# Chapter 3: Narrating Gukurahundi Violence

> *The crimes that the African continent commits against her kind are a kind of a dimension and, unfortunately, of a nature that appears to constantly provoke memories of the historic wrongs inflicted on that continent by others.* (Soyinka, 1999: p. xxiv)

## Introduction

In the previous chapter, I discussed how Vera, Nyamubaya and Hove challenge the masculinised nationalist discourse on the liberation struggle by writing women into that history. In this chapter, I focus on how black writers (both male and female) rewrote the history of Gukurahundi. I begin this discussion by referring to a re-reading of African post-independence history beyond colonial politics. The above epigraph, taken from Soyinka's *The Burden of Memory: The Muse of Forgiveness,* is a good example in that direction. Soyinka demonstrates that the whole African continent has memories of historic wrongs inflicted on her by others; there are wrongs that have been inflicted on Africans by fellow brothers and sisters that are not different from external ones. Zimbabwean memories of historic wrongs need to be contextualized to crimes that vary from region to region. In current popular imagination, the Great Lakes Region (Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, Rwanda and Democratic Republic of Congo are part of that region) is the most politically unstable of post-independence Africa. There is 'genocide in Rwanda […] grisly civil war in Liberia and Sierra Leone, state collapse in Somalia and embedded corruption in Nigeria' (Bauer and Taylor, 2003: p. 2). Though there is a tendency to generalize African politics, one realizes that of all the African regions, Southern Africa is relatively stable politically. Bauer and Taylor locate political stability in a number of Southern African countries:

> Botswana is typically cited as one of the most democratic countries in Africa with a history of peace and stability […] Namibia and South Africa have received widespread acclaim for their democratic constitutions and respect for the rule of law. […] Zambia and Malawi […] made transitions in the early 1990s from decades of single party rule by presidents-for-life to multiparty systems […] none of the countries in the region has been the victim

> of a military coup […] the region is characterized today by relative peace. (2005: p. 6)

Though national political stability/instability remains a controversial subject, it is significant to note that Zimbabwe is part of the Southern African region considered as relatively peaceful. On attaining independence in 1980, Zimbabwe showed all the signs of potentially becoming a democratic state. Nevertheless, there have been major political drawbacks. As early as 1982, after two years of independence, government soldiers of the Fifth Brigade killed thousands of civilians in Matabeleland and Midlands regions (mostly Ndebele people), in an operation named Gukurahundi that lasted up to 1987. The violence was purportedly a move by the government to deal with violent 'dissidents'.

Zimbabwe is a multi-ethnic nation, with major and minor indigenous ethnic groups. Minor ethnic groups include Tonga, Chewa, Venda and Shangaan among others. These 'are located in the marginal borderlands and […] have felt marginalized from both the economy and society and have complained of political and cultural domination by both the Shona and the Ndebele' (Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: p. 289). Yet relations between the two major ethnic groups (Shona and Ndebele) have largely been hostile. In Shona discourse, the Ndebele ethnic group is understood as both 'ruthless and unsympathetic towards their Shona neighbours' (Musiyiwa and Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 2005: p. 76). Oral history tells that Shona people were the original occupants of the space that is known as Zimbabwe today. The Ndebele brutally invaded Shona territory long before the arrival of the whites. This kind of narrative is also recorded in Shona literature.[61] The hostility between the two ethnic groups is particularly encoded in the names they gave each other upon contact. The Ndebele people were named 'Madzviti' by the Shona and, in return, the Ndebele named the Shona 'Amasvina'. Madzviti is a derogatory term that, in normal discourse, refers to 'the lazy, lousy, wandering stinking locusts' (Mutswairo, 1983, as cited in Musiyiwa and Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 2005: p. 77). 'Amasvina' is a term that means 'the dirty ones'. Such hostilities also persisted during the nationalist struggle against colonialism. The antagonism between Shona and Ndebele ethnic groups could also be discerned in the two nationalist

[61] Examples of Shona texts that reflect on ethnic hostilities between Shona and Ndebele include Magwa's *Njuzu* (1991) Masundure's *Mhandu Dzorusununguko* (1991), Chiwome's *Masango Mavi* (1998) and Chakaipa's *Karikoga Gumiremiseve* (1958).

liberation movements that came to be associated with the two ethnic groups, ZANU and ZAPU respectively. The 1963 rifts saw ZANU breaking into ZAPU and ZANU. The distrust between the two movements was also noted in the relations between the respective armed forces ZANLA and ZIPRA. 'The antagonisms between the two guerrilla armies hardened into hostilities between their political parties, as ZANU-PF became convinced that ZAPU was supporting a new dissident war in order to improve its standing in the country' (CCJPZ, 1997: p. 39) upon attaining independence.

> The rivalry between the two parties continued in the aftermath of the post-1980 settlement, punctuated by the Gukurahundi violence of the new state in Matabeleland and the Midlands in the mid-1980. This massive deployment of state violence effectively led to the formal subsumption of PF Zapu to the ruling ZANU PF in the form of the 1987 Unity Accord, and thus the demise of a formidable opposition party. (Raftopoulos, 2007: pp. 126-7)

Against that background, one notes that the political instabilities of the 1980s are redefined as violence between Shona and Ndebele people, largely because of the political connections between the Ndebele and ZAPU and its ZIPRA forces, and between Shona and ZANU and its ZANLA forces and later the Fifth Brigade soldiers.

So, over and above cultural differences between Shona and Ndebele, political affiliation was and remains a distinguishing feature. As Ndlovu and Dube argue, politics and ethnicity were conflated in Gukurahundi, hence it became 'an ethnic cleansing of ZAPU and its Ndebele supporters' (2014: p. 8). From the time ZANU split into two in 1963, national politics 'took an ethnic dimension' (Ndlovu and Dube, 2014: p. 9). Since ZAPU supporters and ZIPRA soldiers were mainly Ndebele speaking, and the Fifth Brigade soldiers were predominantly Shona, Gukurahundi violence was later constructed as a war between ethnic groups. Gukurahundi was largely silenced and unacknowledged by the government. Significant in this discussion is how various writers have re-imagined Gukurahundi in their works. Here I discuss the literary representation of the silenced political instabilities of the 1980s paying particular attention to the general trend in Gukurahundi rewriting. In my discussion I refer to Hove's *Shadows*, Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, Ndlovu's 'Torn Posters', Mlalazi's *Running with Mother*, Godwin's *Mukiwa* and Kilgore's *We are Now Zimbabweans.* I

discuss these texts with a particular attention to the various stages and forms of articulation of Gukurahundi violence. It is significant to note that any writing on Gukurahundi is or at least pretends to be about the past -'a past that no longer exists but keeps on haunting the present' (Van Alphen, 1997: p. 15). Van Alphen says this in the context of literature on the Holocaust, and what he says is also applicable to Gukurahundi violence. Thus all the works discussed here are re-interpretations of the Gukurahundi past from diverse angles.

**Texts and Trends in Gukurahundi Articulation**

Gukurahundi was not comprehensively articulated in government official narratives of history (particularly through the media, which were controlled by the government), and this was a deliberate exclusion. Exclusion was part of the general pattern of a lack of acknowledgement of the reality of Gukurahundi by the government. As indicated in the Catholic Commission on Peace and Justice in Zimbabwe (CCJPZ) report on Gukurahundi, there is only one (government) minister on record who acknowledged the reality, otherwise the government's position is denial. The single exception to this is Minister Mahachi (the then minister of defence), who said in *The Sunday Mail* of 6 September 1992 that: 'events during that period are regretted and should not be repeated by anybody, any group of people or any institution in this country' (1997: p. 16). Mugabe and his government were only held accountable for the Gukurahundi atrocities by the civil society organizations and private media as late as 1997 (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 57). The CCJPZ report *Breaking the Silence* was the first comprehensive report of the atrocities committed by government soldiers in Matabeleland and Midlands Provinces in the early 1980s. Muchemwa described such writings displayed by the CCJPZ as resisting 'the slipping into oblivion of unacknowledged unspoken and unwritten traumas of history' (2005: p. 196).

As demonstrated by Christiansen-Bull, literature 'has qualities that make it instrumental in support of hegemonic versions of national identity as well as in opposition to them' (2004: p. 8). I do not intend to highlight the qualities referred to here, but I want to point out that there is literature that is critical of the government-initiated (and silenced) Gukurahundi. In terms of trends in Zimbabwean literature, 'the first years of post independence were quiet […] and the early post independent writings were 'celebrationist […] (but also contained) elements of criticism and articulated frustration' (Kaarsholm, 2005: pp. 4-5). Much of the criticism was limited to the disillusioning aspects of the

liberation war. Nyamfukudza's *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980) and Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) are some of the early texts critical of the nationalist narratives of war and the new independence. The Gukurahundi atrocities are only 'addressed for the first time in Hove's *Shadows* (1991)', and from a woman's point of view in Vera's *Stone Virgins* (2002).

Hove's *Shadows* is 'not focused specifically on the post independence period […] but tells the story of a family that is forcefully removed from their land' during colonial dominance (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 29). Beyond struggles against colonial oppression, Hove's narrative also takes us to another struggle, this time an internal conflict in post-independence Zimbabwe involving the ex-combatants, popularized as 'dissidents', and the government. In Hove's text, the dissidents describe themselves as men 'who were treated badly after the war to free the land from the hands of the colonizers' and'[…] who had fought the white men from the west' (p. 96). Implicit in this description is that dissidents made a meaningful contribution to the war, yet upon attainment of independence they are side-lined from political dominance. 'Dissidents' understood themselves as liberators of the land, yet the new government described them as dissidents:

> The radio said those young men were bandits who wanted to drink the blood of the defenceless people of the land. Every night the voices from the radio insulted the young men in the bush, they were infidels, murderers who killed everyone they came across. […] even the voices of the big people, who had taken over the rule of the land, they insulted the young men every day. (pp. 96-7)

Such insults by the government are directed at othering the ex-ZIPRA forces and coding them as 'enemies of the state' who should be rooted out. Images of dissidents based on their behaviour evoke past war violence that people may want to forget. Experiences of the war are relived when Hove refers to how 'young men went around even during the day asking for the people to cook for them as it was before the white man was defeated. They began to sleep in houses expelling the owners of the houses' and '[…] sometimes they took the women to dark places, making them pregnant' (p. 97). The dimension of Gukurahundi violence encoded here is that dissidents caused terror, and that their violent activities were a significant aspect of Gukurahundi. The history of the Gukurahundi conflict is explained as follows: 'it is said that they [the

government] had quarrelled with them [the dissidents] about many things. So the young men went into the bush to find the guns they had hidden when they were freedom fighters in the bush' (p. 97). From Hove's narrative, dissident violence influenced Gukurahundi, yet this theme is not given much space in Hove's book. In other words, the book is not about Gukurahundi. Reference to Gukurahundi is an appendage to the account of Baba Joanna's history of displacement. In the space of only four of the last pages and in the form of speculative gossip by the village elders and through the voice of the omniscient narrator, Hove limits his account of Gukurahundi to dissidents' activities. Hove's *Shadows* is best described as 'a warning' about Gukurahundi and Vera's *The Stone Virgins* then becomes a 'groundbreaking project' of retelling the Gukurahundi atrocities (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 88).

Vera has been discussed in previous chapters of this study. I closely read Vera's *Without a Name* and 'It is Hard to Live Alone' in chapter 3. I highlighted that *Without a Name* demonstrates how violated black women relate differently to the land during the liberation struggle. In my reading of 'It is Hard to Live Alone', I indicated that Vera questions nationalist discourse on the liberation war by highlighting the fact that women took a great part in the war, even in their domesticity, and in that approach she managed to force readers to rethink the difference between the battle front and its rears. In chapter 2 of this study, Vera is highlighted as one of the prominent female writers who give women voices. In the same chapter, I also referred to Vera as one of the few post-independence black Zimbabwean writers who are brave enough to articulate the officially suppressed Gukurahundi stories. In this section I expand on that position and demonstrate how, in *The Stone Virgins*, Vera articulates post-independence betrayal by invoking the memories of historic wrongs committed on the Ndebele people by the new, predominantly Shona, government. Elsewhere, Vera describes her role as an artist in the following words:

> As you know, twenty years later we found ourselves a changed people. We have a feeling that we have betrayed our own dream as a country - those of us who thought would become better in our sense of duty, responsibility […]. Because even morally we felt superior to the enemy then. So now, we don't have that. We feel that we have failed ourselves. And that we have a new obligation, which is to create a social change within this new environment

> which has resulted from our independence. So, as a writer you cannot be detached from that. (In an interview with Ranka Primorac, 2012: p. 388)

In the above quote, Vera was talking in particular about the Third Chimurenga crises, but the betrayal that she refers to includes Gukurahundi. In *The Stone Virgins*, she demonstrates a commitment to reflect on the leaders' betrayal by reliving Gukurahundi through a re-telling of the experiences of two sisters: Nonceba and Thenjiwe. The novel is 'set partly during the liberation war and partly after independence' (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 21). Bound in one book and under one title, the two separate historical segments are made one. Such a sense of continuity reflects more on the sense of betrayal early into independence that has come to be associated with Gukurahundi. The sense of continuity affords Vera to link together the struggle for independence from colonial domination and the challenges of a new nation. Gukurahundi placed the first question mark on the reality of independence. Through such a structure, Vera manages to 'iterate the divisions of the past, which the nation's people are obliged to forget', in patriotic narrations of history (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 90). By referring to both the colonial period and the post-independence 1980s, Vera refers to both historic memories of wrongs committed on blacks by both outsiders and by insiders.

Vera's re-writing of the silences surrounding Gukurahundi is richer than Hove's and certainly more complex and detailed. Though both Hove and Vera focus on the violence of the dissidents, , in Vera's *The Stone Virgins,* unlike Hove's *Shadows,* we hear the voices of dissidents as well as civilian victims. Unlike the dissidents in Hove's work who are just described by the villagers and the new rulers, in *The Stone Virgins,* through Sibaso, Vera manages to describe the dissident mentality. Sibaso is a dissident 'who is hunted by the government forces and feared by the civilians' (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 94). Sibaso is the 'ex-ZIPRA dissident who senselessly decapitates Thenjiwe, cuts off the lips of her sister Nonceba, and pollutes the caves of the hills with his violence' (Kaarsholm, 2005: p. 15). Vera also finds space in her novel to detail the activities of the Fifth Brigade soldiers through their destruction 'of the Thandabantu store in Kezi […] torturing and murdering of its owner Mahlatini' (ibid.). Another character, Cephas Dube, comes from the Eastern Highlands. He nurses Nonceba and achieves 'unity at ethnic or provincial level' (ibid.). Unlike the Fifth Brigade soldiers who cross from Mashonaland to inflict pain on

Matabeleland civilians and, unlike the dissident Sibaso who destroys life, Cephas' actions are directed at rebuilding. Christiansen-Bull describes Cephas' efforts as aimed at 'restoring the nation's past' (2005: p. 208).

Besides Hove's *Shadows* and Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, Ndlovu's 'Torn Posters' is one other significant narrative on Gukurahundi. 'Torn Posters' is one of the short stories in Staunton's *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* (2003). In chapters 2 and 5 of this study, I highlight that *Writing Still* is one of the texts that seek to question the discourse of the Third Chimurenga by characterizing it in negative terms, dismissing its liberatory potential. I selected Chinodya's short story 'Queues' from the anthology and discussed it in chapter 5, showing that, like most texts that operate as opposition discourse to the patriotic understanding of the Third Chimurenga, in this story Chinodya tropes a different Zimbabwean history. He particularly rewrites Zimbabwean history, highlighting aspects that are often suppressed in official narratives, largely acknowledging government's faults in post-independence. Ndlovu's short story discussed here is from the same anthology and, just like Hove's *Shadows* and Vera's *The Stone Virgins*, it articulates Gukurahundi violence. Ndlovu is Ndebele and it is significant to note that 'anger' runs throughout her short story. Nyambi has termed such anger 'ethnic-induced-anger' (2013: p. 121). Ndlovu writes about Gukurahundi from the point of view of the victims. This maybe confirms Banks' argument that 'only ethnic minorities will be conscious of ethnicity' (1996: p. 122).

A child narrates the story of a family ordeal, where the father, a prominent opposition party supporter, clearly ZAPU, is arrested. The father and others he supposedly represents are victims of the Shona's 'bad' behaviour directed at brutalizing the Ndebele. There are clear ethnic divisions expressed through the 'them' and 'us' distinction in Ndlovu's construction of Gukurahundi violence. Those that belong to the 'them' category come from Mashonaland, they are bad people led by 'Him'. As Nyambi argues, 'Him' 'is a clear allusion to the then Prime Minister of Zimbabwe Robert Mugabe who is of Shona ethnic origin' (2013: p. 123). 'Us' refers to the Ndebele victims of Gukurahundi who experience the following:

> In the villages of Matabeleland entire homesteads, pots still on the fires, huts set ablaze with sleeping families inside them, mass graves in abandoned mines, mothers stripped naked and forced to

> watch their children's throats slit, elderly women beaten, raped and killed for their blankets. (p. 180)

The 'them' and 'us' distinction in a new independent nation is a sign of disunity exacerbated by ethnic differences made complex by political affiliations to ZANU and ZAPU, that are also clearly ethnic. According to Luraghi:

> The ultimate foundation of the ethnic group and the ultimate criterion for belonging is usually blood ties, members of an ethnic group normally recognise each other and members of other ethnic groups on the basis of ritual practices, speech patterns, styles of clothing and other cultural traits and in some cases physical appearance. (2008: p. 7)

But during Gukurahundi ethnic ties went beyond these blood and cultural ties to include political affiliations. Belonging to ZANU and ZAPU political parties has ethnic dimensions - it meant being Shona and Ndebele respectively.

In Ndlovu's story, the new government, made up of predominantly 'bad' Shona people, failed to ensure proper, complete and meaningful decolonization. The government has made things worse by inflicting pain on everyone that it has identified as the 'other'. As the narrator's mother tells: 'six years later the sheets and blankets still have NRR (National Rhodesian Railways) imprinted on them. It is as if this government of vultures, holding court in their Victorian robes (with white wigs) are nostalgic for the colonial era, only this time they are in the driver's seat, inflicting pain' (pp. 183-4). Ndlovu refers to how the new government has failed in liberating the nation, and has not made meaningful changes, as signified by the blankets that still have Rhodesian tags. All they have done is become the new oppressors.

The victimized Ndebele ethnic group is angry, and anger is manifested in various acts of revenge in Gugu's short story. The child-gang moves around, tearing down ZANU PF posters that are written in Shona, and mocks Shona people. The mockery is particularly directed at how they speak English with a supposedly funny heavy accent. The narrator gives an example of a Shona person speaking English with a heavy accent; '*wot grrede rr u en? Wot es yowa nem*' (p. 182). Such an accent is described as an insult to the Ndebele people (presumably better speakers of the English language). At various levels, the

short story dramatizes ethnic distinctions between the Shona and Ndebele. The Ndebele's perception of what distinguishes them from the Shonapeople includes language use, political affiliation, positions of power, and moral issues of being good and bad.

A recent publication on Gukurahundi is Mlalazi's *Running with Mother*. This text is ideologically not different from earlier critical works on Gukurahundi highlighted in this chapter, in that it voices the 'versions of the nation's history which the government has invited the Zimbabwean people to forget' (Christiansen-Bull, 2005: p. 209). He does that by narrating the silenced Gukurahundi violence, against the background that 'the full truth of those years has not been told' (Eppel, 2004: p. 47). In that context, the text is a reminder of the 'ugly history'. Remembering then becomes a strategy of confrontation with the nation's 'ugly' moments. The confrontation involves 'baring of the truth of one's history in order to exorcise the past' (Soyinka, 1999: p. 1). As Soyinka argues elsewhere, 'knowledge or information is a social virtue that carries the potential for prevention or social alertness' (1999: p. xv). The book is a 2012 publication, and this demonstrates how the memory of Gukurahundi continues to plague the nation as long as no reparations to the victims are made, and as long as the perpetrators are not identified and punished. Narrating Gukurahundi violence is done against the background that, to date, 'the state has failed to deal with the truth of the massacres of the 1980s and other forms of state repression' (Eppel, 2004: p. 43).

Just like Ndlovu, discussed above, Mlalazi is Ndebele yet, unlike Ndlovu, Mlalazi's novel transcends ethnic biases. In *Running with Mother*, Mlalazi

> tactfully constructs Rudo (the narrator) as an ethnic and cultural hybrid (being born to a Ndebele father and a Shona mother and being conversant in both ChiShona and IsiNdebele languages (as reflected in her name Rudo Jamela) to foreground a complex account of the atrocities.[62] (Nyambi, 2013: p. 124)

In addition, Mlalazi 'reflects what was previously less topical; the adverse impact of Gukurahundi on Shona People' (ibid.). Rudo is a 'product of processes of ethnic fusion and fission' what Wenskus termed 'ethnogenesis' (1961, as cited in Luraghi, 2008: p. 8). To use Bhabha's phrase, Rudo's identity is 'in-between-space' (1994: p. 1). The Shona 'element' of her identity dictates

[62] Rudo is a Shona name and Jamela is a Ndebele surname.

that she is accepted by the dominant ethnic group. This is not a personal choice but one that is dictated by the events of the moment. Since Zimbabwe is patrilineal, Rudo's identity is supposed to be Ndebele, but strangely enough Shona soldiers accept her as one of them. Here Mlalazi emphasises that Rudo's ethnic identity has to do with more than blood, and encompasses her relation to the father and mother, to their languages, to the world of foods, songs, sentiments and common knowledge acquired from both parents.

There is a way in which Rudo's ethnic identity is akin to black people born of white and black parents in the U.S. (and elsewhere). Phoenix and Owen say the following in the context of the U.S.: 'mixed parentage challenges binary black-white thinking and demonstrates some of the contestations that are constantly being waged around the terminology of race' (2005: p. 72). This statement on racialized unions illuminates an understanding of mixed parentage at ethnic levels. Pluralities of ethnicised identities like Rudo's challenge especially the conception of Shona-Ndebele binaries, with specific reference to ethnic purity. The 'Rudo Jamela' identity challenges any claims to ethnic 'metissage' (Rodríguez-García, 2006: p. 405). If the Shona ZANU dominated government has 'othered' the Ndebele ZAPU populations, what should happen then to those that 'have both feet in both camps'? (Root, 1996, as cited in Phoenix and Owen, 2005: p. 90). Of all the texts that narrate Gukurahundi, only Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* raises this question. Rudo narrates her experiences of Gukurahundi as one of the privileged victims - privileged in the sense that, though she is Ndebele, she bears a Shona name and her mother is Shona. With that dent of a Shona identity, Rudo is saved the wrath of the soldiers. As she and others run away from the soldiers, they have with them the security of the Shona mother who saves them at the end of the story. Rudo has ties with Shona people through her mother. For instance, she has ties with Uncle Ndoro who calls her '*Muzukuru*' (nephew) and calls her father '*tsano*' (brother-in-law) (p. 5).

The black-white mixed marriages referred to earlier also demonstrate the complicated issue of belonging for children born of mixed parentage. Phoenix and Owen argue that:

> In Britain and the USA the conceptual polarisation of black people and white people has historically, generally led to those of mixed parentage being included in the category now commonly called black. It is indicative of the political nature of this categorisation

> that having one white parent has never been sufficient to permit inclusion as white, but having one black parent necessarily entailed classification as black. (2005: p. 73)

The Fifth Brigade soldiers reconstruct Rudo's identity, including her into the Shona ethnic group. They ensure that she is saved from the wrath directed at the Ndebele people, even though she is born of a Ndebele father. The conversation between the soldier and the narrator in the opening scenes is quite crucial. The soldier is Shona and hence speaks to Rudo and the other girls in Shona. When the narrator replies in Shona, he asks more questions: 'You speak Shona? […] What is your name? […] Your surname? […] Why do you have a Shona name and a Ndebele surname?' (p. 6). And later on Rudo is given an opportunity to escape. The officer instructed her to 'disappear, and don't look back. This is a matter for the Ndebele people only' (p. 9). In the same manner, Rudo's mother is given an opportunity to escape. She confesses: 'When they heard me speak Shona, they told me to run away' (p. 17). Mamvura, Rudo and Gift (who is renamed Anovona) are saved on account of their Shona names, language and identities. They are later taken to the city and advised not to come back to the village or the soldiers won't be lenient on them since they are 'on a national duty and *they* don't want anything disturbing *them*, not even *their* fellow tribes people or their children' (italics my own) (p. 139). The decision to serve Mother, Rudo and the renamed-Gift is an 'ethically-based' decision.

Mother is Shona, and the other two are her children. In that context the title of the novel 'Running with Mother' can be read as descriptive of the relationship between the narrator and her mother. The mother is Rudo's source of security: 'the one person she could trust in the world besides father' (p. 18). The mother plays a significant role and assists the narrator in escaping violence. Such assistance can be read in two ways: the literal escape where the mother leads the journey from the destroyed village to the safety of the mountains and, metaphorically, the mother's Shona identity that redefines the narrator's identity and allows her to escape the wrath of the soldiers. Hilker's article on influences of mixed identities on categories and belonging for the Ibimanyi in the Hutu-Tutsi conflict is one of the few texts that discuss 'people of other 'mixed' heritage - for example, those with the same skin colour, but with parents of different nationalities or ethnic heritage' (2012: p. 231).[63]Mlalazi in *Running*

[63] Ibimanyi are Rwandans of mixed Hutu-Tutsi heritage.

*with Mother* uniquely contributes to this debate by problematizing Shona-Ndebele ethnic binary as well as Gukurahundi victim-perpetrator boundaries.

There are problems or complications associated with the idea of ethnic 'metissage' as demonstrated by Mlalazi in his novel:

1) Rudo's father, Innocent, is Ndebele and marries Mamvura, who is born and bred in Mashonaland. This couple remains a good example of integration and cooperation between the Shona and the Ndebele.
2) Mamvura marries into a Ndebele family and now stays in Saphela village which is part of Matabeleland. Ndoro comes from Mashonaland and works in Matabeleland. Such movements represent what Muchemwa elsewhere refers to as perforation suggested by mobility, and such mobility makes insisting on boundaries difficult (2013: p. 42).[64] Both Mamvura and Mr Ndoro now occupy a space that has been identified by the government as 'dissident territory', and hence they complicate what Captain Finish describes as a national duty to 'keep the country clean of weeds and trash' (p. 138). The soldiers spare Mamvura and her children but Mr Ndoro's ethnic identity does not save him: he gets mad and is one of the men that are killed by soldiers in the Phezulu Mountains. People like Mamvura however find themselves in a dilemma. They are treated with suspicion by the Ndebele people. For instance, in the Phezulu Mountains, one of the Ndebele teachers wants to attack Mamvura, arguing that 'her people are killing us', yet on the other hand Auntie defends her, indicating that Mamvura is part of her family and has killed no one. This position then demonstrates that the perpetrator of Gukurahundi violence cannot be identified on ethnic basis alone. But funnily enough Mamvura's husband is treated just like an ordinary Ndebele person, yet he married into the Shona tribe.
3) The third dimension relates to the children of mixed parentage. As demonstrated by Mlalazi, they are saved by their mother's identity.
4) Since the story is set in Matabeleland, Mlalazi could not narrate what could have happened to Ndebele women who were married to Shona men

[64] Muchemwa is referring to the city-rural boundaries in colonial Zimbabwe in particular, and he concludes that 'this perforation is suggested by the mobility and circulation of people and goods. Mobility and circulation indicate the emergent that links the country and the city. Apart from their key connection with labour, capital, and consumption, goods, as they circulate, transmute into images that reframe the borders that the nationalist imagination seeks to make impervious.' (2013: p. 42).

whilst staying in Mashonaland. In the same way, no light is shed on what could have happened to the Ndebele who perforated the ethnic-space boundaries and were working in Mashonaland.

5) In *Running with Mother*, ethnicity is clearly a dominant aspect of the Gukurahundi massacres yet emphasizing the ethnic and leaving out the political aspect of Gukurahundi is very problematic. Gukurahundi was more political than ethnic and ethnic politics was just used in an otherwise political problem. It then remains disturbing when Mlalazi embraces that position without questions.

At the beginning of Mlalazi's novel, the drama takes place in the Kezi area. Kezi is one of the districts in Matabeleland, mostly populated by the Kalanga people. 'Kalanga [...] have constantly been treated as a sub-ethnicity of the major groups in south-western Zimbabwe such as the Ndebele, Tswana and Shona' (Mazarire, 2003: p. 1). In Gukurahundi discourse, the Kalanga are normally conceived as part of the Ndebele ethnic group, in that they occupied the same space with Ndebele people. One quickly picks up signs of uneven development. The four villages of Saphela have just one secondary school: 'the school is just too far away. But like it or not, it's the only secondary school among the four villages in the Saphela area of Kezi' (p. 1). This can be read in line of the general 'complaints about the sidelining of western regions in development projects and perceived marginalization of Ndebele people in both the economy and politics by the dominant Shona groups' (Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: p. 288). The story setting shifts to the Phezulu Mountains and finally to the narrator, the mother, and Gift's way to Bulawayo. The name 'Saphela' is vital to the imagination of Gukurahundi. Saphela is a Ndebele name that means 'we are finished/we were finished'. It signifies the general outcry by Ndebele victims that Gukurahundi violence resulted in many casualties. An estimated 20,000 civilians, largely Ndebele-speaking, were killed during Gukurahundi.

Mlalazi's story takes place during Gukurahundi - the political genocide as well as the normal time of the year. Normally *gukurahundi* is a Shona word for the first rains that fall around September. The rains are named as such because they are the first rains that sweep away the chaff from the previous harvest. The word has two forms that can be analysed as follows: *gukura* (sweep away) and *hundi* (chaff). As described by the narrator:

> The first rains of the planting season are always met with excitement. When we are at home, and in better times, it is not surprising to see even the elders briefly dancing in rain, just to feel the drops fall on their skin. Children take off their clothes and run around in these first rains, letting the cool water wash their bodies. (p. 60)

The narrator demonstrates how *gukurahundi* is normally a positive development that excites people, both elders and children. Used in the context of the Matabeleland and Midlands massacres, *gukurahundi* acquires both 'positive' and negative connotations. The new government uses it to name the Fifth Brigade soldiers in a way they think is positive, for the violence is taken as some kind of a security measure to sweep away the threat of the dissidents. In the 1980s, a certain sector of the nation had been identified as 'other': the government thought that purging this 'other' was necessary for the purification of the rest of the nation. Identification of the Ndebele people as 'chaff' emanates from the fact that they are ZAPU supporters, and belong to a political party other than the dominant ZANU; and such objectification is prompted by intolerance for opponents in the political arena.

As Ndlovu-Gatsheni argues, ZANU PF used the strategy of *gukurahund*i from as early as 1979 to

> discipline those considered to be wavering. It was used as a strategy of dealing with opponents in 1979, a year that was described as *Gore regukurahundi*' […] in political terms *gukurahundi* has a revolutionary goal of destroying the white settler regime, the internal settlement puppets, the capitalist system and all other obstacles to ZANU PF's ascendancy' (2012: p. 4).

Echoed in the *gukurahundi* strategy is how some lives are conceived as disposable. Disposability of lives as 'chaff' in *gukurahundi* establishes links between Gukurahundi and Murambatsvina of 2005. Human disposability in both cases is not based on incorporating people, but on disposing of lives and driving people away, further marginalizing them. People are disposed of as 'chaff' in Gukurahundi and as 'dirty' in Murambatsvina and, in both cases, those disposed of supposedly belong to and support opposition parties: ZAPU and MDC respectively.

For the victims, the term *gukurahundi* has very negative connotations. As Rudo recalls, the first rains of the spring were something one could not easily forget:

> I will never forget the first rains of that spring. We still had not found shelter when a huge raindrop splattered on my forehead. I looked up. Dark clouds filled the whole sky. And the earth was rich with the smell of rain and wet earth.' (p. 60)

The first rains become the accomplices of the soldiers, against innocent civilians. Rudo and the remaining family members, and others from the area, are running away from the wrath of the soldiers, yet the rains disrupt their efforts to escape and add to their pain and suffering. The soldiers' wrath displaced and scattered families, and the river waters scatter people further.

In the opening scene, the narrator and a group of friends are coming from school in the afternoon, on a supposedly normal summer day. What introduces us to the atrocities of Gukurahundi is a bus approaching the girls on their route from school. It approached them like a whirlwind. The bus raised a lot of dust 'as if a giant broom was sweeping the road' (p. 3). The supposed 'sweeping' function of Gukurahundi and the concept of 'dissidents' and the Ndebele as 'chaff' are echoed here. Implicit in the 'sweeping' act is the ruthlessness of the 'soldiers with red berets' (p. 6). 'Red berets' and violence were some of the distinctive features of the Fifth Brigade soldiers (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, http://www.issafrica.org/pubs/Books/OurselvesToKnow/Ndlovu.pdf: p. 25). The girls are terrified when, in the opening scenes of the book, the red beret soldiers dangle a human hand chopped off at the wrist - not just a hand but a hand that belonged to someone they knew. The hand belonged to headman Mabhena, the father of one of the girls. Rudo's father had his upper body tied with a rope and a black sack covering his head (p. 7).

The narrator describes human beings' remains as follows: 'what we had sensed was one thing was many, a mass of human bodies, burnt together: charred limbs, bones shining white in the moonlight and defaced skulls. The smell of burnt flesh was intense', forcing the narrator to vomit (p. 27). Such images of destruction evoke emotions of sympathy, and force the reader to view the soldiers as evil, and the operation as unjust and a violation of human rights. The soldiers committed other atrocities that included the burning of the clinic and 'ordered the nurses to undress and they took them all away, naked' (p. 26).

People's homes were unsafe and, for the first time,'the open bush represented more security than the solid confines of the hut' (p. 36). Using a helicopter, soldiers dumped corpses into the Saphela Mine. The red beret soldiers also forced villagers to inflict pain on themselves, instructing them to burn their own homes and to dig mass graves for all the people shot. Neighbours are made to kill their neighbours, and men are forced to rape their neighbours' wives with their children watching. Miss Grant, a white teacher, was raped and later died, and other teachers could not burry her. Vultures fed on her body. Indications are that the girls that disappeared at the beginning of the novel were raped, for they were later found 'naked without underwear' (p. 10). Killing in *Running with Mother* is not limited to human beings but also includes the killing of dogs. Dogs are used in most homes to scare off intruders, and their destruction here symbolically implies how all security features for the victims were disturbed, thus increasing their vulnerability to all forms of abuse. Such state power over the subjects' bodies and freedom to destroy their lives represents what Agamben has described as one of the ways in which 'power-threat penetrates subjects' bodies' (1998: p. 10), emphasisingthe disposability of life.

There are two categories of masculinity in Gukurahundi narrative: hegemonic and subordinated masculinities. The two categories are distinguished from each other by their emphasis on power and domination. The Fifth Brigade soldiers as representative of hegemonic masculinity have the power to brutalize everyone who has been identified as the enemy. The enemy camp includes men, women and children. Men in the enemy camp are emasculated in various ways. They are made to destroy their own homes, and are in certain situations forced to act like women. For instance, the teachers had to put on Auntie and Mother's dresses to cover their nakedness upon joining the narrator's family in the cave. They had to sit like 'women with their feet folded underneath them, just as *women* do so as not to show *their* pants' (italics my own) (p. 127). The Fifth Brigade soldiers occupy a position of power and the emasculated men are dominated and hence represent subordinate masculinity. The subordinated males are not limited to Ndebele, some are Shona. Mr Ndoro, for example, is also brutalized by the soldiers although he is Shona.

Pain is at the centre of the lived experiences of Gukurahundi. Pain and grief are signified by wailing that pervades the novel. Wailing is a symptom of pain. The sound that comes from the wailing body expresses the emotional state of hurt. Remarkable instances of wailing include the girls' screaming at the opening of the text, Uncle Ndoro's wailing and seeming madness at the

beginning of the text, Auntie's 'maddening wails' (p. 23) upon discovering her brothers' dead bodies. The narrator also recalls: 'The wails from the village rang through the darkness as if they had always been there, like the moon and the stars, as if the whole world was wailing' (p. 26). 'Pain is often described as indescribable, as subjective experience that eludes language and communication and is explicable only by way of metaphor and analogy' (Philipose, 2007: p. 63). Close to the scenes where wailing takes place, there are laughing vultures. The presence of vultures can be read in two ways here; naturally, vultures are a feature in environments where there is meat to feed on. On a metaphoric level, vultures in the context of the story can come to be associated with the Fifth Brigade soldiers. The bestialized soldiers are 'vultures' who 'laugh', brutalise others and generate joy from their suffering.

The Saphela people are represented as innocent victims of the government soldiers' ruthlessness. The bad things that happen to them have nothing to do with what they have done wrong. Headman Mabhena gets his hand chopped off but he was 'a very important person in the village, a man who was respected, who tried crimes and meted out punishment to all those found guilty' (p. 9). Auntie also describes his brothers as good people: 'Genesis and Francis never did anything to anybody. […] they were not dissidents, just simple people looking after their families and livestock' (p. 24). As described by the narrator, Innocent 'had been a father who liked to laugh with his family, a man who was kind to other people, who had gone all the way to Chisara in Mashonaland East to pay *lobola* for his Shona bride and bring her back to his village in Matabeleland in triumph' (p. 43). Rudo's father is called Innocent and such a name is symbolic. The name intimates a condition of innocence, which is not limited to the name bearer but extends to all other victims of Gukurahundi. As individuals, the Saphela people are innocent, but, in Gukurahundi state discourse, they belong to an ethnic group and support a political party that has been isolated and described as 'the other' by the state. As Sironi and Branche state, in cases of political torture 'the collective dimension of the individual is attacked, the attachment to a group that the aggressor has designated as the target' (2000, as cited in Philipose, 2007: p. 70). In the Gukurahundi violence, the perpetrators are clearly evil and Captain Finish is symptomatic of that evil. He is

> the soldier with binoculars […] the one who ordered the killing of Uncle Genesis and Francis […] he is the one who took away

> Rudo's father, […] he is the one we met on the way from the school […] the one who ordered the nurses to strip naked before he took them away in the army truck. […] So he has come to finish us all off. (p. 77)

He played a significant role in murdering, traumatizing and raping civilians, and is thus clearly identifiable. His name symbolically alludes to an attempt at wiping out an ethnic group. The captain's name is related to Saphela which is a Ndebele name meaning 'we perished/we are perishing'. Mlalazi could be right in identifying 'Captain Finish' and what he represents as the epitome of the victimizer, yet it is a fact that:

> Many parties were at least partly culpable in the unfolding of events [...]. These include ZANU-PF, those ex-ZIPRAs and others who became dissidents, those remnants of Rhodesian state agencies, which sought to disrupt unity and South African agents who both actively disseminated misinformation and who also trained and equipped dissidents. (CCJPZ, 1997: p. 16)

Victimizers were many players as shown in the CCJPZ report cited above.

The concept of 'running' referred to in the title can be read in various ways. On one level, reading through the text is some kind of journey undertaken by the reader and, going through the text, the reader reads the violence of Gukurahundi. On another level, 'running' refers to the narrator's journey as she, and others around her, experience Gukurahundi. Rudo travels with her mother, aunt and the boy Gift. Journeying in this context foregrounds displacement, with people forced to leave the only places they have known as home.

In Mlalazi's text, the helicopter is as menacing as the river waters, and the soldiers. It 'came *with* the incongruous rhumba music' and hovered like 'an ugly looking beast in army colours' (p. 74). The music that accompanies the operations ironically presupposes celebration and joy. The militaristic nature of the violence is captured in the use of the helicopter to hunt down the Saphela people and in the army colours of the helicopter. This is rather an ironic 'war' situation, where the civilians are the enemy and are hunted down with heavy machinery, yet at the same time the supposed enemy is not armed in any way. The soldiers constantly urge people to go back into captivity at Mbongolo Primary school: 'go back to Mbongolo Primary school and we will forgive you'

(p. 65). Mbongolo Primary school is some kind of a prison, where people are held in captivity with promises of being forgiven for having committed unstated crimes. Forgiving and forgiveness have 'distorted meanings' in Zimbabwean politics (Muchemwa, 2011: p. 396). Muchemwa particularly demonstrates this distortion by referring to Chikwava's *Harare North* where the narrator recalls how Comrade Mhiripiri would state that 'for traitors, punishment is the best form of forgiveness' (2009: p. 9). Mbongolo School is reminiscent of the 'Balagwe Camp in the Matobo District (and other camps elsewhere). Here thousands were killed and their bodies thrown down mine shafts' (Eppel, 2004: p. 45). Balagwe Camp reminds people of the colonial Protected Villages that were run by Rhodesian defence forces and were aimed at stopping civilians from offering assistance to freedom fighters (CCJPZ, 1997: p. 12). In both cases, the enforced captivity represents some form of organized state violence. In the context of the novel, the promise of forgiveness is empty after all: the Saphela people are called back to captivity for punishment.

Rudo and company run away from the wrath of the soldiers and find safety in the Phezulu Mountains. These mountains were used during the liberation war by freedom fighters. Rudo and company felt that: 'Just as *the mountains* had given freedom fighters protection during the long years of the struggle, this time *they* hoped that they would give *them* protection from the soldiers ravaging the villagers' (italics my own) (p. 67). Mlalazi here compels the reader to compare the liberation struggle to Gukurahundi not only in relation to the use of the Phezulu Mountains as a hiding place. As Eppel argues, 'compared to the violence of the liberation war the 1980s was far worse' (p. 46). 'The liberation war was painful, but it had a purpose […] the war that followed was much worse. It was fearful, unforgettable and unacknowledged (CCJP and CRF, 1994, as cited in Eppel, 2004: p. 46).

When the teachers insisted on joining the narrator and her company in the cave, Mother was not comfortable for fear of victimisation. Mother's fears were confirmed when the teachers forced them out of the cave. Mkandla, who is later killed together with Uncle Ndoro, points a finger at mother and says: 'her people are killing our people with the permission of the Prime Minister […] she must leave this cave at once' (p. 132). He picks up a stick and threatens to kill Mother with it: 'What I said is that I do not want a Shona person anywhere near me ever again' (p. 133). Such anger manifests itself in various other forms in Ndlovu's 'Torn Posters'. Auntie exonerates Mother: 'she has no part in any of it, this is my brother's wife and she is my family' (p. 132). One of the teachers,

Ndlovu, also helps in making a distinction between the enemy and the rest of the Shona ethnic group. He argues: 'It's not the Shona people doing this […]. It's the soldiers who are doing it' (p. 132). In other words, the soldiers should be accountable for their evil deeds. The narrator adds her voice and concludes that it is not just about the Shona and Ndebele; mother is Shona but not a killer, and gives life to Gift. This is an urge for ethnic reconciliation, yet a point of reference missing in most works on Gukurahundi. Instances of reconciliation of ethnic groups and different social classes are expressed when the narrator refers to how the school 'even had a white person in the school though during the war we were fighting against whites. And Mr Mkandla wrote letters to Auntie, an uneducated village woman' (p. 83). Uncle Genesis married Madube, a Xhosa woman. Marriage then affords individuals to cross ethnic divisions.

Mlalazi goes beyond the ethnic hostilities and demonstrates in *Running with Mother* that ethnic relations are complex and can be redefined. At the beginning of the story, the Shona-speaking people are dismissed as rat-eaters. Auntie dismisses mother and the narrator as 'rat-eating people' and the father too (p. 25). Rudo's father adjusts and accommodates his wife. Out of the interactive process of living together in diversity as husband and wife, he gets to a point when he understands that there is nothing wrong with eating a rat. His rat eating is symbolic of the argument that 'ethnic imperatives' are not absolute (Luraghi, 2008: p. 8). In other words food prejudices do not have logical basis. Innocent (Rudo's father), deals with the stated ethnic prejudice through his marriage to a Shona wife, which, like all other marriages across ethnic groups, is an 'indicator of integration and/or assimilation' (Rodríguez-García, 2006: p. 405). Hilker highlights this as a history of cooperation between ethnic groups that normally extends 'into the realm of friendship and intermarriage' (2012: p. 229).

Rudo's mother is Shona but she is not a killer like the Fifth Brigade soldiers. On the other hand, Auntie's initial refusal to eat rats is just a symbolic act of loyalty to ethnic identity, otherwise she (and this extends to other Ndebele people) knows that a rat is food but she would not eat it for fear of metaphorically 'becoming' Shona. The issue of eating rat or not eating rat indicates artificial human differences that are manipulated for purposes of othering. Auntie's feelings however transform as the story progresses. Later on Auntie eats a mouse, and understands that 'there is nothing wrong with mouse meat' (p. 108). This could be the future of ethnic relations. Mamvura envisions the future of peaceful ethnic interaction as follows:

> I am scared […] about what's happening. This country is for everyone: the Shona and the Ndebele, Kalanga, Venda, Tonga, Suthu and all the other tribes that live within our borders, even the whites, the Indians, the Chinese, coloureds, everybody. Isn't this why we went to war. (p. 108)

Mother advocates unity of different people from different ethnic grounds. Mlalazi, through Mamvura redefines Zimbabwean citizenship. Most importantly, in Mlalazi's narrative, there is a possibility of human contact that bypasses ethnic differences: 'Maybe seeing Auntie sitting beside Uncle Ndoro as if she was a servant serving him, and the images of her eating the mouse, something she had been against for so long, might have prompted it' (p. 117).

Yet, in reality, after 'the Matabeleland genocide […] tensions between members of the two largest language groups Shona and Ndebele, have persisted in Zimbabwe' (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 18). There is an urgent call in Mlalazi's text for the need to collapse the space-tribe rigidities, which Luraghi terms ethnic 'territorial boundaries' exemplified by such names as Mashonaland and Matabeleland (2008: p. 8). In modern Zimbabwe overemphasising such space ethnic boundaries remains problematic: people are free to move and settle wherever they want and people who are not Shona/Ndebele or any other ethnic group for that matter occupy space politically designated for specific tribes.

Rudo, Mother and Auntie cannot understand the violence round them. Aunt initially thinks the headman would have more information on what is happening to their village but is later informed that the headman was probably dead. Before they start their journey, Auntie, Mother and the narrator switch on the supersonic transistor radio hoping that 'there will be something […] on the news' (p. 30). As the narrator recalls:

> The newsreader, [...] first began with the news that the Prime Minister was on a state visit to the United Kingdom, where he was going to be given an honorary degree by the University of Edinburgh. She then went on to report that O' Level results had been better this year than last, and that we were well on our well to having the highest literacy rate in Africa. More news followed about an invasion of locusts in Matabeleland North, and new

> government houses built in Gwelo. […] and then the news in Shona ended. (pp. 34-5)

Repeated again in Ndebele the news was the same. Emphasis on petty issues remains an evasion of serious issues. Government control of information during Gukurahundi included 'silencing all points of view that deviate from official versions of events' (Eppel, 2004: p. 49). Victims cannot find an archive with their narratives, and this demonstrates a lack of recognition of such narratives in state narratives. State-controlled media was significantly silent about Gukurahundi as demonstrated by Eppel in the following proposition: 'Reading archives of the state media of the 1980s is a surreal experience; in Bulawayo, while thousands were being massacred a few kilometres away, the *Chronicle* was almost silent, blaming dissidents for what little violence was acknowledged' (ibid.). This is what writers subvert.

The trend so far is that black writers re-writing Gukurahundi violence do it from different standpoints. They write differently on the same facts around the historical truth of Gukurahundi, as is shown by the movement from Hove, to Vera, to Gugu and Mlalazi's narratives.

**White Writers' Narrations of Gukurahundi**

White Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean writers also articulate the Gukurahundi violence. It is significant to point out from the onset that scholarship on Africa by non-Africans has always been treated with suspicion. This is largely so because 'speaking rationally about Africa is not something that has ever come naturally -*with* absolute otherness as a central notion' (italics my own) (Mbembe, 2001: 1). One of the most significant contributions is Godwin's *Mukiwa: A White Boy in Africa*, an autobiography published in 1996. Godwin is a white Zimbabwean described by Wylie as 'the peripatetic Godwin now living in New York' (2007: p. 160). Godwin has also published two memoirs, *When a Crocodile Eats the Sun*: *A Memoir of Africa* (2008) and *The Fear: Robert Mugabe and the Martyrdom of Zimbabwe*. These two memoirs are set in Zimbabwe and represent eyewitnesses' accounts of the 2008 harmonised election violence. Godwin's articulation of Gukurahundi in his autobiography provoked a range of critical responses. Godwin's work has largely been regarded as part of a colonialist discourse on Africa and hence has been dismissed as misrepresenting African realities. Godwin only refers to the Gukurahundi violence in the last part of his autobiography. As he witnesses the

massacres, Godwin 'wondered briefly whether Chief Maduna's ancestral spirits were going to strike down another white man before he could bear witness' (p. 418). As Chennels asks: 'Does another white man bearing witness suggests that the function of the texts like Mukiwa is to testify to the Matabeleland massacres? Or is the Gukurahundi a metonymy for Africa's savagery that once again has escaped the control of rational Europe and it is that savagery to which Godwin's story bear witness?' (2005: pp. 141-2). Chennels implies that white writers cannot be appreciated outside the colonial ideology. Such interpretations of texts written by whites are efforts directed at silencing some sections of postcolonial Zimbabwe based on race. Other critics however read such texts positively. Muchemwa reads the same text alongside Vera's *The Stone Virgins* and notes that the last part of Godwin's autobiography 'shares the same setting and uses the same stories of horror of the civil war in Southern Matabeleland' (2005: p. 200). Muchemwa also argues that Godwin's 'return to the locations of specific historical crimes - the killing of the civilians in Matabeleland - is also an imaginative return to a past *which* though under siege can be retrieved' (2005: p. 199). The Antelope Mineshaft that Godwin refers to in his autobiography is a site of crime. Here people 'die without proper burial, without dignity, unremembered' (Muchemwa, 2005: p. 200). Wylie argues that Godwin's 'Mukiwa reaches a gritty persuasiveness in its last section where Godwin [...] braves Gukurahundi reportage that could be fruitfully levelled against the only novel so far to deal richly with that shameful episode' (2007: p. 160). It is significant to note that even if Godwin's book could have been the second literary work (after Hove) to portray Gukurahundi, it was simply dismissed as 'white writing', addressing 'European rather than African audiences' (Pilossof, 2009: p. 622), and hence conceived as a continuation of a colonial discourse.

One other white writer who also adds his voice to narrating the Gukurahundi violence is Kilgore, and he does that in his first publication *Weare All Zimbabweans Now* (2009). Kilgore is an American who writes the Zimbabwean story as an outsider. The title of the novel is extracted from Robert Mugabe's speech on reconciliation on attaining independence in 1980. Echoed in the words 'we are now all Zimbabweans' is racial reconciliation. As Barnes argues 'reconciliation refers to race relations [...] relations between indigenous groups are referred to with a somewhat different vocabulary' (2004: p. 141). The term used to describe relations between indigenous groups is unity. Kilgore uses such a title, yet his story is not so much about race relations as it is about

relations between indigenous Zimbabweans, particularly Shona-Ndebele ethnic relations during the Gukurahundi violence.

His novel is about an American student, Ben Dabney, who travels to Zimbabwe to carry out research on Zimbabwean history as part of his PhD studies. Kilgore depends on an outsider to tell the Zimbabwean history. This narrative strategy is similar to the recent trend in Hollywood construction of twenty-first century Africa, which, as Evans and Glenn argue, 'depends on white protagonists' (2010: p. 15).[65] Initially Ben admires the fictionalised real-life figure Robert Mugabe for his reconciliatory speech and political stance on Zimbabwe's attainment of independence. In the course of his research, Ben's opinion of Robert Mugabe changes. The shift is prompted by what he accidentally finds during his research. As he struggles to get facts surrounding the death of a prominent political figure, Tichasara, the narrator gets a glimpse of the Gukurahundi violence.[66] To emphasize the significance of such a discovery, some kind of epigraph titled 'Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, 1983' opens the novel/story. An important point of the discovery is when the narrator fails to sell the story to outsiders, even through the BBC. Ben learns that government-controlled newspapers only carry the stories of dissident actions, and do not refer to the violence inflicted on innocent civilians by Fifth Brigade soldiers. Such evasion of truth is dramatized when top government officials demonstrate their hatred of one of the ex-combatants for telling the truth. Comrade Chokie, short for *Chokwadi*, meaning 'truth', is hated for telling the truth. Truth concealment is enforced on the basis that, as expressed by one of the ZANU members, 'Zanu's dirty laundry must not be washed in public' (p. 88). Gukurahundi then is conceived as part of the dirty laundry that ZANU would want to keep concealed. In response to the BBC story on Gukurahundi violence, the Ministry of Information spokesperson condemns 'western journalists who are fabricating atrocities on the part of the Zimbabwean Army […] the only atrocities perpetrated in this region are carried out by the apartheid government and their agents which include the Renamo and dissidents known as Zapu in

[65] A good example is the movie *The Last King of Scotland*, which is a re-interpretation of Ugandan Idi Amin's despotic rule with Dr Nicholas Garrigan (James McAvoy), as 'the central white focalizer in the film' (Evans and Glen 2010: p. 15).

[66] Tichasara's death alludes to the historical death of Tongogara (a prominent political figure) on the eve of independence in a suspicious road accident. The two names Tichasara and Tongogara are Shona and have closely related meanings: Tongogara means 'we will stay' and Tichasara means 'we will stay behind'. So the use of Tichasara in the narrative is a clever evasion of the use of the historical name Tongogara.

Zimbabwe' (p. 155). From the state's point of view, the only acknowledged violence comes from the South African apartheid government, the Renamo and dissidents, and not from government soldiers.

The fictionalised Robert Mugabe also denies Gukurahundi history in an interview with the narrator. Responding to questions on Matabeleland violence, the President says: 'I don't see that this has anything to do with the history that you are researching. We have nothing to hide, but I wouldn't expect to read about our dissident problem in a history book' (p. 260). Hatred of truth presupposes a telling of lies and one of the lies told by the fictionalised Robert Mugabe is that Matabeleland violence has no place in narratives of national history. The President comfortably talks about Zimbabwean history, emphasizing in particular colonial dominance and the liberation role. When Robert Mugabe finally talks about Gukurahundi he blames everyone else except the government. The West and its press (particularly the BBC), South Africa and the Boers, and super ZAPU are the culprits; anything the state does is in defence of its sovereignty.

The ZANU slogan '*pasi nemadissidents*!' - down with dissidents' - echoes the primary action of Gukurahundi, that of removing the 'chaff' through the killing of ZAPU supporters. From Kilgore's narrative, the 'fifth brigade […] North Korean trained […] All Shonas' (p. 147) are the culprits in the Gukurahundi violence. Kilgore does not problematize such an opinion. Not all Shona people were recruited into the Fifth Brigade and there is no way they could all be responsible for the violence. The supposed killing of Tichasara and the violence of Gukurahundi are evoked in this novel as examples of the faults of the new Zimbabwean government in the early years of independence. It is significant to note that Kilgore's narrative reads more as history than as fiction. The differences between history and fiction in this text are hard to define. For instance Kilgore uses names of historical persons. Robert Mugabe is a major character in the text, and his speeches are rehearsed and taken from historical sources.

**Gukurahundi Debates in Non-Fiction**

In this section, I highlight responses and challenges to opinions on Gukurahundi in non-fiction. I specifically discuss responses to *Running with Mother* by *The Patriot*, Ndlovu and Dube's responses to Vambe's article on Gukurahundi and comments on Viomax's Gukurahundi song posted on YouTube. *The Patriot* is one of the 'pro-Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU PF)' newspapers

(Ndlovu and Dube, 2014: p. 4). Part of a *Running with Mother* review had the following to say:

> The book that Weaver Press describes as a 'short, but powerful novel' is a narration of horrors committed by Government soldiers. Last year, *The Patriot* published a consolidated 64-page police report of the atrocities that the dissidents perpetrated on the population in Matabeleland, Midlands and Mashonaland West between 1981 and 1987. Information about events of the time show that soldiers went in to assist the police to contain the atrocities. But in *Running with Mother* villagers were more afraid of Government security forces and atrocities were committed by soldiers on a 'mission' to 'wipe out the Ndebeles'. Evidently, the book is another offering with a heavy Rhodesian influence. Rhodesians having realized that they cannot overtly fight and 'regain' what they feel they 'lost' have resorted to mechanisms that create animosity between the people of Zimbabwe.[67]

Reference to the role played by dissidents in this review is made as a challenge to the position taken by Mlalazi in *Running with Mother* on dissidents and what they did during Gukurahundi. Mlalazi emphasises soldiers' brutality while *The Patriot* struggles to justify the killings as aimed at dealing with the dissidents. What is clear is that in both narratives, the novel and the review, there are deliberate exclusions in recalling what happened in the past. The reviewer takes a defensive stance on the role played by the soldiers during Gukurahundi, and the review can be read in the context of the government's denial of the atrocities. In the review, *Running with Mother* is dismissed as a colonialist text influenced by 'Rhodesians' who lost land in the Third Chimurenga. Read in the context of the Third Chimurenga, *Running with Mother* functions as what Soyinka, elsewhere, termed 'the role of memory, of ancient precedents of

[67] The review appeared on a weblink that is now broken: http://thepatriot.co.zw/index.php?option=com_contentandview=articleandid=1211:weaver-press-oh-weaverandcatid=6:analysisandItemid=39. Mlalazi had copied it and pasted it on http://www.umthwakazireview.com/index.php/culture/item/581-running-with-mother-gukurahundi-novel-by-mr-mlalazi (accessed 26 May 2014).

current criminality obviously governs […] responses to the immediate and often more savage insults on our humanity' (1999: p. xxv). The link established between Mlalazi and Rhodesians is a strange way of re-invoking colonialist injustice in the context of Gukurahundi. The link is established to force people to always comprehend the white man as 'the' enemy and ignore the local 'enemy'. The reviewer describes Mlalazi as a sell-out:

> Mlalazi is currently hopping from one Western capital, of our former colonisers, to the next. They are feting him because he is spewing out the kind of story that they used to colonise us: to 'stop the Africans from exterminating each other'. The writer may proffer all sorts of argument for his work, but as he is hosted in Europe he must never forget that there is more that unites us as Zimbabweans, as Shonas and Ndebeles than divides us. Seeds sown to cause disharmony among Africans by whites using surrogate blacks might germinate, but will not grow.[68]

*The Patriot* reporter is influenced by the ZANU PF party ideology that defines 'any critique against the ruling party and/or government as neo-imperialist' (McGreal, 2002, as cited in Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 5). In this case, Mlalazi's book about a historical event is viewed as an anti-white discourse of the Third Chimurenga. A version of history that forces the nation to remember the wrongs against its own are dismissed in this newspaper and in ZANU PF's rhetoric on the nation as 'anti-national […] and the ethnic antagonisms are represented as neo-colonial manipulations […] and as the work of the outside forces' (Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 57). The review reflects ZANU PF's position on remembering and forgetting some aspects of history, especially in the post-unity period that insists that any reliving of such 'ugly' historical moments is premised on subverting the government. What we read in the review is not different from Robert Mugabe's response to the CCJP report on Gukurahundi. Like *The Patriot* reporter who views Mlalazi's novel as influenced by 'Rhodesians', Robert Mugabe dismissed the bishops who compiled the CCJP report as 'sanctimonious prelates who were influenced by international gallery' (Meredith, 2002, as cited in Christiansen-Bull, 2004: p. 86). So, for Robert Mugabe, ZANU PF and anyone operating within the same ideological parameters, 'anyone who aired ugly history were dismissed as

[68] See the previous footnote.

agents of the external enemy, because true Zimbabweans were said to be able to distinguish real differences from historical divisions that were overcome by the unity accord' (Christiansen-Bull, 2005: p. 209). The review that I quoted above is political and not literary, where the reviewer is playing puppet to ZANU PF, and trying to relive and rehearse its responses to Gukurahundi. The reviewer's argument that 'Rhodesians' influence Mlalazi remains very much archaic. Such a position represents an evasion of truth where most failed African states would blame others for their failure except themselves. This is thetwenty-first century and Rhodesians are long dead, symbolically as well as literally.

The reviewer states:'As we celebrate silver jubilee of the signing of the Unity Accord one is best reminded that the book is a typical example of the employment of the divide-and-rule strategy. Here is a book produced to fan the tensions between the Shonas and Ndebeles'. The reviewer's understanding of unity in Zimbabwean history is narrow. He forgets that national unity 'collapsed in 1982' (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008: p. 44). As Christiansen-Bull argues, 'unity was installed as the sign by which memories of the violent past could be turned into an obligation to forget' (2005: p. 209). The kind of unity encoded in the Zimbabwe Unity Accord of 1987 should have been preceded by exposition of truth, since 'Truth as prelude to Reconciliation seems logical enough' (Soyinka, 1999, p. xix). *The Patriot'*s effort should be understood as a government effort to 'silence any talk about ethnicity under the political rhetoric of a united Zimbabwe' (Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007: p. 282).

Another significant dialogue to note is one between Vambe and Ndlovu and Dube. All three are academics and their engagement is expressed in the form of academic articles. Vambe published an article on Gukurahundi entitled 'Zimbabwe's Genocide: Voices and Perceptions from Ordinary People in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces, 30 Years On' (2012). His article sought to 'ascertain whether or not there have been marked changes in the perceptions of the people of Matabeleland and the Midlands regarding the legacy of Gukurahundi' (2012: p. 283). Ndlovu and Dube respond to Vambe's article in 'Response to Maurice T. Vambe's "Zimbabwe's Genocide: Voices and Perceptions from Ordinary People in Matabeleland and the Midlands Provinces, 30 Years On"' (2014). They argue that Macaphulana's description of Vambe's article as a 'scholarship of grudge' (2014: p. 1) influences their response. Vambe is Shona and Macaphulana is Ndebele, and he understands Vambe's 'grudge' to be an ethnic one. Ndlovu and Dube demonstrate that they have problems with Vambe's article. The first problem has to do with Vambe's

methodological and theoretical approaches - where he claims to have used qualitative and quantitative methodologies, yet his findings do not demonstrate that he used these. They also have ideological, ethical and moral concerns and agree that the article resembles a 'romanticised and elitist view of what (Vambe) calls ordinary people's views' (2014: p. 5). Ndlovu and Dube conclude that Vambe's article 'seems to accept without question the state narrative of events of what happened in the early 1980s in Zimbabwe' (2014: p. 6). They illustrate their point by quoting the following statement made by Vambe in his article:

> The ZIPRA deserters who were described as dissidents took their arms with them and often used these to terrorise ordinary people, and to abduct foreign tourists. The dissidents also caused general mayhem to government projects. In response, the government trained and sent the Fifth Brigade in parts of Matabeleland and the Midlands to flash out dissidents. (2012: p. 282)

If Vambe had written an article on a different subject, the article was going to escape the scrutiny it attracted. Gukurahundi remains a sensitive issue in Zimbabwe and the ethnic anger is discernible each time people engage in dialogue about what really happened. Vambe wrote his article as an 'outsider'. In this context Oster's argument makes sense: 'if (one) has never had the experience of being in a group that has been discriminated against or persecuted, one cannot possibly understand how sensitive those groups can be' (2003: p. 15). I would also demonstrate this point by quoting responses to Viomax's Gukurahundi 2009 Shona song.[69] The video of the song was posted on YouTube

[69] *Zvakatanga nemadviti vakatora tsvarakadenga* (it started with the Ndebele who raided Shona beautiful women)
*ZIPRA yakauraya mashona akapera* (ZIPRA killed all Shona people)
*Zvakauya navaMugabe vakatora zvombo zvehondo* (Mugabe started it by taking war tools)
*ZANLA yakauraya mandevere akapera* (ZANLA killed all Ndebele people)
*Zvakatanga naLobengula wakatora tsvarakadenga* (it started with Lobengula who took Shona beautiful women)
*Mandevere akauraya mashona akapera* (Ndebele killed all Shona people)
*Zvakauya navaMugabe vakauraya Matabeleland* (Mugabe started it by killing Matabeleland)
*Mashona akauraya mandevere akapera* (Shona people killed all Ndebeles)
*Madviti Masvina Garisanai* (Ndebele and Shona live peacefully)
*Mashona Idyai Macimbi* (Shonas should eat what is popularly known as Ndebele food (macimbi))
*Mandevere idyai mbeva* (Ndebeles should eat what is popularised as Shona food (rats))

and people shared their thoughts through comments. For those who posted their comments, anonymity was ensured using pseudonyms. Below are some of the comments:

> **Nhlonipho Gatyeni**: why wasn't this banned, this is uncalled for when we are calling for peace, someone just goes Ludacris
> **Thulani Nkomo**: golo likanyoko olbhotshela imini lebusuku lizaphela nge AIDS maswina othuvi zinjandini migodoyi alilaplan ngaphandle kobusela.[70]
> **Buqhawe Msimanga**: This idiot needs to be admitted in a lunatic center and kept there for life. Then she calls herself a freedom fighter, bitch please keep your deluded ideas to yourself.
> **Vusumuzi Masuku**: wena msatha nyoko!!!!!!!!!!!!!
> **Ronald Zolas Mazorodze**:*haagone kuimba*, 2ndly, she is planting tribal hatred muZim medu. to hell with you viomak and whoever posted this demonic work
> **Nobhutshuzwayo**: you ma'am, are a complete moron
> **Masende**: VioMak, you are a misguided and obviously uncooked sorry excuse of a musician. Even my Shona friends think this is highly unpalatable and inaccurate misrepresentation of facts about history. You can lick Mugabe's geriatric arse shiny clean but you are going to be here for a very long time. You are just an attention seeking idiot - Well, you hv got it now and we've got you in our cross-hairs.[71]

The affective anger that runs through the comments is because Viomax's memory of Gukurahundi is viewed as unacceptable. The people who comment are hostile to what they see as an inaccurate construction of Gukurahundi history. It is significant to note that Viomax has been attacked for using the ethnophaulisms *Madviti* and *Masvina* to refer to Ndebele and Shona people respectively in her song. She is also attacked for constructing Lobengula Joshua Nkomo as similar to Robert Mugabe. Such a construction means placing

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*Madviti*, *Mashona* Unite (Ndebele and Shona Unite)
*Zvakatanga naUmdala akacherera gidi mujecha* (Joshua Nkomo started it when he hid guns) (Viomax *Gukurahundi* (2009) (Album: Zimbabwe is Mine).

[70] These are insults directed to all Shona people and can be translated as follows: 'Your mother's vagina that is a toilet day and night, you will die of AIDS masvina, dogs who know nothing but stealing'.

[71] http//www.youtube.com/watch?v=FFqHDGdPI0U (accessed 26 May 2014).

Gukurahundi on the same footing with Lobengula's Shona raids and dissident acts. In that context, Viomax's song sounded like a justification of Gukurahundi.

A closer look at a review of *Running with Mother* by a reporter of *The Patriot*, a response to Vambe's article by Ndlovu and Dube, and responses to Viomax's Gukurahundi song, show that writers and critics alike are influenced by ideologies, dominant or non-dominant. Vambe, who has been dismissed as a ZANU PF apologist, argues that

> The debates on Matabeleland and the Midlands disturbances that are being carried out in learned articles in the weekly, *The Patriot*, are important because they reveal a side of the story that only those former dissidents who share their experiences in *The Patriot* can offer. (2012: p. 297).

Here Vambe's support of *The Patriot* ideology is a clear testimony that he is a state apologist for Gukurahundi violence, because the newspaper is pro-ZANU PF. The debates here demonstrate that there are versions on Gukurahundi history with different authors emphasising different aspects. Major emphases are put on the atrocities from the government, dissidents' actions and victims' experiences.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I demonstrated that there are different versions of the Gukurahundi violence, from different writers. In all the narratives, one thing stands out: the writers are aware of the fluidity between history and fiction and each of the works discussed here is a unique interpretation and reflection of that aspect of Zimbabwean history. Each text represents a contesting of reality as narrated by the government. Significant to note is that Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* broadens our understanding of victims of Gukurahundi and shows how Gukurahundi was not simply an affair between the Shona and the Ndebele. In cases where people marry across tribes, it remains difficult to insist on pure ethnic identities. Ethnicity then remains what politicians use as a divide and rule strategy. As pointed out by Barth and Wenskus,'ethnicity is often an instrument used by leaders or elites to mobilise larger groups of people towards specific goals' (1994, as cited in Luraghi, 2008: p. 9).

In Gukurahundi narratives, the Shona in general are implicated as perpetrators, yet accusing the Shona people in general is very problematic, for the ordinary Shona person did not do anything bad to anyone during the Gukurahundi violence. There was no ordinary confrontation between ethnic groups: the government just decided to go out to kill an ethnic group for political reasons. Collective responsibility leaves no room for individual judgment, yet individuals committed the crimes, and these should be held accountable.

Scholarship on the Gukurahundi violence is characterized by serious obliterations: Matabeleland goes beyond Ndebele people in terms of ethnic groups that occupy this space. This is an example of a counter-discourse, where 'the assumption that there exists one essential victim suppresses internal power divisions, since the site of counter discourse is itself contested terrain (White, 1990: p. 82). Imagining the Ndebele as the only victims silences other ethnicities in Matabeleland, like the Kalanga and the Venda. The obliterations referred to can be traced back to colonial administration. As highlighted by Muzondidya and Ndlovu-Gatsheni,'the colonial Rhodesian state divided the country into ethnicized administrative units: Mashonaland for Zezuru-speaking Shonas, and Ndebele-speaking groups […] many groups, especially those speaking minority languages were lumped into these ethnicized administrative units and their alternative identities ignored' (2007: p. 278). It is surprising that thirty-four years into independence scholars continue to construct Zimbabwean ethnic groups and space in ways that ignore and obliterate other ethnicities. It is not correct to say that Mashonaland equals Shona and Matabeleland is Ndebele. Other ethnic groups occupy these spaces and are submerged in such provincial names as Mashonaland and Matabeleland. Ethnic boundaries are not easy to draw.

As indicated in the above discussion, the black-white distinction of writers' identity in the postcolony is one of the various ways of silencing certain groups from commenting on national faults. Such a binary categorization has roots in the theory of deliberate isolation of those that are deemed politically wrong. This can be discerned in the way whites have been dismissed from participating in the public sphere and have been defined as aliens. Yet, in the discussion above, I have noted that 'white' writers who have been dismissed as writing to the European reader, have narrated the Gukurahundi violence in ways that are different from black writers considered here.

Discernible in the last section of the chapter is how the debate on Gukurahundi continues, yet remains ethnicized. Writers and critics alike either sympathize and speak on behalf of the Gukurahundi victims and show 'enlightened compassion' (Spivak, 1988: p. 140) or are the perpetrators' apologists. Lastly, the Ndebele have a term *insewula* for the first rains termed *gukurahundi* by the Shona. However, the Gukurahundi violence was never referred to as *Insewula*. The historic moment cannot come to be associated with the Ndebele term - this term cannot capture the ideological and political implications of the violence. In the following chapter, I will focus on subversion of 'patriotic history' in a selection of texts.