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Graves and the Memorialization of Gukurahundi in Matobo

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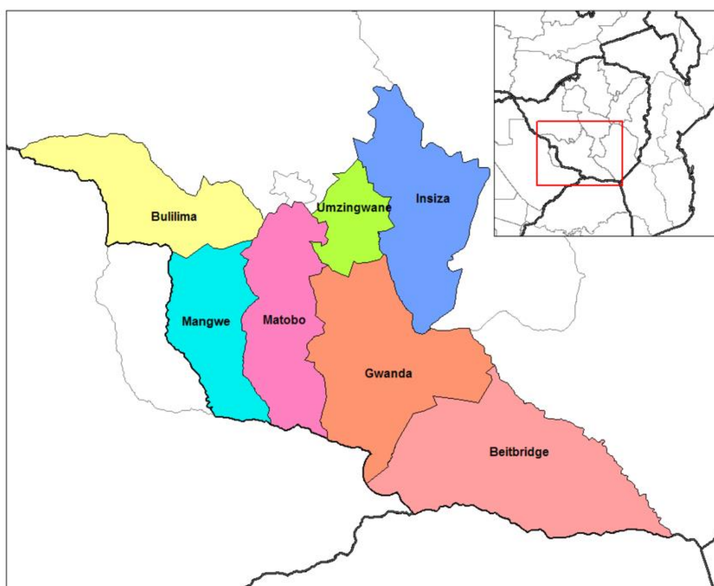
ABSTRACT

The Matobo district sits to the south west of Zimbabwe in Matabeleland South province. After Zimbabwe attained independence in 1980, this district plunged into yet another civil unrest that lasted until 1987. The unrest has been referred to as gukurahundi. A number of new landscape developed during that period which characterise how Ndebele communities and the state interpreted their struggles during gukurahundi. This article discusses the materiality of landscape by focusing on graves as posters of memory. During the post-colonial era, the Ndebele were killed and buried in mass graves dotted in the district. This article argues that post-colonial graves in the district curate the history of how these communities have negotiated with the state what to memorialise about gukurahundi. By focusing at graves, this article argues that the state has had a dissimilar trajectory from local communities about victims of the 1980s. The article uses ethnography and archival material to argue that Matobo communities and the state use graves to advance different trajectories. Matobo graves are capital in the hands of the state to dominate local communities but Matobo has weaponised the same graves to defy state power. The article submits that Matobo graves capture the nub of struggles between the state and communities at the periphery to control memory.

Key words: Graves, belonging, landscape, gukurahundi, memory, Matobo.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of this article is Matobo district which is located on the South western side of Zimbabwe in an area mainly inhabited by BaKalanga. The district sits south of the city of Bulawayo. The map below shows the location of Matobo in relation to other districts in Matabeleland South province.



Located at the heart of the district, are the Matobo hills, most of which were declared a national park in 1926. Within this district, most of the martyrs of gukurahundi lie in graves explored by this article. The park

which eats much of the hilly area, housed BaKalanga communities who were displaced between 1950 and 1962 (Terrence, O. Ranger, 1999). Up to 1893, most Ndebele Communities lived to the north of the park in Insiza and Khami Districts. The Native Commissioner of Gwanda in 1897 assumed that the total population in the "district was 118 000, of which only 12 000 were pure Matabele" (Danziger Commission, 1949).

Most BaKalanga in Matobo today prefer to characterise themselves as Ndebele and use the Ndebele language. Sharon Maphosa's study (2021, p.13) of Mangwe adjacent to Matobo notes that "Ndebele has been taught in predominantly Kalanga-speaking areas for generations. This system has over time produced people who learned Ndebele at school and eventually used it in their homes, creating the use of two languages in some families and a shift from Kalanga to Ndebele in others." Colonial and postcolonial state onslaught on Matobo communities also forced them into identity metamorphosis. It is therefore hard to speak of communities in this district as BaKalanga with absolute rigidity. Belonging to BaKalanga is characterised by pluralism and flexibility. In the 1980s, BaKalanga and the Ndebele shared grave spaces as inseparably as they shared victimism. In this district, communities struggles with the post-independence state over control of their 'bodies' whether dead or alive.

In April 1980, Zimbabwe got independence. By 1982, however, the post-independence peace had had a miscarriage. A civil war had begun in Matabeleland. Some have called it gukurahundi (J. Alexander, 2021, M. Tendi, 2021, U. Rwafa, 2012). Matobo communities were accused by the state of being or supporting dissidents whom the state presumed to be led by Joshua Nkomo (M. Tendi, 2021). Nkomo originated from Bidi, a chieftaincy in Matobo. Matobo therefore became the epicentre of state concentration camps as the state sought to arrest civic unrest in the country by causing something worse. This article examines the materialities of graves in the district to the state and local communities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There is a large corpus of work developing on the gukurahundi (M. Sithole, 1980, U. Rwafa, 2012, S. J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S., 2013). In the 1980s, Sithole viewed this conflict as a factional and ethnic clash between the Shona and the Ndebele (M. Sithole, 1980). Rwodzi (2019) discussed perpetrators of gukurahundi. Eppel's work (2004) suggests that the main perpetrators of gukurahundi were the 5th brigaders. Recent scholars have tried to understand the postcolonial state and how it functioned during gukurahundi. S. Doran (2017) has argued that Mugabe was the main perpetrator of gukurahundi in Matabeleland. All these studies are key in setting the base for studying gukurahundi in Matobo. They reflect on fundamental sentimentalities about the contribution of the 5th brigade and the state during gukurahundi (Killander, M. and Nyathi, M. 2015). These perpetrators were key in leading to the death of many in Matobo whose graves are scattered all over the district whose materiality this article examines.

Cameron (2018) has analysed the contribution of bystanders such as Britain during the massacres in Matabeleland and Midlands. Cameron's work opened an important window in assessing gukurahundi in that the responsibility of the mass murder of the Ndebele was also sprayed to those who, even though they had power to reduce the extend of the massacres or stop it before too many people were killed, only chose to do nothing. That accounted to the many graves which this study analyse. Other scholars have assessed the post-gukurahundi memory in light of the atrocities and their connectedness to the difficulties of reconciliation in Zimbabwe (R. Murambadoro, 2015). This work is deeply rooted in narratives from Matobo district gathered through ethnographic methods. The article therefore explores memories of the Ndebele about the gukurahundi and their attachment to the graves of the massacred in the district.

Memory is key in the study of gukurahundi in Matobo. J. Fontein (2010) argues that the "bones, bodies and human remains occupy an increasingly complex place in Zimbabwe's post-colonial milieu". In similar manner, this article explores the politics of graves in post-colonial Matobo and argues that the history of Matobo is inseparable from the history of grave memorialisation. It is argued that graves curate the

protracted epochs of Matobo post-indepence violence. History is hooked to the substance of graves. In his work *Weapons of the Weak*, James Scot (1985) argues that peasants can device methods of successfully countering state power at the periphery. Matobo communities find solace in graves of people who were massacred during gukurahundi which exhibit state responsibility as villains. This article also argues that the state inversely attempts to command how communities commemorate and memorialise the same graves by attempting to deny memory to communities in the district. Graves are at the centre of memory contestations in the district. P. Maedza (2017) has argued that songs which were sung at killing areas are fundamental in keeping gukurahundi memory alive. If songs refresh memories of communities in Matobo, so do graves.

Marowa (2015) who studied the social memories of the evicted Rengwe communities of north western Zimbabwe argues that memory can be a vital source for retrieving history. That memories linked to gukurahundi can be dented by numerous factors does not mean we should throw away the baht water together with the baby. Fentress and Wickham (1992, p.7) argue that "when we remember, we represent ourselves to ourselves and to those around us". Quintessentially, memory is constructed in dialogue with the environment of Matobo killings (I. Marowa, 2015, p.22). Memory can be separated from remembering as "memory is an active and continuous process in the mind, whereas remembering is the practise and telling of the memory" (Ibid). As Marowa argues, memory can be used as a conceptual framework for understanding the role of graves during gukurahundi. This work uses graves which are regarded as storage granaries of historical information. Because the past begot the present, and the present will beget the future, therefore the future is the past by other means for these These communities envisage their current challenges through the lens of their past struggles of which graves act as cues in the killing plains.

The discourse of the utility of memory in reconstructing the past has proven to be fundamental in accessing the past. Allen and Montell (1981) in particular have argued that there is a linkage between materials and history. This is supported by Maedza (2017, p223) who argues that "memory is embodied in affective history". Maedza's work helps us to have a more nuanced understanding of the role of graves of the gukurahundi. It does that by pointing at the close relationship between memory and historical epochs such as the mass murders which engulfed the Matobo plains. It allows us to analyse and capture the gukurahundi narratives and link them to the various graves that characterised the killing field. Graves can be viewed as memorialisation canons depicting the various socio-political struggles which were characteristic of the1980s-Matobo. The noise, deaths, smell and flies which punctuated daily livelihoods at various camps canbe enshrined in grave memories. When we analyse graves not only as happenstances of the time, we retrieve the residues of the past contained in grave materialities and the environments in which such graves cameinto being.

This work does not display a simplified linkage of history, memory and graves in particular. Howbeit, graves are a potential methodology for gathering undecomposed particles of the past which survive through time. Graves can be ''wormholes through which we travel to better understand" the past (Maedza, 2017, p223). They offer a small windows we can use to peep into the horrors which shrouded the history of the Matobo murdering plains. These memories exhibited through graves must not simply be dismissed as biased because memories are also reflective of the present and imagined struggles, but instead, the ability to sieve through memorialisation of graves must help us in retrieving the hidden treasures of the past's canons which are both buried but unconcealed in dead bodies' graves. The grave story of graves is a scripts that must be allowed to also dominate the gukurahundi discourse as a language expressing the victims and villains' sentimentalities.

This chapter extends the argument by K. Chitofiri, D. E. Mutasa and T. Gwekwerere (2017) that music can be a weapon for fighting for justice and freedom. It is rather argued that graves can be artillery for those terrorised by the state to defy institutionalised bondage and can also be used as postures reflecting compliance with tightly set repressive orders. Chitofiri et al argue that through their music with euphemism, ridicule and overt criticism, Thomas Mapfumo, Hosiah Chipanga and Leonard Zhakata, forge an aesthetic of resistance that exposes and contexts the institutionalisation of patronage, violence and corruption in post-

independence Zimbabwe (K. Chitofiri, D. E. Mutasa and T. Gwekwerere, 2017). In no dissimilar manner, Matobo graves stoop high in scolding and dis-empowering the state and its various instruments of force in Matobo in as much as they are a sign that they had a repressed past. Matobo narratives suggest that graves in Matobo are not filled with resting bodies which can not affect the present and the future. Ethnographic evidence suggest that the living are rather pawns of the dead in a huge way, which invigorates the Matoboan that they are by no means pawns of the state.

GRAVES OF MATOBO

Joseph Mujere (2012) studied migrant BaSotho in Gutu and posits that graves were ascribed important materialism in articulating BaSotho belonging in Dewure. Mujere (2012, p.120) argues that the Bethel cemetery "became a marker of BaSotho belonging". Mienert, Willersle and Seebach (2017, p.37) have also argued that "graves play significant roles as land markers in disputes over land" in Northern Uganda. These scholars agree with Fontein (2011, p.713) who argues that "around Mutirikwi… graves… have a more 'active' and 'affective' presence". These studies are of import value to Matobo as the state endeavored to have entitlement over graves, proving how graves are valuable material when the memory of the past is negotiated. The state seeks to dictate which graves locals should and should not materialise. Contestation over the significance of what locals choose to remember and forget and what the state on the other hand want them to remember and forget is the fulcrum of this article. P. Geschiere (2005, p.59) notes that funerals in Africa often "constitute a high point for the reaffirmation of belonging", even where "quite different modalities of belonging are at stake". The Geschierean notion explains claims by communities in Matobo. Whereas graves offer communities a weapon for belonging, they also offer them weapons for defying state power. On the other hand, the state use graves to also articulate entitlement of the same land claimed by local communities. It is necessary to analyse the significance of various graves to various communities in Matobo over time.

The main 'gulag' where most bodies were buried during gukurahundi was probably Bhalagwe. At this camp, unprecedented butchery of communities took place. Mass graves were dug at the killing camp to bury the massacred. Human skeletons were taken out of Antelope mine shafts close to Bhalagwe, some with coins showing that they were killed after Independence (Breaking the Silence). In 1983, bodies were also retrieved from a mass grave at Cyrene Mission to the north of Matobo, which showed clear evidence of gunshot wounds (Ibid). Evaluating mass graves at Bhalagwe offer us lenses for peeping into the history of the post-colonial conflicts in Zimbabwe.

Ndlovu, who survived Bhalagwe tortures narrates how in 1984 the 5th Brigade summoned villagers to Donkwetongwe, a week before he was abducted. The security forces opened fire killing all the young men. About 8 of them were killed. The bodies of the dead were not buried. The 5th brigade told locals that dogs were supposed to eat bones of dissidents. Indeed, dogs dragged some of the dead for a few yards from where they were shot. P. Ndlovu (interview, July 2020) narrated that after about a week, villagers quietly and 'voicelessly' dug a shallow grave and buried these remains. Lena Reim (2023, p.2) argues that this left "deep scars within Zimbabwe's social fabric". These graves curate memories of how the state massacred Matobo communities. The discourse of *"Unfinished narratives"* by Richard Werbner (1998) helps us by analysing the narratives of these communities. So does "*Noisy Silence"* by Joyclin Alexander (2021). These scholars capture memories of the victim communities. This article further analyses narratives such as the above which suggest that graves are a cue for disinteresting tales of gukurahundi. They are markers of state cruelty against peripheral communities.

N., whose house is on the shoulders of Bhalagwe narrates that "we were living like dead people here. Any day you could be killed. We were moving graves. Belonging to Matobo was seen as belonging to dissidents' headquarters. Survival was by sheer luck." Mugabe labelled Nkomo as "a Cobra in the house" (*The Herald*,

14 February 1982) and his minister Mnangagwa referred to the Ndebele as “cockroaches” and even used the biblical benedictus saying “woe unto those who will choose the path of collaboration with dissidents, for we will certainly shorten their stay on earth” (The Herald, 5 April 1983). The narrative by M. N. suggests that people living without hope for life may live as ‘graves’. This suggests that a hopeless person can live on the border of life and death, waiting to cross the boundary fence from the living to the dead. On the other hand, speeches by Mugabe and Mnangagwa suggest that they had ceased to view Matoboans as human beings.

A visit to Bhalagwe camp today offers a deceiving disjuncture to what she was during gukurahundi. The place is quiet, distancing itself from everyday hustling by communities in the district. Its seclusion may blind passers-by who are unaware of what it is shielding people from seeing. Bushes have grown around areas where daily butchery of victims happened. Faint smidgens of the guilt-ness of this space can be seen only by careful analysis of the area. Time has clandestinely concealed evidence of the crimes committed against Matobo communities at this site. S. Eppel (2020, p.260) describes Bhalagwe as “landscape devoid of human activity, seldom visited. It is a lonely haunted place.” This is Bhalagwe, a place where state efforts were directed at local communities. In 1984, the biggest industry in the district happened here and it was to massacre communities. The noise, smell and investment at this place during gukurahundi makes it one of the most grave memorial landscapes in Matobo history. It also makes this landscape top-priority on the state’s list of graves that communities have to quickly forget about.

The Bhalagwe killing camp was located on a hill to the south west of Matobo. Zamanyone hill demarcates its western edge and the eastern perimeter lies in the direction of Antelope Dam. There are no villages between the camp and the dam. The camp was about a kilometre from the main road running south of Bhalagwe hill, but was invisible to people passing by. The camp provided killing space with maximum privacy. Mass graves were dug by victims who afterwards were shot or bayonetted and buried in those graves (Interview with D.M. Bhalagwe, 13 December 2020). Most importantly however, the camp was located very close to Antelope Mine which became the biggest mass grave for probably thousands of victims who were thrown down the mine shaft (CCJPZ and LFP Reports, 1997).

Eppel’s (2020) recent publication on Bhalagwe examines the memories of communities about Bhalagwe. Eppel (2020, p.62) “recounts the contestation of memory that at times has taken the form of persons sometimes physically destroying one another’s monuments at Bhalagwe”. Eppel’s (2020) work is fundamental base for this study which evaluates the materiality of graves in the killing field of Matobo as a district. It would appear that Bhalagwe was first used around 1982, by the Zimbabwe National Army. It became a detention camp from “some point in 1982 (when) the ZIPRAs (Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army,- a force viewed as predominantly Ndebele) here were allegedly accused of being dissidents, and Bhalagwe Camp was surrounded by elite Paratroop and Commando units” and turned into a district coordination site (Eppel, 2020). From mid-1982, it appears that the camp had been turned into a death camp for the Ndebele. Communities were rounded up and trucked to this killing centre. The killed were sometimes buried in mass graves dug at the edge of the camp.

Apart from Bhalagwe, there were other camps which were mainly used as receiving camps before people were posted to Bhalagwe. Some of those were San Yet San, Kezi Air strip, Bidi Shops, St Josephs and Matobo Mission in Gulati. Victim and 5th brigade narratives suggest the presence of mass graves at all camps. These killing camps became new forms of sacred places, modifying belonging in Matobo which hitherto had been associated with shrines such as Dula, Njelele and Dziko. The new killing shrines may not have decentred landscape materiality in Matobo from previous shrines but certainly redefined shrines by producing multiple centres regarding the essentiality of sacredness as basis for belonging to Matobo. They created new “geographies of pain” (E. Mueggler, 2001, 199) which gave novelty to how shrines were viewed by locals. They created pluralism on centrality of shrines by grafting new places of importance in Matobo; extending boundaries of shrines to broadly elastic limits by harnessing shallow graves used to bury victims as fundamentally significant landscape to communities. These did not challenge Njelele, Dula and

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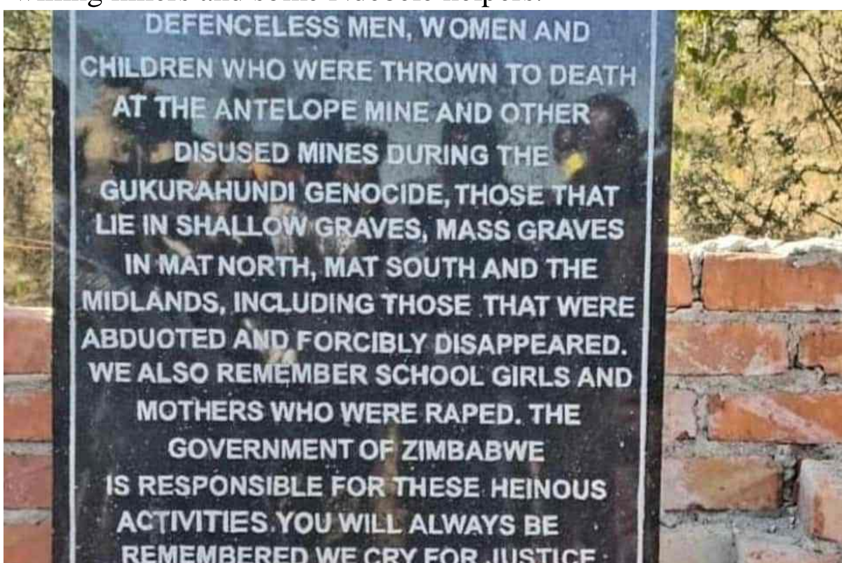
Dziko, but in many ways complemented and extended the meaning of Matobo shrines.

At Bhalagwe, no records were taken or kept for traces of the killed or buried to be made (Maloni Ncube, Interview, Kezi, 13 December 2020). Few people were released. In 1992, bones were taken out of the Antelope mine shaft (Breaking the silence, p.11).Narratives suggest that bones are still buried in the mine shaft to date. During gukurahundi in Matobo, with no journalists or visitors allowed, and all roads leading into the district sealed off, victims were carried by trucks to camps. Disused mines assisted security forces to conceal evidence of mass killings as bodies could simply be dumped into mines shafts. Many more were buried in shallow graves at the fringes of the camps (Ibid, p.4). Comrade Joe (Interview, Masvingo, 22 December 2020) states that to security forces, civilian massacre was not fundamentally secret at the time and they needed not take great pain in hiding it. The curfew did a great job in concealing it and so did the locations of killing camps in Matobo. Antelope mine was mainly used because as bodies heaved in shallow graves, they developed cracks such that Bhalagwe became too stinky to live in (Interview with M.N. 13 December 2020). The need to hide evidence of killings came later when the state was taken to task by international communities after the voice of the victims leaked into Western Europe. As Bhalagwe mass graves heaved and cracked, so did the concealed stinky gukurahundi information about the massacres in Matobo. Godwin (1996) has narrated about a fact finding mission organised in 1984 led by army leader Solomon Mujuru where journalists were nose-pulled to plains where the state was sure there was no evidence of mass killings. Matobo capture how graves museum massacres of Matoboans under the cruel thumb of the state.

Ndlovu (Interview by Zenzele Ndebele, Antelope Mine, 1 July 2020) describes killers at Bhalagwe thus;

"they were harsh and behaved like a rabbit dog. They had no conscience and even killed a young child. Ukhubulala haa labana bale sithupha sibili sesiphelemo (killing! Haa they were killing machines with certificates to kill)."

The day at Bhalagwe started very early in the morning and ended late into the night. Utter luck explained survival. Hundreds were killed daily. From waking up early in the morning, victims were beaten and cold water was poured on them to wake up. The confusion would have started. You would be luck to see that day setting without meeting with terror. Because of the need for interrogation at Bhalagwe, the contribution of Ndebele speaking CIOs (Central Intelligence Organisation) can never be overemphasised in Matobo. Questioning victims needed Ndebele speakers and the state never struggles to get Ndebele accomplices among the Ndebele who were willing to persecute other Ndebele. Killings always flowed smoothly due to willing killers and some Ndebele helpers.



Plaque that was built at Bhalagwe detention camp in memory of gukurahundi victims.

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One Saturday during the winter of 1984, M.N. relates that there was a *pungwe* held at Bhalagwe. Women sat down on their own and men sat facing women. One commander of the 5th brigade, referred to as *Nhaika*[1], ordered one man to stand up. When he did, *Nhaika* asked him, "where is Nkomo's home?" The man replied innocently, "under Chief Bidi down there". *Nhaika* angrily shouted, "you are a dissident! How many times have you gone there?" He was already cranking his gun and he shot him instantly. Another 5th brigade ordered a man to pull the dead away. As he did so, *Nhaika* shot the man pulling the dead accusing him of pulling him by the arms rather than by the legs. *Nhaika* ordered one man to kiss a woman. They were both ordered to undress and have intercourse. They undressed but the man could not get aroused enough. Both of them were accused of being parents of dissidents and were shot.

Around 3am, dozens of people had been killed. Four victims were asked to load the dead into a lorry. The driver took off to where M. N. suspected to be Antelope Mine for dumping. Two days before, about 12 victims had been buried in a shallow grave on the edge of the camp. Bhalagwe represented horror at another level. Food was rationed. No victim could look up. The area was filled with the odour of death. The faces of victims were pale. Around 330a.m. camp detainees were ordered to sleep. There were no blankets. The camp was filled with silence again for about an hour or two before the next shift of 5th brigadiers woke them up again for the next ordeal day. This characterised the daily schedules in the camp. Victims had no voice. They had no right. The dead were not respected, but at least some thought that the dead had at least rested. Their burial was not prioritised. When the Ndebele refer to a person who was not buried properly, they say that he was 'died like a dog'. This captures how much value they accord to proper burial. Bhalagwe memories suggest that most victims were 'buried like dogs'. This hugely explains why communities seek the reburial of those killed during the massacres.

Through studying the fictional and artistic works of Yvonne Vera (The Stone Virgins: 2002), Christopher Mlalazi (Running Mother: 2012) John Eppel and Owen Maseko's paintings, G. Ncube and G. Siziba (2016) concluded that they function to keep memory of civilian victims alive and to call perpetrators to account by pointing out their culpability. At Bhalagwe, graves save as similar markers of the massacre of people. Halal envisage these graves as important in the storage of Matobo history.

Charles Thomas who was detained at Bhalagwe narrates that he remembers victims being buried in "trenches. There were so many people being killed. Wherever I stepped with my toes, it was slippery because of the pools of blood." P. Ndlovu who was also detained at Bhalagwe confirmed that many people were slaughtered there; "many died at Bhalagwe. Many were thrown into the mine…. People were taken in batches of 21. They were beaten with logs and finished off by mine waters (where they were thrown). Flies followed on people's backs because of wounds." The threat that 'you will visit the bottom of the shaft' was usually given to victims who knew that Antelope mine could be their eventual grave. Bhalagwe graves are reservoirs of gukurahundi. The gukurahundi discourse has not centred on how graves curate memories of the massacres and their significance in contestation in Matobo (Doran, 2017, J. Alexander, J. McGregor and T. O. Ranger, 2000, S. Gatsheni-Ndlovu, 2012).

Matobo narratives suggests that many graves around Matobo were markers of incomparable insanity in the murder of communities. Those unparalleled massacres were unforgettable in Matobo. These graves are memorials of that reign of terror. A few miles from Matobo Mission in Gulati, late in 1984, a family of three was burnt in their hut around 3pm for being "too smart". The three were buried in one grave on the edges of the family yard. Their grave facing their kitchen hut on the eastern side. They left a small boy ,Dingani, who was not around when this happened. He was only 8 years old when this happened. He is now in his forties. Both parents dead, Dingani now looks for all kinds of answers to what happened which the state is unwilling to open up. A public apology, he says, could be of some consolation but the state wants to maintain silenceabout this period. On the same day Dingani's family was killed, a woman closeby was forced to grind herone year old child in a mortar. She was accused of being pregnant when her other child was still too

young thus "multiplying dissidents". The baby was buried a few yards outside their compound. Many other victims were killed in similar manner and their graves are dotted allover Matobo. There is one key differencebetween these graves and those at Bhalagwe and other killing camps. These graves are close to family homes and people know that their relatives are dead. They can perform all kinds of rituals like bringing their benign spirits back home. They at least can 'show love' to their dead relatives through erecting tomb stones. At some level, they have closure with their relatives. Killing camps housed people who were abducted and the mass graves there are of people from all over Matabeleland. Some who lie in those graves came from as far as Beitbridge and Plumtree. Their relatives do not know what happened to them apart from that they disappeared or that they were abducted. There is therefore no closure with family and mass graves at killing camps cause huge concern for identification and reburial. Communities want ceremonies to be held at the killing camps to atone spirits. They also hope for exhumation of Antelope mine remains for identification. Graves in Gulati have different materiality to those at massacring camps therefore. In Gulati, they lie there close to family life, as continuous cues of the massacring state.

Marowa (2015), who studied the social memories of the evicted Rengwe communities of north western Zimbabwe argues that memory can be a vital source for retrieving history. Fentress and Wickham (1992, p.7) argue that "when we remember, we represent ourselves to ourselves and to those around us". But that memory is constructed in dialogue with the environment around is key when analysing Matobo killings (Marowa, 2015, p.22). Memory can be separated from remembering as "memory is an active and continuous process in the mind, whereas remembering is the practise and telling of the memory" (Ibid). Memory can be used as a conceptual framework for understanding the role of graves during and after the gukurahundi period. This work uses graves as storage granaries of historical information. Because the past begot the present, and the present will beget the future, therefore the future is the past by other means. The past and the present are in continual dialogue in unlimited ways as they are all curated in graves.

The discourse of the utility of graves in reconstructing the past is fundamental in accessing the past. Allen and Montell (1981) in particular have argued that there is a linkage between graves and history. Graves are embodied in affective Matobo history. There is a close relationship between graves as mnemonic devices and historical epochs which engulfed the Matobo plains. Bhalagwe graves allow us to analyse and capture the gukurahundi narratives and link them to the experiences in the killing field. Graves can be viewed as memorialisation canons depicting the various socio-political struggles which were characteristic of the1980s-Matobo.

This work does not display a simplified linkage of history and memory and graves in particular. Howbeit, graves are a potential methodology for gathering undecomposed particles of the past which survived through time. Graves ''are wormholes through which we travel to better understand" the past (Maedza, 2017, p.223). They offer a small windows we can use to peep into the horrors which shrouded the history of the Matobo murdering plains. The graves 'language' and the scripts they carry must be allowed to also dominate the gukurahundi discourse.

There are a number of important investigations that arise from Matobo narratives. Firstly, to the Matoboan, the killers predominantly spoke Shona and mainly killed the Ndebele and thus gukurahundi is remembered as a tribal, and not merely as a state phenomenon. Notwithstanding the fact that a number of Ndebele-speaking people were also instigating the slaughtering of other Ndebele, narratives of gukurahundi in Matobo reflect that the Shona were trying to exterminate the Ndebele. Though these narratives from the victims bracketing all the Shona as culpable for the gukurahundi cannot stand critical evaluation, nonetheless, it is sometimes helpful to take a glimpse at Matobo gukurahundi from inside the district rather than form outsiders it. Narratives portray how the victims envisaged their struggles and their threats, whether real or imagined.

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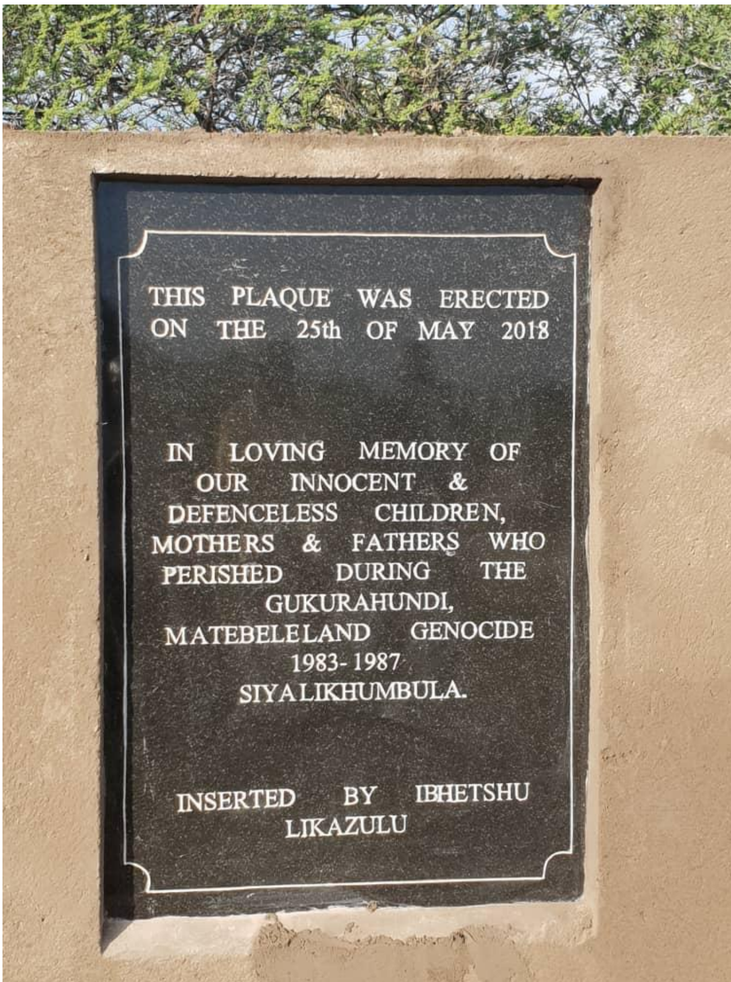

Plaque set up at Bhalagwe in memory of gukurahundi victims

Gatsheni-Ndlovu (2008) argues that gukurahundi murderers conflated ZAPU (Zimbabwe African People's Union led by Joshua Nkomo) for Ndebele and Ndebele for ZAPU and Ndebele and ZAPU for dissidents. Alexander *et al* (2000, p.223) argue that "an attack on the Ndebele was an attack on ZAPU, and an attack on ZAPU was an attack on the Ndebele as Ndebele made those who were not Ndebele come to see themselves as such, (these were) attacks at the root of people's most cherished social and political identity." Yet these historians leave out another discourse that certainly arises from Matobo narratives. Just as Matobo gukurahundists conflated ZAPU for Ndebele and both for dissidents, Matobo communities conflated (and some still do) ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union led by Robert Mugabe) for Shona and Shona for ZANU and both for perpetrators. To them, the fact that the 5th brigade mainly spoke Shona justifies that the Shona were summarily culpable. It was not, to these communities, a state draconian adventure, but a Shona exterminationist expedition against Shona enemies. Therefore whereas conflating Ndebele for ZAPU was the state's ugliest error, conflating Shona for the state is equally Ndebele narratives' most grotesque error.

Another vital point to make from these narratives is that as long as the killing plains with mines into which victims were thrown, fields where shallow mass graves are dotted all over, plains where the landscape of victimisation exist, these graves at killing shrines will continue to trumpet the unforgettable experiences of those who survived gukukurahundi. Graves are devices of memory recapitulation which activate unendingly the unearthing of gukurahundi records among the victims. Traces of gukurahundi massacres will never decay where memory savouries are kept nourished. Psychological studies have indicated that:

"forgetting happens when the right cue is not available for retrieving the memory. In the encoding of a memory, it leaves a memory trace which also stores information about the way we felt or the place we were at the time of encoding." (Gusha, 2019, p.3, *quoating* James Eric Eich, 1980).

The right cues are not constantly present in Harare. In Halal, communities live daily among graves which narrate the gukurahundi story. Accompaniments of gukurahundi produce fertile storage facilities for the maintenance of historical information in the killing plains. Graves echo memories among victims. Landscape such as the trees under whose shade unpitying butchery happened, rocks where babies were crashed to death, anthills and plains with graves are all important memory aids and mnemonic devices. At Bhalagwe, local communities have severally tried to establish plaques of memorialisation of the dead. In 2018, a plaque was unveiled at Bhalagwe in memory of the victims who were murdered there. The plaque did not last days as the state was accused by communities of removing the plaque. On the 25th of May 2021, a plaque was again unveiled by Chief Fuyane in memory of the dead at Bhalagwe. Again, in less than a week, the plaque was damaged and removed. As many times as they tried to put up those plaques, the state has countered that memorialisation by destroying those statues.

On January 4 2022, state security agents used explosives to destroyed the plague that had been erected by villagers in memory of victims of gukurahundi at Bhalagwe. Crisis in Zimbabwe Coalition issues a statement on the 11 of January 2022 that it "was appalled" by the destruction which Harare used to "silence the issue to eternity"

State-destroyed Bhalagwe plague.

The United Nations Human Rights Commission office of the High Commissioner complained in August 2022 that it was "disturbed by reports that the Gukurahundi atrocities which resulted in the killing of around 20 000 Ndebele speakers in the 1980s, continue to be a source of ethnic tension, with many victims remaining traumatized and barred from participating in mourning and commemorative activities by state agents. It urged Zimbabwe to take measures to ensure that mourning and commemorative activities can be conducted without restriction or threat." This followed the state's deployment of security forces to Bhalagwe when the communities wanted to re-erect plaques at the graves to commemorate these graves. State violence to deny Matobo communities memory of gukurahundi can be viewed as the second phase of gukurahundi. Another gukurahundi happened after gukurahundi; a gukurahundi of repressing memory and memorialisation.This memory gukurahundi which happened after gukurahundi suggest that struggles for control of memory in Matabeleland is fundamental when attempting to study these communities. Lena Reim (2023) argues that memories from Matabeleland suggest that gukurahundi was part of state 'Grand Plan' of Ndebele marginalisation. Mphathisi Ndlovu (2021, p.115) argues that "memories of these horrendous crimes remain suppressed and heavily guarded by the state".The state seeks to dictate memory in Matobo using graves. James C. Scott (1985) has argued that the weak employ subtle methods of resisting oppression and that oppression and resistance always exist in constant flux. Therefore, graves are weapons for the Ndebele in resisting state hegemony and imposition of a Harare command memory. As long as Matoboans view themselves as sitting at the periphery of the parting cabal, forgetting state onslaught will be impossible. Harare seeks to monitor what Matoboans remember. Matoboans use graves of people killed by the state as

tools for resisting state power and remembering state cruelty. The state and communities draw strength from and exercise power over each other through graves. Graves also provide Matobo communities with relief from state power and machinations. Quintessentially, Matoboans use massacring camps such as Bhalagwe to exercise agency against the state. By creating mayhem, insecurity and disorder in Matobo, the state lost the moral high ground, power and legitimacy to restore security and order among these communities even though it so desperately wants to still dominate.

The state therefore seeks to dictate what is remembered and what is forgotten in Matobo. David Coltart stated that the state's "dictatorial tendencies wrongly assume that people in Matobo would forget what the state wants them to forget." Reverent Shenk who worked in Tsholotsho and at Matobo Mission during Gukurahundi points out that "the bayoneting, raping, beating, shooting and disappearance of so many people can never disappear from people's mind so easily". Narratives about graves can be used in a heuristic manner because "the greater the similarity between the encoding and the event, the greater the likelihood of recalling the original memory" (Gusha, 2019, p.3). Graves generated another landscape layer of encoding aids about gukurahundi. For the state, gukurahundi graves deposited another layer of anxiety over locals as they offered Matobo communities a reason to amplify hatred against the state. J. Alexander (2021, p.781) argues that exhumation of graves of victims for reburial by relatives from 1999 up to 2014 always met with state displeasure and resistance. The state always hesitated to rejuvenate gukurahundi memorialisation during a time when it sought to get local communities to forget about the phenomenon. To locals communities, bringing back the spirit of the dead was one of the steps towards reconciliation. The state was usually gate-keeping Matobo memory and chose to leave locals anxious and discontented. Reburial and bringing the spirit of the dead back to the family is a key practise believed by most Ndebele to be a remedy for bad spells. The state has denied that process to happen to the communities it unleashed violence to thereby starting another layer of hatred. Tanaka Chidora (2021, p.1) wrote that "there is a country whose main pre-occupation is to allocate sadness to its people". Chidora's work captures the narratives given by Matobo communities. D. M. narrated that "Harare has been quick to forget. We do not care about Rhodes' grave which Mnangagwa wants to exhume. We care about gukurahundi graves. Was Rhodes as big an enemy as Mugabe? Harare forgets but we don't." Thembani Dube (2022, p.2) notes that gukurahundi "caused a lot of suffering which is still vividly remembered by the victims". This study reflects that the state does not want victims to remember what it did to them. Graves however are constant reminders of state onslaught in Matobo.

Another narrative from D.N. lamented that "all I want is for my father to have a descent grave like what others have done to their parents. You see that this is a month in our culture when people run around honouring their parents who passed on by putting grave stones on their graves. Now the state does not allow me to do that". D.N's father was captured in 1984 by state agents and never came back. He suspects that his grave is at Bhalagwe or Antelope Mine. He believes that if he does not build a tomb stone at his father's grave, misfortune such as accidents, unemployment, bad luck, death of livestock will not be stopped in his family. Unfortunately, Bhalagwe is viewed by the state as a place where only rebels go to, to erect tomb stones on people the state killed and buried there.

CONCLUSION

This article has explored the materialities of Matobo graves. It has been argued that Matobo graves curate the history of the Gukurahundi massacres in the region. The Zimbabwea state knows that fact and has tried to obliterate the memories of graves by destroying plaques. Matobo communities also know the materiality of these graves and that is why they have activated memories of graves by commemorating Bhalagwe. Mujere (2012, p.17) argues that "perhaps, more than anything else, funerals and graves put into perspective the politics of belonging in many African societies." Many Cameroonians also consider burial places as fundamental tools for locating their belonging (J. D. Smith, 2004, p.569). For the Ndebele, graves and funeral rituals are closely connected to belonging. According to Mujere (2012, p.17), graves can be

"markers of where 'some-body' or 'bodies' belong(s)". Pointing at an ancestral grave seems to be a key instrument in African place attachment. Post-colonial graves in Matobo have also extended the boundaries of the discourse of graves. These graves have stretched the meaning on shrines and sacred places in the area by not only presenting places where problems were solved like Njelele, but also exhibiting spaces where problems were started like Bhalagwe. The Zimbabwean state has tried to deny Matobo communities memory of the history of their massacre which the state perpetrated and which Matobo graves witness. Matobo graves are mnemonic devices pointing at the state perpetration of violence.

This article argues that graves were materialistically weaponised by Matobo communities in their struggles against the state. This gives another window for viewing Matobo contestations through time. After appreciating these communities' connectedness to their landscape, it would be easier to assess the significance of commemorating ancestral graves. The state fears what the presence of graves may equip communities with evidence of it perpetrating violence, or constrain the state's dominance in future. To Matoboans, graves are what they have to reflect the state's past cruelty. For lost poor peasants, the 1980s left them with graves as markers of their poverty.

By using ethnographic methods, this article has emphasised the value of using materials as research tools in reconstructing the past. Graves in Matobo archive the history of the district and struggles that communities in the area navigated through time. Graves in Matobo are a sign of how these communities refused to be reduced to sheer "government Lackeys" (A. Weinrich, 1971, preface), no matter the quantum of state coercion exerted. These communities morphed "performative identities accompanied by repetition of acts (of violence against them) through time" and through those events identities were constructed and reconstructed, regulated and reified across time and space (H. Canham and R. William, 2017, p.140). The present state of the Ndebele communities in Matobo does not summarily document gukurahundi massacres, it rather reflects how gukurahundi did not wholly succeed in eliminating everything foreign to state designs. And yet communities in Matobo today face a new form of evolved gukurahundi; a memory repression one, but the Matoboan refuse to crack, maybe until all that is left in Matobo is nothing but graves. Or will it be until all those at the helm of state powers who perpetrated massacres go to the grave. Gukurahundi stands as a reminder to states that communities almost always outlive them. The tragedy of gukurahundi massacres is not that it strayed from normal postcolonial Zimbabwean state norms, it is that it actually did not. Graves in Matobo prove right the old Roman proverb; homo, homini, lupus (man is wolf to man).

INTERVIEWS

1. Interview with Charles Thomas, 26 January 2018.
2. Interview with Comrade Joe, 16 September 2020.
3. Interview with David Coltart, Bulawayo, Thursday 26 September 2019.
4. Interview with D.M., Bhalagwe, 13 December 2020.
5. Interview with D.N., Bedzi, 17 August 2021.
6. Interview with M.N., Kezi, 13 December 2020.
7. Interview with P. Ndlovu, Antelope Mine, 1 July 2020.
8. Interview with Webster Sibanda, Fourwinds, 22 February 2021.
9. Interview with Reverend Shenk, Bulawayo, 24 April 2019

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FOOT NOTES

[1] Nhaika means ‘isnt it.’ Nhaika must be a pseudo-name that was given to the commander for always speaking and enganging with his audience by saying *nhaika*. The Ndebele then called him by that statement.