

OPERATION GUKURAHUNDI: A POLICY OF GENOCIDAL RAPE AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN ZIMBABWE 1983–1984

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Abstract: The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda’s historic judgment in the *Akayesu Judgment* established that rape and other forms of sexual violence can be an *actus reus* of genocide as defined by the United Nations Convention on Genocide Article II. The *Akayesu Judgment* therefore provides a logical framework to analyze a hidden episode of extreme post-colonial state violence in the newly independent Zimbabwe, namely a state policy of mass atrocities in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands, targeting the minority Ndebele ethnic group during *Operation Gukurahundi*. The specific foci of this study are the patterns of mass rape and sexual violence in the military operation between 1983 and 1984 in Matabeleland. Drawing on 36 in-depth interviews with survivors from throughout Matabeleland, this study provides a critical new lens on *Operation Gukurahundi* through its identification of uniform systematic patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence across Matabeleland. The article concludes that the patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence identified in this study are indicative of a state policy of systematic genocidal rape between 1983 and 1984, deployed with the intent and effect to destroy, in part, a specific ethnic group, namely the minority Ndebele of Zimbabwe, thereby fulfilling every condition of the Genocide Convention principles of genocide.

Keywords: state crime; genocide; rape; sexual violence; Zimbabwe; Gukurahundi

“Never again” becomes more than a slogan: It’s a prayer, a promise, a vow. There will never again be hatred, people say. Never again jail and torture. Never again the suffering of innocent people, or the shooting of starving, frightened, terrified children. And never again the glorification of base, ugly, dark violence. It’s a prayer. (Wiesel 2012: 77)

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The Most Efficient and Grave Way of Inflicting Injury and Harm

Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (United Nations 1948, UNGC) [hereafter Genocide Convention] defines genocide as meaning specific acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group and includes deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group.

The Genocide Convention does not explicitly enumerate rape as one of the listed acts of genocide; however, the judgement of *Prosecutor v. Jean-Paul Akayesu* at the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR), established in 1994 by the United Nations to prosecute those allegedly responsible for crimes of genocide and other gross violations of human rights in Rwanda, reached the unprecedented conclusion that rape can be an act of genocide (Akayesu 1998). The ICTR recognized how rape and sexual violence functioned to destroy the minority Tutsi group of Rwanda and noted the intersectionality of the crime of genocidal rape and how genocidal rape during the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda targeted certain women because of their ethnicity (ibid.). The *Akayesu Judgment* was pivotal in advancing the discourse around rape as an act of genocide (see, for example, Mackinnon 1994; Allen 1996; Sharlach 2000; Reid-Cunningham 2008; De Brouwer & Chu 2009; Bergoffen 2012; Smith 2013; Di Caro 2019).

The *Akayesu Judgment* also determined that although the act of genocidal rape by the Hutu genocidaires was to destroy a particular group, the outcome of the act was the infliction of serious injury and harm (Akayesu 1998: 731). Furthermore, the ICTR acknowledged that, although “the group” is of principle concern to the crime of genocide, genocidal rape is one of the worst ways of inflicting harm and injury on an individual member of that group and that genocidal rape was conceivably the most efficient and grave way of inflicting injury and harm on individual Tutsi women, thereby advancing the destruction of the whole Tutsi group (Russell-Brown 2003: 352). The definition of rape and the findings of the *Akayesu Judgment* established that rape can be an *actus reus* of genocide, whereby rape was not perceived to be sexual in nature but rather as a weapon of state harm, a violent act perpetrated against a member of a group with the intent of destroying that group. The ICTR Trial Chamber also affirmed in its substantive legal findings that rape might constitute genocide as deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part (ibid.: 505–506) and as imposing measures intended to prevent birth within the group (ibid.: 507).

The Rwandan genocide must also be understood as taking place within the context of a civil war, and to this end a rich body of literature exists that evidences

the prevalence of sexual violence in war (Siefert 1994; Jamieson 1999) and other conflict zones (Heineman 2011).

But genocide can also be a “peace-time crime” (Basaglia 1987; Scheper-Hughes 2002). Indeed, there is a growing body of literature and documentary film, which characterizes as genocide, mass atrocities perpetrated during a peace-time joint state military and intelligence campaign known as Operation Gukurahundi in the newly independent Zimbabwe between 1983 and 1987 (see, for example, Vambe 2012; Coltart 2016; Centre for Innovation and Technology (CITE) 2019; Mpofu 2019; Genocide Watch 2021; Dube 2021; Ncube 2021; Mpofu 2021; Sibanda 2021; Tshuma & Ndlovu 2022; Khumalo 2019). To date there has been no rigorous criminological study of the mass atrocities of Operation Gukurahundi, during which rape and sexual violence were rampant. The legal findings of the ICTR, however, namely that rape can be an *actus reus* of genocide, provides a logical framework within which to explore whether the perpetration of rape and other forms of state violence during the operation were official state policy, intended to destroy in part the Ndebele group, by “deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part, and imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group” (United Nations 1948).

Developing what can be usefully described as a “*rape as an act of genocide framework*” is of significant epistemological advantage to this study, as it facilitates conclusions to be drawn on whether the sexual crimes of Operation Gukurahundi constitute genocide in accord with the definition of the Genocide Convention, as clarified in the *Akayesu Judgment* of 1998; namely that rape is defined as

a physical invasion of a sexual nature, committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. Sexual violence, which includes rape, is considered to be any act of a sexual nature which is committed on a person under circumstances which are coercive. (Akayesu 1998: 598)

The sexual crimes of Operation Gukurahundi which are explored in this article are: public spectacles of multiple perpetrator rape targeting children and adults; forced witnessing of the rape of female and male family members; rape and sexual violence followed by mass killing; forced intrafamilial rape; forced bestiality; forced nudity; targeting the womb of pregnant women; internment in concentration camps for purposes of sexual servitude; forced pregnancy; and genital mutilation. Sexual violence is not a phenomenon exclusively directed at women in genocide. Evidence has established that men are also at risk of sexual violence during a genocide (Kaitesi 2013). The agreed definition of rape in the *Akayesu Judgment* is gender neutral and will be interpreted herein to be applicable to both male and female

victims, although males as victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence were not explicitly considered by the ICTR prosecution (Di Caro 2019).

Listening to the Survivors

It was clear that four decades after the peak period of Gukurahundi violence, one's ability to gather original comprehensive data on the state crimes under examination would be a challenge. The atrocity continues to be unacknowledged by the government of Zimbabwe, and many survivors continue to live in fear of state reprisals should they speak about their Gukurahundi experiences. Having researched the crimes of Gukurahundi from a macro level for a number of years, I found myself in the position of being able to contact gatekeepers both within Zimbabwe and beyond its borders, who were able to put me in contact with 36 individuals, who were direct victims of and/or witnesses to the atrocities of Operation Gukurahundi. Arrangements were made for all interviews to be conducted in South Africa (2017–2020) to reduce risks of harm to the participants. Interviews with the participants ranged from two to six hours in length. Each interviewee talked of their own direct experiences as opposed to hearsay. To assess the extent to which anecdotal reports may reflect any form of systematic violence, rather than isolated incidents, the author established a recruitment method that would reduce the chance of merely gathering information obtained from one, or a few areas, or from only one type of demographic. The resulting set of data shows an even geographical distribution of origin across Matabeleland (Figure 1).

Furthermore, the data set, gathered from 36 survivors between 2017–2020, none of whom were known to each other, exhibits an equal division of male and females, and a well distributed age-range, namely 11–37 years in 1983. Hence, the data reported here are unlikely to be subject to a significant sampling bias and, conversely, are likely to reflect the patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence conducted during Operation Gukurahundi throughout Matabeleland. As will be discussed later in this article, the in-depth survivor interviews coincided to a remarkable degree both in the type and the extent of state crimes experienced, which would indicate that memory bias is not a limitation of this study. Conversely, the converging patterns emerging from distinct individual interviews provides cross-validation between sources, yielding a high overall quality of documentation provided by the collective dataset.

The participants are referred to in this report with a pseudonym, and where pertinent, will be referred to as “survivors” rather than “victims” out of respect for the many affected communities, families and individuals both within and outside Zimbabwe, who are courageously and silently living their lives resiliently and have not succumbed to the intents of their victimizers. This project adhered to the British Sociological Association Statement of Practice (2017).

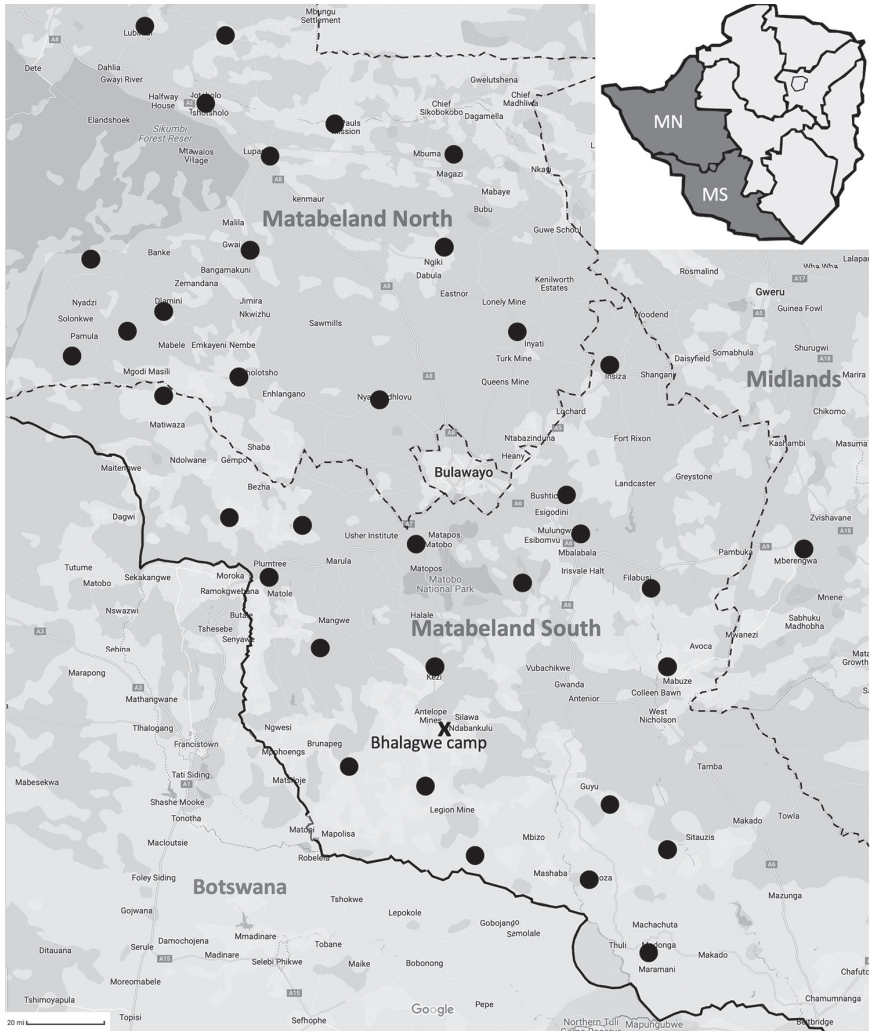


Figure 1 Distribution of interview participants place of residence between 1983–1984. The pinpointing of locations is merely an indicator of the general area they lived, but is not precise so to protect the identity of the survivors.

Operation Gukurahundi

In March 1980, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), led by Robert Mugabe, secured over 60 per cent of the vote in the founding independence elections. The main opposition party, the Zimbabwean African People’s Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo, secured less than 25 per cent of the vote. The

rivalry between ZANU and ZAPU expressed itself as a crude binary between the Shona who formed a decisive majority in Zimbabwe and from whom Mugabe drew his support, and the Ndebele, who constituted less than one fifth of the population and upon whom ZAPU drew its support.

On 20 January 1983, Prime Minister Robert Mugabe launched Operation Gukurahundi in Matabeleland with the stated objective of ridding the country of “dissidents” (see Alexander 1998; Kriger 2003). Notably, the so-called dissidents, an “amorphous amalgamation of disaffected [ZAPU] ex-combatants, disillusioned radicals, and more than a few common criminals” (Berkeley 1986: 7) were “very few in number” (Roger Martin, 2018), and no more than 400 in the entire country (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) & Legal Resources Foundation (LRF) 1997: 37; Dabengwa 2018). “The attrition rate was very high, with approximately 75 percent being killed captured or fleeing to Botswana” (Roger Martin, 2018).

At the heart of Operation Gukurahundi was a strategy of state ordered terror targeting the minority Ndebele, perpetrated by a 4,000 strong all-Shona Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA),¹ and the Central Intelligence Organisation (CIO). Operation Gukurahundi, effected by the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwean National Army and the Central Intelligence Organization, were overseen by the Joint High Command (JHC), headed by the incumbent President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa. Although the peak of the violence occurred between 1983 and 1984, Operation Gukurahundi did not come to an end until December 1987 with the signing of the national unity accord between former President Mugabe and leader of the political opposition party ZAPU, and the merging of the two parties, namely ZAPU and ZANU to form ZANU–PF.

Some commentators argue that President Robert Mugabe’s rationale underpinning Operation Gukurahundi was his drive to destroy his political opposition (ZAPU) and establish a one-party state rather than to destroy the Ndebele people (Tshuma & Ndlovu 2022: 386). However, from the outset, it was evident that the Fifth Brigade were not interested in finding the negligible numbers of dissidents. Although targets included party officials of the political opposition ZAPU and former cadres of its political wing ZIPRA (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army), by far the overwhelming number of persons targeted were the innocent non-combatant civilian population of Matabeleland who belonged to the minority Ndebele ethnic group. In 1983, armed with AK-47s, the Fifth Brigade moved from village to village in Matabeleland North and some areas of the Midlands.² Their presence in any area was accompanied by extreme patterns of violence that included execution of individuals with a political profile and/or status within the community, in combination with killings, severe beatings, torture and massacres of non-political non-combatant civilians (Cameron 2017). The focus of the operation shifted away from Matabeleland North (MN) to Matabeleland South (MS) in

February 1984, where extreme patterns of state violence continued. There were, however, some new strategies deployed by Operation Gukurahundi in Matabeleland South, as the state introduced a harsh curfew that permitted food to be used as a political and military weapon of coercion, torture, punishment and death against the Ndebele population. The deprivation of food supplies, which formed a significant element of this state campaign, deliberately brought between 350,000 and 400,000 people to the extreme edge of starvation in contravention of international law. The government's food embargo caused the death of Ndebele men, women and children from starvation and dehydration as well as through injuries and illness exacerbated by hunger and malnutrition induced by the government's strict curfew and forced starvation (Cameron 2018). The year 1984 in Matabeleland South also heralded a significant increase in the use of internment in concentration camps, where persons with and without political profiles would be subjected to torture and other cruel inhuman acts that sometimes resulted in death. Within the first 28 days of the operation, the Fifth Brigade of Operation Gukurahundi, in their distinctive red berets and army camouflage uniform, were thought to have eliminated somewhere between 3,000–5,000 Ndebele civilians (Doran 2017: 431).

Estimates vary as to the total number of non-combatant civilians who were deliberately massacred during the entire period of Operation Gukurahundi. One conservative estimate is “no fewer than 10,000 and no more than 20,000” (Eppel 2011). However, Dan Stannard, who was the Director Internal of the CIO during the period being examined in this study, believes that the number of Ndebele killed may be closer to between 30,000 and 50,000 (Onslow 2008). As a senior member of Zimbabwe's CIO that worked jointly with the military in Matabeleland, one may anticipate that he would have had access to relatively accurate field intelligence regarding the approximate number of fatalities.

To date, there has been no rigorous criminological study of the patterns of state crimes that were perpetrated under the umbrella of Operation Gukurahundi between 1983 and 1987. The state's use of rape and other forms of sexual violence has also remained hidden from scrutiny and, until now, has not been the subject of any programme of analytical research. The present article seeks to fill this knowledge gap through the analysis of original primary data gathered directly from survivors, providing a rich dataset documenting the experiences of a sample of both named and unnamed victims with the aim of delineating the extent and nature of rape and sexual violence directed at the Ndebele during the peak period of the violence in 1983–1984.

Targeting Ndebele Civilians—a Deliberate Military Strategy?

Genocidal intent requires that acts must be committed against members of a group specifically because they belong to that group (Akayesu 1998: 521). Genocidal

intent can, in the absence of direct explicit evidence, such as a written order, be inferred from circumstantial evidence (Jelusic 1999: 47).

Genocidal acts including rape and sexual violence do not constitute “genocidal acts” simply because they occur at the same time as or in the context of a genocide. The requisite intent to destroy, in whole or in part, must be proven. Indeed, senior members of the Zimbabwean state security forces confirmed that the targeting of Ndebele civilians was a deliberate military strategy and that Operation Gukurahundi was not a “political matter but tribal, that [the] Matabele must be crushed” (see Doran 2017: 584). Ken Rankin, a Scottish surgeon working with victims of Operation Gukurahundi state violence in 1983, described how “[t]hey accuse Ndebele’s of being foreigners who came from South Africa and that they killed their forefathers, ate their cattle and corn. They say they will destroy all the [Ndebele] because they have been deployed to kill them” (Non-Governmental Report (NGO) 1983: 12). Such hate speech is reminiscent of the genocidal propaganda used to rationalize genocide of the Tutsi, whereby the Hutu government accused the Tutsi of being undesirable foreigners who invaded Rwanda from Ethiopia (Eltringham 2006). Similarly, Dutch and American Foreign aid workers based in Hlekweni on the outskirts of Bulawayo reported that the information they had gleaned from Ndebele colleagues suggested that the atrocities being committed by the Fifth Brigade “were clearly tribalistic and [they] literally told people that the Ndebele were unwanted in Zimbabwe and deserved to die” (Danish Volunteer Service (DVS)/ Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) Report 1985). Indeed, the perpetrators themselves laid bare the state’s genocidal intent in Matabeleland, with the all-Shona Fifth Brigade telling villagers that they had been ordered to “wipe out the people in the area” and to “kill anything that was human” (Alexander et al. 2000: 222).

It is widely recognized by genocide scholars, and beyond, that dehumanization is an essential element in genocidal confrontations (Haslam 2019). In every case of genocide, a human group that was about to be decimated was explicitly denied its humanity and likened to rats, cockroaches and other vermin (Haslam 2019: 120). It is therefore of significant relevance that in public speeches of 1983, the current incumbent President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, referred to the Ndebele as “cockroaches,” and the Fifth Brigade as the “‘DDT’ brought into the area to eradicate them” (Cameron 2017: 12). In his public speeches, Emmerson Mnangagwa was explicit that the joint operations of the CIO, and the Fifth Brigade of the ZNA targeting the civilian unarmed population of Matabeleland was part of a deliberate state policy and meticulously planned (Coltart 2016: 143).

Within a few weeks of the atrocities of Operation Gukurahundi being unleashed on Matabeleland North, a variety of actors, including bishops (Karlen 1983) and representatives of international NGO’s working in Matabeleland North, brought

news of ongoing atrocities, including cases of rape, directly to the attention of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, Minister of State Security, Emmerson Mnangagwa, Minister of State for Defence, Sydney Sekeramayi and the Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Herbert Ushewokunze.³ At the request of Mugabe, the representatives subsequently delivered to the government a dossier of evidence of the atrocities (NGO Report 1983).

That the stated aim was to target dissidents, of whom numbers were a mere few hundred, resulted in the death of anywhere between 10,000–50,000 non-dissidents is indicative of at least a spoken policy, if not written, to destroy in part the innocent Ndebele citizens of the Provinces of Matabeleland.

Interviews with the 36 survivors of this study uncovered a wealth of comprehensive data describing numerous forms of brutal extreme violence, and other cruel and inhuman acts both of a sexual and non-sexual nature, targeting the Ndebele population in mainly rural areas of Matabeleland North during 1983 and Matabeleland South during 1984. A set of uniform systematic patterns of sexual harms emerged through analysis of the data gathered, including: public spectacles of multiple perpetrator rape targeting children and adults; people forced to witness the rape of female and male family members; rape and sexual violence followed by mass killing; forced intrafamilial rape; forced bestiality; and forced nudity, to establish if they may be interpreted as “deliberately inflicting on the [Ndebele] group, conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part” as per Article II (c) of the Genocide Convention.

Break[ing] the Bodies and Identities of the Community Through the Bodies of the Community

Public spectacles of rape have been described by Gill et al. (2009: 28, 33) as “an undertaking to break the bodies and identities of the community, through the bodies of the community’s women.” In Zimbabwe, entire villages were ordered by the soldiers of the Fifth Brigade to attend all-night gatherings known as a “pungwe.”⁴ In the context of the violence of Operation Gukurahundi, the pungwe “not only represented an alien hegemonic culture but was a purveyor of forced indoctrination and a space where the military committed violent atrocities against civilians” (Maedza, cited in Ndebele 2021). Ninety-four per cent of the participants of this study were forced to attend the overnight pungwe’s of Operation Gukurahundi and corroborated that multiple perpetrator rape (MPR) (Horvath 2009) was a key feature of such occasions, and central to the demeaning destructive and genocidal effect of these gatherings of terror and death, which were all pervasive during the peak periods of Gukurahundi violence between 1983 and 1984.

Of note is that MPR was not restricted to the large public night-time gatherings of the pungwe; the strategy of MPR was simultaneously a ritual of degradation and physical harm in rural villages during daylight hours as well as in the dark of the night. Buhle was only 19 years old and living with her family in Matabeleland North when the soldiers of the Fifth Brigade “came into the village armed with AK-47s, in camouflage and in red berets.” She recounts how in public and full view of the village community, “I was raped again and again that day by 16 of them, they took turns. I was bleeding. They only spoke Shona. I thought they would stop but they continued raping me even though I was bleeding.” This strategy of public spectacles of MPR in villages to the physical damage of the victim continued unabated as confirmed by the interviews with survivors. Indeed, the same pattern is detectable over one year in later Matabeleland South. There were about 1,000 people living in the area where Nomvula (24 years old, MS) lived.

Most girls were raped. The soldiers would come to our homes and say “You! You must be our wife—it is you.” We knew this meant we were going to be raped by these soldiers. Our village was near the Shashani river so sometimes, my sisters and I, we slept on the riverbanks, we ran away from home so they couldn’t keep raping us.

Survivors consistently reported how soldiers repeatedly went door-to-door in villages at night, forcing women to have sex with a different soldier each night. As a result, many tried to flee the areas where MPR was relentless. Those who did manage to flee continued to be targeted with sexual violence. Melawami (19 years old, MS) recalls:

Because all the females were being raped, many families sent their daughters, wives, aunts away to Bulawayo for protection. Other neighbours did that too. The Fifth Brigade called our families to a meeting and told everyone they must call all their daughters to come home from Bulawayo. They were then badly beaten and left with broken bones. The daughters all came home, and it was terrible. They were all attacked, and these daughters were all raped.

Not all episodes of MPR were public spectacles. With deleterious effect, immeasurable numbers of women and girls subjected to MPR were forcibly removed by the military from their villages and held in sexual servitude in small mobile tented remote camps established close to villages, often on riverbanks, at schools, Christian mission stations, police stations and other government stations in rural Matabeleland. There they were forced to cook for those incarcerating them as well

as being subjected to multiple rapes. Others were transported to established military bases in large army trucks, each capable of carrying scores of victims.

Charles (17 years old, MN) vividly recalls how women were removed from villages and sexually enslaved in the military camps occupied by the Fifth Brigade.

They came and took away all the females from each village in the area. If there were five women, they would take five. If there were 20 women, they would take 20. There were junior and senior soldiers. The senior soldier would order the junior ones to take the ones selected for rape. He'd say, "okay take 1, 2, 3, they count, 1, 2, 3, take them, let's go!" They would then walk them to where their vehicles were in the distance. They left their vehicles a distance from the village and walked in as they knew that once people see and hear the sound of a vehicle, they would run away and scatter. They took these ladies away in their vehicle for rape. Not all returned.

In the very early stages of Operation Gukurahundi in Matabeleland North, a "nurse of [the] mobile unit" (NGO Report 1983: 23) was raped. She was "taken to 5 Brigade camp and repeatedly raped for 4 days" (ibid.). It was well-known to the survivors of this study that those with status in their communities, including teachers and nurses of the Catholic church missions, were amongst some of the first to become preyed upon by the security forces in Matabeleland. Shelton's memories of the state's targeting of a Christian mission near his village in Matabeleland North was indistinguishable to patterns identified in other districts of the province, and also those of Matabeleland South. He retold how "[t]he Sisters in that mission were called outside of the mission, they were all raped. Even the nurses there would get raped" (15 years old, MS). Menzi (12 years old, MS) knew the seven or eight teachers at his primary school. "One morning [he] arrived at the school and found that the female teachers had been raped during the night. Guys [Fifth Brigade] came with guns and they raped the teachers."

That the genocidaires of Zimbabwe between 1983 and 1984 prioritized the subjugation and destruction of those with status and education within the collectivity is not a pattern of behaviour unique to Gukurahundi. The systematic destruction of leading figures of a society or a group, as observed throughout Gukurahundi was a tactic employed in the Armenian Genocide, the Cambodian Genocide, the German-Soviet occupation of Poland and during the conflicts of the Former of Yugoslavia (Gratz 2011).

The research undertaken has provided new insights into the age distribution of those targeted for rape and other forms of sexual violence during Operation Gukurahundi. It was remarkable that during individual interviews, the survivors were in overwhelming agreement that in villages where the Fifth Brigade arrived,

it was a rare occurrence for any female aged between 15 to 25 to escape being raped on multiple occasions. Nomalanga (17 years old, MN) affirmed that

[m]any many were raped, especially the girls who were 17, 18, 19, 20. I think every girl in our village of that age was raped. It was only sometimes that the older women were raped. It is so hard to talk about it in our community.

Children and young girls were not exempt from sexual harm and form a significant cohort of those subjected to MPR. In both Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South, schoolgirls were removed from their schools by force, always overseen by the senior officer in charge who chose those to be raped. School-age children were removed from their villages and schools to be detained in dedicated centres of rape within established military camps where they were subjected to MPR on multiple occasions.

On Friday's they [Fifth Brigade soldiers] would take those girls from the school that were age 14 and above, yes, for whole weekends. They took them away in trucks to Jolotsho [MN] where their main camp was, and they would make them sing the whole night and they were raping those girls. They would bring them back, but some disappeared. Some never came back to school. My two sisters were involved. (Londiwe, 12 years old, MN)

The evidence of the forced removal of school children for the purposes of sexual servitude gathered from participants is corroborated in *Breaking the Silence*, which reveals how on one occasion over 50 schoolgirls were removed from their school to the Fifth Brigade camp. "They were raped repeatedly over the next few months, until the army left the area. Some fell pregnant and others ran away and never went back to school" (CCJP & LRF 1997: 105). On another occasion, the Fifth Brigade arrived at a school in Matabeleland North and removed all pupils aged over 14 years. In one case they removed over 60 pupils. The girls were all raped. Later some of them were ordered to have sex with some of the boys from the school under the watchful eye of the soldiers (CCJP & LRF 1997: 87).

The selection of children for multiple episodes of MPR was a pattern that would continue to be widespread over a year later, with the focus having shifted to the female children of MS. Sicelo (35 years old, MS) shared how

[t]here were about 80 people living in my village. There was too much [a great number] of rapes. Even the young ones. Two of them were about 11. At that age, they were just too small. They were raped by three soldiers. I know them. Two of them passed away immediately.

The rape of children during the genocide is not novel and has been documented throughout the twentieth century, beginning with the Armenian Genocide from 1915 to 1916 (see Bryce & Toynbee, 2000: 92; Roy 1975: 66).

Banele (36 years old, MN) explained:

When these guys came to our area, they would take all the females there to rape—maybe from age ten and above, they would take them to the bush. Not only 18, 19, 20 years of age but small ages were raped. They would take more than ten children at a time from our village to rape. There was usually about six soldiers who went to the bush with them. There was a senior commander—a soldier giving the instructions. They would go to a homestead and if there were five girls in the homestead, the commander would look at them to decide if they were fit for rape, then he would instruct “you go join that group” and “you go join that other group.” Then they would go to another homestead and take the girls suitable for rape and join different groups, up to a number of 30 or more girls. They would then take them to the bush to where their camp was and keep them there for three, four or maybe four days. Sometimes they would take them for a month. They had to be their wives, cooking for them, sleeping with them. The commander would take the girls to the tents and stay with them for 3–4–5 days.

Forced to Witness—an Omnipresent Pattern

In 1992, a Commission of Experts were instructed to gather evidence of grave breaches of the Geneva Convention and other violations of international humanitarian law committed in the territory of the Former Yugoslavia. Their final report to the United Nations (UNSC 1994: para 250) recognized that the rape of women during the conflicts in the Former Yugoslavia involved greater degrees of humiliation and shame when the victim was raped in front of their adult and minor family members, in front of other detainees or in public places. Ten years earlier in Zimbabwe, Ndebele women of Matabeleland were being repeatedly raped and subjected to other forms of gross sexual violence in their villages and at pungwes where their husbands, mothers, grandparents, aunts, uncles and children were forced, on threat of death, to watch. This was an experience shared by all participants of the study. James (27 years old, MN) continues to have nightmares of when “the soldiers came to our home. They hit me, held me and raped her [his wife] as well. They made me look.”

Being forced to watch as loved ones were raped multiple times by the Shona soldiers of Operation Gukurahundi was an omnipresent pattern. Meliwami (17 years old, MS) states:

When the soldiers of the Fifth Brigade arrived in our village they would say “we are not playing, now we start doing the job” [rape]. We tried not to look. Ah, that wasn’t a good thing to look, because in our culture, you respect even your sister. Your brother respects you. Your mother, your grandmothers were taken ... they [the army] just get anybody, even a girl, they are crying, she is getting raped. Even if you turn your eyes, you still find that they are doing that thing, like animals. In front of everybody. They were doing dirty things⁵ in front of us, just doing funny things on top of her like animals. We were told to be singing, clapping hands, forced to watch what they are doing there. They’re [Fifth Brigade] singing in their language. That thing of raping, that’s why I say they call us to a meeting. They just keep us and they say, “now we start the job.” They just choose anybody in front of anybody, everybody. They just choose and start raping and beat and shoot us if we try not to look.

It was not always the case that the MRP of a woman in which a family member was forced to spectate took place in open public spaces. In March 1983, Gugu was a young woman who had travelled by car to visit her boyfriend in a small town near the border with Botswana. They were preparing to marry. She had seen for herself the red berets of the soldiers of the Fifth Brigade camped at the Tsholotsho Business Centre as they drove through the town. She had heard rumours of their arrival, but up until then she had had no contact with them. When she arrived at her boyfriend’s town, she found her boyfriend working in his shop. There were six soldiers of Fifth Brigade hanging about nearby, and a few minutes after she entered the shop three of them entered and aggressively accused her boyfriend of being a dissident and of working together with the dissidents. Gugu (19 years old, MN) confirms that her boyfriend had no political affiliations. She continued:

They [the soldiers] each took a knife and cut him [her boyfriend] on his face and arms. Two of them then raped me. The third forced him [her boyfriend] to stand up and watch.

The soldiers involved were talking in Shona and Gugu could not understand what they were saying. There was more physical destruction to come for Gugu. She revealed:

I was injured and feeling sick. They then just shot my boyfriend dead. Right in front of me. They would not allow anyone to take the body away until the next day. She was 12 weeks pregnant at the time of rape and suffered a miscarriage that same day.

Rape and Sexual Violence Followed by Mass Killing

There is substantial evidence of death in the shadow of acts of rape and sexual violence, a pattern that one may infer was replicated wherever Operation Gukurahundi was active. Whilst some victims, like Gugu, survived their ordeal, for too many others, the conclusion of the spectacle of rape was followed by the killing of the victim or the massacre of the victim and their family through fire or shooting. In one village where Operation Gukurahundi was deployed, they ordered the local shop owner into his shop with his wife:

... then two soldiers took turns of raping the wife in front of her husband in the shop. The shop owner had a car and they removed a five-litre container of petrol from it. They spread these five litres of petrol throughout the shop and over the man and wife who were still alive although badly beaten. They locked the doors of the shop and set fire to it. As they raped the wife, the children were also there, and they were burnt also in the shop. All around the shop there were soldiers. The commander of the Fifth Brigade was outside the shop. (Makhosi, 18 years old, MN)

Other victims were forced with their families and villagers into huts, which were locked and set alight. The Fifth Brigade surrounded the huts shooting anyone who tried to break free (Rose, 12 years old, MN).

Contravening the Norms of Sexuality: Forced Intrafamilial Rape and Bestiality

Substantial evidence was gathered in the shadow of the Rwandan genocide of 1994 of sons being forced to rape their own mothers under threat of death by the genocidaires (Nowrojee 1996). Such acts violate every sexual norm instilled within humans (Sitkin 2017: 13). The systematic dehumanization and degradation of the Ndebele through forced intrafamilial rape was a recurring pattern of state harm that was both physically and emotionally destructive, and pervasive in both Matabeleland North and Matabeleland South.

Bukhosi (19 years old, MS) shared the cruelty of his day-to-day experience of knowing that if he was caught in the company of a male or female member of his family, the Shona soldiers of the Fifth Brigade would without doubt force him to attempt to have sex with them under threat of being shot if he refused. He recounted how:

[t]here were times we were afraid even to be in the company of our sister, even to go to the shop. Because I know when these guys come and see us together, they

say “sleep with your sister.” Then you are afraid to go with your mother because something terrible would happen, they will say “do this to your mother.” You are afraid even to be with your brother at home, because they ... these guys [Fifth Brigade], when they find the two of you. It is terrible ... So we were all separated, we were all trying to avoid each other, trying to avoid that thing, because once they find you there they say, “you do this to this one, you do this to that one.” So we were avoiding to be together all the time. We couldn’t walk with my sister or my mother as we knew that they would definitely do this. They would force us to do that thing in front of neighbours. There were many of us saw it with our naked eyes. We all knew to avoid our sisters or our brother or mother or your father. Just avoid. We as boys, guys, we would stay away from home until very late and only return to sleep and leave very early next morning again.

A focused analysis of the specific wording used in transcripts of the survivors interviews, in conjunction with observations of body language and the use of silence to some questions is highly suggestive that forced intrafamilial rape between Ndebele male family members was prevalent. None of the survivors disclosed being a victim of forced intrafamilial rape or bestiality; however, it is perhaps informative that 89 per cent shared during interviews that they had witnessed activities of forced intrafamilial rape, whilst 14 per cent said they had been witness to acts where men were forced to simulate sex with an animal.

Such rituals of degradation are found extensively wherever a policy of genocidal rape is adopted (Sanasarian 1989; Nowrojee 1996; Sitkin et al. 2019). Operation Gukurahundi was no exception and the present data shows that Ndebele families were subjected to patterns of sexual harms, causing shame and humiliation and leaving communities and individual Ndebele families destroyed, their bonds crushed through the annihilation of all social norms relating to sexuality. Forty years later, the indelible intergenerational impacts on the Ndebele group are profound, with interviewees widely reporting mental health issues and children born of Gukurahundi survivors who are angry as they struggle to understand their family’s brutal history when their questions about their families’ painful experiences are met with silence. Charles (15 years old, MN) talked about his experiences of children born of Gukurahundi rape as they grew up in his community. He described how:

... they looked very very untrustworthy as they did not look healthy. You know they have no identity. And for some, their mothers disowned them. And the life they are living is actually horrible. The children that I am talking about, they will never get documents [identity papers] from the government. Because if they go to get documents they will be asked about their fathers. Then, the parents know

their fathers, but it is a taboo thing to talk about Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe. Can you see the complexities then—that's where it becomes very complex. The parents know about the fathers, but they can't say that the fathers were Gukurahundi because the CIO will get involved so all they can say is "we don't know the father." Then they are told "ok, you are not getting any documents."

Stripped of Their Clothes, Dignity and Autonomy—Forced Nudity

At no point during this study did any evidence surface of individual sexual predations for personal satisfaction. Rather, the patterns identified continued to be indicative of a methodical plan orchestrated by the overwhelmingly Shona government of Zimbabwe, targeting the civilian population of Ndebele, the vast majority of whom had no political affiliations, with the intent to destroy the group in part. This included the use of forced nudity by both the Fifth Brigade and the CIO in their joint operations. In the conflict of the Former Yugoslavia, a decade after Gukurahundi, it was recognized that forced nudity and humiliation were used as instruments to rob the victims and their communities "of dignity and autonomy, destroying communal bonds mandatory for the continuation of the group" (Sitkin et al. 2019: 221). Similarly, there is significant evidence of the use of forced nudity in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, with the encouragement of leaders of the genocide (Akayesu 1998: 688). Survivors of Gukurahundi reveal that Zimbabwe was to be no exception and interviews evidence that while 19 per cent of participants were victims of forced nudity, a remarkable 89 per cent of participants of this study recounted witnessing episodes of forced nudity victimizing males and females of all age groups. In one village with around 60 inhabitants "the soldiers of the Fifth Brigade ordered the entire village to strip naked. One old man refused and one of the soldiers shot him dead right there in the kraal" (Mazwi, 34 years old, MN). Tuliani (14 years old, MS) watched as two of her school friends were forced to strip naked and do cartwheels in the dust to the cheers of the soldiers, which is chillingly similar to the SS officers of the Holocaust "coming into the barracks and order[ing] the inmates to get out into the field stripped naked and do gymnastics" (Rabinowitz 2000: 16).

The emasculation of Matabeleland men through forced intrafamilial rape, forced bestiality and forced nudity during Operation Gukurahundi was profound. In Ndebele culture, men are considered to be protectors, providers and leaders of families and societies (Mapara & Thebe 2015). The survivors interviewed are clear that the state coordinated military tactics physically and mentally destroyed many Ndebele men who continue to feel powerless and dominated by the ZANU–PF government of Emmerson Mnangagwa to this day.

Systematic Patterns of Reproductive Violence

Analysis of the data gathered also identified a set of uniform systematic patterns of reproductive violence, namely: targeting the womb of pregnant women; internment in concentration camps for purposes of sexual servitude; forced pregnancy; genital mutilation; and rejection in a patriarchal society, to establish if such acts may be interpreted as “imposing measures intended to prevent births within the [Ndebele] group” in terms of Article II (d) of the Genocide Convention.

In the *Akayesu Judgment* (1998), the ICTR recognized that during the Rwandan genocide, pregnant women were killed on the grounds that the foetuses in their wombs were fathered by males belonging to the group targeted with genocide. In Zimbabwe, targeting the wombs of pregnant women with knives, bayonets or through stamping, continued unabated during the peak periods of the violence from 1983 to 1984. The NGO Report (1983) personally handed to Robert Mugabe on 23 March 1983 exposed how “[w]itnesses describe how two girls who were pregnant were accused of being made pregnant by dissidents. They were bayoneted and cut open so that ‘people could see what a dissident’s child looked like’” (NGO Report 1983: 12).

Wilbert (26 years old, MS) witnessed two pregnant young women in his village being attacked by the Fifth Brigade with bayonets. He was horrified when the soldiers “split their abdomen revealing foetuses that were alive.” In fact, 94 per cent of survivors interviewed had witnessed pregnant women in their home area being similarly targeted in what emerges as a common widespread pattern of reproductive violence throughout Matabeleland. Mazwi (34 years old, MN) told me:

There is one serious incident that has also touched me. There was a pregnant woman. When they went to the homestead they found the pregnant women, and soldiers had asked themselves, because the lady was carrying twins, boys or girls? They discussed it; they wanted to see what the lady was carrying. With a big knife, a soldier’s knife, they cut the belly and the twins fell out. They cheered when they saw that they were two boys. The women and foetuses died on the spot and were buried at the homestead. This was all done under the orders of the people in charge.

In other villages, soldiers would “find someone that was pregnant, and they just step on their stomach. They just step and then remove the baby out” (Meliwami, 17 years old, MS).

Bhalagwe Concentration Camp

This article has already described locations of detention throughout 1983 and 1984 where sexual violence including sexual servitude was rampant in Matabeleland.

The internment of Ndebele civilians in concentration camps for the purpose of rape and other forms of sexual violence, as well as other atrocities is known to have taken place (CCJP & LRF 1997). Stone's definition of the concentration camp emphasizes the essential elements of stigmatization and extra legality: "a gathering of civilians, defined by a regime as de facto 'enemies,' in order to hold them against their will without charge in a place where the rule of law has been suspended" (ibid.: 105). The most notorious concentration camp of Operation Gukurahundi is that of Bhalagwe, in the Matobo District of Matabeleland South, operated jointly by the Fifth Brigade of the ZNA and the CIO.⁶ Several survivors had direct and indirect experience of Bhalagwe and described the level of violence there as being "off the scale" (interviews with survivors 2017–2020). It is feasible that thousands of Ndebele were exterminated at Bhalagwe, their bodies dumped in nearby disused mine shafts with their wrists and ankles still bound with wire (interviews with survivors 2017–2020).

Bhalagwe concentration camp consisted of 180 asbestos sheds where the Ndebele were held in cruel, degrading conditions in sheds of 6-by-12 metres, each holding 136 people (see Figure 2).

Men, women and children aged between 15 and 60 years were selected from their villages to be imprisoned at Bhalagwe. When first in use, there was a 9:10 ratio of women to men in Bhalagwe. Those detained came from all over Matabeleland and were initially forcibly removed from their villages to Fifth Brigade holding camps before onward transportation to Bhalagwe within a few days. The number interned at any given time is estimated to be between 2,000 in February 1984 (CCJP & LRF 1997: 224) and possibly up to 5,000 within a few weeks of the camp becoming operational in February 1984 (Eppel 2020: 260).

The torture methods adopted at Bhalagwe for both males and females had sexual overtones and are analogous to those of the Cambodian Genocide's Tuol Sleng torture centre (Adam 1998), where "sexual torture was sadistic in the extreme" (Hawk 1986: 26). Survivors of the Zimbabwean concentration camp corroborate that new corpses were seen on a daily basis lying outside the torture sheds, sometimes naked and displaying signs of substantial reproductive violence (interviews with survivors 2017–2020). When prisoners were not confined to their sheds or undergoing torture, they were forced to do hard labour. The use of rape and sexual servitude was extensive within the camp. One survivor, a former detainee of Bhalagwe, told how "[t]he screams of people being raped in the concentration camp was 'all the time, night and day, but worse at night'" (Amahle, 29 years old, MS).

Approximately one to two weeks seemed to be a common detention period ... women selected as "'wives' for the soldiers might stretch to a few weeks" (CCJP & LRF 1997: 124). The number of Ndebele who passed through Bhalagwe will never be known; however, with an estimated 2,000–5,000 passing through every

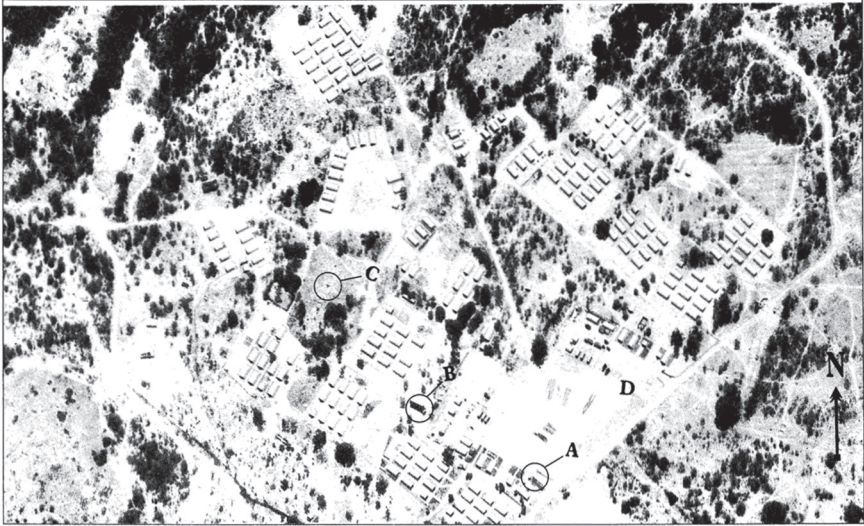


Figure 2 Bhalagwe Camp: Surveyor-General's aerial photograph, 15 May 1982, showing the asbestos huts (CCJP & LRF 1997: 122).

one to two weeks, it is plausible that up to 80,000 Ndebele may have been the victims of the cruelties of the camp during the four months of February to May 1984. How many were dumped dead or alive in the nearby mineshaft of Antelope Mine is also unknown. Although precise statistics cannot be established, on the basis that women made up just under half of the camp population and were subjected to widespread rape and other forms of sexual violence, including detention for the purposes of sexual servitude, one may propose that the overall number of women raped at Bhalagwe may feasibly fall within the range of 30,000–40,000 during the 16-week peak period of operations from February to May 1984. Further research is required before any substantive conclusions can be drawn in relation to the scale of sexual atrocities in detention during Operation Gukurahundi.

With a goal to eliminate the ethnic Albanians from Kosovo and the Muslims from Bosnia-Herzegovina, the women of the Former Yugoslavia were subjected to forced pregnancy between 1992 and 1998 (Sitkin et al. 2019; Cavanaugh 2002: 285). “Genocidal rape aimed at enforced pregnancy was, for many, thought to be a peculiarly Serb contribution to the history of atrocity” (Allen 1996: 92). However, a decade earlier, in the patriarchal society of Zimbabwe, forced pregnancy of the Ndebele women by the all-Shona Fifth Brigade has to this day created a Shona presence among the Ndebele which has, in some villages, undermined their coherence as a community (Mpilo, 21 years old, MS). Whilst the ICTR did not

prosecute acts of forced pregnancy arising during the 1994 Rwandan genocide, the *Akayesu Judgment*, in interpreting the Genocide Convention, did recognize that:

forced impregnation could in some circumstances amount to the crime of genocide by measures intended to prevent births within a group. The Chamber noted that “[i]n patriarchal societies, where membership of a group is determined by the identity of the father, an example of a measure intended to prevent births within a group is the case where, during rape, a woman of the said group is deliberately impregnated by a man of another group, with the intent to have her give birth to a child who will consequently not belong to its mother’s group.” (Akayesu 1998: 507)

In a society such as Zimbabwe, forced pregnancy is doubly deviant as “it makes survivors damaged goods in a patriarchal system that defines a woman as a man’s possession and a virgin woman as his most valuable asset” (Allen 1996: 96).

As has been previously discussed herein, throughout Matabeleland, women, particularly those of childbearing ages, were selected and removed for the purposes of rape and sexual servitude at military bases, or at joint military/CIO concentration camps such as Bhalagwe. Many of these women became pregnant. Some committed suicide rather than give birth. Others died trying to abort the pregnancy without access to any medical facilities (Sibelo, 37 years old, MN). Children born of rape in Zimbabwe are many (interviews with survivors 2017–2020) and can themselves cause the destruction of group identity as a result of the intergenerational impacts (Hogwood et al. 2017). It was not only adults who were subjected to forced pregnancy during Operation Gukurahundi. Children too young to give birth were also forcibly impregnated, thereby damaging their future potential to reproduce, a phenomenon that has been explored by Fisher (1996: 91).

Between 1983 and 1984, the strategies of Operation Gukurahundi policy left thousands of Ndebele men and women of childbearing age infertile. Two male participants of this study (Amahle, 29 years old, MS and Thambani, 30 years old, MS) were held captive at Bhalagwe, where they were subjected to cruel inhuman conditions, torture and sexual violence that has left both men sterile. They reported being held for around two weeks and stated that there were “too too many to count” when asked how many others they knew who had been subjected to similar sexual violence in the concentration camp. Thambani reported how the Fifth Brigade rounded him up along with a group of about 20 men and women from his village, and they were transported a few days later to Bhalagwe. There he was electrocuted on several consecutive days to the point of losing consciousness as electrodes were attached to his “privates” by “men who were not soldiers [CIO]”. As is the case with the Ndebele women, the male victims of sexual violence

continue to be haunted and ashamed by these crimes and find it difficult to articulate the sexual harms they were subjected to. They corroborate that within the camp “men were subjected to beatings which focused on their genitalia. The testicles would be bound in rubber strips and then beaten with a truncheon. Some men complain of permanent problems with erections and urinating as a result of such beatings” (CCJP & LRF 1997: 120).

Operation Gukurahundi’s pattern of sexual violence targeting male genitalia was prevalent beyond the walls of the concentration camp and is identifiable as a widespread systematic pattern of sexual violence implemented in 1983–1984. At least 14 per cent of participants knew male victims from their villages who had sustained damage to their testicles because of Gukurahundi violence. Evidence of the extreme sadistic sexual violence that was presented by Mfundo (19 years old, MS). He recalls how in March 1984, about 1,000 Ndebele were forced to attend an organized meeting about 40 km from Plumtree, Matabeleland South.

There were large numbers of Fifth Brigade as well as CIO. At least one hundred died through beatings, shootings and other forms of cruelty at that meeting. There was a man there who worked for a white farmer. He had two wives. They [Fifth Brigade soldiers] hit him, beat him and then they cut off his front parts [penis and testicles]. They then put the parts in a brown paper bag and gave the bag to one of his wives and told her to “go and show the boss [the white farmer].” They then threw him in the hole he had been made to dig. They put in roots—we don’t call them sticks we call them roots—and everything and burnt him. We had all been called to gather round and watch this whole scene.

It was a common occurrence to see “dead bodies lying with their private parts severed and their genitals on display” (Nomalanga, 27 years old, MN). The practice of soldiers forcing sharp sticks into women’s vaginas was independently reported by more than half of the participants. This was also a form of torture that targeted the female prisoners of Bhalagwe. Such was the severity of the injuries to the female genitalia that “witnesses refer to women at Bhalagwe adopting a characteristic, painful, wide-legged gait after receiving such torture” (CCJP & LRF 1997: 120).

During 1983 and 1984, throughout Matabeleland, women suffered severe beatings of their vaginas throughout, with some experiencing numerous miscarriages during subsequent pregnancies as a direct result. Nomvula shared how “the assaults damaged my womb. I do not have any children” (24 years old, MS). Rose (19 years old, MN) told of how she, too, had had the possibility of having children taken from her as a result of the repeated rape and severe genital trauma she had endured in her village in 1983. She had been unable to conceive since.

Genital mutilation was not only directed towards the adult men and women of Matabeleland. In Banele's village, there was an incident of a child who was 12 years old who was raped in front of the villagers. "They made her lie and with a razor blade they cut her private parts so that they could penetrate. The girl was bleeding badly" (Wilbert, 36 years old, MN). In Matabeleland South, "an 11-year-old child had her vagina burnt with plastic and was later shot" (CCJP & LRF 1997: 119). It is arguable that genital mutilation directed towards men women and children, was deliberately designed to have devastating effects on the Ndebele group, intended to last for generations.

Interviews with the participants of this study evidence that one of the consequences of the sexual violence of Gukurahundi rape and sexual violence was to render immeasurable thousands of Ndebele women unlikely to bear children within their own community, as future marriage became improbable for women rejected by Ndebele men or who are too humiliated by the stigma of their trauma to consider marriage. Around 80 people live in Tulani's village. "Even today, some of those people are there and they are not married at all because a man would not be interested in such kind of a lady. They are just staying unmarried" (14 years old, MS). Mukamana and Brysiewicz's (2008: 379) study of the Rwandan genocide identified how "the perpetrators of these crimes are aware of this and so rape, regardless of pregnancy, can certainly be an effective tool for preventing births." Asinya was only 11 years old when the Fifth Brigade arrived in her small village of 12 homesteads in Matabeleland South. She had few memories of Gukurahundi but was clear that "there [in her village] the women who were raped are not married up to today. More than ten were raped."

The evidence available clearly identifies that the public spectacles of rape and sexual violence, as well as the forced detention of men and women for the purposes of rape and other forms of sexual violence, including sexual servitude, were both supervised and often perpetrated by senior officers that infers a deliberate strategy intended to leave its devastating imprint for generations to come.

Indeed, the presence of a military rank structure and complicity of senior officers in the targeted areas was unambiguous to every single participant of this study. Banele, who was 36 years old and living in Matabeleland North in 1983, recalls how the military came to his village and stayed for about two months:

They had 11 small tents behind the shopping centre. There was a commander there; he was a dangerous guy. Very very dangerous. He was the one who raped a lot of girls. He himself raped them—others came behind him but he was always the first to rape the girls before the more junior soldiers took turns to rape her. The same girls would be raped by four or five soldiers. So many girls were raped every day ... Sometimes the same ones were raped day after day ... The Commander

would attend the meeting every day. He was singing and dancing. They [Fifth Brigade] would keep the [Ndebele] men at the meetings at the camp and only send the [Ndebele] women home and then the soldiers would go to their village and rape them.

Phindile (37 years old) lived in Matabeleland South. There were 21 homesteads in her village. She reports:

We saw three different commanders. Those were the ones who were giving the instructions. Rape was done [by] daylight and darkness but most were done in the evening. The commanders would be there eating. The chief commander would be sitting a distance and giving instructions on what to do. They used to do the raping according to their rank.

The overwhelming view of all those interviewed was that in their villages it was rare that young women and girls were *not* victims of MPR and sexual reproductive violence. Participants noted, for example: “I only know one or two women who were not raped—because they were big ladies. Very few not raped. There are really few not raped” (Meliwami, 21 years old, MS). This was the overwhelming view of all those interviewed. Taking into account an approximate rural population of 350,000 in Matabeleland North (Population Census A, Zimbabwe: 1982) and around 410,000 in Matabeleland South (Population Census B, Zimbabwe: 1982) in 1982, one can only conclude that the number of Ndebele in the population who were victims of rape and other forms of sexual violence between 1983 and 1984 is in excess of 150,000 victims. This is with due regard that not all areas of Matabeleland North were targeted in Operation Gukurahundi.

The participant data, mined from 36 participants of a representative sample of geographical locations throughout Matabeleland between 1983–1984, unambiguously demonstrates that the patterns of rape and sexual violence identified in this study were implemented across all areas targeted by Operation Gukurahundi. The uniformity of patterns of rape and other forms of sexual violence perpetrated by elements of the ZNA army across Matabeleland between 1983 and 1984 reflects the ideology and strategic goals of those in high office. The ZANU policy towards the unarmed citizens of Matabeleland North and South can be readily described as:

... not rape out of control. It is rape under control. It is also rape unto death, rape as massacre, rape to kill and to make the victims wish they were dead. It is rape as an instrument of forced exile, rape to make you leave your home and never want to go back. It is rape to be seen and heard and watched and told to others; rape as

spectacle. It is rape to drive a wedge through a community, to shatter a society, to destroy a people. It is rape as genocide. (MacKinnon 1994: 11–12)

The policy of rape and other forms of sexual violence is discernible as being systematic and predicated on the government's intent to destroy the Ndebele in whole or in part through (1) deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; and (2) imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group. The implementation of a government-sanctioned policy of rape can be defined as "genocidal rapes" not because they occurred during a genocide but because, as the evidence of the survivors demonstrates, they were expressions of a specific intent to destroy in part, the Ndebele group, by and through raping the Ndebele before, during and after the commission of the rapes. All forms of genocidal rape constitute the crime of genocide as described in Article II of the Genocide Convention.

Conclusion

While small in comparison to the sheer scale of the violence and the numbers who were victimized, this study nonetheless permits one to establish reliable conclusions about the nature of events in Zimbabwe and their genocidal nature. To date, there is no record of a written genocide policy, but the evidence available allows conclusions to be drawn that there was at least a verbal policy.

The participants were unwavering in their understanding that the victims and survivors targeted for rape and other forms of sexual violence were selected because they were Ndebele. This is underscored when one acknowledges that 34 of the 36 survivors had no political affiliations. There is no evidence in this study that any of the women subjected to rape and sexual violence were targeted on political grounds; instead, the underpinning of the policy of rape was unambiguously ethnicity. Political groups are excluded from protection under the Genocide Convention. The political classification of those victims targeted by Operation Gukurahundi was, however, inextricable from their ethnic identity as Ndebele.

The implementation of rape from 1983 to 1984 was a premeditated and methodical system of devastation and destruction in Zimbabwe. Those with oversight of the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwean National Army and the Central Intelligence Organization, including the Joint High Command, headed by the current President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, employed systematic and far-reaching rape and sexual violence as a weapon of genocidal violence against a specific group, namely the Ndebele, in both intent and effect, thereby fulfilling every condition of the Genocide Convention principles of genocide (United Nations 1948).

Liability for genocide extends to those who “planned, instigated, ordered, committed or otherwise aided and abetted in the planning, preparation or execution” of one or more genocidal acts (Akayesu 1998, article 6(1)). There has yet to be an official investigation into the mass state-sponsored atrocities of Operation Gukurahundi, meeting appropriate due process standards. Some of the key planners and organizers, those who acted in positions of authority orchestrating the genocidal campaign of mass rape and other sexual violence, continue to hold senior positions in the ZANU–PF government of Zimbabwe. This includes the current President of Zimbabwe, Emmerson Mnangagwa, who had authority over both the Fifth Brigade of the Zimbabwean National Army and the Central Intelligence Organization, in his role as head of the state’s Joint High Command, and Minister of Internal Security. He has not yet been indicted to appear before a competent international or national court of law with the jurisdiction to try such cases, and as such there continues to be no legal judgment recognizing the rapes and other forms of sexual violence of Operation Gukurahundi to be genocide.

In the early 1990s, as reports of state-organized rape, the detention of women in rape camps, enforced pregnancy and other atrocities trickled out of Bosnia and Croatia, securing indictments became an international political priority (Neier 1998). Similar such reports had trickled out of Zimbabwe a decade earlier, but rather than securing indictments as an international political priority, the matter was “[swept] under the carpet” (Cameron 2017: 16) by the British government. The study of Britain’s policy towards Zimbabwe evidences a series of deliberate acts in the furtherance of the country’s political interests. This includes the minimization of the genocidal violence of Operation Gukurahundi by key British figures in Zimbabwe that assisted the advancement of British economic and geo-strategic interests in a key area of sub-Saharan Africa (ibid.). Their wilful blindness facilitated the genocide of the Ndebele of Matabeleland to continue unchecked. The crimes of genocide committed by the Third Reich in Nazi Germany, the Hutu government of Rwanda in 1994 and the Bosnian Serb forces in the Former Yugoslavia, all of which have been commented upon in this article, were investigated, prosecuted and passed judgement on in international courts in a global effort to end impunity through international justice. In Zimbabwe, 40 years after the launch of Operation Gukurahundi, there has yet to be an investigation and prosecution, and the most senior leader and organizer of the genocide, the incumbent Present of Zimbabwe, enjoys not only impunity for his crimes but, most recently, an invitation to the 6 May 2023 coronation of King Charles III of the United Kingdom.

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Notes

1. The author conducted interviews during 2021 with former soldiers of the Rhodesian African Rifles (RAR) and police officers of the British South African Police (BSAP) officers who amalgamated into the Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA) and the Zimbabwean Republic Police (ZRP) in July 1980. They recall that the Fifth Brigade comprised of four battalions of around 1,000 men each.
2. This study acknowledges that elements of the Ndebele population in the Midlands Province were also targeted, however this article will only examine patterns of sexual violence in the Matabeleland Provinces.
3. In 2017, the author completed interviews with Walton Johnson, Oxfam America; Simon Stocker, War on Want; Paul Staal, NOVIB (Nederlandse Organisatie voor Internationale Bijstand); Tim Lobstein, CIIR (Catholic Institute for International Relations) and BVP (British Volunteer Programme); and John Saxby, CUSO (Canadian University Services Overseas), who were five of the eight representatives who wrote a letter of concern, which they hand delivered to Prime Minister Robert Mugabe, Minister of State Security Emmerson Mnangagwa, Minister of State for Defence, Sydney Sekeramayi and the Minister of Home Affairs, Dr Herbert Ushewokunze, on 17 February 1983.
4. Pungwe is the Shona word for sunrise and refers to a gathering that continues through the night until dawn or sunrise.
5. The male participants of this study most often referred to rape as "doing the dirty" whilst the female participants would refer to being subjected to MPR as "sleeping with them."
6. Bhalagwe Camp was originally a base for ex-ZIPRA troops incorporated into the Zimbabwe National Army. But in 1982 the troops there were accused of being dissidents and the camp was shut down. From mid-1982 it became the country's most notorious detention centre for so called dissidents.

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