Uprooting the weeds: Power, ethnicity and violence in the Matabeleland conflict.
Yap, K.P.

Citation for published version (APA):
Acknowledgements

To try to acknowledge and thank all those who have in various ways contributed to the completion of this study, is difficult. I attempt to do so through some personal notes, hoping that those not mentioned know that they are not forgotten.

For those with a dissertation behind them it is known that thesis writing is a trying process, particularly towards the end. It seemingly absorbs all energy and thought into one problematic, whilst the world is continuously changing around this tunnel-visioned person. Having for some time fought the entry of this space, I nevertheless and inescapably it seems, was sucked into the tunnel. Once in it, power, ethnicity and violence became formulations living a life next to my own. At very intense moments of work, my thoughts seemingly formed a symbiotic relationship with these analytical constructs. This caused me to record power patterns in my daily life, confront identity and background as pillars of my existence, and acknowledge forms of violence in my surroundings more common than I had wanted to believe. The evolution of this study and the incubation time of the thoughts put into it, therefore are not only outcomes related to a task, but a personal growth process which has developed next to and together with the aggregated number of manuscript pages. Thus, despite the tunnel being a high-risk space for family and other settings, it nonetheless allowed for both academic focus and personal development. Whilst at times being sure that I would never make it out of the tunnel, having now reached the exit and looking back, I would not choose to re-route my journey. The highs and lows of this process have in the end enriched me tremendously, and for that experience I have many people to thank.

Those first entering my mind are my two supervisors, Prof. Cees Hamelink (University of Amsterdam) and Prof. Martin Doornbos (Institute of Social Studies, The Hague). I sincerely appreciate that they allowed me to take time to arrive where I perceived my goal to be. They have noted my geographical shifts, modification of empirical focus, and theoretical alteration of direction, without attempting to steer my route — whilst simultaneously cautiously setting up signposts for major pitfalls.

This study mainly concerns the immense pain and trauma many people experienced in Matabeleland in the 1980s. Without the co-operation and support from a vast number of Zimbabweans I was in contact with during my residence in Zimbabwe 1990–1994, I would not have been able to carry out my fieldwork nor complete this study. Being well aware that not all can be mentioned here, I would like
to especially express my gratitude in a collective manner to those civilians who agreed to be interviewed regarding the state violence they endured during the 1980s and particularly their Fifth Brigade experiences. Many were willing to speak into my tape recorder after explicitly stating their wish for their story to be told to a wider public. I am hoping that I am partly repaying my debt to them – for reliving pain and sorrow that surfaced with the memories told – by documenting their experiences to my best knowledge in this dissertation.

I would furthermore like to mention some Zimbabwean organisations, colleagues and friends that made this project possible. I am deeply indebted to the Catholic Commission of Justice and Peace (CCJP Zimbabwe), and its Director Michael Auret, who generously made his time available, as well as shared internal CCJP documentation. The impact of CCJP’s long history and commitment to human rights became clear to me as I repeatedly encountered this organisation as the one defending the rights of those most vulnerable. Without the help and support of Jeremy Brickhill, former Zipra member and Zapu activist, I believe my endeavour would have looked different. With his personal experience, knowledge and engagement he opened both intellectual and physical doors. Jeremy also extended his private collection of internal Zapu files for my investigation, allowing me to screen and discuss documents which would otherwise have been beyond my access. Another very important source of information and support was the local NGO, Zimbabwe Project, and its director Paul T. Nyathi. Zimbabwe Project staff gave me invaluable advise for my fieldwork and arranged visits to the two ex-Zipra dissident co-operatives Greenlight and Sebantubanye (Matabeleland North). At these co-operatives I was met by ex-Zipra dissidents who took time off from their work to discuss their experiences both collectively and individually. Their accounts have significantly contributed to this study, and my gratitude is deep for their open attitude towards my questions and probing. One person who I am highly indebted to and I would like to especially mention is Rafael Khoza, who translated during field visits in Matabeleland North. Being a former member of the Zimbabwe National Army and medic at the Fifth Brigade Belaghwe camp, he significantly contributed to my understanding of Fifth Brigade violence and collective behaviour through sharing his personal experiences. Finally I would like to thank David Coltart, lawyer and human rights activist, who introduced me to the Legal Resources Foundation in Bulawayo, and shared his knowledge and insight regarding legal questions related to the Matabeleland conflict.

Having come to a point in the thesis writing whereby I believed I was ‘almost’ ready, I took up a full time position at Sida’s Research Department SAREC (Stock-
holm) in 1998. As many know, the definition of ‘almost ready’ in this context is highly ambiguous. Contrary to my hopes and wishes, I was not able to finalise my study at the pace I had anticipated. Instead I have on two occasions been granted leave of absence to work on the thesis. I would like to thank my colleagues at SAREC for their understanding, support and wisdom regarding the ‘almost ready’ syndrome, of which they all seem to have some experience. I especially thank Michael Ståhl who has read and commented on drafts, and Tomas Kjellqvist who has endured extra work load due to my absence and extended support during moments of exasperation.

Having left the university circuit whilst still working on the thesis, I have tried to avoid academic isolation through circulating drafts to colleagues and friends. I would like to thank Dr. Stephen Ellis, at the African Studies Centre in Leiden for commenting on several chapters. I thank my dear friend and former colleague Lois Woestman, at the New School of Social Research, for highly inspiring encounters and look forward to more. I would also like to thank Prof. Mamadou Diouf, University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, for stimulating conversations and his in-depth comments especially related to the history chapter. Finally, I would like to most sincerely thank Prof. Mahmood Mamdani, Columbia University, for his comments on the theory/analysis chapter, which enabled me to solidify my analytical framework and to sharpen my arguments.

Noting in the beginning how this research project over time became part of my being, I want to turn to those who are closest to my being - my family. For my parents and brothers I understand this project having seemed endless and all-absorbing. I thank them for their ever-lasting understanding for my at times lack of energy and space for that which should have been more important than research - family matters. Finally, I would like to turn all my attention to my husband Ted and our son Martti. Martti was born into this research project and has never known his mother without that one overarching assignment to work on or complete. Whilst Ted has explained both to Martti and himself that all those extra evening hours and weekends are finally leading to a conclusion, Ted has never lost enthusiasm for the purpose and meaning of the research project. Instead, he has with his knowledge and analytical skills offered a permanent sounding-board, simultaneously extending his language and computer abilities. Looking back at this time period I can only note that affection and encouragement has been the cement between the bricks, enforcing the structure of this project. I hope that whilst my thanks to Martti and Ted cannot have a retroactive effect, the outcome of this personal and intellectual growth process will positively disseminate into the future.