

**ARGUMENTS OF ACCOUNTABILITY:  
HISTORICAL NARRATIVE, CRISIS AND SOCIAL BIOGRAPHY IN ZIMBABWE**

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The central issue of this paper is the extent to which social knowledge of the past is moral knowledge. Much has been written about the orientation to the past which glorifies it (as in nationalist myths), laments a loss (as in nostalgia), legitimizes (as in social charters), recovers a silenced history (as in the ethnic "search for roots") (Kapferer 1988; Strathern n.d.; Thompson 1985; Hall 1992). This paper foregrounds knowledge of the past as violation; my emphasis is on the legacy of debt that is kept alive in the present through an ongoing argument which is moral, ritual and political. Whether to bury the past or to expose it is openly debated, as is the choice between reconciliation and confrontation. At one order of relations, it is an argument about personal responsibility within a Kalanga family in western Zimbabwe. At another order, it reaches to the most inclusive public sphere and the accountability for state terror and ethnic violence. Over time, the argument of accountability both separates the local and the global and also fuses them in historical narratives.

In its most recent moment, the argument of accountability gains force, in the public sphere, from what are perceived to be even broader, international pressures towards democratization in Africa. It is not merely that western scholars represent the argument in terms of a problematic nexus between state and civil society (Lamarchand, 1992). It is that protagonists themselves assert that they are consciously acting to realize a civic culture, to compel the state to guarantee the rights of individuals *qua* citizens (Moyo, 1992).

Underlying the argument about the past and accountability are quite disparate assumptions, distinguishable for purposes of analysis but which may be brought to bear by the same people at different times in different situations. Lamarchand suggests a useful distinction framed, first, in terms of Lockean ideas, a version of social contract theory, reflected in the rhetoric of civic culture and citizens' rights, and secondly, in terms of Burke's notion of moral partnership, enduring and not perishable, "between those who are living, those who are dead and those who are yet to be born" (Lamarchand, 1992, p 178, citing Burke n.d.). The Burkean and the Lockean notions need not be seen, at least in Zimbabwe, as exclusive alternatives, one displacing the other. The social contract theory is increasingly salient in debates within the public sphere about the state and its agents: debates in newspapers, in parliament, in litigation. The premise of a moral partnership is stressed, and in the past decade increasingly so, where political accountability is extended to comprehend what is perceived to be a disturbance in the cosmos. Here people convert their awareness of the past, as violation of the person or even the earth, into ritual debt, redeemable only through the performance of rites of personal healing and of cleansing the earth from bloodshed. The intensification of arguments of accountability has meant the increasing salience of debates about the social contract in the public sphere (Moyo, 1992) and an efflorescence of ritual practice recognizing and attempting to assuage ritual debt (Ranger, 1992).

#### **The Politics of Moral Accountability**

At the height of the recent crisis over Zimbabwe's worst drought in living memory, the search for fresh water sources in abandoned mines unearthed mass graves. Bulldozers bringing up water also dredged up human bones. The bones had been dumped in the mines located in the southwestern part of the country, following massacres committed by the elite Fifth Brigade of Zimbabwe's national army in the mid-1980s. While the discoveries were being made, a former commander of the Fifth Brigade, Air Marshall Perence Shiri, was appointed Commander of Zimbabwe's Air Force. In the outcry that followed, the Minister of Defence appealed to the nation not to open up "old wounds" by invoking the history of post-independence violence.

One immediate response, not only to the discovery of the bones but to the Zanu-PF regime's attempt to bury the history, was unambiguous. It was a groundswell of protest, both local and national. The demands were carried forward in a stream of newspaper letters and columns. All urged that the regime must accept moral and legal responsibility for the atrocities carried out in Matabeleland by the Fifth Brigade and the Zimbabwean Central Intelligence Organization. At the national level, *The Financial Gazette*, an independent newspaper, published a debate about the significance of the atrocities. "Horrors of the Fifth Brigade can not be Forgiven nor Forgotten" is the title of an article by Welshman Ncube, a professor of law at the University of Zimbabwe and himself from the western region where the atrocities had been committed. Ncube rejected the calls for reconciliation; he opposed the appeal for healing of the social wounds of war; he argued that the priority has to be the public acknowledgment of guilt by the government and compensation for the families of victims:

I believe that we should neither forgive or forget for there is no reason to forgive. Those who lost their loved parents, spouses, brother and sisters, children, relatives and friends, at the hands of soldiers constituted to protect them have absolutely no reason to forgive. Why should there be forgiveness of a Government which refuses to accept responsibility for its atrocities? (*The Financial Gazette*, October 15, 1992, p 4.)

Ncube's article can be seen as part of a nascent social movement intended to create public opinion demanding the government be made accountable to the people. Some what marginal to this movement are leading politicians from Matabeleland and (including the recently appointed Minister of Home Affairs, Dumiso Dabengwa), formerly of the disbanded opposition party ZAPU, who have joined the government, under the unity agreement with the ruling party. These politicians "prefer to deal with the past in such a way that it consolidates the present alliance between the two parties" (Ranger, 1993, p 4, citing *Southscan*). By contrast, "Human rights activists" is the label now used in Zimbabwe for some prominent campaigners within the nascent movement who opt "for a public, confrontational approach" (*ibid.*).

It is a confrontation over the rule of law and the role of the Central Intelligence Organization as a political apparatus of the ruling party and its regime. The argument is as much about the present and the future as it is about the past. This is reflected in the recent report of *The Sunday Times* on the decision of the Attorney General not to prosecute the deputy director and other officials of the CIO on charges of abduction and murder. The unfinished case follows the disappearance of Rashiwe Guzha in Harare on May 30, 1990. *The Times* reports the protest of, among others, the Dean of Law at the University of Zimbabwe, Kempton Makamure:

In a democratic society the government should resign where it fails to protect the lives of its citizens. The Guzha case is a sad episode in the legal history of Zimbabwe and it clearly means that no-one's life can be safe or guaranteed anymore. Why should blacks in this country have a government? They were murdered by Smith and they are being murdered by this government - the so-called government of freedom fighters - what freedom do we have? (*Sunday Times*, 19 July 1992.)

To prove the answer, others have contested the silence about earlier "disappearances". Even before the discovery of the bones, a group of women from Silobela in Midlands Province had been pursuing a case to get a High Court ruling on the deaths of their husbands who "disappeared" after being abducted at night by security forces in early 1985 (*Censureship News* 17, p 3). They are only one group among the many families of the bereaved seeking death certificates officially acknowledging murder by the security forces. Most recently, according to the *Sunday Mail* of December 6th 1992, Dumiso Dabengwa as Minister of Home Affairs,

reviewed the registration system to enable the children of people who disappeared during the post-independence political disturbances in Matabeleland to get birth certificates... Children of missing persons could now be issued with birth certificates as long as there was someone to testify before the registrar that their parents disappeared (cited in Ranger, 1993, p 5).

But the nascent social movement is not merely a campaign to make the government accountable to individuals *qua* citizens. Nor does it merely reflect a wider discontent with economic mismanagement and corruption. It is most critically a struggle against what is

seen to be an attempt to evade public responsibility, both moral and legal, for making the security forces the means of state-sponsored ethnic violence. Ncube argues,

...Mr. Mahachi [the Minister of Defence] and his government will not own up to these atrocities. They would rather we all shut up and pretend that the Fifth Brigade did not engage in what can only be described as ethnic genocide. (*The Financial Gazette*, October 15, 1992).

The demand is that ethnic violence be recognized and acknowledged as the criminality of the regime whose forces perpetrated it. If there is to be healing, there must be reconciliation with the state, and not only between people asserting opposed super-tribal identities as "Shona" and "Ndebele".

A moral debt is seen to be at issue, one that people are unwilling to renounce without reparation. Such a moral debt is, I shall argue here, like an unfinished narrative, which motivates people to call again and again for a resolution. The stress on the making of historical narrative has been salient in recent discussions of the politics of identity (Friedman, 1992; Hall, 1991; Tonkin, McDonald, Chapman, 1989). The reinvention of the past or the recovery of lost histories - "the search for roots" (Hall, 1991, p 52) - is seen to be a condition for empowering current identities and group causes, such as mobilization in particular struggles. In line with this Friedman, for example, in a recent article, argues that "...the people without history are, in this view, the people who have been prevented from identifying themselves for others" (1992, p 837). What many of these discussions miss, however, is that the politics of representation are a politics of moral accountability in which the past is unfinished, festering in the present. It is not a "search for roots" which is at stake but a demand for rights as a basis for a healing of *open* wounds. As Ncube contends:

Unconditional and unqualified acceptance of responsibility by the government would be an important step towards healing the wounds, that so many in government want not to be re-opened as if they were ever closed (1992, p 4).

### **The Pollution of the Land**

The moral debt is widely perceived as more than a debt to the people themselves. It is perceived to be a ritual debt offending the dead and God. The disappearance of victims of the Fifth Brigade left their surviving kin in an ambiguous predicament. Not only were they unable to get the needed death certificates and birth certificates for children of the dead, but they were unable to work out their bereavement through burials and funerals. Many felt they were suffering from the restless dead, aggrieved, violated and unburied. As individuals, the sufferers turned, in an efflorescence of healing ritual, to Christian churches, diviners, and cult healers offering personal relief and personal cleansing (Reynolds, 1990; Werbner, 1991; Ranger, 1992; on the moral significance of the congregations, see my discussion below). For whole communities there was an awareness of a disturbance in the cosmic order. The earth had been polluted by the massacres.

Even beyond that, there was a recognition that the spilling of blood in the war of liberation itself had left the land and the people as a whole in need of cleansing. From the perspectives of priests and followers of the Mwali Cult of God Above, southern Africa's largest indigenous regional cult centred in Matabeleland (Ranger, 1967, 1991, 1992; Werbner, 1977, 1989), Nkomo and Mugabe as the leaders of the victorious guerrilla armies were at fault; they had not authorized messengers to come together on their behalf at a central shrine and make sacrifice to God Above for restoring the peace of the land (on Nkomo's contested efforts to identify with, capture and even re-invent the cult as a focus of national pilgrimage, see Ranger, 1989; Nkomo, 1984).

In 1989, before the worst of the drought, Mandikangangwa, a very senior and elderly *wosana* (an initiated adept possessed in the Mwali cult), reflected on the liberation war and "the war of Mugabe", which was the civil war fought against "dissidents" by the Fifth Brigade as an army of occupation. The *wosana* told me:

Nkomo himself in that war with Europeans was not saying that he would kill the Europeans off. He was saying, 'They are giving us a public order (mthetho) which is oppressing us, but let us all live together'. But that one (Mugabe) said, 'I am going to



kill until I finish and remain alone'. He wants everyone, whether Europeans or Matabele, to be killed off, so that only he and the people of his home remain (Mandikanganwa, 24 July 1989.)

If limited war might be right, the unlimited war, and what Ncube calls genocide, must be wrong because it denies that the world was created for many different peoples, not one only. The *wosana* continued,

Recently, it has been a little better because Joshua pleaded with Mugabe that they should all be together and rest from all those things. Mugabe had been opening his war to kill us. The soldiers came saying these are the footsteps of dissidents. But the dissidents were really his, Mugabe's [invention]. He said I am not letting the day pass until you kill 3,000 people in Matabeleland. Stop at 3,000. Now that is what has been done and it is finished.

As himself a Kalanga from Bango Chiefdom in the southwest, the *wosana* expressed an opinion widespread in Matabeleland. First, he conveyed that the regime in power, like the armies, is personified by the leader, who is held ultimately responsible for the abuse of power. Second, he insisted that the violence was a deliberate, unprovoked campaign launched by the head of state. But the *wosana* went on further to disclose the religious significance in God's coming judgement of collective responsibility. In my understanding of the *wosana's* transcendental and universalistic perspective, it assumes two critical relations defining the moral universe in the regional cult's cosmology. One is between the order of the cosmos and sociality, which is at once human and beyond humanity. It refers both to the sociality between different peoples, and also between these peoples and each of the various species of all living creatures. The other aspect of this moral universe is the relation between human hubris and God's retribution. As put by my interlocutor, sociality is universal in that the universe is composed of many peoples, *all of whom are empowered by God and none of whom can presume to be alone*. Such a presumption denies that there is a God above them. To act against universal sociality is to act against the very order of the cosmos, the order wherein that upon which life ultimately depends comes from God Above. Human hubris as the overreaching arrogance of great and powerful temporal leaders brings its nemesis in God's collective retribution.

The *wosana* said:

Mugabe does not know that Mwali (God Above), who created below, created for him, too, and for each and every people to live well. God hears what this man says. The way it is we thank God for the power that he gave this man [we do not complain against God for empowering Mugabe], but it [his having power] is not good. And whether you will make it right, God, we do not know. But it will come after this [he gave an ironic, bitter laugh] that the Master of the Sun (God) will 'despise and reject' (*sodza*), having looked closely and kept silent. He won't say, 'You, what have you done? You are spoiling'. He will go, 'Whh, whh (blow the wind, keeping silent)'. [This wind sweeps away pollution, despised by God, and it also drives away rain, desired by people.] If you say you are going to do something, he allows it, 'Alright (let it be your responsibility)'. But one day, ahh! It will reach a measure that is enough for the day of 'I [Mwali] will come here'. Just as he has said, 'I will bring the clouds [of rain]', so too he stops them saying, 'You go ahead and pour out, get rain for yourselves; and if you can't, it is your own affair. I am the one who put you in your place. If you do not respect me, and seize each and everything for yourself, then you can make your own, by yourself [if you arrogate all power to yourself, do not expect help from God].

The *wosana's* fearful anticipation of God's judgement hinted further at an apocalyptic image of impending drought so terrible that it would be decimating in loss of cattle, goats, even chickens and so much loss of human life that there would be no one to bury anyone else. His remarks assume a meta-history or underlying philosophy of the succession of regimes and God's will, which Ranger's recent work illuminates (1989). The demands for acknowledgement of wider political and moral responsibility intensified during the drought. It is an important message of the cult, Ranger argues, that "...individual cleansing must be accompanied by rituals in which the whole society comes to terms with the violence of its past" (1992, p 706), including all people within the wider society, whites as well as blacks. The assertion is that public accountability and the admission of responsibility for violence must be inclusive; it must extend beyond the liberation war to the colonial conquest. In his autobiography Nkomo reflected and advanced this inclusive representation in his disclosure of a prophecy made to him at a central shrine (Dula) in 1953 (Nkomo 1984). On that

occasion, a witness told me in 1989, he had accompanied Joshua Nkomo to the shrine and had heard the oracular Voice weeping about blood spilt in the first war against the whites (at the end of the nineteenth century). "I am made to withdraw by that blood", the Voice said and then explained why the people would have to wait thirty years for their own country (see also Ranger, 1989; Nkomo, 1984). In the cult's continuing and unfinished narratives, the violence of the past has been represented as leaving a trace which still affects the well being and welfare of people in the present. Responsibility cannot be narrowed down. It must make demands beyond the temporal interest of the immediate moment.

This inclusive representation itself has a very wide resonance. It is echoed in a recent column by the Catholic priest Father Oskar Wermter entitled "Time to Choose":

the dead will not go away. They claim their right. Now Matabeleland is yielding up its dead, shattering the official silence. The Minister of Defence, Moven Mahachi, appeals to the spirit of reconciliation so that he can quickly throw his blanket of silence once more, and this time for good, over those bones... But even the dead of the first Chimurenga [the Shona name for the nineteenth century war against the whites] are not at peace. Zimbabwe must be cleansed of a century of violence, say the ancestors (cited in Ranger, 1993, p 3).

What I propose here is that the people's creation of historical narratives, especially about the violence of a collective past, is more than mere legitimization, more than the construction of a past charter in present struggles. Historical narratives of responsibility are unfinished moral narratives, in which traces of past faults impinge on the present and compel people to act. The dead claim *their* right. Such historical narratives gain even greater moral force amidst complaints in the public sphere about the regime's broken promises, mismanagement, corruption and self-enrichment. This is the conjuncture in the finding of historical fault and current failure which characterizes the present crisis of legitimacy of the Zanu/PF regime under Mugabe.

#### **Guerrilla War - The Heritage of Ambivalence**

With this crisis of legitimacy and the nascent movement for accountability has come a growing public reaction against the purely heroic representation of the liberation war. It is a reaction which increasingly brings into public discourse much of the personal, familial and private discourse among civilians in the countryside. In some ways the atrocities endured during the post-independence period were, for members of the family I know best, Lupondo's family, a continuation of the suffering experienced during the liberation war (Werbner, 1991). The home of Lupondo's family is in Bango chiefdom, southwestern Matabeleland. In both periods, family members and other local people continued to be caught between two forces, subjected to arbitrary torture and humiliation and, in extreme cases, brutally murdered without provocation. In both, the people had been compelled to become informers and betray members of their community: during the war of liberation, accusing them under threat or out of alleged self-interest of being "sell-outs", and in the post-independence period of having helped the "dissidents" or knowing their whereabouts.

By the time I returned to the family in 1989, after almost a thirty year absence, family members were engaged in questioning themselves about how they had survived. They had had a year of relative peace following the amnesty of 1988, but many were still uncertain whether the violence of the early 1980s would return. They were all too aware, often enough, that in order to save themselves they had had to betray someone in their community, and they were trying to come to terms with this. At the same time, the women in the family also told stories about their heroism, about how they had stood up to soldiers or rescued children; about how they were the ones who had managed to feed and clothe the guerrillas.

Both periods had left family members with unsettled debts to the dead, debts which expressed themselves in afflictions by abused ghosts or grieving spirits. To ease, if not fully settle the debt, rituals had to be performed. It was not a matter simply of cleansing individuals. There was a concern with putting to rest the restless presence of past moral violation, of which the wandering ghost is the forceful embodiment. Relatives and neighbours had to be brought together in shared sacrifices of cattle or goats. These

sacrifices, felt to be demanded by the dead, recreated moral communities, communities much wider than the family itself. They did not merely alter the personal condition of the afflicted as individuals. Their practice reflects their concern with the moral responsibility of healing. Healing is here an essentially social process.

But besides the carrying forward of moral and spiritual debt for collective as well as individual purposes, there were also very real differences in the narratives about the two periods. Family members conveyed that the horror of the post-independence period had been beyond anything they had thought possible, or could have imagined before. They told about the massacres of nearby people who had been stuffed into the mines, the rapes and starvation which this time left no-one untouched. As I have argued in my account of the family, some of the nightmarish quality of their experience came from a virtually surrealist re-enactment during the latter period of terror of certain parts created in the liberation war. The Fifth Brigade soldiers were the merciless enforcers of collective punishment by the state, re-enacting the part of the Rhodesian forces, yet they represented themselves also as having the moral authority of the people who had liberated Zimbabwe and made it free, and they demanded displays of support of the kind they had known as freedom fighters (see Werbner, 1991, p 169). Looking back upon the senselessness and futility of the post-independence terror, family members conveyed that they had been able to make more sense of their suffering during the war of liberation. They saw themselves as parents protecting guerrillas just as they expected other parents elsewhere to protect their children, and they accepted that their own children had gone to fight a war to win the country from the whites. At the same time, the very recognition of a moral relationship between civilians and guerrillas - and both sides expressed expectations of actual performance as parent and child (clothes, food, shelter) - made the ambivalence of the actual relationship between them all the more problematic. It is important that this ambivalent relationship must not be reduced to a matter of mere coercion as Kriger would have it (Kriger, 1992, p 109-115, forthcoming). Kriger's approach dissipates our understanding of the moral contradictions with which people have to wrestle in guerrilla war. Instead, the analysis must get right the very pervasiveness of the appeal to "kinship", and the forceful ambivalence it entailed when the appeal came along with the ill-controlled threat and, all too often, the actuality of physical coercion. Such an appeal to a parent-child relationship runs not only through the narratives I recorded, but also through the life histories of many of the Zimbabwean women in *Mothers of the Revolution* (Staunton, 1990, p 5, 83, 100, 109, 116, 162, 170, 209). In no way does this deny the arbitrariness in the victimization of civilians in guerrilla violence. It is a reality in moral contradiction to which my interlocutors in Lupondo's family insisted I bear witness on their behalf.

Having survived the suffering and brutalization of both wars, family members and their neighbours remembered the liberation war not as in any way a heroic period for the combatants. Nor did they create a narrative of unified struggle against an external enemy. Theirs was not the triumphalist history of the kind produced for schools as an official, government-endorsed version of the war, extolling the heroism of (especially ZANLA) freedom fighters (Seidman, Martin and Johnson, 1982). Instead, family members and their neighbours gave diverse accounts, and from different perspectives, which reflected the suspicions, divisions, mistrust, as well as the loyalty, support and courage among themselves. They stressed in their stories how they had come through ordeals and confronted them. Survival was itself heroic.

The recent ordeals, which were still fresh in their minds, overshadowed earlier ones. They talked about the wars as distinct periods of suffering and drew comparisons between them. Their overriding emphasis for the second period was on evil; on the threat to annihilate all the people; on the sense parents had of an absurd twist in which their children came back to them, having survived the war, only to be once again in danger of their lives, under suspicion of being "dissidents" and thus enemies of the very Zimbabwe they had fought to liberate. The war of liberation was remembered in moral terms as a far more ambivalent experience. And, in the light of the later ordeals, many family members had to ask themselves: was their suffering in vain?



## The Changing Focus of Moral Narrative

To create a world of moral understandings among themselves, members of a family such as Lupondo's have to manage a tension between the global and the local. How far the global is to interpenetrate with the local is a matter that has to be managed actively. It is not a given of geography, a matter of physical or ethnic isolation, or even of a necessary articulation in a world capitalist system. It is a dynamic condition which can be negotiated and renegotiated.

In the early accounts of their lives which members of Lupondo's family gave me in 1960-61, the local dominated over the global. This, despite the fact that the family had to recreate home and all that it meant to them in the face of colonial encroachment. Dislocation was imposed upon them from without, and repeatedly. They had to move from place to place, dispossessed of their land by white settlers, until their chiefdom of Bango was re-established to the remote south in a "Special Native Area", at the beginning of the 1940s. Embedded in the wider capitalist economy, they took part in the increasing circulation of labour migrants between countryside and town, at times reaching very high rates of migration. From generation to generation, and even within generations, they moved through very different work careers, distinctive both in the short and long term. They became involved in the defence of their settlement against the modernizing and enframing thrust of the late colonial state. Of all that wider movement, however, relatively little emerged from the background in their early personal narratives.

It might be suggested that there is a simple explanation for their inward focus in this pre-war period: withdrawal in defence of autonomy. Having gone through successive dislocations from the early colonial period till the 1940s, a whole generation enjoyed a period of reconstruction, from the 1940s to the late 1950s. Benign or not-so-benign neglect, in effect *laissez faire*, was the colonial policy in their part of the district. This practical limit on official intervention freed them to follow their own social strategies for settlement. They recovered vital connections with neighbours; they reconstituted neighbourhoods of their own choosing. In other words, their localism as an inward focus on kin and neighbours would simply appear to be an expression of relief from the press of the outside world, and most importantly the press of white settlers and colonial officials.

But why did members of other families nearby not share this inward focus? After all, others at that time did give me accounts full of reflection on and consciousness about colonial rule (see "Living with Europeans in Our Country: Tobela Reflects", Werbner, 1991, pp 47-64). And why was this inward focus that of a prominent family sustaining itself together in the largest concentration of family homesteads? The point is that the suggestion about reconstruction takes us only part of the way because it neglects the specificity of family narratives. It is a matter of this family, not another, and not the whole chiefdom.

Lupondo's family members did not start off from a shared reality. Instead, they had a discourse within which they negotiated their understandings and argued with and against each other. What they shared was the argument, not the representations of themselves and others in some consensual interpretation of events in everyday life. They were engaged with, and committed to, each other, even despite themselves. The self-absorption, the disattention to the colonization and the dislocation on the land was constitutive of the defence of autonomy *at a specific phase* of the development of the family. It was the phase in which what was at issue was not only the transfer of leadership from the founder's generation to his sons' generation, but also the very existence of the family as a locally nucleated group. The family was about to split. It was a cause of much anguish and uncertainty. No-one in Lupondo's family took the emerging split as a matter of course, as if it were natural and unavoidable.

Motivated by concerns about their future commitments to each other, members of the family were drawn to engage in an intense moral argument about character and the blame for misfortune. This was the argument about recourse to sorcery within the family. I found that the names given to children were a register around which versions of family history were read. Once given in full, and not as abbreviated nicknames, "The names speak", as one family member told me: "Mind your manners"; "The village is mine"; "You make us vomit", and so forth. The names express recriminations and counter-recriminations among and between the various wives. For me this register was one key to family genres of personal

narrative. What characterizes different genres are the ways family members position themselves morally within or outside quarrel stories.

In relation to the ongoing moral argument, the personal narratives that were told to me fall into four genres. At one extreme is the genre of romance in which the narrator completely distances herself from quarrel stories. She makes her life out to be a glorious romance, without conflict or hostilities - a quest for the right man, the finding of a husband, and now the idyllic marriage. It is especially artful as a representation understood against the background of the voices of other family members speaking of her blame in family quarrels. Partial disengagement from quarrel stories characterizes the second genre, that of nostalgia. In old age the moralizing narrator looks back upon a radical break from good to bad times. The quarrel stories come from after the break, and the narrator longs for the good times when he was himself central in the life around him, and not yet peripheralized in elderhood on the verge of ancestorhood. At a further extreme from romance is the genre of cautionary realism in which the quarrels are cautionary moments. These are told as it were objectively; the warnings about people and their dispositions are less openly stated than implied in the elaboration of circumstantial detail. The narrator fully engages with telling quarrel stories but places herself as a witness, somewhat at the periphery, virtually never as a heroine or at the centre. Finally, in this spectrum, comes the genre of heroic adventure. It is apt for leading sons who give the self-accounts of purposeful and resolute heroes. The narrator represents himself as justified, as deserving of his rightful place, as standing up to the tests of his rivals and enemies within the family. In the quarrel stories his virtues emerge more or less explicitly by contrast to their wrongs and shortcomings.

In their personal narratives as in the rest of their ongoing moral argument, family members had strong views about malice and the destructive capacities of human beings. They took it as an unquestionable truth that human character is profoundly inscrutable and liable to reveal unsuspected evil. They spent a great deal of time backbiting, gossiping, making moral judgements, defending and assassinating each other's character. Direct violence was rare. Admittedly, the campaigns of sorcery accusations, while controlled from exploding into violence against the accused, did arouse hostilities. Such campaigns evoked the passion for vengeance and further embittered rivalries. But restraint was called for in response to attacks of sorcery. Moreover, much was said and done with the explicit intent of containing the destructive capacity of human beings.

If the local can be said to have dominated the global in the prewar personal accounts and moral argument of Lupondo's family, the reverse is more true immediately after the liberation and civil wars. Family members continued to focus on the moral concerns of family members, of course, but these, like the imposed terror and violence, could not be imagined as limited to local events. Their narratives, commenting upon Mugabe, inflation, trends and changes in the wider scene, foreground their ordeals with outsiders primarily, rather than their internal quarrel stories. Family members felt compelled to bring the wider scene into perspective.

Here my own discussion raises the problem of the dialogic nature of social life. Even at the most minute scale, social life is dialogic - argument, disagreement, contradiction, divergence of perspectives, competing interpretations and representations of reality flourish. The question is the extent to which there is *interpenetration* from one scale to another, so that the *same* concerns may come to dominate throughout the different *scales*. To pursue the answer further these family narratives have to be positioned in a wider context that includes the changing public discourse about violence.

### **Family Narratives and Public Discourse**

During the liberation war the Rhodesian press had carried endless reports of atrocities allegedly committed by the "ters" (terrorists) against the civilian population in rural areas (see Frederikse, 1984). Afterwards, there was a run of post-war reminiscences by Rhodesians. Remarkably matter-of-fact about their part in massacres and in the campaign of terror, even their use of poisoned clothing, many of the Rhodesians displaced moral blame (see Ranger, 1991 citing Cole, 1984, Daly and Stiff, 1982, Flower, 1987). Within post-independence Zimbabwe there was, moreover, a muting in the public discourse, the media and press, of civilian suffering as a moral outrage. This was so, I would suggest, because



the ambivalence around the suffering could be negotiated in moral terms (the war was held to be a just war and it could be argued that civilians do often suffer in wars), and because blame could not be allocated singly, to any one group or leader. The grounds were found for a public agreement to bury enough of the past to allow for a *modus vivendi* under the country's negotiated settlement. Much concern was expressed about the safety of the business community, the avoidance of a flight of foreign capital, and the need for reconciliation with whites in order not to disrupt the economy. For the liberation war, unlike the post-independence civil war, there was no single social agency, ethnic group or political movement perceived to be overwhelmingly responsible for the atrocities. No political interest group dared make moral capital out of the atrocities by politicizing them; that was true even when the mass graves left by the Rhodesian regime were discovered.

It was thus possible to reconstruct and re-imagine the war as one of heroic struggle and suffering of the nationalist kind memorialized at Heroes Acres. At first there was little or no attempt to create a monument to civilian sacrifice, or to seek a way to honour and appease the civilian dead in national ceremonial at the capital or in the countryside. Debate in the press raised the question of the absence at the memorial site of any heroines, women combatants. Even beyond that, *heroism* was politicized, being appropriated by the ZANU/PF regime for its guerrilla army, ZANLA. As Kriger has argued, the exclusion of ZAPU's claimed heroes of their army, the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZPRA), was part of a wider appropriation of the symbol of The National Hero by the new ruling elite (Kriger, 1990 cited in Brickhill, 1992). The regime created a hierarchy of heroes, Kriger suggests: at the top, the national heroes buried at the capital in costly and glorious funerals paid for by the state; at the bottom, the local heroes from among the rank and file whose own communities pay for their burial. This appropriation, and the symbolic hierarchy along with it, was contested by ZAPU and its leaders. It is a contestation that was at first suppressed, along with ZAPU, during the post-independence struggle of the early 1980s. The unity agreement between the parties allowed former ZAPU leaders to found the Mafela Trust (Mafela, the Fallen One, after the *nomme de guerre* of ZPRA's last war-time commander) At first the intent was to commemorate ZPRA's war dead in their own home areas.

Eventually, the Trust began to extend its concern to other "forgotten heroes", the civilians themselves. Brickhill contends, as a founder of the Mafela Trust, "The contribution of the Mafela Trust to this contestation is to argue for a return of the historical legacy of the war to the rural people who fought and sacrificed most for the liberation war of Zimbabwe" (1992, p 11).

Initially, straight after the war, there was entrenched resistance to any public criticism minimizing the glory of the guerrilla war. More recently, however, there has been a countersurge of literary, academic and other publications in the public sphere. The literature confronts the sufferings of civilians in the war and the atrocities they had to bear. Thus Ranger comments on the concern with violence and terror emerging from the material on the war now being published in Zimbabwe:

At first, after the 1980 victory, the war was portrayed in terms of the triumph of heroic virtues and bravery both in narrative accounts and in novels. Today both compel the reader to confront and think through terror. (Ranger, 1991, p 11)

Ranger reports that at a conference of writers he attended in Zimbabwe in 1990, many writers said that "they felt it to be *their duty* to record the brutality and insanity of the war and the nitty-gritty of guerrilla life" (p 12, emphasis added); they felt "a compulsion to confront and understand" the horror they felt about it (13). The writers as intellectuals are moved to create the art of an embracing civic and popular culture. It is one that brings into the widest public sphere the painful moral contradictions with which so many individuals and communities have long been wrestling. This is more than a demystification of the past. The thrust is towards a radical disenchantment which rejects the politics of secrecy and authoritarianism.

Clearly the past refuses to be buried. This, despite the fact that there is no ethnic political interest in sustaining popular memories of the liberation war's atrocities - they do not provide a legitimating charter for any present political struggles between ethnic groups (see also my discussion of quasi-nationalism and rival guerrilla armies, Werbner, 1991, pp 19-60). Indeed, these popular memories cannot be appropriated, reduced to the "truth" of a

single group. They are intractable memories for any regime that claims political legitimacy by disguising the terror of the past. The burial of terror is the birth of disenchantment.

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