entered government as members of ZANU(PF) – Joshua Nkomo, only recently the 'father of dissidents', became one of two vice presidents – and, despite their own persecution, argued forcefully that silence was necessary to safeguard 'Unity'. This stance drew heavily on Nkomo's authority and his belief in the necessity of forgiveness and looking forward in the interests of the nation.[41] Nationalism adopted the hollowed-out form of joining hands with ZANU(PF) in the name of development. But, while development had mobilised a broad constituency in the 1980s outside the western regions, the 1990s were the era of structural adjustment, and hardships only increased. In these circumstances, the Unity Accord brought a sullen electoral allegiance to ZANU(PF) but did not displace ZAPU loyalty: a popular metaphor for unity in Matabeleland was a marriage in which ZAPU was the bride who did not lose her name.[42] On all sides, the most durable metaphor for Gukurahundi was a wound. For those who had borne its brunt, it was open and festering. For the leaders of the united ZANU(PF), it had been closed by the Unity Accord, and the danger now lay in re-opening it. Specifically, to open it was to divide the nation through tribalism, a silencing reification of the depiction of the victims of Gukurahundi as its Ndebele instigators.[43] For former grassroots ZAPU

40 Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems, 'Reinvoking the Past in the Present', p. 197, note that Nkomo's 1984 autobiography stressed above all his legitimacy as pan-Africanist and nationalist. Also see R. Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun: Postwars of the Dead, Memory and Reinscription in Zimbabwe', in Werbner (ed.), *Memory and the Postcolony*, pp. 91–2; Dumiso Dabengwa's statement on his release from detention in 'Zimbabwe Prisoners', AP Archive, Story No w085619, 5 December 1986. For rank-and-file views, see Alexander, 'Dissident Perspectives', and Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*.

41 Interview with Welshman Mabhena, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander and Pathisa Nyathi, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

42 Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, p. 230.

43 See the incisive analysis in D.S. Ndlovu, '"Let me tell my own story": A Qualitative Exploration of How and Why "Victims" Remember Gukurahundi in Johannesburg Today' (PhD thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, 2017), pp. 77–80, and below.

nationalists and many ZPRA veterans, unity marked a betrayal of ZAPU's nationalism that delivered nothing in return; for a younger generation, the promise of nationalism appeared empty.

The official silence of the Unity Accord met a noisy response almost immediately. Starting in the late 1980s, journalists in the independent press, notably the then vibrant magazines *Horizon*, *Parade* and *Moto*, reported on struggles to acquire death certificates for the Gukurahundi murdered, the existence of mass graves and the officially ignored history of ZPRA.[44] Reports of human remains were met with denial and threats from ZANU(PF) and a refusal to hear on the part of former ZAPU leaders. For example, following reports in 1992 of the discovery of human remains at Antelope mine (from the notorious Bhalagwe detention camp) in his political home of Kezi, Joshua Nkomo told a crowd that he 'could not answer any questions' in the absence of his co-vice president Simon Muzenda.[45] In case after case where human remains were reported, heavy handed threats from police and the CIO followed. A community effort to create a memorial at a mass grave in Lupane in 1997 was shut down by the CIO, leaving in its wake a makeshift grave marked with a date. The provincial governor at the time, Welshman Mabhena, a man once detained and tortured for his ZAPU loyalties, commented that he had not been consulted but, if he had been, 'he would have told the police to tell the people not to do it': 'it does not help development'.[46] In 2000, on the cusp of a new political era, rain uncovered human bones at Bhalagwe camp itself. The provincial governor, former ZAPU stalwart Stephen Nkomo, presided over a reburial ceremony attended by other former ZAPU officials. None mentioned Gukurahundi. Local people inscribed the forlorn, defiant words 'mass grave' in the cement laid at the site.[47]

These attempts to arrest Gukurahundi stories did not prevent the emergence of what Preben Kaarsholm calls 'local public spheres', in which 'intertextual' exchanges occurred. This included the circulation of media about Gukurahundi between urban and rural, on buses, in the hands of labour migrants and school teachers, feeding a widespread 'reading hunger' in the 1990s.[48] A mixed bag of books that referred to Gukurahundi also rapidly appeared. The first ZPRA memoir, published in 1990, told the story of the 1980s from a ZPRA viewpoint, while three novels published in 1991 (one each in chiShona, isiNdebele, and English) depicted violent, venal dissidents, if for different purposes.[49] There was, in addition, a buzz of storytelling about Gukurahundi in private spaces, the complexity of which is captured in Richard Werbner's ethnography *Tears of the Dead* and in nascent debates on social media.[50]

The circulation of Gukurahundi stories expanded into the space opened by a growing, nationwide disillusion with ZANU(PF). In an indication of this opening, two major research projects took place in the mid 1990s, together revealing a powerful popular and political

44 See review in Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, p. 257.
45 *Ibid.*, p. 257 n. 14.
46 *Ibid.*, pp. 263–4. See also Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun', pp. 97–8.
47 S. Eppel, 'How Shall We Talk of Bhalagwe? Remembering the *Gukurahundi* Era in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe', in K. Wale, P. Gobodo-Madikizela and J. Prager (eds), *Post-Conflict Hauntings: Transforming Memories of Historical Trauma* (London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 270–71.
48 Kaarsholm, 'Coming to Terms', p. 20.
49 A. Nyathi with J. Hoffman, *Tomorrow is Built Today: Experiences of War, Colonialism and the Struggle for Collective Co-operatives in Zimbabwe* (Harare, Anvil Press, 1990). The novels are E.S.K. Hleza, *Uyangisinda Lumhlaba* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1991); E. Masundire, *Mhandu Dzorusununguko* (Gweru, Mambo Press, 1991); C. Hove, *Shadows* (Harare, Baobob Books, 1991). See T. Moyo, F. Sibanda and M. Mazuru, 'Angles of Telling and Angles on Reality: Representations of the Gukurahundi Period in Selected Zimbabwean Fiction in Shona, Ndebele, and English', *Matatu*, 41 (2012), pp. 35–50.
50 R. Werbner, *Tears of the Dead: The Social Biography of an African Family* (London, Edinburgh University Press, 1991). On 1990s social media debates, see Alexander and McGregor, 'Representing Violence', pp. 257–61.

demand for stories to be told. Hundreds of oral history interviews in Nkayi and Lupane districts, undertaken by myself and JoAnn McGregor in collaboration with ZPRA veterans and local leaders between 1994 and 1996 formed part of the monograph we wrote with Terence Ranger, *Violence and Memory*.[51] We encountered fear: the phrase 'we are already dead' at times preceded stories of Gukurahundi. At the same time, there was a passionate demand for the history of this region to be written (and a huge 'reading hunger'), articulated most clearly by the former local ZAPU cadres, who inhabited every village, and ZPRA veterans, who were already researching the war dead of the 1970s and organising commemorative events.[52] They formulated shared political narratives about the neglect and distortion of their history and rejected the enforced silence of 'unity'.

The second research project – a human rights investigation undertaken in 1995–96 – would permanently transform the stuttering discussion of Gukurahundi. Published in 1997, *Breaking the Silence, Building True Peace* was commissioned by two Zimbabwean non-governmental organisations (NGOs), the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Legal Resources Foundation (LRF), and authored by Shari Eppel. It rapidly attained the status of an 'unofficial truth'.[53] The report reflected the global rise of a human rights regime and transitional justice *zeitgeist*, then being enacted next door in South Africa. It gained credibility from the CCJP's history of documenting Rhodesian-era abuses, but its authority was founded above all in its forensic amassing of evidence. The report drew on more than 1,000 eyewitness accounts, two district studies, hospital records, Catholic Church and CCJP archives, legal cases, media, and earlier human rights reports and academic research. It categorised and catalogued abuses, identified perpetrators and produced a chronology. The report made a conservative estimate of not less than 3,000 dead or missing, with the real number 'possibly double 3,000, or even higher', in addition to a much larger number subjected to torture, detention, assault, rape and loss of property, numbers given devastating life in eyewitness accounts.[54] These tabulations were bookended by a historical account and detailed transitional justice recommendations. This was a meticulously told story of excessive state violence directed at armed dissidents, on the one hand, and ZAPU and the Ndebele, on the other, and its legacies of trauma and hardship.

The report expressed the hope that 'greater openness would lead to greater reconciliation', but that was not its effect.[55] An advance copy of *Breaking the Silence* was given to Mugabe in March 1997. He did not respond. In May, the report was leaked and received extensive media coverage in and outside Zimbabwe. Some 2,000 copies were subsequently sold, and a summary version was circulated in chiShona and isiNdebele. Amnesty International described the report's findings as 'crimes against humanity', while press coverage drew parallels to Pol Pot's Cambodia, Nazi Germany and the Rwandan genocide and reported the number of dead and missing as 20,000. This number was based on a casual misreading but rapidly settled as the 'official' number and has been regularly attributed to *Breaking the Silence* ever since.[56] The response of ZANU(PF) was true to form.

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51 See Alexander *et al.*, *Violence and Memory*, pp. 12–13.

52 On ZPRA's efforts, see J. Brickhill, 'Making Peace with the Past: War Victims and the Work of the Mafela Trust', in N. Bhebe and T. Ranger (eds), *Soldiers in Zimbabwe's Liberation War* (London, James Currey, 1995).

53 R. Murambadoro, '"We cannot reconcile until the past has been acknowledged": Perspectives on Gukurahundi in Matabeleland', *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*, 15, 1 (2015), p. 52.

54 CCJP/LRF, *Breaking the Silence*, p. 157, and see Part 2.

55 *Ibid.*, p. xii.

56 See D. Beresford, 'Nightmare of Mugabe's Matabele Atrocities', *Mail and Guardian*, Cape Town, 2 May 1997; I. Wetherell, 'Mugabe Report Causes Division', *Mail and Guardian*, 9 May 1997. The figure of 20,000 (and the Amnesty International comment) is in 'Matabeleland Atrocities Revealed', *Africa Research Bulletin*, 34, 5 (1997), p. 12698. The numerical confusion is probably due to the CCJP/LRF's citation of Joshua Nkomo's figure of 20,000 'casualties' in his 1984 autobiography (Nkomo, *Nkomo*, p. 237), which he

Mugabe called the CCJP 'mischief makers who wear religious garb and publish reports that are decidedly meant to divide us and go into the past, to go into conflict again, to wreck our national unity'.[57] Joshua Nkomo reportedly 'stormed' into the CCJP offices, 'demanding that all copies of the report be handed over to him. He warned staff that publication could jeopardise the nation's unity'.[58]

Later that year, ZANU(PF) declared the date of the Unity Accord's signing a national holiday. State celebrations offered a dramaturgy of the nation in which the hierarchies constituted by the accord were represented in a validation of the post-1987 political order, but with no mention of the 'national instability and mass violence' that had made it necessary.[59] Joshua Nkomo died in 1999, removing both a crucial anchor of the Unity Accord and muffler of Gukurahundi 'noise'. At his funeral, Mugabe called Gukurahundi a 'moment of madness', a phrase that fell pitifully short of describing the years of state-planned atrocities.[60] The fraying of unity was expressed in the spread of Ndebele cultural groups in Bulawayo and, in 1999, the first attempt to re-incarnate ZAPU ('ZAPU 2000'), in this case as part of a call for a federal state and a rejection of the 'Shonalisation of Zimbabwe'.[61] These were signs of the extent to which the nationalist imagination in Ndebele-speaking regions had been undercut, creating the space for an embrace of ZANU(PF)'s story of politicised ethnic division, of 'Ndebele' versus 'Shona'.[62]

The importance of *Breaking the Silence* as validation for the experiential truth of Gukurahundi cannot be exaggerated. It indelibly marked the public sphere and acted as touchpaper for a host of initiatives over the following decades. Before turning to its political life, let me note the noisy silence that it sparked among artists and writers who had grown up in the aftermath of Gukurahundi. The report inspired Owen Maseko's extraordinary 2010 exhibition at the National Museum in Bulawayo. It was made up of a collection of black and red paintings, graffiti and three-dimensional tableaux that depicted Fifth Brigade violence and represented the signing of the Unity Accord in the form of an upright Mugabe sat next to Nkomo's slumped figure, a bloody knife in his back, soldiers and CIO men all around. The show was immediately closed down.[63] Novelists used the truth-telling of *Breaking the Silence* as a jumping-off point to raise new, difficult questions.[64] Christopher Mlalazi explained that the challenge was no longer to establish the truth but to use fiction to 'treat nightmares': 'the intention is to lance a boil that is suppurating in the national psyche'.[65]

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based on Catholic Church sources. These sources are central to the CCJP/LRF report and are not considered by the report to provide evidence of 20,000 dead. The misreading is of Nkomo's use of the term 'casualties' as signifying dead rather than dead and injured, for which the number is indeed plausible in that moment. There are also other estimates of the number of dead (for example, in Tendi, *The Army*, p. 197).

57 Quotes from, respectively, 'Matabeleland Atrocities Revealed', p. 12698, and *Sunday Mail*, Harare, 11 May 1997.

58 Wetherell, 'Mugabe Report Causes Division'. See also Werbner, 'Smoke from the Barrel of a Gun', pp. 96–7.

59 P. Maedza, '"Gukurahundi – a moment of madness": Memory Rhetorics and Remembering in the Postcolony', *African Identities*, 17, 3–4 (2019), p. 182.

60 See Ndlovu, '"Let me tell"', pp. 122–5.

61 ZAPU 2000 was formed just before Joshua Nkomo's death. The quote is from outspoken Bulawayo playwright Cont Mhlanga. See Mercedes Sayagues, 'New Party Has Bulawayo on the Boil', *Mail and Guardian*, 30 April 1999.

62 See Werbner, *Tears of the Dead*, for the first elaboration of this argument.

63 See Maedza, '"Gukurahundi"', pp. 183-4; S. Verheul, '"Government is a legal fiction": Performing Political Power in Zimbabwe's Magistrates' Courts after 2000' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2017), Chapter 8.

64 Novels include Y. Vera, *Stone Virgins* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2002); C. Mlalazi, *Running with Mother* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2012); Tshuma, *House of Stone*; and S.G. Ndlovu, *The Theory of Flight* (Cape Town, Penguin, 2018).

65 F. Machirori, 'Interview: Running with Mother – a Child's Tale of Gukurahundi Killings', *Guardian*, London, 16 August 2013, available at https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/aug/16/zimbabwe-running-with-mother-robert-mugabe, retrieved March 2020.

Novuyo Rosa Tshuma's *House of Stone* deftly explores how a *longue durée* of violence played out across human relations, history and memory. It is a novel that can be read as social theory.[66]

In one passage, Tshuma explores the limits of a human rights truth regime in an imagined version of testimony for *Breaking the Silence*. Mama Agnes testifies in front of the 'Commission of Inquiry People', personified by a harried young man in a run-down rural schoolroom. She has prepared her story but is derailed by her interrogator – for that is what he becomes – who tells her to 'stick only to the very essential information'.

> What was essential information? She wondered. Should she skip the part where she woke up to the screams coming from outside her hut, the thudding of feet, her mama screaming *get up get up get up! Get up manu lina lifuna ukufa yini do you want to die leave everything and run leave everything and run!* Should she tell this young man how she clutched her breasts as she ran, because they seemed like the most important thing to protect, cushioning as they were her heart, begging to be let out, pounding so hard her chest hurt? Was this essential information?

She decides 'that she would not tell him anything of value', offering instead a human rights 'cover story' of dates and numbers of dead, a telling that is 'just telling'.[67] The effects of ZANU(PF)'s violence and failed recognition are terrifyingly explored in Tshuma's 'hi-story'-obsessed protagonist, Zamani, a Gukurahundi orphan who engages in a project of self-archiving and oral history in search of an identity and family denied him by Gukurahundi. He finally finds a nightmarish resolution in the figure of the Fifth Brigade commander Black Jesus – a barely disguised Perrance Shiri – whom he claims as his rapist, matricidal father. The truths of his Gukurahundi story are constituted through deception and coercion, wreaking havoc across his adopted family as he desperately seeks a means of belonging.

It is difficult to imagine these extraordinary exercises of imagination without the foundation of *Breaking the Silence*. The report also freed political imaginations and with them political claims. Even former ZAPU politicians who had supported Joshua Nkomo's enforcement of silence found profound relief in it. As one such held, 'I praise the CCJP, those people, I never thought what we were seeing and hearing, I never thought it would be put into books. When I get hold of those books I feel happy'.[68] In the post-2000 era, the truth-telling and disaffection of the 1990s would inform a host of noisy efforts to re-engage Gukurahundi and to demand recognition.

Political Belonging and Gukurahundi after 2000

It is difficult to exaggerate the heady rise and devastating fall of political hopes and the unprecedented economic devastation of the two decades from 2000. These ructions shaped and were shaped by a series of collective political projects in Matabeleland that invoked Gukurahundi as part of reimagining the nation in disparate ways.

It is important to note first that ZANU(PF) not only failed to shift its position on Gukurahundi as something that was both justified and resolved but found a renewed relevance for its political logic in the electoral challenge posed by the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), a party built on the burgeoning civic and trade union activism

66 See N.R. Tshuma, 'Hewing Fiction from History: The Writing of History, Conflict and Trauma in *House of Stone* by Novuyo Rosa Tshuma', elsewhere in this issue, and Gordon's methodology in *Ghostly Matters*.
67 Tshuma, *House of Stone*, pp. 276–7. And see Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, p. 14.
68 Interview with Welshman Mabhena, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander and Pathisa Nyathi, Bulawayo, 9 October 2008.

of the 1990s. A rich literature has shown that ZANU(PF), in response to the MDC's youthful, urban base and language of rights, sidelined development and democracy and put the armed struggle, race and land at the centre of its claims to legitimacy.[69] This allowed a more generous space for ZAPU's liberation struggle of the 1970s, but the 1980s' violence remained off limits save as a reminder of the political terror justified by threats to 'sovereignty'.[70] ZANU(PF)'s uses of violence in the elections that followed the MDC's near victory in 2000 reached a terrible, legitimacy-wrecking peak in 2008, forcing it into a Government of National Unity (GNU) with the MDC from 2009 to 2013. ZANU(PF) emerged dominant again in the elections of 2013 but, in November 2017, its long-simmering internal fractures led to a coup that ousted Mugabe. His erstwhile henchman, Emmerson Mnangagwa, was installed as Zimbabwe's president, while other prominent practitioners of Gukurahundi, such as Perrance Shiri, took up ministerial and other posts, a transition that would ironically open a small crack in ZANU(PF)'s Gukurahundi story. These political vicissitudes remade the state in overtly partisan, militarised form and were accompanied by the devastation of the economy's formal sectors, hyperinflation and a collapse in the state's ability to deliver the most basic of services, creating massive un- and under-employment, scant opportunity for the young, and tremendous suffering.

If ZANU(PF) reified its stance on Gukurahundi after 2000, Matabeleland's oppositional spaces offered fertile ground for new political stories. These were disparate but shared a vehement rejection of 'unity' and built on the truth-telling of the 1990s. The first collective reworking of Gukurahundi accompanied the rise of the MDC. In 2000, the resentful allegiance to ZANU(PF) in Matabeleland evaporated as the MDC attracted young and old, rural and urban, including many rank-and-file former ZAPU members. Within Matabeleland, MDC activists linked the party to an uncompromised pre-Unity Accord ZAPU through the shared use of the open hand symbol and anger at ZANU(PF)'s violent politics, developmental neglect and – explicitly – its failure to apologise for Gukurahundi. The MDC won by huge margins across Matabeleland, ending the humiliating 'marriage' of the Unity Accord and creating new ways to imagine political belonging.[71] The hope of rejoining the nation faltered, however, as the MDC failed to win power and repeatedly split, sometimes violently, losing many of its Ndebele-speaking leaders and tarnishing its promise of a democratic politics. The GNU brought a sliver of relief but was compromised by the new 'unity' with ZANU(PF)'s Gukurahundi perpetrators. The public telling of Gukurahundi stories continued to be blocked: in a strikingly brazen act, GNU co-minister of National Healing and Reconciliation, ZPRA veteran Moses Mzila-Ndlovu, was arrested when he tried to attend a memorial for Gukurahundi victims.[72]

A shared Gukurahundi story within the MDC proved difficult to sustain for other reasons too. Tendi has explored opposition intellectuals' failure to confront ZANU(PF)'s use of nationalist history in favour of an ahistorical rights talk;[73] a parallel dynamic could be said to apply to Gukurahundi history. ZANU(PF)'s nationwide use of political violence from 2000 had led to a 'retrospective empathy' for Gukurahundi among Harare-based civic and MDC activists, seemingly overcoming the divide in collective

69 See B. Raftopoulos and A. Mlambo (eds), *Becoming Zimbabwe: A History from the Pre-Colonial Period to 2008* (Harare, Weaver Press, 2009); Tendi, *Making History*; S. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and J. Muzondidya (eds), *Redemptive or Grotesque Nationalism? Rethinking Contemporary Politics in Zimbabwe* (Bern, Peter Lang, 2011).

70 See J. Alexander and J. McGregor, 'Elections, Land and the Politics of Opposition in Matabeleland', *Journal of Agrarian Change*, 1, 4 (2001), p. 520.

71 *Ibid.*, pp. 523–31.

72 On the effects of the GNU and after, see D.S. Ndlovu, 'Imagining Zimbabwe as Home: Ethnicity, Violence and Migration', *African Studies Review*, 63, 3 (2020), pp. 629–30.

73 Tendi, *Making History*, Chapter 3.

memories of the 1980s.[74] This impression was reinforced by a nationwide opposition consensus that Gukurahundi should be understood as a genocide.[75] Outside Matabeleland, however, Gukurahundi's complex legacies were rarely engaged. Rather, it was primarily used to condemn ZANU(PF) and elicit international support. The republication of the *Breaking the Silence* report in 2007 symbolised this framing: a blood-dripping image of Mugabe in fanciful military uniform sat on the cover while the front matter issued 'a clarion call for the world to wake up to the crisis in Zimbabwe and to campaign for an end to the egregious human rights violations'. Endorsements from eminent British figures on the back cover identified post-2000 violence as a 'slow-motion genocide'.[76] The danger of reducing Gukurahundi to an antecedent for rights abuses in the present can be seen in Susanne Verheul's analysis of the treatment of the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), a small Ndebele separatist party. The Harare-headquartered Zimbabwe Lawyers for Human Rights (ZLHR), rightly famed for its fearless legal defence work in cases of political persecution, refused to defend the MLF's leaders when they were charged with treason on grounds of their 'tribalism'. Bulawayo-based members of ZLHR left the organisation, establishing their own so as to defend the MLF. They believed, in Verheul's words, that the 'legal consciousness' of the Harare lawyers 'was shaped by a history of repression that did not include *Gukurahundi*' and so they could not comprehend the human obligations made by that shared history of violence.[77]

If the MDC's promise of a route to national belonging receded, there were other versions on offer, among them a revival of ZAPU led by Dumiso Dabengwa. Dabengwa had served as ZAPU's intelligence supremo in the 1970s, languished in prison on charges of treason in the 1980s and taken up the post of minister of Home Affairs in the post-Unity Accord ZANU(PF). In 2008, he declared that he was taking ZAPU out of the Unity Accord. This ZAPU attracted few votes but acted as an important site of collective talk among especially ZPRA veterans, who mourned the 'lost future' of their liberation struggle. Veterans often portrayed themselves as highly trained professionals who had been part of a sophisticated state-making project only to be denied the chance to serve the nation and subjected to the perverse cruelties of Gukurahundi. This was history as tragedy: the hoped-for future could not be realised, and the terrible sacrifices of the past went unvindicated.[78] Their narratives were elaborated in a profusion of efforts to record ZPRA history, not least as a heroic story of collaboration with the South African ANC, and often through memoir and biography. This writing created an intertextual, multi-vocal conversation that broke the chronological wall of 1980 imposed by ZANU(PF) on its ZAPU 'heroes'. The prolific historian Pathisa Nyathi published a study of dissidents and biographies of ZPRA cadres, one of whom had

74 S. Eppel, '"Healing the dead": Exhumation and Reburial as Truth-Telling and Peace-Building Activities in Rural Zimbabwe', in T.A. Borer, *Telling the Truths: Truth Telling and Peace Building in Post-Conflict Societies* (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), p. 262.

75 The term was in widespread use in civic and student politics in Harare in 2000. Pers. comms, Phillan Zamchiya, Brian Raftopoulos, 28 October 2020. On MDC leaders' use of the term from 2000, see Tendi, *Making History*, pp. 218–19.

76 CCJP/LRF, *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe*, front matter, back cover.

77 See Verheul, '"Government is a legal fiction"', p. 256 and Chapter 7.

78 Interview with Dumiso Dabengwa, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander and Brian Ngwenya, Bulawayo, 13 October 2008; interview with Brian Hlongwane, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander and Pathisa Nyathi, Bulawayo, 5 August 2010. And see Alexander, 'Loyalty and Liberation', pp. 13–17; D. Ngwenya and G. Harris, 'The Consequences of Not Healing: Evidence from the Gukurahundi Violence in Zimbabwe', *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 15, 2 (2015), pp. 46, 51. For a brilliant discussion of tragedy in this vein, see E.C. Zeleke, *Ethiopia in Theory: Revolution and Knowledge Production, 1964–2016* (Leiden, Brill, 2020), Chapter 1.

served in the Fifth Brigade,[79] while veterans wrote memoirs as a means of imagining what might have been and to engage one another and ZANU(PF) in sparring matches around responsibility, causality and heroism in the making of the violent past.[80]

The grassroots MDC of 2000 and the revived ZAPU of nearly a decade later made very different links to the nationalist past. A third political strand brought ethnic and separatist claims to the fore in the context of extreme economic hardship and the seemingly unassailable ZANU(PF) dominance of the post-GNU era. This strand had antecedents in the Ndebele cultural groups of the 1990s and the ethnic critique of ZAPU 2000 and the MLF but found new expression in the hands of a Gukurahundi 'second generation', which had little or no direct experience of the 1980s violence and even less of the powerful nationalist bonds forged in the 1970s.[81] Lena Reim has explored the use of history by the Mthwakazi Republic Party (MRP) alongside the influential Ndebele pressure group Ibetshu Likazulu. She argues that these youthful activists had learned about Gukurahundi through 'a fragmented, painful and emotive process', absorbing family silences and traumas and giving them a form that made sense of their own poverty and lack of opportunity.[82] For the MRP, Gukurahundi violence often lost its historical specificity, taking the form of an ethnic genocide perpetrated by a Shona-supremacist ZANU(PF) against the Ndebele and carried into the present as a 'structural Gukurahundi' that reserved jobs and resources for Shonas. The MRP thus echoed the politicised ethnic polarisation purveyed by ZANU(PF) in the 1980s and agreed that there was no place for the Ndebele in ZANU(PF)'s Shona nation state. But it also told a romantic story in which a past golden age might redeem the present: in place of the Shona nation, MRP activists imagined an idealised pre-colonial Mthwakazi kingdom characterised by peace, tolerance and prosperity. If the revived ZAPU mourned its lost future, the MRP vividly envisaged a future homeland excised from the Zimbabwean nation.[83]

Not all youthful activists embraced the separatist vision of the MRP, but the identification of a direct link between Gukurahundi violence (aimed at either or both ZAPU and the Ndebele) and the marginalisation of the Ndebele in the present was widely embraced and powerfully shaped a post-coup politics of confrontation with Gukurahundi's perpetrators.[84] The entrance point for this shift was a chink in ZANU(PF)'s Gukurahundi story, owing to Emmerson Mnangagwa's attempt to mark out his regime as a 'new dispensation'. These efforts led to the establishment of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), Zimbabwe's first real attempt at something approaching a truth commission.[85] An

79 See P. Nyathi, *Dissidents: Creation and Operation in Zimbabwe's Post Independence Era* (Bulawayo, Amagugu, 2018); P. Nyathi, *Joseph Khumo Nyathi (Dickson Khupe): Serving in ZPRA and ZNA's 5 Brigade* (Bulawayo, Amagugu, 2018); P. Nyathi, *The Story of a ZPRA Cadre: Nicholas Macala Dube 'Ben Mvelase' Biography* (Bulawayo, Amagugu, 2014).

80 See, *inter alia*, A. Ndlovu, *Zimbabwe Struggle: The Delayed Revolution, an Autobiography* (Bulawayo, Amagugu, 2014); Sibhona, *Nation Born of Violence*; T.J. Dube, *Tshinga Dube: Quiet Flows the Zambezi* (Bulawayo, Amagugu, 2019); O. Mpofu, *On the Shoulders of Struggle: Memoirs of a Political Insider* (Harare, LAN readers, 2020). ZPRA veterans debated these texts in the press and on social media, including Whatsapp groups and Facebook accounts. Pers. comm., ZPRA veteran DM, 6 November 2020.

81 See Eppel, 'How Shall We Talk'; L. Reim, '"Gukurahundi Continues": Violence, Memory and Second-Generation Political Story-Telling in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe', (MPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2019); Ngwenya and Harris, 'The Consequences'; and, on the Ndebele diaspora in South Africa, Ndlovu, '"Let me tell"'.

82 Reim, '"Gukurahundi Continues"', p. 95 and *passim*.

83 *Ibid.* On romantic histories, see discussion in Zeleke, *Ethiopia*, p. 32.

84 For example, ZPRA veterans might hold on to their allegiance to Zimbabwe as nation while echoing the angry young in condemning the signs of 'Shona colonisation'. Interview with an octogenarian ZPRA veteran, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander, Gwanda, December 2019. Also see Thandekile Moyo, 'The Loveless, Fatherless, Stateless Generation: This Is the Legacy of Rapist and Murderer, "Black Jesus" Perrance Shiri', *The Daily Maverick*, Johannesburg, 19 August 2020.

85 The NPRC was created by Zimbabwe's 2013 constitution but was given life only after the coup.

independent body, in theory, it walked a fine political line. So did Mnangagwa: he at once refused to apologise for Gukurahundi and affirmed that it was acceptable to talk about it, a balancing act that reflected deep unease within ZANU(PF).[86] The NPRC quickly became a vector of heated debate. At first, attention focused on its ethnic composition (seven Shona-speakers, one Ndebele). The commission's public hearings attracted protests from the MRP and Ibetshu Likazulu. MRP activists derailed meetings by toyi-toying and singing, waving banners calling for justice, denouncing Mnangagwa as a perpetrator and rejecting Shona commissioners as the 'siblings' of murderers, even as 'perpetrators' themselves.[87] These public performances demanded justice and rejected the right or capacity of 'perpetrators' (encompassing all Shona-speakers, for some) to deliver it. In subsequent meetings, chiefs and ZAPU members protested too. In a vivid denunciation of telling as 'just telling', Chief Mathema held:

> I do not see the reason why we should be converging talking about how we were killed, beaten and tortured without the perpetrator, we want Mnangagwa to come and answer us, we want to know the crime we had committed to be killed like flies, may be then we get closure … We want the president to listen.[88]

This demanding, confrontational noisy silence directly challenged the state's commemorative and memorial practices too. In 2019, Ibetshu Likazulu displaced the celebration of Unity Day with an 'end of Matabeleland genocide' commemoration, holding a march through Bulawayo with banners bearing images of the dead and culminating with survivors' testimonies.[89] An extraordinary running battle over attempts to create a memorial at Bhalagwe camp, involving multiple constructions and destructions of official and unofficial graves and markers, set Ibetshu Likazulu, Mthwakazi activists and others against ZANU(PF) and state actors. Young men donned T-shirts reading, 'I am the Dissident that the Fifth Brigade was looking for'. Eppel writes that this confrontational politics left 'elders' feeling 'indebted to this younger, braver generation': they experienced their anger as 'catharsis'.[90]

In the shadow of a perpetrator state, new political collectives formed and built on the truth-telling of the 1990s. They produced narratives of Gukurahundi as origin stories for rights-based national belonging, as the tragic moment in which a liberatory nationalism was betrayed and forever lost and as justification for an ethnic nationalism that harked back to a pre-colonial golden age. These ideas were not, in practice, sealed off from one another and, in the aftermath of the coup, found common ground in a growing frustration with telling as 'all there is', transforming the public sphere once more.

Noisy Silence, Healing and Accountability

The stories I have told so far have focused on the expression of demands for political belonging. There were also quite different means of engaging Gukurahundi that crafted narratives across generations – and between the living and dead – in the crevices of a hostile

86 Interview with Zenzele Ndebele, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander, Bulawayo, 23 December 2019. Statements about openness were regularly contradicted by reiterations of the idea that unity had resolved Gukurahundi. See, for example, 'Obert Mpofu's Gukurahundi Utterances Torch Storm', Bulawayo24 news, 25 July 2019.

87 Eppel, 'How Shall We Talk', p. 272.

88 S. Maphosa, 'Gukurahundi Survivors Want to Meet Mnangagwa', *The Standard*, Harare, 28 July 2019.

89 'Gukurahundi Survivors Hold Commemorations', *New Zimbabwe*, Birmingham, 23 December 2019, available at https://www.newzimbabwe.com/gukurahundi-survivors-hold-commemorations/, retrieved 15 November 2020.

90 See Eppel, 'How Shall We Talk', p. 280, and discussion of Bhalagwe, pp. 277–80.

state. I explore two instances, one focused on the healing power of making peace with the dead in local communities and the other on the creation of a cross-generational archive of accountability in the form of documentary film. Both took the truth-telling of *Breaking the Silence* as a jumping-off point to make something new.

Gukurahundi and Exhumation: The Living and the Dead

At the end of the 1990s, the transitional justice passages of *Breaking the Silence* had sparked a search for forms of redress at the edges of a hostile state. The report's author, Shari Eppel, was central to initiating efforts through the Bulawayo-based NGO Amani Trust Matabeleland (later Ukuthula Trust). Based on extensive work with survivors of violence, the 'aggrieved dead' were identified as the greatest obstacle to community healing. Most notably, the improperly buried victims of the Fifth Brigade were held responsible for devastating misfortune and broken social relations. These dead might carry such an aura of terror and shame that they had never been spoken of – or blame for their deaths might have been turned towards neighbours and kin.[91] Either way, they 'demanded their due'.[92]

Eppel envisaged the process of exhumation within the frame of what was politically possible, as 'a time and place-limited truth commission' in which traditional and church leaders and the families of the dead talked about a 'particular killing'.[93] In this 'local sphere of governance',[94] a 'new tradition' was created that combined community storytelling and ritual with the forensic science of the NGO team and its expert advisers.[95] Eppel has described this process as a return of 'personhood' to the dead, as they were 'eased back into conversation with family members' through multiple acts of unsilencing.[96] The bones and items such as clothing and personal objects found in graves yielded clues through forensic analysis regarding the nature of the death and the identity of the person. Marks on and damage to the bones indicated peri- and post-mortem trauma. The clothes recorded uses of violence: bullet holes or burn marks. Objects confirmed identity – a distinctive shirt, a radio, a belt. The bones' and objects' embodiment of violence and identity confirmed eyewitness accounts, while the proximate story of the death opened the way to a further exploration of a life, a person's accomplishments and dreams, character and family relations. Long-hidden photographs emerged, giving the dead a youthful face unknown to a younger generation. Added to this were the public speeches at the reburial and then the *Umbuyiso*, a ceremony held a year after the funeral to call the spirits of the dead home, welcoming them as benign ancestors. These steps allowed for the collective recognition of violent pasts among chiefs, church leaders, neighbours and family.

Realising this form of community healing required a constant negotiation with the state, in which evading the state's repressive capacities, not seeking its recognition, was the goal. The first exhumations, undertaken in 1999, were a learning process. Eppel recounts the story of a mass grave located at a former Fifth Brigade detention camp at Sitezi in Gwanda district.[97] The grave contained the bodies of six men executed by soldiers. Its existence was well known, but the killings and silence around them had divided and disturbed this community for a decade and a half; the desire for a reburial was intense. The strategy

91 Eppel, '"Healing the dead": Exhumation', pp. 259–73.
92 To paraphrase Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, p. xvi.
93 Eppel, '"Healing the dead" in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe: Combining Tradition with Science to Restore Personhood after Massacres', in E. Benyera (ed.), *Indigenous, Traditional, and Non-State Transitional Justice in Southern Africa: Zimbabwe and Namibia* (London, Lexington Books, 2019), p. 118.
94 Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, p. 112.
95 See Eppel, '"Healing the dead" in Matabeleland', p. 114. At first, Argentinian forensic experts who had advised on the CCJP/LRF report worked with the local team.
96 See Eppel, '"Healing the dead" in Matabeleland', pp. 115–19; Eppel, 'How Shall We Talk', pp. 267–9.
97 See account in Eppel, '"Healing the dead": Exhumation', pp. 273–85.

involved seeking informal approval from local police and chiefs and inviting officials from the ministry of health and from museums and monuments as trainees. The exhumation was, nevertheless, briefly shut down by police, a moment of confrontation in which the demands of the dead won out, owing in part to support from former ZAPU politburo members and in part to an impassioned plea from an elderly widow who insisted that the police pray with her.[98] In 2000, it was possible to unveil a tombstone on this site, a moment marked by a celebratory community gathering in which the changed relationships within this community, made in conversation with the dead, were tangibly memorialised.

Demands for exhumations multiplied in 2000 and 2001, and the Amani Trust developed a more careful modus operandi, in which families sought letters of 'no objection' from local state authorities for reburials. Exhumations focused on cases where the identity of the dead was known; exhumed bodies were rapidly returned to families after forensic analysis for the healing drama of a public reburial. Even this, however, was not possible to sustain in the face of escalating ZANU(PF) repression. In 2014, when exhumations next took place, a new strategy was built on the authority of sympathetic chiefs over spiritual and domestic affairs, as delineated under the Traditional Leaders Act. The state had by this time become 'too complicated': officials could no longer 'not object'. Politics and publicity were eschewed under cover of a traditionalist argument: as Eppel explained, this was 'not a drama for outside consumption, but for *that* village, *those* relatives, *their* community history'.[99]

In the post-coup period, the establishment of the NPRC offered a public means of carrying out exhumations but with the risk of bringing the state directly into a field that had operated in its shadows. Practitioners feared that families would lose control of the process or that evidence might be destroyed, but the attraction of the NPRC was that it offered the chance to expand exhumations at a moment when witnesses and family members of the dead were themselves dying and the Gukurahundi dead were 'literally turning to dust'.[100] Post-coup exhumations went ahead with NPRC sanction and included Mthwakazi activists alongside chiefs and church leaders. In December 2019, however, an exhumation was shut down on the very morning it was to start, leaving families stranded and heartbroken.[101] It is unclear when or how exhumations will proceed again. They were marooned between a nervous ZANU(PF) and activists' suspicions of the perpetrator state's intentions. The tensions played out in a complex politics involving the establishment of an NGO umbrella (the Matabeleland Collective) and its crude co-optation by ZANU(PF) and efforts to route exhumations through the (official) national Chiefs' Council. These efforts met with criticism from the NPRC and angry rejection from chiefs, Mthwakazi activists, ZAPU and others. A court case brought by survivors sought to halt exhumations. Among all these actors, the view was repeatedly expressed that any state-controlled process could only be a gambit to hide evidence and deny justice to the victims of Gukurahundi – yet another attempt to 'escape genocide charges' and treat the Ndebele as 'not human beings'.[102]

Exhumations of the Gukurahundi dead created a bounded form of recognition that enabled community healing through storytelling at the margins of the state through part

98 Interview with Shari Eppel, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander, Bulawayo, 23 December 2019.
99 *Ibid.*
100 *Ibid.*
101 *Ibid.*
102 Pers. comm., ZPRA veteran DM, 26 October 2020. Media coverage of these events is voluminous. On the most recent debates, see, for example, N. Ndlovu, 'Court Reserves Judgement on Gukurahundi Exhumations', *Newsday*, Harare, 11 September 2020; S. Nkala, 'Chiefs Used to Whitewash Gukurahundi', *Newsday*, 5 November 2020; S. Nkala, 'Zapu Red-Flags Plot to Erase Gukurahundi Evidence', *Newsday*, 6 November 2020; P. Sithole, 'NPRC should Lead Gukurahundi Exhumations: CSOs', *Newsday*, 10 November 2020; and the extraordinary statement in 'The Chiefs Campaign for Justice and the Rule of Law', Press Statement, 24 October 2020, submitted by Chief Nhlanhlayamangwe Ndiweni.

forensic, part ritual practices. In doing so, exhumations navigated a dangerous set of state institutions and the shifting politics of survivors, producing an extraordinary but precarious collective mode of engaging the violent past.

Gukurahundi Documentaries: Framing Future Accountability

A second set of creative efforts took the form of documentary film. As with exhumations, this work took inspiration from *Breaking the Silence* and required navigating an unpredictably repressive state. Zenzele Ndebele, a Bulawayo-based journalist and film maker who runs the Centre for Innovative Technology, has produced three Gukurahundi films and plans more. The films put witness testimony at their heart and told a story of Gukurahundi that repurposed the multi-generational narratives of the 2000s in order to constitute a future-oriented archive of accountability.

Ndebele ascribes his decision to become a journalist to his terrifying childhood encounters with soldiers in the mid 1980s and his rejection of an older generation's acquiescence in 'unity', thus echoing a wider 'second generation' activism. In 2008, as he completed his first film, 'Gukurahundi: A moment of madness', he explained that his goal was to 'break the taboo that no one should talk about Gukurahundi'. He was angered by the charge of tribalism made against those who spoke of Gukurahundi and frustrated by the silence of former ZAPU leaders.[103] Ndebele recalls his first documentary as 'amateurish', but it was a highly effective assemblage of eyewitness testimony of atrocity, framed by the words of the *Breaking the Silence* report. The film was launched in the face of police threats in a behind-closed-doors showing in Bulawayo, with MDC leader Morgan Tsvangirai as the guest of honour, just as the GNU took power. Ndebele sought to 'create a conversation' around the film through media coverage, the distribution of 5,000 DVDs, and Facebook publicity.[104]

By the time he came to make his second documentary – 'Gukurahundi: Genocide–36 years later' – in 2017, Ndebele 'knew much more' and wanted to make clear 'how systematic the whole thing was'.[105] He had filmed many dozens of interviews with those subjected to the violence of the 1980s and built strong connections to the ZPRA cadres who were centrally involved in ZAPU and the recording of ZPRA history.[106] The film was launched at a Bulawayo hotel before an audience of more than 400, overcoming police efforts to shut it down in part through the 'cover' provided by an endorsement from the NPRC.[107] Clips from the film circulated to urban and rural audiences through Whatsapp, and this and the first film received hundreds of thousands of views on YouTube. In October 2020, Ndebele launched his third film, 'I want my virginity back: A story of rape during Gukurahundi', which placed harrowing testimony from women at its heart, and formed the centrepiece of a largely online film festival, again endorsed by the NPRC. A Gukurahundi documentary and memorial library was also launched. These were all risky endeavours:

103 See Zenzele Ndebele, 'Gukurahundi Documentary Set for Local Screening', 4 October 2008. Interview with Zenzele Ndebele, 'Be Our Guest', conducted by chief reporter, 7 September 2008, and Zenzele Ndebele, 'Gukurahundi: A Moment of Madness', 7 September 2008, available at 'blog archive' via http://gukurahundicorner.blogspot.com/2008/09/Gukurahundi-moment-of-madness.html, retrived 9 September 2020.

104 Interview with Zenzele Ndebele, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander, Bulawayo, 22 December 2019.

105 *Ibid.*

106 Many of these interviews are available online, where they join a host of other Gukurahundi-related items culled from news reports, interviews and conference presentations, together forming a rich digital archive. See Maedza, '"*Mai VaDhikondo*"', p. 219.

107 Interview with Zenzele Ndebele, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander, Bulawayo, 22 December 2019.

Ndebele explained that he constantly re-evaluated risk and strategy in the light of an assessment of the divisions and allies that he found within the state.[108]

I focus on the second film here. As in the first, it opens with an authorising reference to *Breaking the Silence* and proceeds in a choppy storytelling mode, stitching interviews together with voiceovers, clips from news coverage and expert views. The film starts by running the gamut of explanations for Gukurahundi, including the desire for a one-party state, Shona revenge for pre-colonial Ndebele raids and a planned genocide, an inclusive gesture towards first- and second-generation views. Attention then turns to ZPRA veterans' accounts. Their tales of heroism, ingenuity and sacrifice serve to undermine ZANU(PF)'s story of tribalism and treason. The widespread ZPRA belief that the British had sided with ZANU(PF) in 1980 for cold-war reasons is voiced by Dumiso Dabengwa. Others stress the bad faith of ZANU(PF)'s actions, noting the formation of the Fifth Brigade prior to the emergence of 'dissidents' and despite ZAPU's parallel imprisonment of ZPRA soldiers who had refused to enter 'assembly points'. Dabengwa details the use of false testimony at his treason trial. Veterans give first-hand accounts of the violent crackdown on ZPRA in the ZNA. These are graphic stories of torture and murder, of ZPRA officers tracked down while on leave or picked off buses; some tell of warnings by ZANLA soldiers. A former ZPRA dissident, Vincent Ndlovu, recalls running for his life and feeling that he had no choice but to take up arms again. Others emphasised the extent of their ongoing support for the South African ANC despite the danger they were in, including establishing a network of safe houses, issuing Zimbabwean identity documents to ANC cadres and smuggling weapons. ZPRA emerges as an internationalist liberation movement and heroic victim of ZANU(PF).

In the central passage of the film, the narrative focus shifts to the subject matter of Ndebele's first film: civilian accounts of state violence. These are largely single-person testimonies, filmed at the site of violence or in rural homesteads. Interviewees speak directly to camera, mostly in isiNdebele. They are dressed in the worn clothes of ordinary people, often perched on wooden stools or chairs in a courtyard or leaning against a mud wall. Their stories emphasise that civilians were caught in an impossible position between the demands of dissidents and those of soldiers. They focus on the extended abuses that took place in communities that hosted soldiers' rural bases. Women tell of rapes, pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases, broken marriages and the terrible effects on the fatherless children born of these violent attacks, subjects that form the focus of Ndebele's third film. The documentary adds to this the economic devastation caused by Gukurahundi. Elderly men and women narrate the 'looting' of their cattle and donkeys, the roofs of their homes and their furniture. They tell of the killing of breadwinners and the break-up of families due to flight or fear or an inability to live with a rape, and the loss of support that should have come from those absent family members. The testimony makes clear, in often understated language, that people's lives continue to be devastated by Gukurahundi. The documentary ends with a return to the ZPRA interviewees, who emphasise the parallel legacies for ZAPU and ZPRA. Misheck Velaphi Ncube details the loss of the farms, businesses and assets in which the party had invested in 1980 as a means of ensuring ex-combatants' futures. ZAPU's history was stolen too: the movement's archives were taken from its Nest Egg farm and never returned.

To an important extent, this film is for a Matabeleland audience. Stories are told largely in isiNdebele with telegraphic subtitles. Knowledge of the significance of events, places and witnesses is assumed. The purpose is not to explain Gukurahundi to outsiders or to offer a human-rights-style accounting of atrocity but to record a moral and material debt. At the

108 *Ibid.*

launch of his third film, Ndebele stressed that the perpetrators did not require proof of Gukurahundi – they would always know more about their crimes than the victims. The purpose of his documentaries was rather to remind people that what happened was wrong.[109] This form of storytelling recorded a vivid visual moral and political critique of failed recognition and created an archive of accountability that crossed generations, both through its inclusive account and through the demand that it placed on a younger generation to act in future. 'We are just waiting for the regime to collapse', Ndebele explained.[110] This stance conceded nothing to the perpetrators in the present and imagined a future political order in which they could be held to account.

Conclusion

Jackson notes that calling for peace and healing amidst ongoing suffering can feel like a kind of 'blasphemy': even if storytelling can heal, 'all such discursive, ritual, and imaginary tactics remain empty unless the grievous injustices and inequities of everyday life are simultaneously addressed and radically changed. And this is a matter not of art but action'.[111] ZANU(PF)'s perennial insistence that the wound of Gukurahundi is already healed might be experienced as an affront akin to blasphemy, but noisy silence does not present a choice between art and action. Tracing its history over decades in the face of the failed recognition of a perpetrator state reveals an astonishingly rich set of creative efforts to forge political belonging and community, healing and accountability, in ways that have repeatedly reshaped the Zimbabwean public sphere.

The irreconcilable collective stories that emerged from the 1980s had such staying power because of their roots in the relationships, dreams and divisions of the liberation struggle. The tensions between them first produced noisy silence as truth-telling from within the unhearing confines of the Unity Accord. The release of *Breaking the Silence* served as a moment of reckoning, which caused little movement on ZANU(PF)'s part but publicly confirmed for survivors of Gukurahundi violence the reality of their experience. In the wake of this moment, attention turned to the vehicle of the MDC as a possible route back to national belonging. Its locally reimagined nation enabled a remarkable electoral shift in Matabeleland in 2000 and was accompanied by a nationwide oppositional recognition of Gukurahundi as genocide. But ZANU(PF)'s return to violence and the MDC's fragmentation cut off this route to national belonging – first in the GNU and then in ZANU(PF)'s resurgent dominance in 2013. A ZPRA-led 'ZAPU' produced another national vision, rooted in the political hopes of the 1970s and linking the violent histories of the 1970s and 1980s. It constituted a tragedy of liberation lost, in which Gukurahundi was the foundational betrayal. Building on the polarised ethnic politics generated by the performance of Gukurahundi violence itself, a Gukurahundi 'second generation' rejected the Zimbabwean nation as 'Shona' and imagined a pre-colonial Ndebele golden age. In the post-coup period, the angry, confrontational politics that it produced forged new collectives that demanded public recognition from perpetrators.

Amid these political endeavours, there were other strands to noisy silence. Two extraordinary efforts to address the living legacies of the violent past linked generations and navigated the state in different ways. The 'new tradition' of exhumation joined forensic science and ritual to create a bounded form of recognition. This process brought healing through reconciling the living and the dead but could work only in the interstices of an unpredictably intolerant state. The medium of documentary film was used to create an archive of accountability that stitched together the multiple stories of different generations

109 Author's notes, 30 October 2020.
110 Interview with Zenzele Ndebele, conducted by Jocelyn Alexander, Bulawayo, 22 December 2019.
111 Jackson, *The Politics of Storytelling*, p. 169.

and envisaged a future moment in which the perpetrators had lost power. Both these examples testified to and recorded the devastating, ongoing effects of Gukurahundi in daily life, demanding a continued, noisy rethinking of the politically possible under terrible conditions.

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