Of Spirits and Healing: Cultural Values and Post-conflict Reconciliation Agenda in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

This article discusses dynamics in the appropriation of Christian and ''African religious''traditions in post-conflict reconciliation and healing in Zimbabwe. It shows that sickness and healing in Ndebele tradition and culture are understood within a two –tier system which consists of ''normal- natural''and ''deviant spirit- induced'' sickness. Consequently healing has to be understood in spiritual dimensions as well. The article examines how victims and perpetrators of violence can heal from the sickness caused by the legacies of a violent past of "Gukurahundi" in which an estimated 20,000 people were violently killed and not buried in a traditionally accepted manner. Not burying one's dead in Ndebele religion, to which many of the victims of Gukurahundi belong, implies living outside their protection, and killing innocent people leads to suffering the consequences of avenging spirits. Unfortunately mainline churches have not attended to this traditional spiritual need of the relatives of the dead and disappeared victims and perpetrators of Gukurahundi. Instead they have stigmatised indigenous religious conception of healing. As a result politically engaged religious groups such as Grace to Heal (GtH) have recognised the need and proceeded to assist in refurbishing the shallow graves. Subsequently they have provided the focal point for traditional rites through which the local people reconcile with their dead. This initiative by a Christian organisation can be viewed as a charismatic deviation from the central belief or established tradition in mainstream Christianity. The mixture of Christian and Ndebele traditional religion in dealing with the dead and disappeared in the wake of Gukurahundi is a key aspect of social and cultural dynamics.

Introduction

This paper discusses dynamics in the appropriation of Christian and ''African religious''[1] traditions in post-conflict[2] healing in Zimbabwe. The

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concept of healing in the discussion at hand is located within ''African'' cosmology, particularly how sickness is conceived in Ndebele religion. In post-conflict situations both victims and perpetrators of violence require healing. This paper focuses on the healing of relatives and families of the dead and disappeared victims and the perpetrators of *Gukurahundi* in Zimbabwe. The imperative for healing during the period under discussion is engendered by the following facts: the relatives and families of the dead and disappeared were denied the opportunity to decently bury their dead, and the perpetrators of this violence are reported to be suffering from mental sickness due to atrocities they committed and from avenging spirits (*ngozi*). The paper argues that, while the prevalence of Christianity and modernisation have been argued to eventually dislodge ''African religions'', healing in post-conflict Zimbabwe, in this case among the Ndebele people, the main victims of *Gukurahundi*, has to transcend the Christian and scientific culture, to deploying their religious conceptions and culture. To this end recourse by a Christian organisation to Ndebele culture and religion in facilitating post-conflict healing within the gamut of reconciliation is discussed as a fascinating cultural dynamic. The article assumes the following structure: It begins by giving a brief conceptual framework on reconciliation. This shall be followed by the contextual framework outlining the history of *Gukurahundi* within which the discussion is located before presenting the Ndebele traditional funeral rites and the consequences of desecrating them. The article then interrogates the effect of Christianity and urbanisation on traditional rites before evaluating the dynamics of reconciliation and traditional rituals in the light of Christianity.

Reconciliation: A Conceptual Framework
Reconciliation is about institutional reform as much as it is about psychological reform. It deals with questions of how surviving victims and perpetrators can cope with the legacies of the violent past. Admittedly it is a complex concept difficult to reduce to specific terms. Du Toit (2003:295) testifies that ''to define it (reconciliation) too closely would be to destroy the vitalising energy of differing voices converging. Excluding divergent opinions on reconciliation forfeits it. To leave it undefined may again prevent focussed and effective interventions. Continuously postponing the definition of reconciliation may in itself be escapist.'' Cognisant of reconciliation's various paradigms and dimensions, this article emphasises the necessity of upholding cultural values as part of a broader post-conflict reconciliation agenda. The argument is built on Philpot's (2010:17) concept of woundedness which he puts in six dimensions namely i) brute harm which is the physical,

psychic, economic or emotional to the victim's personhood, ii) suffering from ignorance of the source and circumstances of their wounds - for instance ignorance about who was behind the gun? How was my son abducted? Not knowing the truth of one's past is itself a form of torment, iii) violation as a subject of justice, as a member of the political order from which he is entitled to human rights due to violence or injustice at the hands of office bearers. Such treatment can be in the form of the victim's imprisonment, going into hiding, being on the lam, or disenfranchised resulting in what can be called social death or political death, iv) wound of withheld regard resulting from the failure to recognise the victim as a legitimate member of the order but as a victim suffering in the name of the order, v) lack of accountability by the perpetrator of the wound inflicted , not only to the victim but to the political community which promulgates and upholds the law, vi) and failure to confess , apologise , atone for and make amends for the perpetration and condoning of political violence.

Reconciliation therefore has numerous dynamics which are intimated from the above dimensions. Lederach (1997) speaks of reconciliation as both ''a perspective'' and ''a place'' (a focus and a locus) that brings together truth, justice, mercy and peace. The dynamics of truth telling are honesty, transparency, clarity, accountability; those of justice seeking are responsibility, rectification, restitution, reparation and retribution; those of mercy offering are compassion, dignity, forgiveness, acceptance; and those of peace-building are harmony, unity, well-being, sustainability. Various scholars have emphasised different facets of it determined by the disciplinary inclinations. Murphy (2010) reduces the whole reconciliation process to three elements namely rule of law, development of political trust and enhancement of capabilities. The concept of rule of law (ibid: 28) ''captures the importance of institutional dimensions of political relationships, specifically how legal institutions structure political interaction and define the political expectations citizens and officials have of one another'' A functioning legal system reinstates a sense of order and safety after violence (Broneus, 2007: 7). Political trust ''reflects the attitudinal component of political interaction and highlights the view that citizens and officials should ideally take of each other'' (Murphy, op. cit: 28). Enhancement of capabilities refers to genuine opportunities of individuals to achieve valuable doings and beings, such as being adequately nourished and being respected. What capabilities an individual has depends on both what a person has (e.g resources) and what she can do with what she has (e.g. given the social and material environment (Murphy, op.cit :28). The concept of capabilities helps us understand the

ramifications of breakdown of relationships due to violence and oppression such as exclusion of certain people or groups politically and economically. Lack of capabilities implies lack of capacity to be responsible for one's life. In other words it reduces the opportunity to exercise agency.

The argument of the discussion is the importance of cultural values in facilitating reconciliation with regards to the surviving victims and perpetrators of *Gukurahundi* in Zimbabwe. For the purposes of this article and taking from Phillport''s (op. cit.) conceptual reflection on the concept of reconciliation, due to the experience of *Gukurahundi* the victims have suffered traumatizing brute harm and ignorance about what happened to their relatives. They have therefore lived in constant fear resulting in social and political death. No one has taken accountability, apologised and made amends for the perpetration of the violence. This is linked to Murphy's (ibid.) element of enhancement of capabilities. Because the Ndebele people have not been able to psychologically reconcile with the *Gukurahundi* experience, let alone institutionally, they have constantly lived in an attitudinal prison or paralyzing isolation and all-consuming self-pity which bars or limits their full social and political participation as full citizens. They always play second fiddle in societal institutions. This article appreciates the importance of other dynamics of reconciliation and argues that they all have to be facilitated for the complete process to take place. However the article restricts itself to the role of cultural values as part of the reconciliation process, considering that *Gukurahundi* desecrated the cultural values of the Ndebele people in a way that left them without a support system. The dynamics of reconciliation raised by Lederach (ibid.) undercut the discussion at hand as well. For instance the dynamics of truth telling are honesty, transparency, clarity, accountability. The surviving victims of *Gukurahundi* feel the perpetrators have not been honesty, transparent and accountable for their deeds. Hence in the name of justice they seek responsibility, rectification, restitution, reparation and retribution. Only then can they in respect of mercy be compassionate, have their dignity restored, and offer forgiveness. In the final analysis the aim is sustainable peace.

While this article makes deference to the surviving and dead victims, it does not overlook the fact that perpetrators are also in need of healing. The *Gukurahundi* experience was characterised by complex ambiguities and contradictions. It also had psychological impact on the 5th brigade soldiers who perpetrated the *Gukurahundi* violence and the dissidents who suffer greatly from their role in it. They suffer in the same way perpetrators of

violence during a war situation do. With respect to soldiers from Zimbabwe's war of liberation, Nyathi (2004 : 76) notes that ''many of the lingering problems between war veterans and their communities today have been caused by the failure to deal honestly with the less pleasant aspects of the war of liberation, as well as the crimes linked to the colonial regime before the war…''. No counselling and rehabilitation accompanied demobilisation of the war veterans hence some of the problems involving the war veterans can be traced to these early failures (Zimbabwe Liberators Platform, 2004:38). Hence as Jonathan Moyo (1982:12) puts it, the war of liberation had deep socio-psychological impact on both its targets and its perpetrators. According to Huyse (2003:19) reconciliation can be seen in its backward looking operation and forward looking operation. ''As a backward-looking operation, it brings about the personal healing of survivors, the reparation of past injustices, the building or rebuilding of non-violent relationships between individuals and communities, and the acceptance by the former parties to a conflict of a common vision and understanding of the past. In its forward-looking dimension, reconciliation means enabling victims and perpetrators to get on with life and, at the level of society, the establishment of a civilized political dialogue and an adequate sharing of power.'' Of importance here is that perpetrators also need to be helped to get on with life. This suggests that they are also victims in some sense. They also live in paralyzing isolation and all-consuming self-pity due to trauma and guilt conscience for having undertaken heinous acts, as mentioned above.

Historical Background of Operation *Gukurahundi* (1982-1987)
Post-colonial Zimbabwe has experienced some of the following conflict flashpoints which engender the post-violence transition and reconciliation agenda: *Gukurahundi* massacres; political violence not just from the violent and bloody 2008 elections but stretching back to pre-independence period; institutionalisation of violence through political institutions such as security sector, the judiciary, economic sector, land reform programme; Operation Restore Oder, commonly known as Operation *Murambatsvina* (a Shona language word which means get rid of the filth) where alleged illegal houses of ordinary people mostly in urban areas were demolished by the government in a case of a state turning against its citizens. As intimated above, the discussion in this paper is located within the context of *Gukurahundi*. On 18 April 1980, Zimbabwe's independence day, Mugabe announced a policy of reconciliation which promised a dawn of a new era free of violence, repression and oppression. He said "If yesterday I fought

you as an enemy, today you have become a friend and ally with the same national interest, loyalty, rights and duties as myself. If yesterday you hated me, today you cannot avoid the love that binds you to me and me to you. The wrongs of the past must now stand forgiven and forgotten."[3]   It emerged, as Huyse (2003:34) notes that Mugabe was focussed only on black and white reconciliation. He put less emphasis on the question of reconciliation within the black community where two groups had fought bitter conflicts, both in the far past and as rivals in the liberation movement. This conflict is the one that degenerated into *Gukurahundi* two years after the speech.

Gukurahundi was an attack on the second major tribe (Ndebele tribe) in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe between 1982 and 1987. It was based on three interrelated divisions: ethnic - majority Shona versus minority Ndebele, regional - North and South Matabeleland (predominantly Ndebele country), versus most of the other regions, and political - diverging visions of how to build the country after independence (Huyse, ibid.). The attack began when mistrust grew between Zimbabwe African National Union (Patriotic Front) (ZANU PF) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) from the time of integrating the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA), the military wing of ZANU PF, Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA), the military wing of ZAPU and the Rhodesian army into one national army. The violence was also built on the two guerrilla armies''regional patterns of recruitment and operation during the 1970s predominantly ZAPU from Ndebele speaking of Matabeleland and ZANU from Shona speaking, and the history of animosity between their political leaders history (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000:185-6). ZAPU was accused of refusing to recognise the sovereignty of the government and suspected of threatening the regime security of ZANU PF hence were to be shot down and their alleged leader Joshua Nkomo to be crushed (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, ibid.). The so-called dissidents broke away from the national army because of political bias in favour of Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) especially where promotions were concerned and their comrades in the national army were increasingly subjected to arrests, detention and harassment by the Central Intelligence Office (CIO) (Zvobgo, 2009:258). Under the leadership of Robert Mugabe, the ZANU PF leader, a violent attack was unleashed on the Ndebele speaking people in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces where ZAPU dominated. Within weeks North Korean trained 5th brigade soldiers had massacred thousands of civilians and tortured thousands more (Catholic

Commission for Justice and Peace, 2008; Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, op. cit. :181). ''Massacres, mass beatings and destruction of property occurred in the village setting in front of thousands of witnesses...'' (Eppel, 2005:45). ZAPU saw the best way for itself and its people as joining ZANU PF in a Unity Accord of 1987 between ZANU and ZAPU. The 1987 Unity accord however only managed to stop overt violence and was a way of ZANU PF to ensure regime security rather than human security. Regime security is concerned about the welfare, safety and protection of the ruling elite and its few cronies. Its main reference points are territorial integrity, sovereignty, and state security (Kondowe, 2000:85 cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003: 100-101). According to the United Human Development Report (1994:24-5) human security means enjoying the following types of protection: economic safety nets, food security, access to health care, environmental protection, personal security, community security and political security. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (ibid.) notes that it is an alternative way of seeing the world, taking people as its point of reference, rather than focusing exclusively on the security of territory or the government in power. The 1987 Unity Accord was, however, an agreement of elites and not a broad based process involving the masses (cf Ndlovu- Gatsheni, op. cit: 117). The reconciliation process, engendered by *Gukurahundi* has been compromised by the fact that among many other things, the Chihambakwe Commission of Inquiry into the Matabeleland report was never made public and the Clemency Order of 1988, after the Unity Accord pardoned all violations committed by all parties between 1982 and the end of 1987 (Huyse, ibid.38). That covered the Matabeleland atrocities, with no accountability and no apology.

The Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace's (op. cit) report on *Gukurahundi* recorded that 98% of the deaths were perpetrated by government agencies while 2% were by dissidents. Victims of dissidents in most cases received burials with full traditional rites since dissidents killed not more than one or two people at a time and were very quick to leave the vicinity for fear of the authorities. Those in mass graves and who did not receive decent burials are civilians killed by state agencies, in particular the 5th Brigade (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, op. cit: 361). The 5th Brigade insisted that there was no mourning for the dead. In some instance relatives who wept were shot. It was characteristic of victims to be buried in mass graves. At times people would simply be shot and neglected without care to what happens to their bodies. There are basically five ways in which the bodies were disposed: i) left were they were killed with burial forbidden, ii) buried in mass or individual graves in villages but not in the accepted

place or manner[4], iii) left inside huts in cases where people were burnt to death inside the huts, iv) buried at 5th brigade camps v) dumped into mine shafts (ibid: 362).

If the victim was killed on allegations of being a ''sell-out'' the relatives and friends would not be given the opportunity to mourn this person because to do so would label one a sell-out as well. So people suffered the loss of their loved ones in silence, if not asked to be part of the killing (Eppel, 2006). The lack of a body to mourn causes serious psychological distress. Of importance in this article is that both mass and individual shallow graves result in lack of the traditional funeral rites and a focal point for traditional rites at and after death. The spirits of those buried in mass graves and those who disappeared remain unappeased. This led to psychological sickness interpreted both in scientific and spiritual terms. The latter is of focus in this paper.

Victims whose bodies are unavailable as focal points to perform traditional rites do not only refer to the ''dead''but also to the ''missing or disappeared''. The term ''dead'' refer to those whose deaths were witnessed while ''disappeared'' refer to people who are known to have been taken from their homes at night or in mysterious circumstances, or known to have been detained and never seen again (Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, op. cit: 360-361). In both cases decent burials with full traditional rites were not carried out, but as Hamber (2004) notes and shall be demonstrated shortly, in Southern Africa spirituality and communal life are at the centre of life. This dovetails with Machakanja's (2010:8) observation that traditional mechanisms in healing and reconciliation have been advocated for since they are seen as ''creating cultural social spaces that would accommodate both victims and perpetrators in facilitating the acknowledgement of wrongs and the validation of the experienced pain and loss , with a view to achieving the mutual coexistence of all affected parties.''

The Practice of Ndebele Traditional Funeral Rites
The funeral rites of the Ndebele people shall be discussed since the victims of *Gukurahundi* are mainly from this group of people. One way of dealing with the legacies of violence is invoking the traditionalist idiom rooted in the idea of a moral partnership between the living and the dead (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000:254). The presence of a corpse during funeral rites provides the opportunity to send the dead to the world of ancestors and the grave site provides for the focal point for the rite of ''*umbuyiso*'' through which the dead is brought back home to watch over the family left behind.

According to Bozongwana (1983) when a person dies in the Ndebele tradition, it is most important that the dead person should spend a night in his home before he is taken to the grave. During burial the grave is treated before or after lowering the corpse depending on the tradition of the family. This serves two purposes namely to protect the corpse from witches and it is a part of uniting the dead with the spirits. The relatives then throw soil on the coffin saying ''*Hamba kuhle; usikhonzele*'' (Go in peace and plead for us), as a way of bidding him farewell, and while in the internment service, names of all the dead fathers are mentioned and each is asked to receive and keep the dead man, an actual committal of the soul. The spitting of saliva on the soil to be thrown into the grave is another symbolical way of sending him victorious, while praise names of the dead, said at this part of the service, are an inducement for accommodation.

After a year or more, a date in spring is set for *umbuyiso* (bringing back the dead). ''*Umbuyiso*'' is a ritual that is carried out one year after the initial funeral. Nyathi (cited in Ranger, 2004:114) asserts that *umbuyiso* forms the basis of Ndebele religion. He further asserts that if the dead are not brought back, the living will not communicate with them. It is meant to officially bring the spirit of the dead home and inaugurate it as part of the ancestors to watch over the family. Bozongwana (ibid.) notes that all adults who were parents have this ceremony performed for them while Ranger (2004:114) reminds that it was however not carried out for the childless, witches and for suicides. He adds that it also ended the period of mourning for the widow and allowed for the distribution of property. Bozogwana (ibid) further explains that for ''*umbuyiso*'' the elders of the family gather together and corn is soaked in water by the oldest member of the family and he says: ''This is your beer, we are bringing you home so that you look after the children.'' On the day of the service, beer is squeezed and one calabash of beer is set aside for the spirits to drink at night. At sunset, the service begins at the grave. The centrality of the ceremony is demonstrated in that during pre-colonial tribal wars, the surviving warriors would bring back soil from the graves of those who would have died in battles for a field and ceremonies would be performed around this soil. In the same vein Ranger (2004:115-116) puts it that, during the making of colonial cities when the Ndebele people who moved to stay in cities died, *umbuyiso* was performed in the rural areas if the person had a rural homestead. If the person was buried in the township his relatives would come from the rural areas , go to the grave and perform ritual acts there, talking to the grave , saying they had come to the person's spirit to go and protect his children. They would take some soil from the

grave to his homestead. Back in the rural home they would sprinkle the soil at the person's favourite resting place and perform other acts that completed the whole ritual.

Bozongwana (op. cit.) explains that some families take a goat to the grave to offer to the dead man in order to appease him and induce him to come home. The goat is driven back and killed to the spirits. Some cut a branch and drag it from the grave into the home; while other families take beer in a calabash, sip it once as they talk and pour the libation on the grave and then walk back home singing *"Woz" ekhaya"* (come home). In the afternoon of the same day, an ox will have been slaughtered, skinned and put in the hut for the night. The goat is killed, roasted and eaten the same night by the family only sniffing at regular intervals. This is a communion service in which every member of the family can say and ask whatever she or he wants from the ancestors. The rest of the meat, a calabash of beer and snuff are left in the hut for the spirits to feast and drink.

In the morning, beer is split on the ground as libation as people dance and sing: *"ubaba makeze ekhaya"* (father should come home). Ox meat is roasted and eaten and beer is served as well. Some beer offering is left over night for the relatives after all people have gone. One member of the family is then chosen (usually a child) to represent the dead man particularly if he was a medium or was named after the dead. Bozongwana (op. cit.) asserts that the immediate implications in the communion sacrifice mean the re-admission of the recent dead person into the home in another form and capacity and it underlines the importance of their belief in immortality and the appeasement of spirits. The sharing of the sacrificial meal secures permanent acceptance for belief in communion between the dead and the living. The purpose for the sacrifice is to express or establish a relation of harmony and unbroken fellowship leading to looking after the family. To facilitate communication, the spirit is given an animal as its host. It is then installed on the day of *umbuyiso*. Whenever there is illness in the home, the head of the kraal will go to the ox very early in the morning and will talk vehemently to the spirits as he kneels beside the animal. In strong language, the spirits are told to stop molesting and causing illness to the family: "If you don"t protect your children, what is your work then?" The man would say to the spirit.

Following *umbuyiso*, an annual drink, food and snuff offering is made even if there is no illness. A successful year characterised by fertility of land, livestock and also human beings is attributed to the co-operation and

direction of the ancestral spirits and, as such, all that man has is ordered by their governance. The elaborate rituals serve to affirm how denying the dead decent burial with full traditional rites is a desecration of the cultural values. The question to be investigated therefore is ''what is deemed to be the consequences of desecrating cultural values?''

Consequences of desecrating Cultural Values
As articulated above, the spirits of the dead (ancestors) play a special role in the lives of the living. For an ancestral spirit to play its role effectively, it needs an honourable funeral and subsequently the *umbuyiso* traditional ceremony. A spirit that has not been honoured through these rites becomes an angry and restless spirit, a scenario which can bring bad luck to the family and the community at large. Bad luck can be exhibited through bad behaviour in children, failure by children to marry, illness, droughts, floods, crop failure among many others. It is not surprising that the droughts of 1991-2 and 1994-5 provided an impetus for a critique of moral and religious appraisal in Matabeleland. The cause and remedies were subsequently religious, particularly the desire for a cleansing of the metaphysical and physical traces of violence, during the liberation and post-independence wars (Alexander, McGregor and Ranger, 2000:264-265). When a problem is interpreted to be caused by an angry spirit it is normally interpreted as follows: ''the spirit of so and so is in the wilderness, she or he is wandering and was not brought home to watch over his or her family''(Eppel, 2006:264-6). Carrying out the aforementioned rituals has simultaneous effect of healing the individuals, that is the direct family of the wandering spirit and the whole community as the ritual has value insofar as it is part of the community value system, as demonstrated above in the role the family and the community plays during the funeral rites.

The general health and well being of an individual is connected to the community and is not something that can be maintained alone or in a vacuum. Healing ritual and community are vitally linked (Somé, 1999:22). Rituals are the most ancient way of binding a community together in a close relationship. It has been the most practical and efficient way to stimulate the safe healing required by both individual and community. Ritual has been the way of life of the spiritual person because it is a tool to maintain the delicate balance between the body and the soul. It is so deeply connected to human nature such that any time it is missing as is the case in *Gukurahundi* era, there will be a lack of transformation and healing. Rituals therefore should not be seen as empty, old fashioned, irrelevant, boring, dark and pagan with no

place in modern times, but as transforming, essential, challenging and healing (Somé, 1999:141-6).

Denying traditional burial is subversion of cultural values and that offends and disturbs the survivors. Not performing these rituals makes them feel vulnerable to danger within the fortune-misfortune complex (De Craemer et al, 1976:463), considering that in ''African religions'' and in this case in Ndebele religion and culture, people cannot live without a sacred canopy to use Berger''s (1969) terminology, in which there is a hope of deliverance and protection from all evil in all its different forms, including evil spirits, and sorcery, misfortune, natural disasters, disease, poverty and socio-economic deprivation and oppression (Anderson, 2001:233). Berger (1969:26-7) asserted that another opposed category of the sacred in addition to the profane is chaos. The sacred cosmos, characterised by order and harmony emerges out of chaos. The sacred cosmos transcends and includes man in its ordering of reality, thus provides man's ultimate shield against terror of anomy. To be in good standing with the sacred cosmos is to be protected from chaos while to be otherwise is to be abandoned on the edge of the abyss of meaninglessness. Interesting enough is the observation that the English word ''religion'' derives from Latin meaning ''to be careful''. Berger further says that the sacred is potentially dangerous though its potency can be domesticated and harnessed respectively. The religious man is therefore careful about the dangerous power inherent in the manifestations of the sacred where behind it lie an even more danger, that is losing all connection with the sacred and be swallowed up by chaos, hence all the nomic constructions are designed to keep this terror at bay. The sacred narrative guides and informs the life of the African people, in this case the Ndebele people. Their world is a ''continuum between the visible and invisible worlds and mankind shares its environment with spirits of some type who influence mundane transactions and with which direct communication is possible (Ellis and ter Haar, 1998: 179).

Another dimension to the spirits of the dead, which touches the perpetrators, has to do with avenging spirits. Killing an innocent person is believed to result in the spirit of the deceased person becoming an avenging spirit. Maxwell (1999: 206) describes it as a restless spirit of an innocent yet wronged person, aggrieved and dangerous to the living. It is the most feared of all spirits amongst the Shona people and likewise among Ndebele people. In addition to being unjustly killed, the person is improperly buried or was mistreated when alone. It shows itself by killing the members or descendants

of the offending family before revealing itself. Through a host it demands that fines be paid to its kin in the form of money, cattle or a young lady. Since these are a costly enterprise, the affected opt to have the spirit exorcised by the *sangomas,* African Initiated Churches (AICs) or Pentecostal Charismatic Churches (PCCs) or any religious actor who claims to be able to do so. Gunda (2011:336) notes that prophets in AICs and PCCs in Zimbabwe are legitimized as divine representatives by ''the gifts of the spirit'': divine healing, glossolalia, exorcism and prophecy.

Many warriors in the Zimbabwean liberation struggle and the soldiers of *Gukurahundi* are reported to be suffering from mental illnesses, in some cases alleged to be caused by avenging spirits. Somé (1988:29) asserts that healing in indigenous communities includes the dimension of spirit; hence definitions of illness extend to the unseen worlds of mind and spirit. Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008: 79) puts it straight forwardly that death and illness among the Ndebele were considered unnatural and were attributed to either anger of ancestors (*amadlozi*) or witchcraft. In the same vein Gunda's (2007:231) assertion on the Shona people of Zimbabwe is similar to that of the Ndebele. He states that sickness among the Shona people is understood in two forms namely ''natural''and ''deviant''sickness. The former attacks the physical man and is generally believed to be of natural causes while the latter is believed to have supernatural origins, normally a result of some angry spirits: either family or alien spirits. This conception is contrary to the western understanding which views sickness in purely scientific terms. Peel (1968:133) asserts that scientific culture states that the evidence of sickness is traceable to natural causes and its cure is simply a matter of technique. It is not a sign of divine displeasure or need to polish up one's moral. Religion is not seen as a technique for achieving healthy and prosperity. In ''African religions'', sickness remains a religious problem (ibid: 230). Traditional and Christian healers have helped ex-combatants to come to terms with their memories of violence and sense of guilt (Maxwell, 1999:206). In a narration about the war of liberation one interviewee in Maxwell (ibid: 206-7) gives an idea of the sickness that results from *ngozi* when he narrated that ''some men and women start crying alone, others act as if they are cooking *sadza*[5], others try to take things and run with them. They pretend to have guns implying that (the person with) that spirit died whilst performing that act. Older women crawl like guerrilla when possessed…by bad spirits and men have to restrain them''. This type of sickness in ''African religions''constitutes ''deviant''sickness, hence requires spiritual intervention for its remedy. The

main explanation for mental problems following political violence has to do with angry spirits – ancestral/ family and avenging spirit.

With respect to *Gukurahundi,* Werbner (1991:187) notes that there was a rise of *sangomas* (spiritual healers) to deal with the spiritual legacies of the violent episode. He says that the *sangomas''*costumes are an embodiment of the dead as a way to warn people not to forget the dead. The task of the *sangoma* is to protect against sorcery and ask for healing through restored communication with the dead. One of their key tasks is memorialisation of violence, aggression and violation of the person with the belief that this will lead to healing. Healing is to be understood as ''the totality of activities and ideas which help both individuals and the wider communities to come to terms with the experience of violence and bereavement caused by war, in a manner which allows them to continue the daily existence'' (Maxwell, 1999:205-6).

The *ngozi*-cults (*sangomas* in Ndebele context) memorialise the dead through the agency of the living providing the families the opportunity to grieve and mourn their loss. The *ngozi*-host, along with the traditional healer, is in prime position to mediate between the two families, involved, and thus brings about reconciliation and restoration. The role of the *ngozi-cult* in this case is not only a spiritual endeavour but has physical implications (Maxwell 1999:207). The reconciliation exercise as understood in international terms focuses and rightly so, on issues such as truth telling, justice, and forgiveness. However, the discourse has not paid due attention to religious and spiritual aspects of violence, conflict and the dead.

Gukurahundi desecrated cultural systems and needs surrounding the dead, not only by refusing proper burials of the dead, but also forbidding mourning, and forcing people to take part in disrespectful behaviour such as dancing and singing on shallow graves of the newly murdered, and leaving bodies in pain of death. According to Campell (2007; 2010) cultural systems serve to meet the human needs for meaning. Cultural systems hence provide meaning of life at three levels namely cognitive, emotional and moral. At the cognitive level they explain why things are as they are. Since it is not enough to know ''what is'', but also what the people are meant to feel about this picture of life and universe presented to them - whether to be awestruck, amazed or fearful, or hopeful, joyous or welcoming- cultural systems supply the emotional meaning, and offers guidance on what to feel and under what circumstances. Cultural systems provide moral meaning by helping people understand why things are as they are when judged not simply from a

disinterested scientific stand point but from an interested and partial perspective of human desires, hopes and expectations. A successful cultural system therefore is one that ''that tells people what it is that they should think, how they should feel, on what basis they should judge others as well as themselves, together with what actions they ought to perform to attain salvation, peace or enlightenment'' (Campell, 2007:167). The desecration of cultural system through *Gukurahundi* ruptured the framework of meaning upon which the survivors hang in their daily life, in a world characterised by fortune and misfortune.

''African religions'', under which funeral rites fall, give a framework within which to explain problematic things that happen in people's lives and sometimes provides practical response to that. Religion helps in understanding and coping, and has the psychological function of integration and equilibrium. Through it people are able to accept situations in their life. Socio-economic and political aspects of life are guided by it. Hence it is not an abstract principle but something practical. It is profoundly integrated into social and technical life. To think of it as disappearing, as was argued by advocates of secularisation thesis including the Indian historian and diplomat K. M. Pannikar who argued that religion would decline in Africa and Asia following the end of Western colonial rule (see Meyer, 2004:452) is superficial and without depth.

Enter Christianity and urbanisation
The advent of urbanisation and Christianity in its various strands over time gives another dimension to this discussion. Christianity as it is understood today in Zimbabwe was introduced by the western missionaries mainly of the Roman Catholic, Evangelical Lutherans, Anglican, and Methodists churches. Missionary Christianity was understood as part of the process of civilisation and modernisation. Within the realm of health, this meant undermining all traditional health delivery systems hence we witness the establishment of mission hospitals. The missionaries used stigmatisation to undermine traditional health delivery systems, such that to this day many people consult the traditional healers in the night or in far away places so as not to be noticed. The same point explains why traditional healers have been labelled witchdoctors (Gunda, 2007:230, 238). In one of the Christian villages established in Zimbabwe by the Jesuits, missionaries even used violent means to fight local health system. For example they asked the local people to burn their prayer houses and Father Biehler ''tore the clothes off a woman medium beating her naked body with a stick. Father Richartz beat the local

herbalist, and broke his medicine containers''(McLaughlin, 1996: 238). With making of cities permanent township dwellers who owned stands performed their *umbuyiso* in the townships. However in the 1930 and 1940s they began to meet difficulties. The colonial municipality controlled beer drinking. It was supposed to be done in the municipal Beer Halls. Brewing beer behind houses for *umbuyiso* became illegal and one would be arrested if known. Animal sacrifice which accompanies *umbuyiso* was also banned in the cemeteries and municipal watchmen patrolled the cemeteries for night ceremonies at graves (Ranger, 2004: 117).

The advent of Christianity hence saw the stigmatisation of *umbuyiso*. The missionaries condemned and prohibited the practice (Ranger, 2004:114). To date attempts have been made to Christianise the practice through the process of *inculturation*. The Gweru Catholic diocesan Synod of 2000 resolved to take compatible aspects of *umbuyiso* into the Christian rite. However it can be said that the resolution between these two seems far from realisation. Theologian and Catholic priest Father David Muguti[6] argues that when a priest conducts burial rites, he asks for the intercession of the deceased relatives believed to be in the presence of God and saints to take the spirit of the deceased person to heaven. Some of the aspects of the process of *umbuyiso* seem contradictory to this conception, especially that when a priest asks for the spirit to be taken to heaven, in *umbuyiso* it is being recalled back. It is also selective as described above. It leaves out the childless, the witches and the suicides.

The foregoing narrative explains why consulting a traditional healer is to this day viewed negatively. The missionary churches have not made any significant changes to understand the two forms of sickness. This standpoint, as alluded to earlier on, has paved way for the growth of AICs and PCCs, because as Kirsch (2004:699) puts it ''people's ideas of and experiences with spiritual entities engender particular ways of talking about and practising belief.''. The two strands of Christianity have accepted and appreciated the aforementioned two-tier system of sickness. Anderson (2001:199) writes that ''in many AICs in Southern Africa, the prophet-healer has taken over the function of the traditional diviner-healer.'' Pentecostals emphasise healing and deliverance from the terrors and insecurities inherent in African experiences of evil powers and sorcery (Gunda, 2007:242). The process of dealing with spiritual legacies of violence has not been confined to AICs and PCCs, but has been adopted as well by politically engaged religious movements which deploy religious symbols and rituals in implementing

healing and reconciliation programmes. Grace to Heal (GtH), a Christian organisation, established in 2003 with the aim of fostering a faith based process of peace, reconciliation, justice and conflict transformation in the whole of Zimbabwe, is a case in point. Its vision is to bring the process of peace building and nonviolent social transformation as both a culture and goal in Zimbabwe.

The Reconciliation Discourse and Ndebele Traditional Rituals
An activity unique to GtH is its involvement in community healing through helping families and communities to bestow dignity upon the many shallow mass graves of people who died during *Gukurahundi*. Werbner (1991:186-7) describes the effect of *Gukurahundi*, and brings to the fore two elements with respect to spirits of the dead (ancestors and avenging spirits) as follows: ''There was a widespread experience of senseless loss and anxious bereavement, often due to kin dying in atrocities without decent burial or wakes. It was well known that there were mass graves into which people had disappeared, leaving no trace for their kin. The need to be cleansed from wartime acts of violence was also widely felt […].''

There have been open mass graves and other graves for unknown persons. GtH is securing them to stop people, children and animals from playing on them. GtH asserts that a significant number of affected communities were unable to give their loved ones "proper" burial and continue to be concerned about this: ''Most of the graves are so shallow that dogs and other animals dig up the bones. Others can no longer be identified as graves; so people who do not know walk over them, school children play over them, thus desecrating them'' (Grace to Heal website,[7]). In some places GtH has fenced the area or built a box or a small wall to indicate that there is a grave. Some people are now able to carry out the appropriate rituals. In this vein one interviewee said: ''Even if we are Christians, some people still believe that you talk to the dead.''

Within the reconciliation discourse, identifying and refurbishing of graves, and exhumations are vital aspect of truth understood as knowing what happened, where it happened and how it happened. As aforementioned, Phillport (2010:17) interprets the feeling that emerges from lack of knowledge or truth as a state of woundedness characterised by suffering from ignorance of the source and circumstances of their wounds, for instance who was behind the gun? How was my son abducted? Is the person really dead? If so at what point did he/she die? Did she or he suffer a great deal first? Where is

the body now? The families do not know when to accept that the person is dead, and the biggest question is how does one mourn when there is no body to weep over? Eppel, (2006:268) concludes that through the absence of a body to weep over, the disappeared are denied a place among the living and among the dead. GtH does not end with refurbishing the graves but holds funeral services. This is based on the belief that gathering friends and family around a ritual to recognize the dead triggers the beginning of healing (Motsi, 2011:11). This also marks the beginning of rituals with respect to the dead as a way to begin the journey towards healing. As Somé (1988: 29) notes, the road towards healing is not in words but is paved with gestures, touch, sound, melody and cadence. In support of memorialisation and ritualisation Machakanja (2010:14) advices on the importance of ''physical reminders in the form of monuments, ceremonies, memorials or other ritual occasions aimed at contributing to the acknowledgement as well as the setting of a general ethos of healing.''

For GtH to refurbish shallow graves, hold funeral services and provide the focal points for relatives of the victims of *Gukurahundi* to carry out their traditional rites, is to arguably imply that it believes in the importance of the traditional rites of the dead such as *umbuyiso*. By so doing GtH sets itself on a passive nonconformist path vis-à-vis the mainline churches, which as explained above, are opposed to the dual conception of sickness in Ndebele tradition which requires traditional religious rites.

The presence of mass graves is a concern to the communities, to the present day, who feel that exhumations and refurbishments must be undertaken within the broader reconciliation agenda. The Co-Minister of National Healing, Integration and Reconciliation, Moses Mzila Ndlovu from another faction of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) political party was blocked from initiating the reburial of *Gukurahundi* victims discovered at a primary school in Lupane, Matabeleland North province. The Minister said that the villagers discovered the remains and approached his ministry seeking government assistance to give the victims a decent burial but ZANU-PF is not sincere in any *Gukurahundi*-related issue and is determined to suppress it. He argued that the villagers have not known peace since the discovery as they were being intimidated by people believed to have links with ZANU-PF and they have been told to stop associating with him as well as to stop talking about *Gukurahundi*. He further challenged the people of Matabeleland region to never shut up until the issue is addressed properly (Nkala, 2012).

The fencing of some places, or building a box or small wall to indicate a grave by GtH, are vital gestures for symbolic healing. Establishment of symbolic shrine is important since as the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (op.cit) reports states, relatives of the victims often express the strong need to have a place where they can remember their loved ones, pray or follow other cultural practices of mourning. Establishment of shrines imply a social and national recognition of what happened. The lack of broader acknowledgement is apparently a source of deep disturbance for the relatives and witnesses of the tragic events. Such shrines break away secrecy and bring unspeakable secrecies into the realm of historical and social reality.

Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace (ibid) noted that exhumations assist relatives of victims in their right to recover the remains of their dead or missing their loved ones so that they can carry out the customary funeral rites such as those referred to above. The procedure of identification of the dead or the willingness to attempt this is a necessary step towards emotional healing. Beyond cultural wishes and in line with other dynamics of reconciliation such as truth and justice, exhumations can provide physical evidence to help in the reconstruction of events, validate one version of truth over another. If this will involve forensic investigations, then historical controversies can be ended. The evidence can be used in court. This can be part of addressing the problem of ''patriotic history''which is being currently perpetrated by the political elites. The whole process can contribute to national awareness and acknowledgement (not just knowledge) and could help the process of healing. An interviewee[8] lamented that no official book has been written about *Gukurahundi* for public knowledge, no history has been communicated about it but the third *Chimurenga*[9] is already in the history books. This is because the political powers that are, benefit from it since it is instrumental for regime security. This leads to the question of who writes the history and for what purpose, whose point of departure in answering it is deference to the old adage that history is written by the victors recording what they want the reader to know. This respondent affirmed the role of history in dealing with political transitions and reconciliation. History is vital to affirm a people's identity and to have points of reference to avoid repeating the same mistakes. As already noted, in the discourse of reconciliation it is part of truth telling. Through history the narrative of the atrocities is given and a foundation for intervention is laid.

Healing is a lengthy and culturally bound process (Hamber, 2004:78). One of the consequences of violence and conflict is trauma understood as the

destruction of individual and/or collective structures of society. Repression of culture and expression, ethnic intolerance and discrimination as demonstrated in *Gukurahundi*, undermines and destroys social and cultural norms of feelings of identity, belonging and trust in institutions. Exhumations, refurbishing and securing of graves and establishment of symbolic shrines help concretise traumatic incidences and serve as a focal point in the grieving process (ibid: 85). However these do not provide healing through delivering an object such as a pension, monument or simple exhumation but through the process that takes place around it such as the reburial ritual (ibid: 84).

Other civil society organisations participate in the healing process but cannot deploy religious resources as religious movements do. They may deploy secular mechanisms in truth telling, justice and other institutional reforms but the religious movements deploy both religious and secular resources ahead of the former. The effects of violence are part of a societal malaise, sickness and disease, within the fortune-misfortune complex. Such societal sickness and acts that violate the human person have been the cause of the rise of religious movements in the form of AICs. These religious movements have gained momentum and are increasing in Zimbabwe because they dovetail with African religiosity. This form of Christianity dovetailed with the expectations of indigenous people, because they could see into the future, they could demonstrate extra-ordinary power manifested in miracles and healings. In short their service could be paired with traditional practitioners (Gunda, 2012:338). It could address the aforementioned misfortunes. The rise of Pentecostal and evangelical Christianity is also gaining momentum on the same bases. It promises to deal with issues at the heart of African religiosity. In the light of a population that confesses the Christian faith to the tune of 75%, social, spiritual and religious malaise engendered by violence can be best dealt with by religious movements as many of the churches have slowed down on this task.

Involvement in refurbishing and identifying mass graves, by GtH, therefore offers decent burials to the improperly buried, give their families the opportunity to perform their rituals and in the process relieve themselves of psychological oppression or the guilt of not having done enough for their dead thereby living outside the sacred canopy and fearing that they may rise in anger against them as avenging spirits. The religiously biased activities of GtH offer an opportunity for spiritual cleansing for those who have committed acts of arson and participated in killing innocent souls.

Perpetrators come to seek help from the guilt conscience and mental sickness with the belief that prayer may have exorcising and cleansing effect on their acts of violence which led to innocent people's deaths which now affect them mentally.

Conclusion

Recourse to traditional conception of healing by a Christian organisation raises questions with regards to the position held by some analysts that there is a hermetic distinction between Christianity and ''African religions''. GtH is a Christian organisation which would not be expected to entertain any traditionally founded or inclined activities. This is against a background of ancestors and spirits being at the top of the list of evil spirits in Christian practice. If anything, the ancestors and spirits can only be incorporated into Christianity through their demonization or translation into the devil or continue to exist as Christian demons under the auspices of the devil (see Meyer, 2004:455). On one hand this confirms the warning by Meyer that making a hermetic distinction between African religion and Christianity should not be naively done, since both survive on the existence of spirits by accentuating them to create the devil to fight, out of them. On the other hand what GtH does challenges the assertion that Christianity maintains the existence of spirits by translating them into the devil. GtH does not demonise or translate the spirits into the devil but indirectly recognises the persistence of African tradition, including burial rites amongst people including Christians.

What emerges is a hybrid conception of tradition and spirits, qualitatively different from both Ndebele religion and Christianity but originating there-from. An amalgam of two differently focussed religious traditions ensues. Christianity is ''vertically''focussed with emphasis on salvation to be attained in heaven; while Ndebele religion is ''horizontally''focussed with emphasis not on salvation in heaven but here and now through protection from misfortunes and advancement of fortunes. This hybrid conception has been discussed through concepts such as Africanisation, inculturation, collective identities and contextualisation among many others. In other words this points to the reshuffling and reordering of Christian beliefs vis-à-vis African customs. This can be viewed as a charismatic innovation in which African traditional rites of health and healing are rationalised within the domain of Christian practice, as a response to the void created and maintained by mainline churches through stigmatisation of the indigenous religions. This is so if charisma is to be understood also as a force in tradition bound epochs,

working from inside, as a transforming starting point, born of necessity leading to change in the central tendencies of belief and action and a new orientation of attitudes to particular phenomenon of life and the world (Weber, 1956:182). GtH emerges as a force within traditions of Christianity, particularly mainline churches in its effort to bring a new orientation to dealing with sickness and healing. The necessity prompting this move is the psychological insecurity and oppression resulting from not having undertaken traditionally due rites to their dead or having killed innocent people during *Gukurahundi*.

The appropriation of religious resources by religious organisations to the politically engendered violence has implications for understanding the long standing contest on the distinction between the sacred and the secular. Politicians have made this distinction between what is political, translated to be the secular and what is religious as a way of shutting the religious actors out of the political sphere. In African religion this is a problematic assertion considering that in many of pre-colonial African societies, political power lay with traditional chiefs who held both temporal and sacred power. The source of this power was sacred. Their power is connected in the ''specific ritual roles in communicating with the ancestors or ensuring the fertility of land, animals and people (Swidler, 2010:163). In the same vein Turner (1969:49) notes that in most traditional societies of Africa the tribe itself and its rulers and institutions were set within a sacred cosmic order. Today politicians capitalise on structural differentiation, engendered by the secularisation thesis, by asserting that the religious actors, particularly the church has no business with what the politicians do with people here on earth, because the church's interest is in heaven. In healing through refurbishing of the graves the chiefs play a leading role, not only as traditional and cultural, but religious leaders. They work together with the pastors as a reminder that they are also religious leaders.

This paper has attempted to show that sickness and healing in African tradition and culture are understood within a two –tier system which consists of ''normal- natural''and ''deviant spirit- induced''sickness. Mental sickness and other misfortunes are conceived to be caused by the latter hence require spiritual attention. Not burying one's dead implies living outside their protection and killing innocent people leads to suffering the consequences of avenging spirits. These scenarios have been common in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces of Zimbabwe through *Gukurahundi* in which the dead were not accorded due traditional burials. As a result the

relatives of these victims have not been reconciled with their dead and this is a cause of concern to them. The lack of reconciliation is also due to the fact that in some instances some relatives merely disappeared. But in both scenarios decent burials were not conducted. Mainline churches have not attended to this traditional spiritual need of the relatives of the *Gukurahundi* to reconcile with their dead. To the contrary, they have stigmatised indigenous religious conception of healing. Politically engaged religious groups such as GtH have recognised the need and have proceeded to assist in refurbishing the shallow graves and providing the focal point for traditional rites through which the local people reconcile with their dead. While AICs and PCCs have acknowledged the tow-tier conception of sickness and healing, they have resorted to exorcisms while GtH has opted for refurbishing and securing of graves. This initiative by a Christian organisation can be viewed as a charismatic deviation from the central belief or established tradition in mainstream Christianity which can lead to negative sanction of the organisation. However the mixture of Christian and African religion in dealing with the dead and disappeared in the wake of *Gukurahundi* is a key aspect of social and cultural dynamics.

Notes
1. Using quotation marks here is to acknowledge the debate about speaking of African Traditional Religion(s) in the plural or in the singular, which is beyond the purview of this article. Some scholars like (Awolalu, 1976:1) argue that it is possible to talk of African traditional religion in the singular. They argue while Africa is a large continent with multitudes of nations who have complex cultures, innumerable languages and myriads of dialects, there are many basic similarities in the religious systems—everywhere there is the concept of God (called by different names); there is also the concept of divinities and/or spirits as well as beliefs in the ancestral cult. Every locality may and does have its own local deities, its own festivals, its own name or names for the Supreme Being, but in essence the pattern is the same. There is that noticeable "Africanness" in the whole pattern. Others like Mbiti (1961:1) choose to speak of the religion in the plural ''because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system …''. In this article effort is made not to allow this debate to confuse the discussion at hand.

2. There is debate in referring to Zimbabwe at the time of writing as a post-conflict environment considering that there are still incidences of violence. Post-conflict in this paper shall refer to the period after open conflict characterised by violence.

3. ''President Mugabe''s 1980 Independence Speech,'' http://www.zbc.co.zw/news-categories/opinion/18369-president-mugabes-1980-independence-speech.html, accessed 07 January 2013.

4. Accepted manner includes how the corpse should lie in the grave. According to Ndebele culture the body of the deceased is placed sideways facing the south where they originated from. Accepted manner also means with proper religious service and ritual, lack therefore and dumping as in mine shafts is the quintessential undignified death, severing the dead from their ancestors, their kin and their community (see Ranger 2004: 123).

5. Sadza is the staple diet in Zimbabwe. It is thick porridge often made from maize flour.

6. Interview with Father David Muguti, 07 January 2013, Lugano, Swirtzerland.

7. Grace to Heal website http://www.gth-zimbabwe.org/.

8. Interview with Zakhe Moyo (name changed) on 14 February 2012.

9. Third Chimurenga refers to the land reform programme that began as from 2000, which was viewed as another war of liberation, the third one after the first (1896–1897 Ndebele-Shona revolt against colonial rule by the British South Africa Company) and second liberation war (The Second Chimurenga, also known as the Rhodesian Bush War or as Zimbabwe''s liberation war, refers to the guerrilla war of 1966–1979 which led to the end of white-minority rule in Rhodesia and to the de facto independence of Zimbabwe struggles in Zimbabwe.

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