

# Rhetoric of Anxiety and Anxieties of Rhetoric: Strategies of Remembering Memories of Genocide in Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012)

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## Abstract

In *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1983) Wayne Booth argues that the rhetoric of fiction is its capacity to endlessly defer meaning, and in this process produce new meanings via unexpected significations. This article draws from some of Booth's insights to tackle three creative problems related to the rhetorical challenges of fictionally representing genocide in the African novel. The first problem is how to artistically translate knowing into telling; the second challenge relates to how authors writing on genocide can guard against the danger of creating archetypal images of suffering women that might prove inadequate to capture women's multiple human agencies. The third problem regards how to deal with the anxiety of what the language of genocide narratives may not be able to manifest in representing women's responses to atrocities. Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) and Christopher Mlalazi's *Running with Mother* (2012) are two novels from Zimbabwe that suggest that creative authors who use metaphorical language to magnify suffering may not always be in total control of meanings and tend to not always know the implications of the metaphors they use in describing the process by which they make their own metaphors of suffering. The language of genocide has generated certain archetypal images that represent more than one thing. Vera and Mlalazi use the language of the genre of the literature of atrocities to enlarge, embellish and stylise representations of genocide. This article argues that these creative problems are inevitable because language is the only cultural resource that the fictional imaginaries might manipulate in order to recover and reconstitute certain memories of genocide.

**Key words:** women; genocidal war; history; rhetoric; anxiety; narrative fiction; *The Stone Virgins*; *Running with Mother*; Matabeleland; Ndebele and Shona people; Zimbabwe

## Introduction

The rhetoric of anxiety constitutes a mode of emplotting how to talk or write about agonistic experiences in stressful situations such as those evoked by a genocidal context (White 1978). This idea is contrasted to the anxieties of rhetoric. This relates to the native purpose of language and how imaginative writing “knows itself—as figurative discourse about a subject that exists independently of the discourse” (Lang 1990, 141). The implication of using metaphorical language is that “it purports to add to the subject something that it would otherwise lack. The effect of this supplement, however, does more than only elaborate this ‘single’ subject” (Lang 1990, 143). Language introduces point of view, provides a means for individuation and impinges on the content of genocide as it adds itself and decisions it presupposes (Lang 1990, 143). These challenges of how to represent genocide manifest differently in how Vera’s *The Stone Virgins* and Mlalazi’s *Running with Mother* depict women during and after the genocide war that took place in Matabeleland between 1980 and 1987.

*The Stone Virgins* came out in 2002 and was thus published closer to the actual historical genocidal war in Matabeleland. This war is cryptically/euphemistically referred to in official circles as “disturbances” and “civil war.” The novel’s creative canvas spans the colonial period and the liberation struggle, and ends with narratives that remember memories of women’s experiences and their ambiguously tenuous positions in the fratricidal and genocidal war. Mlalazi’s *Running with Mother* was published in 2012. The novel also invents the story of women and genocide in Zimbabwe from the perspective of a young male author. Additionally, the novel takes as its central task the role of a revisionist archive (Mbembe 2002). In so doing, *Running with Mother* attempts to authorise narratives that reignite conversations that extend, engage and revise *The Stone Virgins*’ singular gaze on the negative fate of Ndebele women who are portrayed using symbolic figuring akin to the proverbial children of Sisyphus (Patterson 1982). *Running with Mother* confirms the bleak narrative of women-as-victims by choosing to focus on the plight of a Shona woman married to an Ndebele man caught up in the vortex of the genocide of the 1980s. However, the novel mainly demonstrates a *will to live* by a Shona woman and her hybrid girl child, Rudo. The Shona woman’s actual name is withdrawn as she bears a role-name, Mother, more like Babamukuru in *Nervous Conditions* (Dangarembga 1988). There must be a purpose for withholding a character’s name or more specifically replacing a proper name with one derived of a social role in a patriarchal society. Mother is ridiculed and persecuted by some Ndebele people for sharing ethnic ties with the predominantly Shona army that is blamed for unleashing the genocide on the Ndebele people. Despite being resented by the Ndebele community, Mother and Rudo’s human agencies find expression through reconciling a community threatened by irreversible political ruptures.

Critical enquiry in Zimbabwe on the idea of representing women's experiences in a war situation has not sufficiently questioned, clarified and encouraged a radical understanding of the differences between a liberation war and a genocidal war. Both a liberation war and a genocidal war are descriptively violent processes. However, while a liberation struggle purports to speak on behalf of the suffering masses, a genocidal war is viewed as antithetical to total freedom by those who suffer from it. Liberation war as a symbolic narrative has tended to produce, sustain and rely on marked archetypal metaphors associated with sacrifice and assumes the movement from suffering to triumphant heroism. What is privileged in this characterisation of a liberation war narrative is inadvertently a stable narrative assumed to be representable inside and not outside language and thought. A genocidal war, on the other hand, excites extreme pathos and is viewed as occurring in a symbolic territory of representation marked by negative senses of dissent, and characterised by anxieties of narratives of the unspeakable which are thought to divide the realm of silence and speech. As a way of "voicing silenced memories" (Toivanen 2009, 1) in symbolic form, narratives of genocidal war are viewed as elaborating what Lang terms a "negative rhetoric" in which we hear the atrocities being described as beyond comprehension, without any meaning and as "unspeakable [even if] we usually hear afterward a fairly detailed description of what is unspeakable" (2000, 18). Debates over how to understand the "space between metaphor and what it is of—and, by implication of the possibility of alternatives to the metaphor" (Lang 2000, 142) in depicting genocide remain inconclusive. As noted by White (1992, 44), one pervasive view holds that it is an impropriety to use any literal representation of genocide because in fiction

figuration produces stylization, which directs attention to the author and his or her creative talent. Next, figuration produces particular perspective on the reference of the utterance, but in featuring one particular perspective it necessarily closes off others. Thus it obscures aspects of events.

There is no narrative that uses language and remains unembellished. White rejects forms of narrative that reify genocidal war, making it look mystical and therefore rendering it an unacceptable mode of emplotting (White 1992) the symbolic experiences of women, men and children in a genocidal war. The academic field of representing genocide is still demarcated by unproductive categories that oppose history to fiction. Yet fact and fancy are all imaginatively invented, just as "history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation" (White 1978, 122). Young argues that "we find in metaphor, the countless ways it has been figured, coloured, distorted and ultimately cast as a figure for other events" (Young 1988, 89). Metaphor enables narratives to usurp the events that they would represent and this expands the horizons of unanticipated meanings in a work of art (Lang 2000). In past scholarship on genocide and cultural representation, a view that holds sway is that humanity can only know the *actual* by contrasting it with or likening it to the *imaginable*. This view must give way to the new conception of representations as artistic inventions through the imaginary (White 1978).

## Genocide, *The Stone Virgins* and the Creation of “Illicit Versions of the War”

*The Stone Virgins* is one of the earliest Zimbabwean novels to bear witness to the genocide in Matabeleland through metaphor. The novel rejects the archaic notion that literature or creative art cannot sufficiently represent genocide because of metaphor's tendency to stylise pain (Rosenfeld 1980). In fact, the novel openly accepts the ideological premise that thinking, conceiving and writing about genocide is already implicated in the metaphorical character of language (Young 1988). In *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Vera suggests that the roots of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) lay as far back as the 1950s when African women struggled to maintain some sort of cultural space in the face of the threat of colonialism. The author registers the changing perceptions of women, showing how they became part of a new urban popular culture defined by “bottles of Shield deodorant and Tomesai Shampoo. And Ponds” (2002, 23). Most historical accounts of African people's negative experiences under colonialism have been written from the perspective of male authors. Vera's literary account of black women in rural Matabeleland undermines the assumption that these women were mere observers in the making of Zimbabwean history. In the novel, black women who occupy the rural space sometimes move to the city and attempt to domesticate the city and adapt to the new city culture; Vera's women of the fifties display contradictory perceptions. In the city, the women feel entrapped by the new culture of the *ambi* generation (23).

Vera's novel complicates the picture of a Zimbabwean war narrative by refusing to depict it as a distinctly male affair, or largely a Shona-dominated Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) history. The efforts of Ndebele women coalesce into the liberation movement in which women participated side by side with men. This version of the events of the war interrogates patriarchal nationalism that appropriates for itself the role of liberators, with black women playing second fiddle. This account that foregrounds the positive roles of black women as freedom fighters in Zimbabwe's liberation war is often represented by African patriarchy as an illicit version of the war. Most women who went out for training to become military cadres in the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) and Zimbabwe People Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) were kept away from the war front (Nyamubaya 1996). *The Stone Virgins* puts women at the centre of its narrative consciousness as subjects of their histories that they were making. Vera contradicts the notion that literature grows in stature when it mimics conventional history. For example, conventional Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) history begins with the formation of ZAPU in 1961, progressing linearly into how that party was built into a huge guerrilla war machine, until the party began to train soldiers for a conventional war in 1978. This picture of “official” ZIPRA history is confirmed by Jeremy Brickhill (1995, 48–72) whose account of the ZIPRA war narrative dutifully follows ZANLA accounts in the ways it underplays the role of black women in that war. In contrast, *The Stone Virgins* remembers these two wars differently (Vera 2002, 82).

## Genocide and the Clash of Violent Masculinities in *The Stone Virgins*

Vera registers an acute awareness of the fragility of the Ndebele community between 1981 and 1986 in a manner that undercuts the discourse of war and peace popularised by the Mugabe government. This is done in the way in which the novel represents the torture of some individual Ndebele men by Mugabe's Fifth Brigade army trained in North Korea. Vera does not write *The Stone Virgins* as if she was present during the genocidal turbulences that rocked Matabeleland between 1981 and 1986. The author resorts to reported speech in describing the dislocation of the lives of the Ndebele people of Thandabantu by Mugabe's soldiers. Mugabe's soldiers abducted, "disappeared" and then murdered Ndebele men (Vera 2002, 123–24). Of the effects of the atrocities committed against Ndebele people by the Fifth Brigade soldiers, it is registered poignantly (Vera 2002, 123–24) that

some of the men who are missing in the village *are said* to have certainly died there, others, *it is said*, walked all the way from Kezi to Bulawayo ... having managed to escape, carrying with them the memory of a burning body and an impeccable flame. *Others insist* that nobody fled to Bulawayo.

Regarding the actual killing of an Ndebele businessman called Mahlathini, the novel says "those who witnessed the goings-on at Thandabantu on this night said Mahlathini howled like a helpless animal" (123). A pernicious harm of a genocidal war is that it destroys individuals who are most productive in a targeted group because they have power to regenerate the socio-economic fortunes of an ethnic group. Additionally, after the civilian population of Kezi refuses to submit and confess where the "dissidents" are, "soldiers shoot them, without preamble—they walked in and raised AK rifles: every shot was fatal" (121). The violence of Mugabe's soldiers reduces Kezi to "a naked cemetery" (143). In this account of how the new government transgressed, violated and killed its own people, with women suffering the most, Mugabe's government is depicted as a terrorist organisation. In this depiction, the triumphant and celebratory tone that marked the new leader's rule in the new nation is subverted and ridiculed.

Vera deploys the genre of reportage because of its ability to unravel potential discrepancies between facts outside the text and "reality" imaginatively constructed in the novel. Reportage also introduces a multiplicity of narrative voices, all vying to capture the problem of representing a genocidal war narrative that can never be complete when uttered from one side or position. The frailty of memory is a permanent feature of the oral mode within which reported speech is inscribed. Within the instability of the oral narrative suggested by the reported speech in the novel, the desire to represent ZANU/Shona "violence" against Ndebele as absolute and natural is contestable. *The Stone Virgins* necessitates a preliminary critique of the main actors in the genocidal war narratives it has constructed. Writing about the genocide that occurred in Zimbabwe was a punishable offence. *The Stone Virgins* insists on representing illicit versions of events considered taboo by the new nationalist leaders. These illicit versions perform

the function of undermining official claims that independence gained by black Africans in 1980 is experienced in the same manner amongst Zimbabwe's ethnic groups.

To countermand ZIPRA narratives that project Ndebele people as persecuted only by the Shona-led Mugabe government, *The Stone Virgins* contains individual oral testimonies from "dissidents." Sibaso, one of the "dissidents," projects himself and his comrades as absolute and helpless victims of what is in Matabeleland perceived as the brutality of the new leaders. However, this "dissident" war narrative is denied the privilege or monopoly of absolute "truth." Some Ndebele men also committed atrocities against Ndebele women. Sibaso is held responsible for murdering and mutilating the body of Thenjiwe (73), as well as raping Nonceba (62) who happens to be Thenjiwe's sister. Vera deploys the metaphor of a "cracked mirror" to distort Sibaso's narrative. When Sibaso looks at himself in the mirror he sees an apparition (71); "the mirror looked cracked. I could see my own broken face behind it" (76). To accentuate the brittleness of dissenting Ndebele male narratives, Sibaso is imaged as a "post-war spider, a hungry spider [that] is fragile like the membrane around dreams" (76). Associating Sibaso's war narrative with a "cracked mirror," "broken" face and "fragile" dreams is Vera's way of casting doubt on the authenticity of that narrative that emphasises victimhood, without revealing how the victims themselves had become killers of their own people (Mamdani 2001).

Ultimately, it is Ndebele women who in the novel appear to have suffered the most, first from colonial oppression, second from the Gukurahundi genocide and third from the violence meted out to them by men like Sibaso. Ndebele male narratives are denied the closure that these narratives might have wanted in order to impose themselves as the only absolute truth of what occurred in Matabeleland in the 1980s. Vera uses the narrative trope of the rhetoric of anxiety. Its essence is that it reveals the new Zimbabwe nation as fragile because the new leaders marginalise minorities and persecute those whose views the new leaders cannot live with. In Vera's rhetoric of anxiety archetypal images of suffering of the Ndebele communities during the Gukurahundi genocide are deployed. This enables Vera to upend an illicit version of war in order to transgress the ideology of nationalism that threatens to hollow out the aspirations of a significant segment of the people in the new Zimbabwean nation.

### **Anxieties of Narrative in *The Stone Virgins***

In *The Stone Virgins*, Vera seems aware of the arbitrary and artificial nature of metaphorical language. Through interpretation, metaphorical language can be stretched in different directions to yield values that are seldom homogeneous because it is in the nature or ethic of symbolical language to sometimes force readers to arrive at unexpected meanings. Representing evil requires an author to motivate the reasons that create the conditions of genocide. Vera refuses to describe the war of 1981 to 1986 as a civil war, or "dissident" menace. To do so would confirm the official account of genocide in Matabeleland as a product of ZAPU "malcontents" who, as the government-

controlled media described Ndebele people, are enemies of the state who deserve to be treated like beasts (*The Herald*, June 2, 1984). Vera also refuses to explain why that war took place, because that would lock her novel within the social science paradigm which emphasises causation, continuity and closure in the explanation of social reality. Lang (1990) notes that it is generally easier to find motivations of perpetrators than those of the victims due to the innate disposition arising from the decree of genocide pronounced against the victims. The refusal to dwell on the “historical causes” does of course mean that Vera might be de-historicising the war of 1981 to 1986. But it appears to be part of Vera’s rhetorical strategy in her fiction to rely extensively on creative invention. Literature creates its facts through imaginative invention that the fictional dimension of art alone can represent. Thus, in the novel, the triumphalist ZANU war narrative and post-war stability are deconstructed through the deployment of the metaphorical language that emphasises the carnivalesque that pokes the official “nose” by retelling stories that “violate” officially defined social boundaries of what should be contained in narrative utterances on Zimbabwe’s genocide.

The crisis of representing “evil” arises when Vera decides to creatively balance the suffering of Ndebele people on the one hand, and the hopefulness of Ndebele communities in the middle of a fratricidal war on the other. The military expedition of Mugabe’s soldiers in Matabeleland is represented by the desecration of the cultural life of Thandabantu. The soldiers’ actions in this theatre of war reveal a criminal intent that constitutes the violation of Matabeleland, an attempt at the “burying of memory” (Vera 2002, 59). Mugabe’s soldiers openly project their desire to permanently destroy the reproductive capacities within the Ndebele communities. In executing this objective dutifully, the new leaders turn out to be rogues or a gang of bandits because they use coercion to define the cultural life of the new nation. For most Ndebele people, although the nation is a source of new identities, the same nation paradoxically represses memories of the people of Matabeleland that it defines as dissident and cannot therefore exist with. The banality of the leaders’ power is revealed by the soldiers who carry out systematic torture to “intimidate, to kill, to extract confessions, to resurrect the dead” (124). Two soldiers chillingly force an Ndebele wife to axe her husband to save her two sons (80) from death. The brutal torture of Mahlathini (123) that leads to his death is described in ways that suggest that it is the new government that is illegitimate and consequently is made up of a band of bandits and not professional soldiers as the new leaders would like to portray them. Vera stockpiles images of suffering Ndebele people to shock humanity to act and stop the genocide on Ndebele people.

It is not easy to determine the extent to which Vera has restrained her creative imagination, as argued by Ranger (2002, 209). The genocidal war was planned, atrocious and represented purposeful (2002, 124) ethnic cleansing of the people of Matabeleland by a predominantly Shona government. This mode of depicting the conflict is actually meant to challenge the ZANU government’s claims that it was dealing with bandits and not dissidents. Bandits are considered to lack coherent political motivation, a fact that is used to justify dealing with them as one would deal with beasts.

However, Vera has not sufficiently differentiated the subjectivities of both Shona and Ndebele people in artistic perspective. Lang believes that representing genocide “affects the thought and life of readers [therefore,] the literary work and its author are morally accountable” (2000, 118). *The Stone Virgins* creates and validates a new Ndebele subaltern narrative predicated on what the author perceives as violence instigated by the Shona people against the Ndebele people. In this way, Vera might appear to be participating in the reinvention of ethnicity in order to project ethnic consciousness as part of the political imaginary of the new Zimbabwean nation. Furthermore, in Vera’s novel, Thenjiwe, Nonceba, Mahlathini and Sibaso all bear Ndebele names as if to suggest that there are no Shona people who were negatively affected by the genocide in Matabeleland. This ethical limitation in Vera’s womanist war narrative reveals that narratives of genocide contain ambiguities, “undisturbed histories” (2002, 50) and “burnt portions of . . . memory” (71), of pain and anger that they might fail to transcend.

The above criticism does not take away credit that is due to Vera for penning a novel that destabilises ZANU political hegemony. This subversion of official truths is performed through criticism of errant Shona cultural nationalism contained in the foundational Shona novel, *Feso* (1957), written by Solomon Mutswairo. *Feso* projects the First and Second *Zvimurengas* as distinctly Shona discourses of cultural nationalism. The mere existence of *The Stone Virgins*, its giving of voice to the “dissident” narrative, is the process by which the author transfers spiritual anchorage of the new nation to Bulawayo. The new nation that is to be installed at Lobengula’s kraal (Vera 2002, 165) needs to restore the past and the cultural symbols that will give this new nation form; this new nation is depicted as coming from Matabeleland. Here, Vera validates an Ndebele autochthonous patriarchal system “because the country needs heroes, and flags, and festivities” (4). The author finds heroines among black township women of Thandabantu. This also validates the positive roles Ndebele women have played during the struggle.

*The Stone Virgins* stages a reversal of roles between African women and men. In her novel it is the historical urgency of the African women, their memories of anger and pain and their desire for total freedom, that is emphasised. Women’s remembered war narratives and memories enter the novel, becoming *the* text that interrogates the “official” patriarchal war narrative. This revisionist sensibility in *The Stone Virgins* is effected so that it would take on board what the narrator describes as other “illicit versions of the war” (53). These illicit versions of the war are the novel’s inchoate but *probable* narratives that deny the novel interpretive closure. As the omniscient character says, to acknowledge that there are other narrative versions of the war is itself an act of refusing to bury the memory “[of] the bones [of Nehanda] rising” (59). This statement connects *The Stone Virgins* to *Bones* by Chenjerai Hove in which Nehanda prophesies that even when the colonialists kill her, her “bones” shall rise in the name of African women and men to avenge her death. *The Stone Virgins* concludes by narrating a different kind of war—one of healing and “delivery” between Cephaz Dube and Nonceba. In this new war of healing, the two are supportive of each other; they both



avoid defining the roles of each other in restrictive ways. However, the seeming contradictions in *The Stone Virgins* indicate that even the best-intentioned works of fiction might have some tensions that reflect the anxieties of working with the slipperiness of language in representing genocide.

## **Genocide, Remembrance and the Archetypal Image of Ndebele Suffering in *Running with Mother***

*Running with Mother* is a novel that recreates the atrocities which occurred in Matabeleland in the early years of Zimbabwe's independence after 1980. The novel is narrated by one Rudo Jamela, a Form Two girl from the village of Mbongolo. The narratives she authorises for herself and also on behalf of the people of Mbongolo and Dabulani villages are all marked by anxieties emanating from a condition described by Langer—writing in the context of the holocaust—as one of “innocent insecurity” (1975, 135). In *Running with Mother* Rudo's situation as an anxious narrator is induced by the naked force and brutal murder of her Ndebele family members which tear the veil of language that would have insulated her from witnessing the grotesque violence at such an early childhood. Beyond an ethnic narrative of Ndebele victimhood lie other anxious narratives in which women suffer the most and at the same time women attempt to patch up a quilt of family stories that tell of women's power to evoke love and compassion between the Shona and the Ndebele survivors. The first narrative that remembers the violations of Ndebele bodies is extraordinary in its attention to details that pertain to the pain that aesthetic language can make available to the reader.

The site of memories of the atrocities in the village of Mbongolo is marked on the human body, the space/environment, and the psyche. The atrocious war is described as an ethnic one pitting the Shona against the Ndebele. The soldiers in red berets said so: “The soldiers said they're just killing all the Ndebele people” (Mlalazi 2012, 17). In order to confirm the truth of this narrative of violence directed against an ethnic minority, Rudo witnesses soldiers holding a human hand belonging to Mr Mabhena (7). Violence is indexed differently in the text. At school where the soldiers have made a temporary jail, the humiliation of Ndebele families continues. The soldiers “made a jail with a fence of barbed wire in the middle of the football ground and put people inside it. Everyone is naked: men, women and children ... some people broke free and ran away. The soldiers shot them, several fell to the ground” (41). The ruthless campaign shifts from the school ground to the village of Mbongolo where soldiers also pillaged human life: Rudo's uncles Genesis and Frances are forced into a hut and burnt alive. Rudo saw “a mass of human bodies, burnt together: charred limbs, bones shining white in the moonlight and defaced skulls. The stench of burnt flesh was intense” (27). As Rudo, Mother and Auntie run away to hide from the soldiers, they encounter evidence of destruction in the forest near the river: “a naked body was floating towards us” (70). And its head was decapitated (79):

Turning a bend, with an exclamation of horror she moved quickly towards a body that lay half in and half out of the water, its head stuck in a clump of bushes. We drew nearer and recoiled when we realised that it had no head.

The stockpiling of images of destroyed lives is meant to underline the vulnerability of the people of Ndebele stock. As Mother, Rudo and Auntie run towards the Phezulu mountains, they also come across the body of Miss Grant, a white woman who had been raped and shot (130). While Rudo, Mother and Auntie are forced to retreat to the Phezulu mountains, they also encounter teachers from Mbongolo village who escaped death. Rudo's teachers are naked and in a bad state; they look dehumanised and humiliated to a point where they have lost respect and look like spirits (50). As Mother, Rudo and Auntie find refuge in a cave in the Phezulu mountains, danger is never far away from them. First, the teachers tell them the destruction of human life has now moved from Mbongolo to Dabulani village where soldiers are burning people alive. To further desecrate Ndebele lives, the soldiers were "making neighbours kill neighbours" and "forcing men to rape their neighbours' wives with their children watching" (130). Some of the Ndebele men who were not killed were forced to dig mass graves into which the Ndebele dead were thrown (129). When these graves were full and could not accommodate any new dead, the helicopter made several journeys from Dabulani village towards Saphela mine where more dead Ndebele people were thrown into the mine shafts (131). The banality of the soldiers' actions of killing innocent people is revealed through euphemistic language. Soldiers describe the Ndebele dissidents as "weeds and trash" (138) and the process of killing is even described as exhausting. The soldiers are often forced to go to Bulawayo to rest before coming back into Mbongolo to continue with the task of killing. Comrade Finish, the leader of soldiers who commit atrocities in Mbongolo, confesses that they would also go "to the city for a day or two to get some rest" (139). The soldiers believe that they are "on national duty and we don't want anything to disturb us, not even our fellow tribespeople or their children" (139).

The ethnic narrative in *Running with Mother* that has been sketched above accomplishes several things. First, mostly Ndebele are singled out as the victims, but the anxieties of this narrative manifest in that some Shona people such as Uncle Ngoro are also killed by the soldiers (137). Nyambi (2012, 1) believes that the Ndebele ethnic narrative of being persecuted by the new black government's soldiers under the new prime minister is a manifestation of patriarchy competing for power during and after a "masculinised violent liberation war." Second, the violence unleashed by the soldiers is committed against men, women and children, in a way destabilising the assumption that there is any one single gender that suffered more than the other. Third, the ethnic narrative refuses to give motive to the soldiers' or dissidents' actions that ended up affecting the lives of ordinary people. Neither do the government soldiers explain to the Ndebele masses why the soldiers were killing the masses. It is possible, as Langer argues, that "in most literature of atrocity, the specific forces behind the suffering of the victims are as anonymous as they themselves are destined to become" (Langer 1975, 164). The

ethnic narrative of genocide gives voice to the Ndebele people. However, Palumbo-Liu (1996, 211) observes, what the narrative does is to present itself as a

subversive revision of the dominant version of history; it gives voice to a text muted by the dominant historical referents; and it makes possible an imaginative invention of a self beyond the limits of the historical representations available to the ethnic subject.

But in *Running with Mother*, the “historical representations available to the ethnic subject” are never entirely allowed to stabilise and sediment as the only narrative that the novel authorises. The novel also revises the collective ethnic memory first to reflect and depict the suffering that is unique to Ndebele women. Nyambi agrees when the critic writes that the masculinised, violent liberation war created “post-war gendered political power configurations bordering on political misogyny” (Nyambi 2012, 1). In *Running with Mother* the representations of black womanhood are differentiated. The novel resists the official government narrative that painted the 1980s as an era of political bliss (Vambe 2008) and does this by giving form to the archetypal image of young black and Ndebele women as victims of rape during the Gukurahundi genocide in the Mbongolo and Dabulani villages recreated in the novel.

### **The Archetypal Metaphor of Rape in *Running with Mother***

Right at the beginning of the novel, it is not only the likes of Headman Mabhena who are victimised by the soldiers. Young Ndebele women are preyed upon by the soldiers. Rudo tells the reader that her friends who were Ndebele were sexually molested by the soldiers and then probably killed as it is never revealed what became of them or where their bodies were dumped. Where Rudo is spared by the soldiers because she has a Shona name since her parents were Shona and Ndebele, Rudo’s Ndebele friends meet a horrifying fate. First, the violation of Ndebele girls takes on a physical dimension. Rudo says: “Nobuhle and the other girls were now grabbed by the soldiers, as if they were also going to have hands cut off. Nobuhle was still screaming” (Mlalazi 2012, 9). And then, the commander unleashes his soldiers, who ravage the girls (10):

The girls were naked, without underwear. The soldiers must have torn their school uniforms off, as I saw them lying on the road, though one was hanging forlornly on a bush. As I looked back, the soldier in the reading glasses raised his hand, there was an explosion and I found myself lying on the ground for the second time that afternoon.

Narratives of remembered rape, murder and bombing of Ndebele girls act as an archive that approximates how the genocidal war was experienced. The instituting imagery of the genocide narrative inheres in the fact that it suggests that how one dies in a war context matters. This narrative of the rape of Ndebele girls tells the story of physical harm and despoliation and depicts Ndebele girls as underdogs in a war that the girls have not started. Rape is an instrument of torture and humiliation, and physical annihilation is the final expression of the harm that defines genocide, particularly when that violence is targeted at a minority group. Regarding the targeting of Ndebele women,

Rudo suggests that their death was not a form of collateral damage; violence was willed on them as is seen with what happened to Uncle Genesis's wife, MaDube (27):

Uncle Genesis had had a family of six. At last only one body remained on the floor. It was not as burnt as the others had been. Its upper body was still intact, and I clearly saw the face. It was Auntie MaDube, Uncle Genesis's wife. She was lying on sheets of asbestos.

Auntie MaDube was murdered by the soldiers; she also lost her daughter Sithabile. Auntie MaDube was forced to leave a baby boy named Gift. The narrative of the rape of Ndebele women depicted in *Running with Mother* reveals that there is no one memory of the genocide in Mbongolo and Dabulani villages, but several. The Ndebele women bore the brunt of the genocidal war, doubly dying (Rosenfeld 1980) in the sense that before they were finally murdered, they were raped first. In other words, unlike Ndebele men who were shot on sight, Ndebele women went through harrowing experiences and their bodies became the site of different memories of the violence of war. The tragic experiences of Ndebele women challenge the dominant narratives of the soldiers that defined the women as dissidents or wives of dissidents. The ironic perspective that Rudo's narrative of the suffering of Ndebele women during the genocide brings complicates the patriarchal Ndebele narrative in which the war is viewed as one based on the Shona nationalism bent on suppressing Ndebele male identity. The emphasis on mythologising the past becomes a trap for women within which attempts to alter traditional roles are often taken as attempts to subvert ethnicity itself.

*Running with Mother* questions the ideology of ethnicity that projects the genocide in Matabeleland as targeting Ndebele people only. This interrogation is done through the depiction of the murder of Uncle Ndoro by Mugabe's soldiers. Uncle Ndoro is Shona. Like Mother, Uncle Ndoro bears a role-based name. He originates from Chisara in Mashonaland East, although he works in Matabeleland. Mother is Shona and Rudo is hybrid, having been born of a Shona mother and an Ndebele father. This ambiguous identity determines the different ways in which Mother and Rudo experienced the genocidal war in Matabeleland and the novel is very keen to depict the contradictory way in which non-Ndebele women coped during the genocidal war recreated in the novel. It is Mother who remobilises and glues together the fragmented Ndebele community in the novel. She feeds her dead husband's relatives while hiding from Mugabe's soldiers in the mountains. Mother's role is associated with resourcefulness. She is able to play the mother-figure to Ndebele characters who have been mentally deranged by the genocide. Mother's narrative does not displace the suffering of Ndebele people; her narrative shows that even in the most agonistic and hostile circumstances, the best of humanity will retain semblances of cultural values with which to connect to the victimised Ndebele community. This might facilitate though not entirely heal the wounds of war in many Ndebele surviving families. However, Mother is constantly reaching out to Ndebele characters, signalling the possibilities of lasting reconciliation between Shona and Ndebele people in the future. This said, Mother is not cast as larger

than life; she has her moments of fear, and moral uncertainties. This suggests she, too, was psychologically disoriented by the genocidal war in Matabeleland. A post genocide and war context enables the two Zimbabwean authors to opt to represent suffering and the will to live. This is the essence of what I called the rhetoric of anxiety. Additionally, the authors' narratives of genocide have tended to emphasise the tentative and the contingent over narratives of absolute truths. This is what I referred to as the anxiety of the rhetorical narratives that represent genocidal war.

## Conclusion

The main aim of this article was to explore representations of the Matabeleland genocide and how women remember it in Zimbabwe. Two creative texts, *The Stone Virgins* and *Running with Mother*, were analysed. It was demonstrated that Yvonne Vera and Christopher Mlalazi are creative authors who chose to bear witness to the genocide in Zimbabwe in the 1980s through metaphor. In so doing, the authors joined some world authors for whom it is archaic to argue that fiction should not represent genocide because a metaphor adds its own content to the events of genocide. The authors rejected the romantic and patronising notion that only those who participated in the genocide as either soldiers or victims could write about the way women experienced genocidal war. The article embraced the realistic view that the metaphorical nature of language makes it possible to think, conceive and write creative narratives about genocide. This assumption meant that the article rejected the idea of opposing fiction to history because literature does not grow in stature when it approximates the protocols of representation used in conventional history textbooks. The article then showed that *The Stone Virgins* engaged the masculine, cultural nationalist narratives authorised by men who are ZANU and ZIPRA political leaders and criticised these men because they were violent towards Ndebele women in the liberation struggle and during the Gukurahundi period in post-independence Zimbabwe.

*The Stone Virgins* produced a narrative in which Ndebele people, both men and women, were the only people at the receiving end of state-sponsored violence in the 1980s in Matabeleland. The novel went further to show that male Ndebele former guerrillas also passed on their violence to Ndebele women who are depicted through the archetypal images of rape and murder. As a creative act of "refusing to forget" (Bull-Christiansen 2004, 87), *The Stone Virgins* remembers and privileges an ethnic Ndebele narrative. This is Vera's way of putting the voice of the marginalised at the centre of Zimbabwe's narratives of belonging and citizenship.

*Running with Mother* produced multiple narratives of how women experience genocide. The first narrative was constructed as an Ndebele ethnic narrative in which Ndebele women and men suffered aggression from a Shona-dominated army during the Gukurahundi genocide in the 1980s. However, the novel revised this narrative and inserted a subversive narrative in which Ndebele women more than Ndebele men doubly suffered as they were subjected to rape and murder by the soldiers in post-independence

Zimbabwe. Beyond a creative affirmation of representing the rhetoric of anxiety arising from the suffering of the Ndebele people in the Gukurahundi genocide, *Running with Mother* refused to end by limiting itself to the construction of an Ndebele-only experience of suffering. The novel's informing or central narrative represented the misfortunes of a Shona woman in the character of Mother and her hybrid daughter, Rudo. This focalisation of the physical and emotional vicissitudes of a Shona woman does not displace the inordinate suffering of Ndebele women. Rather, this depiction confirms Gaidzanwa's (1985) critical observation that Zimbabwean authors have written showing the immeasurable depths of the suffering of women.

Nonceba in *The Stone Virgins* and Mother in *Running with Mother* emerge out of their sad experiences scarred and yet emboldened to make Zimbabweans aware that there are alternative images of womanhood. Nonceba demands respect from men like Cephas in post-independence Zimbabwe, while Mother authorises a discourse of community healing and reconciliation between Ndebele and Shona people. Despite these representations of positive womanhood in the two novels, the authors refuse to seal with closure the endings of their novels. This rejection of creating female characters that appear to command all the power over their bodies at all times demonstrates the anxieties of narrating genocidal experiences where no certainties are guaranteed. Nonceba and Mother remain vigilant and it is this open-endedness in their understanding of the fragility of their memories of the genocide that makes them aware of their new roles that represent forces of positive social change.

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