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

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Chapter Four
Power, Ethnicity, and Violence: An Analysis

There is no simple answer to why the Matabeleland conflict took place. This chapter attempts to analyse the conflict, considering historical and current events, through theoretical constructs combining considerations of both institutional and mental character. The objective is to gain insight into the emergence and the evolution of the conflict. With the awareness of the complexity of the conflict in mind, generalisations drawn from the analysis no doubt offer explanations that can be contested from a variety of standpoints. However, the multitude of explanations given to why the conflict took place is a point particularly brought to the fore in this study: the Matabeleland conflict produced a number of ‘truths’, all linked to the experiences and perceptions specific to the different actors involved. These truths were the basis for actors’ decision-making. Therefore, a purpose of the chapter is to crystallise the positions of actors, considering both historical and contemporary occurrences. Noting the many entry points of understanding, the conclusions made here offers one way of explaining the events that took place, and are seen as an input among others, in a debate about Zimbabwean post-independent political development.

As the previous chapter disclosed, in the Matabeleland conflict complex patterns of reactions to historical contradictions fused and played out against contemporary currents. Patterns of differentiated Shona and Ndebele perceptions emerging in early colonial history, partly having later consciously and unconsciously amalgamated in the nationalist parties, carried over to post-independence. Conflict actors and observers were furthermore after 90 years of colonial rule necessarily affected by racist politics and policies, the administration of power based on fragmentation and differentiation, and authoritarian methods of rule and governance. Therefore the historical moment of the conflict weighed heavily, as it evolved after a long period of oppression and fifteen years of civil war.

The Matabeleland conflict thus began and developed in a political environment in which colonial violence, undemocratic ruling and political competition were both historical and contemporary experiences. The war was still extremely fresh both in peoples’ minds and in institutional memory. Despite a celebrated policy of reconciliation, no centrally constructed vision of post-independent nationalism could, through political best wishes, create national cohesion and a new collective Zimbabwean
wean identity overnight. Instead, the new nation was shaken by the tensions and violence that arose in connection with the army integration process, dissident activities, and subsequent military intervention. The historically rooted culture of violence eminent in the liberation war was reproduced. This reinforced the notion that change could only come about through violence, and opposition only being dealt with through force. The new country thus began with a legacy of conflict settlement based on confrontation rather than mediation. Furthermore, the perceived meaning of those confrontations varied. Actors involved and those affected interpreted what occurred, and why, in a distinctly dissimilar way. This discrepancy came to have a crucial impact on the way in which the Matabeleland conflict developed.

Examining both the narrated historical events and the conflict description, it is apparent that notions of *power, ethnicity, and violence* are continuously present and are closely interlinked. Therefore, in order to gain insight into how the conflict emerged and developed it is necessary to examine the three themes and their inter-relationship. Analysing singularly how power relations were constructed, or focusing solely on the origins of ethnic identity, or separately viewing the impact of violence in the conflict, would subsequently give us pictures with separate frames. Therefore the three areas will be analysed in a dynamic relation to each other, allowing for a more diversified and multifaceted picture to emerge.

In addition to analysing the three central themes dialectically, the chapter is based on another central notion: the mode of understanding developments as a *process*. Subsequently, the understanding of the Matabeleland conflict is based on historical background. Furthermore, the mode of analysis is one in which the conflict is understood in its *own* historical context, not as a case in comparison to a possibly similar case elsewhere. Applying Mamdani’s framework (1996) focused on the legacy of late colonial rule, its locations and manifestations of power, we connect back to the pre-colonial and colonial narrative in chapter two. A central dimension is how power was organised in the colonial period, centrally and locally. Adopting notions of Mamdani’s framework in relation to the Rhodesian experience, we focus on how power and ethnicity from the onset of colonial penetration became interconnected. We note that governance of the rural areas was equal to control of natives, in a framework in which ethnic identity and separation were enforced politically. Thus, the understanding of local state rule was inescapably linked to that of tribe. Centrally, power was based on race, settlers deriving their rights based on civil law rather than customary law. Power emanated from the centre, decentralised through the Native Authority in the local state. An important component for this study put forward by Mamdani, is that force and violence be-
came part of the understanding of governance and rule, as both were used by the local and central state. Violence was inherently part of the understanding of the governance and the applied method of solution. We note that perceptions of differentiation fostered through the colonial experience, were linked to tribal belonging and its definition in power and governance.

Whilst Mamdani’s framework includes crucial tools for conceptually understanding power relations, his framework does not give extensive attention to how perceptions of rule form and operate. Therefore, for the exercise to understand actors’ decision-making, an added theoretical construct is necessary, in order to highlight the emergence, formation and reproduction of perceptions. Whilst Mamdani’s framework here is labelled as an ‘institutional framework’, the added framework to address perceptions is noted as a ‘mental framework’. The latter is a loose construction of a number of theoretical notions on memory and socialisation linked to power, identity and violence. The central notion of the mental framework is how memory and socialisation operates in relation to power relations, thereby considering conformity and identity formation in relation to values and beliefs of the ruling elite. It also recognises that during decades of colonial rule abstention of preference and psychological adaptations, caused internalisation of colonial power relations, cementing in the unconscious.

With the theoretical equipment of the institutional and mental frameworks the Matabeleland conflict is examined and analysed. For this exercise a selection of events and interventions from the empirical chapter have been made, based on the explanatory value of those events for the argument made. Regarding dissidence the focus is on the ex-Zipra dissidents, rather than all categories of dissidence actors. In addition, the analysis is focused particularly on Fifth Brigade interventions, rather than including the vast activities conducted by the different sections of the army. This selection does however not dismiss nor downgrade the importance and effect of events or issues previously discussed in the empirical chapter. The analysis of the conflict is divided into four parts: Zipra dissident activity, military intervention by the Fifth Brigade, government discourse, and the unity process.

Examining aspects of power relations evident in the conflict brings a number of conclusions to the fore. It is noted that the way in which power was structurally organised during the conflict years (1980–1987) had not considerably changed compared to that of the late colonial period. More importantly, perceptions of power had not changed, as the new rulers partly took on the mental framework from their predecessors, reproducing colonial power relations. On the basis of conclusions made from the empirical analysis, the chapter goes on to examine what les-
sons can be learned from the Matabeleland conflict. The discussion is focused on conceptualising the site of struggle in the conflict, identifying the content of the struggle at this site, and examining why this site propels such forceful reactions.

1. Rhodesia: Power, Ethnicity and Violence

1.a. Pre-Independence Power Relations

As brought forward in the history chapter, ninety years of Rhodesian colonial power and rule is marked by strategies of separation, both in terms of race and ethnicity. The dictate was social control through an elaborate central and local system, in which settlers had exclusive power and maintained a discriminatory franchise system. Ethnically, the natives were ruled with division and differentiation as a hallmark. Intra and inter-ethnic differences were appropriated and moulded, reflexively, dictated by the political and military aspirations and objectives of colonial rule. In this process of constructing difference through institutional power and in the cultural framework of every day life, perceptions of power and ethnicity took form and shaped peoples’ understanding of events and constructed meaning of the context in which actors operated. Power relations were based on the rulers right to absolute power. The use of fragmentation and control as a mode of rule gave birth to perceptions of racial and ethnic difference and politics in terms of absolute rule.

A study in which power relations are central is Mamdani’s research (1996) on the legacy of late colonialism in Africa. Attention is on the mode of domination, mapping out locations and manifestations of power. In the framework analysing colonial power and its institutional legacy, colonial fragmentary dualism is conceptualised as the bifurcation of the state, separating the rural from the urban and one ethnicity from another. Central in this conceptualisation is the notion of rights. Urban power represented civil society and civil rights – the rights of citizens –, whilst rural power represented that of community and culture – the rule of subjects. The rights are Mamdani’s framework seen to be attributed to community: in the framework of customary law, the community is defined in ethnic terms, as the tribe; in the case of civil law, the community is a nation. The subjects derived their rights through membership in a tribe, the citizens through membership in the nation. Thus, in Mamdani’s conceptualisation, racial domination was in the local state grounded in a politically enforced system of ethnic pluralism. Ruled by customary law, the African was defined not as a native, but as a tribesperson. Customary law encapsulated the individual in a set of relations defined and enforced by

432 See chapter two, pp. 35–40.
ethnic identity, a law which in turn through colonial mandate was defined and enforced by the tribal leader (Mamdani 1996:18, 22–23, 286).

Mamdani’s conceptualisation of customary law is applicable to the Rhodesian experience. In the late colonial period Rhodesian settler regimes applied indirect rule for the running of Native Affairs. Subsequently, as outlined in the history chapter, the majority of the African populace was in terms of ruling, enveloped in a restricted sphere which remained not only ungeneralised beyond tribe, but also retrograde in character. Thus customary rules and laws were inherently connected to the way in which the rural population was governed. Applying Mamdani’s conceptualisation of governance being defined through ethnic parameters, to the Rhodesian experience, tribe and rule intrinsically linked. Following Mamdani’s conceptualisation, racial domination was institutionalised through the colonial occupation of rights translated into a system of governance, in which at the local level of rule, ethnic identity and separation was politically enforced (Mamdani 1996:286).

In Rhodesia, as other colonial experiences, colonial rule was forcefully executed. To enable the execution of this power it was organised through division and segregation. In Mamdani’s conceptualisation, colonial power was simultaneously both centralised and decentralised. Power was centrally orchestrated, but highly decentralised through the Native Authority in the local state. In the local setting, power was greatly centralised as the single and fused nature of authority at local level was that of the chief. Mamdani notes that ‘To the peasant, the person of the chief signifies power that is total and absolute, unchecked and unrestrained’ (Mamdani 1996:54). Mamdani’s also notes that the colonial experience was marked by force to an unusual degree. Day to day violence was embedded in the customary Native Authority in the local state. Falling under customary law, force and violence was perceived as codified and legitimate. Affecting perceptions, Mamdani notes that ‘From considering force and African custom, it was but a short step considering Africans as accustomed to force- as, say, a European may be to reason (Mamdani: 1996:157).

Power being organised in the above manner had certain effects. Generalising from colonial experiences, Mamdani notes that the ethnically identified institutions of control caused tremendous pressure from within. The state-enforced and tribally circumscribed notion of custom caused particularly two sets of tensions, according to Mamdani. First, the inclination to homogenise and streamline cultural diversity within the tribe, preference being a singular official tribal version. Second, causing

433 See chapter two, p. 41.
ethnic heterogeneity to transform into a source of tension, through imposing tribal law as customary (Mamdani 1996: 24, 292).

Mamdani's generalisation complies well with the historical development in the Rhodesian case. The construction of local rule based on customary law caused tension, both intra and inter-ethnic. The quest to homogenise diversity was particularly distinct in Matabeleland, where the settlers decided that Ndebele ethnic customs were the 'same' as in Zululand (Ranger 1985:8) The differentiated policies in relation to the Shona and Nguni ethnic groups, applying distinct logic's to the way in which groups were ruled, enforced tribal differentiation and produced intra-ethnic tension. Ethnic heterogeneity in Rhodesia did however not only cause stress when applying customary law. As discussed in the history chapter, the continuous policy differentiation applied between Shona and Ndebele groups of people, moulded perceptions of differentiation used and abused by both settlers and Africans. Also, the partitioning, amalgamation, and 'construction' of tribes to create 'order' in correspondence with parameters of Rhodesian rural administration, resulted in disruption and displacement. In addition, the incorporation of African representatives in positions of colonial domination, caused contradictions. By combining traditional tribal authority with elected local members, a sense of representation was enforced. Strictly limiting powers and rights, political participation and representation were however merely illusory. Occupying positions of domination, the tribal representatives and the members elect found themselves in a compromising and contradictory position vis a vis the populace.434

Thus, the mode in which power operated continuously caused differentiation. Mamdani conceptualises the differentiation geographically by making a difference between the rural and the urban, ethnically through differentiating groups, and racially through differentiating black and white.

Clearly, Rhodesian power relations were steered by policies of fragmentation and differentiation. However, as narrated in the history chapter, organised resistance began already soon after colonial occupation, before settler rule had taken a precise institutional shape. King Lobengula's war in 1893 was the first effort in what would become, in various forms, a continuous resistance against colonial exploitation. In response to native resistance, colonial domination and force was heightened. The eruption of the Ndebele and Shona uprisings in 1896–1897 surprised nevertheless settlers, showing a forceful and organised opposition to colonial rule. The uprisings also clearly showed differences in organisation and execution of re-

434 See chapter two, p. 41, and pp. 45–46.
istance between the Shona and Nguni groups of people. A difference, which subsequent colonial regimes would capitalise on for many years.

In Mamdani’s understanding of colonial resistance, the racist exploitation combined with the tribal contradictions inherent in the system of local rule caused a dual response: resistance against the racial barriers in civil society, and resistance against the local contradictions caused by the rural institutional form of rule. In Mamdani’s conceptualisation, the site of the struggle became the customary, reproducing the notions of power and ethnic fragmentation within which they were institutionally operating. As ethnicity defined the parameters of rule, it also defined the resistance against it. The tension and contradictions which emerged from the colonial power thus lay the basis for its resistance. Therefore, Mamdani argues, ethnicity became a dimension of both power and resistance, as well as the problem and solution (Mamdani 1996:8, 23–25).

What were the consequences of the type of rule and the resistance it bred in terms of political development? Mamdani’s conceptualisation of colonial power elicits a number of consequences. The dichotomous power process resulted, according to Mamdani, in civil society being racialised and Native Authority being tribalised. The ruled being fragmented along ethnic lines, and ethnic identity and separation being politically enforced in ‘the customary’, caused tribalism to become the very form that colonial rule took within the local state. The customary became the site of the struggle, and force as well as violence became connected to the understanding of the customary. As ethnicity defined the parameters of rule, it also defined the resistance against it. This fragmentation, according to Mamdani, caused resistance movements to carry ethnic fragmentation from within (Mamdani 1996: 183–185, 218–220).

What is of essential interest for this study, adopting notions of Mamdani’s framework in relation to the Rhodesian experience, is how power and ethnicity from the onset of colonial penetration became interconnected. The understanding of local state rule was inescapably linked to that of tribe. Governance of the rural areas was equal to control of natives, in a framework in which ethnic identity and separation were enforced politically. Force and violence became part of the understanding of governance and rule, as both were used by the local and the central state. Resisting colonial rule and its modes of governing, resulted in a struggle in which ethnicity was the starting point. Violence was inherently part of the understanding of the governance and the applied method of solution. Thus, perceptions
of differentiation fostered through the colonial experience, were linked to tribal belonging and its definition in power and governance.435

1.b. Pre-independence perceptions of governance and rule

The perceptions of differentiation fostered through the colonial experience had 90 years to take root in Rhodesia. Generations of Africans grew up, were socialised, functioned, and in turn socialised their children about rule, control and resistance, their own and the governments’. For this they needed memories. Memory is an important device in the socialisation process and the moulding of perceptions. Memory, the past, and perceptions are intrinsically linked. This immensely central connection to human existence constitutes a basis for our understanding of our every day life and actions we take, a connection which became central to how the Matabeleland conflict developed.

By applying Mamdani’s framework to the Rhodesian case in examining the basis of perceptions under colonial rule, the picture that emerges is that of power entrenched through all layers of society. Subsequently, the colonial differentiation process, intrinsically encompassing all social relations, inescapably became part of the actors’ understanding of the world. This understanding sunk into unconscious level of functioning, perceptions and collective memory, being part of the meaning put to the framework of existence. How does such a process take place? How is memory used to build ‘meaning’ for today’s experiences?

Memory is about the past. In order to think about the past one must represent aspects of it to oneself, or to others. Tonkin notes that references to the past are continual. When we grasp a historical fact or interpretation we make an extremely complex collection of interpretations to do so. The interconnections between memory and history help shape our selves; we are our memories, according to Tonkin. Furthermore, we try to shape our futures in the light of past experiences, or that which we understand to have been the past experience (Tonkin 1992:2). Tonkin notes that any representation of pastness is identity-constitutive, and can be shaped and elaborated into an identity support as well. Insofar as memorisations create the sense of a past — whether there is a coherent narrative or disparate individual recollections — they contribute to the experience of group identity now (Tonkin 1992:111). Tonkin quotes Peel stating that ‘the “society sense” of the past is integral to its self-production through time through two means: first, the present

435 What is here emphasised is the fact that this study utilises selected notions from Mamdani’s study on contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism, i.e. those that have analytical value for gaining insight into the Matabeleland conflict. For a comprehensive appreciation of the theoretical framework and its application, the reader is referred to the original work, Mamdani (1996).
is organised by “structures of significance”, taken to be of the past, second, representation of the past derives from present practice working mainly upon present evidences of the past, including memory’ (Tonkin 1992:123). Past events are thus shaped in reflexivity as a guide to future action, and are notably common to a particular kind of political culture and this culture being generated by a particular type of social structure (Tonkin 1992:123). Memorisation therefore creates a sense of a past whilst also constituting the social, the social being a basis for identity. Tonkin notes however that ‘the social’ is not a ‘seamless robe’, but a very complicated interaction of practices, where the past is re-enacted, modified, denied, and conserved as both lived experience and mode of understanding differently for individual community members (Tonkin 1992:111).

Thus, the historical experience of colonial fragmentation and differentiation and resistance against it, was a reality for Africans under Rhodesian rule. This reality shaped the understanding of the world, and, using Tonkin’s understanding, was through memory ‘identity-constitutive’. The particular social structure created through memory ‘the social’ and contributed to group identity in the current situation. Applying this understanding to the Rhodesian historical experience seen with Mamdani’s understanding, group identity formed in relation to two institutional structures: the racially differentiated rule centrally directed, and the tribally oriented rule through the customary Native Authority. Memory and identity formation in terms of rule had two foci: race and ethnicity.

The political culture emerging from an organisation of society based on oppression was one of force and control, violence and contestation between forces. Examples of power relations where actors functioned in democratic coexistence were scarce. Instead, actors where subjected to rules and perceptions in which the message clearly signalled that power centrally anchored must be locally kept, steered, and controlled. Locally there was one centre of power: the chief. Power was absolute. How then do actors respond to such a power framework?

Foucault is concerned with the methods of surveillance of individuals, and conceives power as a technique that achieves its strategic effect through its disciplinary character. In Foucault’s view identities are shaped and moulded through the exercise of disciplinary power. Individuals falling outside the adopted norm through the marginalisation effect of disciplinary power are given a certain identity in relation to that system. For fear of being marginalised and exposed to repression, or losing out on spoils and opportunities, individuals conform to the acceptable norm of behaviour as stipulated by the ruling elite. Foucault notes that people need not to be formed through socialisation processes to refrain from pursuing their first
preferences – it is enough to shape their beliefs or expectations in such a manner that they consciously abstain from pursuing such a preference due to anticipated consequences (Nordlund 1996:31).

Gaventa also writes about abstention of preferences. Gaventa’s focus is on the conditioning of reactions, which through indirect means cause psychological adaptations in the subjugated group. In response to continual defeat perceptions change, and may lead to a greater susceptibility to the internalisation of the values and rules of the powerful. If over a period socialised to compliance, an acceptance of the political reality as offered by the dominant group may be cemented. This may also develop into a ‘culture of silence’, lending the dominant an air of legitimacy. What does not happen or what goes unsaid may also shape perceptions about which matters are appropriate for consideration on the dominant agendas. Yet, what is voiced may not always reflect the real conflict or issue, but may articulate norms or myths that disguise or deflect the more latent conflict (Gaventa 1980:17–19, 21–22, 256).

Thus, an organisation of power based on long term oppression may, according to the understanding of Foucault, lead to an abstention of primary preferences and actions due to the anticipated force and violence that follows a differently chosen path. Identities mould over time in relation to the disciplinary power and perceptions form in relation to how power is exercised. Based on fear of violence conformity to the ruling norms takes place. In Gaventa’s view the socialisation process goes further. Not only do the actors consciously sustain from their preferences, but through the conditioning of reactions psychological adaptations may occur in the subjugated group, causing internalisation of rulers’ values.

Applying Foucault’ and Gaventa’s understandings to the Rhodesian experience, using Mamdani’s historical framework, gives insight into how perceptions of governance and rule may have formed. Africans were ruled locally by way of central direction, therefore, following Mamdani’s understanding, conformity to rule took place on two levels: conformity to racial ruling (centrally) and tribal ruling (locally). However, ninety years of colonial oppression did not only cause conformity. Memory and socialisation caused values of the rulers to internalise. As discussed in the history chapter, using fragmentation and differentiation as a tool, colonial rulers were able to enforce the historical dichotomy between the Shona and Ndebele groups of people. Rulers particularly in the late colonial period repeatedly reinforced myths and perceptions related to the dichotomy, and over time internalisation of difference were cemented.436

Thus in the Rhodesian experience, one may conclude that the memory of institutional structures of rule over time and actors conformity to rule over time, formed actors’ perceptions in relation to race, ethnicity and violence. One may also conclude that the conformity to racial and tribal ruling had the content of internalised ethnic difference. Thus perceptions of governance and rule formed over time carried the content of fragmentation and differentiation inherently.

Another important ingredient in Rhodesian colonial history is resistance. We have seen that structures of governance and long term conformity to rule influenced the formation of perceptions. We note that colonial beliefs and policies caused an internalisation of certain values. How did resistance influence perceptions? How was violence related to resistance memorised? What perceptions may have formed in the cause of fighting colonial rule?

Irwin-Zarecka writes about memory in relation to power challenges. She notes that it is not the absolute weight of historically inflicted pain which matters to those who have suffered. Rather, it is how people perceive the consequences, mostly in terms of justice rendered but also justice attempted (Irwin-Zarecka 1994:97,137). How did then people perceive the historically ‘inflicted pain’ and its consequences during the liberation war in Rhodesia? Brickhill notes that in Rhodesia certain perceptions developed in the cause of guerrilla warfare related to the use of violence. Living under conditions of war and participating in guerrilla warfare, creates an ‘ideology of warfare’. The dual use of violence as a means in the political/military struggle and war, and as a force used under harsh conditions of discipline violence transforms into a ‘methodology of mobilisation for war’ (Brickhill 1990:18–21). Thus, under the condition of guerrilla warfare where a political goal is central, violence seems partly to gain a level of acceptance by those both affected and participating. The war is fought for a future gain, and in this process violence is inevitable. Violence for the supported cause is perceived as ‘just violence’, as opposed to aimless force and brutality with no explanatory markers for those affected.

Where does this bring us in terms of the formation of perceptions under colonial rule? In line with Irwin-Zarecka’s and Brickhill’s understandings, perceptions of governance and rule, violence and resistance, are influenced by the cause behind it. How we perceive inflicted pain and violence is in accordance to the meaning we attach to it. It is the meaning given to an event, rather than the event itself which is of importance (Irwin Zarecka 1994:49). If the meaning is perceived ‘just’, as in terms of opposition against oppressive rule, perceptions of certain violence may be positive rather than negative – or acceptable rather than non-acceptable. Thus,
memory and perceptions of violence and resistance are linked to actors’ ideological stance. This ideological stance, giving an event its meaning, may override the importance of the event itself, such as ‘just violence’.

1.c. Conclusion

Perceptions formed under colonial rule carried layers of understanding. Firstly, an understanding of governance and its structure: a strong central state and power infused local Native Authorities. Secondly, there is an understanding of modes of rule. Following Mamdani’s conceptualisation: racial rule centrally and tribal rule locally. Lastly there is resistance, based on ideological stance.

These three layers of understanding regarding colonial power relations were framed by actors’ socialisation and memory. We noted that in relation to institutional structure memory and identity formation had two foci: race and ethnicity. We concluded that organisation of power based on long term oppression influences perceptions so that it may lead to the abstention of primary preferences, conformity to rule and internalisation of rulers’ values. As an example of internalisation we used the colonial enforcement of the Shona-Ndebele dichotomy, showing that perceptions of governance and rule formed over time carried the content of fragmentation and differentiation. Lastly, we noted the importance of resistance in the framework of power relations, and discussed the perceptions of violence this produced, concluding that the meaning of an event is more important than the event itself.

Having conceptually separated perceptions linked to colonial power relations, it is important to note that in reality perceptions operate dynamically and interdependently. An understanding of power relations is based on peoples’ priorities and ways of making sense of the past in a complex process occurring both consciously and unconsciously. The dynamics and interdependence of perceptions cause contradictions and complexities. For example, whilst there is an ideological resistance against racial oppression, internalisation of values of ethnic fragmentation is simultaneously present – causing resistance to carry ethnic differentiation as an inherent. This fragmentation will work against the primary cause, to resist racial oppression.

Referring back to Mamdani’s framework, one of his main arguments reflects the aforementioned; that the way power was organised and enforced caused resistance to carry ethnic fragmentation from within. In Mamdani’s historical understanding, a population functioning under the customary system, carried over this mode of reasoning in relation to ethnic identity. Due to the way in which power was organised, power and ethnicity were institutionally and culturally linked. As ethnici-
ty defined the parameters of rule, it also defined the resistance against it. How is then the aforementioned line of thinking additional to Mamdani’s framework?

Mamdani’s framework is understood as being focused on power relations looking at the ‘institutional framework’. What has here been argued is the influence of colonial power relations on perceptions, memory, and consciousness, thus a ‘mental framework’. Hence, we have adopted Mamdani’s conceptualisation of colonial power relations, and with the support of notions of memory, perceptions, and power, we have built on the former framework’s central notions, to show how colonial legacy becomes part of the conscious and unconscious, and how people may experience history. Linking this to the Rhodesian experience, in terms of political culture, this means perceptions of power and ethnic differentiation became firmly cemented in peoples thinking and consequently acting. Having this historical understanding of the Rhodesian experience, power and ethnicity are inherently linked and embedded in the understanding of everyday life. Fragmentation and ethnic differentiation are through generations of exposure entering the subconscious of actors, moulding self-images and identity – inescapably a part of the personal content through which incidents and occurrences pass.

Consequently, the crucial points for the analysis of the Matabeleland conflict is firstly, the conceptual understanding of power relations, the reality under which people functioned. Secondly, the link or relation to power relations made through memory work and socialisation, often unconscious or non-conceptualised, but nevertheless present in perceptions. Lastly, the fact that perceptions are the basis for decision-making and actions taken.

Thus, we enter the analysis of the Matabeleland conflict with the dual understanding of colonial power relations: one institutional framework and one mental framework. Both understandings have as minimal communal starting point that the Matabeleland conflict could not have taken place without the historical baggage of colonial power relations, and particularly that of ethnic fragmentation and differentiation.

2. Ex-Zipra Dissidents: Power and Ethnicity

Ex-Zipra combatants constituted the core group of dissidents in the conflict. We begin the analysis by summarising central ex-Zipra notions documented in the empirical chapter, and by pinpointing central perceptions guiding their actions.

A major catalyst behind ex-Zipra dissidents’ actions was the new government’s non-fulfilment of liberation war goals. The persecution of Zipra and Zapu mem-
bers and the ensuing ethnic discrimination were particularly perceived as outcomes of this failure. Many strongly felt a lack of choice regarding their decision to become 'dissidents'. They perceived their flight to the bush a means of self-defence to avoid both political and ethnic persecution. Politically their positioning was that there was a lack of unity in the country, and that the government caused this situation. The immediate goal was unity between Zanu and Zapu. The ex-combatants followed former Zipra ideological and methodological frameworks, with the added component of 'staying alive'. The ex-Zipra dissidents acted allegedly without the Zapu structure, with the main aim to cause destabilisation through sabotage of government projects. The enemy was seen to be government forces. They claimed a non-aggressive stance against civilians (being dependent on civilians for supplies), with the exception of those defined as 'sell-outs'. Allegedly no recruitment efforts of civilians were undertaken, and politicisation campaigns were not employed. The latter was seen to be unnecessary as the ex-Zipra dissidents’ stance was that of Zapu – the same as during the liberation war. The assumption was thus that civilians in Matabeleland would recognise the ex-Zipra dissidents’ political identification.

The perceptions that guided dissident actions were primarily based on experiences from the late colonial period and the liberation war, mirroring the past into the new situation. No doubt, the fundamental anti-climax caused by the aborted Zero Hour offensive due to the Lancaster House Agreement, and the setbacks the agreement brought in terms retained white economic and political privilege, influenced ex-Zipra soldiers perceptions. It seemed as that which had been achieved in the war zones was robbed at the negotiation table: racial reconciliation weighed heavier than majority rights. Added to this frustration came political and ethnic persecution, denying reconciliation and unity between Zanu and Zapu. Some perceived the liberation war simply as not having ended; their actions being a continuation of the struggle into a second phase. Previous experiences manifested for example through ex-Zipra dissidents’ choice of fighting method (guerrilla warfare), their legitimacy (Zapu), ideology (nationalist), and security measures regarding 'sell-outs' (liberation war tactics). This is not surprising, the liberation war barely having finished at the inception of the conflict. It is nevertheless important to gain insight into how the past worked in the present, in order to crystallise issues and perceptions behind actions and reactions. It is also crucial to note the power related context in which ex-Zipra dissident acted, which is what we shall examine below – before connecting back to ex-Zipra dissident issues.
2. a. Power Structures and Relations: Continuities and Shifts

Despite major changes in the political landscape at post-independence, certain power related foundations remained. As outlined in the history chapter, the Lancaster House Agreement stipulated strict rules on acquisition of private land until 1990. It ensured that private property be protected from compulsory acquisition, and that any legal purchase be on a willing seller/willing buyer basis in accordance with market prices (remittable abroad). Thus, economic power remained intact in settler hands. In terms of political power, nationalist parties were restricted from truly representative political power, as settlers retained 20 reserved seats (out 100) in parliament. Subsequently, despite the 1980 election outcome, a true majority rule reflecting the country’s electorate was denied.\(^{437}\) Furthermore, the inherited colonial administrative system, and particularly the segregated local government and judicial systems went in the 1980s through only peripheral changes.\(^{438}\) With hindsight, Rambanapasi noted in 1990 that ‘there has been little change between the colonial and post-colonial regional policy frameworks even though the post-colonial regime has articulated an ideology of the state which substantially departs form that of the colonial state’ (Makumbe 1998:38). In Makumbe’s view, the central government’s reluctance to decentralise power, authority and responsibility to local authorities resulted in democratic centralism, in which ‘little, if any, real pow-

\(^{437}\) For details on the political and economic impact of the Lancaster House Agreement, see Mandaza 1987:33–41.

\(^{438}\) As outlined in chapter two, the inherited segregated local government system consisted of two settler bodies and one African body. Firstly, the settler run Urban Councils covering major urban centres, and Rural Councils catering for commercial farmers. Secondly, the African Councils linked to colonial native administration of traditional chieftains under the control of District Commissioners. The 1980 District Councils Act stipulated a change of the former African Councils to District Councils which reflected an administrative rationalisation based on district geographical boundaries rather than chieftains. Urban councils were democratised in terms of extending the vote the majority Africans, however despite amendments, the basic rationale and powers were retained. The Rural Councils were similarly left to operate with little change. The local population working and residing in Rural Council areas remained disenfranchised until the Rural District Council Act of 1988, amalgamating Rural and District Councils (Wekwete 1998:270–272). With regards to the judicial system the dual framework of customary and common law continued at post-independence. In 1981 through the Customary Law and Primary Courts Act tribal courts were abolished and replaced with non-racial primary courts: the village and community courts. In these courts customary law governed civil legal matters. The upper courts (the Supreme Court, the High Court and the Magistrates’ courts) were empowered to hear criminal cases and process civil matters under common law and customary law. The judicial framework thus remained partially fragmented in terms of the application of customary or common law. A notable difference to pre-independence was however that lower court cases were able to appeal to upper courts (Cutshall 1991:1, 17–19).
er, authority and responsibility was transferred from the centre to the periphery’ (Makumbe 1998:39).

Thus, despite majority rule and a slow transformation of power structures, only limited alteration in the nature of power took place. Power had not ‘self-destructed’. Continuity was particularly visible as some actors from the colonial institutions merely transferred into the new system. Thus, dissidents were met by state institutions such as the army and the police, using same methods as a few months earlier, merely having changed the enemy description. As Mamdani notes regarding colonial regime shifts, ‘the ideological text may change from customary to the revolutionary – and so may political practice – but, in spite of real differences, there remains a continuity in administrative power and technique’ (Mamdani 1996:291). At this time in newly independent Zimbabwe there was in most cases no break with the forms of power specific to the formal institutions. Colonial rulers were removed, but replaced by others with similar powers.

The shift from minority to majority rule, and the change of actors in rule and in opposition, did however fundamentally transform the political dynamics in Zimbabwe. Gaining the legitimacy to rule mandated through democratic elections caused power struggles to become significantly different. As described previously, the 1980 general elections were subsequently the first time power relations between Zanu and Zapu were openly weighed and measured. The periodical contest in elections opened a new sphere in political power competition, as the right to vote gave space for a qualitatively differently committed choice of political allegiance. A measure which the majority of the population under colonial rule had neither to fear nor count on.

To win power through legal, administrative contest thus caused a shift in power competition between Zanu and Zapu. Other factors also influenced the shift. An imperative difference of pre and post-independence Zanu-Zapu power competition was the empowerment the liberation war gave its victors. Both ex-Zipra dissidents and the new government came out of the experience of opposing power structures locally and centrally, having participated in defeating the mighty Rho-

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439 Makumbe takes as examples the Prime Minister’s directives on provincial governors (1984) and on the structures of village and ward development committees (1985), which created structures of popular participation in development, but ‘failed to provide and generate complementary legislation to facilitate actual transfer of power, authority, responsibility, and resources to the new structures’. Consequently, the new structures ‘have little real impact’ (Makumbe 1998:40).

440 See Mamdani 1996:179 regarding the tendency of power not to ‘self-destruct’ but to adapt to a changing context.
desian fire force. Both categories had experience of how to militarily and ideologically fight for power. In the new situation however, only the government (and as it was perceived, Zanu PF) had access to the execution of state power. The gained empowerment was used differently by the contestants in the conflict situation. The government hastened to protect the power entrusted, with the ambition of enlarging the hegemonic project through a one-party state. The ex-Zipra dissidents experiencing threat and frustration in army integration process and Zapu/Zipra persecution used their initial military empowerment by continuing the struggle as before, through sabotage and contacts with army forces.

The new majority rulers, Zanu (PF), had a history of dealing with internal opposition as well as fighting the colonial oppressors. The inherited state administration had the legal tools and experience necessary for dealing with 'subversion'. Furthermore, Zanu (PF) had through the Fifth Brigade installed a military force to eliminate 'malcontents'. The ongoing dissident activity was a hindrance for development and security, as well as an irritating challenge of Zanu’s power base. However, as noted in the conclusion of the previous chapter, the Zanu (PF) government did not attempt conflict resolution or mediation during the conflict. Instead government actions had an explicit political purpose: to incapacitate its main political opposition through deliberate civilian targeting. Opposition (real or assumed) had to be eliminated. Connecting back to Mamdani’s conceptualisation of power relations, he formulates that during the colonial period urban power represented civil society and civil rights – the rights of citizens –, whilst rural power represented that of community and culture – the rule of subjects. Applying this to the Rhodesian case one may conclude that the citizens where white and settlers, and the subjects were black and natives. Independence brought a shift. Colonial rulers were removed, but replaced by others with similar powers. Now the victors (Zanu PF) were in government and can be conceptualised as having transferred to the role of ‘citizens’, whilst those persecuted and dissatisfied with unfulfilled liberation war goals, where treated as ‘subjects’.

As we shall frequently return to the above described transfer of roles, it is pertinent to dwell on this conceptualisation here. What is central in the ‘translation’ of Mamdani’s notion of citizen and subject to the post-independent era, is the power relation and the perceptions connected to it. Thus, key for understanding the analytical usage of Mamdani’s framework in this way is the dichotomy of rulers and ruled as mirrored from the colonial period, and the methods of control involved.

441 See chapter two pp. 63–65 regarding the Zipa experience, and Mugabe on three internal ‘rebellious developments’, pp. 102–103.
The emphasis here is on the institutional and mental inheritance of authoritarian use of power and how it was manifested at post-independence. The transfer of the citizen and subject concept into the post-independent era, is therefore not an assumption that Zanu (PF) consciously placed Ndebele citizens as their 'rural colonial' subjects. Instead, the analytical usage of the Mamdani framework rather leans on the insight into how from the onset of colonial penetration power, ethnicity, and violence became interconnected. Thus, the Zanu (PF) being conceptualised as 'citizens' relates to the party's power ambitions and historically ingrained perceptions of authority, legitimacy and rule. This is exemplified through the ruling party's attempt to fundamentally suppress the existing opposition - as had the colonial rulers. This interpretation will be further illuminated below, as the narrative crystallises patterns of colonial governance and rule being repeated and reproduced in the Matabeleland conflict. Thus, conceptually, we shall note how patterns from the colonial war of citizens ruling the subjects repeated and reproduced, when former subjects (now citizens) began to rule their former fellow subjects.

One of the significant examples of power relations in the Matabeleland conflict is the question if dissidents' rights in front of the law. In Mamdani's conceptualisation the notion of rights is central. Following his understanding, subjects' rights were attributed to community, the African being ruled by customary law. The subject was thus not defined as a native but a tribesperson (Mamdani 1996:292). How did dissidents define their rights? Coming out of the colonial war, their definition was no doubt as 'citizens' - with rights to participate on equal terms in the Zimbabwean polity. In the conflict however, dissidents' rights as 'citizens' were in terms of civil, political and legal rights not fully recognised (interview Coltart, 1994). Had for example their legal rights been acknowledged, dissidents would have been treated as criminals and would without exception have had to stand for criminal law. According to government discourse however, it was legitimate to kill dissidents without hearings and trials, as did the army and the Fifth Brigade. Thus instead of being defined as 'citizens', using Mamdani's conceptualisation, dissidents were treated as the rural subjects and members of a tribe under Native Authority, where force was legitimately used. Premier Mugabe mirrored a suparchief with unquestionable authority, disciplining subjects opposing his rule. The government, on the other hand, derived its right to act from democratically executed elections and the framework of civilian law and civil society.

The question of rights is closely linked to that of legitimacy. What gives an actor the legitimacy to act the way he/she does? Dissident legitimacy became a central issue as the conflict developed. Paradoxically, whilst ex-Zipra dissidents did not
have formal Zapu legitimacy, but acted as if they had, the government claimed ex-Zipra dissidents as having Zapu legitimacy, but acted as though they did not have it. This complexity resulted in confusion as to the objectives and intentions of both ex-Zipra and government interventions, and caused government policy decision-making to lack transparency. Firstly, we examine ex-Zipra dissident legitimacy.

As outlined in the previous chapter, ex-Zipra dissidents functioned outside the law. They did not have a guerrilla legitimacy as their actions were not sanctioned nor extensively supported. Yet the ex-Zipra dissidents did not act without a sense of legitimacy. In the conflict they used the former liberation war legitimacy to validate their actions. This validity allowed for self-defence, as well as military attacks, violence and destruction. Thus the perceptions linked historically to a situation in which a political goal had given legitimacy to violence. These perceptions reproduced in the conflict, and as previously, violence was seen as ‘just’. Noting the accounts by ex-Zipra dissidents recorded in the Voices section442, Irwin-Zarecka’s conclusion becomes transparent: that it is the meaning given to an event, rather than the event itself which is of importance. The ex-Zipra dissidents recount the meaning of their actions, leaving out the violence they were responsible for (the event itself). Thus, formally the ex-Zipra dissidents did not have Zapu/Zipra legitimacy. However, based on their previous status, belief of self-defence and the right to act against government’s policies, the ex-Zipra dissidents created a legitimacy to act – even if it was one which lacked official sanctions from others than themselves. This caused confusion particularly amongst civilians, who were uncertain of the intentions of the ex-Zipra dissidents, not knowing what or who gave the ex-Zipra dissidents legitimacy to act.

Contrary to the ex-Zipra dissidents’ stance, in the government’s view Zapu bestowed dissidents their legitimacy. In government discourse the claim was that Zapu sanctioned, supplied and directed ex-Zipra activities in order to overthrow the Zanu (PF) majority government. This was put forward despite a Zapu-dissident connection being denied by both the party and the ex-Zipra dissidents, and the fact that government filed court cases never found evidence for the claimed Zapu-ex-Zipra dissident connection. Being a cornerstone in government discourse and a justification for massive military action, the government nevertheless insisted on the ex-Zipra dissident legitimacy being that of Zapu. However, instead of officially confronting the Zapu party structure (and coalition partner) with the government allegations and possibly discuss ex-Zipra dissident grievances, the government opted for armed confrontation based on the logic that the dissidents were

lawless bandits. Thus the paradox was that the government claimed that ex-Zipra dissidents had Zapu legitimacy, but instead of subsequently formally confronting the Zapu structure with the allegation, they acted as though ex-Zipra dissidents did not have Zapu legitimacy by ordering the total elimination of dissidents based on their criminality. This caused confusion when policy decision had to be made in government, as the Matabeleland conflict was interchangeably treated as a political problem (power competition between Zanu and Zapu), and a military problem (criminals causing destruction).

Legitimacy was thus a key issue in the conflict, both for ex-Zipra dissidents and the government. Within the framework of legitimacy, the contestants had a common denominator: legitimacy to act also included legitimacy to use violence. Violence was perceived to be ‘just’ by dissidents when punishing or killing for example ‘sell-outs’, as it was by the government, whether treating ex-Zipra dissidents as criminals or politically motivated actors. Connecting historically, the reactions mirrored previous power relations in which opposition was forcefully put down. For both sides consequences of violence were seemingly shaded by the meaning given to the event (self-defence/resistance, and ‘national security’ respectively), rather than the event itself (warfare).

2.b. Power relations: fragmentation and differentiation.

Disparate views of conflict actors’ legitimacy and objectives became symptomatic as the conflict evolved. Actors and those affected interpreted what occurred, and why, in distinctly dissimilar ways, and as the conflict ensued certain perspectives cemented.

What is crucial to note in the development of dissimilar views, is the government realisation of fragmentation and differentiation used for power purposes.

As the disparate perceptions of the conflict had an impact on political positioning and decision-making it is useful to attempt to identify and formulate certain strands. Examining media and other sources, several versions of why and how the conflict took place are identifiable. One may generalise the official discourse regarding the conflict presented by government ministers, civil servants, and Zanu (PF) members into the following positioning: the government took military measures to eliminate dissidents and to incriminate dissident supporters (supporters being identified as Zapu members/sympathisers), who were considered a threat to national security and national unity.

In contrast to the official government discourse, the positioning put forward by conflict victims, those generally affected, and a number of ex-Zipra dissidents, can be generalised and formulated as follows: the government and the ruling party pursued a
military operation in Matabeleland justified by dissident activities, in order to eliminate political opposition, as well as to marginalize, suppress and inflict injuries on people identifying themselves as part of the Ndebele ethnic identity.\textsuperscript{443}

What is apparent from this crystallisation of views is the incongruity in the placement of a conflict cause. Whereas the government side considers the conflict to be about the defence of national security, the summery of conflicting perspectives places the emphasis on an offence against opposition and a certain ethnic identity. The great discrepancy of views caused the understanding and meaning given to actions taken by conflict actors, to be continuously in conflict.

In the context of disparate conflict views, the ex-Zipra dissidents’ two main points of government critique were ‘disunity’ and ethnic discrimination. We will examine both.

Disunity was a recurrent term during the conflict, used differently by different actors. The relative political weight of ‘unity’ related to the liberation war experience and the many efforts to merge Zanu and Zapu into one political and military force. After many aborted attempts, the Patriotic Front nevertheless was formed. As noted in the history chapter, the Zanu initiated split-up of the Front before the 1980 elections disappointed and outraged many Zapu members. Thus, the question of political unity or creating disunity had much rallying force in the conflict period. This is reflected in the discourse differences. The government claimed that the military intervention took place to end disunity, chaos, violence and disorder caused by the dissidents. As opposed to the split dissidents were perceived to cause in the country, the government put forward its own positioning being one of multiethnicity, unity, and the protection of citizens irrespective of ‘race, tribe or creed’.

In the dissidents’ view, the army integration process and government policy, interventions by the police, CIO and the Fifth Brigade created disunity, chaos, violence and disorder, which forced them to take action in self-defence and subsequently prompted them to respond against the government.

Both historically and in the conflict situation ‘disunity’ is related to fragmentation. Both sides accuse the other of disintegration whilst claiming the own position being one in defence of that which is perceived unified. The defence of that which is perceived unified is deemed imperative to the extent that taking up arms to fight

\textsuperscript{443} The two discourses are a synthesis from research conducted, and derives from impressions, memories and statements made by people affected and involved in the Matabeleland conflict through the author’s interviews in Zimbabwe 1990–1994, and Zimbabwean newspaper articles published at the time of the conflict, 1980–1987.
for it is justified. The paradox is however, that the accusations and actions taken in this cause, reinforce disintegration.

The second point of ex-Zipra dissident critique was thus ethnic discrimination, which also constituted another major contradiction between existing views. In public discourse the dissidents were Zipra members, and their supporters were either Zapu members or sympathisers. As is generally accepted, most Zapu members were Ndebele. Based on the assumption that all dissidents were Zipra, their supporters were Zapu, and that Zapu members were Ndebele, the government claimed that the dissidents and Zapu were fighting a tribal war.

In contrast to this, in the conflicting view, the claim put forward was that the government was fighting a tribal war. Victims and affected, particularly those subjected to the Fifth Brigade operations, repeatedly related how the soldiers stated their aim to eradicate the Ndebele. In this view the perception of government nationhood and unity was based on Shona supremacy.

The disparate views on ethnic discrimination were substantially influenced by government discourse and interventions in which ethnic differentiation was an important component. What we have seen from the above examples is fragmentation and differentiation in operation, based on the output of government discourse and policy. The disparate views of defence and offence were repeatedly reinforced by government and dissidents actions and reactions. However, mainly the part of the population directly affected by the conflict (primarily population in Matabeleland North, South and parts of Midlands) realised the major discrepancy in views, as they were the ones who experienced the contradiction between government discourses and government policy. Thus, the effects of government policies of fragmentation and differentiation occurred in the camp in which the government wanted to consolidate its’ power position, whilst for the remaining population government discourse and policy may have appeared as non-contradictory.

Consequently one may generalise that two poles developed: those disagreeing with government intervention (realising contradictions in discourse and policy), and those supporting government policies (seeing the conflict as presented by government discourse). Between the poles the space widened as the conflict developed.

One of the reasons for the space to widen between views was historical, and related to the difference in Zanu-Zapu relations in pre- and post-independence. Whilst inter and intra ethnic tension and power competition was present in Zanu and Zapu during the liberation war, both parties fought a common enemy – the racist minority government. Thus, both parties were in opposition, without access to
state power. In the Matabeleland conflict however, power relations had changed. Ex-Zipra dissidents' perceived themselves and Zapu being with lesser power than they deserved and where formally mandated to have. Zanu PF and the government found the ex-Zipra dissidents without a cause, generating destabilisation. In this conflict situation, having lost the previous common enemy definition, the tension of political power competition and ethnic differences present in the previous historical experience now came to the fore in a different light. Zanu and Zapu were parties in a political power competition, and each party had followers divided to a great extent based on ethnic identity (Zanu/Shona – Zapu/Ndebele). Due to the political competition and antagonism, the ethnic identities were in effect in a position of competition and hostility as well. In this new setting and as the conflict developed, ethnic and political tension polarised and consolidated rapidly. The space between conflicting poles grew.

The government policy in which discourse and actions were diametrically opposed, – claiming multiethnicity and unity whilst operating with policies of fragmentation and differentiation, – was not accidental. As we have noted, fragmentation and differentiation were methods used by Rhodesian colonial regimes for control purposes. In the Matabeleland conflict they operated similarly, as a strengthening of power positions. Connecting back to Mamdani’s understanding of colonial rule, he noted that ‘occupying powers learned that if popular resistance could not be smashed frontally, it would have to be fragmented through reform’ (1996: 90). As an alternative to racism tribalism would be an effective mode of control, as ‘tribe would dissolve the majority of the colonised into several tribal minorities’ (1996:90). Simultaneously, the mode of control would be the mode of representation. ‘Control and representation were two sides of the same coin, which would eventually make a single fit; the mode of representation, whether racial or tribal, would shape the lines along which natives would organise and in turn avail the state corresponding avenues of native control’ (1996:90). In Rhodesia colonial rulers followed the above pattern, resisted and fought by nationalist forces. The lesson learned and used by the newly independent government was the double purpose of ‘representation’. Whilst forming a coalition government ensuring liberation forces’ representation, and arguing for unity against minority splits and tribalism, it acted in order to sustain its hegemony and create a one-party state based on its exclusive rule. Thus, through the government’s interventions in the conflict, it caused fragmentation, whilst simultaneously giving the impression of democratic rule through representation, when in fact its rule was an effective mode of power and control.
2.c. Power relations: The role of ‘tribalism’

As political polarisation intensified, actors increasingly used ethnic overtones in discourse. The fact that Zanu and Zapu were parties in political power competition, and that each party had followers divided to a great extent based on ethnic identity, does however not explain why ethnicity become central in the conflict. As Doornbos puts it ‘Ethnicity as such does not explain anything; it needs to be explained’ (Doornbos 1991:56). To find possible answers we turn back to the Rhodesian historical experience.

As discussed in the history chapter, nationalist organisations during the colonial period were highly conscious regarding choice of being national not tribal in orientation. It was central to create ideological frameworks overcoming divide. Difference in terms of origin was not to be a central theme for platforms. Simultaneously organisations were sensitive to tribal representation and balance. Nevertheless ethnic tension was constantly present. Sithole argues that the nationalist movements’ omission of an internal ethnicity analysis was tied to three factors: the struggle was conceptualised as one between the blacks and the whites; an internal ‘self-analysis’ in terms of ethnicity would have been a ‘hazardous exercise earning enemies’ in various ethnic factions; and due to the Marxist discourse at the time, in which ethnicity and tribalism was considered as ‘false consciousness’, the phenomenon was dismissed (Sithole 1980:19–20).

Another important element leading to dismissal of ethnicity as a phenomenon was that tribalism was conceptualised as a colonial divide and rule device. Thus, an analysis of ethnicity and tribalism as an independent factor was not recognised. Instead, tribalism was conceptualised as an effect of colonialism.44 Seen in this light tribalism was recognised as a policy used by colonial powers. Thus tribalism was a political instrument or tool which could be selected to use. Conversely, one could choose not to adhere to it, be part of or influenced by it. To choose to use tribalism could then also be connected to blame for doing so. Subsequently, a tension existed between the lack of acknowledgement and conceptualisation of tribalism as an inherent part of nationalist party experience, and the use of it in political discourse.

The tension of not giving tribalism conceptual space whilst the phenomenon was in active political use carried over to the post-independence era. There it reproduced as the intertwined political and ethnic identities consolidated. A frustrated voice remembering the conflict period registers this dilemma:

44 For this conceptualisation, see Mamdani 1996:185
They have the majority of power, they have the majority of land, they have the majority of resources as well. What does hurt me in the process of reconciliation is that even in the distribution of resources, at whatever level, there is no sensitivity to assuaging geographical or ethnic considerations. If you say this to the Government, which is dominated by one ethnic group, they say your behaviour and your actions are tribalistic in making that charge. That is what annoys me. Every time you confront Shona speaking people they say you are being tribalistic, and yet you know that they are using the threat of tribalism to carry out tribal activities (interview [anonymous], 1993).

Thus, on the one hand tribalism was not allowed independent conceptual space in relation to political experience, nor in power relations historically and at the time. Simultaneously, tribalism was used accusatorily of those different minded or in organised competition and opposition. In the conflict, each side denied the use of tribalism, nevertheless, both sides blamed the other for using it. As tribalism was foremost considered a colonial divide and rule device, it had rallying force and the weight of the blame was heavy.

Mamdani’s conceptualisation of ethnicity and power offers another understanding of tribalism than the one described here and adopted by many in the nationalist organisations. He argues that to understand tribalism as an effect of colonialism offers only a partial view of the creation of ethnic identities, as tribalism is the ‘very form of colonial rule’ (1996:185). Mamdani concludes that ‘understanding ethnicity exclusively as an artefact of colonial rule’, the other side is missed: that ‘ethnicity is also a form of the anticolonial revolt’ (1996:185). In his framework ethnicity defined the parameters of rule, and therefore also defined the resistance against it. Ethnicity became a dimension of both power/resistance, and problem/solutions. This reproduction, according to Mamdani, caused the liberation movements to carry ethnic fragmentation from within. He further notes that how liberation movements understood themselves being shaped by the power they fought, set the course of their development.

Conceptualising the tensions present in the nationalist movements in the pre-independence period according to the Mamdani understanding, offers insight into why tribalism became central in the conflict – reproducing unresolved tensions and conflicts historically cemented during colonial rule. The ethnic and racial separation and fragmentation brought on by Cecil Rhodes in a continuation until Ian Smith’s government, was inescapably carried by Zanu and Zapu. Following Mamdani’s reasoning of ethnicity and power being intrically linked, pre-independence conflicts

445 Emphasis added.
between Zanu and Zapu inescapably carried inter-ethnic tension and differentiation as a result of the pre-colonial and colonial experiences, inherently imprinting ethnicity in the nationalist movements. In the course of the liberation war differentiation became geographically defined as well, in Zanu operating mainly in Shona speaking areas and Zapu in Ndebele speaking areas. Following the above line of argumentation, in the conflict between Zanu-Zapu, Zipra-Zanla in the pre-independence period ethnicity cannot be neither dismissed nor divorced as a phenomenon. Thus, rather than tribalism being conceptualised as an effect of colonialism, ethnicity and tribalism are, when applying the Mamdani framework, seen to be an inherent component. What difference does such a conceptual distinction make, and how does it tie to the polarised ethnic and political fragmentation and differentiation in the conflict? Central to the distinction is the functioning of denial and blame which operates and carries immense rallying force in the conflict. Discussing transitions Mamdani argues that democratisation includes to dismantle the mode of rule organised on the basis of fused power. He defines that:

The antidote to a mode of rule that accentuates difference, ethnic in this case, cannot be to deny difference, but to historicize it. Faced with the power that fragments an oppressed majority into so many self-enclosed culturally defined minorities, the burden of resistance must be both to recognise and transcend the points of difference (Mamdani 1996:296).

Referring to the transfer of power in the South African case, Mamdani notes the way in which actors were shaped by the nature of power, but not yet having come to grips with its nature nor means to transcend the many ways in which power fragmented circumstances and experiences. Tools for response were therefore lacking (Mamdani 1996:272). Applying Mamdani’s understanding to the current case, the dissidents came out of a colonial legacy of institutional power, a set-up which in Mamdani vocabulary was a mode of absolute power centrally orchestrated and locally fused into the rule of the chief. In the Matabeleland conflict ex-Zipra dissidents found themselves in a conflict situation mirroring that they had recently and victoriously come out of. With the exception however, that government actors were their former fellow ‘subjects’, who now where those who used tribalism (rather than the colonial power) in the conflict. Dissidents did however not historicize the phenomenon as urged by Mamdani, which, following the Mamdani logic, would have brought them to the realisation that resisting tribalism they must both recognise its operation in terms of power, and transcend the points of

46 Emphasis added.
difference it brought. Furthermore, if tribalism had been conceptualised as an inherent, an element present in the political fabric without options to exclude, it would have been overt that both the government and the ex-Zipra dissidents were carriers of the phenomenon. Denial and blame would subsequently have lost their edge as propaganda tools and the rallying force would have diminished. Most importantly however, seeing ethnicity as inherently linked to power struggle, the ex-Zipra dissidents may have gained insight into how power and ethnicity was used in order to fragment opposition. This may have allowed them to also see themselves as merely one part of a larger picture. However, as ‘staying alive’ was one of the motivating objectives, instead of historical analysis, the ex-Zipra dissidents responded in patterns ingrained during the colonial period. In Mamdani’s conceptualisation – ‘ethnicity as a form of anticolonial revolt’. However, in this time period the revolt was against the new government, not colonial rulers.

The new government, coming out of the historical experience of non-recognition of tribalism as an independent factor in politics, had the same conceptual starting point as ex-Zipra dissidents: tribalism seen as an effect of colonial rule. The new government however, inheriting institutional power, was reproducing colonial power relations. Modes of absolute power repeated both in terms of colonial tradition, but also as had been the competition between Zanu and Zapu in the 1960s. Then members of the nationalist organisations had at times identified each other as enemies – as two sides with irreconcilable difference – and in which the winner emerged at the cost of over-powering the other. Zanu executive Shamuyrlira’s comment regarding the 1960s could be translated to the 1980s: ‘It had to be complete victory or defeat for one party or the other’. The great difference between the 1960s and the 1980s however was, as noted above, that Zanu was in a position of hegemony, legally entrusted to the party through elections. Having this power, they used tribalism as had their predecessors: as a divide and rule device.

2.d. Power relations: Socialisation and Memory

In the above sections we have attempted to analyse ex-Zipra dissidents’ positioning and actions in relation to government responses. We can conclude that in the newly independent Zimbabwe the nature of power had not changed compared to that of the late colonial period. However, power relations between actors, primarily Zanu and Zapu, were distinctly different from pre-independence days. To crystallise how power relations changed, a synthesis is here made focusing on circumstances, historical experience, responses and effects. To this synthesis the role of memory is added, in order to highlight the presence of both the ‘institutional framework’ and the ‘mental framework’ in power relations.
Power relations between actors were distinctly different in pre-and post-independence times as circumstances had changed. Zanu (PF) was in a majority position in government, a government in which PF Zapu was an invitee coalition minority party. Both parties had the liberation war experience behind them, both in terms of successful counter insurgency warfare and state level institutional power responses. Another circumstance was that the political sphere had changed drastically with the measurement of political competition carried out through elections. Political allegiance and votes became imperative. The political power competition between Zanu and Zapu also changed shape as the common enemy of colonial rule was removed. In terms of perceptions, the recalled circumstances from the liberation war were fully operational in the current situation. The memories with which people interpreted the present were related to previous social relationships, connected to identities and social roles (Tonkin 1992:12,117). Thus, the change of circumstances shifted power relations, whilst operating perceptions were closely linked to previous social relations and identity.

Into these circumstances historical experience was carried from the pre-independence era. Political competition between Zanu and Zapu violently starting in the 1960s, Zipra-Zanla fighting in the late 1970s, numerous aborted merger efforts, and the Patriotic Front split before the 1980 elections, brought the two nationalists parties into post-independence with a scarred history. This history included an ethnic component of the Shona-Ndebele dichotomy, reinforced over time. Another influential historical experience was the legitimacy to act through popular support, which included violence both as a method and ideology. In terms of power relations, governance structure, modes of rule, and resistance were inescapably part of historical experience.

Memory was another inescapable and inseparable part of historical experience. Alonso notes that representations of the past are organised by interpretative schemes and by discursive strategies that produce effects of truth. In order to be credible, histories have to be authoritative; effects of truths are also effects of power. Power and memory are most intimately embraced in the presentations of official histories that are central to the production and reproduction of hegemony (Alonso 1988:50). Alonso also quotes Aron in ‘the past is never definitively fixed except when it has no future’ (1988:51).

Thus, in the sphere of politics memory is inherently linked to power and ideology. Zanu’s and Zapu’s representations of the past were linked to power and ideology, each reproducing their ‘truth’. However, Zanu being in a position of hegemony, used also memory in that purpose. For example, Zapu’s role in the liberation war

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was downgraded, whilst memory of Zanu and Zanla efforts were elevated. The past was thus not 'fixed', but took a new shape in the output of hegemonic perceptions.

The circumstances, with historical baggage attached, developed into destabilisation. A number of responses and counter-responses took place. Ex-Zipra dissidents picked up arms, (as did bandits and South African sponsored 'Super-Zapu'). Government denied rights to dissidents of any category and responded with military actions. Ex-Zipra dissidents in turn responded by reproducing method, ideology, legitimacy and tactics from the previous circumstances. The government's reaction, in addition to military actions, was to use methods and tactics used by the previous government: fragmentation and ethnic differentiation.

Looking at responses and counter-responses it is notable how memory work contributed not only to perceptions but to concrete action taken in the current situation. Both ex-Zipra dissidents and the government reproduced historical responses, following the logic noted by Tonkin, that past events are shaped in reflexivity as a guide to future action. Thus, this makes transparent a key issue brought up previously: perceptions are the basis for decision-making. This seemingly self-evident conclusion is nevertheless the synthesis of a complex memory process. Tonkin quotes Cumbales explaining that 'although events occurred in the past, we live their consequences today and must act upon them now. For this reason, what already occurred is in front of the observer, because that is where it can be corrected. History is, therefore, most relevant to the present and is of the present' (Tonkin 1992:127).

The responses to the conflict had a number of effects. Using fragmentation and ethnic differentiation as tool to fight the local Matabeleland destabilisation caused an overt intertwining of political and ethnic identity. The polarisation was mainly due to two government presented assumptions: generally equating dissidents to be Zapu/Zipra members, their supporters being Zapu members or sympathisers, who in turn were assumed to be Ndebele, and secondly by claiming that dissidents were fighting on the basis of ethnic identification. Ex-Zipra dissidents on the other hand, denied rights of expression and legal defence, and responding to government's statements and actions, continued destabilisation. A response to the many actions and counter actions was the development of highly disparate views of why the conflict took place. The government put forward that it took military measures to eliminate dissidents and to incriminate dissidents supporters, whilst an unofficial view saw the government pursuing a military operation in Matabeleland justified by dissident activity in order to eliminate opposition and to marginalize people identifying themselves as part of Ndebele ethnic identity.
Crystallising the disparate views of motives for the conflict is important for two reasons: it highlights how perceiving is a highly selective process where events are perceived against a background of attitudes and predispositions (Campbell in Dorn/Sigall 1977:300), and that subsequently decision-making based on perceptions is directly linked to this selectivity (as opposed to 'rational decision-making'). This again is seemingly self-evident, however, the consequences of such decision-making particularly in a conflict situation may have grave consequences. The complexity of perceiving and making sense of the past and the present, and the danger of the inherent selectivity of perceptions as a basis for decision-making, lies in Ricoeur's point that 'our reflection can only be partial since we are simultaneously the subjects, in both a political and a phenomenological sense, and the objects of our own understanding' (Alonso 1988:51). The disparate views of the background to why the conflict developed, is an example of 'partial reflection', as the actors were both subjects and objects of their own understanding of the event and its historical background.

2.e. Conclusion

In terms of power relations, the imprint of colonial power and control is the common denominator in the Matabeleland conflict's circumstances, historical experience, responses and effects. Assimilated in the colonial process, constantly reinforced in the liberation war and fanned by government discourse and actions, ethnicity was inescapably linked with power, governance and rule. History repeated itself both in terms of mirroring patterns of absolute power, but also in terms of responses to those patterns.

Connecting back to the three layers of understanding noted in the previous section, namely governance structure, modes of rule, and resistance, we can conclude firstly that no overnight changes took place regarding the structural way of organising power. Centrally and locally power was executed much in the same way as in the late colonial period, although the ideological basis was entirely different as were the government ambitions for change.447 The modes of rule as conceptualised by Mamdani, racial rule centrally and tribal rule locally, had transformed as the racially dominated rule had been replaced. Similarly and subsequently, resistance had transformed. However, key to the understanding of post-independent power relations and the development of the Matabeleland conflict is that whilst power relations had changed, perceptions of power had not changed. The layers of understanding regarding power relations, framed by socialisation and memory,

447 For details on government reforms in the 1980s, see Stoneman/Cliffe 1989:168–175.
continued to operate. Thus, conformity to rule, internalisation of values and resistance to that which was perceived oppressive were in motion just like before independence. Consequently, actors had changed, however, the way in which the new actors executed power in relation to opposition had not, as their mental framework remained in the colonial setting. Patterns from colonial rule of 'citizens' ruling the 'subjects' repeated and reproduced.


The violence conducted by dissidents and other recorded civil unrest prompted military action by the government. Since the Entumbane clashes (1980/1981) military operations were continuously carried out in Matabeleland North and South, and continued in various forms until the Unity Agreement was made public in December 1987. Neither ex-Zipra dissidents nor the government experienced mediation and conflict resolution a possibility, avoiding violence, destruction and the suffering of innocent civilians. The government's choice of army strategy back-lashed however, rather than containing dissident activity the government's harsh military intervention led to more army desocations and promoted further violence.

As discussed in the previous chapter, in 1983-1984 the Matabeleland conflict reached a peak in which the scale of organised violence affected several thousand people. The army conducted unambiguous, indiscriminate and massive targeting of civilians through army counter-insurgency operations in Matabeleland North/South/Midlands provinces. Based on the assumption that the dissidents operated through Zapu political structures, the government attempted by various means to break down the opposition party's organisation. Bearing the colonial and liberation war experiences in mind, local structure control was crucial. The focus was thereby not per se to eradicate dissidents, as claimed.

The government's presentation of events, although possibly lacking in information and overview of dissident intentions, was used in the interest of the ruling party's power position. Since Zapu was linked to dissident legitimacy, the threat of power seizure was argued to be extensive, which in turn was used as a justification for armed confrontation. As noted earlier, in this argument the government interchangeably conceptualised the conflict as a political or a military problem.

Part of the argument of the dissident issue being a military problem, was the proof of the then South African governments' destabilisation activities within Zimbabwe, particularly the so called Super Zapu elements. The threat of South African destabilisation was duly stressed particularly in parliament, where with six months
intervals, the government argued for an extension of the state of emergency. However, when examining the government media coverage of the Matabeleland conflict (1980–1987), there is relatively little written about the South African infiltration. One can only speculate as to the political and security reasons for this. Yet it seems a choice was made, for had the South African infiltration been the centre of the government discourse, the political Zapu versus Zanu dispute (including the ethnic elements) would have taken on a different dimension. How does one justify a crackdown on Zapu if the enemy is the South African government? Instead, the official government discourse did not stress international destabilisation (although having proof of South African agents operating in Matabeleland during this time), but claimed Zapu to be responsible for the dissident activities.

What this choice of discourse indicates is that although the government claimed the Matabeleland conflict to be a military problem, the focus of the official discourse was on a political dispute: power competition between Zanu and Zapu. However, when the government was approached in parliament to deal with the problem politically, a political solution was rejected in favour of a military solution. Thus, the government seemed to have had two strategies: one in which government discourse was oriented toward the political problem (Zapu versus Zanu), whilst simultaneously making decisions based on the conflict conceptualised as a military problem (‘Lawlessness cannot be solved by political debates’). However, when operationalising the military intervention, a return was made to the political conceptualisation of the problem, as Zapu members and structures where targeted. For members of parliament and the public outside the affected areas however, the chosen army strategies were not evident. Despite CCJP’s and others’ attempts to inform the public, at the time little was known particularly of the horrors of the Fifth Brigade.

3.a. The Pacification of ‘Undesirable Ideas’

Having being formed in order to handle ‘insecurity’ by ‘malcontents’, the Fifth Brigade was nevertheless trained to operate as an infantry facing a modern warfare situation, including chemical and nuclear weapons. The one year uninterrupted training by North Koreans was to produce a highly effective army unit, whilst outside the barracks a politicised military conflict was under way. Upon graduation, the Brigade received instructions to deploy in Matabeleland in counter-insurgency operations, resulted in an anti-climax for the soldiers, who were ready for ‘big fire fights’ rather than a small guerrilla force. The latter was perceived as ‘a big bore’.

448 Robert Mugabe (Murders Part, 1984).
The government and Zanu (PF) did however not perceive the task given of lesser importance. Instead, the Brigade was given the challenge to politically reorient Matabeleland civilians. According to Mugabe the brigade’s philosophy was that of Zanu (PF)’s and the approach was ‘not just the gun’ but it was also ‘political as during the liberation war’. Trained for a specific problem and answerable directly to the Prime Minister, the Fifth Brigade acquired a particular status – one which was connected to power.

Central to the Brigade’s military operations was the assumption that dissidents operated interchangeably as civilians/guerrillas and had local backing. Therefore brigade operations could not be solely focused on identifiable dissidents, instead civilian targeting was a clear Brigade goal. Once the ‘armed element was removed’ a new phase followed where contacts were replaced with methods to ‘alienate or pacify undesirable ideas still embedded in the local population’. Pacification through coercion took place in the form of ‘pungwes’, using the method of guerrilla political education extended to civilians during the war. The message was to cease with dissident support, realise that local political orientation was ‘wrong’, and to accept government authority. The underlying assumption was that civilians were Zapu members or sympathisers, and that the (coalition) government’s political orientation was that of Zanu (PF).

What is apparent with the above description is the reproduction of historical experience both in terms of actions and perceptions. Despite the formation of a Zimbabwean army (ZNA) which was to be non-political, the Fifth Brigade was reverted into the liberation war mode, both in terms of orientation and method. The difference between the pre and post-independent situations was however that during the liberation war guerrilla soldiers’ politicisation amongst civilians was based on the liberation of colonial oppression. Put simply: guerrillas were ‘right’ in their political orientation, whilst the colonial rulers were ‘wrong’ – imposing their rule and values. In the current context, the situation had reversed. Now the rulers were ‘right’, demanding belief in their authority and assimilation of their political values, whilst civilians were assumed to be ‘wrong’ in political orientation. Linking back to our previous discussion noting that post-independence power relations had changed, but perceptions of power continued to be those prevailing during the colonial period, we can note the same pattern here. Power relations between Zanu and Zapu had changed, but the way in which Zanu PF used its hegemonic position was based on perceptions emanating from power relations anchored in colonial rule. Absolute power enabled centrally enforced local control. Opposition was
dealt with by using force. Not in terms of race, but in terms of power relations ‘citizens’ ruling the ‘subjects’ reproduced.

3.b. The Militarisation of Ethnic Identity

The Fifth Brigade’s objective of civilian targeting is disclosed by the results of its first Matabeleland deployment (January–July 1983). Within the first six weeks more than 2,000 civilians were killed, thousands had been assaulted in public mass beatings, and hundreds of homesteads were burnt. Most of the dead were killed in public executions. Those particularly selected were Zapu members, ex-Zipra combatants or army deserters. The Brigade pattern of intervention consisted of waves of intense brutality, followed by random incidents of beatings and executions. The reoccurrence caused constant anxiety for renewed attacks.

When the Brigade redeployed (September 1983), the pacification campaign was evidently changed to tactics of terror in order to induce extreme fear. This required a political decision, according to the Commander, as such a campaign is beyond the authority of the army. The new strategy was of a clandestine character, as operations shifted from the village setting to interrogation camps. Civilians were assembled (without detention orders) and in truckloads transported to makeshift army centres in which structural conditions were created and enforced to induce maximum hardship. Survivors report the use of electric shocks, excessive beating, rape, genital mutilation and fundamentally dehumanising activities where ethnicity and sexuality were central. In addition to torture, food denial and forced labour (such as grave excavating) were administered. Corpses were buried inside the camp and in mine shafts.

An instrumental element in the Fifth Brigade operations was its ethnic stance. Victims accounts repeatedly emphasise the ethnic discourse used by soldiers, victimising people identifying with the Ndebele ethnic group, and stressing Shona superiority. Soldiers often told civilians that their task was to ‘wipe out the Ndebeles’, one of the reasons being crimes conducted by Ndebele ancestors towards Shona ancestors. The Commander explains that the occurrence was due to ‘superiority and inferiority complexes’ between the two tribes, and a drive to ‘settle old scores’. In the Commander’s view, when the ruling party claimed the Fifth Brigade as ‘its’ army, this also translated into an ethnic (pro-Shona) claim, which influenced the brigade’s transformation to an ethnically and politically biased brigade. Operating under the assumption that local structures supported the dissidents, pinpointed the Ndebele civilians as justified targets. When orders had filtered down to the operational level, ethnicity crystallised further. According to the Commander, on that level political and ethnic identity had amalgamated into an enemy identification in

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which the insurgent was firstly of Ndebele origin, and secondly with Zapu as political affiliation. Also the forms of violence used by the Fifth Brigade had culture specific tendencies. For example being aware that burial and mourning where tears of the living release the soul of the deceased were central in Ndebele culture, soldiers denied burial, instead they ordered corpses to decompose publicly, and killed family members who wept. Admittingly, the Commander remembers that coming down to soldiers executing operations in villages, the modus operandi ‘could not have any sophisticated discourse, it became simply ethnic’.

How can we understand the extreme Fifth Brigade violence and its ethnic orientation?

To gain insight into the occurrences we link back to power and ethnicity in the colonial period. Mamdani notes that without taking into account how in the colonial context power was organised and how it was fought, one cannot understand the force by which colonial resistance took place (1996:286–287). In the Matabeleland context, similarly, without taking into account both the colonial experience (how power was organised), and the experience of the liberation war, (how power/authority was fought), one cannot understand the force by which the new government reacted toward the destabilisation taking place in Matabeleland. Just as in the colonial experience when resistance, in accordance with the Mamdani conceptualisation, was shaped by the very structure it resisted, in the Matabeleland conflict, the government response was shaped by the imprint of colonial mode of rule. Thus, when rule and power were questioned by dissidents, rulers responded through state force. The government opted for the method and strategy used by themselves to fight colonial power (counter-insurgency), however, with the power perception previously held by the colonial government. What forcefully came through in the Fifth Brigade activities was the notion that power embedded in government centrally must be enforced locally, and that those who oppose central power must be fragmented, removed, ousted, or exterminated. The method was, as in the liberation war, eroding military capacity and destroying the institutional structure. Thus, the Mugabe government’s decision to respond with force against civilians (and dissidents), reflects continuity with the Rhodesian government’s response of force against civilians (and ‘terrorists’).

449 At the time of the liberation war, the Rhodesian government noted that ‘hearts and minds’ operations were dropped as the blacks were ‘too primitive’ to appreciate such schemes and only ‘respected force’. See chapter two, p. 76. Compare with Lt. Col. Munemo’s outline of stages of intervention in the conflict, and the choice of terror tactics to induce extreme fear, chapter three, pp. 200–210.
The use of force against Matabeleland civilians did to some clearly ring a familiar, historical bell. Lt. Col. Lionel Dyke, who lead the first Task Force to Matabeleland at the inception of the conflict, stated the following regarding his successors’ tactics:

*I support it [the government’s strategy to deploy the Fifth Brigade]. I think quite often you have to be cruel to be kind.... I believe the Matabele understand that sort of harsh treatment, far better than the treatment that I myself was giving them, where we would just hunt and kill if a man was armed – or find a man who was unarmed and seemed to be a terrorist, and take him away to be dealt with legally. That was the Rhodesian way of doing things, and I had been brought up to do. It was, I think, not all that successful. The fact is that when the Fifth Brigade went in, they did brutally deal with the problem. If you were a dissident sympathiser, you died.*

Lt. Col. Dyke’s statement highlights existing perceptions linked to differentiation and violence. By stating that particularly the Matabele understand harsh treatment, implies a comparison to another group, disclosing differentiation between groups. By stating that the same group understands a harsh treatment ‘better’ than through corrective measures defined through a court of law, discloses the perception that to ‘brutally deal’ with the problem is legitimate. Lt. Col Dyke’s support of the Fifth Brigade operations also indicates a perception of state power legitimately being absolute: the right to kill dissident ‘sympathisers’.

From the above reasoning we can thus conceptualise violence and its ethnic orientation as a merger of past events with current political developments. The Fifth Brigade empowered by the Prime Minister, grew to see itself as a ‘Shona’ army fighting the ‘Ndebele’. Mare notes that a sense of history and origin gives coherence and legitimacy to the present existence of a group, through merging past events with present identity and ideology (Mare 1993:14). The Fifth Brigade was driven by an internal ethnic coherence, legitimising its acts of violence through historical events – ‘settling old scores’. Added to this historical component, the Brigade’s operational attitude was connected to ethnicity through the enemy identification given in the army and the ethnic mobilisation by carried out by the government. The mobilising force in using ethnic identities in political manipulation is well documented in the literature. Mare for example, notes that ethnic identity is frequently used for political interest, as this form of representation carries multiple reinforcement in the form of cultural, emotional and historical links. Under conditions of war state policies in the mobilisation of ethnic identity may play an extremely powerful role in how a conflict develops. Smith notes that in the mobilisa-

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450 Lionel Dyke, (Interview 1994)
tion of ethnicity during a war, ethnic belonging and identity is activated through appropriate imagery. In protracted warfare propaganda and psychological warfare is used, in the aim to construct favourable self-images and negative enemy stereotypes. Here tapping myths and images common to the ethnic community drawn from previous wars and encounters are commonly used, causing ethnic group cohesion (Smith 1981:390–391).

The Fifth Brigade’s actions and it’s operations simply turning ‘ethnic’ can thus be seen as a response in which perceptions linked to the past operated dynamically and interdependently in the present. Subsequently the Fifth Brigade created an identity for themselves and another for the Matabele civilians. Keeping in mind that such processes are complex, we are reminded by Hylland Eriksen’s warning that identities are ambiguous, and that ambiguity is connected with a negotiable history and a negotiable cultural content (Hylland Eriksen 1993:73). Here we can connect back to Irwin-Zarecka’s point of how we perceive the meaning of an event. Thus, identity formation, history and a cultural context are only relevant in relation to which meaning we attach to it, the meaning being a result of our perceptions. How we perceive identity and ethnicity is thus central. Doornbos notes that the meaning given to ethnicity is multidimensional, as ethnicity does not exist independently. Ethnicity represents a single element, aspect or dimension lifted from a more complex reality, deriving its meaning from other variables (class, state, power) while in turn it can infuse such dimensions with meaning and political clout (Doornbos 1991:56). The ambiguity in identities is thus connected to meaning and perceptions, and that which is negotiable is connected to our personal experience: memory and socialisation. Hence, the Fifth Brigade’s arrival at simply turning ‘ethnic’ can in this light be seen as a complex process of past and present operating simultaneously, in the context of war resulting in a crude and unsophisticated formula of ethnic violence.

Whilst the Fifth Brigade acted in a seemingly isolated manner in the closed off Matabeleland region and where soldiers were carriers of individual perceptions of power, ethnicity and violence, it is however imperative to remember that the brigade acted on orders from Prime Minister Mugabe. How detailed their orders were, and how much of the brigade’s operational methods were instructed during their North Korean training, is not documented in the literature. The fact remains that the actions that were taken were conducted by a state army, on the basis of a policy and executed based on orders. The point made here is that whilst members of the government operated with their ‘institutional’ and ‘mental’ frameworks as a backdrop to current decision-making, so did the soldiers in the brigade. Thus, the
simultaneous effect of a government instruction of orders and a brigade execution of those, both being influenced by ‘institutional’ and ‘mental’ frameworks, reinforced the outcome.

Consequently, we can understand the Fifth Brigade violence and its ethnic stance from a historical perspective in which the ‘institutional framework’ and the ‘mental framework’ operated simultaneously. Our definition of these frameworks, in simplified form, is: due to the way in which power was organised in the colonial period, power and ethnicity were institutionally and culturally linked; and due to socialisation and memory, perceptions of power and ethnic differentiation became firmly cemented in peoples thinking and acting. The Fifth Brigade consisting of former guerrilla fighters, carried both the institutional and mental frameworks into to the conflict, whereby Matabeleland became an arena in which historical experiences were released, relived and reformattted for current use.

3.c. Violence Past and Present

How did past and present in a dynamic amalgamation affect actors? Here we first look at the army, where after we note affects on civilians.

We noted above that the Fifth Brigade’s actions went from a policy of pacification to a policy of terror tactics, and from an enemy identification of dissidents with local support, to the insurgent being an Ndebele. In both instances the Brigade’s perspective became simplified and more extreme. How can we understand such a process? Apter notes that political violence polarises people around affiliations such as race and ethnicity, feeds on divisions and intolerance, and generates loyalties. Apter formulates that political violence ‘turns boundaries in the mind to terrains and jurisdictions on the ground’ (1997:1). This compartmentalisation planted from mind to ground is in Apter’s framework connected to boundary making and remaking. In his view, political violence is explicitly designated for a reordering purpose: that of smashing the old in order to reset it anew. In the quest to reset boundaries, violence generates its own objects, and ‘interior’ meanings occur (Apter 1997:1). Apter also notes that once the violence has begun, it develops within its interiority and its own rationality. It is divorced and above the rest of society. Apter reminds us that interpretations and explanations need not be convincing to outsiders, only to those involved. The collective’s rules become binding, and penetration or violation of boundaries, goals or principles give rise to punitive outrage. Perpetrators invoke their own legitimising principles, aiming at altering boundaries, moral and territorial (Apter 1997:6,16, 17).
The extreme violence Matabeleland civilians were subjected to in the makeshift interrogation camps, cannot be explained solely by dissident destabilisation in the region. The sadistic forms of torture conducted on arbitrarily selected men, women and youth, had not much to do with if anyone was sympathetic to dissident activity or not. Adopting Apter's conceptualisation, it was political violence 'designated for a reordering purpose'. The task was to 'smash the old', Zapu political affinity, and to 'reset it anew', into adopting government authority. But as violence had begun, as Apter notes, it developed its own rationality. Clandestinely conducted in the makeshift camps, 'divorced and above the rest of the society', the conduct of violence needed not to be understood nor convincing to other's than members of the Fifth Brigade. Driven by their steam to hate, they 'invoked their own legitimising principles', as Apter formulated. The Fifth Brigade's punitive outrage has been well documented by the CCJP in their report of the Matabeleland destabilisation, giving many examples of horrifying, humiliating and excruciatingly painful treatments of Matabeleland civilians (CCJP/LRF 1997).

The ethnic content in the extreme Fifth Brigade violence is also documented, demonstrating the use of cultural markers in torture. Appadurai, writing on collective behaviour and severe ethnic violence, notes that violence inflicted on the human body in ethnic contexts is 'never entirely random or lacking in cultural form'. A link is made between the forms of bodily violence and the relationship of purity to identity. The body constitutes the material form of the ethnic other, and is in horrible efforts 'exposed, penetrated and occupied' (Appadurai 1997:7).451

The Fifth Brigade's ethnically orientated torture, seen in the light of Appadurai's writing, is a castigation of Ndebele bodies, in an effort to collectively punish and penetrate the Ndebele political and ethnic identity. By exposing, penetrating and occupying their victims, the ethnic other is fragmented, silenced or destroyed.

Having examined how past and present in terms of violence affected the brigade, we turn to look at how civilians were affected by violence in the conflict. Apter noted that political violence polarises people, feeds on division and intolerance, and generates loyalties. In addition to the immense trauma of violence affecting Matabeleland inhabitants, civilians were squeezed between conflict parties, being subject to the choice of loyalties, generating emotions of suspicion and blame.

451 Appadurai notes that in the case of rape, the violation is not only linked to the understandings of honour and shame and the effort to abuse organs of (ethnic) reproduction, but it is furthermore the most violent form of 'penetration, investigation and exploration of the body of the enemy' (1997:18).
During the liberation war both guerrillas and government soldiers subjected local communities to mobilisation and interrogation. As narrated in the history chapter, both sides searched for enemies. The location of enemies was both internal and external to the communities, and caused division through differentiation. This process became linked to harsh methods and violence as disloyalty irrespective of side was punished. The search and location of those perceived disloyal caused communities to be enveloped by notions of suspicion and blame.\textsuperscript{452}

In the Matabeleland conflict communities were again subjected to two contesting parties: dissidents and the government. The civilians re-experienced the liberation war pattern of enemy search and punishment of disloyalty. However, an added detrimental dimension for civilians was a lack of clarity regarding dissident objectives and the government’s strategy of civilian targeting, thus dimming civilians’ possibility to deal with the violence in a context. Without being clear about different actors’ objectives, civilians were prompted to act. Those who had contact with ex-Zipra dissidents and recognised them having a legitimacy in the conflict, were subject to a choice between loyalty to ex-Zipra dissidents\textsuperscript{453} and the new coalition government. Those who did not support dissident activity, were nevertheless subject to pressure from dissidents needing supplies, and government forces. Finally, those who never had dissident contact were not prompted for or against dissidents, but nevertheless subject to state violence, as the army acted upon the assumption that Matabeleland civilians were Zapu supporters therefore dissident sympathetic. Thus, the last category of civilians was in particular subject to state violence in a context inexplicable to them.

The lack of clarity of objectives of the contesting parties and the exposure of inexplicable state assault, link back to our previous discussion on the understanding of violence. We noted that violence for a supported cause is perceived as ‘just’ violence, as opposed to aimless force and brutality with no explanatory markers for those affected. Brickhill noted that many perceived violent occurrences during the Zimbabwe liberation war as ‘tolerable violence’, whilst the brutal force used in the Matabeleland conflict was by many perceived as ‘incomprehensible assault’ (Brickhill 1990: 21).

\textsuperscript{452} See chapter two on “peoples’ courts”, pp. 57–58.

\textsuperscript{453} In general, civilian loyalty toward Zapu was connected to the historical experience during the liberation war, a loyalty in which Zapu politics and Ndebele ethnic identity often merged (see chapter three, p. 179). This symbiosis caused a dilemma for some civilians, when being approached by the ex-Zipra dissidents.
Incomprehensible assault was not the only experience civilians were subject to. As in the liberation war, through the prompted identification of ‘sell-outs’ suspicion and blame became again notions civilians were burdened by. Werbner notes responses among victims of the Matabeleland conflict being blamed for having reported community members, self-blame for not having acted differently to save loved ones, or just for having survived one-self (Werbner 1991:173). Thus, as in the liberation war, loyalty to a side was central; loyalty to ex-Zipra dissidents, the government, the community, to family members. The paradox and tragedy was however that the right to choose loyalties or stay neutral was not present in the eyes of the Fifth Brigade. Instead, the assumption was that Matabeleland civilians had chosen a side (Zapu), and that they denied loyalty and authority to the other side (the government). Thus, the weighty emotions of blame and suspicion in the communities were ‘redundant’, as punishment for disloyalty was administered by the army irrespective of what political positioning or actions Matabeleland civilians in reality took.

Despite being ‘redundant’ notions of suspicion and blame took root, fragmenting communities. Just as the dissidents were unable to come to grips with the role of tribalism in the conflict, many civilians were not able to come to grips with the cause behind dissident actions or government responses. Consequently, lacking a context of understanding violence and oppression, suspicion and blame were reproduced, taking centre stage in civilian responses to the conflict. Meanwhile, the caused fragmentation in the communities was an effect which facilitated the implementation of a certain rule.

Punishment of disloyalty was not only administered by the army. The Fifth Brigade’s activities were enforced by government policies such as the denial of health facilities and the Matabeleland South food embargo. The food embargo was enforced for three months (February – April 1984) and was a drastic operation affecting 400,000 civilians. In the effort to ‘starve out’ the dissidents civilians suffered severely from the government policy of withholding food into the curfew region. The Fifth Brigade played an active role enforcing the policy. At rallies soldiers repeatedly stated that in punishment for being dissidents, the government desired to starve all the Ndebele to death (CCJP/LRF 1997:118). One eyewitness related such a speech as follows:

On Thursday, 23 February (1984), the soldiers called a meeting at Sibomwu (Matabeleland South). I went there. The soldiers were under the shade of a big Ntenjane tree while the people sat around in the sun. The meeting was from 12 to 4

454 See chapter three, pp. 210–212.
p.m.... Their leader told us his name was Jesus... They had come to kill the Mandebele [Ndebele] because the dissidents were found only in their area and not in Mashonaland. [He said] You are going to eat eggs, after eggs, hens, after hens goats, after goats cattle. Then you shall eat cats, dogs and donkeys. Then you are going to eat your children. After that you shall eat your wives. Then the men will remain, and because dissidents have guns, they will remain. That's when we will find the dissidents (CCJP/LRF 1997:177).

Going to extreme lengths, the soldiers rationed water, punished people for eating wild fruits, destroyed fencing to allow cattle to graze the minimal crops having survived the drought, and brutally beat people merely waiting at shops accusing them of breaking the food curfew (CCJP/LRF 1997:119). In general terms the population was thus subject to violence based on political and ethnic differentiation, not action or fault. The psychological impact was profound. Being aware that the starvation was caused by the government, enforced by the state army, seriously demoralised many civilians in Matabeleland South. In many cases the violence was experienced as incomprehensible.

The government's choice of policies and methods, both in terms of Fifth Brigade operations and policy implementations such as the food embargo, were a suspension of civil rights. The responsibility of actions taken by various groupings of dissidents, were placed indiscriminately and collectively on Matabeleland civilians. No appeal or rectitude for such a displacement of justice was in the realm of possibilities. Thus, just as in the liberation war, when civilians were collectively punished by the Rhodesian soldiers for the guerrilla insurgency, so where the civilians now collectively punished for dissident activity. Furthermore, at both occasions the civilians were caught without any prospects for a legal defence. Connecting back to our historical understanding of rule and governance, following Mamdani's conceptualisation on rights, the Matabeleland civilians were treated as colonial 'subjects' – being denied rights recorded in civil law.


Having examined Fifth Brigade operations and civilian responses to the conflict violence, we now turn to analyse how the conflict was presented publicly. Which presentation of events did people outside affected areas receive?

Conceptualising government strategic undertakings during the conflict into three types of interventions – military, policy, and discourse interventions –, offers a view how actions were effectively enveloped in the government's scheme. The three inter-
ventions were intricately interwoven and operated simultaneously. The military operations in a covert manner saw to the execution of the strategy locally, while the more overt policy interventions (such as curfews) gave the nation the idea that dissident destabilisation was addressed. Framing the whole exercise was government discourse which, was partly used to mould public consent for government interventions.

What may the government have intended to achieve with the discourse disseminated by government members, and foremost by Prime Minister Mugabe?

Two issues were seemingly central in the messages presented to the public: to identify the enemy in the Matabeleland conflict, and to create consent for the methods chosen by the government to solve the conflict. As previously noted, the enemy identification was dissidents (mainly perceived as being ex-Zipra members), those sympathetic to dissidents, and the method for conflict resolution was military intervention.

In government discourse the public was not given much space to react to methods, instead violence as a solution was continuously put forward. Subsequently, throughout the conflict violence stood in the centre of events and interpretations. In media and government rallies government representatives expressed that authorities would ‘eradicate’, ‘destroy’, ‘crush’, ‘wipe out’, and ‘kill’ all dissidents. The same line of argument applied to the apprehension of alleged dissident sympathisers. Mugabe repeated that it was impossible to distinguish between dissidents and their sympathisers, and that both categories were just as guilty of dissident crimes. Therefore both were subject to the same measures. In executing these measures, it was unavoidable that innocent people got victimised in the process. Mugabe explained:

The government is going to track down the dissidents until they are completely wiped out. Those who harbour and support dissidents will too be wiped out. We cannot select, because dissidents have no distinguishing marks (We will, 1983).

Seemingly, the fright for the ‘wrath’ of the government was intended to be greater than the fear of non-co-operation with the dissidents. The government message echoed passed experiences. As outlined in the history chapter, during the liberation war collective punishment was meted out against civilians as the rural population supporting ‘terrorists’ were themselves seen as ‘terrorists’. Subsequently, no differentiation could be made between those presumed guilty and those perceived innocent. Thus, the understanding that innocent people were victimised in the Matabeleland conflict allegedly in the process of dissident apprehension, carried a re-

455 Compare statement on p. 76 by Minister Van der Byl (Minister of Defence) in 1977, to that of Prime Minister Mugabe in 1983, quoted above.
markable resemblance to the Rhodesian government's understanding of a similar setting during the liberation war, constituting an unmistakable continuity between pre- and post-independence forms of authoritarian rule and abuse of power.

In sum, the post-independent government's attempt with a discourse focused on violence was seemingly to induce fear, create acceptance for violence as a method – also against alleged (with difficulty identifiable) sympathisers, seek legitimacy for its military and policy interventions in the conflict region, and minimise public discussion of alternative methods of conflict resolution through controlling public discourse space.

4.a. The mobilisation of bias

The conscious effort to steer public opinion in a specific direction is not an arbitrary affair. To convincingly put forward an official message to the public includes both certain strategies and methods. In Scott's study of power relations and discourse he notes that the 'public transcript' representing the commands, opinions and values of the ruling elite, includes a highly partisan narrative, however not totally fictitious or misrepresenting (Scott 1990:45). In Apter's writing on political violence, he concludes that political violence being interpretative, discourse plays an important role legitimising both the presence and execution of violence. The discourses are fictive and logical reconstructions of reality (1997: 2,6).

The strategy to put forward a ruling elites' partisan narrative, legitimising both the presence and execution of violence, is often combined with propaganda as a method for dissemination. Hamelink defines propaganda as the production and distribution of messages intended to persuade an audience to actively accept an interpretation of reality as legitimate (Hamelink, 1988). Propaganda as a precise technique, rationally planned and carried out, has a specific objective clearly defined by the messenger. To provoke a reaction related to deeply rooted values and ideas, propaganda manipulates through strong emotions like love, hate and fear in combination with significant cultural or national symbols (Hamelink 1988).

Herman/Chomsky examines propaganda and how to 'manage' public opinion through media propaganda campaigns. They conclude that propaganda can distort, misrepresent, and suppress evidence in conformity with elite priorities (Herman/Chomsky 1994:xiii). Through the media, privileged groups that dominate the society and the state defend their economic, social and political agendas. In this process a 'mobilisation of bias' and a 'manufacturing of consent' occurs through the selection of topics, distribution of concerns, filtering of information, emphasis and tone, and through keeping a debate within certain boundaries. In
cases of conflict, the authors conclude, that news processing fails to place public policy into a meaningful context (Herman/Chomsky 1994: xii, 298).

In government discourse, in order to induce fear, create acceptance for violence, legitimacy for military and policy interventions, and minimise other resolution options, a partisan narrative disseminating values of the government was thus enacted, using the methods of propaganda. An example is the food embargo in Matabeland South. Whilst the population in this region was denied food the government stated that food was ‘flowing freely’. Information to the general public was misrepresented, suppressed and presented in a context in which the public remained uninformed or deceived. In more in general terms conflict information was suppressed. During the conflict and particularly at the height of the Fifth Brigade operations, the government enforced a news blockade whereby no external to the region was allowed entrance. Information for the Zimbabwean public was streamlined to be only government reports, excluding the disclosure of terror tactics. During the years of massive government human rights abuses, victims were in general buried with their experiences. A blanket censorship rested over massacres, executions and rapes. Thus, Herman/Chomsky’s points of distortion, misrepresentation and suppression of evidence are phenomena recognisable in the government’s choice of methods.

Furthermore, examining how the Zimbabwean government dealt with the Matabeland conflict, one can see correspondence with the conclusions of a ‘mobilisation of bias’ and ‘manufacturing consent’. The Zanu (PF) majority government attempted to mobilise bias and mould public opinion to defend their political agenda, by misinforming, omitting, or misleading the public regarding the multiple causes of the conflict and government conflict policies. In addition, the government utilised propaganda methods such as the manipulation of national symbols or significant beliefs to further their cause. By stating for example that the government had full moral, political and constitutional authority to ‘wipe out the scourge that would debilitate and finally destroy our sovereignty and unitary nationhood’, the government divided its citizens in those who supported the government, and those who were perceived to be enemies of the state. Thus, the government was ‘right’ and dissidents and their sympathisers were ‘wrong’. Obviously the conflict was much more complex than this dichotomous interpretation, but precisely in this simplification lay the propaganda mechanism. In closing out other interpretations, the government actively produced and distributed messages to the audience

456 See chapter three, p. 211.
in which the only officially legitimate conflict interpretation was that of the government. Subsequently, public opinion was mobilised in favour of a certain transmitted set of ideas and values.

Furthermore, criticism of government policies during the conflict was a highly restricted activity. As Scott notes, for the elite it is central to avoid any open display of insubordination in the public transcript. Open refusal to comply with a hegemonic performance is particularly dangerous for the dominating elite, as it pierces perceptions of apparent consent (Scott 1990:57, 205). The way in which the government did respond to publicised critique, was by using the criticism to forge public opinion to the government's benefit. Rather than addressing the issues brought up by, for example the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace, the government first published the criticism and subsequently used the content for its own discourse advantage. This manoeuvring fogged government responsibility, mobilised antagonistic feelings regarding those with a view different than the government's, and deflated attempts of an independent discourse to emerge.

We can thus conclude that suppression, simplification, distortion, and context displacement where methods used in the attempt to manage and mould public opinion, and in order to 'mobilise bias' and 'manufacture consent' for a specific purpose.

4.b. Discourse Past and Present

How can we relate this development to our understanding of the Matabeleland conflict and the ‘institutional’ and ‘mental’ frameworks?

The production of authoritative messages with a political content, particularly in a conflict situation, for the purpose of convincing a position, can be conceptualised to equal the intent of influencing and shaping perceptions. To overtly distort and suppress vital information, can be conceptualised to equal the enforcement of power relations. In both cases the impact on perceptions is crucial as they are the foundation for actors’ decision-making. We connect back to our earlier discussion on Foucault's understanding of power as a technique. In Foucault's view identities are shaped and moulded through the exercise of disciplinary power. Individuals falling outside the adopted norm are given a certain identity. For fear of marginalisation and repression individuals conform as stipulated by the ruling elite. Gaventa noted subjugated groups' psychological adaptations and internalisation of values and the rules of the powerful.

Government discourse in the Matabeleland conflict was a forceful method to instil the hegemonic power relation for which primarily Zanu (PF) stood for. It skilfully used propaganda, divided the nation into those who were ‘right’ and ‘wrong’,
those who were for unity and national security and those who were ‘enemies of the state’. The government accomplished, following Foucault’s vocabulary, through its disciplinary character to create a norm. Subsequently, those who feared marginalisation or repression, conformed to the norm. The norm stipulated that government military intervention was legitimate, and the use of violence on civilians was justified.

However, the extent to which adaptation and conformity to norms can be accomplished by rulers relates to historical background, just as does power relations. The Smith government was, particularly during the liberation war, infamous for its propaganda, censorship and distortion of events. Particularly well known were the airdropped brochures describing perceived criminality of guerrilla combatants toward rural civilians. Thus, the colonial government created a norm and through its disciplinary character enforced it on its adversaries. However, it’s success was evidently limited, Zanu and Zapu mobilisation in the rural areas was not seemingly fundamentally affected by the Smith government’s discourse. Why was the Smith government’s propaganda strategy unsuccessful?

In the liberation war conflicting parties’ objectives were clear: colonial minority rule versus independence and majority rule. Despite propaganda, distortions, suppression of information, taking a side in the war was not ambiguous for either party. In the Matabeleland conflict however, dissident objectives were neither homogeneous (three categories acting) nor disseminated, and government objectives were enveloped in propaganda. However, judging from participation in demonstrations and rallies, and actions taken by the Zanu (PF) party, Youth, and Women’s organisations particularly 1985–1987, the government’s discourse was seemingly adhered to. Why? What constituted the difference between Smith’s and Mugabe’s propaganda machines? In terms of method, not much. In fact, Mugabe’s government reproduced most techniques, including the airdropped folders – this time describing the perceived criminality of dissidents against rural civilians. However, what differed were perceptions of those who ruled. Coming out of a 15-year liberation war, many in the newly independent country saw the majority rule as a historical accomplishment carried by its liberation movements, who now ruled the country. Thus, a widespread perception of credibility for the rulers existed, which enforced a disbelief in eyewitness accounts regarding state violence in Matabeleland. Furthermore, the use of violence against opposition was historically ingrained – rulers legitimacy to act included historically violence both as a method

457 This is not to ignore or deny the complexities in relation to guerrilla support, recruitment, and authority in relation to rural civilians. See Kriger (1992).
and ideology. Thus, credibility, in addition to distortion and suppression of vital information, historically conditioned conformity to authority, historical legitimacy for violence against opposition, and fear of violence, were all elements used by government.

Through the skilful manoeuvring of these elements the government attempted to induce fear, create acceptance for violence, seek legitimacy for its military and policy interventions, and minimise discussion of alternative conflict resolution. Doing so it reproduced methods used during colonial rule. It utilised citizens' perceptions of credibility endowed through liberation war resistance against colonial rule, and at the same time adopted colonial perceptions of absolute rule.


How power was to be exercised under continuous (albeit low intensity) destabilisation, continued to be an issue for the government. As in detail outlined in the history chapter, army efforts had been used for five years, when the 1985 general elections were due. Despite the government's severe measures to contain dissident activities in Matabeleland and Midlands, the government had been unsuccessful. Having in 1983–1984 heavily relied on army interventions, the government changed strategy in 1985. Fifth Brigade operations as described above, ceased, and public beatings and executions decreased. The government seemed to opt for a strategy of a less obvious pattern. Although methods changed, it did not alter the underlying assumption that Zapu as a party was tied to dissident activity. Civilians suspected of opposition affiliations – mainly in Matabeleland and Midlands – were in the pre-election period subjected to political intimidation, detentions, and abductions conducted by Zanu (PF) members in co-operation with police and state security. The shift from using the army caused the interventions to be more difficult to detect.58

In the Matabeleland conflict the 1985 general elections constituted a critical measure of political strengths between Zanu and Zapu. Although few questioned Zanu (PF)'s majority support, Zapu's local relative strength was critical. Both parties had ambitions to penetrate each others' strongholds; aspirations that failed for both. Instead the election results showed that Zanu remained politically excluded from Matabeleland, and Zapu's political support outside Matabeleland was minimal. Neither party could claim through electoral backing that they stretched beyond regional loyalties to the sphere of national support. For Zanu (PF), the devastating loss in Matabeleland was evidence that government policy interventions aiming at breaking

458 See chapter three, pp. 235–245.
down Zanu structures had not affected people’s choice of political party affinity. Consequently, the inability for Zanu (PF) to claim national support worked strategically against the aim of creating a one-party state. For Zapu the defeat in all provinces except Matabeleland was a step back from the 1980 elections, its position as coalition partner was undermined as the argument of power sharing was weakened. What Zapu election results did show was a resilient electoral loyalty which overcame a crippled party infrastructure and the intimidation of massive state violence. Nevertheless, Zapu’s political clout as a major opposition party had lessened.

Having secured a majority in parliament in the July 1985 elections, Zanu (PF) members accentuated the party’s hegemonic position through mass demonstrations and rallies which included explicit anti-Zapu manifestations. In a punitive rage by the election victors violent actions were taken towards suspected opposition members, the theme often coinciding with comments such as ‘there is no space for them [Zapu] in the one-party state’.

In addition, the immediate post-election period saw large scale mass detentions of Zapu members, simultaneously as Mugabe delivered a ‘final warning’ to Zapu regarding ‘the banditry they deliberately created’. Arrests increased sharply and Amnesty reported torture being widespread in police stations and during interrogations. The organisation further noted that in a number of instances ‘members of minority parties have been detained as part of the ruling party’s effort to establish a one-party state’.

After a standstill in dissident destabilisation before the elections, the post-election period brought a rise in dissident operations, including South African sponsored destabilisation. The latter was seen partly to be connected to unity negotiations which started between Zanu and Zapu (September 1985), as a successful conclusion of unity talks would possibly lead to a conflict settlement. For the apartheid regime’s destabilisation plan this was not welcome. With an increase of destabilisation, government discourse hardened, focusing on Zapu. Enos Nkala, Minister of Home Affairs, stated that ‘We want to wipe out the Zapu leadership’ without ‘hearing any pleas for mercy’.

5.a. Zapu: coalition partner and ‘enemy’

Throughout the conflict government representatives made highly negative and accusatory statements about Zapu. Enos Nkala, as quoted above, was particularly infamous for his inflammatory statements. The fact that Zapu remained in government during the entire conflict raises questions regarding which role Zapu as a party played during the conflict, and whilst in government.
In the literature there is little information available on Zapu positioning during the conflict. The media focused on government discourse in which Zanu (PF) government representatives made statements on behalf of the coalition government. In available media documentation, there is in general a scarcity of statements by Zapu government representatives. The media being controlled by the government and its majority party, this is not surprising. However, already in 1980 it was evident that a deepening division in the coalition government was developing, and in the aftermath of Entumbane One, Nkomo was demoted from Minister of Home Affairs to Minister Without Portfolio with a 'key voice in security affairs'. This caused an uproar in the Zapu Central Committee where some demanded a pull-out from the coalition government. However, according to Zapu internal documentation, a decision against this was taken due to the need for Zapu involvement at ministerial level in order to arrest lawless trends, and the joint (Zanu-Zapu) obligation to integrate Zipra and Zanla forces. An important factor for Zapu remaining in the coalition government may have been the fact that ex-Zipra combatants' frustration for Zapu marginalisation (in government, media and in the ZNA) was a reason for Zipra desertions from the army, and to some reason for dissidence. Zapu pulling out of the coalition government may subsequently have led to further desertions and destabilisation - due to perceptions of stranded 'unity'. Although this was one occasion as early as 1980, it may be an indication to existing perceptions in the Zapu Central Committee. Despite Zapu marginalisation in the coalition government and in discourse, some influence and insight into decision-making was better than standing totally outside.

Zanu (PF)’s positioning towards Zapu as a coalition partner was ambiguous. As narrated in the previous chapter, Zapu portrayal in government discourse varied, causing contradictory statements and interpretations of government intentions. Some issues were central. Firstly, Zapu was seen to have ‘misguided elements’ or ‘subversives’, and ‘moderates’ or ‘progressives’ – the latter accepting Zanu (PF) government authority. Differentiating Zapu in this way, allowed those who were perceived not ‘misguided’ to stay in government and remain blameless of dissident activity. How the differentiation between the innocent and the guilty within Zapu was made, was never elaborated on in the public discourse. Zanu (PF) could have excluded Zapu in one stroke from the coalition government, claiming all to be subversives. Not doing so however created an image of Zanu (PF) being ‘fair’, not treating all Zapu members the same. Furthermore, having ousted Zapu from the coalition government could have caused two possible effects: strengthened Zapu as a party due to added polarisation and stranded unity, and tarnished Mugabe’s pol-
itics of reconciliation. Both effects were highly negative for Zanu (PF)'s power ambitions, as the elaboration below will show.

Firstly, Zapu growing in strength (psychologically, in terms of voter support, or members) worked against Zanu (PF)'s political goal of a one-party state. Militant elements within Zanu (PF) were forcefully against the coalition government, instead favouring a one-party state. Some actors had doubts about Nkomo's motives and resented Zapu's expectation that it should enjoy political power greater than was warranted by its perceived contribution to the war (Hodder-Williams 1983:6). This perception linked to Zapu's 'Zero Hour' strategic offensive, as in detail discussed in the history chapter. However, the stumbling block for the creation of a one-party state was nevertheless the existence of a vibrant opposition party, and Zanu's lack of national hegemony not having penetrated Matabeleland. Simultaneous to internal pressure for a one-party state, destabilisation evidently by ex-Zipra combatants took place. The accusation of Zapu and subsequent political reorientation efforts in Matabeleland were put in. Thus, the actions taken were in order to weaken Zapu, which was favourable for the one-party state plan. However, going as far as excluding Zapu from government could polarise the conflict in such a way that it would strengthen Zapu, as it would allow Zapu an independent role outside government and perceptions of 'stranded unity' would amalgamate forces within Zapu against Zanu (PF).

Secondly, tarnishing Mugabe's international reputation would obviously be damaging. For many actors in the international community Zimbabwe was an important example of hard won liberation against colonial powers and independence under democratic majority rule. Mugabe's policy of reconciliation was received with high acclaim, raising Mugabe's status to that of a statesman with credibility to rule democratically. Zapu being invited to a coalition government was included in this picture. Thus, Zapu's exclusion of the government would discredit Zanu (PF), raise questions regarding dissidence and subsequently government corrective actions such as military interventions. For Mugabe the latter would possibly influence international co-operation and trade possibilities.

Thus, Zanu (PF)'s ambiguous positioning toward Zapu as a coalition partner included many layers all interdependently operating in discourse. However the central logic seemed to be that discrediting some Zapu members whilst perceiving others as 'co-operative' to government authority, allowed Zanu (PF) to both criticise and incriminate Zapu and keep it in the coalition government for its own political benefit.
Consequently one may conclude that whilst both coalition parties partly opposed each others’ positionings, discourse and actions, for different reasons both parties chose to keep the coalition intact. However, it is also evident that both parties had internal division regarding the choice of ruling together.

5.b. Zanu – Zapu merger

After five years of continued destabilisation, as discussed in detail in the previous chapter, Zanu and Zapu began a move towards ruling together – not in coalition but as one party.

The unity negotiations formally initiated by Zanu (PF) were, although officially not a government matter, nevertheless closely linked to that of government. The stated reasons for both parties to merge were the general notions that they together ‘commanded the support of the majority of the people of Zimbabwe’, and that ‘of this majority Zanu enjoyed a major share’; and the ‘desire of the two parties for unity, peace, law and order, as prerequisites for socio-economic development’ (Chiwewe 1989:271).

Thus, although the unity negotiations were per se a matter between two political parties, they turned in to a matter of government interest. For the negotiating proponents the settlement results were directly linked to expansion of state power: Zanu (PF)’s expansion of hegemony and its definition encapsulated through the creation of a one-party state; (PF) Zapu’s resumption of recognised power-sharing, regaining its national legitimacy based on its participation in the liberation war and its electoral backing, (power sharing and legitimacy both having been undermined during the Matabeleland conflict), by handing over its electoral support to the new party constellation. Precisely because the negotiations were in extension regarding degree of, and accessibility to, state power, the question of party and state inflated in this case. Therefore the unity negotiations are here interpreted as a government intervention in the Matabeleland conflict in which an attempt is made to find a political solution to the dissident problem, as well as the means of expanding scope of power.

The Unity Accord between Zanu and Zapu was signed on December 22, 1987, an amnesty for dissidents and a pardon for convicted security personnel were declared. Despite the diversity of reactions to what unity stood for and which meaning it should be given, it was unanimously acknowledged that the Unity Accord brought one important change: the end of the Matabeleland conflict. The killing in Matabeleland had stopped, the military occupation of the region was over. Zapu members were no longer under suspicion of being ‘enemies of the state’.

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Moven Mahachi, (Minister of Home Affairs) noted that ‘The solution to the problem of the dissidents was political’ (Bandits, 1988).


The task in this study has been to gain insight into the emergence and the evolution of the Matabeleland conflict. As noted at the beginning of the analysis, there is no simple answer to why the conflict took place. Each actor, through his/her experience and understanding carries a ‘truth’ which offers explanations and answers from the persons’ particular perspective. We have nevertheless, through recording of events and perspectives attempted to generalise in order to conceptualise, to subsequently analyse with theoretical tools those abstractions made.

Neither institutions nor behaviour remain constant or homogeneous over time. Changes in structures and positioning take place in accordance with developments. Slow shifts and gradual changes are at times difficult to detect and are not obviously recorded. However, the fact that institutional change and political positioning fluctuate is per se important to acknowledge. What is recorded in this study, firstly generalised and secondly conceptualised, inescapably translates into simplifications of complex interrelated occurrences and developments. With this in mind, and as noted in the introduction, this study offers one way of explaining the events that took place.

6.a. Perceptions of Difference

The study begins with a historical description with the objective to trace developments in Rhodesian history, in order to facilitate an understanding of the emergence of the conflict. The reoccurring theme in the historical narrative, as throughout the study, is difference and particularly perceptions of difference. Historically two collections of perceptions are identified: firstly, perceptions tied to a Shona and Ndebele dichotomy; and secondly, perceptions linked to Zanu-Zapu power competition. These two collections of perceptions subsequently became closely related when ethnicity became an issue in the nationalist parties. Furthermore, when political and military developments partitioned Rhodesia in separate Zanu and Zapu areas, coinciding with the ethnically divided geographical regions, a reinforcement of a Zanu/Shona – Zapu/Ndebele dichotomy took place. The dichotomy was further reinforced by intense power competition between nationalist organisations – and/or between certain personalities within these structures.

Some influential developments during the colonial history which further caused the dichotomy to strengthen are also worth remembering here. The construction
of myths regarding Shona and Ndebele difference continuously fed and fertilised by white political establishment; the Zapu split in 1963 causing violent Zanu-Zapu clashes reinforcing the historical baggage of division by parties being unable to break patterns of competition and violence; the repeatedly aborted external and internal unity attempts between the parties; Zanu’s and Zapu’s disparate military orientations and subsequent methods of establishing legitimacy and authority to command and rule liberated areas; and finally Zanu’s (conventional) and Zapu’s (counter insurgency) warfare strategies at the final stages of the liberation war.

Thus, the above developments led to polarisation, and fertilised perceptions of difference between the two sets of actors. With hindsight one can see how particularly the military strategy at the end of the war constituted an influencing factor regarding perceptions of Zanu and Zapu difference. Zapu’s decision of a conventional army offensive (Zero Hour), possibly paving the way for a military victory without negotiations, subsequently grew in views and memory as a difference linked to unscrupulous (Nkomo) power ambition. The cancelled plan also cancelled a guarantee of Zapu having a leading role in the governance of the new Zimbabwe – unless elections took place through a communal Zanu – Zapu ticket. Zapu knew its geographical spread and support, and could calculate a lesser chance of election victory on a single Zapu platform, whilst Zanu knew of its opposite position. Zanu cancelled the Patriotic Front and subsequently in the 1980 elections Zanu and Zapu competed on separate tickets. Thus the end of the war did not signal the end of power competition between Zanu and Zapu, instead it switched into a higher gear in the event of independence elections. Perceptions of difference having cemented during 15 years of political competition, violence and war were placed centre stage, when the population for the first time was to register their political loyalties through the vote.

Following the historical narrative we travelled through the description of the Matabeleland conflict. Perceptions of difference continued to operate and were exacerbated, leading to overt tension and fighting. The Entumbane clashes signalled how near the surface tensions lingered. Difference was picked up by the South African apartheid regime, who saw a chance to use it for the sake of destabilising and limiting the possible success of a ‘Marxist’ neighbouring state, sending in Super Zapu dissidents. Ex-Zipra dissidents experienced persecution and fought for what they perceived to be against difference – for unity. The government chose a military offensive against destabilisation, based on a discourse against ethnic difference and for multiethnicity. Officially the government represented multi-party democracy, a coalition government legitimately ruling. The ambition was however a
one-party state, based on containing difference under a hegemonic project. Many perceived Zapu as a stumbling bloc for the legal constitution of a one-party state. Furthermore, many Zanu (PF) members perceived ex-Zipra dissidents’ responsible for the ongoing destabilisation, and assumed a Zapu connection to this destabilisation. As the activities refused to cease harsher methods were seen to be required, both of dissident eradication and for the reorientation of thought in Matabeleland and Midlands. Ideological difference was to be eradicated and the Fifth Brigade was to execute the task. Thousands of Matabeleland and Midlands civilians went through political reorientation efforts at ‘pungwes’ as well as through terror tactics, being physically assaulted or silenced for perceived difference. Government switching strategies when new elections were due, selected mass arrest and abductions as new methods. To end difference between the parties, unity negotiations between Zanu and Zapu started. The killing in Matabeleland had to cease, but how was power going to be organised and shared? Unity was about power: access to it and how much of the power one could wield. The settlement of the political forces was thus for Zanu an expansion of its power position, and for Zapu a resumption of recognised power sharing. Difference was not eradicated, but contained.

Thus, at the end of the Matabeleland narrative we arrived at the insight that historically cemented differentiation became overtly manifested in the post-independence power constellation. Violence and ethnicity became central in developments, taking excessive forms of expression. How could we understand these developments? Choosing perceptions and the interdependency of perceptions to actions and reactions as a starting point of the study, the mode of understanding developments is that of a process. Inevitably, then, the understanding of the Matabeleland conflict had to be based on historical background. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, the mode of analysis is one in which the Matabeleland conflict is understood in its own historical context, not as a case in comparison to a possibly similar case elsewhere.

6.b. Institutional and Mental Frameworks

As a tool for historical analysis Mamdani’s framework was used, focusing on the legacy of colonial rule, its locations and manifestations of power. Central for the understanding of the Matabeleland case was Mamdani’s conceptualisation of how the local state and its power relations was inescapably linked to that of tribe. Also of central importance for the study was Mamdani’s notion that governance of the rural areas was equal to control of natives, in a framework in which ethnic identity and separation were in a dynamic manner enforced politically. Force and
violence became part of the understanding of governance and rule, moulding resistance to be defined by the structures which it resisted.

Whilst Mamdani’s framework implicitly recognises perceptions, discussing tribal and democratic ‘logics’ (1996:289), noting that ‘tribal ideology [is] a source of identity and common purpose’ (1996:91), or stating that tribalism as civil war is a continuum ‘along which muted tensions coexist long before they break out into open confrontation’ (1996:292), attention to how the logics, a common purpose, or muted tensions operate within a political context is however not dwelt upon in Mamdani’s work. Therefore, for our exercise to highlight the formation, internalisation, and reproduction of perceptions, a theoretical construct was added which was labelled the ‘mental framework’. The historical understanding of power relations as argued by Mamdani, was labelled the ‘institutional framework’. The central notion of the mental framework is memory and socialisation in relation to power relations, thereby considering conformity and identity formation in relation to values and beliefs of the ruling elite. In this framework it is also recognised that during decades of colonial rule abstention of preferences and psychological adaptations of rulers’ values, caused internalisation of colonial power relations, cementing in the unconscious.

We thus arrived at noting that the crucial points for the analysis of the Matabeleland conflict is the conceptual understanding of power relations (institutional framework), and the link or relation to power relations made through memory work and socialisation (mental framework), often unconscious and non-conceptualised, but nevertheless present in perceptions. We also, importantly, noted the fact that perceptions are the basis for decision-making and actions taken.

With this theoretical equipment we embarked on the dissection of the Matabeleland case. Examining many aspects of power relations evident in the conflict and comparing those to the late colonial period, the conclusion reached was that the way in which power was structurally organised at post-independence had not substantially changed, compared to that of the late colonial period. What was crucially different between pre-and post independence however, was the power relation between the two main actors Zanu and Zapu. Whilst ex-Zipra dissidents and Matabeleland civilians (perceived as Zapu) were treated as the former colonial ‘subjects’, in accordance with Mamdani’s conceptualisation, the ruling party Zanu was acting as the ‘citizens’ of yesterday’s colonial rule. The subjects were excluded from civil law, whilst government derived its rights to act from the same. Thus, whilst power relations had changed, perceptions of power had not changed. The new rulers took on the mental framework from their predecessors, reproducing coloni-
al power relations. History repeated, both in terms of mirroring patterns of absolute rule, but also in terms of response to those patterns. Following Mamdani’s argument, the reproduction of ethnicity in those patterns, was inherent.

Conflating the above theoretical conclusion with the case, we can conceptualise the conflict as that of a quest for hegemony and the legislation for a one-party state. In this quest it is argued, that the dissident destabilisation was a side event of the conflict—although presented as the centre of the conflict. It is put forward that the ex-Zipra destabilisation, was an opportunity which Zanu (PF) took (and partly created) as a tool for manipulation in their pursuit to immobilise Zapu. From this perspective one may conclude that whilst ex-Zipra dissidents caused destabilisation to press for changes in government policies, the government caused destabilisation justified by dissident actions, in order to implement a Zanu (PF) political program. In this light, the ex-Zipra dissidents were thus used for Zanu (PF) political benefit. The Matabeleland civilians, subjected to state violence due to political and ethnic identity, carried ultimately the cost of the ruling party’s quest for hegemony. Subordinating state administration and national interests to that of party politics, the government manipulated public opinion to create consent for its actions.

Reflecting on the fact that institutions and positioning change, fluctuate and shift, it is important to point out that the conflict developed in non-linear manner. We noted that complex patterns of reactions to contradictions carried over from historical experience were played out in the contemporary situation, resulting in a diversity of reactions, based on actors current goals and objectives. Thus, historical events and meanings attached to them were in constant dialectic with current events, causing the foundation for the formation of perceptions to be in constant flux. Considering decision-making being based on one’s perceptions of events and developments, it is clear that actors at a number of conjunctures made choices regarding positioning and which actions to take.

6.c. The Politics of Choice

The availability of choice in government policy decision-making during the conflict was an issue seldom stressed by government discourse, nor in parliament. Instead, reference was made to the destabilisation as a war situation, and the inevitability of a military response in a situation of war. The state of emergency was extended every six months with records of destabilisation accounted for, without much discussion of alternative routes or methods to those chosen under the emergency situation. As argued previously, government positioning was presented as the choice, whilst simultaneously barring other options from discourse space. The stress on inevitability of certain responses and actions includes an underlying as-
Assumption, that of freedom from accountability. How can one be accountable for a decision one was circumstantially ‘forced’ to make? This is exemplified by Robert Mugabe’s reply regarding Fifth Brigade atrocities when he stated ‘I won’t apologise. This is what happens in a war’.\textsuperscript{459} Thus during, as well as after the conflict, there was a tendency to see government policy in terms of responses toward destabilisation as a one way lane: the motion could only go in one direction on a path incontrovertibly taken. Such an interpretation of the situation simplified the complex and contradictory to that of a neat and linear context, in which distinct choices were not available.

Connecting back to Mamdani’s analysis he notes regarding culture and the interpretation of circumstances that

But culture is seldom as compact and singular as it is sometimes made out to be. Rather it is full of tension, diverse and differentiated. To understand culture as an undifferentiated and noncontradictory whole is to presume a single outcome to situations of conflict, whether that outcome is explained as the result of a single initiative or a singular absence of one (Mamdani 1996:226).

Mamdani notes that despite economic, sociological and cultural constraints, decisions are made. Interpreting circumstance however as a ‘noncontradictory whole’ may lead to the above mentioned one way lane, as Mamdani puts it:

It is tempting to read back from an event and to explain it as the necessary outcome of historically evolved circumstances or consciousness. Such a reading back obscures the element of choice that confronted participants at each step along this historical route (Mamdani 1996:226).

Thus, obscuring government choice during the Matabeleland conflict had less to do with real options than politics of choice, and had less to with the ‘necessity’ of force than political will.

Hence, contrary to the message that choices were not available, decisions and actions were taken not only by government, but all conflict actors. A myriad of choices were made based on a variety of criteria, such as instructions, group decisions or singular positionings. The decisions were framed by two factors particularly: constraints based on actual circumstances, and actors’ perceptions. Despite for example the ex-Zipra dissidents’ statements that their actions were due to ‘lack of choice’, the reasoning was based on a perception that there was a lack of choice, as the option to pick up arms was a choice made amongst possible others. The

\textsuperscript{459} Robert Mugabe, (Tell me, 1993).
dynamics of real constraints and perceptions is ambiguous. Firstly, ‘real constraints’ are perceived differently by different actors, and secondly, responses to choices within the framework of real constraints are also based on perceptions. Thus, ‘real constraints’ remain subjective and are influenced by both the ‘institutional’ and ‘mental’ frameworks. Despite subjectivity however, these constraints constitute part of the framework for decision-making. Thus for example, the use of force by either side is not the result of lack of choice necessitated by circumstances, whereby accountability can be released. Instead, choices were made, with the inclusion of institutional and mental frameworks and as a result of current dynamics – resulting in decisions. How can this be generalised?

Godfroij notes in a study on strategic action and the interdependence of actors, that ‘adequate explanation of social phenomena is considered impossible, if no attention is paid to the interpretative and creating role of actors’ (Godfroij 1981:251). Godfroij further brings our attention to Crozier and Friedberg, who look at the relation between actors and social systems in a non-deterministic way. Godfroij quotes the authors concluding that ‘with respect to actors alternatives to actions actors are conditioned but not determined' by social structures’ (Godfroij 1981:252).

Relating this back to above reasoning, we may conclude that actors in the Matabeleland conflict were conditioned by the institutional and mental frameworks, but not determined by them. Decision-making took place in the dynamics of historical understanding and contemporary contradictions. Thus, we cannot understand the Matabeleland conflict without attempting to understand the complex and contradictory context in which it is played out. Within this context there is emphasis of choice, rather than decisions being ‘necessary outcomes of historically evolved circumstances’. The conflict being one focused on power relations, and political positioning, brings the choice of political allegiance to the fore. The long experience of difference, polarising Zanu and Zapu, became overt in a new fashion in post-independence. Both Zapu and Zanu wanted state power to execute their programs. Despite marginalisation and persecution of party members, Zapu made the choice to stay in the coalition government in order to influence decision-making. Zanu used military intervention in order to reorient the political values and beliefs of Matabeleland civilians, to shift political allegiance from Zapu to Zanu. Thus, being conditioned by institutional and mental frameworks, but not determined by the same, in the conflict of power relations, the space of choice to choose political allegiance was crucial.

\footnote{Emphasis added.}
6.d. The Space of Choice

In Mamdani’s study of late colonial power relations he argues that the key to an alien power’s achieving a hegemonic denomination was a cultural project: one of harnessing the moral, historical and community impetus behind local custom. Custom was defined and enforced by customary Native Authorities in the local state (1996:286). Customary law, unlike civil law, was then in Mamdani’s conceptualisation, an administratively driven affair, for those who enforced custom were in a position to define it in the first place. Custom was, according to Mamdani, state ordained and state enforced. This lead, in Mamdani’s view, to the customary being more often than not the site of struggle. Custom was often the outcome of a contest between various forces, not just those in power or on the scene agents. The contest took place in an institutional context and framework which was heavily skewed in favour of state-appointed customary authorities (1996:22).

We have used the above understanding explaining how ethnicity and power became inherently intertwined in the Matabeleland conflict. Thus, as a result of resistance of colonial power both within the local state and against the central state, ethnic identity became part of the struggle. Then, in pre-independence, the site of the struggle was in Mamdani’s conceptualisation the customary. The Matabeleland conflict on the other hand, took place in post-independence. Power relations between the major actors had transformed, circumstances were changed. Elections were a measurement of loyalties and allegiances, and were (formally) the arbitrators of political strength. Actors had a choice when voting for whom to rule, albeit not their policies of rule. Nevertheless, power relations could as compared to Rhodesian pre-independence, be influenced through general elections. The site of struggle was no longer the customary. The contest between forces was not about custom and who enforced it. Where can one then conceptualise the site of the struggle to be in the Matabeleland conflict?

We noted above that the Matabeleland conflict being one focused on power relations, caused political positioning and the choice of political allegiance to be central. Within Zanu many saw Zapu as a stumbling block for the party’s quest to implement a one-party state. Thus to Zanu’s hegemonic project Zapu allegiance, values and beliefs were a hindrance. The space available for formal political choice, – elections –, gave nevertheless the right for political allegiance to be manifested and legally executed. Thus, to change political allegiance of those who were a hindrance to the hegemonic project became imperative. In the Matabeleland conflict, the attempt of shifting peoples’ political allegiance is painfully apparent in the Fifth Brigade operations, where the alienation and pacification of ‘undesirable ideas’ and
the enforcement of government authority in terms of a ‘new political thinking’, were rationales for executing military operations.\textsuperscript{461} However, the shift of individuals’ political allegiance does not take place through prompted instructions, requests, or violence. In the conflict this is evident for example when Matabeleland inhabitants chose to keep their Zapu membership cards and loyalty, although forced \textit{en masse} to buy Zanu (PF) cards and undergo political reorientation efforts at ‘pungwes’. In Nkayi, Zapu committees were forced to rename themselves Zanu (PF), however, political allegiance did not shift. ‘It was just on paper, we were all Zapu members’, remembers a committee member (Alexander et al, 2000:225). In line with this reasoning it is clear, that in the Matabeleland conflict the subjects of the struggle were not the dissidents. They were a sub-ordinate issue in the conflict. The subjects of the conflict were the population of Matabeleland who, despite massive state violence, in two elections proved political allegiance to the opposition party Zapu. Noting that the Matabeleland population were the subjects of the conflict, we can further conclude that the site of the struggle can be conceptualised to be the \textit{space of choice} this part of the population exercised in terms of political values and beliefs. Thus, the contested space is the site in which people decided their political preference. What is the content of the struggle at this site? Why does this site propel such forceful reactions?

When conceptualising the site of struggle, we can separate between a ‘physical’ and a ‘mental’ site. Whilst the physical site can be understood to concern institutions, the mental site can be comprehended as the space of choice exercised by individuals. The institutional site can be influenced and controlled through administrative measures and changes in structure. For example, the two political institutions Zanu and Zapu united to form one party, causing changes in structure due the merger. Contrary to the physical site, the mental site cannot be controlled and change cannot be forged. In the case of the Zanu-Zapu merger, structure changed, but the meaning members attached to this change could not be enforced by party leaders. Thus, the space of choice in terms of the meaning given to the merger, could not be controlled. The distinction between the physical and the mental is important. In the Matabeleland conflict the struggle does not concern the right to create democratic institutions, i.e. physical sites. This took place in the previous struggle fought in the liberation war. At post-independence through majority elections, two parties governed and democratic institutions were, in a general sense, in place. Thus, the struggle was not the \textit{choice for creating} these institutions. Instead the struggle was the \textit{space of choice} to democratically \textit{utilise} those physical sites. That this

\textsuperscript{461} See chapter three, pp.202–203.
space was utilised is evident as notwithstanding harassment, abductions, torture and murders of Zapu members prior to the 1985 elections, opposition party members did not refrain from Zapu political activism nor from going to the polls to vote for their choice of political party.

From the above reasoning we can conclude that the physical site, involving institutional change, may be forged through power. This is contrary to the mental site, where the space of choice is operative, because change in the mental site cannot be forcefully executed. Perceptions and thought cannot be controlled. Thought can be institutionally framed, influenced, co-opted or finally extinguished, but even in the moment before a thought is finally terminated – it cannot be externally controlled. Yet for rulers to succeed in any kind of political transition, thought – in terms of actors’ political positioning, values and beliefs – is imperative, as it is the basis for decision-making. We can now return to our previous conclusion on the location of site, and repose the question what is the content of the struggle at this site? Through our reasoning we concluded that the site of struggle is the space created by the element of choice to exercise free political thought. The content of the struggle at this site is then on the one hand, the attempt to change individuals’ political allegiance, and on the other hand, the right to utilise the exercise of free choice. In the Matabeleland conflict, the government and the ruling party Zanu (PF) fought to influence and control this site, forcefully attempting to shift Zapu allegiance to Zanu support. However, as apparent in the way Matabeleland inhabitants reacted, their political choices were not determined by state violence. The mental site is not a sphere that can be controlled. That is why the site of struggle being the space of choice is so powerful, and propels such forceful reactions.

A conclusion made by Mamdani is that ‘the most important institutional legacy of colonial rule, may lie in the inherited impediments to democratisation’ (1996:25). Connecting this conclusion to our above reasoning, we may note that: if the mental site of struggle is the space of choice in terms of values and beliefs, in which the democratically elected government tried to forcefully alter perceptions in favour of its own hegemonic project – the mental site constitutes an impediment to democratisation. Thus, the legacy of colonial power relations impedes democratic rule, although power derives from democratic elections. Put differently: even though institutionally power has been democratically established, the dialectics of the institutional and mental frameworks with current developments, is overpowering institutional democracy. Hence, even though in Zimbabwe the post-independent government was democratically elected, the unchanged nature of power inherited from the colonial era, in combination with authoritarian power perceptions,
overruled the legally and institutionally established democracy. What lessons can we learn from such a development?

6.e. Lessons from the Matabeleland conflict

An obvious conclusion from the Matabeleland conflict is that democracy is not guaranteed through institutional reform. That which seemed to the outside world a democratic and popular government, was a government which shrouded in secrecy vehemently suppressed parts of its population. As Rhodesia became Zimbabwe transitions of institutions remained partial as perceptions remained linked to the former authoritarian power structures and forms of rule. We can thus conclude that when shifting from an authoritarian rule, change of institutions does not necessarily take place if not followed by a democratisation of perspectives. But this is experienced over and again historically and currently, simultaneously in different parts of the world. The conclusion is rather self-evident. People and organisations with power ambitions are a permanent feature in most societies, as are actors who are prepared to use opportunities and institutions in a non-democratic way for personal or institutional benefit. What we can do is to ask ourselves what lessons can be learned. Hence, what can we discern from the understanding of the Matabeleland conflict outlined in this study?

We may gain insight into how political occurrences seem to evolve considering two factors. Firstly, the understanding of an event as a process both in a historical context and in relation to present dynamics. The Matabeleland conflict cannot be fully understood unless placed in its own historical setting, and analysed in the complex and contradictory context in which it is played out. Secondly, insight into the development of political occurrences may be gained when examining prevalent perceptions in a historical context and in shifts leading to the current standpoints. Without considering Matabeleland actors’ perceptions (emergence/development and internal contradictions/external dynamics), the rationale for decisions made by actors may remain hidden, illogical or inexplicable. As we noted previously, the two factors events and perceptions condition and define each other; but they do not determine outcomes nor choices. Thus, though actors had certain perceptions of the conflict, these conditioned but did not determine the outcome of the conflict. Choice is constantly present. But choice is not a clean-cut undertaking. Perceptions and choices are dialectically an outcome of contradictions in the past and the present. Hence, as the Fifth Brigade soldiers conducted military operations to break down Zapu structures, they also vented their historical anger when claiming that they ‘settled’ old Shona versus Ndebele ‘scores’. Trying to grasp historical developments, all being so seemingly dynamic and dialectic, how can one grasp the flow of events?
This study has attempted to show how perceptions influenced decision-making and outcomes of events. Recognising the imperative status of structure, perceptions have nevertheless remained central. A way to gain insight into events and their evolution is to record perceptions. Recording and subsequently analysing perceptions gives insight into decision-making and behaviour, and what meaning actors attach to developments and responses. Particularly because perceptions and choices are dialectically an outcome of contradictions in the past and the present, it is necessary to note how focus of loyalty shifts and results in new complex alignments with their own situational logic. An example of a complex interplay between choices and presented perceptions is the shifting government discourse during the unity negotiations. As unity was internally debated and choices were made for a party merger, the public was presented with contradictory messages regarding the government's stance on Zapu. Those ranged from Zapu being equalled to MNR in Mozambique\textsuperscript{462}, to Zapu members being 'brothers and sisters' to whom the public should 'extended the hand of friendship'.\textsuperscript{463} As outlined in chapter three, government discourse was a complex exercise of seemingly intended contradictions, in order to prepare the general public and Zapu for a merger under a Zanu (PF) hegemony. Thus, connecting back to our conclusions, through recording and analysing perceptions and how focus of loyalty shifts, we may gain insight into new complex alignments. However, recognising the dynamics of perceptions and choices, it is important to note that the dialectics between the two can never be totally captured and permanently understood, as perceptions and choices are part of a never-ending process, continuously negotiated and compromised.

Further concluding from the study we can note that recording and analysing events including prevalent perceptions, may lead to the recognition of certain patterns and context specific dynamics. This recognition may be of outmost importance to actors particularly in conflict and war, as it may give those affected (added) tools for understanding the turbulence they are subject to or are part of. An example of this is the level of acceptance amongst civilians towards violence in the liberation war. As violence was inevitable in the context of war and the war was perceived to be fought for a future gain, the recognition of the context specific dynamics resulted in a perception of brutality being perceived as 'just violence'. This in turn, allowed for a level acceptance of the experienced situation.\textsuperscript{464}

\textsuperscript{462} MNR – Mozambique National Resistance (also called RENAMO); a rebel group known for its extreme brutality towards civilians operating against the Frelimo government in Mozambique from the late 1970s to 1992.

\textsuperscript{463} See chapter three pp. 263, 253, 246.

\textsuperscript{464} See chapter four, pp. 293–294.
Secondly, noting patterns of events and perceptions defined to certain circumstances, may replace emotions of denial, blame and suspicion with a contextual understanding of the experienced event, releasing weight from negative feelings. This conclusion we can relate to two experiences discussed in this study, namely the Rhodesian use of chemical warfare, and the extreme brutality of the Fifth Brigade. In both cases denial, blame, and suspicion became prevalent amongst civilians. The food and clothes poisoning implemented by the Selous Scouts caused inexplicable deaths resulting in an internal enemy search and ‘sell-out’ executions, with denial, blame and suspicion as a result in the local community. In the Matabeleland conflict similar emotional responses were experienced by civilians, emanating from the incomprehensible government violence (as opposed to the perception of ‘just violence’ in the liberation war). A contextual understanding of the conflict was lacking, because dissident motives were not clear, and state violence was undifferentiated and collective.\textsuperscript{465} On a personal and community level the effect was profound. Soldiers demanded spouses and parents to locate their family members due to Zapu membership, an identification that inevitably lead to harassment, violence and often death. This resulted in accusations and self-blame for not having acted differently to save loved ones or for having survived one-self.\textsuperscript{466} Thus, connecting back to the conclusion, had civilians in these circumstances recognised the context specific patterns (Rhodesian military tactics, and Zapu incapacitation rather than dissident arrest), feelings of denial, blame and particularly suspicion may have been avoided or diminished in strength. Subsequently, actions related to these feelings may have been averted. The latter point is significant, as it results in change of behaviour. Thus, the conclusions here made are two-fold: analysing prevalent perceptions may lead to the acknowledgement of patterns and dynamics specific to a historical moment, and this insight may release weight from negative reactions caused by the perceived inexplicability of the circumstances. Secondly, a contextual understanding, including frameworks of history, socialisation and memory, may influence actors to choose a different route in their responses, and thereby causing a shift in behaviour.

In conclusion, perceptions being an engine in actions taken, may through an analysis of events, including that which has here been labelled ‘institutional and ‘mental’ frameworks and current contradictions, cause shifts in perspectives. The shift

\textsuperscript{465} Whilst an understanding of the underlying causes for dissident and government military behaviour was lacking, the pattern of exerted authority by rulers towards different minded was clear, as was the historical continuity of this pattern. See particularly ‘Voices’ sections in chapter three.

\textsuperscript{466} See chapter four, p. 323.
in perspective may be of major influence when it is the result of analysed information transformed to knowledge and consolidated in the actor as that of his or her own understanding. Consolidated in such a way the actor may then use the knowledge based on his or her own conditions or prerequisites, and transform it to conscious choices and priorities. Unravelling events and analysing connections thus allows for ownership of ones’ history and conditions for change, causing a shift in a perspective to perhaps be a small event in history, but a fundamental transformation in consciousness.