

## Editorial: In the Shadow of *Gukurahundi*

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A number of the contributions to this Special Issue on Zimbabwe have made more than passing references to the *Gukurahundi*, the brutal campaign of violence carried out against the mostly Ndebele populations in Zimbabwe during the 1983 and again during the 1985 elections. It is worth reflecting on the meaning of the *Gukurahundi* for anyone interested in understanding why the ruling party, ZANU(PF), when it found itself backed against the wall by election results they thought could never happen (the March 2008 defeat of so many ZANU(PF) members of parliament AND President Mugabe himself), turned to such depraved forms of terror and political violence to punish individuals and rural villages en masse for having voted for the opposition rather than their supposedly “beloved” ZANU(PF).

In April, word started to spread of the violence against mostly Shona villagers and MDC supporters in the smaller towns of the northwestern provinces of Zimbabwe. There was here and there talk of “*Gukurahundi*” again. People began see familiar examples of tactics from the *Gukurahundi* in much of the news: the forced “conversions” of entire villages by ZANU(PF) youth, war veterans, police, and soldiers in April, May, and June 2008; the public beatings of civilians accused of voting for and supporting the MDC; the murders of party activists, of their families, and even their relatives for attending funerals.

Memories of *Gukurahundi* are extremely painful to those who survived it, or were born afterward and told of its horrors by their relatives who had lived through it, and this editorial is not seeking to make a direct comparison of recent events with those of the 1980s. While there are chilling similarities in the tactics used by the ZANU(PF) regime against its

opponents in the aftermath of the March 2008 elections, this editorial does not seek, by noting those similarities, to minimize the extent of the suffering and persecution that occurred during the *Gukurahundi*. Those who were affected by that wave of violence in Matabeleland and Midlands in the 1980s deserve recognition for the scale and depth of their losses, and the attendant political alienation that they have suffered ever since, as marginalized members of the body politic of independent Zimbabwe. The salient point to emphasize here is that the perpetrators of the *Gukurahundi* were never brought to book. The *Gukurahundi* campaign's designers in fact remain in positions of power in the current government. The continued non-admission from the regime as to the scale and intent of the 1980s atrocities, their refusal to admit the *Gukurahundi*'s ethnic character, along with the continued access to power by those who helped plan and command the *Gukurahundi* is what has allowed the ruling party to re-deploy *Gukurahundi*-like actions of political punishment at the grassroots level once again in 2008, and once again to devastating effect, albeit this time not aimed at Ndebele-speaking supporters of ZAPU, but at the Shona-speaking ZANU heartland that had turned away from the party of Mugabe and voted for the MDC.

For many people outside of Zimbabwe, the details of what the *Gukurahundi* was and how it has shaped Zimbabwean politics is little known. A great deal of criticism has been made of scholars and the international community for not looking more critically at the *Gukurahundi* when it was occurring because the world was “in love” with Mugabe and the newly independent Zimbabwe. In addition, much of the world was concentrating on fighting apartheid South Africa, so the crimes of Mugabe--seen at the time as a liberation war hero and a staunch anti-apartheid leader among the Frontline states--could be overlooked in pursuit of the goal of bringing down apartheid in South Africa.

This was a sad failure on the part of the international community, but one that should not be allowed to be repeated in 2008. As Clapperton Mavhunga's article in this issue reflects, the attempts at press censorship that were available to Mugabe's insiders in the early 1980s are much less effective in the Internet age. As described below, the details and photos of victims of these most recent attacks on innocent people are well documented and available for the world to see. The same cannot be said for the evidence of the *Gukurahundi*, but that does not mean the details are unavailable. Thanks to a republished version of the extraordinary document from 1997, the "*Report of the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980-1988*" originally written and published in 1997 by the Zimbabwean Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (CCJP) and the Legal Resources Foundation, it is possible to research and understand the stark similarities between state violence then and now.

The report republished in 2007 as *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: a Report of the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980-1988* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007) is well worth finding in your library or requesting that your library order a copy. The Report provides a very clear historical account of the *Gukurahundi*, a term that translates from chiShona as "the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains." To briefly outline the Report's account, *Gukurahundi* was a military campaign launched in January 1983 against the civilians of Matabeleland South, Matabeleland North, and Midlands provinces by Robert Mugabe and others in the ZANU-PF leadership. In addition to military leaders, the Report suggests it was Enos Nkala and Emmerson Mnangagwa along with Mugabe who were most responsible for the planning and implementation of the campaign.

As the report details, two sources of instability had prompted Mugabe to organize the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, a North Korean trained force estimated to include between 2,500 to 3,500 soldiers. The first was the

presence of dissidents after Independence. The report describes how the growth of dissident numbers had increased after violence broke out between demobilized soldiers of Mugabe's ZANU and Joshua Nkomo's ZAPU at Entumbane, a suburb of Bulawayo, in 1980. In addition, the apartheid State in South Africa used former ZAPU soldiers to destabilize Zimbabwe in this period, creating a small group of "Super ZAPU" dissidents responsible for brutal attacks on civilians in an attempt to destabilize Zimbabwe and hamper the use of Zimbabwe by the ANC and PAC to organize their attacks on South Africa. The kidnapping of six foreign tourists in July 1982 became the event used by Mugabe to justify ZANU's unleashing of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the civilian population in predominantly Ndebele areas. When the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade received their marching orders in January 1983, Mugabe handed them a flag emblazoned with the term *Gukurahundi* on it. He then sent the soldiers off encouraging them to "plough and reconstruct." It soon became clear that the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was not going after the dissidents and super ZAPU directly. Instead, whole villages and districts were targeted for collective punishment and the tactics used showed a strategy of terror, killing, and beatings in order to punish villagers for the presence of dissidents. The Report suggests that there were already adequate regular troops to engage the estimated 200-400 dissidents active in Zimbabwe in 1983. But the specially trained 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, made up almost exclusively of Shona-speaking soldiers loyal to Mugabe, began to terrorize the civilian population of Matabeleland. Mugabe's call to "plough and reconstruct" was meant in terms of sending a message in the predominantly Ndebele-speaking areas of the country that ZAPU itself was no longer welcome to remain as a viable opposition party.

It is important to obtain a copy of the republished Report to understand the systematic use of torture and collective punishments during the *Gukurahundi*. Based on over 1,000 personal testimonies, the Report details extensive and extended beatings of individuals both in their home villages and also in special camps set up to make

the beatings more “efficient”. These torture camps became death camps for many victims, and those who survived often suffered physical and psychological injuries that would cause many lifelong disabilities. Families were traumatized by these beatings and the disappearances of loved ones. An appendix at the back shows one example of a list from a hospital of admitted patients, a list that shows how systematic the beatings on the buttocks causing open sores was used, as were the breaking of bones. These same tactics were deployed during the violence this past summer. A Human Rights Watch report from April 2008 describes the tactics used after “base camps” were set up in areas that had voted for the MDC;

During the day, ZANU-PF and their allies (so-called “war veterans,” youth militias and some armed men in military uniform) gather at these camps to decide on their targets, generally those known or thought to support the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). According to witnesses, the targets are then rounded up and brought to the camps at night, where they are beaten for hours with thick wooden sticks and army batons. Human Rights Watch has interviewed more than 30 people in the last two days who have sustained serious injuries, including broken limbs, as a result of these beatings.<sup>1</sup>

Another tactic used during the *Gukurahundi* was literally to starve out the people of rural Matabeleland. Rural shops were forced to close and curfews imposed to stop individuals from moving from urban areas to their rural areas with supplies. Most importantly, food aid was withheld from areas during periods of serious drought. People risked their lives to get to urban areas, while others were reduced to surviving off of foraging and other strategies. The same tactics have been used against the MDC over the past 6 years, with rural populations told in the past that they needed ZANU(PF) membership cards to receive food aid.

This year may be the worst yet, as the shortage of seed and fertilizer has meant fewer and fewer people can afford to plant food, and the politicizing of food aid distribution compounds the situation. During the period of the political violence, Mugabe’s government banned relief agencies and NGOs from working in Zimbabwe, and now that they are allowed to return they are finding the situation to already be dire. In addition, the Zimbabwean government reportedly managed to influence the SADC food security report to show areas of need in ZANU(PF) areas, and leaving out of the report areas controlled by the MDC.

As Alexander and Tendi have described in this issue, during the period between the March election and the June run-off, it was not the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, as in the 1980s, who carried out the violence but by what has been alleged to be a coordinated plan by the Joint Operation Command (JOC) to make sure that when it came time for the June 27<sup>th</sup> presidential run-off vote, the areas of traditional ZANU(PF) support would have no choice but to vote to reelect Mugabe. Once the violence began, a number of MDC candidates who had won seats in parliament were forced into hiding. The MDC organizers and anyone suspected of harboring opposition views were targets, and once again the rural teachers were forced to run or face torture and public beatings.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the direct parallels of tactics used in both the *Gukurahundi* and this past year, the shadow of *Gukurahundi* is still an issue because of the culture of impunity it created. In 1985, as the Report describes, political violence was used before and after Zimbabwe’s second general election to guarantee a ZANU victory, and by 1988, with ZAPU no longer a political threat and the ZAPU leadership brought into the ZANU(PF) government, the perpetrators of the *Gukurahundi* were given a blanket amnesty. The authors of the *Gukurahundi*

1. Human Rights Watch, “Zimbabwe: ZANU-PF Sets Up ‘Torture Camps’” (April 19, 2008) <http://www.hrw.org/english/docs/2008/04/19/zimbab18604.htm>

2. The Sokwanele website has provided detailed accounts of the violence during the summer. A total of 2,168 cases were reported as of November 7, 2008. <http://www.sokwanele.com/map/electionviolence>

Report expressed the following concerns about the 1988 amnesty offered to all those involved in the *Gukurahundi*:

Whilst we have grave reservations about amnesties of this nature, given the lapse of time between 1988 and now and the fact that those responsible for the (more numerous) human rights violations which occurred during Zimbabwe's liberation struggle area also immune from prosecution, we do not suggest that human rights violators be prosecuted. However, it is important that those who were directly responsible for human rights violations be removed from positions which may enable them to violate human rights again in the future. History shows that the retention of the human rights violators in positions of authority can lead to those same people reverting to their old ways.<sup>3</sup>

Writing in 1997, the authors understood then what has now come to pass: to give amnesty to the soldiers and civilians involved was one thing, but to give blanket amnesty to those in power, to the ministers and generals, to the politburo and the President, only heightens the risk that the political and military leaders will use the same deadly tactics again.

The parallels between the tactics of the *Gukurahundi* and 2008's Operation *Mavhoterapapi* ("How did you vote?") will require a systematic examination by scholars and students writing on the political situation in Zimbabwe today. There are plenty of documented cases and reports of the 2008 violence available on the web. For example, reports written for Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch, and Solidarity Peace Trust are a good place to start.<sup>4</sup> The hardworking team of Zimbabwean

journalists at the Voice of America's Studio 7 for Zimbabwe have produced a number of valuable stories of this past summer's violence, as have many Zimbabwean and non-Zimbabwean journalists for the major English-language newspapers. Perhaps the starkest imagery available to show the extent of the torture and beating are the photos of victims of the violence on the Sokwanele's Flickr photostream.<sup>5</sup> These photos should be enough to convince even the most skeptical person of the magnitude and depravity of the political violence this past summer. Similar photographs from the 1980s appear in the original *Gukurahundi* Report. The psychological trauma experienced by families and survivors of this past summer's violence has been and will continue to be great. And while the Zimbabwean health infrastructure has currently ground almost to a halt, the heroic work done by churches, medical workers, and others to assist victims requires greater international recognition and financial support.

### **The Shadow of Gukurahundi and the Power Sharing talks**

The national unity model of negotiations that Mbeki, SADC, and the AU pulled out of their hat in August and September 2008 seemed at first a perfect way to save face. It allowed South Africa and SADC to claim "ownership" of the crisis, and allowed the international community to show their concern but also to absolve themselves of any tough diplomatic choices, in particular making the illegitimate election and political violence in Zimbabwe a priority at the UN Security Council. One major problem with the talks soon became apparent, that was the inability of SADC to convince the very same ZANU(PF) leadership, who are also close business and military associates with the most powerful players in SADC (South Africa,

3. *Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: a Report of the Disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands, 1980-1988*. Introduction by Elinor Sisulu. (London: Hurst & Company, 2007) 379.

Another important book is Brian Raftopoulos and Tyrone Savage (eds), *Zimbabwe: Injustice and Political Reconciliation* (Harare: Weaver Press, 2004). See especially the chapter by Sheri Eppel, "'Gukurahundi' The need for truth and reparation" pp. 43-62.

4. Amnesty International, *Zimbabwe: Time for Accountability*: <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/zimbabwes-victims-of-violence-can-no->

[longer-wait-for-political-solution-20081031](http://www.amnesty.org/en/news-and-updates/report/zimbabwes-victims-of-violence-can-no-longer-wait-for-political-solution-20081031) ; Human Rights Watch, "*They Beat Me like a Dog*": *Political Persecution of Opposition Activists and Supporters in Zimbabwe*

<http://hrw.org/reports/2008/zimbabwe0808/> ; Solidarity Peace Trust <http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org/index.php>

5. Sokwanele Photostream <http://www.flickr.com/photos/sokwanele/>

Angola, Namibia, the DRC), that they must negotiate in good faith.

Now that this lack of good faith on the part of ZANU(PF) is self-evident to the world, there is talk of offering an alternative by organizing a new election. Here again the shadow of *Gukurahundi* appears. As David Moore perceptively observes in this issue, who will stop the current ZANU(PF) from returning to violence again if another election was to be organized? At a recent conference, Mac Maharaj facilitated a lively discussion on the topic of the suitability of a South African-style "power sharing" negotiations in other African states, as has been attempted now in Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Zimbabwe. In an interview by Peter Alegi and Peter Limb after the session, Maharaj pointed to what he saw as the main danger of such generic applications of the model in each new African crisis: "So what we are creating in these other countries [by insisting on a "national unity" or "power sharing" model]... that is, it is almost creating a culture of impunity by those who may commit gross violations of human rights and atrocities against people."<sup>6</sup> There is serious concern that Mugabe will come out of these negotiations even stronger and with the support of South Africa and the majority of SADC member states.

Whatever the outcome of the SADC power sharing negotiations, it is clear that Mugabe and his ZANU(PF) insiders have managed to buy more time for themselves by understanding how fickle world interest has always been when it comes to a nation like Zimbabwe. As Horace Campbell argues in this issue, they also buy time thanks to the high levels of international mining interests in Zimbabwe. While the United States and other Western nations have used "selective sanctions" against Mugabe, the mining interests from North America, Europe, and South Africa continue to support ZANU(PF) through their constant flow of

new capital investment and in their share of profits. Richard Saunders wrote a detailed report this summer of South African investments in Zimbabwe.<sup>7</sup> Saunders' report is worth reading to better understand the way South African economic interests continue to invest and take over key areas of the Zimbabwean economy. Chinese and Indian businesses have taken over key areas in mining and in steel and coal production. All of this will continue whether or not a power-sharing agreement is reached, and the general absence of discussion of how the shadow profits from these contracts are "eaten" by the predatory nature of the Zimbabwean political elite makes talks of power sharing as purely a "political" solution all the more suspect.

As concerned scholars, we need to consider ways to advise our own leaders to once again engage the Zimbabwean crisis meaningfully. The excitement around an Obama administration should be seized as an opportunity to reinvigorate US policy toward Zimbabwe. The Bush administration was very slow to realize that Mbeki was failing to negotiate in good faith between ZANU(PF) and the MDC during his six years of "quiet diplomacy". And when U.S. Undersecretary for Africa Jendayi Frazier did finally lose patience with Mbeki, she managed to alienate the South Africans even further by deciding to go to South Africa and declare the MDC's Morgan Tsvangirai as the outright winner of the presidential election while Mbeki remained quiet about the results. It would be helpful if Frazier and the US State Department could do more in the next few months behind the scenes to push SADC and South Africa toward a more responsible role in protecting Zimbabweans from violence both within Zimbabwe and within the region. The US has lost a lot of its legitimacy in Southern Africa over the past 8 years, if not the past 28 years, but the Obama administration can do a great deal to mend fences with a new South African president in January, as

6. See Peter Alegi and Peter Limb, "Africa Past and Present: Episode 16" <http://afripod.aodl.org/> The quote above is from about the 16:30 minute mark.

7. Richard Saunders, "Painful Paradoxes: Mining, Crisis and Regional Capital in Zimbabwe" *Ezine: South Africa in Africa* No. 4, August 2008 <http://www.africafiles.org/atissueezine.asp>

well as with other regional leaders. However, it is important for US policymakers not to simply accept the status quo of “on again off again” negotiations and tacitly accept South Africa’s role as the key negotiator. South Africa is deeply implicated in the Zimbabwean crisis, mostly through its neglect even to recognize it as a crisis until quite recently, and then only after xenophobic violence within South Africa targeting Zimbabweans caused an “embarrassment” to South Africa’s international image. As Hammar and Rutherford have shown in their articles in this issue, the use of Zimbabwean labor in South Africa, both highly skilled and less skilled, has been a large benefit to the South African economy--- but the poor treatment and precarious status of Zimbabweans in South Africa and the region need to be taken more seriously by SADC, and with greater coordination with relief organizations who can assist displaced and at risk populations.

The risks involved in accepting the current dispensation of on-going negotiations and lack of serious attention to food insecurity and displaced populations are troubling to say the least. Consider the results that came from the South African brokered peace in the DRC in 2002, or the American-led negotiations over the CPA in the Sudan in 2005 and again over Darfur in 2007. None of these processes have turned out particularly well, with each conflict returning to a cycle of political violence and humanitarian crises where the death tolls are still mounting. Will it be possible to avert such a fate for Zimbabwe? Is it really the case that the Zimbabwe situation constitutes a conflict resolution model? Or is it a case of a one-sided war against a civilian population? If SADC does manage to force an agreement--and the ANC’s Jacob Zuma has used that term this weekend, that “regional leaders must ‘force’ Harare deal”, who will protect the opposition from further violence once the meetings are over and the handshake photo ops are over?<sup>8</sup>

8. Blessing Zulu, “South Africa’s Zuma Says Regional Leaders Must ‘Force’ Harare Deal” November 7, 2008 <

Since 2000, Mugabe has gambled with the use of elections, hoping to convince the world that he actually cared about the results, while at the same time deploying violence to guarantee a ZANU(PF) victory. Each time he did this, his allies in SADC gave their stamp of approval. The events around the 2008 election showed the world just how the shadow of *Gukurahundi* has returned to action when the corrupt group around the state leadership saw their privileges challenged through legal means. SADC and the AU were unable to sweep this election under the rug, but the international community has thus far been satisfied with allowing South Africa and SADC to continue to legitimate Mugabe’s use of violence by first legitimating his role as president of Zimbabwe, and then by urging him to offer up to the MDC a piece of the political and economic pie. It now would appear that Mugabe and his “super-patriots” have failed even to agree on sharing the crumbs, as reports from this past week show renewed beatings and disappearances of MDC politicians and their supporters. To most casual observers, it would seem illogical and suicidal for Mugabe’s insiders to refuse a deal in order to protect their hold over the economic patronage they command, particularly as the Zimbabwean economy sinks even deeper for the majority of citizens. Students should investigate the intricate links this ruling group maintains to many forms of accumulation, almost all of which depend on using the privileges of state power to ensure their continued economic “success”.<sup>9</sup> This is not simply

<http://www.voanews.com/english/Africa/Zimbabwe/2008-11-07-voa57.cfm> >

9. For just one recent example, see the reporting by Oscar Nkala in the *Mining Weekly*, “Zim loses \$2bn worth of diamonds a month through smuggling – central bank” (November 7, 2008). After reporting the amount claimed lost by Reserve Bank of Zimbabwe (RBZ) chief Gono, the author interviews a “senior police officer from Manicaland” who explains

‘...that the diamond smuggling syndicates cannot be uprooted because they have political and security establishment connections.’

a class of business elites who can give up their hold on the state and do something else, nor can they possibly consider any attempts at opening the state to those who might find them guilty of abusing state offices. The people around Mugabe's rule are not about to cede their power through a negotiated "power sharing" exercise.

As word of more violence in Zimbabwe begins to reach the world in November 2008, it will be very essential that South Africa and SADC be pushed towards a more active role in peacekeeping and food security. The factions within ZANU(PF) are once again preparing to prove to Mugabe--before the December ZANU(PF) meeting in Bindura--that they are more hardcore in defeating the MDC than the other factions. Again, innocent Zimbabweans will inevitably suffer. This is therefore not a time to wait for drawn-out negotiations or to expect that the new administrations in South Africa and the United States will offer a quick fix. Concerned scholars need to work together with policy makers to devise strategies and approaches. Otherwise, all the best-laid plans for a "post-Mugabe redevelopment" that now circulate around Washington and European think tanks will be meaningless. We all need to realize that there are a number of men and women in ZANU(PF) who will continue to defend the status quo should Mugabe, like two of his previous vice-presidents Joshua Nkomo and Simon Muzenda, die in office.

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'Like all illegal activities that involve huge amounts of money, this problem of illegal panning and smuggling will simply not go away. Many a time we have arrested people with big stashes of diamonds and even cash in US dollars, only to get a phone call from some high-ranking government or party official to say we should release the suspects and give them back 'their' loot.

'The RBZ may want to see this ended quickly, but they would have to arrest top government and security establishment officers, who are bleeding this country to death,' says the officer.

<http://www.miningweekly.com/article.php?id=146460>

Also available at the very helpful website for research, the Zimbabwe Situation, <http://www.zimbabwesituation.com/>