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# State-Organized Starvation: A Weapon of Extreme Mass Violence in Matabeleland South, 1984

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*This paper explores an episode of state led extreme mass violence in Zimbabwe, commonly referred to as Gukurahundi, with a specific focus on the second phase of the campaign in Matabeleland South in early 1984. During this phase, the state targeted both the political structure of the main political opposition party of ZAPU, as well as the minority Ndebele ethnic group from which ZAPU drew much of its grassroots level political support. Between February and April 1984, the Government of Zimbabwe used food as a political and military weapon of coercion, torture, punishment, and death against the Ndebele people of Matabeleland South. Analysis of (a) transcripts of interviews with survivors and witnesses, and (b) official government communications, between the US Department of State and the American embassy in Harare during 1984, obtained by Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, sheds a critical new lens on the policy of starvation and punishment. The original sources compiled in this study provide evidence of: (1) the suffering of the innocent Ndebele victims of state crime, (2) the knowledge that was available to the Western diplomatic community, (3) the response of the US government to the atrocities, and (4) the response of the Government of Zimbabwe to the atrocities. This study concludes that the deprivation of food supplies, which formed a significant element of this state campaign, deliberately brought between 350,000 and 400,000 people to the extreme edge of starvation in contravention of international law. Corroborating reports from credible sources evidences that these Zimbabwean state crimes resulted in the death of men, women, and children from starvation and dehydration as well as through injuries and illness exacerbated by hunger and malnutrition induced by the government's strict curfew and forced starvation.*

*Key words: Gukurahundi, Fifth Brigade, forced starvation, mass atrocities, state crime, torture, US foreign policy, Zimbabwe*

Starvation is the characteristic of some people not having enough food to eat.

It is not the characteristic of there being not enough food to eat.<sup>1</sup>

Any society that is not built on the firm foundation of truth,  
honesty and justice is already a failure.<sup>2</sup>

## Introduction

This paper explores an episode of state perpetrated extreme mass violence and atrocities in southwest Zimbabwe in the 1980s, with a specific focus on Matabeleland South between February and April 1984, in what can be termed the second phase of a massive security clampdown, commonly referred to as *Gukurahundi*.<sup>3</sup> The first phase of *Gukurahundi* took place in Matabeleland North in 1983 when state security forces put in place a curfew, and massacred, beat, raped, and tortured hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. Villages were looted and burned, leaving entire communities devastated.<sup>4</sup> The second phase of the *Gukurahundi* campaign was marked by the

Government of Zimbabwe's (GOZ) launch of a strict curfew in parts of Matabeleland South in 1984, whereby they created a "ghetto of exclusion"<sup>5</sup> within which the Central Intelligence Organization (CIO), the Zimbabwean National Army (ZNA), and Fifth Brigade, an all Shona North-Korean trained military brigade, not attached to the ZNA, enforced a policy of food deprivation against the overwhelmingly Ndebele residents of the rural communal lands. The GOZ's policy of food deprivation deliberately targeted a population of around 350,000 Ndebele<sup>6</sup> and, according to Solidarity Peace Trust,<sup>7</sup> deliberately brought 400,000 people to the extreme edge of starvation.<sup>8</sup> Many of those targeted died through hunger; the precise numbers may never be known since, as is the case with other examples of mass deaths, no records exist that indicate the number of victims who were killed directly and those who died from the deleterious conditions arising from a campaign of mass atrocities. Interviews with Gukurahundi survivors and witnesses, including missionaries, staff of NGO's, and foreign diplomatic officials, highlight an extraordinary degree of cruelty and a wide spectrum of gross atrocities during this second phase of Gukurahundi, when the GOZ sought not merely to devastate the Ndebele but to maximize their suffering, whilst the then President, Robert Mugabe, strove to attain absolute power and destroy all political dissent.

Forced starvation is a weapon that has been exerted against populations throughout history, in times of peace and conflict. It represents a gross violation of human rights, a form of extreme mass violence, and a contravention of international law. The human right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition, as well as safe access to adequate food and water, is recognized in several instruments under international law. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights deals most comprehensively with this right.<sup>9</sup> Food deprivation and starvation as an act of state crime<sup>10</sup> is the focus of this article, but, as is acknowledged herein, it was by no means the only form of food-related violence; during Gukurahundi the state also wielded food as a weapon of coercion, torture, and punishment.

There is a dearth of academic literature on Gukurahundi, and the state sponsored program of forced starvation in 1984 has yet to be systematically investigated. This paper provides several independent sets of data, which are complementary and allow a degree of triangulation, in order to delineate the approximate scope and scale of the state organized starvation, namely an analysis of: (1) transcripts of interviews with survivors of the mass atrocities, (2) official government communications, obtained by FOI requests, between the US Department of State and the American embassy in Harare during 1984, as well as (3) documentary material from the British Cabinet Office and Ministry of Defense. Based on these data, the study identifies key aspects of the policy of starvation and punishment during Gukurahundi, including: (a) the knowledge available to the Western diplomatic community in relation to the ongoing atrocities within the strict curfew areas of Matabeleland South between February and April 1984, (b) the response of the US government to the atrocities, which included admirable humanitarian efforts in challenging the GOZ and heightening public awareness to the ongoing state crimes, (c) the response of the GOZ to the atrocities, and (d) the victim groups' actual experience of the state's forced starvation. The data summarized here establishes that during 1984 the GOZ intentionally starved a specific group of its citizens in parts of Matabeleland South, and used food as a political and military weapon of coercion, torture, punishment, and death. As such, the study permits original insights into, and adds conceptual clarity to, our current understandings of

Gukurahundi. This is both significant and important since, throughout the past three decades, the GOZ has systematically denied and suppressed the narrative of Gukurahundi, an account of mass forced starvation, mass torture, mass rape, mass beatings, and mass extermination of the Ndebele, ensuring these atrocities have remained a hidden episode of Zimbabwean history and for which there remains a need to establish truth, accountability, and justice.

### Background and Historical Context

Robert Mugabe's Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) party won the first election of the newly independent Zimbabwe<sup>11</sup> in 1980. The election was flawed and the results were never fully accepted by ZANU's key rivals.<sup>12</sup> Longstanding tensions between ZANU and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), led by Joshua Nkomo, escalated, and the already fragile political relations between the two parties further deteriorated. The rivalry between ZANU and ZAPU expressed itself as a crude binary between the Shona (who formed a decisive majority in Zimbabwe and from whom Mugabe generally drew his support) and the Ndebele speakers (who constituted less than one fifth of the population and upon whom ZAPU generally drew its support). By early 1982, Zimbabwe was experiencing a "dissident" campaign of killings and economic sabotage aimed at destabilizing the country's economy and undermining support for Mugabe's government.<sup>13</sup> This dissident activity developed in the western part of the country, namely Matabeleland and parts of Midlands, areas that were overwhelmingly the homeland of the Ndebele. These dissidents had no acknowledged leadership and no avowed political aims.<sup>14</sup> Robert Mugabe over-politicised the assorted security problems, and ascribed goals to the dissidents that were akin to the GOZ's own distinctive interests in consolidating state power and entrenching ZANU hegemony in the political system. Mugabe accused his political rival of sponsoring the nefarious actions of the dissidents, accusations that remain unsubstantiated.

Under the pretext of addressing insurgency and a highly inflated dissident problem, the GOZ launched an operation of mass atrocities in Matabeleland, with the aim of eradicating both the political structures of its main political rival and ZAPU's grass roots level support, who were overwhelmingly of Ndebele ethnicity.<sup>15</sup>

In January 1983, the government began a massive security clampdown on Matabeleland and parts of Midlands that drew upon all brigades of the ZNA, the CIO, the Police Internal Security Intelligence Unit (PISI), as well as ZANU-PF Youth Brigades. The most brutal brigade was the North Korean trained Fifth Brigade, under the command of Perence Shiri, who explicitly told local inhabitants that they had been ordered to "wipe out the people in the area" and to "kill anything that was human."<sup>16</sup> It is of note that Shiri continues to hold a senior position within the current GOZ, entering Cabinet in the 2017 post-Mugabe administration as Minister of Lands, Agriculture and Rural Resettlement.

From the outset, witnesses concluded that Fifth Brigade was using the guise of finding dissidents to target the Ndebele population of the rural communal lands of Matabeleland.<sup>17</sup> "The almost entirely Shona-speaking Fifth Brigade regularly used an overtly tribal and political discourse, and its all-encompassing violence could not be explained as militarily motivated."<sup>18</sup> From late January to mid-March 1983, Fifth Brigade massacred, raped, and tortured hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians, including babies and children, as well as looting and burning entire villages. On other

occasions, entire families were herded into grass-roofed huts, which were then set alight.<sup>19</sup> Pregnant women were bayoneted, killing the babies in their wombs.<sup>20</sup> Young Ndebele men between the ages of 16–40 were frequently targeted and killed while others were forced to perform demeaning public sex acts, often on their own family members.<sup>21</sup> Women and girls were particularly vulnerable and few between the ages of 15 and 50 years escaped multiple episodes of rape by senior commanding officers and junior soldiers of Fifth Brigade.<sup>22</sup> Members of the ZNA, the CIO, and the PISI would arrive at villages with lists of people who had been affiliated to ZAPU during the Rhodesian Bush War of 1964–1979.<sup>23</sup> Those found would be detained, tortured, and executed. Throughout the Gukurahundi campaign, the CIO was headed by then Minister of State, Emmerson Mnangagwa, the current President of Zimbabwe, who was installed in the post-Mugabe administration of November 2017.

The international diplomatic community with embassies in Harare were aware of the state-led atrocities taking place in Zimbabwe.<sup>24</sup> The Swedish ambassador in Harare, Bo Heineback, was concerned that the Zimbabwean Minister of Information, Nathan Shamuyarira, had taken a very hard line when he raised the Matabeleland situation with him, insisting “that the ZAPU political structure must be ‘wiped out.’”<sup>25</sup> Likewise, the West German ambassador, Richard Ellerkmann, reported that “some of the German missionary doctors who have been working in Matabeleland for many years have become so disgusted and upset by the atrocities that they want to quit and go home.”<sup>26</sup> Ellerkmann said he had been told that “Mugabe, in his latest speech in Manicaland, had used the Shona equivalent of ‘wipe out’ with reference to the Ndebele people, not just ZAPU people, if they don’t stop supporting the dissidents.” He found this statement “ominous.”<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile, the scale of dissident violence in the west of the country continued to be greatly exaggerated by the GOZ, a useful technique and opportune justification to wipe out ZAPU—the only real limitation to Mugabe’s total hegemony.

### **Famine Prevention Measures in Zimbabwe**

Drought affects some parts of Southern Africa virtually every year. Zimbabwe suffered from some of its worst years of drought in the twentieth century from 1982–1984<sup>28</sup>—a prolonged and severe drought that became a vehicle of torture and terrorization of the Ndebele by the GOZ. The most severe effects of the drought were felt in Masvingo, the Midlands, and Matabeleland, regions in which the bulk of peasant farming areas are located. The maize crop, which is Zimbabwe’s principal staple crop, was a total failure, wreaking havoc on the lives of many vulnerable families. A former Zimbabwean civil servant noted that “whether intentional or coincidental, the subsidized price of maize meal and the high price paid by the grain marketing board for maize in Zimbabwe in 1980 to 1982 ensured that farmers sold their entire maize production and relied on purchased meal.”<sup>29</sup> The abundant harvest that immediately preceded the drought years should have meant that when the maize stocks within households were depleted, there would be maize available to buy at food distribution centers. But, according to the former civil servant, “government blockades on shipments of maize [into Matabeleland] inevitably ensured almost immediate starvation. I think this was pre-planned.”<sup>30</sup>

Early in 1982, the Zimbabwean government introduced famine prevention measures with a large-scale distribution of take home food rations to the adult population,

and supplementary feeding for children under 5. However, by 15 September 1982, the Herald reported problems with access to food in Matabeleland, noting

... the ban on all traffic other than government vehicles in the curfew areas in Matabeleland had cause (sic) "severe" hardships to the people ... [Joshua] Nkomo posited that buses and trucks that used to bring food from towns and cities could not now reach the inhabitants of the curfew areas at a time when there was also drought.<sup>31</sup>

The GOZ, to detract from its own insidious intent, blamed the dissidents for disrupting relief efforts, and, remarkably, at one stage even held them "responsible for the drought."<sup>32</sup>

### **The (ab)Use of Food to Torture, Terrorize, and Starve, 1984**

Research with survivors has revealed that the precise modus operandi of Gukurahundi between 1982 and 1987 varied across time and place. Documentary analysis and interviews reveal that during 1983, Gukurahundi took the form of open massacres in Matabeleland North; "public mass murders, mass graves, mass tortures, mass rapes, mass everything."<sup>33</sup> After the substantial and negative international media attention of these atrocities, the GOZ became concerned about the impact their tarnished international image may have on relations with donor countries. By 1984, having waged a successful campaign of terrorization of the Ndebele in Matabeleland North the previous year, the focus of the government's attention was now on Matabeleland South with a clear shift in their modus operandi. Rather than the spectacle of decomposing dead bodies left on open display on the orders of Fifth Brigade in Matabeleland North in 1983, the second phase of the Gukurahundi campaign saw the state engaged in a strategy of torture and extermination hidden behind the walls of concentration camps;<sup>34</sup> of disappearing the target community without trace; of disposing of dead and live bodies down flooded mineshafts;<sup>35</sup> and the terrorization of communities through the slow death resulting from starvation during a time of drought.<sup>36</sup> This afforded the GOZ a more convincing degree of deniability at a time when journalists and foreign diplomats were banned from the curfew areas of Matabeleland South.

As indicated above, a central tactical element employed by the government both in Matabeleland North in 1983 and Matabeleland South in 1984, was the imposition of a strict curfew on the region in concert with the deployment of Fifth Brigade. These curfews prevented anybody from entering or leaving the area and banned all forms of transport. A harsh food curfew was included in the GOZ strategy of 1984 with grocery stores being forcibly closed by government troops and their stock looted by Fifth Brigade.<sup>37</sup> Officially the GOZ imposed curfew prohibited movement within the curfew zone from dusk to dawn only. The reality on the ground was that those Ndebele civilians trapped in the "ghetto of exclusion"<sup>38</sup> could move no further than 150 yards from their homes day or night, and were shot if caught breaching this directive in their desperation for food and water.<sup>39</sup> People caught using bicycles or donkey carts in the curfew zone were also shot. Given the severity of the drought, such measures were certain to trigger immediate food shortage and starvation from the outset, and cannot be explained as collateral consequences of operations to tackle dissident activity. This set of conditions made sure that little news of events was known outside the curfew zone. However, as small trickles of people escaped the area, stories of the atrocities

began to spread and it was clear that the security forces were adopting a more sophisticated strategy of intimidation and terror against the civilian population in 1984. The US embassy reported to Washington that “the current campaign was less humane than the decimations of 1983, as death by starvation was slower and threatened the entire population who after two and half (sic) years of drought, had no food reserves.”<sup>40</sup>

On 4 February 1984, the US embassy informed Washington, that the GOZ had deployed the ZNA and Fifth Brigade into Matabeleland South and had announced the imposition of a strict curfew in the province:

... southwest of a line that begins at the westernmost point of Maitengvve district where the Manzamyama river exits Zimbabwe, [and] runs eastward along the river to the Mananda dam, from there south to Marula on the Plumtree-Bulawayo road, and then along the road northeast to Bulawayo. From Bulawayo, the line runs southeast along the highway to Beitbridge via Essexvale and Gwanda .... [In] the curfew area food is available within a 5km radius of [the business districts of] Plumtree, Bulawayo, Essexvale, Gwanda, West Nicholson and Beitbridge, where stores remain open. Elsewhere stores have been closed.<sup>41</sup>

The stringent set of curfew rules in Matabeleland South led to the closure of the clear majority of stores; all food deliveries, including drought relief food, were banned in most areas. The strict curfew imposed by the government made life difficult for people in Matabeleland to either grow or obtain food, and brought many in the province to the brink of complete starvation.<sup>42</sup> Access to drinking water was explicitly obstructed, causing dehydration, with Fifth Brigade setting up camp at the site of village boreholes and wells thereby intentionally depriving the community of water on fear of death should they try to approach the water outlet.<sup>43</sup> In addition to the food curfew, the CIO, the ZNA, and Fifth Brigade detained and transported thousands of civilians to large detention and extermination centers where they were then tortured and regularly disappeared.<sup>44</sup> Curfew measures were of such extreme intensity that villagers “could not move more than fifty metres from our homes. We had no food and had to risk our life to sneak to the bush and find a root or leaves to eat ... we were given nothing to eat by the army.”<sup>45</sup> Drought relief food that was being supplied to the people in the affected areas prior to 1984 had now stopped completely.<sup>46</sup> To shield the operation from media attention, a news blackout was imposed by the GOZ and journalists were banned from traveling to anywhere close to the curfew zone while the local population within the zone was being systematically exterminated, raped, tortured, and starved.

At one meeting, a tall strongly built man wearing dark glasses—a senior commander of Fifth Brigade—told the gathered Ndebele villagers:

I am Commander Jesus ... I am one of the leaders of the Gukurahundi. In my car, there are some gallons of blood. Human blood. But my supply is running low. We are here to kill, not to play—to kill the Mandebele because they are dissidents .... I arrive here to check up on my boys and what do I find? Nothing. Beating up people instead of killing them. I don't mind if thousands of you vermin are killed or die of starvation. You ate eggs, after eggs, hens, after hens, goats, cattle. Now you shall eat cats, dogs, donkeys. Then you are going to eat your children. After that you shall eat your wives. Then the men will remain, and because dissidents have guns, they will kill the men and only dissidents remain. That is when we will find the dissidents .... Now sing, dance, wriggle like snakes in praise of Our Leader who delivered you from the shackles of colonialism, racism, imperialism, Sing!<sup>47</sup>

### Warnings of "Imminent Starvation"<sup>48</sup>

Within 10 days of the imposition of the strict curfew and food embargo in Matabeleland South, a group of church leaders in the province sent an appeal directly to Prime Minister Mugabe and President Banana, asking them to address the food shortages and warning of "imminent starvation."<sup>49</sup> This letter was ignored, as were parliamentary statements by Senators Rosenfels, Oatt, and Ndiweli, which included first-hand accounts of farm workers begging for food, emaciation, and children near to death because of hunger.<sup>50</sup>

The following week, the Canadian High Commission made Ottawa aware that "shipment[s] of relief food into [the] area ... has been disrupted resulting in deaths"<sup>51</sup>, while the following week the Australian embassy wrote to Canberra that "there are some indications of deliberate denial of food."<sup>52</sup> Representatives of European countries had met earlier in the week and had "agreed that food was being used as an instrument of pressure."<sup>53</sup>

Similar reports of "ZNA brutalities" and information that "the government's curfew order in Matabeleland South is producing starvation" were being reported to the American embassy in Harare.<sup>54</sup> They reported to Washington that

... [a]ccording to Senator Max Rosenfels, whose farm straddles the curfew line at the Mananda dam, roughly 250,000 people live in the curfew area ... the situation in the curfew area [is] desperate. No movement by African inhabitants in or out is permitted; even bicycles and carts are turned back at police and army checkpoints. Army activities in the area include patrols and interrogations of villagers and commercial farm workers. Accounts of brutalities are plentiful, Rosenfels stated. He said one of his brother's farm workers had been interrogated and beaten up by a ZNA patrol. When the employee produced no information on dissidents, one of the army men had poured a shovelful of embers from a fire down the chest of the employee's overalls. The man's son at that point turned to flee and was shot dead. Worse than the brutalities, Rosenfels said, was the tactic of starving the populace. In mid-February, Rosenfels attended a meeting at which Plumtree district administrator and chairman of the provincial ZANU(PF) committee for Matabeleland South Herbert Matanga addressed commercial farmers, teachers, and local ZNA officers. Matanga told the meeting that the policy behind the curfew was to starve the population within the area until it produced the dissidents. The curfew was accomplishing half the result. Rosenfels said that workers on the commercial farms were pleading for food from the owners. Africans from the communal area adjoining Rosenfels' farm had come onto his land to ask for food. The supplicants were emaciated; their children were reportedly close to dying.<sup>55</sup>

The American embassy's Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM), Gib Lanpher, noted that "local and foreign journalists are getting the same stories, but most seem reluctant to file for fear of antagonizing the GOZ. We have no reason to question the general accuracy of Rosenfels' account, which fits with what we have been hearing from a variety of sources."<sup>56</sup> Lanpher advised that "the gist" of reports received from church groups, commercial farmers, other embassies, and

... the Harare rumor mill is that the GOZ is engaged in an all-out but predictably mis-conceived effort to eradicate the dissidents in the curfew area of southwest Zimbabwe. The army's method includes forceful intimidation, beating of villagers, the sealing off of the curfew area to normal vehicle traffic and food, and the closure of stores in the area



with the intent of starving the people into yielding up the dissidents ... the allegations of withholding of food, if proven, represent an “abuse” affecting far more than 30,000 people.<sup>57</sup>

The ZAPU Minister of State in the prime minister’s office, John Nkomo, described the situation in Matabeleland at the end of February, beginning of March 1984, as “dreadful” and found that “his efforts to have the ‘food ban’ lifted have fallen on deaf ears.”<sup>58</sup>

In a speech on 6 March 1984, Senator Rosenfels made the Zimbabwean Senate<sup>59</sup> aware that the Ndebele in the curfew area were being starved.<sup>60</sup> He told the Senate how

... the only vehicles allowed to move in these areas are military and those of the security forces, and commercial farmers going about their normal business. What this means in effect, Mr President, is that no food is getting into the areas. How can it be transported into the areas when all movement of vehicles has stopped and all stores have been closed? ... [T]o illustrate my point, I draw my supplies of mealie meal, as a commercial farmer, from national foods depot in Plumtree, where in the past it has always been in short supply because of the very heavy demand owing to the drought conditions. I normally place my order a week in advance to be sure of receiving my two-ton monthly requirement. The situation there at the moment is that in the past four days two 40-ton truck-loads of maize-meal have been returned to the main depot in Bulawayo. This is because there is no longer any storage space in the depot because it is full to the ceiling. This is food that should be going out to the communal lands over the past six weeks ... I live in the curfew area and many of my employees live in the communal lands adjoining it. I have been approached by these people, as have other fellow farmers in the areas to personally appeal to government to take note of their plight, the children are starving. We are all aware of the weather conditions in that part of the world, this is the third consecutive drought. With those weather conditions, there is no food whatsoever on their land. The people have no food in their granaries and there is no reserve because of the previous two years of drought. They are completely dependent on the supplies of food reaching them through the normal trade channels but the stores have been closed. If the stores are closed and all the vehicles are banned, I do not see how it is possible for food to reach them ... I implore the government to have some compassion and consideration for the human suffering that is taking place in those communal lands.<sup>61</sup>

At the close of Rosenfels speech, he was followed on the floor by senator Chief Kayisa Ndiweni, also a resident of Matabeleland. Ndiweni “made an impassioned plea for the prime minister to look into allegations of starvation ... Ndiweni spoke in some detail about earlier efforts he made to contact the prime minister concerning the problems in Matabeleland”<sup>62</sup> but had received no response.

The next day, the Herald ran an article that heightened

... public awareness that the situation in Matabeleland warrants GOZ attention ... The Herald reported that during a question and-answer session ... the deputy prime minister, Cde Simon Muzenda, pledged to investigate the flow of food into areas under curfew in Matabeleland South ... He was asked if he was prepared to make personal inquiries into the position of women and children, believed to be starving in the curfew areas due to the closure of stores and the lack of food going into the areas. Cde Muzenda said the same question had been asked of the minister concerned at a cabinet meeting and the following day the minister had announced that food was allowed to go into these areas.<sup>63</sup>

Mike Auret, Chairman of the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, was able to corroborate to US embassy officials that people within the curfew zone were starving and were being forcibly deprived of food.<sup>64</sup> When

... the deputy Prime Minister was also asked to travel to Kezi to interview people there who had allegedly been adversely affected by the curfew and army operations in the curfew zone, Cde Muzenda said there had already been investigations into alleged brutalities and murders by members of 5 Brigade. It had come to light that people who alleged murders had been committed by 5 Brigade did not know the difference between dissidents and army men.<sup>65</sup>

Such a claim is in sharp contrast to the findings of the research of this paper in which survivors of Fifth Brigade atrocities could describe with clarity the distinction between “dissidents and army men,” recognizing Fifth Brigade by their unique uniforms that included bright red berets.

### **“[C]arrying the Can Alone on Matabeleland”<sup>66</sup>**

In desperation over the food supply situation in Matabeleland, the leader of the opposition ZAPU turned to the British “for help.”<sup>67</sup> By 5 March 1984, the US embassy in Harare had become increasingly alarmed by the reports it was receiving from Matabeleland South and they too turned to the British for support. After meeting with British High Commissioner Martin Ewans to discuss the deleterious Matabeleland situation, Lanpher confirmed to Washington that Ewans was fully cognizant that “the army’s method includes forceful intimidation, beating of villagers, the sealing off the curfew area to normal vehicle traffic and food, and the closure of stores in the area with the intent of starving the people into yielding up the dissidents.”<sup>68</sup> Ewans confirmed to Lanpher his intention “to raise the matter with the Minister of State [Emmerson] Mnangagwa.”<sup>69</sup> However, when Lanpher asked Ewans whether “his government and the EC [European Community] would be inclined to join with [the US embassy] in approaching the GOZ, Ewans, politely but clearly, begged off noting [Her Majesty’s Government] isn’t really in the food aid business and that his [European Community] colleagues here are not inclined to get involved.”<sup>70</sup> Lanpher wrote to Washington that “we agreed to stay in touch” before adding “[c]omment: I have the clear feeling that Ewans does not want to do anything that would rock the boat [with Mugabe] prior to Prince Charles’ arrival March 24.”<sup>71</sup>

Having been rebuffed by the British government and, according to British High Commissioner Ewans, the backing of the European Community as a whole,<sup>72</sup> Lanpher was frustrated that the US were left “carrying the can alone on Matabeleland.”<sup>73</sup> Taking into consideration the lack of Western diplomatic support, Lanpher concluded that a formal *démarche* on Matabeleland with the GOZ “would put us on a very lonely lead and would probably result in a non-productive US-GOZ confrontation.”<sup>74</sup>

Undaunted, the Deputy Chief of Mission and Aid Director Roy Stacy took it upon themselves to informally challenge the Zimbabwean Minister of Agriculture, Denis Norman, and invited him to Lanpher’s “home to discuss the reports coming out of Matabeleland evidencing the states” forcible starvation of the Ndebele. They advised him “we could not countenance depriving innocents of food.”<sup>75</sup> Lanpher told Norman that

... the international press was onto the story, and that the government must move quickly to get food into the affected area or risk alienating all potential donor nations ... Norman initially seemed taken aback by what we had to say, asking “are you confident of your information?” We said we were, citing (with his prior permission) what Senator Rosenfels had told us. At that point (and they are old friends of 20–30 years standing), Norman conceded his appreciation of the situation was the same as ours, and that he was deeply concerned. He added that he didn’t know where the food deprivation order had come from, but he knew the ZNA on the ground were claiming it came from the highest levels.<sup>76</sup>

The government of the United States had recently pledged nearly \$11 million in food aid to Zimbabwe to combat the third consecutive year of drought there. Lanpher and Stacy made it clear to the Minister of Agriculture that “a continuation of this policy [of food deprivation], whether at Harare or locally (sic) initiated policy, could put in jeopardy our food aid program ... not only the pending 30,000 tons of maize but future GOZ requests.”<sup>77</sup> It was agreed that Norman would “meet with Minister of State Security Mwangagwa and make the same points to him.”<sup>78</sup> Washington was informed that shortly thereafter

Norman met with Minister of State Mwangagwa and Home Affairs Minister Mubako who is formally in charge of the curfew area. They both apparently were aware of the allegations regarding deprivation of food in the curfew area, but denied the substance of the charges. Both, however, expressed a willingness to look into the question, and one said he would be willing to take journalists on a tour of the curfew area ... Norman said he would be meeting with Prime Minister Mugabe ... to go over Zimbabwe’s food situation and plans to raise with him the Matabeleland situation ... Norman is fully in the picture and will be as helpful as he can be. We can’t expect too much, however as his agenda is pretty full and his clout is limited on ‘political’ matters. The next step from this end is Mwangagwa. And I’m hopeful my pitch to the Brits yesterday morning will percolate around.<sup>79</sup>

Lanpher ended his cable to Washington by intimating that the “[d]epartment may wish to repeat this message ... to selected posts, particularly London, as I see no reason why we should be carrying the can alone on Matabeleland.”<sup>80</sup>

Armed with a wealth of corroborating and credible information, on 8 March 1984, Lanpher met with the Minister of State Security Emmerson Mwangagwa and made him fully cognizant of the US’s concerns in relation to the incidences of starvation in Matabeleland. Lanpher reported to Washington that Mwangagwa

... never acknowledged that the allegations might be true ... [I] expressed the hope that food would quickly flow into the allegedly affected areas. I suggested that since the allegations of food deprivation were already appearing in the world press, I thought the GOZ would be wise to invite the press to accompany the trucks distributing food. He got the point, but made no commitment.<sup>81</sup>

The next day a meeting was held of the army’s joint operations command (JOC)<sup>82</sup> in Bulawayo, convened to designate “selected areas of Matabeleland South where access to food would be continued to be denied.”<sup>83</sup>

News of the ongoing atrocities in Matabeleland South soon reached the attention of the international media. On March 11 1984, the Washington Post (WP) and the

New York Times (NYT) wrote accounts of the Matabeleland suffering that made “grim reading but jibe pretty closely with what [the US embassy had] been hearing and reporting.”<sup>84</sup> The US press also reported that medicines had been prevented from entering the area<sup>85</sup> and that the “Government . . . [has] shut off food supplies to nearly a half million drought-stricken people in the southern part of the country in a harsh new crackdown against dissidents, according to eyewitness accounts and church officials.”<sup>86</sup> Lanpher remarked that “there is nothing we can do to undo the damage the GOZ has done itself since the curfew was imposed on February.”<sup>87</sup>

On the same day that the WP and NYT ran the foregoing stories, Joshua Nkomo, the President of ZAPU, headed one of the biggest rallies in the country since independence from Britain some four years previously. He addressed a large gathering of up to 60,000 supporters and followers of ZAPU, stating that the military had not, as claimed by Minister Simon Muzenda, resumed food supplies to Matabeleland South. Nkomo told the gathering that the Zimbabwean government claimed that food supplies had been cut to prevent them from reaching dissidents operating in the area, however Nkomo advised that only peasants were being affected by the food cut-off. The opposition leader told the crowd that he believed Mugabe was trying to create a one-party state in Zimbabwe and that the curfew in southern Matabeleland was intended to terrorize members of the opposition.<sup>88</sup> He noted, “[m]any young mothers are dead from nothing else but hunger . . . . Many children have died of hunger.”<sup>89</sup>

### The GOZ Response

Throughout the period of the strict curfew from February to April 1984, the GOZ was repeatedly challenged on their policy toward the victimized communities of Matabeleland South by a variety of sources, which, without exception, evoked a government response of outright denial and misinformation. The GOZ denied that it was deliberately preventing food supplies from entering the area of Matabeleland South under curfew, and claimed that food was flowing freely in the curfew area. Despite the wealth of credible multi-source information gathered from foreign officials, missionaries, and those survivors who had escaped the curfew zone, which confirmed a policy of forced starvation in Matabeleland, the then Minister of State Mnangagwa maintained his position of outright denial in an interview on 22 March 1984, reported in *The Herald*, claiming that Matabeleland South was “one of the country’s ‘most properly serviced’ in terms of food distribution and asserted that no one had died of hunger.”<sup>90</sup> Washington remarked, “this statement must be taken with a grain of salt.”<sup>91</sup> Mnangagwa also claimed in this interview that ZAPU leader Nkomo was ‘lying’ when he had said that people in the area were starving because security forces had not allowed shops to open. Mnangagwa stated “‘There has not been a single death in Matabeleland South from hunger’”<sup>92</sup>

In view of the overwhelming evidence to the contrary, it is arguable that Mnangagwa’s assertions that Matabeleland South was “one of the country’s “most properly serviced” in terms of food distribution, and that “[t]here has not been a single death in Matabeleland South from hunger,”<sup>93</sup> were willful and malicious falsehoods that caused further suffering to the victims of the ongoing strategy of state sponsored starvation in Matabeleland South.

### “The Issue Is [GOZ] Willingness”

After the commendable efforts of the US embassy “to get the GOZ to face up to the mess it has made for itself (and us) in Matabeleland South” the previous week which had “produced blurred results,”<sup>94</sup> it was the assessment of Lanpher that

the GOZ has the capacity to implement an equitable food distribution system throughout Zimbabwe. GOZ capacity in this regard is also complemented by the private sector which has outlets in all areas ... [t]he general availability of food relief, save apparently in Matabeleland South, supports the conclusion that the capacity to implement an equitable food distribution program remains. The issue is [GOZ] willingness.<sup>95</sup>

One positive response to the US’s efforts of the previous week was Minister of Justice Simbi Mubako’s acknowledgment that “all was not right there [Matabeleland South]” and his assertion that action was underway to rectify the situation.<sup>96</sup> The US embassy noted that “[a]s of this morning, March 14, however, we are not able to confirm that the GOZ has in fact bent its full efforts to assuring that the whole population of Matabeleland South has adequate food supplies.”<sup>97</sup>

In his continued efforts to drum up support from other Western embassies, Lanpher again met with British High Commissioner Ewans. On this occasion “Ewans told me he, too, was concerned that food may not actually be flowing into Matabeleland” despite the claims of the GOZ. “I gave him copies of the Times [NYT] and Post [WP] articles and told him what we were doing.” Lanpher reported to Washington that he was now “confident [that] Ewans is seized with the problem and will do what he can. London seems to have focused his attention on the problem.”<sup>98</sup>

Lanpher thereafter “delivered a letter to Mnangagwa’s office ... enclosing copies of the Times [NYT] and Post [WP] articles.”<sup>99</sup>

As previously noted, the US embassy had been “on the verge of signing [a food aid package] when [they] learned that as part of their Gukurahundi campaign the GOZ had imposed a well-publicized food curfew covering a vast area of rural Matabeleland.”<sup>100</sup> Lanpher continued to press the GOZ to immediately lift all restriction on food and arranged another private meeting with Minister of State Mnangagwa on the afternoon of 21 March.<sup>101</sup>

In the meantime, British Deputy High Commissioner Roger Martin spoke with officials of the US embassy to compare information on the situation of food deprivations and starvation in Matabeleland. Lanpher noted that “what they have jibes with what we know.”<sup>102</sup> Martin conceded to the US officials that “the British High Commission, led by Ewans, had downplayed the Matabeleland situation however they had become ‘energized’ because of the increased media attention being given to the issue in London.”<sup>103</sup>

Lanpher reported to Washington that Ewans and Martin are now

... making private pitches around town—feed the people in Matabeleland or risk the loss of donor support ... [we] believe the [British High Commission] is indeed energized at last—partly by the press play at home, and partly by the knowledge that if we opt out of the food aid scene they’ll be the GOZ’s number one target. Martin and Ewans are gloomy about the GOZ’s intentions in Matabeleland South—they are inclined to the view that the ZNA is no longer after dissidents but bent on political intimidation of the Ndebele’s. They may well be right.<sup>104</sup>

The US embassy continued to make clear to the GOZ [their] concerns on the Matabeleland food supply situation. They informed Washington that “Deputy CIA director McMahon called on Mnangagwa and Mugabe [on] March 26 ... McMahon got a bit of a stiff arm, but the message got through [however] [w]e don’t expect a mea culpa, or a dramatic improvement on the ground.”<sup>105</sup>

In relation to the 30,000 tons of maize about to be transferred, Lanpher recalls that

... [w]orking with my AID Director, Roy Stacey, and without as I recall consulting Washington, we inserted into the pending [food aid] agreement language that required the GOZ make our maize available to those in need everywhere in the country .... At the signing ceremony which took place on a Friday afternoon, the [GOZ] signed [the agreement], but the [Permanent Secretary] asked me about language we had added. I told him that it meant our maize would have to be available to those under curfew. He was not happy. Monday morning, I got a call from the Minister of Agriculture Denis Norman who said Mugabe asked him to call wanting to know if we were serious about food going to everyone. I told Denis who was a close friend that we were deadly serious and that if the curfew was not lifted we would divert the ship to Kenya that was also in line for our maize. As I recall there was a public announcement that evening lifting the curfew. I guess one could say we wore the white hats for that one.<sup>106</sup>

By the end of March, some areas of Matabeleland South were “reported[ly] still under full curfew, while others [were] suffering from a dearth of shop owners willing to return to the area.”<sup>107</sup> A US embassy official returned to Harare from three days in Bulawayo and was able to confirm that “some, but by no means ‘normal’ amounts of food are getting into the area through both drought relief and commercial channels. All food distribution continues to be tightly controlled by the army—which means total denial is still probable in some areas.”<sup>108</sup>

One health official estimated that residents of the curfew area were eating less than 20 percent of the food they needed. The official said the shortages had brought the status of children and the elderly to what he called a “critical point.” There was no maize, no sugar, no bread. Large numbers of people were said to be subsisting on “imikiliwana” a sort of immature watermelon normally thrown to pigs, but now consumed by the people for lack of alternative sources of nourishment.<sup>109</sup>

In April 1984, Harare reported to Ottawa how

... Maria Eder, the doctor at the Catholic Church’s Brunapeg mission in Bulilamangwe district had conducted a weight-to-height measurement on the local adult population that revealed how large numbers of men over 170 centimetres tall now weighed below 40 kilograms. There had also been cases of pregnant mothers walking 30 kilometres to give birth then dying of malnutrition. She said she had no way of knowing precisely how many people had starved to death because “they die quietly out there in the kraals.”<sup>110</sup>

### **GOZ’s “Collective Punishment ... of Innocent Hungry People”**

Throughout 1984, the appalling policy of food violence amounted to the “collective punishment ... of innocent hungry people,”<sup>111</sup> and went beyond the mere fact of starvation detailed above. Thus, the hunger and dehydration experienced by entire villages put people in vulnerable positions and exposed them to additional violence by

Fifth Brigade. For example, an announcement by the military of food being made available at a specific store was frequently used as bait by Fifth Brigade to lure “innocent hungry people” to their death at killing zones.<sup>112</sup> Alternatively, starving and dehydrated people who ventured into the bush to try and find wild berries and roots to sustain themselves were rendered vulnerable to the victimization of Fifth Brigade who were usually camped nearby. Emaciated villagers risked a beating or worse if they tried to access water at the nearby boreholes where Fifth Brigade often set their camps, ensuring that people had no access to water for drinking, cooking, or washing. In sum, not only did the Ndebele suffer because of the state depriving them of food, food itself was used as a method of torture. The extreme mass violence inflicted by the systematic and targeted campaign of a specific victim group by the GOZ is reflected in the stark details of multiple and independent eye witness accounts.

Effie, a survivor from the village of Zimnyama, Mangwe District, recalls how on one occasion in the Spring of 1984, when he was 15 years of age, Fifth Brigade called the whole village to a meeting at the school. Perence Shiri, the Commander of Fifth Brigade, was present and demanded that his “boys” be fed: He shouted:

“they need food” ... people were like, “why should we provide you with food?” Another officer then demanded that my aunt feed them saying “we want food now and you must bring food to the back of the hut.” There were many [Fifth Brigade] there wearing their red berets and they were singing and jiving ... they were like not normal human ... they were like vicious dogs ... they had gathered people at the school from many of the surrounding villages and had gathered them in our village and were making the people clap their hands, sing their songs. There were 50 or more people in one place, gathered in one circle, and those who couldn’t sing Shona songs were being beaten. Another officer said to my aunt “Okay, cook us food.” They clapped, they clapped and then they said to another villager “her,” pointing at my aunt, “she must prepare food.” There was really little food in the whole village but my aunt asked other villagers, maybe it was four or five villagers to help and they went quickly around [the] village gathering up all the food .... The four or five women, along with my aunt, quickly brought different types of food, including vegetables, rice and meat. There was enough on the plates to feed more than 10 people. The soldiers then told my aunt to bring a large bowl of water .... The soldiers washed their hands like they were about to eat. They washed, their hands were dirty. But after they patted their hands dry, they didn’t eat. No, all the different foods, that was brought for them, they emptied into the bowl with dirty water. They said my aunt should mix it with her hands. They then said my aunt should eat everything in that water that they used to clean. They said to my aunt “you must eat this food now.” That food was supposed to be eaten maybe by 10 people at least but they said my aunt must eat it and finish it ... my aunt started to eat. She was beaten and beaten and beaten while eating. If she stopped, they would kick her hard. She just kept eating, eating, eating, eating until you can see food is no longer going through her body. They said, “Eat!” but my aunt vomited all the food back up. When she vomited, they said, “Take it back, put it back. Mix it again.”

The woman was forced to scrape up all her vomit off the ground and place it back into the basin of food and dirty water. Effie continued:

She mixed it, she mixed. They [Fifth Brigade] said, “Eat.” She ate, she ate, she ate. They [Fifth Brigade] kicked her and kicked her. She ate until she collapsed. She didn’t die, but she never fully recovered.<sup>113</sup>

Moses, who in the spring of 1984 was 23 years of age, recalls that the shops in his area were closed for almost a year:

We had to go the meetings every day or we had to sleep in the bush so in that way we were really starving. In the Empandeni Mission, sometimes the priests would send someone to call us at night at say about 8, 9, 10 o'clock. We would go to the mission and Brother Kilian and Father Johannes would give us 5 kg of mealie meal, but we were a family of ten and after three days we would have no meal left. The only way we got any food was from the priests who smuggled it in. Sometimes priests would also run away from the mission and then we would remain with no one, maybe for about a week, and there was no way to get food. I know a family who died of hunger in our village—Thomas Simbanda and his family. What happened was they had stayed for almost three weeks without food . . . . They died and that was because of hunger. They all died. We used to have chickens, but the soldiers came and ate them all.<sup>114</sup>

It took Busani and his brother three to four weeks after the curfew began to run out of food supplies. When they tried to fetch water, they would see the soldiers camping there and hear guns shooting. When interviewed, Busani stated that

their plan was, we mustn't get any food and we must die. Their actions had shown us they wanted us to die. When you close the shops, and say they don't want any shop to be open, that's another sign of starving somebody. I remember, in secondary school then there was a church called Salvation Army . . . we used to go there to church. One day, the lady she saw people starving, especially the school children. She took a 5kg mealie meal, then took a cup each and said go and make some porridge or whatsoever, but hide, because when soldiers see, they will kill me. I don't know what happened. One of the schoolchildren, the soldiers saw him carrying that mealie meal. Then they went straight to that lady, they said don't ever do that anymore, to give people this mealie meal. So, to me it shows exactly that they were intending to kill people by hunger.<sup>115</sup>

Subisiso was 30 years old and living in Bulilima District when the GOZ introduced their policy of starvation in Matabeleland South. He remarked that

[i]t was a terrible situation. It was a terrible situation, because there was nothing we could eat. Even water. It was difficult time to get water. People died because they had no food . . . but some of them died without food because some of them, they were hit . . . . They can hit you, but they can't give you food. We couldn't go and collect water as we weren't allowed to move. And people died without water.<sup>116</sup>

Others recalled how they were punished with severe beatings by Fifth Brigade if they were caught eating wild fruit or trying to come to the aid of a starving neighbor.<sup>117</sup> These eye witness accounts are echoed in official documents composed at the time of the events. Thus, in a telex of 13 March 1984 Lanpher relayed a comment made in the senate that

in the hospital in Bulawayo, at the moment, there are two women who were accused of cooking food for dissidents and the price meted out by the Zimbabwe National Army was to cut [off] both their hands. I was told that women who were found brewing beer, boiling it, were accused of brewing it for the dissidents. A child was hacked off the back of one of those and thrown into the pot. He died immediately.<sup>118</sup>



It was in no small part due to the pressure on the GOZ from the international press and the threat from the US embassy of withholding food aid on humanitarian grounds, that in April 1984 the strict curfew in parts of Matabeleland South was finally lifted.

Lanpher notes that “[i]n the case of Zimbabwe I think we were seen as a pain in the ass.”<sup>119</sup> Deputy High Commissioner Martin proved to be more zealous than Ewans in his efforts to try and stop the forced starvation “in private ways.”<sup>120</sup> It was Martin’s belief that

public denunciations would have been an absolute disaster ... but it troubled me more than it troubled my colleagues I suppose. We were keenly aware of what was happening but also aware that any direct intervention by us to say to Mugabe “Come on my lad, you’ve got to stop this now” would have been directly counterproductive. We would have been out on our ears.<sup>121</sup>

In January 1985, Washington reported that they had “received information that Fifth Brigade atrocities ... continue unabated ... food is still being embargoed.”<sup>122</sup>

Despite this, when British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher met Robert Mugabe at 10 Downing Street in July 1984 for a tête-à-tête, rather than challenging him on the documented atrocities ongoing in Matabeleland, she instead took the opportunity “to compliment Mr. Mugabe” on his recently awarded Honorary Degree by the University of Edinburgh and “expressed sympathy for Zimbabwe’s drought problem. She conveyed our offer to negotiate 12 million worth of programme aid.”<sup>123</sup>

### **GOZ Rationale for State Crime**

The GOZ’s official rationale for the strict curfew and food embargo that resulted in the starvation and death of innocent civilians was the elimination of dissidents. Yet by many accounts, most dissidents had already deserted the area by 1984, and there was not in fact a genuine desire to challenge dissidents, who were few in number. Senator Max Rosenfels advised that “the ZNA, when it receives reports of dissidents has proven singularly ineffective in establishing contact.” He continued that “the curfew resulted in only 5 dissidents killed. Four of those were killed in an operation led not by army or police, but by a white farmer with a group of police in support.”<sup>124</sup> In considering the veracity of the GOZ’s rationale for their campaign in Matabeleland South in 1984, one must juxtapose the insignificant number of dissidents captured or killed during this campaign with the hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians who became victims of mass and extreme state violence.

The only motive that can reasonably account for the scope, design, and comprehensiveness of the enforced mass starvation as evidenced above, is the elimination, or mass devastation, of the people of Matabeleland who were perceived to be supporters of the political opposition of ZAPU. It must be acknowledged that while the Ndebele residents of vast tracts of communal lands in Matabeleland South encountered severe food deprivation in 1984, there was unhindered food relief distribution by the ruling ZANU party in the rest of the country, overwhelmingly inhabited by their political supporters, overwhelmingly the Shona of Zimbabwe

A state’s use of forced starvation to punish, coerce, torture, and kill victims is a recognized tactic throughout history. In his address at the Reich War Academy in Berlin in 1943, Marshal von Rundstedt noted that “organized underfeeding ... is better than machine guns.”<sup>125</sup> The current President of Zimbabwe, and former Minister of

State during Gukurahundi, Emmerson Mnangagwa, in the face of unsurmountable evidence, has yet to withdraw his denials of more than three decades, that people were forcibly starved by the GOZ, resulting in death for some in the spring of 1984 in Matabeleland South.

## Conclusion

This paper explores a specific episode of state crime in the newly independent Zimbabwe, namely the second phase of the GOZ's extreme mass violence termed Gukurahundi, which included state sponsored starvation in Matabeleland South between February and April 1984. Corroborating reports from credible sources identified throughout this paper allows one to conclude that during this time, in the communal lands of Matabeleland South, the Zimbabwean state undermined the civil and political rights of an ethnic and political target group and employed food as a tool by which to exert political, military, physical, and psychological force upon the Ndebele victim group, depriving them of their rights to freedom from hunger and malnutrition, as well as safe access to adequate food and water. The target group were further victimized by extreme mass violence as the GOZ wielded food as a weapon of coercion, torture, and punishment in Matabeleland South.

These deleterious state crimes were the result of the GOZ's determination to crush all dissent and political opposition. The Ndebele were viewed as a distinct threat to the GOZ because of their overwhelming support of the political opposition of ZAPU led by Mugabe's arch rival Nkomo, and were rendered vulnerable because of their distinct area of settlement in Matabeleland. The GOZ deliberately manipulated food supplies and international aid to favor its supporters, and both suppress and intimidate the opposition. In 2003 and 2004 Human Rights Watch published extensive details of conflicts between human rights groups in Zimbabwe and the government over the restriction of food aid to supporters of Mugabe's political opponents.<sup>126</sup> Such policies have subsequently been employed by the same administration throughout the past three decades when the GOZ has manipulated drought relief for electoral advantage.<sup>127</sup> The use of food and food aid as tools of political coercion has been a repeated pattern of the Mugabe administration.

Zimbabwe is, in 2018, once again suffering from drought and in need of external food aid. 2018 is also the year in which the country is set to hold elections under the new administration of President Mnangagwa. It is therefore ominous that Mnangagwa and the current Minister for Lands, who both featured heavily in the documentary material analyzed in this study, were key actors in the planning and execution of the Gukurahundi state sponsored starvation, and have demonstrated a willingness to (ab)use food for political gain in Zimbabwe. Only time will reveal whether the GOZ's longstanding custom of manipulating food for political advantage, a custom which has proven to be a highly successful strategy, will play a role in the forthcoming election process of 2018.

That those responsible for mass political violence, that is emblematic of Zimbabwean politics, have enjoyed impunity from punishment at the national and international level, is an obstacle to the process of building a lasting peace in the country. It was to the now President Mnangagwa that the US embassy addressed their concerns about the ongoing mass atrocities in Matabeleland South in 1984, and were met with his denial, misinformation, and determination to conceal the atrocities. Such political silence

around Gukurahundi, which continues to this day, is definable as a form of secondary victimization of the Ndebele victims and survivors. That the Ndebele were disproportionately targeted during Gukurahundi is suggestive of genocidal intent and deserving of further detailed research, which is beyond the scope of this paper.

As relevant in 1984 as it is today, is the comment of DCM Lanpher who remarked that the tactics of Mnangagwa were “self-defeating, we cannot see how they will lead the country to peace and reconciliation. Any society that is not built on the firm foundation of truth, honesty and justice is already a failure.”<sup>128</sup>

The question of accountability is relevant to the process of healing and reconciliation that must take place in Zimbabwe if the country is to build a peaceful and sustainable future. History would indicate that the healing of wounds and divisions of a society in the aftermath of sustained violence requires the development of trust and understanding between former enemies. It is questionable whether the foundations of a peaceful future are possible while those responsible for these mass atrocities remain in power and the communal lands of Matabeleland continue to be blighted to this day with the innumerable unmarked mass graves of the unacknowledged innocent women, men and children.

In this regard, the strategic position assumed by the international community is relevant. An analysis of a multiplicity of mutually independent yet corroborative sources reveals that the commendable humanitarian role of the American government during the extreme mass violence of 1984 was in sharp contrast to the less humanitarian role of the British government.

When asked about the British lack of response, Lanpher stated that

the UK was not under the same pressures when it came to human rights, and it was free to weigh other factors when it came time to react to GOZ human rights abuses. Perhaps the legacy of Lancaster House (where I was the US observer) weighed on them. Maybe the fact they had a substantial military training mission in Inyanga was a factor. My guess is they probably thought being out front would be futile so why spend the chips. I'm quite sure they had a good idea of what was going on in Matabeleland.<sup>129</sup>

Lanpher observed that

... [b]ased on my 7 plus years in Zimbabwe I would have to say we [the US government] were well out in front of the Brits [British Government] when it came to challenging the GOZ on human rights issues. As I recall they tended to combine with the EU rather than act unilaterally.<sup>130</sup>

As was the case in a previous study using a similar methodology,<sup>131</sup> one can but assume that the British government's wilful blindness to the atrocities of 1984 was due to its overarching motivation to maintain a British military presence in the country at the behest of Mugabe, and to safeguard positive relationships with the GOZ for London's own political, economic, and strategic interests.<sup>132</sup>

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## Notes

1. Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1981), 1.
2. Cable American Embassy, Harare, to Secretary of State Washington DC, 29 March 1983, US/ZM/125.
3. The name given to both the state-sanctioned atrocities perpetrated on the Ndebele and the military formation of Fifth Brigade was Gukurahundi, a term which derives from the Shona language term that loosely translates to “the early rain which washes away the chaff before the spring rains.”
4. Hazel Cameron, “The Matabeleland Massacres: Britain’s Wilful Blindness,” *The International History Review* 40,1 (2018): 1–19.
5. Olga Bertelsen, “Starvation and Violence Amid the Soviet Politics of Silence, 1928–1929,” *Genocide Studies International* 11,1 (2017): 38–67, 38.
6. Cable Secretary of State Washington DC to American Embassy, Nairobi, 28 March 1984, US/ZM/225.
7. The Solidarity Peace Trust is a non-governmental organization registered in South Africa. The Trustees of the Solidarity Peace Trust are church leaders of Southern Africa, who are all committed to human rights, freedom and democracy in their region.
8. Solidarity Trust, “Operation Taguta/Aisuthi: Command Agriculture in Zimbabwe: its impact on Rural Communities in Matabeleland” (Port Shepstone: Solidarity Peace Trust, 2006).
9. Articles 11 and 12 of the Covenant, adopted by the United Nations in 1966, specifies the human right to sufficient and physically accessible water, as well as the fundamental right to freedom from hunger and malnutrition as well as adequate food. The right to water clearly falls within the category of guarantees essential for securing an adequate standard of living, particularly since it is one of the most fundamental conditions for survival.
10. State crime has been usefully defined by Penny Green and Tony Ward, “State Crime: Governments, Violence and Corruption” (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 2, as “state organizational deviance involving the violation of human rights.”
11. Formerly a British colony, Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980 after a prolonged civil war between the Rhodesian army and the two liberation movements of the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the military wing of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU), a militant African nationalist organization, and the Zimbabwe People’s Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the armed wing of the Zimbabwe African People’s Union, a Marxist—Leninist political party in Rhodesia.
12. Joshua Nkomo, *Nkomo: The Story of My Life* (London: Methuen, 1984), 209–10.
13. Bill Berkeley and Elliot Schrage, *Zimbabwe, Wages of War: A Report on Human Rights* (Lawyers Committee for Human Rights: Human Rights First, 1986), 7
14. Berkeley and Schrage, 7
15. Cameron.
16. Jocelyn Alexander, Joanne McGregor, and Terence O. Ranger, *Violence and Memory: One Hundred Years in the “Dark Forests” of Matabeleland, Zimbabwe* (Melton: Heinemann and James Currey, 2000), 222.
17. Cameron.
18. Alexander, McGregor, and Ranger, 218.
19. Cameron.
20. Cameron.
21. Cameron.
22. Interviews in Southern Africa, November 2017, with survivors of Gukurahundi,
23. Also known as the Zimbabwe War of Liberation, a civil war that took place from July 1964 to December 1979 in the unrecognized country of Rhodesia between the Rhodesian government, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (the military wing of Robert Mugabe’s Zimbabwe African National

- Union), and the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (the military wing of Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union).
24. Cameron.
  25. Cable American Embassy, Harare to Secretary of State Washington DC, 07 March 1983, US/ZM/95.
  26. Cable American Embassy, Harare to Secretary of State Washington DC, 07 March 1983, US/ZM/95.
  27. Cable American Embassy, Harare to Secretary of State Washington DC, 07 March 1983, US/ZM/95.
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  29. Personal correspondence between author and a former Zimbabwean civil servant, January 2018.
  30. Personal correspondence between author and a former Zimbabwean civil servant, January 2018.
  31. Cable American Embassy, Harare to Secretary of State Washington DC, 16 September 1982, US/ZM/26.
  32. Mitter 1988, cited by Jean Dreze, "Famine Prevention in Africa: Some Experiences and Lessons," in *The Political Economy of Hunger Volume 2: Famine Prevention*, ed. Jean Dreze and Amartya Sen (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1991), 123-72.
  33. Interview with survivor of Gukurahundi, Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, November 2011 (ref ZM/11/1).
  34. Interview with survivor of Gukurahundi, Johannesburg, South Africa, November 2017 (ref ZM/17/18).
  35. Interview with survivor of Gukurahundi, Johannesburg, South Africa, November 2017 (ref ZM/17/13).
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