

Gukurahundi's Ghosts: A Cautionary Tale of Failed Justice and Reconciliation & the Rise of Separatism in Matabeleland from 1982 to the Present

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Abstract

This article highlights the atrocities committed by the North Korean-trained 5th Brigade of the Zimbabwean army that include killing thousands of civilians and dissidents in the Matabeleland and Midlands between 1983 and 1987. It analyzes the politicized nature of post-conflict reconciliation through tracing the Zimbabwean government's attempts to control the narratives of victims, citizens, and even intellectuals. This control is embodied in firm silencing practiced through legal censorship, outright suppression, and official commissions for truth and reconciliation. The article features testimonials from survivors, leaders of

the civil society groups, ministry officials, and military veterans from the most affected regions. The author argues that the failure to reconcile embodied in incessant suppression of affected population voices continuously feed ongoing social, political, and ethnolinguistic chasms in the country. The article concludes by highlighting the role of collective and creative efforts in establishing new political possibilities through truth-telling, a process primordial to heal historical wounds and hold perpetrators accountable.

**GENOCIDE, ZIMBABWE, UNITY ACCORD,
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Gukurahundi, which in the Shona language means the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains, and to which survivors refer to as an attempted genocide, involved a systematic targeting of civilians, liberation war veterans, and dissidents in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of Zimbabwe by a North Korean-trained unit of the Zimbabwean army, the 5th Brigade. Between 1983, just two years after Zimbabwe gained independence, and 1987, the 5th Brigade killed thousands of people in the region and tortured and brutalized countless others, leaving them in life-altering economic and social circumstances.

The Zimbabwean state has since brutally censored all citizen discussion and memorialization of the atrocities, while simultaneously supporting various National Truth and Reconciliation Commissions which have yet to publicly release an official account or hold any individual accountable. That the country's current leadership oversaw the atrocities is significant in that any account of the atrocities invites contestation, lest the leadership be implicated in war crimes.

This essay foremostly highlights the politicized nature of post-conflict reconciliation through tracing the Zimbabwean government's attempts to control the narratives of victims, citizens, and even intellectuals such as journalists through legal censorship, outright suppression, and through official commissions of truth and reconciliation.

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This government silence and silencing is then juxtaposed with personal interviews, quoted anonymously here for the safety of the interviewees, with civil society organization leaders, teachers, ministry officials, military veterans, and survivors of the Gukurahundi massacres; these interviews not only fill in the narrative gaps, but highlight the ongoing personal, communal, and national effects of Gukurahundi, including generational trauma, regional ethn0-linguistic divisions, and regional financial marginalization. This article argues that the failure to reconcile and the continued suppression and marginalization of the affected population has strongly contributed to ongoing social, political, and ethn0-linguistic divisions in the country.

Given what is at stake for the government in power, all outright discussions of Gukurahundi, including this article, put authors and interviewees at risk. The interviews contained herein were conducted in 2014 for a study on the long-term effects of Gukurahundi on the education system in the affected regions of Matabeleland and the Midlands. Being from the region, individuals were willing to speak with me, albeit in private and in the absence of family members. The interviews abruptly ended when I attended a community gathering in Matopos, one of the most affected regions, and was slipped a note by one attendant who knew of my questions that noted, “plain-clothed policemen were in attendance”, meaning that the communities remain surveilled and that I may be a person of interest. I promptly excused myself for the bathroom and sped off, knowing that if I were searched, my notebook and tape recorder might put the lives of the 42 individuals I had interviewed at risk. I held on to the interviews for nine years, with this being the first publication of portions of the interviews, lest I put my family at risk or be barred from entering the country and not be able to conduct further research for my doctoral degree.

There has, however, been much written about Gukurahundi from the periphery of an official national narrative; journal articles, memoirs, creative fictional stories, and art installations have addressed the aftermath and trauma of Gukurahundi. Jocelyn Alexander refers to this phenomenon of official suppression and unofficial discussion as “noisy silence” which “occupied a productive middle ground where collective,

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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” (Alexander, 2021). These divergent, collective accounts have become crucial given the renewed interest of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the rise of a secessionist movement from the affected regions; the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF) is a political movement aimed at re-establishing a pre-colonial majority Ndebele state in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions of the county (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011).

One might also trace the history of the government’s role in the atrocities and its continued oppressive censorship through the lens of international organizations which have since petitioned the government to cease human rights abuses regarding Gukurahundi. On 23rd May 1997, the Secretary General of Amnesty International, Pierre Sané, penned an open letter to Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe in advance of his acceptance of Chair of the Organization of African Unity to “...urge Your Excellency to commit yourself and your government to resolving Zimbabwe’s need for greater openness and public discussion of the massive human rights violations that took place in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the 1980s violations that were occurring in Matabeleland” (Amnesty International, 1997). The calls went unheeded and the massacres and disappearing of citizens continued through 1987, when Robert Mugabe signed the Unity Accords agreement to cease the campaign officially. Since then, leaders who oversaw the atrocities have assumed higher leadership positions in the country, and not a single perpetrator has been called to justice.

Gukurahundi provides an example of the intensifying dynamics of repression of and threats to journalists and scholars working on controversial or taboo topics. The political and politicized nature of these topics reveal the political nature of scholarly “objectivity”—what is “neutral and objective” scholarship in one time and milieu can become “subversive, activist agitation” in another. As a result of the so-called “post-truth” era and the profusion of “reality bubbles” made possible by social media, such work by journalists, scholars, and activists committed to uncovering, understanding,

and articulating truth in the face of state, corporate, and other oppressive powers has become ever more important.ⁱ

Historical Origins of Gukurahundi

To understand the events which culminated in Gukurahundi, one must first understand the history of violence within the ruling party, in addition to the historical antagonism and mistrust between the two parties (ZANU and ZAPU) of the independence movement and the regional instability cultivated by the Apartheid regime in South Africa. Gukurahundi means the physical winnowing and separation of the wheat from the chaff by the early rains. The phrase was first used to describe the control and elimination of enemies and perceived “sellouts” in the 1970s within the Zimbabwean African National Union (ZANU), one of the two political parties and militias that led the fight for Zimbabwean independence. It was from this political party that Robert Mugabe became the first president-elect of the newly independent nation in 1980 (Alexander, 2021). The phrase was again employed just three years into his tenure, when Robert Mugabe sent a force to decimate the Matabeleland and Midlands regions, which were the traditional base of support for the rival ZAPU political party (the other main independence political party and militia). In crippling ZAPU’s base, Mugabe hoped to complete his consolidation of power over the new nation of Zimbabwe by eliminating any viable political opposition to his rule.

Before 1963, the Zimbabwean African People’s Union (ZAPU), was the foremost political party aiming to secure Zimbabwe’s independence from the white-ruled Rhodesian state. The new Maoist ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union) party split from ZAPU to create two separate parties working towards the same goal of national independence. Each party had its own military wing: ZAPU’s military wing was ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army) and was Cuban and Russian-trained, and ZANU’s military wing was the Chinese-trained ZANLA (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army). Given the Cold War politics of the time, historians such as Patisa Nyathi, have suggested that these alliances with Communist states discouraged the

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British from intervening to stop the massacres that occurred during Gukurahundi (Scarnecchia, 2011).

Although the initial split of ZAPU into two parties did not follow ethnic lines, separate regional recruitment and mutual antagonism “led to a growing association between ZAPU and Ndebele-speakers” (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe & Legal Resources Foundation, 2008). By independence in April 1980, ZAPU was almost exclusively associated with Ndebele-speakers and ZANU with Shona-speakers. It is important here to add that there are several ethno-linguistic groups in Zimbabwe, the Ndebele and Shona groups are the most populous and dominant, leading to an unfortunate subsuming of other tribes under these two dominant groupings, despite their distinct histories and identities.

Despite both forces fighting for independence, there was fierce conflict and competition between the two. After independence, during the disarmament and attempted incorporation of troops from both liberation movements into the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA), the antagonism and mistrust between the two forces led both militias to stockpile weapons. ZANU won the elections, and a number of ZIPRA soldiers deserted the national army, refused to enter the disarmament zones, and some even actively took up arms against the government. These former ZIPRA fighters refused to disarm for a number of reasons, but the most common reason given was fear of being killed by former ZANLA soldiers in the army, which was not infrequent (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000).

Political relations between ZAPU and ZANU eventually broke down after two major clashes between guerrillas in two of the disarmament camps, which were meant to house soldiers until they could be integrated into the army. Mugabe then demoted ZAPU’s Joshua Nkomo from Minister of Home Affairs to Minister without portfolio.

More ominous, however, were the rumors of the arrival, in 1981, of “106 North Korean instructors and quantities of equipment and arms intended for training a special Fifth

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Brigade which, according to press reports, would be used to ‘wipe out dissidents and criminals’, including those ‘found in the army’” (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000). ZAPU leader Joshua Nkomo questioned the necessity of this separate armed group, presciently fearing that it would be used “for the possible imposition of a one-party state” (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe & Legal Resources Foundation, 2008). The final political rift occurred when the government announced that it found large caches of weapons in the compound of the ZAPU-affiliated company Nitram and outside of ZIPRA assembly points (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe & Legal Resources Foundation, 2008). Despite the questionable nature of the evidence, Mugabe argued that the arms caches were part of a conspiracy to overthrow his government. Although the ZAPU leaders were exonerated in a High Court, proving that they were storing and passing on weapons for the African National Congress (ANC) fighting the Apartheid government in South Africa, Mugabe used this as a pretext to have the ZAPU leadership thrown in jail until 1986.

Mugabe then deployed the special 5th Brigade in January 1983 to track down and eliminate “dissidents”, a category which included deserters of the army and any who were opposed to the outcome of the elections and Mugabe’s rule. The 1997 report of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and Legal Resources Foundation Report (CCJP), states that although there were no more than 200 dissidents in Matabeleland North, and 400 altogether countrywide, the 5th Brigade, together with Police Support Units and auxiliary army units totaled more than 5,000. “In other words, the ratio of government troops to dissidents in Matabeleland North was at least 25:1” (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, 2008). There is also evidence which points to the fact that many of the “so called” dissidents were planted by South Africa’s Apartheid regime in attempt to fuel conflict between the ZIPRA, Joshua Nkomo’s party’s military wing, and Mugabe’s ZANLA militia, fearing ZIPRA’s alliance with Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the military arm of the African National Congress (ANC), which was fighting the Apartheid government in South Africa. In addition to attempts to kill ZANU leadership, the

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Apartheid government launched “Operation Drama”, which recruited and armed a fake Zimbabwean insurgent group, dubbed “Super ZAPU”, which posed as a ZIPRA dissident force (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000). “Super ZAPU” dissidents were however, distinct from the ex-ZIPRA dissidents, and the latter made sure to distance themselves from this South African-sponsored group. Nonetheless, “Operation Drama” successfully contributed to the instability of the region and provided Mugabe with a useful pretext for the operations of the 5th Brigade.

While uncorroborated by external sources, many interviewees were of the opinion that many of the so-called “dissidents” were also planted by ZANU-PF as justification for the atrocities. Senior ZAPU members interviewed for this project outright accused Mugabe of planting dissidents. David Coltart, a former Minister of Education and co-author of the CCJP report, pointed out that all dissident activity ceased immediately after the Unity Accord agreement, which many recognized as ZANU-PF subsuming, and therefore eliminating the opposition party entirely. All of this indicates that the dissident threat which the 5th Brigade was trained and deployed to eliminate, was, at least, in part, a creation of outside political forces in order to create and justify violence against the people of Matebeleland and the Midlands, and consolidate the political power of ZANU. Under the cover of targeting dissidents, the Gukurahundi soldiers were trained to target civilians and punish perceived political/ethnic differences. As Eppel notes, “the 5th Brigade told victims that they were being punished because they were Ndebele – that all Ndebeles supported ZAPU and all ZAPU supporters were dissidents” (Eppel, 2005). Moreover, all evidence, including interviews carried out with ZAPU soldiers for a different project, highlights the targeting of all former ZAPU fighters, affiliates, and communities. Between the deployment of the 5th Brigade in 1983, and the Unity agreement between ZAPU and ZANU in 1987, over an estimated 10,000 civilians were killed or “disappeared”, and many more were tortured and raped.

Government Repression and Control of the Narrative

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After an outcry from international bodies and effectively dismantling the opposition ZAPU party, Robert Mugabe extended a “Unity Accord” agreement to the ZAPU leader, Joshua Nkomo, who was released from jail in 1986 after serving 36 months. The government then disbanded the 5th Brigade in 1987, when Nkomo signed the Unity Accord and was named Vice President, by all accounts marking the elimination of any significant political opposition to ZANU. Robert Mugabe therefore became the leader of a de facto single party state and remained in power until 2017 when his own party, led by Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, ousted him. Given that Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa, widely believed to have ordered many of the killings and atrocities of Gukurahundi during his tenure as Head of Intelligence, became the Minister of Justice after the events of Gukurahundi, and is the current head of state, it is no surprise that the government refuses to revisit the events of Gukurahundi. The events of the massacres directly implicate him in the killings, which has resulted in the stifling of alternative narratives about the killings and the role of Mnangagwa and the state. In addition to endorsing biased accounts of the independence history in the school curriculum (Barnes, 2007) which overlook the critical role of ZAPU, the Mugabe regime, and subsequently Mnangagwa’s government, has actively attempted to prevent individuals and communities from speaking about Gukurahundi (Scarnecchia, 2011).

Almost three decades since the first call for accountability, on 22nd December 2022, Amnesty International published an article damning the arrest of three activists by Zimbabwean security forces who were calling on “national peace and sought to honour the victims of the Gukurahundi Massacres” (Amnesty International, 2022). Of the arrests, Flavia Mwangovya, Amnesty International’s Deputy Regional Director for East and Southern Africa, is quoted stating, “The Zimbabwean authorities have previously destroyed memorial plaques put in place by local activists, in a clear sign that they wish to permanently censor any discussion or remembrance of the Gukurahundi massacres” (Amnesty International, 2022). While the ruling party, ZANU-PF has long been condemned for its brutal responses to criticism and opposition, these recent arrests are significant in that they violate the recent recommendations by the National

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Truth and Reconciliation Commission that a process of truth and reconciliation should take place in affected communities.

Given that the only systematic report on the atrocities was published in 1997 by the CCJP, communities continue to call upon the government to acknowledge the atrocities and release government-commissioned reports carried out in the 1980s, which were never published. The first report, which was chaired by late former Chief Justice Enoch Dumbutshena, supposedly reviewed the Gukurahundi massacres, and the second report, overseen by Justice Simplisius Chihambakwe, was believed to have investigated the fighting between ZANLA and ZIPRA forces, the military forces of ZANU and ZAPU in the town of Entumbane and within the demobilization camps (Zimbabwe Situation, 2022). Both reports were never published after being presented to then-Prime Minister Robert Mugabe and have since been described as lost.

The misplacement or attempts to withhold the reports, in addition to the failed commissions offer proof of the government's knowledge of the events of Gukurahundi and its calculated attempts to obfuscate this history. Further acknowledgment of the severity of the massacres in the region can be discerned in the government's attempts to leverage the calls for peace and reconciliation for political gain. An interviewee who worked within a civil society organization, that is a non-state actor organization that works with and advocates for communities, noted that he was part of a government-sponsored committee in 1999 which aimed to document the grievances and draw up compensatory packages as part of a truth and reconciliation mission. Well into the process, the interviewee recognized the commission as a mere campaign strategy by Robert Mugabe at a time in which the Prime Minister's popularity was waning. The committee carried out their investigations and listened to as well as documented survivor testimonies. On the day that committee was scheduled to meet with and present their findings to Robert Mugabe, they were informed that there was no allotted money for the truth and reconciliation process, let alone compensation for the victims. The interviewee recalled his frustration,

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“[A government official] said, ‘I’m from the President’s office, there is no money’. So, the government wanted to use... the issue of compensation as a campaign strategy because really the drive was... to compensate people” (Mthwakazi National Party, 2014).

Owing to this history of failed promises and the banning of any memorialization, the more recent promises by the government have been viewed with skepticism. When Emmerson Mnangagwa, who at the time of Gukurahundi was Head of Intelligence and was rumored to have overseen the atrocities, became President in 2017, he began to address the history of Gukurahundi under renewed calls by local civil society and international organizations. According to the National Transitional Justice Working Group Zimbabwe (NTJWGZ), President Mnangagwa met with civil society organizations in 2019, and in 2021 with local chiefs from Matabeleland. According to a member of the NTJWGZ, citizens and civil society organizations are concerned that the chiefs are loyal to the President and that they have been asked to preside over the truth hearings instead of the National Peace and Reconciliation Commission (NPRC), an independent commission which falls within section 251 of Zimbabwe’s constitution (Muyendes, n.d.).

The government’s steps in 2019 and 2021 toward a national truth and reconciliation commission while using legal and violent censorship of any discussions of Gukurahundi raises a concern related to the very nature of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions, and that is whether the Commission would be used as an attempt to control the historical narrative, and more sinisterly, to exonerate the Zimbabwean government of the atrocities committed. The Zimbabwean government has, for example, passed and leveraged several laws under which any discussion of Gukurahundi has been banned, including the Criminal Law Codification Act and the Access to Information Privacy Act. The aforementioned three organizers who were arrested on 22nd December 2022, for organizing a Gukurahundi memorialization on National Unity Day (the day that ZANU-PF and ZAPU merged, and the atrocities

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ceased in 1987) were charged with contravening section 37 (1)(a)(ii) of the Criminal Codification Act: “Participating in gathering with intent to promote public violence, breaches of the peace or bigotry” (Moyo, 2022). Other laws which have been used to limit information and discussion of Gukurahundi include the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act, the Official Secrets Act, the National Archives of Zimbabwe Act, and laws relating to the protection of information relating to personal or public safety, publishing or communicating false statements harmful to the state, and undermining the authority of the president (Zinyengere, 2012). The legal frameworks used to censor survivors and citizens contradict the government’s calls for a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which ostensibly would rely on the very same testimonies of survivors in order to establish fault and promote reconciliation.

The use of the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission as a tool for government exoneration, in addition to coercive control of a contested narrative, is not unprecedented. When violent protests broke out in Harare during the 2018 elections, soldiers were deployed and subsequently shot live ammunition into the crowds, killing six civilians. The incident was recorded by local and international observers. Given that the army cannot be deployed without authorization of the President, and the head of Zimbabwean Defense forces, his ally, Constantino Chiwenga, who led the ‘soft coup’ which overthrew Mugabe and placed Emmerson Mnangagwa as President, Mnangagwa obfuscated the direct question of his knowledge of the soldiers’ deployment and set up a seven-person commission, led by South African President Motlanthe. Despite the video evidence and the legal chain of command for army deployment, the Motlanthe Commission exonerated the President while highlighting the violence of the opposition protestors. To date, no arrests have been made and even the recommendations by the Commission to compensate victim families have gone unheeded (United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), 2019). Additionally, survivor’s and witness’ testimonies, upon which all Truth and Reconciliation Commissions rely, carry a significant risk of government retribution and backlash, particularly within a country ruled by a violently brutal regime. A report on the failed Chihambakwe mission highlights the example of Edward Moyo

and his brother Shadreck Denga Moyo who were arrested a few days after Edward Moyo testified before the Chihambakwe commission. Both were arrested and, to date, their whereabouts remain unknown (Carver, 2000).

Legacies of Gukurahundi: Trauma and Violence

Yet, in spite of the risks and the skepticism therein of a government overseeing a National Truth and Reconciliation Commission that is investigating itself, survivors, journalists, and all who participate in the “noisy silence” continue to demand their narratives be told and offer them up in diverse forms. For the survivors of Gukurahundi, the individual, communal, and regional vestiges of what they describe as a genocide are significant enough that are willing to bear the risks by telling their stories and requesting restitution. The following sections recount a few of these testimonies. Interviewee grievances of their experiences during and after Gukurahundi, fell into seven categories which I highlight below, namely, being a victim of physical violence; witnessing physical violence; loss of family members; the deliberate erosion of trust within their communities; loss of economic and educational opportunities; continued regional and ethnic marginalization; and the lack of government acknowledgment and subsequent government suppression.

The extent of the violence, torture, and trauma in Matabeleland during Gukurahundi is, in many ways, incomprehensible, partly owing to government suppression of all information out of the region as well as the change in tactics of the 5th Brigade military unit of over time. The “red berets”—as the 5th Brigade were dubbed due to their distinctive headgear—were most publicly violent between 1983 and 1985. When the force was deployed in February 1983, they killed and tortured citizens en masse, often in public spectacles, such as schools and meeting halls. Two of the most affected regions were the Tsholotsho and Lupane districts, which were the first districts where the armed forces were deployed. After the CCJP described and decried their public violence, the soldiers were withdrawn and ostensibly retrained before being re-deployed in August 1983.

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Owing to the pressure from outside groups, including the CCJP, by 1985, the 5th Brigade began limiting public killings and violence, resorting to “disappearing people”, or taking them to large camps called Bhalagwe and Sun Yat Sen, where they were tortured and/or killed, and where mass graves and human remains in mineshafts have since been discovered. However, there were exceptions to this general pattern. In one of my interviews, a headmaster from Matopos, a mountainous region where a number of dissidents were hiding, recalled that the 5th Brigade were still actively beating and torturing people in public in the area in 1985. While some of these trends were generalizable across Matebeleland and the Midlands regions, the local 5th Brigade commanders and the location determined the degree of community atrocities; for example, previous research on schools revealed that the least targeted schools were boarding schools run by senior clergy or white missionaries, both assumed to have ties to the international community. The surrounding communities that did not have such international connections were not spared.

The Gukurahundi’s initial extent of murder has been decried as genocide insofar as it targeted a specific ethnic group under the alleged suspicions that the dissidents were of the same ethnicity. David Coltart, then a lawyer who helped the CCJP record affidavit statements from hundreds of victims and then thereafter legally represented accused dissidents and ZAPU veterans, noted in an interview,

“I realized then (after interviewing women in Tsholotsho), that this was, you know, getting close... to genocide because basically, it became apparent to me that if you were male in between the age of 16 and 40, you were just wiped out [killed]” (Coltart, 2014).

When asked about the origins of the massacres, one interviewee, who is senior director of a community and peacebuilding non-governmental organization in the region, made references to genocidal language later used in the Rwandan genocide

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and attributed it to Emmerson Mnangagwa, who was, at the time of the interview, Minister of Defense. He noted,

“But the 5th Brigade came to harass and to maim, to rape, to murder the civilians... Minister Mnangagwa had said he was going to come to fumigate and deal with the cockroaches. So, the notion of a cockroach is not peculiar to Rwanda. In fact, that term was first used in Zimbabwe. When these people wanted to unleash a genocide, so that is when that term was used, then of course, it became popularized in Rwanda in 1994” (AS, 2014).

Although the phrases attributed to Mnangagwa have not been documented elsewhere and discussions of the definitions of genocide lie beyond the purview of this paper, what is significant is that the witnesses and victims of the atrocities view the acts as genocidal and that the quotes attributed to Mnangagwa, whether factual or folkloric, are widely perceived to be true. In light of the present Mthwakazi movement and within the Matabeleland region, that the current President, Emmerson Mnangagwa oversaw the atrocities is significant. As Minister of State Security and head of the CIO (Central Intelligence Organization) during Gukurahundi, he was quoted in the official CCJP report as having stated, “burn down all the villages infested with dissidents”. He added, “the campaign against dissidents can only succeed if the structure that nurtures them is destroyed” (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe and Legal Resources Foundation, 2008). Those “structures” were the families and communities within Matabeleland; the level of violence against them recounted in detail in the CCJP report highlights the extent of the atrocities committed by the 5th Brigade.

It is important to note that families were afraid to keep their children at home for fear that if the 5th Brigade found them, that they would be considered dissidents or errand boys for dissidents, and not being in school, would be killed. When asked about violence within school grounds, which was the impetus for my interviews in 2014, interviewees shared harrowing stories of mass killings, beatings, and torture. Given that schools served as community centers, teachers were viewed as community

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leaders, and schools were important networks that connected families, particularly across sparsely populated rural areas, the vicious targeting of students and teachers by the 5th Brigade was an efficient means of eroding these communities.

One teacher shared how he had been sent to town to collect teacher salaries and when he had returned, he had discovered seven of his colleagues were shot in front of the entire school assembly and their bodies placed in the pit latrines. Another interviewee, who was seven years old at the time, shared how he watched the soldiers beat female teachers in their private parts, which the soldiers called “food for dissidents” and made the male teachers fight one another. Yet another described how the 5th Brigade brought three elderly community members, including his grandfather, and paraded them as “dissidents” to the assembled students and teachers before shooting them. Corpses of community members were brought to schools as warnings of “what happens to dissidents” while soldiers tortured and ridiculed teachers and violently questioned students and teachers alike about the whereabouts of the dissidents. Across Matabeleland, stories of torture and rape of students were almost universal among interviewees, and often told with details that interviewees admit that they wished they could forget, with one interviewee noting with dismay at the sheer detail with which he remembers the events that happened when he was younger than 10 years old. Students and community members alike were made to sing songs and chant in Shona and in some regions, were made to attend “pungwes”, night-time rallies around fires, a signature ritual of ZANU’s military wing, except this time, at the expense of the villagers who were being tortured and killed.

In the few regions where the few dissidents (plants or not) were present, villagers were doubly targeted. One interviewee who went to school in the Matopos region highlighted the fact that while the Gukurahundi soldiers harassed them during the day, the dissidents, two of which he remembered went by the nicknames “Danger” and “Fidel Castro,” would torment them at night. They would visit the villagers and demand food, rape women, and make the young boys keep watch. Mr. N, a headmaster in the Matopos region noted that the 5th Brigade would send a few soldiers to pretend to be

dissidents in order to test the villagers to see if they would inform on the dissidents. The community was put in an impossible situation, since they were never sure whether the dissidents were genuine or not, and whether informing the 5th Brigade would either secure their torture by the dissidents, or not informing on them would ensure their death by the 5th Brigade.

Legacies of Gukurahudi: Mistrust, Regional Marginalization, and Ethno-Linguistic Rifts

Of the more cruel and subtle tactics employed by the 5th Brigade was the cultivation of shame and mistrust within communities. They forced community members to commit acts of violence and humiliation with and in front of one another, just as they had with teachers in front of their students. Interviewees witnessed teachers being told to climb trees, swim in mud, and were beaten in front of their students in order to undermine their authority within the community. Likewise, interviewees mentioned of the soldiers orchestrating similar acts within communities, leaving neighbours either too ashamed to interact with one another with respect or sowing seeds of mistrust, especially if some children or neighbours were spared the 5th Brigade's wrath; the "sell out" label, which was a remnant of the guerrilla war in which community members were viewed as traitors aiding the enemy, was revived as communities disintegrated.

Dr Reverend Ray Motsi, a pastor and founder of the "Grace to Heal Project" which works within communities affected by Gukurahundi, carried out dissertation research in the Tsholotsho district, one of the most affected areas, and argues that the creation of mistrust within communities was deliberate. In an interview, he noted that the soldiers went so far as to force neighbours to kill one another.

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“To make things worse, most of the killing was not actually done by the Gukurahundi themselves. They forced neighbours to kill neighbours. The reason why that was so it was because they wanted to bring about mistrust and discontent within the communities, so much so that they will not be able to trust each other from an African social perspective. The community and extended family is the surface net on which, if there's a crisis in the family, that will actually hold. Now if that is attacked and destroyed, it means there was nothing else they could do in order to actually hold them. And that was deliberate. And it was designed so” (Dr Rev. Motsi, 2014).

The mistrust that the Gukurahundi soldiers' tactics created within communities negatively impacted community development projects, including community involvement in creating and supporting schools. Shari Eppel notes,

“And um, so, you also, almost everywhere we go we hear about sell-outs. Where people say my son was killed, my neighbour's son wasn't killed, that means they must have sold out and as a reward their son wasn't killed and mine was. So, if you think your neighbour got your son killed, are you going to be on a goat-fattening project with that family? You know, so there is no social trust. So social trust is seriously undermined. And then how can development succeed in a situation where people don't trust one another, people are afraid, people are depressed; people have low self-esteem” (Eppel, 2005).

After the soldiers descended upon his village and school, one interviewee, who is presently a pastor and counsellor in Bulawayo, was sent to live with his family in the city. He noted that when he eventually returned to his village, the social fabric had eroded. Community members were no longer working together, and many had shirked their traditional communal responsibilities, including towards schools, “People don't want to take responsibility even paying school fees. People are poor, they are no longer a normal society, and there is no cohesion. Instead, put them into finger-pointing

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and they excel". Young men lucky enough to escape Gukurahundi were sent to overcrowded schools in the city or to neighbouring South Africa, often without documentation and with limited opportunities for upward mobility.

Beyond the death of loved ones and breadwinners, Gukurahundi impeded the economic growth and development of the region. Although difficult to quantify, the campaign placed a heavy financial burden on struggling families who were already brutalized. In addition to continuing their tactics of public violence, the 5th Brigade instituted a food embargo in 1984, which coincided with a year of drought in Matabeleland. Food was not allowed in or out of some parts of Matabeleland. A man who was a bus driver at the time described to me how the soldiers would beat him and his passengers and take whatever food they carried with them off the bus in addition to closing grocery stores. Financial insecurity caused by the conflict was also one of the reasons why some students were unable to pay their school fees and return to school.

The educational disruption not only affected the Matabeleland youth at the time, but became generational, owing to the government requiring birth certificates to progress beyond the seventh grade. At the time of the interviews in 2014, non-governmental organizations (NGO) workers decried the fact that children born during Gukurahundi, or whose parents were killed or fled without any paperwork, were unable to obtain birth certificates, and thus were unable to take the national exams required to enrol in secondary school. According to Zimbabwean law, in order to obtain a birth certificate, both parents must be present to sign the certificate. In the absence of a parent, one has to present the parent's death certificate, which must clearly state the cause of death. In addition to the many people who were "disappeared" and whose bodies were never found, it continues to try to prevent individuals from documenting the violence of Gukurahundi by refusing to grant death certificates for the casualties of the Gukurahundi soldiers. Those who have been able to obtain death certificates have had to invent false and less politically sensitive causes of death. Many more people have been unable to obtain death certificates for their parents, and therefore have been

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unable to obtain their own birth certificates, preventing them from taking their seventh-grade examinations. One interviewee's organization aided one such man who was told that he would only be granted a death certificate for his father if he declared the cause of death to be a stomach-ache instead of murder by the 5th Brigade soldiers.

Obtaining birth certificates was much more difficult for those who were born as a result of rape or whose parents were taken by Gukurahundi and "disappeared", since there was no proof of paternity in the former case and no proof that the parents had died in the latter. On 25th June 2014, the Bulawayo 24 news agency published an article reporting that most youths from the Silobela area in Matabeleland "failed to proceed beyond Grade 7 as they did not have birth certificates because of Gukurahundi" (Bulawayo24 News, 2014). A recent Amnesty International report notes that the inability to obtain death certificates has hundreds of thousands of descendants of Gukurahundi victims stateless in the country, since proof of birth and death is required to obtain nationality documents (Amnesty International, 2020).

Beyond the immediate effects of the atrocities and the generational lost opportunities, there was consensus among interviewees, even those who had worked within government, that since Gukurahundi, the region has been purposefully marginalized and underdeveloped, with tribal nepotism favouring non-Ndebele applicants in jobs, tertiary education, government positions. When carrying out research in 2014 on the long-term effects of Gukurahundi on education in Matabeleland, I was handed a document titled "The Grand Plan" which has since been published in its entirety (Ngwenya, 2018). Below the title reads, "For Restricted Circulation for The Eyes of the Shona Elite Only, Please Pass To Most Trusted Person!" (Ngwenya, 2018). The document was supposedly written by a ZANU-PF Shona loyalist who laid out the plan for exterminating Ndebele culture and marginalizing the Matabeleland region. The document has significant derogatory terms in reference to Ndebele people and calls for their elimination from the nation. It also references pre-colonial antagonisms between the tribes and the oft-stereotyped narrative that Mzilikazi, a pre-colonial Ndebele ruler, led raids on Shona cattle to build Ndebele wealth. A few portions read,

“National public addresses at official functions are done in Shona. Being a Shona is now a source of pride, particularly in Shona assimilates who in place of that cultural void, have received a reward to fill in the gap as a result of seeking redemption from Shonas. Marriage partner preferences bear full the testimony to the superiority of Shona. Ndebele girls will without exception opt to marry a Shona man given a choice between men from the two groups. This is not without reason. Ndebele men are often savage and brutal prospective husbands. They are ungenerous, unprotective and stingy...

Because the majority of people in Bulawayo are Shonas, the rural areas must now be the target. This can only be done through the resettlement programme. The deployment of Shonas in rural Matabeleland will be the last blow to break the spine of the enemy. Because of this vision on our part, political power cannot be allowed to slip into the hands of tyrants. Zapu was an impediment to the realization of this vision, but we managed to destroy it. In the words of the now maverick and controversial Zvobgo being advice to Zapu, ‘there is no less painful way for you than to join Zanu’. Nkomo capitulated in 1987 and we all know that the unity accord was a farce or smokescreen facesaver for Zanu’s one-time greatest foe and headache turned tool. Shona supremacy is not a dream but a reality. Should you stand idle and fail to throw your weight behind the leadership? Ask yourself whether you could be where you are, were it not for Mugabe and Zanu—educationally, economically, etc. Land that is still in white hands must all find its way into Shona hands”.

Although historians have been unable to authenticate the document and the plans of ethno-genocide stated therein, the significance of the document lies in the fact that many residents in Matabeleland believe the document is authentic and argue that their experiences confirm that the present political party as well as the government in power is actively following “The Grand Plan” to bring Shona domination to fruition (Ndhlovu, 2021). The document has since been used by the “Mthwakazi National Party” for

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political rallying and, in 2014, portions of the document were posted on the “Mthwakazi National Party” Facebook page (Mthwakazi National Party, 2014). While only a few interviewees referenced the “Grand Plan” by name, all shared that they felt ethnically targeted and geographically disadvantaged. The lesson the Gukurahundi soldiers “taught” the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands was that they were second-class citizens whose existence is only precariously tolerated by the State. One exclaimed to me, “I am not Zimbabwean, I am Matabele!” (Anonymous, 2014).

Whether or not a concerted intentional effort exists to disenfranchise Matabeleland, evidence does exist that there is a de facto difference in regional development along ethnolinguistic fault lines. David Coltart, speaking as then Minister of Education noted that, “[Regarding] government appointments, over the last 30 years, it is very clear that there has been, at the very least subconscious or conscious attempt to exclude minorities, not just the Ndebele. If one looks at present, the Chief Justice, the commander of the Army, the president, the chief of police, and a variety—I think the Registrar General—are all [ethno-linguistically] Shona. If you look at the CEOs, companies in the country, and certainly the CEOs of parastatals, you'll find hardly any Ndebeles, virtually all Shona. What results from that is that access to capital then becomes concentrated or rather the decision-making around that is concentrated in the same people. It's been further compounded by the fact that most talented Ndebele leaders have left the country and are running large firms in South Africa and elsewhere. And that's a part of the grand plan. Obviously, perhaps it's a consequence of it, but it certainly fuels it. If there is such a plan, and I suppose what I'm saying, in conclusion, is that whether there's a plan or not, objectively, if you look at leadership in our country, it has happened” (Coltart, 2014).

Coltart's mention of educated Ndebele leaders leaving the country to go to South Africa highlights the acknowledgment of individuals from the region of their marginalization. Bulawayo, the second largest city and former capital of the country (now capital city of Matabeleland), was once the country's industrial centre, but industries have since dwindled and little to no infrastructure development has occurred, a notable contrast to the expansion of Harare, the capital city. The lack of government support over the

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past three decades has been compounded by the economic crises beginning in 2000 (Clemens and Moss, 2005).

An interviewee who works with the poorest communities in Matabeleland, which happens to have been the worst affected by Gukurahundi three decades prior, mentions the hopelessness felt by community members who recognize themselves as marginalized.

“If you go to a place called the Bidi, near Kezi... also Gwanda... most of the educational infrastructure is quite deplorable. There isn't much that has been done except by maybe UNESCO, the government seems... unwilling to really do anything for the community.... In Tsholotso, which was among the worst places affected by Gukurahundi,... there's a lot of poverty, a lot of hopelessness. So, people don't really feel like they're part of Zimbabwe. Today, most of them go to South Africa, or they feel like, 'why do I have to go through to secondary education?... They don't care about us. So, what's your point of education in the first place?' Right. So, the average kid, for example, growing up in Matabeleland South, or rural Matabeleland North, they want to go to South Africa, without maybe even getting their full secondary education. So, there's a sense of not belonging to the home nation in that sense—a lot of hopelessness. Yeah, I see that, that sense of hopelessness in communities. But they realize that they, especially the older ones, that maybe if they don't do anything, that nothing will happen so they are doing things on their own, without the support of the government, it will be the support of NGOs, and donor agencies” (Anonymous, 2014).

The lack of faith in the government and hopelessness regarding secondary and tertiary education was mentioned by other interviewees in relation to the tribalism they anticipated and believed would impede their future progress. Numerous interviewees mentioned that tertiary educational institutions in the country favoured Shona candidates over Ndebele, mirroring the tribal nepotism in many economic sectors.

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A university professor at NUST, the National University of Science and Technology, noted that even taking into account the fact that Ndebele residents make up just over a quarter of the population, there are fewer applications received from the region owing to disparities in the aforementioned lack of access to secondary education as well as school infrastructure such as labs, which other interviewees mentioned were installed in other parts of the country during Gukurahundi. Dr Fay Chung, who was head of ZIMFEP (Zimbabwe's Foundation for Education with Production) from its formation in 1981 until 1988, when she became Minister of Education, noted in personal written communication that while certain members of the government cabinet aimed to limit funding to the region, she insisted on making educational funding proportionate to the population, though admitting that assessments and developments were slowed down and impeded due to "disturbances"—in other words, the violence and social upheavals of Gukurahundi (Chung, 2014).

As is the case with other long-term effects of the conflict, whether quantifiable or not, this actual and perceived victimization creates an accelerated self-fulfilling prophecy. A Ministry official who oversaw Matabeleland North and South in 2014 noted that the Ministry struggled to find qualified teachers for the region, despite Bulawayo having one of the most well-respected teacher training colleges in the country, Hillside Teachers Training College. Her hypothesis was that in addition to the most educated teachers leaving the country, the ethnic tensions created by Gukurahundi have meant that communities are often hostile towards Shona teachers. During the economic crisis of 2007, thousands of qualified teachers left the country to look for work in South Africa and in Botswana. A disproportionate number of the teachers who left were from Matabeleland because Matabeleland borders South Africa and Botswana. However, a Matabeleland government official, who declined to be named for fear that the government would sanction him, informed me that despite the severe shortage of qualified teachers in Matabeleland, few qualified Shona teachers, or teachers not of Ndebele origin, were able to teach in the rural areas effectively. "Last time I got a call from the community in Lupane district who told me to 'come and take your teachers, they are trying to 'Shonasize' our children" (Ministry Official, 2014).

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The education official also recounted how many qualified Shona-speaking teachers refused to teach in Ndebele rural areas because of the hostility that they faced. Moreover, due to the political climate, the official felt unable to address the matter explicitly. “As an official, I can’t talk about the effects of these things... [Gukurahundi], all I can say is that in Matabeleland we have a problem of teacher mobility. That is all I can do” (Ministry Official, 2014). The resulting loss of teachers has created a cycle of low-quality education, as ethnic Ndebele teachers can face greater barriers to accreditation, and those who clear these hurdles often leave for the greener pastures of South Africa and Botswana, while teachers from Mashonaland are not able to settle and invest in the Matabele communities within which they serve. High teacher attrition rates, therefore, affect student academic outcomes and limit the number of professionals from the region who can fill in the need for qualified teachers in these communities.

Outside of the schoolroom, ethno-linguistic and regional divisions impede national unity. The fact that the 5th Brigade soldiers spoke Shona and sometimes singled out their victims by their names and tests of Ndebele pronunciation has transformed linguistic differences into strong political and social divisions. A community organizer who held reconciliatory workshops in Gukurahundi-affected areas noted that victims are offended by being spoken to in Shona.

“In Zimbabwe, if I am speaking Ndebele and they speak Shona, I feel offended. I feel offended by that, but I should not feel offended, it is their language. But it’s also the history... up to now, relationships are affected at a social and professional level, when somebody speaks Shona and I feel like ah, but they’re speaking the language of the opre[ssor], it reminds me of Gukurahundi... And so, to speak, people associate Shona... with the oppressor and get angry... up to today ethnic relations are bad” (AS, 2014).

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The lingering trauma and effects of Gukurahundi, including the exodus of Ndebele speakers to bordering South Africa, where they face xenophobia, have been compounded by the economic collapse of Zimbabwe and the violence with which ZANU-PF has maintained power. As two interviewees who have studied the atrocities and who are active in community projects pointed out, the violence, censorship, and tactics of “disappearing” political opponents which have been imposed nationwide are the continuations, of the modus operandi of the 5th Brigade.

As a result, for the survivors of the atrocities, the fear of another “cleansing” is ever-present. Even in 2014 when I sat down with Mr N, a retired headmaster from the Matopos region of Matabeleland, he nervously looked about before we started speaking. Mr N was head of a school in the Matopos region which, as previously mentioned, was targeted both by dissidents and the 5th Brigade. Even though I was asking him about events three decades prior, at one point he held my gaze and told me that if the government were to send the Gukurahundi troops again, the wall around the school grounds was not tall enough to keep them out. He was also upset that he presently had no guns, “How will we defend ourselves?”, he asked.

From the perspective of the victims of Gukurahundi, the political party and the individual orchestrators of the Gukurahundi, including the current president of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, have always been, and continue to be, a threat. They are not only living with the trauma of Gukurahundi, but they have been living in persistent fear because, to them, the 5th Brigade soldiers have merely changed uniforms and dress as militias during voting periods, undercover or “plain clothes” policemen daily and nameless individuals in unmarked, unlicensed vehicles that capture citizens in broad daylight and “disappear” them. The most publicized abduction and disappearance was of a well-known government critic and journalist, Itai Dzamara in 2015. He was grabbed outside a barbershop in broad daylight (Amnesty International, 2020). Essentially, the same tactics of violence and suppression employed by ZANU-PF during Gukurahundi have been unleashed upon all critics of the Zimbabwean government.

The government's response to the rise of secessionist groups calling for Matabeleland's secession or the recreation of the pre-colonial Mthwakazi kingdom has only cemented the fear of victims of Gukurahundi, including those who have nothing to do with these separatist movements. On 22nd March 2022, a video was published of President Mnangagwa giving a chilling speech to "those trying to divide Zimbabwe into smaller states", ostensibly to the Mthwakazi movement. He noted that they would "varikutsvaga mazuva avo kuti atapudzwe panyika", which translates to "find that their days on earth are numbered" (The News Hawks, 2022) (Mpofu, 2022). For the people of Matabeleland, those words eerily echo the pre-Gukurahundi speeches attributed to him.

Present Calls for Reparations

Both the rise of the Mthwakazi movement and the calls for government acknowledgment of the atrocities reveal the deep rifts that began after independence, as well as the squandered opportunities for reconciliation. Implicit in the accounts of the grievances of survivors and communities affected by Gukurahundi, however, are expectations of the ways in which the government should atone and reconcile. Although they differed in their visions of ideal compensation and restitution, when asked how the government might make amends, the majority of interviewees demanded an official apology, an audience for truth-telling, and compensation for Gukurahundi's life-altering trajectory for millions in Matabeleland. Truth-telling, as expressed by survivors, civil society leaders, and war veterans, remains a central tenet of healing owing to the cross-generational effects of the mass atrocities.

In addition to removing the legal impediments or laws under which any discussion of Gukurahundi is criminalized, to allow for discussion and memorialization, interviewees argued that the physical legacy of Gukurahundi be addressed, particularly the mass graves that haunt communities. To date, there are an unknown number of mass graves in schools and communities since no comprehensive study on Gukurahundi and its effects has been allowed, and some communities are too afraid to report these graves

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to government officials. For example, in 2011, a mass grave containing the remains of 60 people was discovered by a group of students at St. Paul's school in Lupane (Bulawayo24 News, 2011). Community leader JJM mentioned that he was arrested and accused of trying to "incite an uprising against the government" by working within his organization to remove a pole and build a memorial around a mass grave found near a teacher's cottage inside a school. Among the community organizers I spoke with, JJM's story was not unique; Reverend Motsi's organization, Grace to Heal, helps communities mark graves because it is illegal to exhume the Gukurahundi graves, even when community members know the identities of the victims.

"We have had to refurbish some shallow graves, because the government does not allow us through my organization to do exhumations, we had to do securing of graves. Because we do believe that as and when the time comes for us to be able to do exhumations. It doesn't matter how old the remains are, more often than not, remains will speak for themselves, in terms of what actually transpired" (Motsi, 2014).

The mass graves scattered throughout the countryside in Matabeleland and the Midlands represent a particularly painful aspect of Gukurahundi's enduring legacy. These graves in schools and other areas have a deep cultural and religious significance for communities. According to Ndebele traditional beliefs in which the dead ancestors play a crucial role in the prosperity of the family, those buried without the proper rituals bring bad luck or "curse" their families. Living near such abodes of aggrieved spirits is considered unsafe and inauspicious. The mass graves in schools have therefore been places of political contestation and of trauma for school children who find them, the teachers who work and live near them, and especially for the families whose loved ones still lie there.

To date, commemorative community events, including prayer services and attempts to tend to the mass graves have been thwarted. One community organizer recalled that the Roman Catholic priest Nkandla organized a prayer meeting and

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commemoration in Isilwane village in 2011 where, out of 100 households, 32 members of the community were killed during Gukurahundi and dumped into a mass grave, and a family of 10 or 11 were killed in a single hut. But this commemoration had serious consequences, as the interviewee recounted:

“Testimonies were brought from people that were affected by that incident. Afterwards, the priest was arrested and charged for inciting violence, trying to [portray him as being] against the state and so on just under... [the] criminal law codification act so as to discourage any such conversations taking place. What was interesting, though, is that in that meeting, even the Minister of the Organization for National Healing and Reconciliation [was present]” (AS, 2014).

In addition to allowing communities to openly grieve, one of the most important demands of survivors is that the government provide counsellors to help individuals, families, and communities process their trauma. In 2014, TN summed up his organization’s work within affected communities as foremostly beginning to offer counselling services, which he argued were unofficial and inadequate.

“But what we have been pushing for, first of all, is a conversation that leads to truth recovery. And then secondly, compensation that helps the victim as an individual and the victim as a community, so to speak, where we say the victim as an individual will need counselling. Not much has been done. We know the number of organizations that have been doing counselling trying to provide those services but it's spontaneous, it's not official. It's not formal because of the feeling that the state is unwilling to allow such things to take place” (TN, 2014).

The request for counselling services highlights the needs of survivors for public recognition and the lack of closure for a period of life-altering circumstances. Tellingly, several interviewees asked their children and family members to leave the room before

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the interviews began, revealing not only the secrecy with which Gukurahundi is discussed, but the generational rifts of that knowledge and acknowledgement.

The final point of contention and demands raised by survivors includes financial restitution, that is, compensation for the personal and communal generational wealth that has been lost during and since the atrocities. TN describes this compensation as “compensatory development”. He notes,

“But the other aspect we have been pushing for is what we call compensatory development, where we're saying it was not just the individual or rights that were violated community rights were violated” (TN, 2014).

His sentiments were echoed by interviewees across the professional spectrum, including the necessity of financially compensating families and building infrastructure. “This is the kind of infrastructure when people do not only memorialize, but they get income as a community” (TN, 2014).

Another head of a civil society organization differentiated the kinds of restitution owed to victims of Gukurahundi. S., an activist and pastor, argued that in addition to acknowledgment of atrocities, transformative justice needs be carried out, as opposed to restorative justice. He notes that the difference is that in addition to compensation for what was taken, survivors be compensated for the lost time and lost opportunities over the past three decades.

“Some [civil society organizations] were saying, no, there is restorative justice. I am in proponent of transformational justice... transformational justice is opposed to positive justice, then this is opposed to restorative justice. Restorative justice says, you lost your car during the conflict... let's restore the relationship and restore you, your car. But transformative justice goes beyond to say, you lost a car, but and you stayed for many years without a car so instead of giving you back your car, I'm giving you two cars, I'm giving you back a car, and something else, in addition, that will empower you and compensate for the loss that you incurred and the time that you are were without” (S, 2014).

While an analysis of these different reparative proposals is beyond the scope of this paper, the demands and needs of individuals and communities should be paramount when designing policies and processes for reconciliation. The authority to draw equitable solutions post-conflict should be vested in the survivors and aggrieved communities. As highlighted and partially documented within this paper, the first steps should include an understanding of the history of Gukurahundi's mass atrocities and their ongoing legacy, space for personal and communal truth-telling, and an official acknowledgment of the atrocities, as well as compensation in various forms.

Conclusion

On 23rd November 2022, President Mnangagwa's cabinet ratified amendments to the Criminal Law Codification and Reform Amendment Bill, also called the Patriotic Bill, criminalizing any criticism of the government both within and outside of the country, making anyone convicted liable to a fine, imprisonment, and termination of citizenship. The bill targets “any citizen or permanent resident of Zimbabwe who, within or outside Zimbabwe, actively partakes... in any meeting whose object the accused knows or has reasonable grounds for believing involves... military or other armed intervention” or “wilfully damages the sovereignty and national interest of Zimbabwe” (Matimbe, 2022). This law effectively defines critical dissent out of the nation state: to be a citizen is to support the government in power, and supporting the government in power is the

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criterion of citizenship. There is little doubt that the consideration for this bill included criticisms of leadership and specifically Mnangagwa, who earned the pejorative nickname “the crocodile” post-Gukurahundi. In the National Assembly debates on the need for the Patriotic Bill, discussions of the need for maintaining the “promotion of the country’s positive brand” (Matimbe, 2022) directly referred to attacks on the President’s record. In debates, Minister Hon. Mpfu was quoted stating, “If you attack the leader of this country, that has an effect when that leader goes out there to source business for this country. Nobody wants to do business with a person who from his country has been called so many names” (Matimbe, 2022).

This law gives the government further control over the narratives on Gukurahundi and over its citizens. What is different about this law, however, is that it highlights the important role that the Zimbabwean diaspora continue to play in articulating critiques and narratives on government atrocities that are more difficult to voice within the country. Gukurahundi is a striking illustration of this strange dynamic, often found in such situations—those affected the most by the crisis/situation tend to be at greatest risk for speaking out, while those at greater remove tend to risk less and have more of a platform. This dynamic can influence scholarship, journalism, and the popularity of narratives skewing them towards those privileged in certain respects. Nonetheless, as the case of Gukurahundi demonstrates, while attempts are made to bury official evidence, such “noisy silences” are leaky: the consequences, voices, feelings, trauma, and narratives of those affected escape like smoke from live embers. In Zimbabwe this can be seen in the numerous “unofficial” reports, artworks, oral histories, international articles, and the fractures in individual, communal, and national fabrics and psyche.

For many post-colonial nation-states, the project of nation-building often involved homogenizing violence as ethno-linguistic and religious identities were transformed under colonial rule into political identities competing in battle royale for state power and resources (Mamdani, 2001). While many arguments might be made for why this need not have been the case, in reality, the post-colonial state’s inability to tolerate or cope with political, ideological, ethnic, religious, or cultural diversity has plunged many new

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African nations (such as Rwanda, Uganda, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola, Mozambique, The Central African Republic, etc.) into cycles of violence. With a few notable exceptions, including Rwanda, this cycle of violence is often perpetuated by the proclivity of governments to deal with the trauma of violence through an institutionalized process of forgetting or burying evidence, further marginalizing victims and communities who call for justice. Within the context of this inaugural issue of Transformations, this essay serves as a cautionary tale of the dangers of ignoring restorative justice in a nation that has since continued to splinter along the fault lines of the Gukurahundi massacres. In this way, by highlighting the very voices that continue to be silenced, this essay simultaneously brings their stories and truths to light, and contributes to the chorus of calls for the government to acknowledge its wrongdoings and take steps toward reconciliation.

This article highlights the contested narratives surrounding Gukurahundi and the government's attempts to control these narratives through the penal system, violence, and through National Truth and Reconciliation commissions, despite the significant evidence of the impacts of Gukurahundi on the lived experiences of individuals, communities and the nation at large. By focusing on the narratives of survivors of Gukurahundi, this article adds to those voices calling for restitution. Through interviews with politicians, local NGO leaders, activists, teachers, and regular citizens conducted in 2014, this essay highlights the lingering effects of this trauma on individuals, communities, and the political landscape of Zimbabwe, as well as the hopes of these communities for a more just and peaceful future. But for these fragile seeds of hope to take root in an increasingly unstable political soil, a process of healing and truth-telling must take place, to which this essay aims to contribute.

Given the ratification of the "Patriotic Bill," as the author of this article and a Zimbabwean citizen, I would be remiss if I did not mention my own apprehension in publishing this article. That said, such risks must be taken, and in such cases, the line between scholar and activist must be crossed, especially if those who were the most

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affected by the atrocities, who have the most to lose, are willing to hold their oppressors accountable.

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