

# Ethnicity, domination and tyranny: A Case for the Ndebele people in *Running with Mother* (2012)

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## Abstract

Hegemonic state grand narratives are often absolutist in ways in which they insist on particular ways of viewing the past, present and the trajectory to the future. They canalize society's attention to certain ways of remembering, forgetting and viewing the socio-political, economic, cultural and ethnic relations in ways that legitimate the state as quintessential. Zimbabwean history, in its patriotic sense, is appropriated by the state in order to inscribe technologies of domination and tyranny in politics and ethnicity. In this research we argue that contesting narratives like *Running with Mother* use memory and re-memory to establish patterns of marginalisation, violence and hegemony used by the ZANU-PF government. Mlalazi's narrative uses memory of the Gukurahundi violence in order to confront ethnic and political injustices in the past and present and, in this way, seek justice and healing in the public sphere. We argue that ZANU-PF politics since 1980 has been totalitarian and geared towards the elimination of ZAPU and the Ndebele through various exclusions and coercive acts whose consequences have left the Ndebele confronted with the question of: Who are we (the minority) and what are the opportunities in an increasingly 'Shonaised' (ZANUFIED?) Zimbabwe? We conclude by arguing that violence was used by the ruling party on the Ndebele not to create an inclusive society but to establish ethnic domination and tyranny which is still manifest to this day. The act of remembering the violence therefore, becomes a site for psycho-social therapy in a situation where the dehumanization is unacknowledged, diminished or perpetuated in other guises.

## Introduction

The conflict theory asserts that social problems occur when dominant groups mistreat subordinate ones and thus advocates balance of power between the dominant and subordinate groups. Similarly, the Marxist view conflict as a result of power struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The subsequent result of the conflict for some states has been slavery, colonialism, apartheid, genocides and other dehumanizing acts of violence. Christopher Mlalazi (2012) in *Running with Mother* reflects on violence, murder, genocide, rape and arson through the lens of a child's eyes. He narrates a 'civil war' that many would not dare to talk about for fear of being treated the same because the dominant group seeks to impose itself on the underdog and influence its very existence.

While the Gukurahundi disturbances could have been genuinely motivated by the government's fear of destabilisation by apartheid South Africa (Alexander, et al., 2000) issues surrounding the period appear much more complex. Proxy wars do indeed normally

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take place in volatile circumstances where a perceived injustice exists that can be taken advantage of. In Zimbabwe the unfair treatment of ZIPRA combatants in the Zimbabwe National Army press ganged some of them to become dissidents rather than endure the humiliation by former ZANLA combatants. The situation of suspicion and animosity was further accentuated by the discovery of arms caches on ZAPU properties. Clearly the government of Prime Minister Robert Mugabe found an excuse for the establishment of its long-cherished one-party state. The one-party state ideology, premised on woolly Marxist-Leninist-Socialism speciously argued that a multiparty system created and reinforced divisions, tribalism and sectarianism. At the time of independence, ZAPU offered some credible opposition to the ruling party (Eppel, 2005). The party therefore had to be destroyed by all means necessary. In this all-consuming obsession ZANU-PF, the state and government became interchangeable so that “when the party and its leadership became angry, the state became equally angry and reacted on its behalf and often at the behest, of the party leadership” (Sithole, 2000, p. 156). This was a short step to creating what Kriger (2003, p. 75) calls “a party-state and a party-nation.” Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007, p. 75) sees the deployment of the Fifth-Brigade as part of what Mugabe saw as “nation-building” in the form of “power-building and legitimacy seeking processes” in a region likely to reject him as leader. It was a primitive way of establishing ZANU-PF as the uncontested centre of power.

To underscore the political dimension to the Gukurahundi, Sithole (2000, p. 157) quotes Prime Minister Robert Mugabe’s speech at a rally in Bulawayo asking the mainly Ndebele audience the chilling questions of:

“Where will we be tomorrow? Is it war or is it peace? Let the people of Matebeleland answer the question.”

The bellicose discourse was further concretized by his apposition of ZAPU leader (and his supporters) to a snake in the house whose presence has to be eliminated through a preemptive strike. The language of intolerance, of imminent violence warns the opposition party to toe the line and vanish into the dominant, hegemonic and majority political party and group. Looked at from this perspective, the military, political, ethnic and historical dimensions of this crisis tend to blur, producing overlaps and interpenetrations that spiral ad-nauseum. What is important is to realize that complex factors come into play in the theatre of the absurd that was Gukurahundi. Nkomo (2001, p. 217), the leader of ZAPU and the target of ZANU-PF’s vitriolic attacks, observes that the Gukurahundi “... overtly justified its violence in political and tribal terms. This is further underscored by Eppel (2005, p. 45) who avers that:

*As they murdered and destroyed, 5 Brigade told victims that they were being punished because they were Ndebele-that all Ndebeles supported ZAPU, all ZAPU supporters were dissidents.*

The two factors seem to have fed into each other to produce one of the darkest moments in the history of post-independence Zimbabwe. Raftopoulos (2004) looks at the crisis as a manifestation of the residue of the war period between ZANU and ZAPU that was never seriously resolved. He argues that the facade of unity under the Patriotic Front was merely a decoy to pragmatically negotiate during the Lancaster Talks.

In the book *Running with Mother*, Mlalazi seems to emphasize the ethnic factor more than anything else. The Zimbabwean discourse of totemising politics has often poisoned the conduct of the same in that claims to autochthony often take the exclusive form of Shona genealogy symbolized by filial proximity to the makers of Great Zimbabwe architecture. Often this leads to framing the ethnic others as rank outsiders to be subjugated. This is the context of ZANU (largely Shona and therefore indigene) and ZAPU (largely Ndebele

and therefore outsiders) conflict and the resultant subalternization of the minoritised group. Raftopoulos (2004, p. 1) however cautions that “for a state to maintain its right to rule, it must continuously engender the consent of (all) its citizens, through overall management of society with minimum force.” The tragedy with ZANU-Pf is that it is so habituated to tyranny, force and intimidation that it has become difficult to unlearn these political skulduggeries. A plethora of cases present themselves in for example the way they dealt with their Vashandi and Nhari rebellion, the Gukurahundi, the way they dealt with the opposition Zimbabwe Unity Movement (ZUM), the 1997-98 food riots, the violent Land Reform Programme and the attempt at crushing the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Schmidt (2013, p. 11), apropos of the above, avers that “violence aims at silencing the attacked and thus at producing a victim, someone robbed of agency and personhood.” In this research we analyse the ways in which Mlalazi and others fictionalize the technologies and landscapes of violence perpetrated by the Shona dominated ZANU-PF on the minority, the Ndebele-dominated ZAPU to map out what Mbembe (2001, p. 111) calls “...the violence that can be set in motion to protect the vocabulary used to denote or speak of commandment, and safeguard the official fictions that underwrite the apparatus of domination since these are essential to keep people (Ndebele) under the commandment’s spell.” We argue that Gukurahundi violence may have had a political dimension, but it had far-reaching consequences on Ndebele identity, aspirations and collective ego. The brutality occasioned particular power and ethnic alignments whose reverberations will hover for a long time to come. The Rhodesian tyranny was and is rehashed after independence in ways that bring about an ironical sense of the *déjàvu*. We conclude therefore that whilst memory can indeed open up festering wounds, it is, nevertheless, essential for purposes of healing individuals and communities. Such healing is contingent upon confronting the painful pasts which the ZANU-PF government conveniently wishes away.

### **Research theory**

In this research paper we invoke Maria Pia Lara’s socio-literary theory that insists on the ways in which literary narratives, through their illocutionary and disclosive force, have a transformative effect on the nature of society. Although her theorizations are largely applicable to feminism, her theory makes sense in the context of Gukurahundi in so far as it rehearses and shows how dominated groups seek to authorize, contest and delegitimize ‘polluted discourses’ represented by official narratives of the ruling elite. She argues that narratives delineate past injustices and ways of confronting these injustices and, in the process, making a just society possible. This is because narratives have the capacity “to disclose previously unseen marginalisation, exclusion and prejudice...and that they are “society’s ways of coping with the past, the present, and a possible, utopian future” (Lara, 1998, p. 7-8). The act of recollection and retelling can be analgesic in a Zimbabwean society that imposes silences on and about uncomfortable pasts in the name of national unity and ‘not opening old wounds.’ This accords with Schmidt (2013:10) whose view is that “... memory carries the potential of being subversive even-and maybe especially when hegemonic discourse, such as that of the state, attempts to control remembrance” and forgetting. Lara’s theory is also important because it introduces the idea of justice and good life in the public sphere in a country governed by ZANU-PF metanarratives that seek to erase the Gukurahundi and the marginalisation of Matebeleland out of secondary books and therefore out of national memory. Re-memory is important in so far as it dredges up the past in order to reconstruct and inform the present thus transforming the future.

### **Politicisation of Ethnicity, or ethnicisation of politics? A look at *Running with Mother***

The writer, Mlalazi, uses the technique of child narration in the story in order to capture the absurdities, grotesqueness and the incomprehensibility of the adult world. Child narration in literature is important because the world is viewed from the standpoint of an innocent voice trying to make sense of a senseless world. It is a technique that registers events without the agency to change the life circumstances. To that extent, in its naiveté and innocence, it is used to good effect by the writers to judge the gratuitousness, brutality and irrationality of adult behaviour to the extent that it is an innocent, uncalculating voice free from adult attitudes, it is used to register disgust at political imperatives that ‘thingify’ human life for ideological and ethnic purposes. In this way, it can be viewed as a tear-jerking strategy meant to emotionally involve the reader looking at how children are socialised into grisly and macabre politics of the Gukurahundi.

Through the eyes of a fourteen-year-old girl, the writer narrates the Matabeleland atrocities that bring out a story no character from Saphela area will ever forget. The novel sets off with the description of the Kezi landscape. The road is desolate, there is lack of development, and only one bus travels to the village from Bulawayo. The lack of development is marked by the presence of only one other form of transport ‘too many’ a rickety old truck owned by the owner of the only shops that are present in two villages. The Saphela area seems to be devoid of resources as the solitary bus brings in goods from Bulawayo.

Mlalazi seems to set the mood for abject poverty and seems to indicate that the people of this area are already suffering from the lack of economic and basic amenities like schools and water. Rudo comments that, “The sound of a car in the village has always been one that makes people-adults and children-stop whatever they are doing and watch the road, as if a good spirit is about to appear” (p. 21). Through the description of a marginalized and underdeveloped Kezi, the writer uses the technique of focalisation. The technique is important here in that it shows the state of affairs in rural Matabeleland soon after independence. Obliquely, the writer is drawing attention to a region that the colonialists deliberately underdeveloped in pursuit of their racist ideology. The expectation was that the black government was going to move fast in bringing a certain level of development and progress in order to make up for colonial stagnation. The circumstantial irony, however, is that the government, instead brings further destruction and violence. The reader is made aware that the schools are few and far away. Immediately after the coming of the red-bereted soldiers, the schools are rendered obsolete because no one goes there because the conditions have become uncondusive to learning. The chilling description given is one of wanton destruction of the infrastructure and homes. Schools are burnt down and the teachers violated and killed. The clinic is also burnt down and the nurses undressed and humiliated. Homes, livestock and dogs (Skelemu) are destroyed. Even the only bus, Siyahamba Bus Service is laid to waste by the rampaging 5 Brigade whose brief seems to be that of destroying anything that bears a Ndebele name and anything that could infuse the community with a sense of ownership. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008, p. 167) refers to this when he observes that it “became a scenario where for the nation to live, the tribe (Ndebele) and its whole notion of group existence had to die.”

The state of affairs is infused with rich symbolism and portentousness. Why would the schools be razed down as if, by some strange alchemy, they have metamorphosed into dissidents? Why would the clinic be burnt down and nurses violated for doing their professional jobs? The writer, in a stroke of a pen, creates an atmosphere pregnant with sinister intent on the people of the region and the language they speak. The child narrator

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speaks of the existence of soldiers with “red berets parked at the side of the road, parallel to the crushed bus”, the only bus that plies this route (p. 6). These soldiers speak Shona and ask the narrator: “Why do you have a Shona name and a Ndebele surname?” (p. 6). The child is forced into a world of ethnic identity politics, the world of antagonistic difference hitherto unknown to her. The texture of the narrative at this point gives the impression that the behavior of the soldiers is much more than military.

Destruction of infrastructure and the only bus, the school and clinic smacks of gleeful sadism that goes beyond the hunt for the dissidents. At any rate, the reader is given no evidence of any attempt to hunt and militarily engage the dissidents. The helicopter hovers dangerously over the heads of the civilians who cower helplessly whilst the soldiers play rhumba music. This evokes a sense of the diminution of the lives of the people hunted because it is as if the soldiers are hunting game. The inscription of the sense of fear and death contrasts poignantly with the atmosphere of joy evinced by the soldiers aboard the helicopter. State resources are used to hunt down a section of the population in the fictional world of the novel. Msindo (2012, p. 212) observes that “as the government’s notorious Fifth Brigade consisted mainly of Shona, it became like a Shona occupying force sent to slaughter Ndebele people.” This suggests a violent fixation with collective punishment which goes against the rules of natural justice. One is left to wonder if the destruction of the schools, which is metonymic, is not meant to create an illiterate ethnic group that will forever be at the beck and call of the dominant group. Or is it a hegemonic attempt to try and impose the control of the majority in all spheres to do with well-paying jobs? According to Bull-Christiansen (2004, p. 56), Mugabe described the Gukurahundi,

*As an act of self-defense on the part of Zimbabwean people. This (sic) people was by now apparently Shona, since the entire Ndebele-speaking part of the population was seen as the constituency of the enemy.*

But if particular regions go through turmoil of this nature and magnitude, while others develop academically, culturally, infrastructurally, etc., the trend is that such a people tend to lag behind, making necessary affirmative action. No one can argue that a particular group of people can be said to possess monopoly of intelligence to outdo others in the employment sector. One needs to interrogate the effects of the Gukurahundi on the educational levels in the affected regions during that time and the distribution of people who hold influential positions even to this day and one would be staggered by the pernicious consequences of that deliberate operation. The politics of selective empowerment ensures that such asymmetries exist in a Zimbabwe shaped by the politics of Gukurahundi. Poverty is often created in the country the better to control and manipulate people. According to Fanon (1963, p. 132):

*The state, which by its strength and discretion ought to inspire confidence and disarm and lull everybody to sleep, on the contrary seeks to impose itself in a spectacular fashion. It makes a display, it jostles people and bullies them, thus intimating to the (people of the affected regions) that he (they are) in a continual danger. The single party is the modern form of dictatorship...*

It is no wonder the appearance of the soldiers is not only extremely, frightening but also perplexing to the poor villagers. The appearance of the soldiers disturbs the villagers even before they are attacked.

Mlalazi relates this confusion to the physical appearance of the commander whose countenance is that of a teacher although he possesses the brutality of a murderer. Rudo the protagonist is baffled and reacts to the complex personality “I had never seen a soldier wearing reading glasses before, sunglasses yes but reading glasses... (p. 6). Mlalazi seems to hint on the old adage of ‘wolves in sheep skin’. It is even plausible to argue that Mlalazi is insinuating the fact that the 5 Brigade was not really a fighting force fashioned in the

crucible of military engagement, but that they were a political outfit meant to 'discipline' the bodies of the Ndebele people. At first glance, Rudo seems to think the bespectacled soldier is friendly and learned. It is not until he shows her the headman's hand that had been cut off that she realizes the truth. Similarly, at first reports on the Matabeleland massacres were said to cleanse the area of dissidents when in fact it was to eliminate all Ndebele speaking people. If that was not the idea, how then did the army justify the killing of women children and the burning homesteads? Were women and children also dissidents?

Mlalazi descriptions and narrations are not far off from the factual report that was presented by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace in Zimbabwe (1997) (CCJP) report on the disturbances in Matabeleland and the Midlands. From the eyes of the fourteen year old, the attack on her friends and relatives was a clear indication that the soldiers did not consider their lives worthy of anything, since they belonged to a minority group that was posing challenge to the dominant group. Kendal, et al. (2004, p. 312) opine that a minority group (or subordinate) is one whose members because of physical or cultural characteristics are disadvantaged and subjected to unequal treatment by the dominant group who regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination."

The army commander clearly articulates their intention and dominance over the Ndebele people when he says:

*'You', he said in Shona. 'Hurry, disappear and don't look back. This is a matter for the Ndebele people only.'* (p. 9)

The tribal atavism is further buttressed by the fact that the other girls have to be violated for not speaking Shona, they have to be stripped naked and raped just like the fate of headman Mabhena, the owner of "... a human hand...chopped off at the wrist which glistened with blood" (p. 7). Rape, whether individual or collective, symbolises the imposition of the other's dominance, will and control. It is a phallic symbol meant to enlist submission and an act of 'breaking' a people's resolve, it is absolute humiliation in order to annihilate people's proud history and to call into question their identity as Zimbabweans. Ironically, it was the same strategy that was used from 2000 and beyond on the opposition supporters. The strategy also involved the 'long sleeve' and the 'short sleeve' options in which the youth militia gave their victims the Hobson's choice of having the arm hacked near the wrist (long sleeve) or somewhere above the joint (short sleeve). This further complicates and muddies the insistent ethnic dimension that the novel *Running with Mother* takes about the motivations of Gukurahundi. Sithole (2000, p. 156), sees this as mere "policy of annihilation." For Reeler (2004, p. 230) "... Ndebele speaking people ... were assumed to be supporting dissidents" and that "this was not a war (sic) for the hearts and minds of the people but a terror campaign to destroy the will of a whole community" (*ibid.*). The child narrator in Thabisani Ndlovu's (2006, p. 3) short story characteristically calls Gukurahundi "soldiers in a war that is not a war."

Mlalazi brings out the hatred that is fueled by tribalism and ethnocentrism. The depersonalisation is clearly not about dissidents because the soldier clearly articulates that the issue is about the Ndebele people as a tribal group. The commander is not concerned about gun wielding dissidents who lived in the forests and sporadically harassed and robbed the people of the community. The people of Saphela seem to be normal village folk who do not have any ulterior motives towards the state. One then questions where the said dissidents were when all this was happening. When the same 5<sup>th</sup> brigade was fighting the war of liberation did they look for the white colonisers in their Borrowdale homes or they fought in the forest away from civilians? If the intention was to look for dissidents, did they live in Ndebele people's houses only? It is not surprising that Rudo in

her circumscribed imagination questions the methodology that was being used to look for dissidents when she says:

*Were those soldiers doing all those horrifying things- cutting of people's hands, burning them in their homes, stripping adults naked, beating them and herding them like cattle into a pen- were they trying to turn the Ndebele people into slaves of the Shona? (p. 117).*

The child narrator is incisive in her analysis because the linguistic landscape in Zimbabwe therefore changed into a master-servant relationship. Almost all Ndebele speakers are now able to speak or have a smattering of Shona thanks to Gukurahundi while those that speak Shona declare boldly that they do not understand Ndebele. The effect of Gukurahundi was the manifest 'Shonisation' of Zimbabwe. It also created a sense of self-doubt amongst the Ndebele such that they always feel they need confirmation from the dominant group about anything political in Zimbabwe. Conceptually, the definition of tribalism shifted from being open to many interpretations of behaviours and utterances to being appropriated by the dominant group in order to apply it subjectively, conveniently and whimsically on the subaltern Ndebele group. This created overt asymmetries in the domain of politics, economics, culture, social life and general Shona/Ndebele relations at personal levels. One wonders if this was not the putative intention of the deployment of the 5 Brigade. Eppel (2009, p. 22), a white Zimbabwean writer cynically views government behavior as an act of ethnic cleansing and bossing over a people. In his book, the first prisoner, who is Ndebele, dramatizes this when he says, "they hate you because you are white, they hate us because we are Ndebele. They call us dissidents ... We Ndebele, we have been suffering since 1980." This is a reference to perceived marginalisation, peripherisation and a sense of having to fit into the dominant group's agenda.

It is instructive to note that Rudo's mother comes from Mashonaland but is married to a Ndebele husband advocates a more inclusive and polyphonic Zimbabwe than the one created by Prime Minister Mugabe. She persuasively says:

*"This country is for everybody: the Shona, the Ndebele, Kalanga, Venda, Tonga, Suthu and all other tribes that live within its borders, even the whites, the Indians, the Chinese, Coloureds, everybody. Isn't this why we went to war? (p. 109).*

Thus the presence of Ndoro and Mamvura in Matebeleland deconstructs the essentialised, fixed and regionalized views of identity that anyone who lives in Matebeleland is Ndebele and that Shonas are from Mashonaland. Rudo's mother's lamentation is a wail against the politics of fragmentation and fracturing, the politics of arbitrary exclusion and inclusion, of totemic entitlement that ZANU-Pf inaugurated after independence. This fragmentation foreshadows the de-nationalisation of the whites as people of foreign origins in the post 2000 politics of nativism.

Mamvura and Rudo's lives are spared and they are taken to Bulawayo because they are Shona. It is not surprising therefore that the politics of totem and tribe breeds resentment in some Ndebele speakers who, through association, believe that everyone who speaks Shona is culpable and shares in the basic philosophy of the Gukurahundi. This is what Mkandla, the teacher, refers to when he says of Rudo's mother: "Her people are killing our people with the permission of the Prime Minister" (p.132). The short story "Torn Posters" by Gugu Ndlovu, shows young Ndebele children who are socialized into bitterness against the Shona in general because the soldiers who arrest their father speak that language. So embittered are these children such that their arrival in Harare to see their imprisoned ZAPU father is an entrance into 'enemy territory.' When they tear down campaign posters with the message "Pamberi Ne ZANU" (Forward with ZANU), they feel their actions as children

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are a show of ethnocentric patriotism against THEM (the Shona in general) and HIM (the then Prime Minister) who is Shona and gave orders for the slaughter and mutilation of the Ndebele. In both narratives the urgent need for a healing process is emphasized for the sake of the future. Yet in Zimbabwe the Ministry of National Healing established during the Government of National Unity was nothing but a paper tiger meant to create spaces for people to ride the gravy train. The government did not want healing to take place. The Dumbutshena Commission of Enquiry formed to look at the atrocities of the Gukurahundi was never made public. The truth about ethnicity in Zimbabwe is always suppressed in order to safeguard so-called national unity where this unity means the continued hegemonic hold of ZANU-PF and their dominant ethnic group.

Kendal et al (2004, p. 317) argue that, “the ultimate form of discrimination occurs when people are considered to be unworthy to live because of their race or ethnicity”. The atrocities that Rudo narrates are not only alarming to the reader as they rehash old wounds for those affected by them. The disturbing part, which Mlalazi seems to address, is that the truth was never revealed of how many people died in the massacre. The genocide that follows soon after the girls are raped is not reported in the history of Zimbabwe. It is the strategic silence that underlines the genocide that Rudo’s mother finds shocking. “It’s hard to believe that those people today were really government soldiers”, mother continued. “Government soldiers are trained and disciplined and they would not go around burning up people and children in their homes” (p. 33). What Rudo’s mother does not seem to fathom is that these are party soldiers who have been elevated to ethnic paratroopers and therefore discipline has nothing to do with it.

For Rudo, her mother and surviving aunt the soldiers in their village were not from their government. The brutality and savage killing of people far surpassed that of people who belonged to the same nation and shared the same birthright. The actions to the soldiers were those of an enemy who had nothing in common with those they attacked. It is the enforced silence that Mlalazi takes courage to break through Rudo’s Aunt who laments the absence of the rule of law, the lawlessness the lack of protection of her people when she says:

*It is impossible that our government has not  
heard about this with all that shooting  
and all those people killed (p. 47).*

The lack of participation or comment from the government and the head of state on the atrocities are indicative of the fact that the soldiers had the blessings of the government to carry out the said exercise. Their actions were not dissimilar to the way Rhodes and his army violently colonized Zimbabwe. Lobengula and his army did not stand a chance with the assegais and shields.

The dominant group, through Gukurahundi, conquered and colonized the Ndebele people. They were forced to submit to the dominant group. The state of internal colonialism is evident in the way they have been kept out of the economic and political mainstream so that it is difficult for them to compete with the dominant group members (Kendal et al., 2004, p. 326). They have been subjected to severe attacks on their own culture which has led most Ndebeles to migrate to South Africa and Botswana where they feel comfortable in spite of xenophobia in those neighboring states. The lack of development in Matabeleland is not only present in the opening chapters of the book but it is still evident today. Bulawayo which once boasted of a thriving industrial area that employed thousands of Ndebele man and women is almost a ghost town whose few remaining companies largely import workforce from outside the region. Of late, the industrial areas are being turned to places of worship. Rasna (2008) argues that historically presidents have tended to use their powers to decide which regions will benefit the most from public resources. It is not

far-fetched to surmise that President Mugabe's formidable and determined opposition to devolution of power is motivated by the need to maintain the hegemonic status quo. Rudo laments my school is just too far away" (p1). In some provinces in Zimbabwe there is a primary school every five kilometers this is not so with Saphela area.

### **Significance of literary onomastics in *Running with Mother***

Person names and toponyms play a significant role in concretizing the thematic poetics of the writer with regards to the intentions and patterns of the Gukurahundi. Names are signposts that reflect or correspond to behaviour, context, commentary or circumstances surrounding the standing of a given character. In this book, the writer seems to scaffold the name of Captain Finish. He is the commander of the army that is arresting, torturing and killing all characters with Ndebele names. To finish is to unambiguously put to an end The name is fraught with sinister connotations; whatever he says or does seems to be guided by the macabre and grisly intent to put to an end the life of any living thing or object that bears a Ndebele name. As a synecdoche of the ruling elite, he means to annihilate and exterminate the Ndebele people physically, spiritually, emotionally, historically and dignity wise. At a symbolic level, he means to scatter the Ndebele proud view of themselves and what they and their party, culture and history represent. His behavior bespeaks of an attempt at total annexation and 'colonization' of the Ndebele so that they toady to the dominant group. That he is sure of his mission is dramatized by his statement to Mamvura when he says:

*We are on national duty and we don't want anything to disturb us, not even our fellow tribes people or their children (p. 139).*

Thus in line with Captain Finish's 'national' mandate, dogs, livestock, schools, clinics, houses, buses etcetera have to be destroyed. The problem with Captain Finish and his superiors is that they do not seem to problematise the ideas of nation and citizenship in their complexities. They are simply driven by ethnic and political urgencies that cloud their judgment about the role of government, state, nation-state and belonging. The book seems to be making a pungent criticism about the dangers of ethnocentric nationalism.

Toponyms also play a significant role in properly understanding the events and experiences of the characters. This dovetails with what Holquist (2002, p. 68) observes:

*Literary texts, like other kinds of utterances depend not only on the activity of the author, but also on the place they hold in the social and historical forces at work when the text is produced and consumed.*

Thus the killings, humiliations and maimings take place in a place called Saphela. Saphela is a frenzied Ndebele word which means we are finished, we are all dead. At a literal level, it refers to being physically killed, but, at a metaphorical plane it shows the erosion of the very edifice that defines the Ndebele as a people. There is also Uncle Genesis whose sobriquet is Mahleka (One who is always laughing) as if to stress his harmlessness and conviviality. This is juxtaposed to macabre scenes where Uncle Francis and family are locked in a hut and incinerated therein (p. 17). This is accentuated by visual image of helicopters making countless rounds collecting and dumping the corpses of Ndebele people and dumping the in the disused Saphela Mine. Outside the fictional life-world, the Saphela mine represents Bhalagwe in Kezi where many a Ndebele was dumped during the intense period of the Gukurahundi that was concentrated the Kezi and Tsholotsho areas.

The surreal nature of the brutality can only be explained in terms of a people (the Gukurahundi, despite being sent) whose political and ethnic indoctrination rendered them robotic in their hatred of the Other. People without a cosmopolitan outlook, whose existence has always been with people of their own ethnic groups are bound to be prejudiced, to doubt and even hate the humanity of others different from the due

to ethnocentrism and political brainwashing. How does one dehumanize and debase others without in some way diminishing one's own humanity. This may appear like pulpit morality but the result of the Gukurahundi campaign was, according to Ncube (1990:161) a campaign that "degenerated into brutality and atrocity resulting in the maiming and death of hundreds of people who were neither dissidents nor collaborators" but mere Ndebele and ZAPU supporters.

The Phezulu Mountains are used as a strategy to heighten the oxymoronic nature of independence for the people of Matabeleland. In IsiNdebele 'phezulu' means 'high up there' and these mountains provided refuge to the guerrillas and civilians against the brutality of the Smith regime. Read in this way, the mountains become a symbol of resistance to tyranny and segregation, they take on the hue of people's determination to create a just and democratic society. The destabilisation of all forms of hegemonies was always the stated aim of the liberation war. Immediately after the war is won (which represents the apogee of people's quest for freedom, phezulu), the Phezulu Mountains become a symbol of refuge against the rampaging government of ZANU-PF bent on perpetuating colonial violence, discrimination and political domination. Ngugi refers to this as the "blackisation of colonialism" (quoted in Ugwanyi, 2011). Hegemonic practices and discourses find expression in alien performances such as the *pungwes* (all-night vigils for purposes of ZANU political indoctrination) which the ZIPRA forces operating in the areas never did, are now being foisted on the Ndebele people. The same goes for the vitriolic discourse of slogans like "Pasi..." (Down with...) and the songs that lionize ZANU-PF and its leaders whilst denigrating the Ndebele and ZAPU. This was the beginning of the hegemonic discourse of patriotic history (Ranger, 2005) that placed everyone else who was not ZANU outside the pale of national belonging and recognition. Thus what should have been the zenith of Ndebele aspirations becomes the nadir of their selfhood. The Phezulu Mountains become symbolic of a revolution gone awry for the Ndebele people.

## Conclusion

The 5 Brigade violence in the life-world of *Running with Mother* was strategically carried out in order to domesticate the Ndebele people and the ZAPU political formation. The act of violating a people based on ethnicity was an attempt to impose the hegemonic urgencies of the majority party and group on the minority in order to create particular ethnic matrices of power relations. The Gukurahundi violence sought to break the spine of the Ndebele, scatter their political, ethnic and historical identities and thereby underscore their subalternity. The destruction of schools, roads, clinics, homes and buses fundamentally removed the Ndebele from the locus of national development and 'progress.' The violation of individuals through rape, maimings, massacres, burning of homes and dropping corpses in disused mines depersonalized them and called into question their Zimbabweanness. Their bearings as citizens were disoriented. The tyranny and violence had its intended consequences in that the affected regions lagged and still lag behind in terms of infrastructure and education in general. The majority of the people fled into South Africa, further creating a numerical vacuum that was exploited by the dominant group who flooded the regions. In terms of professional jobs, a situation was created where the Ndebele were seen as anti-education, further justifying recruitment of the dominant group into the regions allegedly because they were better educated.

At a cultural level, the Gukurahundi inaugurated the 'Shonisation' of Matabeleland through education and television which is, by and large Shona in content. That the Gukurahundi soldiers spoke in Shona in their violent disciplining of the Ndebele, that the *pungwes* and slogans were thundered in Shona meant the predominance of that language as a language that could distinguish between death and survival. The operation inculcated

in the Ndebele a sense of diffidence and always having to play second fiddle to the dominant group. Today, in the poisoned environment created by ZANU-PF, a Ndebele can only aspire to be second vice-president and no more. Gukurahundi reinforced their minority status so that they began to feel that they should always be followers and never national leaders in politics. In the absence of acknowledgement of wrong-doing on the part of the Shona-led government, and with no healing, the victims of this ethnic cleansing have to resort to memory narratives as some form of analgesia. Far from creating an inclusive society that privileges plurality, the text *Running with Mother* shows an ethnically bifurcated society in which the Ndebele are the Other to be ridden roughshod over. Devolution of power could have gone a long way in assuaging the sense of pain, exclusion, marginalisation and being tyrannized over, but it looks as if power is exercised best and comfortably when there is the ethnic other groaning under domination.

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