

**Sites of remembrance and forgetting: New media (re)constructions of  
distinct Ndebele collective memory and history in the context of hegemonic  
Zimbabwean Nationalism**

By

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## **DECLARATION**

By submitting this thesis electronically, I declare that the entirety of the work contained therein is my own, original work, that I am the sole author thereof (save to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), that reproduction and publication thereof by Stellenbosch University will not infringe any third party rights and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory and history in the context of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. Situated within the overlapping fields of cultural studies, journalism and media studies, the research explores the possibilities of news websites as liberatory spaces for ethnic minorities, such as the Ndebele people, to recollect, mediate and circulate their historical narratives that have been marginalised and suppressed in the dominant nationalist spheres. Given that new media have been lauded as counter-hegemonic sites that promote political participation, civic engagement and social change, this study contributes to these scholarly engagements by examining how Ndebele people are appropriating three news websites (*Newzimbabwe.com*, *Bulawayo24.com* and *Umthwakazireview.com*) to resurrect, preserve and commemorate their repressed historical memories. In focusing on a Ndebele community that is haunted by traumatic memories of the state-orchestrated post-colonial violence, this study probes how new media are empowering the subjugated communities to recount, mediate and share their memories of past events that remain occluded, repressed and criminalised in official discourses.

This research is premised on a social constructionist understanding that the media do not reflect a reality “out there”, but rather construct our knowledge of the social world. Drawing upon theoretical insights from cultural studies, this study examines how Ndebele communities employ new media artefacts to construct, in other words, their lived experiences, and to reconstruct their historical imaginations. This study is framed within a qualitative methodology, as the aim was to explore meaning-making practices in cyberspace. The Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA), a strand of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), was selected as a method for analysing how language use serves to reproduce and challenge asymmetrical power relations amongst social groups. Data was selected purposively from three news websites, and genres such as editorials, opinion pieces, discussion forums, YouTube videos and readers’ comments were analysed to make sense of the reconstructions of Ndebele public memories. The research findings indicate that Ndebele people are employing new media to recollect, preserve and transmit their pre-colonial and post-colonial memories in ways that not only repudiate hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism, but also contribute to the resurgence of Ndebele secessionist imaginations. Thus, new media are sites of memory that are not only transforming and democratising the processes of narrating, preserving and disseminating historical memories, but also are reinvigorating and heightening Ndebele nationalism.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek konstruksies van Ndebele- kollektiewe herinneringe en geskiedenis in nuwemedia-tekste teen die agtergrond van hegemoniese Zimbabwiese Nasionalisme. Die studie is geposisioneer in die oorvleuelende velde van kultuurstudies, joernalistiek en media-studies ten einde die moontlikheid te ondersoek dat internetwebwerwe kan optree as bevrydende ruimtes vir etniese minderhede, soos die Ndebele, waar historiese narratiewe wat in die dominante nasionale areas gemarginaliseer en onderdruk is, versamel, bemiddel en versprei kan word. Hierdie studie dra by tot aktuele akademiese debatte deur ondersoek in te stel na hoe Ndebeles gebruik maak van drie nuus-webwerwe, naamlik *Newzimbabwe.com*, *Bulawayo24.com* en *Umthwakazireview.com*, om hulle onderdrukte historiese herinneringe te laat ontwaak, bewaar en gedenk. Deur te fokus op die Ndebele-gemeenskap, by wie traumatiese herinneringe van staatsgeorkestreerde postkoloniale geweld spook, probeer hierdie studie vasstel hoe nuwe media onderdrukte gemeenskappe kan bemagtig.

Die navorsing is gebaseer op 'n sosiaal konstruksionistiese begrip dat die media nie die realiteit “daar buite” weerkaats nie, maar eerder ons kennis van die sosiale wêreld konstrueer. Deur te put uit teoretiese insigte van kultuurstudies, ondersoek die studie hoe die Ndebele-gemeenskap artefakte in nuwe media gebruik om sin te maak van hulle ondervindinge en om hul historiese verbeelding te herkonstrueer.

Die navorsingsontwerp is kwalitatief omdat die doel was om die konstruksie van betekenis in die kuberruimte te ondersoek. Die diskoers-historiese benadering, 'n variasie van kritiese diskoersanalise, is gebruik om vas te stel hoe taalgebruik funksioneer om ongelyke magsverhoudings tussen sosiale groepe te reproduseer en uit te daag. Data is doelbewus van die drie nuus-webwerwe geselekteer, en genres soos redaksionele kommentaar, meningstukke, gespreksforums, YouTube-video's en leserskommentaar is ontleed om sin te maak van die rekonstruksies van die openbare herinneringe van Ndebeles.

Die bevindings dui aan dat Ndebeles die nuwemedia-platforms gebruik om pre- en post-koloniale herinneringe te versamel, te bewaar en te versprei op wyses wat nie slegs die hegemoniese Zimbabwiese Nasionalisme uitdaag nie, maar ook lei tot die herlewing van Ndebele- separatistiese verbeeldings. Die nuwe media verskaf dus plekke van herinnering wat nie net die prosesse van vertelling, bewaring en verspreiding van historiese verbeelding demokratiseer nie, maar ook aan Ndebele- kollektiewe bewussyn nuwe energie en stukrag verleen.

## DEDICATION

In loving memory of my niece, Zinhle Ncube, and my nephew, Methembe Ndlovu. You left this world too soon.

“They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old:

Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning,

We will remember them” - Laurence Binyon

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

*The 'I' who writes here must also be thought of as, itself, 'enunciated'. We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context', positioned (Hall, 1990:222).*

### 1.1 Motivation

Zelizer (2010: vii) observes that our choices of research undertakings “rarely stray from the personal”. In the same vein, this scholarly project is a product of a combination of encounters, interactions and experiences that have shaped my understanding of the social world. Born and raised in Matabeleland, Zimbabwe, I am an isiNdebele-speaking subject whose childhood years, like that of most young people of my generation, were marked by an unequivocal quest for an identity. I remember vividly how the history and collective memory of Ndebele people became ingrained in our everyday lives. Most importantly, these stories handed down to us were contributing to shaping our perceptions of the social world and our relations with others. However, it must be noted that these narratives of the past were far from being stable, but rather were fraught with ambiguities and contradictions. On one hand, I was intrigued by the tales of the heroic exploits of our pre-colonial Ndebele forefathers; but on the other hand, I was grappling with the depictions of the Ndebele people as “raiders” and “invaders” – narratives that were predominant in our history textbooks at secondary school. Also, I was struck by the silences and whispers that were embedded in the discourses on the post-colonial violence in Matabeleland. Confronted with these conflicting historical accounts and untold stories, I began to ponder the complexities and ambiguities of the recollection of past events. Positioned within the positivist epistemological camp,<sup>1</sup> I contemplated discovering the “Truth” about Ndebele past events. At that moment, I was searching for an objective, essential, universal and unquestionable truth about past events. However, there was to be a rupture in my conceptualisation of social reality.

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<sup>1</sup> The epistemological debates are covered extensively in the theoretical framework and methodology chapters.

The year 2005 was a defining moment in my life – I enrolled for an honours degree in journalism and media studies at the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) in Zimbabwe. This was a turning point not only in mapping my academic path but, more importantly, in grounding and shaping my theoretical and methodological positions. Further, my interests in Ndebele history and memory were to become aligned with the interlocking fields of journalism and media studies. In 2011 I registered for a Master's programme in journalism and media studies at Rhodes University. Consequently, I gained various theoretical insights into cultural studies, representation, ideology and the broader debates on the role of the media in society. In addition, a new world, in the form of constructionism as a research paradigm, opened up for me, and I became aware of the socially constructed meanings of reality. Gradually, I discarded my deep-rooted assumptions about an objective history that I had hoped to excavate. In lieu of quashing my enthusiasm about history and collective memory, new possibilities for academic inquiry emerged as I became drawn to media texts and representation. Given the centrality of the media in mediating our collective experiences (Lewis, 2008:4; Thompson, 1995:34), I contemplated investigating how memories of Ndebele past events are being forged, negotiated, contested and circulated in the media. At the same time, I was aware that any study of the media and representation of past events needed to be located within the broader socio-historical setting, as there are various structures, discursive practices and processes involved in the production and distribution of historical narratives.

Increasingly, various questions were posed as I tried to make sense of this phenomenon. Which Ndebele past events are remembered, by whom and for what purposes? How are these historical events narrativised? What are the roles of the media in the processes of mediating and negotiating the meanings of the collective past? How are the official narratives reproduced and legitimated in the media? In what way are these dominant representations resisted and undermined by counter-narratives? Lastly, how are these historical imaginations shaping ethnic consciousness and national identities? In the light of the euphoria and the liberatory rhetoric being flaunted about new media (Mano & Willems, 2010:183), and the silencing of Ndebele memories in official discourses (Eppel, 2004:47; Lindgren, 2002:52), I was persuaded to interrogate new media as sites of remembrance for the Ndebele community. Thus, this study explores how new media are enabling Ndebele people to recount their subjugated pre-colonial narratives and to recollect their traumatic memories of the post-colonial violence, in ways that not only challenge the dominant Zimbabwean nationalist imaginations, but also reinforce Ndebele separatist longings. Considering that violence spanning across different historical

epochs has shaped the ways in which people in Matabeleland remember their collective past (Alexander, McGregor & Ranger, 2000:1), this is a timely scholarly project that explores the ways in which Ndebele memories are created, negotiated and shaped on news websites. With Matabeleland separatist politics on the rise (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:50), and hence the dangers that these secessionist calls could lead to a violent conflict, it is fitting that this research investigates how new media are invoking historical memories in ways that animate Ndebele identity politics.

## 1.2 Research problem

The effectiveness of new media technologies in facilitating political participation and creating social change is hotly contested (Wasserman, 2011:146). By “new media”, this study refers to the digital media that promote user engagement with media texts, and these include internet websites and social media like YouTube, Twitter and Facebook (Logan, 2010:7) (see section 4.3 for an extensive discussion of new media). This debate on new media is hinged on whether to highlight the “structural limitations” of new media, or to focus on the “agency of its users” (Wasserman, 2011:147). Consequently, there has been a stark division between “cyber-pessimists” and “cyber-optimists” (Mudhai, 2004:313; Norris, 2000:279). In the early 1990s, the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) were perceived as “heralding a new era for African democracy” (Wasserman, 2011:148). It is in the light of this that Atton and Mabweazara (2011:667) posit that many “utopian predictions” have been postulated about new technologies in Africa. This celebratory rhetoric stems from an assumption that these technologies can “increase political participation and pave the way for a democratic utopia” (Papacharissi, 2004:379). With various technical features, such as multi-mediality, interactivity and hyper-textuality, there has been an overarching conviction that online media have a democratic potential (Mabweazara, Mudhai & Whittaker, 2014:4). In addition, it is argued that the normative ideals of traditional journalism are being challenged by the participatory cultures of new media (Lewis, Kaufhold & Lasorsa, 2010:163). Within this new media culture, the boundaries are blurred between the producers and the audiences, as the public are now able to actively participate “in the creation of the media landscape” (Hermida & Thurman, 2008:343). Needless to say, various assumptions have been postulated in relation to the interface between new media and identity politics. Some scholars argue that the Internet can be used as a tool by groups such as cultural minorities and social movements for political expression, mobilisation and empowerment (Wasserman, 2005:164; Norris, 2000:279). The argument is that new media

are entrenched in the surge of collective identities, inducing movements of resistance that result in discontinuities and fragmentation within nation-states (Castells, 2010:2; Webster, 2006:110). In addition, it is asserted that technological innovations have transformed the processes of remembering the past as communities are appropriating new technologies to identify with a collective past (Diptee & Trotman, 2012:4; Haskins, 2007:401). Thus, acting as a “vehicle of memory” (Haskins, 2007:401), the Internet has revolutionised the processes of collecting, preserving and circulating the meanings of the past events (Diptee & Trotman, 2012:4). Consequently, the Internet has provided the subjugated communities not only with a space to access and share a wide range of information, but also an arena for these social groups to rearticulate and reconstruct their historical imaginations (Diptee & Trotman, 2012:4; Bird, 2011:90). In view of this democratic potential offered by new media, it is fitting to examine the various ways in which citizens are being empowered to dislodge the hegemonic historical narratives, and imagine their own histories. Considering that some African post-colonial nation-states are being challenged by the marginalised minority ethnic polities imagining their own histories and memories (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Mhlanga, 2013:15; Davidson, 1992:10), it is appropriate to examine how these sentiments are manifesting in cyberspace.

Various scholars acknowledge the centrality of ethnicity in shaping the political landscape and processes of many African countries (Cocodia, 2008:9; Berman, Eyoh & Kymlicka, 2004a:8; Vail, 1989: xi). Zimbabwe is not different from other African countries, as ethnicity is a salient force that remains one of the challenges to the survival of the nation-state (Mhlanga, 2013:48; Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:275). At the heart of this ethnic question is the challenge of forging nationhood within Africa’s multi-ethnic nation-states (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:168; Adebajo, 2005:83; Mazrui, 1994:60). The tensions in these post-colonial African states have been exacerbated by the nation-building strategies that suppress the identities and memories of minority ethnic groups in an attempt to create homogeneous nation-states (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:168; Berman *et al.*, 2004a:14; Bulcha, 1997:325). As such, the struggle of these disenfranchised groups to resuscitate and reconstruct their repressed identities, histories and memories has become a common feature in multi-ethnic African states (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Mhlanga, 2013:15; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:168).

The resurgent (re)constructions of Ndebele memories and narratives are countering the hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism propagated by the ruling party, the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) PF (Mlambo, 2013:51; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:4). This hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism is a nationalist-inspired imagination of a “monolithic” nation that



promotes a partisan nationalist historiography from the perspective of the dominant Shona group (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:51; 2008b:168; Bhebe & Ranger, 1995:6). The plight of the Ndebele people in the south-western part of Zimbabwe is known as the “Matabeleland Question” or “Ndebele Particularism” (K. Moyo, 2009; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:39). This entails a rendition of a distinct Ndebele history that is different from the triumphant Shona historical imaginations in which the Zimbabwean nation-state is anchored (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:39). In the light of Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2008b:190) assertion that Ndebele Particularism is recurring in cyberspace, as Ndebele-speaking groups in the diaspora are invoking their histories and memories to construct their virtual nation, this study examines the nature and form of Ndebele Particularism that is being reconstructed in new media. I explore how pre-colonial and post-colonial Ndebele memories are invoked in cyberspace to reconstruct a particularistic identity that challenges hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalistic discourses. The term “particularism” is understood as a cultural claim that rejects and denies all forms of universalisms (Wallerstein, 2004:513).

In the light of these debates on the condition of post-colonial Africa, this study examines the (re)constructions of past events on three Zimbabwean news websites, focusing on how members of the Ndebele community attempt to reclaim their histories using cyberspace and new and social media. The three news websites, *Newzimbabwe.com*, *Bulawayo24.com* and *Umthwakazireview.com*, were selected because they provide a space for the resurgence of discourses on Ndebele memory.

### **1.3 Socio-historical background of the study**

Matabeleland province is inhabited predominantly by the Ndebele people, who constitute about twenty percent of Zimbabwe’s population (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b: iii). Although twenty percent is the official figure in Zimbabwe, I am aware of the problem of statistics in a contested area such as Matabeleland, as Ndhlovu (2007:131) and Anderson (1991:168) reveal that a census is a political exercise. The Shona constitute the dominant ethnic group and reside, in the main, in Mashonaland province (Ndhlovu, 2006:306). The Shona people (and the Ndebele) are not necessarily homogeneous groupings in all respects, but rather socially constructed formations subjected to internal divisions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:39). Although the term “Shona” connotes a cluster of various tribes speaking similar dialects (Vambe, 1972: xxiii), there are struggles amongst these sub-ethnicities (Ranger, 1989a:118). Similarly, there are

various interpretations and contestations of who constitute the Ndebele people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:35; Lindgren, 2002:52).

The origins of Ndebele identity can be traced to the pre-colonial era, when Mzilikazi Khumalo, the founder of the Ndebele Kingdom, broke away from the Zulu Kingdom in 1820 with a small group of Nguni-speaking people, settling in the south-western part of the Zimbabwean plateau in 1840 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:11; Lindgren, 2005a:155; 2002:52). The term “Ndebele” connotes a conglomerate of diverse groups, as Mzilikazi created a multi-ethnic state comprising the Nguni-speaking people from Zululand (AbeZansi), the groups incorporated en route, such as the Tswana and Sotho (AbeNhla), and the Rozvi groups conquered in the Zimbabwean plateau (AmaHoli) (Mlambo, 2013:55; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:160; Lindgren, 2005a:156). Although the Ndebele state was heterogeneous, it also operated along a caste system, as the Nguni stratum was regarded as the “pure” Ndebele (Lindgren, 2005a:156). As such, Ndebele ethnicity needs to be viewed as socially constructed, rather than a “fixed primordial” identity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:28; 2008b:181). Thus, it is characterised by “complexities, contradictions and ambiguities” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:6). In Chapter 3 I provide a deeper analysis of these fissures and complexities as they are shaping the collective remembrances of the past.

As the constructions of Ndebele identity span the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:154), it is important to briefly explore the historical processes and encounters that have shaped the contested narratives of the Ndebele people. Firstly, there is the colonially propagated narrative that demonises the pre-colonial Ndebele people as cruel warriors and savages, who survived on raiding the defenceless Shona community (Barnes, 2004:142; Lindgren, 2002:52). Secondly, there is the subordination of Ndebele history, memory and heroes to triumphant and hegemonic Shona history in the national narrative (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:188). The Zimbabwean historiography is selective, as it privileges the liberation role of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and silences the history of the contribution of the liberation war by the Zimbabwe African People’s Union (ZAPU) (Fontein, 2010:430; Raftopoulos, 1999:130; Robins, 1996:74). ZAPU was formed in 1961, with Joshua Nkomo as one of its prominent leaders (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:281). However, this movement split in 1963, leading to the subsequent formation of ZANU, which concentrated its recruitment in Mashonaland and was led by figures such as Ndabaningi Sithole, Robert Mugabe and Leopold Takawira (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:31; Nkomo, 1984:117). The split of ZAPU in 1963 was a defining moment that had far-

reaching implications on the prospect of building a cohesive Zimbabwean “nation” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:36; Masunungure, 2006:4). It is important to explore the complexities surrounding this “grand split” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:36), as they are shaping new media discourses of Ndebele Particularism. The causes for the split of ZAPU and the formation of ZANU are widely contested by various scholars. Although there are different interpretations of the incident, it is acknowledged that a core Shona-speaking group, which included Leopold Takawira and Robert Mugabe, rebelled against the leadership of an Ndebele-speaking Joshua Nkomo to form the ZANU movement (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:281).

Scholars such as Msindo (2007:290) reject the ethnic interpretation of the split, as they argue that the rupture within the nationalist movement was caused by “personality differences and the struggle for power”, rather than by “ethnic enmity”. Sachikonye (2011:3) concurs that it was power struggles rather than ethnicity that caused the nationalist rift. However, other scholars foreground the ethnic dimension as they assert that the split polarised the nationalist struggle along ethnic fault-lines, and reinforced “Ndebele” and “Shona” ethnicities (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011; Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007). Within this nationalist struggle, which was bifurcated along ethnic fault-lines, ZANU became predominantly a Shona camp, whilst ZAPU became associated with the Ndebele-speaking people in Matabeleland (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:38; 2008a:44; Du Toit, 1995:214). There were further ethnic struggles within these political formations in the 1970s, which pitted Ndebeles and Kalangas against Shonas in ZAPU, and involved the struggles amongst the Shona sub-ethnicities (Karanga, Manyika, Zezuru, and Korekore) in ZANU (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:281-282; Nkomo, 1984:159). Masipula Sithole’s notion of “struggles within the struggle” (cited in Mlambo, 2013:63; Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:282; Du Toit, 1995:213) encapsulates the divisive nature of ethnic politics within the nationalist movement. Given this explosive ethnic politics, some scholars have concluded that Zimbabwe was “born with a very bad ethnic birthmark” that undermined the vision of building a unitary nation (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:282).

Although the split of ZAPU and the subsequent birth of ZANU in 1963 reinforced Ndebele-Shona cleavages (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:185), the two movements projected themselves in an inclusive nationalist orientation transcending ethnic identities (Mlambo, 2013:58; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2010:194). But this projection of unity was seriously undermined by the fourth and most recent encounter that has shaped the contested narratives of the Ndebele people: the Gukurahundi atrocities that “heightened the victims’ awareness of being Ndebele

and at the cost of being Zimbabwean” (Lindgren, 2005b:158). Gukurahundi is a Shona expression meaning the “rain that washes away the chaff from the last harvest, before the spring rains” (CCJP & LRF, 2007: xiii; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:22). In the political context, the term Gukurahundi connotes the state-sanctioned violence that resulted in the death of at least 20 000 Ndebele-speaking civilians in Matabeleland and parts of the Midlands, when the ZANU government deployed the Fifth Brigade military unit to stamp out a “dissident” movement in the 1980s (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:168; CCJP & LRF, 2007:1). Although the violence ended in 1987 with the signing of the Unity Accord between ZANU PF and PF ZAPU (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:31; Sithole & Makumbe, 1997:134), the scale and impact of the atrocities are yet to be acknowledged by the state officials (Fontein, 2010:429; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:153; Eppel, 2004:47). As a result, the official silence on the Gukurahundi is “devastating” (Robins, 1996:73), and the people of Matabeleland have been “forced to live with their silenced memories of horror and fear” (Eppel, 2004:46).

This study is also situated within the context of the “Zimbabwean crisis”, as the displaced Ndebele-speaking groups are linking up via the Internet to imagine an autonomous Ndebele nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:190). By “Zimbabwean crisis”, this study means the political, economic and humanitarian upheavals that marred the country in the late 1990s, resulting in the displacement of many Zimbabweans (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012: ix; Muzondidya, 2010:5; Raftopoulos, 2009:202). Various scholars acknowledge the complexities and multifaceted nature of the “Zimbabwean crisis” (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012; T. Ndlovu, 2012; Raftopoulos, 2009; Hammar & Raftopoulos, 2003). This crisis manifested in numerous ways, such as the struggles over land and property rights, debates over the meanings of nationhood and citizenship, questions of human rights abuses and constitutional violations, and the anti-imperialist and Pan-African discourses (Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012:ix; Muzondidya, 2010; Raftopoulos, 2009:202; 2004; Hammar & Raftopoulos, 2003). Further, there is scholarship that evokes the discourses of Pan-Africanism to celebrate ZANU PF hegemonic nationalist narratives as a counter to Western neo-imperialism (Moyo & Yeros, 2007). However, this particular study focuses on the slippery and fluid concept of ethnicity, and hence draws attention to the ways in which the Zimbabwean “crisis” re-animated and reconfigured debates on national identity, belonging, citizenship, or “Zimbabweanness” (Mlambo, 2013:62; Chiumbu & Musemwa, 2012:ix; T. Ndlovu, 2012:100; Mano & Willems, 2010:183).

Some professional journalists fled the country and established news websites as alternative public spaces “countering the government propaganda churned through the state-controlled

media” (Moyo, 2007:90). These news websites constitute what has come to be known in the Zimbabwean landscape as the “diasporic media” (Mpofu, 2013:115; Moyo, 2007:81). The three websites being studied are hosted from outside Zimbabwe. *Newzimbabwe.com*, launched in 2003 (Moyo, 2007:92), was selected for this study because it is “one of the first Zimbabwean online publications to be established outside Zimbabwe, by Zimbabweans” (Mpofu, 2013:116). The website was established in the United Kingdom (UK) in June 2003 by “five former Zimbabwean journalists” (Mpofu, 2013:116). Its founding editor is Mduduzi Mathuthu, a journalist who used to work for the privately owned *Daily News* newspaper (Mpofu, 2013:115; Mano & Willems, 2008:107; Moyo, 2007:92). *Bulawayo24.com* was established in December 2010, and was chosen for this research because it positions itself as an “online news service for Bulawayo”.<sup>2</sup> Bulawayo is at the heart of Matabeleland, where the Ndebele people traditionally reside. However, I could not obtain information pertaining to the ownership of the website. According to the administrator of the website, who requested anonymity, *Bulawayo24.com* “belongs to people of Matabeleland”.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, *Umthwakazireview.com* is a news website owned by Themban Dube, and is hosted in the United States of America (USA). Created in 2012, this website was chosen because it positions itself as an “Mthwakazi<sup>4</sup> news site that deals with Matabele news, Ndebele history and the Ndebele people of Zimbabwe”.<sup>5</sup> The aim of the website is to give “Mthwakazi/Matabeleland people a platform to offer that narrative with pride about who they are, their history and their culture and indeed cultivate in them the need to seek self-determination and the determination of their collective destiny as a collective people”.<sup>6</sup> The salient feature of these news websites is their “underground nature” (Moyo, 2007:86), which then creates serious challenges for researchers who seek to obtain background information about these sites. Due to the volatile nature of the Zimbabwean political environment, the administrators of these news sites tend to be suspicious of researchers probing their nature and operation. It is due to this “perceived threat to personal security” (Moyo, 2007:91) that the media personnel tend to be reluctant to divulge information about these websites that they deem to be sensitive, such as the names of owners and sources of funding. The following section is a discussion of the socio-political contexts that have shaped the media

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<sup>2</sup> [http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-about\\_us.html](http://bulawayo24.com/index-id-about_us.html)

<sup>3</sup> From email correspondence with an editorial team member.

<sup>4</sup> UMthwakazi is the name of an imagined Ndebele nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:50).

<sup>5</sup> [www.umthwakazireview.com/](http://www.umthwakazireview.com/)

<sup>6</sup> From an email interview with the owner of the news website.

in Zimbabwe, and how these conditions are implicated in the emergence of the diasporic news websites.

### 1.3.1 The media in Zimbabwe: Repression in the “real” space

The mainstream media environment in Zimbabwe has largely been dominated by the state-controlled newspapers, such as the *Herald*, the *Chronicle*, *Sunday Mail*, and the *Sunday News*, which are all published by the Zimbabwe Newspapers Group (Mabweazara, 2014a:49; Chiumbu, 2004:30; Willems, 2004:5). In addition, the ruling party maintains a stranglehold over the broadcasting environment through its monopoly of the Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC) that has been entrenched since independence (Ndlela, 2005:76; Moyo, 2004:17; Ronning & Kupe, 2000:141). Radio stations such as *Radio Dialogue* have been denied broadcasting licences, as the government is “reluctant to democratise the airwaves” (Moyo, 2012a:180). The state-controlled media outlets have been deployed by ZANU PF to reproduce and sustain its hegemony in the wake of popular resistance from civic groups and oppositional political forces (Moyo, 2012a:179; 2004:28; Saunders, 1999:20). In this regard, a number of scholars have explored how, since 2000, the state-dominated media have been instrumental in forging and redefining the ZANU PF-espoused discourses of national identity, citizenship and belonging (Moyo, 2012a; Moyo, 2005; Ranger, 2005b; Chiumbu, 2004). It is through the media that the state has entrenched its ideology of “exclusion” and “selective nationhood” (Chiumbu, 2004:32). Thus, this period witnessed advent of “patriotic journalism”, which has been propagated by the state-controlled media and which champions ZANU PF historical imaginations by bifurcating Zimbabweans into “patriots” and “sell-outs” (Ranger, 2005b:13). This argument is echoed by Moyo (2012a:177), who affirms that the state-controlled media have been propagating a “highly selective discourse of the Zimbabwean nation”.

In addition to the state-owned media, the Zimbabwean media environment has also been penetrated by privately owned newspapers, such as *The Zimbabwe Independent*, *The Zimbabwe Standard*, *NewsDay* and the *Southern Eye*, which all fall in the Alpha Media Holdings (AMH) stable (Mabweazara, 2014a:49; Ndlela, 2005:76). These newspapers are part of the “independent” media that take a critical stance against the government (Moyo, 2005:112; Ndlela, 2005:76). Although the private press provides alternative viewpoints to the official government discourses, these newspapers operate under stringent conditions instituted by the state (Mare, 2013:91; Moyo, 2005:109; 2004:26). The government has promulgated



“draconian” media laws that curtail freedom of expression, assembly and movement (Mpofu, 2014:119; Ndlela, 2005:77; Moyo, 2004:26). These statutory instruments, such as the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA, 2002) and the Public Order and Security Act (POSA, 2002) have restricted the democratic space by not only muzzling the media, but also by constraining civic participation (Moyo, 2009a:61; Chiumbu, 2004:31; Moyo, 2004:26). Within this repressive environment, a number of newspapers (*Daily News*, *Tribune* and *Weekly Times*) that were critical of the government were shut down under AIPPA (Moyo, 2005:109; 2004:26). In addition, opposition politicians, activists and journalists have been charged with contravening POSA (Mpofu, 2014:119; Moyo, 2004:26). These repressive media laws have culminated in the “shrinking” of the democratic space (Moyo, 2007:82) for all forms of “alternative and oppositional discourses” (Chiumbu, 2004:31). Thus, political engagement, mobilisation, participation and activism have been constrained in the “real” space (Moyo, 2009a:61).

### **1.3.2 The emergence of diasporic news websites**

Consequently, alternative forms of media such as “clandestine radio stations” (Moyo, 2004:28), and the Internet have emerged as alternative spaces for these oppositional discourses to counter this restrictive communicative space (Moyo, 2012a:179; Moyo, 2009a:61). The “pirate” radio stations (broadcasting without licenses), such as Studio 7, SW Radio and Voice of the People (VOP), are being run from the diaspora and are beaming into Zimbabwe (Mhlanga & Mpofu, 2014:132; Mpofu, 2014:116; Moyo, 2012b:487; 2004:28). Within this culture of “state authoritarianism” (Moyo, 2012b:485), the Internet has emerged as another alternative space for opposition forces, civic groups and other activists to articulate and resist the hegemonic discourses advanced by ZANU PF (Mpofu, 2014:115; Moyo, 2012a:179; 2007:81). Thus, the repressive political environment in Zimbabwe “spawned a multiplicity of alternative public spheres” such as diasporic news websites that enable civic engagement and participation (Moyo, 2007:81). In a similar vein, Moyo (2009a:61) affirms that the proliferation of online media has been “largely motivated by Zimbabwe’s authoritarian and repressive political environment”. More importantly for this study, Mhlanga and Mpofu (2014:129) assert that social networking sites are providing a space for the people of Matabeleland to articulate their “sensitive discourses”, such as the Gukuruhundi that have been “denied spaces in the local public sphere”. This research is a scholarly contribution to the studies on new media within the Zimbabwean political landscape.

## 1.4 Preliminary study and gaps in the field of research

There are studies that have sought to make sense of the online media phenomenon within the Zimbabwean context. Some of these examined the contribution of online media to countering repression and promoting civic engagement (Moyo, 2009a; Moyo, 2007). Moyo (2007) examined the role of news websites such as *Newzimbabwe.com*, *Zimdaily.com* and *Zimonline.co.za* in contributing to the broader debates on the “Zimbabwean crisis”. He argues that these websites constitute the “diasporic media”, as they play a significant role in forging and reconstructing diasporic identities (Moyo, 2007:89). Thus, these diasporic media play a dual role: firstly, they articulate the experiences and challenges faced by Zimbabweans in the diaspora and, secondly, they provide information on the crisis “back home” (Mano & Willems, 2008:106; Moyo, 2007:89). As such, new media are forging a connection between the “homeland” and the “diaspora” (Mano & Willems, 2008:106). In their study of the diasporic debates surrounding the participation of a Zimbabwean nurse in the British television show *Big Brother*, Mano and Willems (2008:112) examined *Newzimbabwe.com*’s discussion forums in order to make sense of the constructions of “Zimbabweanness”. They concluded that the Internet provides an arena for the assertion, reconstructions and contestations of individual and collective identities (Mano & Willems, 2008:121). Building upon this work, this study explores how Ndebele collective memory is produced, celebrated and repudiated on three news websites, considering that the Internet provides a space for the negotiation and mediation of identities.

Other studies have explored the new ways of journalism practices and cultures emerging with the appropriation of the social media by mainstream print journalists (Mabweazara, 2014b:65; 2011:692). However, there is a lack of studies related to new media and the struggles of minority groups, particularly Ndebele identity in the context of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. Of the selected news websites, only *Newzimbabwe.com* has received scholarly attention, as a number of scholars have conducted studies on this website (Mpofu, 2014; Moyo, 2009a; Mano & Willems, 2008). However, these works have not produced an extensive interrogation of the mediation and contestations of Ndebele collective memories and identities. This particular study builds on this scholarship by delving into the complexities of Ndebele cyber-memories, and also introducing two other news websites to examine how they are implicated in the discourses on Ndebele Particularism. These websites serve the readers both in the diaspora and in Zimbabwe (Mpofu, 2014:115; Moyo, 2007:89). According to *Alexa.com*



(2015),<sup>7</sup> an organisation that provides analytical tools for measuring data traffic on the Internet, most users of *Newzimbabwe.com* are based in South Africa, the United Kingdom, Russia, Zimbabwe and the USA. Closely related, *Bulawayo24.com* is frequently visited by users located in South Africa, the United Kingdom, Zimbabwe, Germany and the USA (*Alexa.com*, 2015). However, *Umthwakazireview.com* does not appear on the search engine of *Alexa.com*.

Alexander and McGregor (1999) examined how an internet forum known as *Zimnet* provided a space for Zimbabweans in the diaspora to debate about the Gukurahundi massacres. Contrary to popular celebratory assumptions about the potential of new media, Alexander and McGregor (1999:258) contend that *Zimnet* discussions were not subversive, as the dominant postings tended to reproduce and perpetuate the government's discourse on the violence. Although there are similarities between Alexander and McGregor's (1999) and the current research in terms of the focus on Gukurahundi, the two studies differ in a number of areas. Firstly, Alexander and McGregor's (1999:258) case study was *Zimnet*, a forum for "elite expatriate Zimbabweans", with most of its members studying abroad. In contrast, this study encompassed a wider scope, as it investigated three news websites that serve readers in both Zimbabwe and the diaspora. Secondly, Alexander and McGregor (1999:261) note that *Zimnet* was dominated by members who "hailed from outside Matabeleland". This study, on the other hand, focuses on news websites that report on Matabeleland issues, some of which were established specifically for the people of Matabeleland. Lastly, there is a difference in the historical context that underlies the studies, as Alexander and McGregor's (1999) research was conducted in the 1990s. In the light of these aforementioned differences, this study builds upon Alexander and McGregor's (1999) work by providing new insights into the role of new media as sites for (re)constructing Ndebele memory.

Among the few studies on Ndebele identity, those by Mpofu (2014; 2013) analysed opinion articles from the *Newzimbabwe.com* website and concluded that taboo issues, such as the Gukurahundi, were now finding expression in new media. Mpofu (2014:125) asserts that the Internet is enabling ordinary citizens to participate in discussions on topics that they would not deliberate on in the mainstream public domain due to the restrictive environment. In this study, I delve deeper into the representations of Ndebele history in new media by extending the focus to a total of three news websites, and the way in which they incorporate various social media,

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.alexa.com/siteinfo/newzimbabwe.com>

such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. Moyo (2009b) focused on how Zimbabweans of Ndebele ethnicity living in the diaspora used the now defunct *Inkundla* website as a space to celebrate their cultural identity. Moyo's (2009b) focus was on the discussions amongst the diasporic communities in a forum that was not a news website, while this project will concentrate on news sites, with a focus on the journalistic discourses on Ndebele Particularism. Further, Mhlanga and Mpofu (2014) explore how a social networking mailing list, known as the *Forum*, provides a space for the suppressed voices of the people of Matabeleland. They argue that the *Forum* is connecting participants in the diaspora and at home as they engage in and discuss the discourses of the Gukurahundi, and the socio-political and economic exclusion of the people of Matabeleland in Zimbabwe (Mhlanga & Mpofu, 2014:130). As the *Forum* enables these participants from Matabeleland to engage in discourses that are denied space in mainstream public forums, such as the Matabeleland secession, Mhlanga and Mpofu (2014:140) conclude that new media are acting as "liberating devices from social constraints". Although these studies provide significant insights into the interplay between new media and Matabeleland politics, there is room for further exploration of the role of news websites as sites of Ndebele remembrance. This research is not only a contribution to the scholarly works on the interplay between journalism and memory, but also examines how new media discourses on Ndebele memories expose the fractures and fissures within Ndebele identity. In repudiating the essentialist conceptions of Ndebele identity, this study provides new insights into the intersection of new media, memory and identity. This project is also a progression from my Master's thesis, which examined the constructions of nationhood in the Matabeleland secessionist debates in two Zimbabwean newspapers, the *Chronicle* and *Newsday* (M. Ndlovu, 2012). I am aware of the challenges of venturing into research on ethnicity and Ndebele history, as such an exercise is deemed "unpatriotic" within state circles, with claims that it succours divisions and undermines nation-building and national unity (Mhlanga, 2013:47; T. Ndlovu, 2012:108; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:19). In this regard, Mhlanga (2013:47) and Mpofu (2013:117) note that, within official circles, voices on ethnicity are "criminalised". In the midst of these challenges, it nevertheless is imperative to undertake a study on Ndebele Particularism, as there is room for further theorisation.

## 1.5 Problem statement and focus

By using the Ndebele ethnic group in Zimbabwe as a particular case, this research investigates the emergence of Ndebele collective memory on three news websites, and how journalists and

the audiences are using new media to make sense of the past through online posts and interactions. Situated within the overlapping fields of cultural studies, journalism and media studies, this study interrogates the role of new media as terrains for the production, negotiation and contestation of social meanings of Ndebele collective memory, which is fraught with trauma, mourning and nostalgia (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:188; Lindgren, 2005a:158). In focusing on a community that is coming to terms with the legacies of the Gukurahundi atrocities (CCJP & LRF, 2007:1; Eppel, 2004:46), this research examines how this social group with a “troubled past” (Edy, 2006:1) uses new media forms to negotiate the meaning of its past. It is important to explore how this “trauma-community” (Zertal, 2005:2) constructs meanings of its past using new media, as memories of a social conflict are a powerful force “that can heal rifts, salt wounds, or provoke social transformations” (Edy, 2006:2).

## **1.6 Significance of the study**

Bearing in mind that the question of the role of new media in Africa’s democratisation process is a contentious issue (Wasserman, 2011:146), this study hopes to enrich this body of knowledge by examining the possibilities offered by online media as spaces for the mobilisation, resistance and empowerment of repressed or marginalised minority ethnic groups. Situated within the broader historical and socio-political setting of Ndebele identity politics, this research not only provides insights into the role of new media in identity politics, but it also builds on the scholarship of ethnicity. This is significant because, in spite of its salience in Africa’s political landscape, ethnicity has been disparaged and dismissed as retrogressive and tribalism within the dominant circles (Hameso, 1997:1; Vail, 1989:2). This study will not provide definitive answers to the general question of the contribution of new media to deepening Africa’s democracy, but rather will offer intensive insights from a particular case of the Ndebele people in Zimbabwe.

## **1.7 Theoretical points of departure**

This study is informed by a constructionist epistemological view of human knowledge (Crotty, 1998:8). In contrast to positivists, who believe in the existence of an objective truth waiting for us to discover it, this research draws on the constructionist view that social meaning or truth is not discovered but constructed (Crotty, 1998:8-9). This formulation enables this study to examine the truth claims in new media that are constructed about the history and memory of the Ndebele people. In the same vein, this study draws on the social construction theory that

views the development of technology as being shaped by social structures and processes (Klein & Kleinman, 2002:30). This approach is useful, as this study will situate the memory constructions in cyberspace within the wider socio-political and historical context. This is in contrast to technological determinism, which views technology as having determinate effects upon society (Williams & Edge, 1996:868).

In addition, informed by Foucault's (1980:81-82) genealogy of power/knowledge, this study views the marginalised or suppressed Ndebele narratives as representing "subjugated knowledges" that have been "buried", "disqualified", or "located down the hierarchy". In examining new media representations of Ndebele memory, this research draws on the scholarship of collective memory, which is defined as the ways in which people construct a sense of the past (Confino, 1997:1386). Underpinning this study is the notion that collective memory is socially constructed, that is, the reproduction of the past remains under the influence of the present social milieu (Huysen, 1995:250; Halbwachs, 1992:49). This assumption enables this research to examine the selected Ndebele past events and the "mnemonic battles" (Zerubavel, 2003:2) that are waged over the "proper" way to remember these pasts (Conway, 2003:16). As such, this study draws on the poststructuralist theorisation of representation, in particular Hall's (1997a:13) constructionist approach, to examine the contestations over the social meanings of Ndebele memory on news websites.

Broadly, this research therefore is situated within cultural studies as an approach to journalism and media theory (Dahlgren, 1997:48). This framework of analysis provides a detailed description of how audiences negotiate and use media texts in the course of their everyday lives, constructing their own meanings within socio-historical contexts (Strelitz, 2000:38; Dahlgren, 1997:53). Within the fields of journalism and media studies, cultural studies have gained prominence with its focus on "culture, meaning and power" (Dahlgren, 1997:49). This study is inclined towards cultural studies because this approach has developed a technique for textual analysis that situates the text within its "historical, material and cultural context" (Lewis, 2008:32). Flowing from the above are research questions that are posed to address the main concerns of the study.

## **1.8 General research question**

The general research question guiding this study is: What role do new media play as sites of remembrance and forgetting in the (re)constructions of distinct Ndebele collective memory and history in the context of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism?

Emerging from the aforementioned general research question are five specific research questions that are inextricably linked.

### **1.8.1 Specific research questions**

- What are the representations of the Ndebele past and memory that are being produced and sustained in the discourses on the three selected news websites?
- How are the three selected websites providing a space for the resurgence of the repressed Ndebele history?
- What are the tensions, fractures and negotiations around Ndebele histories that are emerging from the interactions amongst the Ndebele community on the selected news websites?
- How are the discourses on hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism reproduced and perpetuated on the three selected news websites?
- What are the overlaps with and divergences in the selected news websites in their representations of Ndebele Particularism?

## **1.9 Research design and methods**

This study employed a qualitative methodological approach that is hinged on interpretivism, constructionism and phenomenology (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271; Deacon, Murdock, Pickering & Golding, 1999:6). I am aware of the quantitative-qualitative debates centred on different epistemological and philosophical assumptions (Bryman, 2001:270; 1984:75). Qualitative research can be defined as the study of human action from an insider perspective, with the goal of describing and understanding human behaviour (Bryman, 2001:270) (see Chapter 5 for a more detailed discussion).

### **1.9.1 Critical discourse analysis**

This study employs critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a research design that is interpretative and contextualist (Richardson, 2007:15). A research design is a “plan or blue print” of how one intends to conduct research (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:55). CDA was selected because it provides theories and methods for conducting an analysis of the “relations between discourse and social and cultural developments in different social domains” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:60). It is suitable since it is concerned with how “language use” contributes to the “creation and reproduction of unequal power relations between social groups” (Jorgensen &

Phillips, 2002:63). Although CDA is not a homogenous body of theory and methodology, the various approaches have a common ground, as they all focus on “power, ideology and critique” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:1). From the various CDA approaches, discourse-historical approach (DHA) was selected as an analytic method or technique (Wodak, De Cillia, Reisigl & Liebhart, 2009:7). This method is preferred because it takes into account the historical context in which the discursive “events” are embedded (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:7-8). Thus, I was able to situate an analysis of texts within the socio-historical contexts of Ndebele Particularism. As discourse is viewed as social practice (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:61), this study examined how discourses of Ndebele history are socially conditioned and, at the same time, constitute our objects of knowledge about the topic. This CDA is informed by Foucault’s conceptualisation of discourse, knowledge, and power (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:10). Since discourse produces the objects of knowledge (Hall, 1997a:44), and shapes our understanding of the social world, this study explores how the narratives of Ndebele history are constructed within discourses. Further, Foucault’s notion of “plurality of resistances” (1978:96) permits this study to investigate the Ndebele counter-histories that are seeking to subvert and destabilise the mainstream historical narratives (see section 5.4 for a detailed elaboration of Foucault’s discourse).

### **1.9.2 Data gathering**

In selecting articles for analysis, this study employed a purposive sampling method that evidenced the “conscious and deliberate intentions of those who apply the procedures” (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:50). This non-probability sampling method was suitable, as it is associated with qualitative research (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003:78). A sample was drawn from the three news sites, and an analysis of texts was conducted until the data and emerging findings were saturated (Merriam, 2002:26). Rather than generalising findings, this research provides intensive insights into the phenomenon in a specific context (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:43). Firstly, purposive sampling was used in the selection of the three news websites. Secondly, this technique was employed in selecting texts for analysis that are centred on Ndebele memory. In the selection procedure, the study considered themes such as representations of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past, Gukurahundi, and imagination of an Ndebele nation. These themes were chosen because they indicate the persistence and recurrence of Ndebele particularistic history and identity traversing the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:154). Further, this study considered genres such as editorials, opinion pieces, interviews and forums through

which discourses on Ndebele memory are created, circulated and contested. Lastly, the scope of this study is January 2003 to December 2015, that is, from the inception of *Newzimbabwe.com*. This period is significant because there were disgruntled voices from the Ndebele-speaking people against “Shona triumphalism”, and these manifested in political formations claiming a separate history and yearning for the re-creation of a pre-colonial Ndebele state (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:50-51).

### **1.9.3 Data analysis**

In the analysis of website articles I employed the DHA model, consisting of three interwoven dimensions: the contents or topics, the discursive strategies employed, and the linguistic realisation of these contents and strategies (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999:91). Firstly, this study identified the representation of pre-colonial Ndebele people, the representations of Gukurahundi, and the imagination of an Ndebele nation as thematic contents of the discourses on Ndebele Particularism. Secondly, I examined the discursive strategies adapted in the struggles over social meanings of Ndebele history. This study distinguishes between the constructive, perpetuating and/or justifying discursive strategies, as well as strategies of transformation and dismantlement (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33). Lastly, I unpacked the linguistic forms, such as argumentation, tropes and predication, adopted in these contestations of Ndebele Particularism (see Chapter 5 for a detailed explanation of the methodological issues).

### **1.9.4 An outline and structure of the thesis**

Chapter 1 has introduced the main concern of this study, which is new media (re)constructions of Ndebele collective memory and history in the context of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. In mapping the contours of this research, this chapter defined the research problem that intertwines new media and Ndebele identity politics. In addition, I briefly discussed the socio-historical and political contexts embedding this research. This contextualisation process is extended to Chapter 2, as I situate this study within cultural studies and social constructionist theoretical frameworks. In this chapter (2), I lay out the philosophical and epistemological assumptions of constructionism that resonate with the concerns of this study. The recurring theme in Chapter 2 is the argument that social meaning is constructed, and hence Ndebele histories and collective memories are being (re)constructed and contested in new media.



In order to adequately cover all facets of existing scholarship, two chapters (3 and 4) are dedicated to literature review. The first one (chapter 3) charts and analyses scholarship of the broader debates on nationalism, ethnicity, the African nation-building project and hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. Within this chapter (3), I narrow the scope to Ndebele Particularism and draw our attention to the debates pertaining to the Gukurahundi atrocities. Chapter 4 examines the interplay between collective memory and new media, and hence explores the ways in which new media are engaged in preserving, shaping and reinvigorating our collective remembrances. Chapter 5 discusses the research design and methodological framework of this study. It engages with the quantitative-qualitative debates, examining the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings of these methodological approaches. As this study is hinged on constructionism, qualitative research was selected as the methodological approach for this study. In addition, the chapter provides a discussion of CDA as a research design, and concludes by describing the sampling considerations. Two chapters (6 and 7) are dedicated to the analysis of data and the discussion of findings. The rationale for having two analysis chapters is that one chapter (6) focuses on the reconstructions of pre-colonial Ndebele past events and the other chapter (7) analyses the recollections of post-colonial Ndebele (Gukurahundi) memories. In Chapter 8 I consolidate the findings, and offer a conclusion and recommendations for future research.



## **CHAPTER TWO: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Cultural studies, journalism and social constructionism**

#### **2. 1 Introduction**

This chapter discusses cultural studies, journalism and social constructionism as central perspectives from which to examine discourses on Ndebele collective memory in new media. This chapter explores the key assumptions that underpin these approaches, and probes how different related theories fit into the concerns of this study. In exploring the possibilities of journalism as a space for memory construction, this chapter also examines the influences of cultural studies and social constructionism within journalism scholarship. Thus, this study explores how the convergences, divergences and overlaps between different approaches and theories illuminate the cyber-contestations of Ndebele memory and, at the same time, enrich journalism studies. In the first instance, I engage with cultural studies as an approach to media theory, and argue that this theoretical perspective provides a framework for examining the constructions of social meanings of Ndebele Particularism on news websites. Secondly, this chapter traces the development of journalism studies and examines its strong connections with cultural studies. Lastly, I argue that the foundational tenets of journalism are entangled in epistemological issues, and hence this study draws on the social constructionist tradition. The position adopted in this study is that cyber-recollections of Ndebele memories are reconstructions of the social meanings, rather than a discovery of intrinsic knowledge about collective past events.

#### **2.2 Cultural studies**

Mass communication and the media have emerged as central components of contemporary culture that are shaping the transformation of societies (Fornas, 2000:55; Thompson, 1995:10; 1988:359). As constituting “mediated communication”, they are intricately involved in the production and dissemination of social meanings in contextualised social spaces (Thompson, 1995:11). Cultural studies provide a theoretical lens for explicating the role of the forms of mediated communication such as new media in the construction and shaping of Ndebele collective memories. It is important to note that cultural studies comprise a diverse school of thought that incorporates many variants and disciplines (Storey, 2003:1; Turner, 2003:22; Strelitz, 2000:38; Dahlgren, 1997:49). Although this approach is “heterogeneous” (Dahlgren,

1997:49) and “transdisciplinary” (Kellner, 1995:28), there are fundamental tenets that underpin cultural studies. The origins of British cultural studies can be traced to the works of scholars within the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (BCCCS), such as Richard Hoggart, Raymond Williams, E.P. Thompson and Stuart Hall, who have contributed immensely to the development of this field (During, 1999:3; Dahlgren, 1997:50). Emerging in the 1960s, British cultural studies pursued a critical trajectory, as the emphasis was on analysing the role of cultural artefacts and practices in the reproduction and contestation of social domination (Kellner, 1995:31; Johnson, 1987:39).

### **2.2.1 The centrality of “culture”**

Within this approach, culture is conceptualised as a “feature of the lived practices of everyday life” (Dahlgren, 1997:50). Williams’s (1989:4) understanding of culture is twofold: firstly, as the “whole way of life – the common meanings”, and secondly, as the institutions of “arts and learning” where these social meanings are expressed. In essence, the emphasis is on the processes of meaning-making, and hence culture is understood as an “assemblage of imaginings and meanings that are generated by a given social group” (Lewis, 2008:18). As such, cultural studies provide a theoretical framework for investigating the ways in which people make sense of their everyday lives, and how social meanings are created, generated and circulated within socio-historical contexts (Fornas, 2000:55; Strelitz, 2000:38; Fiske, 1987:254). The assumption is that cultural practices not only “articulate the meanings of particular social practices and events”, but that they also “define the ways we make sense of them, how they are experienced and lived” (Grossberg, 2005a:158). Culture is entrenched within the meaning-making processes, and hence cultural studies theorists explore the production, circulation and consumption of meanings, and how these meanings represent power struggles in society (Storey, 2003:3; Du Gay, Hall, Janes, Mackay & Negus, 1997:12). These social meanings are not essential (in the sense of having a clear essence), but are constructed through cultural practices (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:14). As a result, there is a preoccupation with how cultural texts, forms and practices articulate and shape identities such as race, ethnicity, class and gender in social contexts (Dahlgren, 1997:54; Kellner, 1995:25). This study considers new media as central in the constructions of social meanings on Ndebele ethnic and national identities.

The media are an integral resource in the construction of meanings and the negotiation of cultural identities (Silverstone, 2002:762; Fornas, 2000:56). Thus, they are “immersed in the

everyday practices of meaning-making of individuals and communities” (Lewis, 2008:4). As cultural artefacts and practices, the media occupy a central place in the “public representation of unequal social relations and the play of cultural power” (Cottle, 2000:2). Cultural studies theorists regard culture as a site of struggle, as it is intricately embodied in power relations (Dahlgren, 1997:54; Johnson, 1987:39). This postulation of the intricate relationship between culture and power has been shaped in the works of Michel Foucault and Antonio Gramsci (Storey, 2003:3). Culture is conceptualised as an arena of ideological struggle over social meaning, and cultural studies provide a framework for not only analysing the ways in which power relations are produced and sustained, but also examining the possibilities of resistance in power struggles (Grossberg, 2005a:158; Turner, 2003:17; Dahlgren, 1997:55). Drawing upon Gramsci’s notion of hegemony, cultural studies explore how cultural texts and practices serve “either to further social domination, or to enable people to resist and struggle against domination” (Kellner, 1995:31). In a nutshell, cultural studies follow a constructionist and dialectical trajectory, as it is premised on an understanding that “people and social institutions in specific historical circumstances produce culture, which in turn helps to produce and reproduce society” (Dahlgren, 1997:53). As noted by Johnson (1987:39), culture is neither “autonomous nor an extremely determined field, but a site of social differences and struggles”. This conception explains how Ndebele cyber-memories are not only socially shaped, but are also constituting the imaginations of Ndebele Particularism.

In the analysis of cultural texts and practices, cultural studies embrace all the cultural processes that constitute the “circuit of culture” (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:3; Johnson, 1987:47). The argument is that an adequate study of culture must acknowledge all different facets encompassing the production, circulation and reception of cultural artefacts (Strelitz, 2000:38; Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:3; Johnson, 1987:47). Johnson (1987:47) identifies “production”, “texts”, “readings” and “lived cultures and social relations” as the “moments” in this circuit of culture. In addition, Du Gay *et al.* (1997:3) recognise “production”, “consumption”, “regulation”, “representation” and “identity” as constituting the circuit of culture. Informed by the aforementioned insights, this study concentrates on three key processes – texts, representation and identity – as I examine the representations of Ndebele Particularism in new media texts. Considering that all the “moments” in the circuit of culture are intertwined (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:3; Johnson, 1987:47), this textual analysis of Ndebele cyber-memories is situated within the socio-historical contexts of their production and consumption. Although this study is text based, as it is primarily concerned with an analysis of texts from news websites, it is important to acknowledge the

significance of other “moments” of cultural processes as new media representations of Ndebele collective memory are being shaped by the contexts of production and consumption. Du Gay *et al.* (1997:3) invoke the notion of “articulation” to assert that the linkage and connection of these cultural “moments” is not “necessary, determined, or absolute”, but its condition of existence must be situated in the “contingencies of circumstance”. Cultural studies thus provide a framework for situating cultural texts within the broader socio-historical and cultural contexts (Lewis, 2008:32; Cottle, 2000:10). This is important, as it prevents this study from sinking into “textual determinism” (Cottle, 2000:10).

But what is the relationship between cultural studies and journalism? How, and in what ways, can these two fields complement each other? The next section explores the foundational tenets of journalism, and probes how this field intersects with cultural studies.

### **2.2.2 Cultural studies and journalistic discourses**

It is important to grapple with definitional issues before exploring the fundamental assumptions that underpin the traditional liberal notions of journalism. The term “journalism” is sometimes used interchangeably with concepts such as “mass media”, “news media” and “media” (McQuail, 2013:1). The concept “mass media” refers to the broader channels of communication encompassing the industry and institutions that reach a wider audience (McQuail, 2013:1). Thus, the term “media” covers “all institutionalised structures, forms, formats and interfaces for disseminating symbolic content” (Couldry, 2012:viii). On the other hand, journalism can be viewed as a component of mass media, as it denotes the activities and processes of producing news accounts (McQuail, 2013:14). Thus, McNair (1998:4) defines journalism as:

Any authored text, in written, audio or visual form, which claims to be (i.e. is presented to its audience as) a truthful statement about, or record of, some hitherto unknown (new) feature of the actual, social world.

The normative assumptions of the role of journalism are tied to the traditions of Western liberal democracies (Carpentier, 2007:152). Within this traditional liberal framework, journalism is conceived as a source of information for ensuring deliberative democracy, and also as a watchdog/fourth estate that oversees the government and market, and hence exposes their abuse of power (Carpentier, 2007:152). These perspectives on journalism vis-à-vis its role in society are influenced by particular epistemological and philosophical underpinnings (Bennett, 1982:31).

Within Western liberal societies, the dominant discourses of journalism are anchored in epistemological assumptions of objectivity (Deuze, 2005:448; Lichtenberg, 2000:238; Reese, 1990:394; Hackett, 1984:232). Objectivity is a postulation embedded within the positivistic school of thought, and hence it is intertwined with notions of “truth” and “reality” (Wien, 2005:3; Lichtenberg, 2000:239). This journalistic concept is premised on a belief that “facts can be separated from opinion” (Hackett, 1984:232), and that a journalist should be a “detached observer” who approximates “a truthful account of ‘what’s out there’” (Reese, 1990:424). It is from this epistemological presupposition that journalists legitimate their profession, as they claim that they are “able to present true pictures of reality” (Wien, 2005:3). Such an understanding has a bearing on the framing of the theoretical and methodological trajectories of this study, and this research rejects this positivistic rendition of social reality and adopts a social constructionist conception. This study builds on journalism scholarship by arguing that the social meanings of Ndebele collective memory are in flux and constantly negotiated on news websites, rather than inevitable and fixed. As such, I examine the representations of collective memory in journalistic genres such as news, opinions and readers’ comments on news websites (section 4.2.1 explores how journalism and memory are implicated in each other). Therefore, the focus is on journalistic discourses of Ndebele memory, rather than journalistic conventions, practices and routines of news production. The assumption is that the collective past is read, remembered and narrated in “journalistic prose” and “received by audiences as ‘news’” (Kitch, 2008:311). This study considers the three selected news websites as journalistic products that provide a space for the mediation of Ndebele memory discourses.

The concept of objectivity has increasingly been scrutinised from various standpoints. Firstly, there are scholars who assert that news does not reflect “truth”, as it is socially constructed through journalistic routines, practices and conventions (Deuze, 2005:443; Hackett, 1984:229; Tuchman, 1972:660). For instance, Tuchman (1972:660) views objectivity as a “strategic ritual” that is invoked by journalists to meet deadlines and ward off possible libel suits. Secondly, critical political economy theorists argue that journalism is not value free, as economic imperatives such as media ownership have implications for news coverage and the operations of the media (Golding & Murdock, 2000:70; Herman & Chomsky, 1988: ix). In a nutshell, the mainstream tradition has been refuted by the “critical paradigm” in media studies, which foregrounds issues of culture, ideology and language in the construction and contestation of social meanings (Hall, 1982:65). As such, this research is located within the journalism scholarship that has been influenced by cultural studies and social constructionist frameworks,

as the focus is on how social meanings of Ndebele memory are produced, shared and contested on news websites. In this vein, the idea of journalism as a mirror to society is questioned, as social meaning is viewed as a site of contestation, rather than a stable and fixed essence (Storey, 2003:4; Dahlgren, 1992:14). Thus, journalism does not simply reflect reality “out there”, but it is through language that social meanings are mediated and contested (Hackett, 1984:234, Hall, 1982:77).

As a result of its positivistic orientation, journalism is considered by Zelizer (2004:100) as having an “uneasy place in cultural studies”. In arguing that the tensions between journalism and cultural studies “have worked to mutual disadvantage”, she calls for a need for cultural studies to accommodate journalism in its analysis (Zelizer, 2004:100). She argues that the two fields are interlocked in that “the emphasis on power and discourse made journalism a natural setting for probing many of the issues relevant to cultural studies” (Zelizer, 2004:108-109). However, in the main, the study of journalism from a cultural perspective has remained at the periphery due to the seemingly incongruent epistemological standpoints of these two fields (Zelizer, 2004:101). Thus, cultural studies’ stress on constructionism, subjectivity, contingency and socio-historical contexts is usually considered to be incompatible with the journalism practice that is anchored in “God-terms” such as “facts, truth, and reality” (Zelizer, 2004:101). As a result, there is a tendency in cultural studies to focus on audiences and their meaning-making processes, a trend that “conflicts with a firm assumption among journalists that journalism takes shape in the newsroom, not amongst the public” (Zelizer, 2004:104). Informed by Zelizer’s (2004:114) assertion that journalism has not been incorporated fully within cultural studies, this study extends this scholarship on the intersection and symbiotic relationship between these two fields by examining the constructions of collective memories in journalistic discourses. Fourie (2007:145) notes that positivism and critical theory are the two “grand theories from which all mass communication research depart”. The positivist approach places an emphasis on “empiricism” whilst critical theory focuses on “ideology, power and inequity” (Fourie, 2007:145). More importantly, Fourie (2007:145) asserts that there is a “fusion of paradigms” as the two approaches supplement and enrich one another. In embracing the constructionist or critical interpretation, this research is not necessarily dismissive of journalism studies anchored in positivism, but rather, I endorse Fourie’s (2007:145) view that a researcher’s choice of an approach is a “matter of emphasis and focus”.

### 2.2.3 Cultural studies and the “ethnographic turn”

The dominant strand within cultural studies is the “ethnographic turn”, or audience reception studies, which examine how media audiences use texts to construct meanings in socio-cultural contexts (Strelitz, 2000:38; Dahlgren, 1997:51). Thus, there has been a shift within cultural studies from the preoccupation with texts to the focus on audiences and their reception of cultural artefacts (Turner, 2003:109; Kellner, 1995:37). Although this particular research is not an audience reception study, it is important to briefly discuss the tenets of this strain. It is key to point out that this study does not depart totally from the reception variant of culture studies, as critical discourse analysis is intertwined with reception studies. Firstly, my own analysis of texts constitutes a process of consumption of texts and a meaning-making practice. In addition, the readers’ comments and the construction of meanings on news sites indicate another layer of the consumption of texts. At the same time, this study draws on journalism studies, which incorporates production analysis, as the focus is on news websites, and the role of news (and history) in the construction of meanings as seen in texts and read by audiences.

Within reception studies, audiences are conceived as active participants in the constructions of meanings within situated contexts (Strelitz, 2000:38). Hall’s (1980:136-138) encoding/decoding model is one of the seminal works that challenges the media effects school, as it opens up possibilities for audiences to decode “dominant”, “negotiated” and “oppositional” meanings of texts. Further, Radway (1987) examined how women make sense of romance novels in the context of their everyday lives. Ang (1985) explored the television viewers’ reception and experiences of the soap opera *Dallas*. Lastly, Morley’s (1980) ethnographic study of the audiences’ reception of *Nationwide* television programme is one of the influential works that affirms that audiences’ interpretations of media texts are multiple and embedded in socio-cultural environments. With an emphasis on the “interpretive freedom” (Dahlgren, 1997:55) of audiences in their consumption of texts, the major criticism of this variant is its tendency to drift to an “uncritical populist” celebration of audience resistance and pleasure in their consumption of texts (Strelitz, 2000:40; Kellner, 1995:38; McGuigan, 1992:5). Fiske’s (1987) is one of the notable works on television and audience reception that exemplifies this tendency to valorise audience autonomy and resistance (Strelitz, 2000:40; Kellner, 1995:38; McGuigan, 1992:49). Fornas (2000:45) argues against a tendency within cultural studies to avoid text-based studies in favour of audience research. In a similar vein, this study acknowledges the centrality of textual analysis in cultural studies, as also emphasised by Turner (2003:17), Fornas (2000:45) and Johnson (1987:58). One of the possible criticisms



that may be levelled against textual analyses is that an academic researcher of texts decodes and constructs meaning that is totally different from the original text or preferred reading. Considering the “polysemic” nature of messages, and that meanings in texts are in flux and constantly renegotiated (Turner, 2003:32; Hall, 1982:75), this study acknowledges that this research report may be seen as another reconstruction of social meaning, as there are other possible interpretations of the same text. However, although the interpretation of texts is “highly specific and clearly contestable”, Turner (2003:32) further states that a researcher must “outline properly the particular historical conjuncture that has produced these texts”. Informed by the aforementioned statement, this study places an analysis of texts within the socio-political and historical contexts, and also employs other forms of triangulation in methodology, such as drawing data from different media genres in order to ensure trustworthiness and authenticity in my reading of texts on news websites. Yeasmin and Rahman (2012:156) define triangulation as “the combination of two or more theories, data sources, methods or investigators in one study of a single phenomenon to converge on a single construct”. In a nutshell, this study employed a rigorous methodology that was informed by Wodak *et al.*'s (2009) method of CDA, which guards against a totally subjective reading of the websites and an arbitrary construction in the research project (see Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion).

#### **2.2.4 The “linguistic turn” in cultural studies: Texts, language and representation**

Within the text-based studies, the text emerges as a site of struggle in the production and contestation of social meanings (Turner, 2003:17; Cottle, 2000:10). As such, this research is inclined towards this “linguistic turn” in cultural studies (Cottle, 2000:10; Dahlgren, 1997:51; Hall, 1997a:19), as the focus is on the centrality of language, texts, representation and context in the production and shaping of social meanings. This variant draws upon structuralist and post-structuralist conceptions of language, representation and knowledge (Burr, 2003:50; Hall, 1997a:35). Structuralism is indebted to the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, whose works provide a connection between language and culture (Burr, 2003:50; Turner, 2003:10; Hall, 1997a:31). Language is understood as a system of representation, such as writing, speech and images that signify a thing, idea or concept (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:13; Hall, 1997a:31). It is through language that meanings about the social world are produced (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:13). The “sign” is a central feature in Saussure’s structuralist theory of language (Burr, 2003:50; Turner, 2003:14; Hall, 1997a:37). Saussure argues that the “sign” consists of two elements: the



signifier and the signified (Burr, 2003:50; Hall, 1997a:31). The signifier denotes the form (words, images and sound, etc.) that represents an idea or concept (signified) (Burr, 2003:50; Hall, 1997a:31). It is this relation between the signifier and the signified that is central to the production of meaning (Hall, 1997a:19). One of Saussure's great contributions is his argument that the relationship between the signifier and the signified is "arbitrary" (Burr, 2003:51; Hall, 1997a:31). This suggests that meaning is not predetermined or given, but is culturally contingent (Turner, 2003:11). Since there is no "necessary correspondence" between the sign and meaning (Grossberg, 2005a:158), "different kinds of meaning could be ascribed to the same events" (Hall, 1982:67). Further, it is in the marking of "difference" that meanings are generated (Turner, 2003:11; Hall, 1997a:31). Thus, the meaning of an idea or object is often "defined in relation to its direct opposite" (Hall, 1997a:31).

Saussure further categorised language into two parts, that is, "langue" and "parole", to indicate how meanings are constructed through language (Turner, 2003:12; Hall, 1997a:33). Langue denotes the underlying structures of language, such as "rules and codes" shared by users and governing all forms of communication (Hall, 1997a:33). On the other hand, Saussure viewed parole as the "surface" of language, consisting of the "particular acts of speaking, or writing, or drawing" (Hall, 1997a:33). Saussure's model suggests that people are able to interact meaningfully because they share linguistic codes and rules that govern their communication, an understanding that has shaped a constructionist approach to representation (Hall, 1997a:35). Thus, Saussure introduces the cultural and sociological dimensions of language, which reminds us that meanings are socially constructed, rather than inherent and natural (Turner, 2003:11; Hall, 1997a:35).

One of the major shortcomings of structuralism is the presumption that the meaning that is constructed through language is fixed and unchanging (Burr, 2003:52). The problem with such a presupposition is that it does not explain how meaning is constantly shifting over time (Burr, 2003:52). This study regards the social meanings of Ndebele and Zimbabwean identities as contingent and fluid, rather than stable. It is in this regard that this research draws upon post-structuralism to address the deficiency within the structuralist conception. The post-structuralist theorisation on representation is anchored in an assumption that meaning is constructed through language, and is "open to question, always contestable, (and) always temporary" (Burr, 2003:53). It is in this regard that this study identifies "Zimbabwe", "tribalism", "nation", "Ndebele" and "Gukurahundi" as social meanings that are contested in

cyberspace, as they do not have intrinsic meaning. Thus, they signify different things for social groups situated in different discursive spaces.

Hall (1997a:15) identifies three theories of representation. This study rejects the reflective and intentional approaches, and endorses the constructionist perspective (Hall, 1997a:15). The reflective approach is premised on an assumption that the role of language is to “reflect a meaning which already exists out there in the world of objects” (Hall, 1997a:15). The intentional approach is grounded in a presupposition that the meaning lies in the intention of the author or speaker (Hall, 1997a:25). However, this study is anchored in the constructionist approach, as it is through language that meaning is constructed (Hall, 1997a:15). Thus, meaning is not simply “found” in things (Du Gay *et al.*, 1997:14). As Hall (1982:67) rightly argues, “things and events in the real world do not contain or propose their own, integral, single and intrinsic meaning”. It is through the processes of signification that Ndebele past events, such as pre-colonial encounters and the Gukurahundi, become meaningful. All constructionists do not deny the existence of the material world, but the argument is that it is through language and processes of representation that the social meanings of “things” are conveyed (Hall, 1997a:25). Therefore, this study is rooted in a belief that news websites do not merely reflect and transmit the essential knowledge on Ndebele collective memory, but rather, they produce, structure and shape the social meanings of these past events. This process of constructing meaning is not apolitical, but rather, it is about the “politics of signification”, that is, the “power to signify events in a particular way” (Hall, 1982:69). Thus, it is important to examine how the legitimisation of certain meanings, and the marginalisation of other constructions in new media, serve to sustain the unequal power relations in the context of Matabeleland politics. As language is a site of struggle, this research explores how different social groups employ new media to legitimate, reproduce and naturalise particular social meanings of Ndebele memories. The notion of “articulation” is central in the text-based research within cultural studies (Grossberg, 2005a; Hall, 1982:80). Stuart Hall defines articulation as the “form of the connection that can make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions” (cited in Grossberg, 2005b:141). As a result, texts can assume “chains of signification” (Grossberg, 2005a:158), as they can be “disarticulated” from one meaning and “rearticulated” to another connotation (Hall, 1982:80). This raises the question of the multiple meanings carried by

signifiers such as Gukurahundi, Mzilikazi and Lobengula,<sup>8</sup> as they are constantly disarticulated and rearticulated in new media discursive spaces. Thus, the notion of articulation enables this research to examine the fluidity in the social meanings of Ndebele memory. Hall, Critcher, Jefferson, Clarke and Roberts's (1978: viii) influential work explicates how media representations of race, youth and mugging in Britain were significant in the construction of an "authoritarian consensus". They argue that the media played a pivotal role in defining the social meanings of mugging, and hence, in the process, manufacturing and reproducing the idea of societal "consensus" (Hall *et al.*, 1978:55). In building upon this argument, this study examines how consensus on Ndebele identity politics is constructed in cyberspace through "common sense", or taken-for-granted elements (Hall, 1982:73).

### **2.2.5 Cultural studies, identity and hybridity**

This study is anchored in a constructionist approach that conceives cultural identities as socially constructed, rather than essential or fixed, categories (Taylor & Spencer, 2004:2; Hall, 1992:277). Constructionists assert that, when we speak of identity, we are concerned with our belonging, a "sense of personal location" (Weeks, 1990:88). This is echoed by Hall (1990:225), who rightly points out our identities signify how we are "positioned by, and position ourselves within the narratives of the past". As such, identities are constructed within specific social, political and historical moments (Hall, 1991a:20; 1990:225; Weeks, 1990:88). In addition, cultural identities are formed through "Othering" or "ambivalence" (Hall, 1991a:20; 1991b:48).

It is important to understand identity as "de-centred" rather than unified, fragmented rather than homogenous, and constantly evolving instead of being fixed (Downing & Husband, 2005:20; Hall, 1992:277; 1991b:59). In this regard, an identity is seen as a matter of "becoming" (Hall, 1990:225), and a sense of being that is "never completed, never finished" (Hall, 1991b:47). By conceiving identities as fluid and in flux, this paradigm provides a framework for exploring the contestations, fissures and alignments that are at play as the Ndebele people recollect their collective memories and reconstruct their identities on the selected news websites (see section 3.7 for a discussion on the contested nature of Ndebele identity). This study explores the kind of histories and collective memories that are invoked by

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<sup>8</sup> Lobengula is the pre-colonial Ndebele king who succeeded his father, Mzilikazi, who was the founder of the Ndebele kingdom.

different people who are placed within different “points of identification” and “positionalities” (Hall, 1990:237). The discourses on the constructions of cultural identities are aptly captured in the literature that examines the social meanings of English identity or “Englishness” that are evoked, reconstructed and circulated through stories, narratives and images in the media, books and popular culture (Hall, 1992:293; 1991a:20). What emerges from these works is the debunking of representational strategies that are deployed to construct an English identity as essential, unitary and unchanging (Hall, 1992:294; 1991a:22). Similarly, this study examines the reconstructions of “Ndebele-ness” that are manifested and articulated in cyber-memories.

Situated within a constructionist perspective, this study considers culture as hybrid. Hybridity is a concept that originated in post-colonial studies (Burke, 2009:31; Brah & Coombes, 2000:1), and was subsequently taken up within cultural studies. This concept reverberates in the works of post-colonial theorists such as Edward Said, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy and Homi Bhabha (Burke, 2009:3; Kalra, Kaur & Hutnyk, 2005:70). Hybridity is considered a “slippery” and “ambiguous” category that carries multiple connotations (Burke, 2009:54; Kalra *et al.*, 2005:70). The complexities and nuances are evident in that, at one level, hybridity is conceived as a threat of “contamination” of the essentialist ideations of “pure and authentic origins” (Brah & Coombes, 2000:1). On the other hand, it is being celebrated as the antithesis of primordial cultural essences (Moreiras, 1999:373). As such, this notion can signify multiple meanings, depending on the writer’s positioning in the discursive space (Kalra *et al.*, 2005:71; Brah & Coombes, 2000:1). This study contributes to these scholarly debates by exploring the ways in which the concept of cultural hybridity illuminates the cyber-constructions of Ndebele Particularism.

Generally, hybridity denotes the engagements, interactions and intersections of “cultural exchange” (Burke, 2009:6; Hutnyk, 2005:80; Kalra *et al.*, 2005:71). Thus, this theory provides a vantage point for making sense of the mixture and interface of diverse cultural practices (Kalra *et al.*, 2005:71). The notion of hybridity is premised on an understanding that cultural identities are fluid and constantly changing (Kalua, 2009:23). It thus rejects any ideas of fixed, monolithic and natural identities (Kalua, 2009:25). This study draws on Bhabha’s (1994) theorisation of hybridity as it provides a framework for countering essentialist conceptions of nationalism and ethnicity. Rather than being “pre-given” and “set in the fixed tablet of tradition”, cultural identities are ambivalent and complex phenomena that are constantly being negotiated and transformed in socio-historical contexts (Bhabha, 1994:2). Such a conceptualisation repudiates claims of “inherent originality or ‘purity’ of cultures” (Bhabha,

1994:37). Drawing upon this theorisation, this study rejects conceptions of Ndebele ethnic/national imaginations as fixed and steeped in a primordial essence, but analyses the dynamics and nuances in the discursive construction of Ndebele memories and identities in relation to colonial and post-colonial power structures.

Kalua (2009:25) builds upon Bhabha's (1994) theorisation on post-colonial identities by affirming that there is no authentic and "pure" African identity, as post-colonial identities are deeply entrenched in colonial discourses. In making sense of this colonial encounter, Kalua (2009:25) asserts that the "coloniser and colonised are so very deeply implicated in one another that any discourse about origins smacks of paradoxes". This argument is echoed in the work of Brah and Coombes (2000:10), who identify the appropriation of colonial cultural forms such as the English language as symptomatic of cultural hybridisation in post-colonial Africa. In addition, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2014:31) argues that the work of post-colonial theorists demonstrates that African resistance against colonialism cannot be conceived in linear and bifurcated terms, as the struggle was marked by complexities and nuances. One of these ambivalences that characterised the liberation struggle was how Africans appropriated colonial traditions, structures and systems such as Christianity to advance the cause of their liberation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2014:31). In focusing on Ndebele political agitations against settler rule in the early twentieth century, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2007:177) posits that an understanding of the colonial encounter must transcend the traditional domination/resistance binary rendition of African Nationalism, as the Ndebele mobilised and appropriated colonial discourses such as liberalism, trade unionism, human rights and Christianity as political weapons against the settler regime. The political movements in Matabeleland were in contrast to an idea of a rigid, pure and unitary identity, as the Ndebele indigenised and contextualised the doctrine advanced by Christian missionaries to "yield a Christianity that stood in vivid contrast to colonial orthodoxy" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:186).

Building upon Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2007:186) rendition, this study considers the current manifestation of Ndebele Particularism in cyberspace as complex and ambivalent. Rather than a restoration of an essential, mythic, and "unsullied" identity (Bhabha, 1994:34), Ndebele political imaginations are reconstructions of memories. I take into account that Ndebele political consciousness has undergone various forms of transformation across historical periods, such as its entanglements within the colonial discourses. As such, it is useful to conceive this identity as a cultural hybrid, rather than an essentialist category, as Ndebele people, positioned in various discursive spaces, assume different identities at different

moments. Thus, the Ndebele people can articulate discourses of secessionist politics, but at the same time remain embedded within the Zimbabwean nation-state configuration. Moreover, they can mobilise the discourses of Ndebele Particularism using Western-derived discourses such as human rights, liberalism and self-determination, and diaspora politics. As such, this study is premised on an understanding that the process of recounting the past in new media does not entail a reclamation of the “real” past as it was, but reconstructions of Ndebele memories.

## **2.2.6 Cultural studies and social constructionism**

As already stated, this research is rooted in the journalism and cultural studies frameworks that have been influenced by the social constructionist epistemological tradition. Because the discussions above have already covered much of the principles of social constructionism as a theoretical paradigm as well, the outline here will be a brief summation with some elaboration of relevant additional debates.

Cultural studies and social constructionism not only complement each other, but also augment journalism scholarship, as they provide a theoretical lens for examining the constructions and contestations of social meanings in cultural texts. This section explores the key tenets of social constructionist epistemology and how it has shaped the trajectory of journalism studies. By epistemology, this study implies “a way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998:3). The debates at an epistemological level relate to our understanding of the world, how we make sense of it, and what we think counts as knowledge of that social world (Crotty, 1998:8). Such understandings of truth and knowledge are pertinent for this study, which engages with the cyber-reconstructions of the social meanings of the Ndebele collective past (see section 2.2.5 for further insights on the intersection between cultural studies and constructionism). Although the research scope of social constructionism is multiple, varied and “mosaic” (Gubrium & Holstein, 2008:4), there are central assumptions and principles that underpin this approach (Burr, 2003:3; Gergen, 1985:266-267).

### **2.2.6.1 What is social constructionism?**

Before delving into the core arguments of this approach, it is important to state that the terms “social constructionism” and “constructivism” tend to be used interchangeably, a scenario that has resulted in conceptual confusion (Andrews, 2012:39; Young & Collin, 2004:375; Burr, 1995:2; Gergen, 1985:266). In order to avert any theoretical muddling, it is pertinent, from the outset, to distinguish between these two concepts, and to affirm that I employ “social

constructionism” throughout this study. Firstly, “constructivism” is usually used to refer to the Piagetian theory, which is a “perceptual theory” (Burr, 1995:2; Gergen, 1985:266). Thus, this approach is rooted in developmental and cognitive psychology, as it focuses on how “each individual mentally constructs the world of experience through cognitive processes” (Young & Collin, 2004:375). On the other hand, however, social constructionists place great emphasis on the “social rather than an individual” (Young & Collin, 2004:376). Thus, social constructionism focuses on the social practices, interactions, social processes and socio-historical and cultural contexts that shape the production of knowledge and social meanings (Andrews, 2012:40; Young & Collin, 2004:377; Burr, 2003:4). Considering that this study examines new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memories, and how these discourses of past events are being produced and transformed by social and political forces at a specific historical juncture, it is useful to employ social constructionism as a conceptual framework. The social constructionist perspective is grounded on the assumption that:

All knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of the interaction between human beings and their world, and developed, and transmitted within an essentially social context (Crotty, 1998:42).

This tradition is underpinned by the works of leading scholars such as Michel Foucault, Kenneth Gergen, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (Gergen, 2001:423; 1985:267; Berger & Luckmann, 1966:1). Berger and Luckmann’s (1966) book is recognised as one of the earliest and influential texts that has provided inspiration for scholarly works on social constructionism (Foster & Bochner, 2008:88; Gubrium & Holstein, 2008:4). The dominant thesis advanced by Berger and Luckmann (1966:1) is that “reality is socially constructed”, an argument that has been appropriated by various scholars to develop the social constructionist perspective.

Within this epistemological debate on “truth” and “reality”, social constructionism emerges as an antithesis of an “absolutist” (Guba & Lincoln, 2008:264) or “objectivist” paradigm (Crotty, 1998:8). This objectivist conception is associated with positivism, an epistemological view of knowledge that presupposes that “truth and meaning reside in their objects independent of any consciousness” (Crotty, 1998:42). Thus, positivism is grounded in an assumption that there is an “objective truth” (Crotty, 1998:42), or that reality is “out there”, and that it can be approximated through objective methods of inquiry (Guba & Lincoln, 2008:269). This assumption has become the cornerstone of journalistic professional ideology (see a discussion of journalism and epistemology in section 2.2.2). However, this orthodox positivist view has



been refuted by social constructionists, who contend that “there can be no such thing as an objective fact” (Burr, 2003:6).

### **2.2.6.2 The premises of social constructionism**

One of the foundational tenets of social constructionism is its refutation of the “taken-for-granted” meanings of the social world (Burr, 2003:2; Gergen, 1985:267; Berger & Luckmann, 1966:19). Constructionists invite us to be critical of the notion that “conventional knowledge is based upon objective, unbiased observation of the world” (Burr, 2003:3). By the same token, our understanding of Ndebele identity and collective memory is not an objective conception, but a socially constructed rendition. Thus, this study presents another layer of this construction of collective memories (see section 2.2.4 for a discussion of the “linguistic turn” and constructionism). The possible criticism of this constructionist method of textual analysis is that the procedure is subjective, as the findings may be blemished by the researcher’s own biases, preconceptions and value judgements. However, I address these concerns by situating the study within its socio-historical context, and also by demonstrating that these findings were attained through a balanced, credible and impartial process (see section 5.3 for an extensive discussion of issues of quality in research).

Secondly, constructionists assert that knowledge and truth are historically and culturally specific (Young & Collin, 2004:377; Burr, 2003:3). As such, this study conceives of Ndebele Particularism as fluid, evolving and constantly renegotiated, rather than a fixed and natural phenomenon. Thirdly, social constructionism is grounded in a supposition that knowledge of the social world is constructed and sustained by social processes (Young & Collin, 2004:376; Burr, 2003:4; Gergen, 1985:268) (see section 2.2.1 for a discussion of cultural studies as a constructionist approach). Thus, our meanings of the social world are “not derived from the nature of the world as it really is” (Burr, 2003:4), but it is through social processes and interactions in our everyday practices that we construct knowledge, or our social meanings of the world (Andrews, 2012:44; Burr, 2003:4; Berger & Luckmann, 1966:21).

As social meanings are regarded as socially constructed, it is then evident that social constructionism takes an anti-essentialist trajectory (Andrews, 2012:39; Burr, 2003:5; Crotty, 1998:48). In other terms, our knowledge of the social world is derived from “meaning-making activities” (Guba & Lincoln, 2008:264), and this view is echoed by Gergen (1985:266), who affirms that our conception of the social world is not a “reflection or map of the world”, but an “artefact of communal interchange”. Since “meaning does not inhere in the object, merely



waiting for someone to come upon it” (Crotty, 1998:42-43), it follows then that the social meanings of Ndebele memory and identity are socially constructed as social groups engage with each other in spaces such as news websites and interpret their social world. More importantly for this study, social constructionists underscore the salience of language in the construction of social realities (Andrews, 2012:44; Foster & Bochner, 2008:85; Young & Collin, 2004:377). The argument is that language constructs and shapes, rather than merely reflect, reality (Foster & Bochner, 2004:86; Young & Collin, 2004:377). This study explores the production, mediation and contestation of Ndebele collective memory through language in new media spaces.

Criticisms have been levelled against social constructionism for its apparent relativism (Slife & Richardson, 2011:334; Houston, 2001:841), and nihilism (Proctor, 1998:359).<sup>9</sup> The critics argue that constructionism espouses a relativist notion that “anything goes”, a position that presumes that all claims of knowledge are valid and admissible (Slife & Richardson, 2011:334). Whilst acknowledging the weight of these aforementioned reproaches, it is pertinent for this study to offer a defence of social constructionism. Some leading scholars of social constructionism, such as Gergen (2001), have rejected the relativist and nihilist tags. Pertaining to the realist-relativist polemics, Keaton and Bodie (2011:192) rightly note that “the confusion often surrounds just exactly what is being socially constructed”. The social constructionist perspective espoused in this study does not deny the existence of the physical or material world (Keaton & Bodie, 2011:192; Hall, 1997a:45; Laclau & Mouffe, 1990:100). This study rejects “universal constructionism” – a view that everything is socially constructed (Hacking, 1999:24). Instead, it favours a milder constructionist approach that acknowledges that material objects exist independently of our consciousness (Laclau & Mouffe, 1990:100). This argument is reinforced by Hall (1997a:44-45), who states that Foucault’s (1972) constructionism does not imply that “nothing exists outside of discourse”, but, rather, it postulates that “nothing has any meaning outside of discourse”. In essence, social constructionism enables us to understand that all forms of knowledge are shaped by power, ideology and other socio-political and historical forces (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009:25; Schwandt, 1998:198; Hacking, 1999:2). Thus, this approach is “liberating”, as it helps us to

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<sup>9</sup> Nihilism is the view that “nothing is knowable” (Proctor, 1998:359).

realise that social meanings are not “fixed and inevitable”, and hence can be challenged (Hacking, 1999:2).

## **2.3 Summary**

This chapter has provided a discussion of the conceptual underpinnings of cultural studies, journalism and social constructionism. I argued that these traditions provide useful theoretical insights into how Ndebele collective memories are being reconstructed and contested on selected news websites. In a nutshell, throughout this study, I consider national identities, ethnicities and collective memories as socially constructed phenomena that are being produced, shaped and contested in social spaces such as new media in specific spatial and temporal locations. As such, social constructionism and cultural studies are not only complementary to, but also enhance, journalism scholarship. By emphasising how social meanings are constructed within socio-cultural and historical contexts, cultural studies and social constructionism remind us that news is a socially constructed product, rather than a reflection of a reality “out there”. As stated in section 1.9.4, two chapters are dedicated to literature review. The following chapter reviews with the scholarly debates on nationalism and ethnicity.

## CHAPTER THREE: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Nationalism, ethnicity, and Ndebele identity politics

#### 3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a critical analysis of the literature that informs this study. I begin by exploring the complex notions of “nation”, “nationalism” and “ethnicity”, and then probe how these conceptions shape our understanding of the role of the media in the social construction of reality. Secondly, this chapter contextualises these debates within the milieu of post-colonial Africa, where nationhood and ethnicity are hotly contested. Subsequently, the scope is narrowed to Zimbabwe in order to examine the fractures within the imagination of the nation-state, and particularly to explore the creation and tenacity of Ndebele identity politics. This study is premised on an assumption that ethnic and national identities are socially constructs.

#### 3.2 Nationalism, nation and national identity

Our sense of national belonging and consciousness are integral components in shaping our understandings of the social world (Ichijo & Uzelac, 2005:1; Reicher & Hopkins, 2001: vii). Not surprisingly, the concepts of national identity, nation and nationalism have attracted scholarly attention, sparking various debates as academics attempt to make sense of these phenomena (Smith, 2003:23). However, amidst these competing and multifaceted conceptualisations, there is a common thread that runs throughout: a belief that these concepts are problematic and ambiguous (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001:7; Smith, 2001:10; Geertz, 1963:107). In the first instance, Smith (2001:9) defines nationalism as an “ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity for a population of which some of its members deem to constitute an actual or potential nation”. In addition, Gellner (1983:1) defines nationalism as a “political principle which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent”.

Intertwined with the above formulation is Billig’s (1995:24) rendition that the term “nation” evokes two interconnected meanings: a “nation as the nation-state”, and a nation as the “people living within the state”. In this vein, nationalism is rooted in the idea that “any nation-as-people should have their nation-as-state” (Billig, 1995:24). Further, Billig (1995:6) propounded the concept of “banal nationalism” to call attention to the discursive habits and processes through which the idea of a nation is continuously and routinely “flagged” and “reproduced” in the

everyday lives of citizens. Similarly, this study explores the ways in which the contesting discourses of the Zimbabwean and Mthwakazi “nations” are invoked, reproduced and reaffirmed through banal expressions, symbols and representations in ideological spaces, particularly new media. This notion of banal nationalism resonates with Renan’s (1990:19) assertion that a nation is a “daily plebiscite”, in the sense that it is not a “given” entity, but has to undergo processes of affirmation, celebration and negotiation. The following sections explore the paradigms of nationalism, not only examining their key underpinnings, but also assessing their contributions to an understanding of the role of the media in nation-building processes. Ozkirimli (2010) and Smith (2001; 1999) provide comprehensive analyses and critiques of the various theoretical approaches to nationalism. In this vein, this chapter critically analyses three conceptions of nationalism: primordialism, modernism and ethno-symbolism. These different understandings provide a basis for making sense of the struggles between Ndebele Particularism and hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism as they play out in the post-colonial media.

### **3.2.1 Primordialism**

Primordialism is a theoretical position that holds that nations are “natural” orders of human beings and are anchored in primordial ties such as religion, blood, kinship, race and language (Ozkirimli, 2010:49; Joireman, 2003:19; Geertz, 1963:110). Therefore, primordialists assert that nations are to be conceived as the “givens” of social existence (Geertz, 1963:110), as they are innate in human nature (Ichijo & Uzelac, 2005:3; Joireman, 2003:19). The prominent theorists within this camp include Horowitz (2004), Geertz (1963) and Shils (1957).

However, severe criticisms have been levelled against the primordialist tradition due to its stress on the “naturalness and/or antiquity of nations” (Ozkirimli, 2010:50). Needless to say, primordialism has become a term of “opprobrium combining the sins of naturalism, essentialism, and retrospective nationalism” (Smith, 2009:8). In addition, Horowitz (2004:72) laments that primordialists are the most “caricatured and most maligned” for their assumption of national identity as “given rather than chosen”. In his seminal work, Renan (1990:15-17) denaturalises an understanding of nationalism by contending that categories such as race, religion and language are narrow and cannot be conceived as bases for the creation of nations. Rather, he posits, nations are constituted by people who possess a “rich legacy of memories” and a “desire to live together” (Renan, 1990:19). In this study, the role of the media in constructing and circulating these shared memories is central. Madianou (2005:13) argues that

there is a “striking absence” in the scholarly works of primordialists on the relationship between the media and national identity. This lacuna, adds Madianou (2005:13), is not surprising, considering that primordialists conceive identities as “given by birth”, which implies that the media have no role to play in their formation, maintenance and reproduction. As such, primordialism is rejected in this study, as it is more useful to theorise national identity as shifting, evolving and fluid, with the media playing a central role in the reconstruction of these identities. In this regard, I turn to the modernist approach to nationalism.

### 3.2.2 Modernism

This paradigm emerged as a reaction to the primordialist conception of nations as natural and “given” (Ozkirimli, 2010:72). Its leading exponents are Anderson (1991), Hobsbawm (1983) and Gellner (1983). Although there are divergent strands within modernism, this approach is grounded on fundamental tenets that are shared by various scholars. Firstly, it is premised on the belief that nations and nationalism are modern phenomena; that is, they are products of modernisation processes such as capitalism, urbanisation and industrialisation (Ozkirimli, 2010:72; Smith, 2001:46). Secondly, it is founded on an assumption that nations are social constructs<sup>10</sup> and cultural artefacts, rather than natural and “given” phenomena (Smith, 2001:48; 2000:52). Thus, nations are conceived as “imagined political communities”, which are imagined in a particular space and time as “sovereign” and “limited” (Anderson, 1991:6). Anderson (1991:44) draws our attention to the central role of “print-capitalism”, such as vernacular newspapers, in this process of forging national consciousness in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. In the same light, this study conceives new media forms as modern versions of “print-capitalism” that are central in connecting and binding geographically dispersed communities in the processes of imagining nations (for further discussion of new media and identity construction, see section 4.5). As such, the role of a researcher is to examine the mechanisms and means by which nations are imagined in particular settings, in this case new and social media. In addition, other theorists consider nations as “invented traditions”, cultural artefacts that are mobilised and engineered in service to nationalist elites (Hobsbawm, 1983:1; Ranger, 1983:211). With its focus on the discursive meanings of nationhood, this approach provides a

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<sup>10</sup> Section 2.2.6 provides an extensive discussion of social constructionism.

framework to decipher the constructions and contestations on Ndebele Particularism as expressed on news websites.

There are a number of scholarly works couched within the social constructionist perspective that examine the role of the media in the formation, reproduction and contestation of national identities. Firstly, Dayan and Katz (1992) argue that “media events” such as the Olympic Games, funerals and coronations that are broadcast on television transform the “viewing experience” in ways that contribute to the forging of a sense of national belonging. Further, Ferguson (2004:122) regards the media as an “identity industry” because they “form, reform, (and) indeed constitute” our identities. Lastly, in a study on the relationship between the media and national identity in Greece, Madianou (2005) examined not only the discourses about national identity on television news, but also explored how audiences of different cultural backgrounds articulated and mediated their identities through the processes of media consumption.

The modernist perspective, however, suffers from a number of theoretical drawbacks. Firstly, the notion that nations and nationalism are modern phenomena is being challenged by primordialists (Ozkişimli, 2010:126; Smith, 1999:100). Entwined with this view is the contention by ethno-symbolists (see discussion below) that modernists have discounted the role of ethnic phenomena in their accounts of the formation of nations (Smith, 2009:17). As a result, the potency and tenacity of pre-modern ethnic ties has largely been ignored by modernists, who argue for the novelty of nations (Ozkişimli, 2010:126; Forrest, 2004:26). In addition, modernists such as Anderson (1991) have been criticised for their Euro-centrism, as they assume that nationalism and nations are “modular” forms spreading from the European to the non-European world (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:49; Chatterjee, 1996:216). Notwithstanding the various drawbacks of modernism, the view that nations are rooted within socio-political and historical contexts provides a useful framework for exploring the various discourses and imaginings of Ndebele collective memory. The strong role ascribed to the media in this model is also accepted, as this study examines the discursive constructions of Ndebele Particularism on selected websites. In order to restore pre-modern ethnic elements to the focal point in the constructions of nations, this study draws insights from ethno-symbolists, who combine primordialist and modernist formulations.

### 3.2.3 Ethno-symbolism

Emerging as a theoretical critique of modernism, but building in part on the role ascribed to the media, ethno-symbolists stress the role of symbols, traditions, myths and memories in the formation of nationalism and nations (Ozkirimli, 2010:143; Smith, 1999:9). In contrast to modernists, ethno-symbolists such as Smith (2003:166) underline the defining role of pre-existing ethnic pasts, ties and heritage in the making and legitimation of nations. Thus, the focus is on how shared ethno-histories, memories and myths are “rediscovered” and “reinterpreted” by modern nationalists in the processes of forging and sustaining nations (Smith, 1999:9; 1986:24). As such, ethno-symbolists’ emphasis is on the re-appropriation and reconstructions of these ethnic myths, histories and memories to create and anchor national identities (Smith, 1999:17). In this way, symbolic and cultural repertoires, such as ethno-histories, myths of ancestry, origins, “golden age” and the exploits of heroes and “messiahs”, are evoked and celebrated in the quest to forge a sense of national belonging (Smith, 2003:40, 174). In addition, the shared memories of the sacrifice and valour of the “glorious dead” are conjured up to express, reinforce and epitomise the ideals of a nation (Smith, 2003:218).

It is important to note that embracing some aspects of ethno-symbolism does not necessarily contradict or create a tension with the fact that this study is situated within social constructionism. This study does not view ethno-symbolism as antithetical to modernism in all respects, as there are overlaps and parallels between these two models (Smith, 2009:14). Both modernism and ethno-symbolism are constructionist approaches, as they acknowledge the rootedness of nations within particular spatial and temporal locations (Smith, 2009:14). As such, this study views ethno-symbolism as complementary to social constructionism, as it rightly emphasises the influence of ethno-histories and memories in the constructions of nations. It is against this backdrop that this research examines the centrality of myths, memories, traditions and ethno-histories in new media reconstructions and contestations of Ndebele Particularism. The following section examines the scholarship of ethnicity and how it is implicated in the conceptualisation of the role of new media in the reproduction of ethnic politics.

### 3.3 Paradigms of ethnicity

There are numerous debates and discourses on the origins, nature and tenacity of ethnicity. This section illuminates these discourses by engaging with various approaches to ethnicity. In

Africa, ethnicity carries multiple connotations, as it tends to be stigmatised and denounced by various groups – those within the modernist perspective denigrate ethnic consciousness as “retrogressive”, “archaic” and an anathema to the modern nation-state (Berman, 1998:306; Maybury-Lewis, 1997:52; Vail, 1989:2), whilst Marxists deplore it as “false consciousness” (Lentz, 1995:303; Mafeje, 1971:259) (as the discussion below will indicate). Within the modernist discourse, it was assumed that ethnicity would disappear in the wake of the modernisation processes and institutions such as the nation-state (Berman, Eyoh & Kymlicka, 2004b:319; Vail, 1989:1). Similarly, Hameso (1997:1) argues that the Western media disparage ethnicity in Africa as “bad tribalism”, and provide narrow, stereotypical and sensational reports about the continent. Amidst the contestations and misconceptions surrounding the idea of “ethnicity”, it is important to trace the origins of this concept before engaging with the different approaches to ethnicity and their implications for the theorisation of the interplay between the media and ethnic politics.

The term “ethnicity” is derived from the Greek words “ethnos” and “ethnikos”, and it has come to signify different meanings across different historical periods (Mhlanga, 2013:49; Fenton, 2010:13; Eriksen, 1996:28). Initially, the term depicted a number of people living together, and particular tribes of animals or flocks; however, it was later rearticulated to signify various groups such as foreign nations, “barbarians”, “heathens” and non-Athenians (Mhlanga, 2013:49; Fenton, 2010:13-14; Eriksen, 1996:28). From these different understandings it is clear that ethnicity was deployed as a form of “Othering” within the “us/them” dichotomy (Mhlanga, 2013:49; Lentz, 1995:305). In the contemporary usage, the term “ethnicity” has come to signify a community with a shared culture (Hastings, 1997:173; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:5).

The following sections describe the various schools of thought that have emerged to make sense of the genesis, character and resilience of ethnicity, and the ways in which these theories provide ways of exploring the intersection between the media and ethnicity. This study identifies and examines the current streams of the understandings of ethnicity – primordialism, instrumentalism and constructionism.

### **3.3.1 Primordialism**

This approach stresses the archaic and primordial bases of ethnic identities (Young, 2001:174; Berman, 1998:309; Lentz, 1995:306). The eminent scholars within this paradigm, Van den Berghe (1981:251) and Geertz (1963:109), assert that ethnic identities are determined by common primordial ties and cultural bonds. In his sociobiological theory, Van den Berghe



(1981:18) argues that ethnicity is an “extension of kinship” and arises from common descent. In this vein, ethnicity is conceived as being essential and natural (Geertz, 1963:109), and rooted in the biology of human nature (Van den Berghe, 1981:251). In a nutshell, an ethnic group is understood as a “given” identity of people sharing primordial ties, common descent, language and culture (Lentz, 1995:306). However, the primordialist position is open to serious criticism. The primordialist categorisation can be viewed as ahistorical, as it presumes that ethnicity is stagnant and unchanging (Berman, 1998:309; Hutchinson & Smith, 1996:8). In contrast, this study views Ndebele ethnicity as socially constructed, fluid and evolving (see the discussion on the construction of Ndebele identity in section 3.6). Thus, it is more useful to situate ethnicity within the constructionist perspective (see discussion below), which does not view ethnic consciousness as a fixed essence but rather as a phenomenon that can be redefined, renegotiated and reconstructed (Atkinson, 1999:23; Berman, 1998:311). But first, the discussion turns to another reaction to the primordialist tradition, namely ethnicity as seen from the instrumentalist perspective.

### 3.3.2 Instrumentalism

Instrumentalists view ethnicity as a weapon deployed by elitists pursuing political and class interests (Yeros, 1999:77; Berman, 1998:309). Thus, they place emphasis on the exploitation and manipulation of ethnicity by elitists (Ake, 2000:94; Yeros, 1999:78). This conceptualisation resonates with Neo-Marxists, who regard the manifestation of ethnic sentiments as “false consciousness” conjured up by the “petty bourgeoisie” in order to “obscure” and “mask” unequal power relations in society (Berman *et al.*, 2004b:319; Yeros, 1999:79; Mafeje, 1971:259). The instrumentalist paradigm is often regarded as a form of constructionist perspective, as it views ethnic identities as circumstantial, contingent and subjective (Berman *et al.*, 2004b:319; Yeros, 1999:2; Van den Berghe, 1981:18). Although instrumentalism overlaps constructionist analyses to a certain extent, the theoretical underpinnings of instrumentalism are inadequate in explaining the nature and resilience of ethnicity. First, instrumentalists depict ethnicity as a transitory instrument that can be evoked at any moment for political and class interests (Ake, 2000:94). However, this is a misconception, as instrumentalists fail to take into account the fact that “ethnicity is not always exploited or always exploitative” (Ake, 2000:94). Instead, we need to understand that, in Africa, ethnicity exists as a “lived reality” (Mhlanga, 2013:52), rather than as a tool “conjured up from thin air” (Berman, 1998:112). It is more useful to conceive of ethnicity as a “living

presence produced and driven by material and historical forces” (Ake, 2000:95). It is against this backdrop that this study is located in the constructionist approach, which does not “take ethnicity for granted”, but views it as a product of socio-historical and political realities (Yeros, 1999:79; Young, 1994:79).

### 3.3.3 Constructionist approach

In contrast to primordialism, which presents ethnicity as a fixed essence, and instrumentalism, which takes ethnicity for granted (Atkinson, 1999:23; Berman, 1998:310), constructionism<sup>11</sup> is premised on an understanding that ethnicity is socially constructed (Yeros, 1999:1; Berman, 1998:310). Thus, constructionists assert that ethnicity is not a natural or unitary category (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:32; Comaroff, 1997:73), but is characterised by nuances, complexities, shifts and contestations (Yeros, 1999:80; Berman, 1998:310-312). As such, in order to fully grasp ethnic consciousness, a study on ethnicity should be grounded in the socio-political and historical settings that mediate ethnic consciousness (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:32; Yeros, 1999:79; Berman, 1998:311).

Anderson’s (1983:15) concept of “imagined communities” has been adopted by constructionists as a starting point to conceptualise nationalism and ethnicity (Yeros, 1999:1; Young, 1994:79). In addition, Ranger’s (1983:211) “invention of tradition” thesis has been predominant in the conceptualisation of ethnicity in Africa (Berman, 1998:305; Hastings, 1997:148). This “inventionist” tradition is anchored in Terence Ranger’s assumption that ethnicity in Africa is a product of colonial construction (Ranger, 1999a:133; Hastings, 1997:149; Ranger, 1983:211). Ranger presupposes that ethnicity is a modern category, as it is one of the traditions “invented” during the colonial era by colonial administrators and missionaries (Ranger, 1999a:133; Yeros, 1999:3; Ranger, 1983:212). However, Ranger’s (1983) constructionist analysis of ethnicity has been repudiated fervently by various scholars, such as Msindo (2012), Atkinson (1999), Comaroff (1997) and Hastings (1997), who argue that ethnic identities existed in “pre-capitalist Africa” and are not “purely the product of colonialism” (Comaroff, 1997:76).

Acknowledging the shortcomings in his postulation, Ranger has since repudiated his earlier “inventionist” formulation and has produced revised editions that recognise the existence of

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<sup>11</sup> Section 2.4 provides an extensive discussion of social constructionism.

identities in pre-colonial Africa (Ranger, 1999a:134; Hastings, 1997:149). In the light of these arguments, this research is situated within the constructionist paradigm, which is anchored in the position that ethnicities in Africa were constructed, shaped and mediated in socio-historical and political contexts spanning across the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs. This is aptly articulated by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008a:40) when he posits that “the colonialists did not ‘invent’ Ndebele ethnic identity; they ‘reconstructed’ it for colonial purposes”. This study acknowledges that the construction of Ndebele identity traverses the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods (see the discussion in section 3.6). Against this backdrop, I provide new insights by examining the role of news websites in the process of reconstructing Ndebele Particularism within this post-colonial specificity. This understanding of the interplay between the media and ethnicity is underpinned by the constructionist paradigm.

### **3.3.4 The media and ethnicity**

This study is grounded in an assumption that the media are an integral cultural space for shaping ethnic consciousness (Nyamnjoh, 2010:57; Zarkov, 2007:2; Cottle, 2000:2). It is through the media and other institutions that people are classified and marked as “us” and “them”, “insider” and “outsider”, and “citizen” and “foreigner” (Cottle, 2000:2). In other terms, such categorisation reinforces ethnic consciousness, as the media serve as sites of struggle where ethnic identities are not only reproduced, but can also be “resisted, challenged, and changed” (Cottle, 2000:2). This notion is buttressed by Zarkov (2007:2), who argues that the “representational practices of the media” played a crucial role in the reproduction of ethnicity during the war in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s. In an ethnographic study that focuses on the appropriation and reception of television by the Punjabi youth community in London, Gillespie (1995:2) argues that the media are contributing to the construction, shaping and contestation of ethnic identities in this Asian community. In Africa, the media are entrenched within ethnic politics as they provide a cultural space for people to define, assert and reinterpret their sense of belonging (Nyamnjoh, 2010:57). In his focus on South Africa and Cameroon, Nyamnjoh (2010:58) concludes that the media are integral in the construction and reproduction of the discourses of ethnic consciousness, national belonging, nativity and citizenship. Lastly, in his study on racism, ethnicity and the media in Africa, Mano (2015:5) posits that the media play a pivotal role in “reinforcing”, “undermining” and shaping ethnicity and racism. This study builds on this scholarship on media and ethnicity by examining the reproduction of Ndebele ethnicity in the cyber-contestations of Ndebele memory. Considering that new media

discourses on Ndebele Particularism are informed by the broader debates on ethnicity and nationhood in Africa, the following sections explore the literature on the politics of nationhood on the continent.

### **3.4 The question of belonging in Africa: Nationalism, ethnicity and the pitfalls of nation-building**

The question of ethnicity is salient in the scholarly discussions and debates on the challenges confronting nation-building in Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b; Berman *et al.*, 2004b; Ake, 2000; Hameso, 1997; Davidson, 1992). In this section, this study explores the various perspectives on the interplay between ethnicity and African Nationalism, as these discourses provide a basis for making sense of the manifestation of Ndebele ethnic sentiments challenging hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism in new media spaces.

There are scholars who assert that African boundaries and nation-states are “artificial” and “arbitrary” (Adebajo, 2010; Mazrui, 2010; Ikome, 2004; Hameso, 1997). The argument is that the current African borders were created by European colonialists to serve their interests (Mazrui, 2010: x; Adebajo, 2005:83; Laremont, 2005:2; Asiwaju, 1985:1). The Berlin Conference of 1884-1885 remains a dark chapter in the history of Africa, as it precipitated the “scramble for Africa” and, ultimately, the fixing of the political map of the continent (Adebajo, 2010:12; Mazrui, 2010: x). It is important to explore the premises of this perspective on colonial boundaries, as it informs some of the constructions of Ndebele cyber-memories. The discourses on Ndebele Particularism are centred on a call for the restoration of the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom.

This critical position is underpinned by an assumption that the colonial boundaries constitute an “original sin” that has been the bane of African nation-states (Mutua, 2007:142; Young, 2007:242). Although they were aware that the political map of Africa had been created by the colonialists, the African founding fathers resolved to maintain these colonial boundaries when the continent was decolonised (Mazrui, 2010: xiii; Idowu, 2008:46; Young, 2001:166). Thus, instead of reviewing the boundaries, the African nationalists decreed the “inviolability” and “sanctity” of these colonial borders (Idowu, 2008:46; Adebajo, 2005:89; Laremont, 2005:2; Young, 2001:166). This principle of the inviolability of colonial boundaries was endorsed by the African Heads of States at the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) meeting at Addis Ababa in 1963 (Olukunle, 2010:67-68; Ayissi, 2009:132), and reaffirmed by the Cairo

Resolution of 1964 (Ayissi, 2009:132; Idowu, 2008:47). As such, these borders bequeathed by colonialists to an independent Africa were to remain “frozen” (Idowu, 2008:47; Adebajo, 2005:85; Maybury-Lewis, 1997:54), and any form of secession was prohibited (Olukunle, 2010:67).

The rationale for preserving this political configuration was rooted in the nationalist fear that adjusting these colonial boundaries would undermine the achieved unity, as it would be akin to opening a “Pandora’s box” that could unleash unprecedented conflicts over boundaries (Ikome, 2004:5; Maybury-Lewis, 1997:54). However, what has arisen is the contention that the challenges confronting the post-colonial nation-states are caused by the boundaries, traditions and institutions inherited from the colonialists (Adebajo, 2005:83; Davidson, 1992:10). This is captured by Mazrui (2010: xiii), who posits that the wider implication of the creation of the colonial boundaries was the destruction of “ancient boundaries of identity”, as ethnic groups with “no traditions of shared authority” were subsumed within the African nation-states. Zimbabwe is one of the African states confronted with the challenges of forging a sense of belonging amongst different groups subsumed within the nation-state (see section 3.5.1 for further discussion). Undergirding this formulation is the argument that African boundaries do not reflect the historical, cultural and political realities of African societies (Mhlanga, 2010:104; Idowu, 2008:46; Davidson, 1992:163; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1987:50).

As such, Mlambo (2013:54) asserts that, at independence, “Africa had states or countries that had yet to become nations”. Hameso (1997:2) construes the African nationhood project as “flawed” and not based on “African realities”. Scholars such as Mazrui (2010: xxvii; 1994:60) maintain that African post-colonial states are haunted by the “bondage of boundaries”. In addition, Adebajo (2010; 1995) evokes his thesis of the “curse of Berlin” to call to mind the far-reaching implications of the Berlin Conference on the question of nationhood in Africa. Similarly, other scholars assert that the inherited colonial boundaries have created a “northern problem” (Akopari, Price & Thompson, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Mhlanga, 2013; Mhlanga, 2010). This “northern problem” arises in a context where there is a “disgruntled group which believes that it is being excluded, dominated or is unwanted by the dominant group in a state” (Akopari *et al.*, 2013:306). Consequently, these sentiments may develop into calls for secession, federalism or devolution of power (Akopari *et al.*, 2013:306; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:15; Mhlanga, 2010:105). In other words, the “northern problem” describes the condition of minority groups who are re-invoking and re-imagining their particular identities, myths and memories in order to resist and dismantle the post-colonial nation-states they perceive to be

colonial structures (Akokpari *et al.*, 2013:306; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Mhlanga, 2013:15). In tandem with Mhlanga's (2010:106) position that the Matabeleland Question is a manifestation of the "northern problem", this study extends the horizons of this argument by exploring new media contestations of Ndebele memory and history against dominant Zimbabwean Nationalism.

However, this study rejects essentialist claims about "real" pre-colonial African nations, as all identities are products of socio-historical and political forces (as indicated below). This discourse on the artificiality of the political map of Africa has been challenged by a number of scholars, who argue that all political boundaries are artificial and arbitrary (Ayissi, 2009:136; Berman *et al.*, 2004a:13; Mamdani, 2001a: 653). Thus, rooted in social constructionism, this research discards any assumptions that cultural identities such as Ndebele Particularism are natural and fixed categories. Further, some scholars assert that the solution to the African nationhood quagmire does not lie in dismantling the colonial boundaries, but rather in building institutions that will foster and promote a sense of belonging and national identity amongst citizens (Berman *et al.*, 2004a:13). Lastly, Mamdani (2001a:653-655) argues that the problem is not with the colonial boundaries, but the institutional legacy of colonial rule that bifurcated identities between "natives" and "settlers", or "citizens" and "subjects".

### **3.5 The imagination of the Zimbabwean "nation": Historiography, memory and the burden of forging national identity**

The national question is at the heart of the political discourses in the Zimbabwean media, as it continues to shape the discussions and debates on nationhood, citizenship and belonging. At the core of these discourses is the interrogation of what it means to be "Zimbabwean", and who constitute the "people" of Zimbabwe (Mlambo, 2013:49; T. Ndlovu, 2012:100). Far from being a stable and agreed upon phenomenon, the Zimbabwean national identity remains an "unfinished business" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:20). Premised on an assumption that both Zimbabwean and Ndebele identities are socially constructed, the following section examines the complexities and nuances of the hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism, and how these tensions are shaping the reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism in cyberspace.

### **3.5.1 Unfinished business: Multiple genealogies and the struggle for national belonging**

Premised on an understanding that histories are discursive constructs, rather than essential truths (Rusu, 2013:262), it is important to review the official and counter-hegemonic nationalist literature on past Zimbabwean events. There are scholarly works that celebrate the Zimbabwean nation-state as a unified and cohesive configuration, in ways that serve to perpetuate and reproduce ZANU PF's official discourse on nationalism (Mudenge, 1988; Ranger, 1985; Martin & Johnson, 1981). Ranger's (1967) text is one of the prominent works that has shaped the official discourse, as it provides a historical account that celebrates a unity that was forged by the pre-colonial Ndebele and Shona people in their struggle against colonialism. However, this nationalist historiography has been challenged by various "revisionist scholars" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009c:53), such as Cobbing (1977) and Beach (1998; 1974), who dispute Ranger's claims of Ndebele-Shona unity in the anti-colonial struggle, and the centrality of spiritual mediums in leading the rebellion.

In his critique of the Zimbabwean nation-building project, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009a:1) poses a pertinent question: "Do 'Zimbabweans' exist?" Departing from the dominant celebratory and triumphant nationalist historiography, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2009a:42) seminal intervention is one of the emerging elements of scholarship that traces the contours of nationalism in Zimbabwe and examines the fractures and fragilities within the idea of Zimbabwe. He asserts that the national identity is an "ongoing and highly contested process" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:3). The perceived failure by the ruling party to forge common citizenship amongst diverse groups is aptly captured by Masunungure (2006:7), who posits that "Zimbabwe the state is a reality but Zimbabwe the nation is still a fiction". Thus, Zimbabwe is "not yet a nation", but rather, it is in the process of "becoming" one (Mlambo, 2013:50; Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2009: xxxii; Masunungure, 2006:3). Other scholars contend that one of the drawbacks of the Zimbabwean post-colonial building project is that it was founded on a false premise that Zimbabwe as a "people" existed prior to colonialism (Mlambo, 2013:54; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:47; Masunungure, 2006:7). However, as asserted by Mlambo (2013:54), the different groups in Zimbabwe, such as the Shona, Ndebele, coloured and Indian communities, were bound by their "shared opposition to colonial rule", rather than any sense of national consciousness.



Some scholars expose the deep-seated fissures within the idea of a Zimbabwean “nation”, and reject the conception that a cohesive and unified Zimbabwean national identity exists (Mlambo, 2013; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a; Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2009). Thus, the idea of a Zimbabwean “nation” is widely contested, as there are multiple and contested pasts, memories and imaginations of the nation (Mlambo, 2013:54; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:4). It is in the light of this that this study identifies Ndebele Particularism as one of the alternative imaginations countering the hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. Within this critical imagination, the argument is that the nationalists failed to build a cohesive national identity and to instil a sense of belonging amongst diverse people (Mlambo, 2013:54; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:4). When the country attained independence in 1980, the Zimbabwean nationalists were confronted with the challenge of synthesising multicultural and multi-ethnic groups, such as the Ndebele, Shona, Kalanga, white and Indian communities, to forge a common citizenship (Mlambo, 2013:53). However, this was to prove a difficult task, as the country remains fragmented along ethnic, racial and class fault lines (Mlambo, 2013:53; Raftopoulos & Mlambo, 2009: xvii).

### **3.5.2 ZANU PF’s hegemonic Nationalism**

Upon assuming power in 1980, the ZANU PF party, led by Robert Mugabe, began a process of redefining and reconstructing the Zimbabwean “nation” in “partisan” terms (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:7; 2008b:169). Consequently, alternative memories and imaginations have been excluded as the nation has come to be articulated in terms of ZANU PF’s “monolithic” and “exclusivist” worldview (Muchemwa, 2010:504; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:169). With the foundational myth of Zimbabwe anchored in ZANU PF’s memories, myths and histories, the alternative imaginations, like the memories and histories of ZAPU, have effectively been expurgated and obscured from the narration of the nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:4). In addition, the ruling party has mobilised and appropriated commemorations, state funerals, national holidays and other cultural rituals to sustain its hegemony and memorialise itself into the narrative of the nation (Muchemwa, 2010:504; Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009:945). To illustrate this argument, Muchemwa (2010) examined ZANU PF’s use of the national shrine, galas and other commemorative rituals as sites for nationalist reconstructions. In a similar vein, Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2009) explored ZANU PF’s appropriation of musical galas, cultural performances and commemorations such as Heroes’ Day and Unity Day as forms of “cultural nationalism”.



Furthermore, within this hegemonic nationalism, ZANU PF continues to deploy the ideology of “Chimurenga” to maintain its stranglehold in the midst of its rising unpopularity, and to imagine the post-colonial nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:7). The term “Chimurenga” is derived from the name Murenga, a Shona spiritual medium who was an inspirational figure in the 1896-1897 resistance against colonial rule (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:3; 2009c:51). However, the term has been re-appropriated within official circles to signify an armed struggle or a war of liberation against colonial rule (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:10; Martin & Johnson, 1981: xvi). At the same time, this hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism is not only pro-ZANU PF, but it is also “Shona-centred”, as it excludes other groups, such as the Ndebele people, in the imagination of the nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2009:950). The imagination of the nation is hinged on Shona myths, histories, memories, symbols and traditions (Mhlanga, 2013:57; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:188; 2008b:169). Therefore, the birth of the narration was characterised by the celebration of what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009a:166; 2008b:169) terms “Shona triumphalism”, which has obscured alternative imaginations, such as Ndebele myths and historical experiences. Shona historical figures, such as Nehanda and Kaguvi, have been glorified within ZANU PF nationalist discourses, and elevated to foundational myths of the nation (Mhlanga, 2013:57; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:13; 2011:41; Muchemwa, 2010:506). This depiction of Zimbabwe as a Shona “nation” is clearly articulated by Stan Mudenge, the late historian and ZANU PF cabinet minister. Mudenge (1988, cited in Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:169) posits that:

Present day Zimbabwe, therefore, is not merely a geographical expression created by imperialism during the nineteenth century. It is a reality that has existed for centuries, with a language, a culture and a worldview of its own, representing the inner core of the Shona historical experience.

In tandem with this monolithic conception of the nation is Robert Mugabe’s statement in 1977 that equated an imagined, independent Zimbabwe to a “natural Shona nation” (cited in Bhebe & Ranger, 2001: xxv). This narrow, essentialist and nativist imagination of a post-colonial nation-state undermines the possibility of forging a cohesive and inclusive national identity, as the historical experiences and memories that fall outside the Shona “worldview” are being excluded from the narration of the nation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:29; 2008b:169).

Further, some scholars argue that ZANU PF nationalist discourses are underpinned by a “patriotic history” that has been propagated in schools, media and other public spaces (Raftopoulos, 2009:202; Tendi, 2008:379; Ranger, 2005a:8). This “patriotic history” denotes

the selective, narrow and “authoritarian” narrative of the liberation struggle that is celebrated by ZANU PF in a bid to sustain its hegemony (Tendi, 2008:379; Ranger, 2005a:8; 2004:218). Underpinning this imagination of the nation is a “parochial and highly distorted historiography” (Mlambo, 2013:62) that bifurcates Zimbabweans into “patriots” and “sell-outs”, and an “indigene/settler” duality (Tendi, 2008:379; Ranger, 2005a:8; Muponde, 2004:176). Within this dominant narrative, the opponents of ZANU PF, such as members of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) formations, are regarded as “traitors” that need to be punished (Ranger, 2005a:8). In addition, “patriotic history” espouses racial cleavages, as white people are excluded from the imagination of Zimbabwe (Mlambo, 2013:62; Tendi, 2008:380). Thus, this version of history is characterised by “essentialist and nativist” imaginations (Muponde, 2004:177) that narrate a Zimbabwean nation that is “expressed through centuries of Shona resistance to external intrusion” (Ranger, 2010:505). This view is echoed by Mlambo (2013:62), who notes that the Ndebeles who are critical of ZANU PF are denounced by “extreme Shona nationalists” as settlers who should return to their homeland in South Africa. As a result of its authoritarian and exclusionary imaginations, Mlambo (2013:62) views the ZANU PF nationalism as a “narrow Shona chauvinistic particularism inspired by rising xenophobic tendencies”. In the light of these complexities surrounding the reproduction of ethnicity in Zimbabwe, this study analyses the nativist and essentialist discourses that are mobilised and invoked by web users in the process of reconstructing Ndebele cyber-memories.

### **3.5.3 Sites of contestation: Hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism and nationalist historiography**

Historians have been crucial in producing accounts that have shaped the ways in which the Zimbabwean past is remembered, celebrated and commemorated (Mlambo, 2013:6; Tendi, 2009:1; Lindgren, 2002:46). More importantly, these historical narratives have influenced contemporary understandings of the conceptions of citizenship, nationhood and national identity (Mlambo, 2013:64; Tendi, 2009:1; Ranger, 2004:234). Scholars such as Ranger (1985) and Martin and Johnson (1981) have produced celebratory texts that have shaped the accounts of the liberation struggle and anchored ZANU PF’s authoritarian nationalism (Phimister, 2012:28; Raftopoulos, 1999:130; Robins, 1996:76).<sup>12</sup> It is against this backdrop that Robins

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<sup>12</sup> Raftopoulos (1999) and Robins (1996) provide comprehensive reviews of the nationalist historiography.

(1996:77) argues that the historians in the triumphal era of the 1980s became “willing scribes” as they produced “praise-texts” that celebrated ZANU PF’s nationalism without critically examining the deep-seated problems associated with the nationalist struggle.

As a result, there is an emerging scholarship that calls for a critical interrogation of the nationalist politics, and a need to confront the past that has been excluded from the official accounts (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:15; Raftopoulos, 2009: xxxii; Robins, 1996:80; Dabengwa, 1995:24). In advocating a more nuanced and diverse rendition of the liberation struggle, Dabengwa (1995:24) condemns the chroniclers of the nationalist struggle for their “timidity, sectarianism and outright opportunism”. In the same vein, Raftopoulos (1999:130) dismisses Martin and Johnson’s (1981) text as a “hagiography for the ruling party”, constituting an “unashamed apologetic justifying the coming to power of a section of the liberation movement”. Bearing in mind that national histories and memories are contested in multiple cultural spaces, this study focuses on new media as sites for memory reconstructions and the reproduction of historical imaginations.

### **3.6 Ndebele Particularism: History, collective memory and identity**

Although its discourses are being overshadowed by the deepening contemporary political and economic turmoil ravaging the country, Ndebele Particularism remains a salient phenomenon in the Zimbabwean political landscape (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:27). The construction of Ndebele ethnicity began in the 1820s, when Mzilikazi broke away from the Zulu kingdom to create a “people” known as the Ndebele (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:11; Lindgren, 2005a:155). With a small band of Nguni-speaking followers, Mzilikazi left Zululand in the 1820s during the Mfecane<sup>13</sup> period and migrated north, where he incorporated Tswana- and Sotho-speaking people en route, before settling in the present-day south-western part of Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:38; Lindgren, 2005a:155; 2001:123). Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Bjorn

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<sup>13</sup> Mfecane, translated loosely as “unlimited warfare”, denotes a movement of “violent upheaval” in the 19<sup>th</sup> century that spread across southern Africa and other parts of central and eastern Africa (Omer-Cooper, 1994:52). Thus, “mfecane” is an Nguni term describing the “wars and disturbances which accompanied the rise of the Zulu” (Omer-Cooper, 1966:5). The dominant discourse is that the expansion of Shaka’s Zulu kingdom had a ripple effect, as it resulted in massive migrations and disruptions, and the subsequent creation of kingdoms such as Ndebele, Gaza and Ngoni (Omer-Cooper, 1994:68; 1966:3). However, in the 1980s, this widely accepted view became subjected to scrutiny in the academia. Cobbing (1988:487), one of the leading critics, contends that the concept of mfecane is a “myth” and an “alibi”, as the upheavals were caused primarily by European colonialists, rather than by the Zulu.

Lindgren are the prominent historians that provide detailed accounts of the genesis, reconstructions and perseverance of Ndebele identity politics that traverse the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b; 2008a; Lindgren, 2005a; 2001). However, Msindo (2012:4) is critical of Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2009b) work on Ndebele history, as he accuses this historian of producing accounts that buttress the current Ndebele secessionist imaginations. In contrast to Msindo's (2012:4) claims that Ndlovu-Gatsheni's work romanticises pre-colonial Ndebele history, Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009b:7) has noted the "forms of oppression and exploitation within the Ndebele state", as this political formation was marred by "class dualities pitting royals and non-royals". Against this background, Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2009b; 2008a) works provide rich and insightful details that illuminate not only the origins and recurrence of Ndebele particularistic identity, but also the ambiguities and complexities of this identity politics.

It is important to explore the various definitions of Ndebele identity as illustrated in Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009b:11-14; 2008b:175-179). These different interpretations do not only explicate the complexity and contestations of Ndebele identity, but also point to the ideological undercurrents, as these social meanings are usually deployed to produce and sustain specific power relations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:179). Firstly, there is a "clannish" definition, whereby an Ndebele is regarded as any person of Nguni ancestry and a descendant of Mzilikazi's Khumalo clan (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:12; 2008b:175). This formulation is considered "reductionist" and "narrow", as it confines Ndebele identity to descendants of those people who originally resided in Zululand, thus excluding other groups who are not of Nguni heritage (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:12; 2008b:179). Secondly, there is a linguistic interpretation, as an Ndebele is defined as any person who speaks isiNdebele as mother tongue (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:175). Thirdly, there is the regional-geographic version, in terms of which an Ndebele is connoted as any person residing in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:175). This perspective is repudiated by Msindo (2012:4), who contends that Matabeleland is not identical to "Ndebele-land", as this area is also tied to the past of other groups, such as the Kalanga, Tonga and Venda. As such, this study does not conflate Ndebele identity with Matabeleland politics, as there are prevailing dynamics and nuances underpinning identity politics in this geographic area. Rather, I acknowledge the plural nature of identity politics in Matabeleland, such as the manifestation of Kalanga activism, which contests this supra-Ndebele identity (Msindo, 2012:2; 2007:278).

Fourthly is the political meaning that was constructed during the Gukurahundi period, when an Ndebele came to be defined as any person loyal to ZAPU (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:13). During this period of violence that engulfed Matabeleland, Joshua Nkomo, leader of ZAPU, was depicted by ZANU as an Ndebele king (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:13). As a result, this conflation of ethnic, regional and political identities resulted in what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008b:179) terms the post-colonial “re-tribalisation and provincialisation of Ndebele identity”. Lastly, there is a historical-pluralistic version that regards the Ndebele as an amalgamation of the descendants of all the people whose ancestors were part of the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:175). This is an inclusive interpretation, as it encompasses various groups, such as the Nguni, Sotho, Tswana, Kalanga, Venda, Shona, etc. (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:13). As noted by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2008b:179), this is a more plausible definition, as it does not reduce Ndebele identity to Nguni ancestry, but rather acknowledges the disparate groups that were incorporated into the creation and shaping of an Ndebele state. As I have endorsed the constructionist understanding of nationalism and ethnicity (see section 3.2.2 and 3.3.3 for a detailed explanation), this study is able to examine the contending versions of “Ndebele-ness” in new media reconstructions of histories and identities.

### **3.6.1 Ndebele-Shona encounters: Memory and narratives in historiography**

The pre-colonial Ndebele state was characterised by complex and contradictory nation-building processes, such as conquest, domination, raiding, consent and assimilation of various groups (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:38). As a result, the representations of the pre-colonial Ndebele people have been a site of contestation. Ranger (1999b:5) exposes the imbalances in Zimbabwean historiography when he argues that the dominant narrative of Matabeleland known to Zimbabweans has been “an emphasis on the Ndebele as invaders, raiders and conquerors”. This argument is echoed by Muponde (2004:139), who regards that these official discourses are “xenophobic musings” that display a “widespread and deep-seated resentment of Ndebele history”. The dominant myth that has been produced and reproduced across the colonial and post-colonial epochs is an image of the Ndebele people as cruel warriors who survived on raiding their neighbouring communities (Lindgren, 2002:53; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:9). These depictions of cruelty embedded in the works of early missionaries such as David Livingstone and Robert Moffat have been predominant in many cultural spaces (Ndlovu-

Gatsheni, 2009b:42; Lindgren, 2002:54). One of the biting attacks on the Ndebele people is from Omer-Cooper (1966:130), who depicts king Mzilikazi as “one of the most savage destroyers of human life”, and a “tyrant who wallowed in blood and rejoiced in the smoke of burning villages”. Within this colonialist narrative propagated in history textbooks, Barnes (2004:143) argues that the Shona were portrayed as “disorganised weaklings” at the mercy of the Ndebeles, who were “mindless militaristic bullies”. Besides the colonial historiography, there also is literature produced by Zimbabwean historians such as Vambe (1972:61), which is replete with derogatory and stereotypical depictions of the pre-colonial Ndebele as “invaders from the South” who were constantly on a rampage, “looting and plundering” the Shona communities.

However, there are scholars who are challenging these myths about Ndebele power, as they argue that these representations crystallise on assumptions, exaggerations and distortions that were propagated by missionaries and colonialists to justify and legitimate their colonial conquest of the Ndebele kingdom and the “emancipation” of the Shona people (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:42-43; Barnes, 2004:142; Beach, 1974:633). In challenging the stereotypical depictions, Lindgren (2002:47; 2001:130) deploys Mudimbe’s (1994: xii) notion of a “colonial library” to argue that the dominant Ndebele historiography has been mobilised from a canon of knowledge that is underpinned by colonial experiences, discourses and imaginations. Most importantly, these colonial representations of the Ndebele history have been reproduced and propagated in the Zimbabwean nationalist historiography (Barnes, 2004:149; Lindgren, 2002:62). As such, this study examines the role of new media as sites of resistance that empower Ndebele communities to dislodge these hegemonic narratives and re-imagine their particularistic histories and identities. The following section engages with the discourses on the post-colonial violence in Matabeleland, as they are implicated in new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism.

### **3.6.2 The Gukurahundi: An elephant in the room**

The memories of the Gukurahundi atrocities have not only shaped the history of Matabeleland (Alexander *et al.*, 2000:1), but they also have become a site of struggle between hegemonic narratives and counter-hegemonic accounts (Rwafa, 2012:313; Werbner, 1998a:1). With the memories of these massacres ever-present in the politics of Zimbabwe, Rwafa (2012:323) describes the country as a “wounded nation where surviving victims of Gukurahundi are still



simmering with anger, resentment and frustration". It is important to briefly discuss the events leading to this post-colonial violence.

Zimbabwe gained independence in 1980, and the Mugabe-led ZANU PF party won the country's first elections held in the same year (Kriger, 2003:29; Alexander, 1998:152). Having declared a policy of "reconciliation", Mugabe formed a cabinet that included Rhodesian and ZAPU representation (Kriger, 2003:29). In addition, the three military wings were integrated into the Zimbabwe National Army (ZNA) that had recently been formed (Kriger, 2003:29). During the liberation struggle, ZANU had the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army (ZANLA) as its armed force, and ZAPU had the Zimbabwe People's Revolutionary Army (ZIPRA) as its armed wing (Eppel, 2004:44; Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:152). As the recruitment and operation of these two guerrilla armies had been regionally based, ZANLA was dominated by Shonas and ZIPRA by Ndebeles (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:44; Kriger, 2003:151).

Despite the rhetoric of reconciliation in the new political dispensation, there were growing suspicions and tensions between ZANU and ZAPU, and fierce clashes ensued between ZANLA and ZIPRA forces, with the notable battle at Entumbane (Bulawayo) in late 1980 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:44; Eppel, 2004:44; Alexander, 1998:154). As the ZANU-ZAPU relations were deteriorating, the defining moment came in February 1982, with the "discovery" of arms caches on a ZAPU-owned property outside Bulawayo (Lindgren, 2005b:159; Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:155). Mugabe used this incident to accuse ZAPU of plotting a coup and, subsequently, Joshua Nkomo and other ZAPU ministers were sacked from the government (Lindgren, 2005b:159; Meldrum, 2004:50; Alexander, 1998:156). In addition, two ZIPRA commanders, Lookout Masuku and Dumiso Dabengwa, were arrested on treason charges (Lindgren, 2005b:159; Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:155). However, some scholars have noted that the allegations of a coup plot were not convincing, considering that both sides were aware of the existence of these weapons prior to their "discovery" (Meldrum, 2004:50; Alexander, 1998:155). The issue is that, since the 1980 elections, as Alexander (1998:152) argues, there had been a pervasive fear in ZANU that ZAPU would attempt to overthrow the government.

In the midst of these tensions, ZIPRA guerrillas deserted from the army, citing concerns of repression and persecution (Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:156). It is this group of deserters that became tagged as the "dissidents" (Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:174). There are different understandings of the reasons for the desertions of the ZIPRA guerrillas. In her study

on the experiences and perspectives of the “dissidents”, Alexander (1998:156) argues that the mass desertion of these former ZIPRA guerrillas was motivated primarily by the repression, violence and persecution they suffered at the hands of the ZNA military personnel. From the accounts of twenty former “dissidents” she interviewed, Alexander (1998:159) posits that these former combatants fled the army because of “life-threatening pressures”, rather than a ploy to stage a coup. However, in spite of Nkomo and ZAPU denying links with the “dissidents”, Mugabe and ZANU politicians accused ZAPU of engineering the dissident movement to topple the government (Phimister, 2009:473; Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:153). Enos Nkala, a prominent Ndebele-speaking ZANU PF Minister, asserted that the dissidents were “Ndebeles who were calling for a second war of liberation”, and depicted Joshua Nkomo as a “self-appointed Ndebele king” (Kriger, 2003:76; Alexander, 1998:153). As these “dissidents” were numbering not more than 400 members at their zenith (Kriger, 2003:30; Alexander, 1998:166), some scholars argue that the scale of their threat was greatly “exaggerated” by ZANU (Rwafa, 2012:473; Phimister, 2009:473; Alexander & McGregor, 1999:250). During the same period, in Matabeleland, there was a group of insurgents known as “Super ZAPU” that was trained and armed by the South African apartheid government with the objective of destabilising Zimbabwe (Phimister, 2009:473; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:28).

In 1983, Mugabe reacted to these “dissident” activities by deploying the Fifth Brigade military unit to suppress the movement in Matabeleland (Phimister, 2009:473; Lindgren, 2005b:155; Kriger, 2003:31). However, this military unit targeted ZAPU officials, ex-ZIPRA guerrillas and civilians in the Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, as they were accused of supporting the “dissidents” (Phimister, 2009:473; Lindgren, 2005b:156; Kriger, 2003:31). In this regard, ethnic, political and insurgent categories were conflated, as all Ndebele were seen as “dissidents” and members of ZAPU (Eppel, 2004:45; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:222; Alexander & McGregor, 1999:246). In summoning memories of the pre-colonial myths, the Fifth Brigade claimed to be avenging the Ndebele “raids” on the Shona communities (Lindgren, 2005b:161; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:25; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:222). Trained and armed by the North Koreans, this Fifth Brigade was composed of ex-ZANLA guerrillas who were an almost exclusively Shona-speaking unit that reported directly to Mugabe (Eppel, 2004:44; Kriger, 2003:31; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:25; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:218). This Fifth Brigade unleashed terror in the Ndebele-speaking communities, committing atrocities such as killings, mass detentions, torture, abductions and rapes (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:46; Eppel, 2004:45; Kriger, 2003:31; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:222). At Bhalagwe camp in Matobo District, thousands were



tortured, sexually abused and killed, and their bodies were thrown in mine shafts (Fontein, 2010:443; Eppel, 2004:45; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:25). The horrendous stories of the Fifth Brigade activities are detailed extensively in the report by the Catholic Commission for Justice and Peace and the Legal Resources Foundation Report (CCJP & LRF, 2007).

Whilst all these abuses were being committed, the state-controlled media, such as the *Chronicle* newspaper in Bulawayo, propagated the government discourse of vilifying the “dissidents”, and hence they were almost silent on the atrocities committed among civilians by the Fifth Brigade (Eppel, 2004:50; Alexander & McGregor, 1999:250). As the local media failed to report adequately on these massacres, there is an argument that people outside the affected areas were not aware of this state brutality against civilians (Vambe, 2012:283; Eppel, 2004:50; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:250). In the light of the euphoria surrounding the emancipatory potential of new media, this study explores how Ndebele communities are appropriating news websites to remember their collective past, dislodge the official discourses on the Gukurahundi, and re-imagine their own historical narratives.

The Gukurahundi ended in 1987 with the signing of the Unity Accord, which resulted in the merging of ZANU and ZAPU (Kriger, 2003:31; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:31). As the dissidents and the Fifth Brigade were granted amnesty and pardoned, the truth about Gukurahundi has been silenced (Eppel, 2004:50; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:32). The state failed to acknowledge the impact of these atrocities, or to compensate the victims (Lindgren, 2005b:165; Eppel, 2004:47; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:32). Due to its “culture of denialism” (Rwafa, 2012:319), ZANU PF regards the Gukurahundi as a closed chapter, and the collective memories of the atrocities are repressed (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014:5; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:153). Furthermore, there are scholarly works such as that by Ranger (1989b) that reinforce ZANU PF discourse by giving an account of the atrocities in Matabeleland without mentioning the activities of the Fifth Brigade. Ranger (1989b:172) applauds Mugabe for his “generosity” and “courage” in granting amnesty to the “dissidents”. However, this position, which seems to absolve the Fifth Brigade, has been overtly dismissed by various studies that indicate that a lot of atrocities were committed by the Fifth Brigade and other state army units, rather than by the “dissidents” (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014; Lindgren, 2005b; Kriger, 2003; Alexander *et al.*, 2000; Werbner, 1998b). In addition, Vambe (2012:286), in his work on the “voices, views and perceptions” of the surviving victims of Gukurahundi, claims that the victims and perpetrators of the mass killings “have moved on with their lives”. However, this perspective has been rebutted by Ndlovu and Dube (2014:1), who accuse Vambe (2012) of failing to adhere to “ethical and

moral biddings that should be a feature of all academic endeavours”. They regard Vambe’s (2012) study as misleading, as there is no evidence in his research that indicates that he conducted the unstructured interviews he claimed to in order to gather the views and perceptions of ordinary people (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014:2). My research focuses on the role of new media in the reconstructions of past events, and hence I explore the social meanings of the Gukurahundi that are being evoked, constructed, and contested.

The popular and scholarly understandings of the motivations of the violence are sharply divided between political and ethnic interpretations (Alexander *et al.*, 2000:218). Writers such as Rwafa (2012), Vambe (2012) and Nyarota (2006) completely dismiss the ethnic factor in their making sense of the Gukurahundi, as they argue that ZANU PF’s agenda was to crush a political opposition party, ZAPU, and establish a one-party state. The argument is that foregrounding the ethnic dimension amounts to implicating all the Shona people in the massacres (Rwafa, 2012:320). However, Ndlovu and Dube (2014:10) note that arguing that a “Shona-dominated regime” orchestrated the killings does not implicate all the Shona-speaking people in the genocide. Rather than dismissing ethnicity, it is useful to deploy a more nuanced approach, as the atrocities cannot be fathomed as solely politically motivated, as there was a strong correlation between ethnic and political categories (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014:8; Eppel, 2004:45; Alexander & McGregor, 1999:246). In this regard, there is scholarship that depicts the Gukurahundi as an ethnic cleansing of ZAPU and its Ndebele supporters (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014:8; Matshazi, 2007:67). Thus, some scholars note that the Fifth Brigade employed overtly “tribalist” discourses (Lindgren, 2005b:161; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:223). Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009a:182-183; 2008a:47) interprets the Gukurahundi as indicative of the incongruities of Ndebele Particularism and “Shona triumphalism”, as Ndebele people were “summoned” and “conquered” to be part of a Shona imagined nation-state. Similarly, Werbner (1998b:93; 1996:13) conceptualises the Gukurahundi violence as a product of ZANU’s “quasi-nationalism”. He defines quasi-nationalism as a “movement of ideas and practices which win its often cruelly violent moments within the formation of the nation-state in the twentieth century” (Werbner, 1996:12). Focusing on post-colonial Africa, Werbner (1998b:92; 1996:13) argues that, upon capturing the nation-state, the ruling regimes unleashed violence on communities that were perceived to be threats to the vision of a homogenous and unified nation. Thus, in the case of Zimbabwe, argues Werbner (1998b:93; 1996:13), ZANU PF deployed the Fifth Brigade to unleash terror and brutality upon the people of Matabeleland, who were castigated as “dissidents” conniving with the foreign powers to overthrow the government.

With the Gukurahundi considered a closed chapter in the dominant circles, some scholars have noted the growing demands in Matabeleland for accountability, commemoration and cleansing ceremonies (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a; Eppel, 2004; Alexander *et al.*, 2000). Thus, these emerging, marginalised voices are calling for a need to acknowledge, commemorate and publicly remember their dead relatives in order to find closure (Eppel, 2004:52; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:276). Further, there are demands for the exhumation of bodies from mass graves, public mourning, appeasing the spirits of the dead, and the memorialisation of those killed in sites such as Bhalagwe camp (Eppel, 2004:52-58; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:259). However, the state has thwarted any attempts made by the local communities to commemorate and remember their dead relatives. A notable case is that of a public ceremony in 1997 that had been organised in Lupane to remember the dead who were buried in a mass grave, but it had to be called off after the members of the rural community were intimidated by state security agents (Alexander *et al.*, 2000:262). Most recently, an artist, Owen Maseko, was arrested for exhibiting a painting on the Gukurahundi at an art gallery in Bulawayo (Rwafa, 2012:324). This clampdown on dissenting voices not only attests to how the memories of the Gukurahundi are being muzzled, heavily guarded and repressed by the authoritarian regime, but also points to the growing demands from the hushed voices to remember, commemorate and share the experiences of their collective traumatic past. It is in this regard that this study focuses on new media as a cultural space for the articulation of these Gukurahundi discourses that have been marginalised and silenced (see section 4.5 for a discussion of how the Internet enables the subjugated communities to invoke and re-imagine their suppressed historical narratives).

More importantly, the memories of Gukurahundi have triggered and reinforced Ndebele particularistic identity, subsequently bifurcating the nation-state along ethnic lines (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:169; Lindgren, 2005b:156). In his study of the memories of the violence in Matabeleland, Lindgren (2005b:156) established that the people of Umzingwane district “explicitly identify themselves as Ndebele when remembering the atrocities”. Thus, the massacres have sown seeds of resentment amongst the Ndebele against the ZANU PF government and the Shona people in general (Mlambo, 2013:58; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:48; Lindgren, 2005b:167). As a result, Ndebele Particularism has been re-animated and recreated in the form of secessionist politics spearheaded by groups such as the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), which are calling for the restoration of the pre-colonial Ndebele state (Mlambo, 2013:58; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2012:18; 2008a:48). It thus is important to examine the intersection of news websites, collective memory and identity politics. In addition, this Ndebele identity

politics has been shaped by the current feelings of disenchantment and grievances against what the people of Matabeleland perceive as domination, marginalisation and alienation in the socio-economic and political spheres (Moyo, 2012b:487; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:47). In conclusion, Ndebele Particularism is multifaceted, but is centred on the renditions of Ndebele historical experiences and memories that repudiate ZANU PF's authoritarian nationalism anchored in Shona imaginations (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009a:188; 2008a:51). This study explores the role of new media as sites for the emergence and reconstructions of Ndebele particularistic identity.

### **3.7 Summary**

This chapter has explored how the different conceptions of nationalism, ethnicity and identity shape our understanding of new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory. Further, I have engaged with the question of citizenship in Africa in general, and in Zimbabwe in particular. Lastly, the chapter explored the origins and recurrences of Ndebele Particularism, examining the centrality of the Gukurahundi in the contestations of memories in cyberspace. The subsequent chapter on literature review explores the broader conceptions of collective memory and the role of the media as memory signifiers.

## CHAPTER FOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Perspectives on collective memory, history and new media

#### 4.1 Introduction

Having established in the previous chapter that identities (national and ethnic) are social constructs, this chapter extends the contours of the discussion by exploring the interplay between collective memory and new media. Firstly, I explore the literature on collective memory and history, highlighting the socially constructed nature of these phenomena. The second part of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the debates on the democratic potential of new media. As an exploration of collective memory and new media, this chapter probes the role of the Internet as a platform for social groups to convey, share and contest their collective remembrances. Anchored on an assumption that the social meanings of collective memory are negotiated and mediated on news websites, this chapter accentuates the role of the Internet as “technologies of memory” (Sturken, 2008:75; Van House & Churchill, 2008:296) that mediate, reproduce and transmit the contested knowledges about the past. The first section traces the genesis of collective memory studies.

#### 4.2 Collective memory research

The concept of collective memory has gained prominence within the humanities and social sciences, as there has been growing scholarly interest in the implications of collective memory for contemporary social life (Rusu, 2013:260; Huyssen, 2003:1; Kansteiner, 2002:180). In making sense of the explosion of work within this field of research, scholars have come to use expressions such as “memory boom” (Hirsch, 2012:34; Huyssen, 2003:18), “surfeit of memory” (Maier, 1993:136), and an “obsession with memory” (Huyssen, 2003:18). Collective memory has emerged as a multidisciplinary field, as it draws from various research domains, such as sociology, history, philosophy, communication and anthropology (Roediger & Wertsch, 2008:9; Zelizer, 1995:216). Situated mainly in the field of cultural studies, this study builds on this scholarship on collective memory by examining how the collective memories of Ndebele people are embodied on news websites in the struggle against hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism.

This study is premised on the understanding that collective memory is a social group’s shared recollections of past events (Zandberg, 2010:7; Harris, Paterson & Kemp, 2008:214; Edy,

2006:3; Confino, 1997:1386). Conway (2003:309) adds that these are “memories of the past that are embodied in genre or ‘technologies of memory’ such as films, books, documentaries, poems, songs, memoirs, and the like”. Maurice Halbwachs, a French scholar, is regarded as the pioneer of collective memory studies (Olick, 2007:6; Green, 2004:37; Burke, 1997:44; Zelizer, 1995:214). Fundamental to Halbwachs’ theorisation on collective memory is the notion of “social frameworks of memory”, an assertion that individuals’ recollections of past events are enmeshed in social contexts (Olick, 2007:6; Burke, 1997:44; Halbwachs, 1992:40). His principal argument is that what we remember as individuals is shaped and constructed within group contexts (Olick, 2007:19; Burke, 1997:44; Halbwachs, 1992:40). Underpinned by an assumption that memories are “socially framed” (Olick, 2007:6), this study probes the ways in which Ndebele communities are using new media to express, assert, share and solidify their collective memories and identities.

There is a tension between “individualist” and “collectivist” conceptions of collective memory (Olick, 2007:11; Kansteiner, 2002:180). The individualistic perspective is anchored in psychoanalytical and behaviourist traditions, as it regards collective memory as an “aggregate” of personal memories, and hence focuses on cognitive aspects (Olick, 2007:23; Kansteiner, 2002:180; Zelizer, 1995:215). In stark contrast, Halbwachs’s “collectivist” approach foregrounds the collective remembrances, rather than personal memories that are disconnected from a social group (Harris *et al.*, 2008:214; Olick, 2007:19; Zerubavel, 2003:2; Kansteiner, 2002:185; Halbwachs, 1992:40). This study rejects the “individualist” perspective of collective memory, as it downplays the social contextual factors by focusing on the cognitive and behavioural processes (Olick, 2007:25). Rather, this research is rooted in Halbwachs’s “collectivist” approach, as my focus is on the ways in which members of the Ndebele ethnic group appropriate news websites as spaces for evoking and negotiating collective remembrances of past events. In other words, this study focuses on what web users remember as self-identifying members of the Ndebele group as they converge in new media spaces. In addition, Halbwachs (1992:51) posits that these accounts of the past are reconstructed in social groups such as the family, religious groups and social classes. In a similar vein, some scholars evoke the idea of “mnemonic communities” to maintain that collective memories are shared amongst members of social groups such as families, ethnic groups and nations (Wertsch, 2012:10; Harris *et al.*, 2008:214; Zerubavel, 2003:4; 1998:315).

Furthermore, Halbwachs (1992:40) conceptualises collective memory as socially and historically constructed. As such, the emphasis is on the socio-historical environments that

underlie the reconstructions of these past events (Green, 2004:37; Zerubavel, 2003:4). Halbwachs affirms that the images of the past are reconstructed in tandem with the “predominant thoughts of the society” (Halbwachs, 1992:40). As such, scholarly pursuits on collective memory must consider the socio-historical setting, as the memories of public events are reconstructed in order to serve contemporary purposes (Olick, 2007:28; Huyssen, 1995:250; Schwartz, Zerubavel, Barnett & Steiner, 1986:149). It is in this regard that Huyssen (2003:11) evokes the notion of “present pasts” to reflect on the ways in which the images of the past are entangled in contemporary politics. In addition, other scholars evoke the idea of “presentism” to reinforce this position that the interpretation of the past is shaped by present needs and circumstances (Edy, 2006:14; Olick & Robbins, 1998:128). In the light of this theoretical positioning, this study examines the ways in which the negotiation of Ndebele cyber-memories is being influenced by the current Matabeleland secessionist discourses and other forms of political agitation.

Halbwachs’s theorisation on collective memory has been problematised by some scholars. The main contention is that this theory is “functionalist”, as it presupposes that collective memory maintains consensus, unity and stability, and hence ignores the conflicts, fractures and divisions that manifest within social groups (Green, 2004:38; Burke, 1997:55). Attentive to this criticism, this study does not present Ndebele Particularism as a homogenous and essentialist rendition of the past; rather, I explore the contending memories and probe these “mnemonic battles” (Zerubavel, 2003:2) being waged by different “memory communities” (Burke, 1997:56) as they interpret the social meanings of their past differently in cyberspace. As the struggle over memory revolves around the selection of certain events deemed worthy to be remembered, the exclusion of other accounts, and the selection of a particular rendition of those historical events (Wertsch, 2012:10; Hasian Jr & Frank, 1999:99; Schwartz *et al.*, 1986:148), this study examines news websites as contested terrains for different mnemonic communities as they represent and reinterpret Ndebele collective memories.

There is a body of literature on the Holocaust “post-generation” that reflect on how the experiences of the genocide survivors have come to constitute the memories of subsequent generations (Hirsch, 2012:4; Hoffman, 2004: xi). These studies examine how these traumatic memories and knowledges are being bestowed on a “hinge generation” that has been tasked with the “guardianship” of the legacy of the Holocaust memories (Hoffman, 2004: xv). In reflecting on the aftermath of the genocide, some authors have conceptualised the notion of “postmemory” to describe how these inherited traumatic memories, stories and experiences are



deeply entrenched in the lives of the “second-generation” or “generation after” (Hirsch, 2012:5; 2008:103). More importantly, these studies on the Holocaust remembrances identify the family and photography as crucial units and sites of transmitting collective memories across generations (Hirsch, 2012:22; 2008:103). Similarly, this study reflects on the possibilities of new media as sites for the transmission and creation of the Ndebele postmemory as the traumatic experiences of the Gukurahundi are handed down to later generations. Thus, I also probe the nuances in the dialogue, and the divergences between the group that directly experienced the Gukurahundi, and the other that inherited the memories of those atrocities.

The scholarship on collective memory covers an investigation of both the texts and the forms of remembrances (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, 2010:1103). Nora (1989:7) focuses on “sites of memory”, drawing our attention to the role of archives, cemeteries, museums, monuments and other public spaces as domains for representing and remembering the past. In a similar vein, Confino (1997:1386) maintains that the past is reconstructed into “shared cultural knowledge” through various “vehicles of memory”, such as museums, films and commemorations. This study identifies the Internet as the emergent sites of memory, as it provides a space for the preservation and reconstruction of past events. It is important to explore the ways in which the Internet establishes and interweaves a “living connection” (Hoffman, 2004: xv) between the Ndebele community and its past in the processes of forging a sense of belonging.

There furthermore is scholarship that explores the interrelations between collective memory and cultural identities, with an argument that collective memories create and consolidate cultural identities as they provide social groups with knowledge of their past (Sorek, 2011:464; Hasian Jr & Frank, 1999:98; Zerubavel, 1994:77). Collective memory studies postulate that social groups construct their own memories of the past, and these serve to establish and delineate the boundaries of their communities (Zandberg, Meyers & Neiger, 2012:68; Zandberg 2010:6). In addition, some scholars argue that memories of triumphs and debacles are crucial in producing and maintaining national consciousness (Sorek, 2011:464). Other scholars have illustrated the interplay between collective identity and memory by examining how the collective remembrances of Jewish events, such as the fall of Masada in 73 A.D. and the Holocaust during the Second World War, have been appropriated and rearticulated in Israel by Zionist nationalists (Zertal, 2005; Zerubavel, 1994; Schwartz *et al.*, 1986). Despite having been “forgotten” and marginalised for a long time in the Jewish historical narratives, the memories of Masada came to occupy a central place in the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the time of the rise

and consolidation of Zionist nationalist identity (Zerubavel, 1994:75; Schwartz *et al.*, 1986:148). Informed by these arguments, this study probes how Ndebele cyber-collective memories are fitting into the current Matabeleland secessionist politics. However, this study does not present the correlation between cultural identity and collective memory as a taken-for-granted, or a “given” phenomenon; rather, this constitution is not stable, as there are contestations within social groups over the past to be remembered, and the ascription of social meanings to these historical events. Arguing against essentialism, this study is informed by an understanding that our recollections of the past are far from being “objective” enterprises (Zerubavel, 2003:2), as collective memory is a contested terrain constituted by “mnemonic standoffs” (Wertsch, 2012:9) between social groups articulating contending versions of the past. As the process of recounting the past is enmeshed in power relations in society, there is a question of which particular versions of the past are remembered by which particular groups and for what purposes (Zerubavel, 1995:214).

As the process of recollecting past events is marred by contestations, some scholars draw attention to the “politics of memory” to insist that social meanings of memory are constructed by social groups as a political weapon to entrench or resist power (Sturken, 2008:74; Huyssen, 2003:1; Hirsch, 1995:10). Consequently, the processes of “remembering” and “forgetting” have come to be regarded as a source of struggle in this politics of memory (Assmann & Assmann, 2010:231; Brockmeier, 2002:15; Orwell, 1949:19). Within the traditional conception of memory, “remembering” and “forgetting” are depicted as mutually exclusive processes, with the former carrying positive connotations and the latter being vilified (Brockmeier, 2002:15). Thus, within this narrative of the struggle for truth, remembering is depicted as the “hero” that preserves and protects historical knowledge, whilst forgetting is signified as the “villain” that masks and falsifies historical accounts (Brockmeier, 2002:15). As a result, some scholars maintain that the process of remembering is a “subversive” and liberatory endeavour against the totalitarian governments that control the memories of the past, whilst forgetting is a weapon deployed by the power bloc to sustain and perpetuate the status quo (Assmann & Assmann, 2010:231; Orwell, 1949:19). Orwell’s depiction of “Big Brother” is a classic case of the constitution of remembering and forgetting in power struggles, as he affirms that oppressive regimes produce and sustain relations of domination by controlling the production and dissemination of the memories of the past (Assmann & Assmann, 2010:231; Orwell, 1949:19).

However, other writers have demystified the rigid and dichotomous relationship between remembering and forgetting in memory struggles (Brockmeier, 2002:21). These scholars assert that collective memory is intricately constituted by the dual processes of remembering and forgetting, as events deemed useful are recounted and celebrated, whilst inconvenient historical episodes are excluded, omitted and banished from the narratives of the past (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, 2010:1103; Zerubavel, 2003:5; Brockmeier, 2002:21). Rather than conceived in irreconcilable binary fashion, remembering and forgetting can be regarded as “two sides of one process” (Brockmeier, 2002:21). Against this backdrop, this study is attentive to the “silences, omissions and exclusions” (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, 2010:1104) in new media narratives of the Ndebele collective past, and how these activities are embedded in memory contestations. Thus, I probe aspects of Ndebele history that Ndebele mnemonic communities omit and minimise in their narration of the past.

Although certain historical accounts are excluded and marginalised in mainstream domains, these narratives are never completely expurgated, as they are constantly lurking (Colmeiro, 2011:18; Faber, 2005:205). Thus, within collective memory studies, there are scholars who have examined the trope of “haunting ghosts” in cultural forms such as literature, films, documentaries and cinema to call attention to the resurgence of the repressed and marginalised memories in post-dictatorial Spain (Colmeiro, 2011:24-25). In the same light, this study examines news websites as spaces for the mediation and resurgence of Ndebele Particularism that is disrupting and subverting the official discourses on the Gukurahundi, which crystallise around denial, censorship and silences. The metaphor of “haunting ghosts” resonates with the socio-historical context of this study, as Ndebele Particularism has been shaped by the lingering memories of the unresolved legacies of Gukurahundi (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:48; Lindgren, 2005b:156; Eppel, 2004:52-58). Further, I consider the allegory of “haunting ghosts”, the tenacious representations of Ndebele people as “immigrants” and “raiders” from Zululand, that are deplored by Ndebele memory interpreters.

As collective memory is closely intertwined with the discourses of history, it is important to explore the two theoretical understandings of history (Rusu, 2013:260). Firstly, there is an “ontological” conception informed by a positivist epistemological tradition that views historical knowledge as “what objectively existed in the past” (Rusu, 2013:262). Within this scholarly camp, history is defined as the “totality of facts and events that had occurred in the past” (Rusu, 2013:262). Thus, as a scientific discipline anchored in epistemological assumptions of objectivity, history is perceived as “linear”, “unitary” and “continuous”

(Attwood, 2008:77). However, this formulation has been regarded as problematic, as some scholars contend that the process of recording of events is not objective, but involves “selection, interpretation and distortion” (Burke, 1997:44). As such, it is more useful to frame this study within the “discursive” conception of history (Rusu, 2013:262). Within this second formulation, history is understood as the “discourse about the past, embodied in various narrative accounts purporting to verbally reconstruct segments of the past” (Rusu, 2013:262). Rather than being retrieved or rediscovered from the past, these narratives are socially constructed (Friedman, 1992a:194; 1992b:837). This “making of history” is not an objective process, but is “positional”, as it is “dependent upon where one is located, in social reality, within society” (Friedman, 1992a:194). Informed by this understanding, this study regards Ndebele histories as discursive constructs that are multiple and prone to contestation. This position is anchored in Tulviste’s (2011:217) theorisation about “history wars” to underlie that the narration of the past is contested and implicated in political struggles. Having explored the multifaceted nature of collective memory studies, the following section provides an in-depth discussion of the interaction between collective memory and journalism in order to reflect on the possibilities of news websites as spaces of struggle over journalistic discourses of Ndebele collective memories.

#### **4.2.1 Collective memory, journalism and the media**

In focusing on the intersection of memory and journalism, the interest of this study is in examining how past events are turned into news (Zelizer, 1997:10). Thus, I explore how public past events are narrated, recollected, mediated and contested through journalistic discourses. There is a growing scholarship that examines the symbiotic relationship between memory and journalism (Olick, 2014; Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014; Kitch, 2008; Zelizer, 2008; Edy, 1999). Firstly, Zelizer and Tenenboim-Weinblatt (2014:1) examine how journalism and collective memory “mutually support, undermine, repair and challenge each other”. They assert that journalism plays a central role in “keeping the past alive”, and in shaping collective memories, as past events are commemorated and interpreted through news (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014:1). Secondly, Olick (2014:17) laments that the scholarship on the nexus between collective memory and journalism has remained “underdeveloped”, as journalism tends to be subsumed within the generic field of media studies. It is in the light of this that Kitch (2008:311) rightly argues that journalism should be placed “inside memory”, as it is a central site for the mediation and construction of shared experiences of the past.

In addition, Zelizer (2008:79) explores this relationship between journalism and memory, and argues that these two fields connote “distant cousins”. In examining this symbiotic relationship, she argues, in the first instance, that memory depends on journalism to “provide one of the most public drafts of the past” (Zelizer, 2008:79). Thus, there is a need to conceive of journalism as a site of memory, and also to examine journalists as “memory agents” (Zelizer, 2008:81). In the second instance, journalists rely on memory to contextualise and explain current public events (Zelizer, 2008:82). As journalism plays a significant role in recording and recollecting past events, Zelizer (2008:85) calls for a need to “invest more efforts in understanding how it remembers and why it remembers in the ways that it does”.

Edy’s (1999:71) typology of the “journalistic uses of collective memory” is seminal, as it provides a framework for making sense of how the collective past is invoked in journalistic discourses. In this typology, Edy (1999:71) classifies the journalistic uses of the public past into three sets: commemorations, historical analogues, and historical contexts. Firstly, she argues that the collective past is made meaningful by journalists through commemorations or “anniversary journalism” (Edy, 1999:74). Thus, journalists allude to the past through commemorations of events or people (Edy, 1999:74). Secondly, historical analogues denote an attempt by journalists to “make the past relevant to the present by using a past event as a tool to analyse and predict the outcome of a current situation” (Edy, 1999:77). Lastly, journalists use historical contexts to “trace the portions of the past that appear relevant in leading up to the present circumstances” (Edy, 1999:81).

Other scholars invoke the notion of “cultural authority” to examine the mechanisms deployed by journalists to legitimate their role as authoritative speakers on public events (Zandberg, 2010:5; Zelizer, 1992a:200). Thus, in exploring the interplay between “journalistic authority” and collective memory, these studies examine how journalists contend with other storytellers, such as politicians, intellectuals, historians and poets, on the right to shape society’s recollections of the past (Zandberg, 2010:6; Zelizer, 1992a:200). In his analysis of the commemoration of the Holocaust in Israeli daily newspapers, Zandberg (2010:11) concludes that journalists relinquished their authority to other groups such as politicians, intellectuals and poets in the narration of the genocide. In addition, Zelizer (1993:219; 1992a:9) postulates that journalists establish and solidify their reconstructions of a collective past as members of an “interpretive community”, that is, a group that is bound by its collective interpretations and shared memories. The question of cultural authority is pertinent for this study, as I explore new media as spaces for various interpretive communities that construct, sustain, circulate and

contest the social meanings of an Ndebele collective past. Thus, in the context of the Ndebele collective memory that is hotly contested, this framework is central, as it enables this study to examine the practices and narratives of different groups, such as journalists, human rights activists, academics and historians, as they employ news websites to entrench and sustain their interpretations of public events.

In a nutshell, journalism is regarded as a “site of memory construction” (Kitch, 2008:311), and this view is echoed by Edy (2006:3), who maintains that the mass media are “primarily responsible for disseminating shared stories to a public that is demographically diverse and geographically scattered”. A number of scholars highlight the centrality of the media in the construction and maintenance of our collective memories (Neiger, Meyers & Zandberg, 2011; Huyssen, 2003; Edy, 1999). These writers argue that what we remember about our collective past is increasingly being shaped by mass communication and popular cultural forms (Edy, 2006:5; Huyssen, 2003:20; Zelizer, 1992b:21). With the concept of “mediation” fundamental within the fields of collective memory, journalism and cultural studies (Neiger *et al.*, 2011:4; Sturken, 2008:75; Hoskins, 2001:336), it is not surprising that there has been a growing scholarly interest in the role of the mass media in the production and negotiation of memories in specific cultural and political milieus. Some scholars argue that our shared recollections of the past are mediated through “media-saturated” spaces such as the press, television and the Internet (Huyssen, 2003:17; Hoskins, 2001:333). Against this backdrop, studies in memory are recognised as central and complementary to the fields of journalism and media studies, rather than being disparaged as “disciplinary threatening” (Sturken, 2008:74).

Consequently, the notion of “media memory” has come to be used to denote this interplay between the media and collective memory (Neiger *et al.*, 2011:4). Scholars of media memory use expressions such as “memory agents” (Neiger *et al.*, 2011:10; Zandberg, 2010:5) and “mnemonic signifiers” (Zandberg *et al.*, 2012:68) to affirm the role of the media as sites for collective recollections, dissemination and performance of the “social ritual of remembering” (Neiger *et al.*, 2011:13). Zelizer (2010:11; 2002:699) examined the various ways in which photography shapes and mediates the shared recollections of the collective past. In the light of this, she observed that images of the past can be appropriated and used by social groups for the purposes of grieving, commemoration, and forging national identity (Zelizer, 2010:11). Further, Zelizer (2002:699) upholds that photographs not only “concretize memory”, but the displaying and exhibition of images enable individuals to “forge a personal connection with a traumatic public past”. Informed by these findings, this study explores how images are adopted



and utilised on news websites to recast and solidify particular memories of the Ndebele collective past. The evolution of new communication technologies such as the Internet has redefined and reconfigured the processes of reconstructing and mediating public past events (Diptee & Trotman, 2012:4; Huyssen, 2003:18). The following section explores the scholarly debates on the capabilities of new media as spaces for the transmission, preservation and contestation of collective memory.

#### **4.2.2 Collective memory and new media: The Internet as technologies of memory**

Some scholars assert that the processes of recollecting public past events are increasingly being shaped by “technologies of memory” (Sturken, 2008:75; Van House & Churchill, 2008:295). The notion of “technologies of memory” draws our attention to the ways in which memory is constructed, mediated and experienced through the use of new technological forms such as visual communication and the Internet (Sturken, 2008:75). These technological advances have transformed the practices of capturing, storing and displaying artefacts of collective memory (Hoskins, 2009:93; 2001:334; Van House & Churchill, 2008:295). Hoskins (2009:92) postulated the notion of “digital network memory” to describe how new technologies such as the Internet, websites and social networks, viz. Facebook, YouTube and Twitter, are entrenched in the mediation of collective memories. He argues that these new digital technologies have “transformed the temporality, spatiality and indeed the mobility of memories” (Hoskins, 2009:93). Premised on the assumption that new media are transforming the ways in which the past is remembered, study examines how Ndebele cyber-communities are using news websites to articulate, share and circulate their collective memories.

There is a body of literature that affirms that the emergence of technological and communication innovations has resulted in the reconfiguration of collective memories in the global arena, rather than being confined to a local geographical space of the nation-state (Assmann & Assmann, 2010; Assmann & Conrad, 2010). Thus, new technologies such as the Internet have been integral in transmitting memories across national boundaries and ushering them into the global space (Jones, 2012:391; Assmann & Assmann, 2010:226; Assmann & Conrad, 2010:2-3). The processes of recollecting and mediating public past events are being transformed as a result of the “fluidity, reproducibility, and transferability” of digital texts (Hoskins, 2009:97). Anchored in these understandings, this study examines the role of news websites as spaces for connecting people in different geographical locations as they imagine



Ndebele collective memories centred on pre-colonial myths and the Gukurahundi. In other words, the research explores the interaction between the local and the global participants in new media as the Ndebele collective past is commemorated, mediated and contested by web users situated in different spatial locations.

In addition, other scholars argue that the advent of the Internet has democratised and decentralised the practice of remembering and representing collective memories in public spaces (Diptee & Trotman, 2012:4; Jones, 2012:391; Haskins, 2007:403). Thus, the new technologies have “expanded the avenues and processes used to collect and disseminate understandings of the past as well as the material used as signifiers of the past” (Diptee & Trotman, 2012:4). In appraising the emancipatory potential of the Internet, Haskins (2007:403) proclaims that collective memory is now produced and circulated “by the people”, rather than “for the people”. Haskins (2007:405) adds that the Internet has transformed the processes of collective remembrances, as it promotes “diversity, collective authorship and interactivity”. In a similar vein, Jones (2012:390) affirms that new media constitute the forging of “mediated remembering communities” that provide a platform for the “voicing of traumatic pasts”. Using a case study of a discussion forum on a website dedicated to the people who experienced political victimisation in the former East Germany, Jones (2012:391) asserts that new media are providing space for these individuals to share their collective experiences of “suffering and trauma”, and to construct and cement their collective identity. In the same light, this study interrogates how Ndebele people are creating virtual remembering communities on the selected websites to share their traumatic experiences of the Gukurahundi.

Other scholars explore new media as “archives” of memory (Hoskins, 2009:93; Haskins, 2007:401). As noted by Hoskins (2009:93), the notion of “archive” as a “repository” or “store” is predominant in media memory studies, as scholars reflect on how the Internet is shaping the interpretations of the past. Further, Hoskins (2009:97) identifies a key feature of this new media framework as the connectivity and networking of these digital archives. In the case of the reconstructions of Ndebele cyber-memories, this study examines how the selected news websites are linked with social networks such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. However, the traditional notion of archives as “static” and “permanent” storages is being superseded by the “fluid temporalities” of digital media (Hoskins, 2009:97). Consequently, debates are raging over the “fleeting” nature of the Internet (Jones, 2012:390; Van House & Churchill, 2008:303). Some scholars assert that digital memories are “ephemeral” (Assmann & Conrad, 2010:4) and “transient” (Jones, 2012:399). The argument is that, in contrast to paper and other enduring

memory objects, cyber-memories are transitory, as digital data might not be accessible in the future due to technical constraints such as changes in formatting (Jones, 2012:399; Van House & Churchill, 2008:303). In addition to the possibility of the digital content being obsolete, web pages can be permanently disconnected from the network, hence hampering the processes of information retrieval (Hoskins, 2007:100). However, there is a need to think beyond the fleeting/permanent binaries when conceptualising new media, and hence this study draws on Chun's (2008:148) theorisation of digital media as an "enduring ephemeral". Chun (2008:164) challenges the notion of digital media as a storage site that is static, fixed and unchanging. Bearing in mind that speed renders digital media transient, Chun (2008:171) avows that the focus should be on the ways in which "ephemerality is made to endure". Rather than just mere storage, new media "constantly transmits and regenerates text and images" (Chun, 2008:161). Mindful of Chun's (2008) dynamic insights into cyber-memories, this study examines the fleeting traces of Ndebele memories as they are constantly regenerated and reconstructed on news websites. Rather than being conceived of as simply permanent or fleeting, this study considers Ndebele cyber-memories as a "hybridity between fixity and fluidity" (Jones, 2012:399). Thus, this analysis of media texts on news websites is an attempt at "catching fleeting memories" (Jones, 2012:390).

Having examined the scholarly assumptions of the interplay between collective memory and new media, the following section delves deeper into the conceptions of the "new media" phenomenon. I begin by unpacking the problematic definition of "new media".

#### **4.3 Defining "new media": Contestations, complexities and ideological undertones**

As alluded to in section 1.2, the discourse on "new media" has gained scholarly ground, as various academics are interrogating this phenomenon (Logan, 2010:4; Lister, Dovey, Giddings, Grant & Kelly, 2003:9). At stake are definitional issues, that is, the question of the "newness" of these media, and how they are distinct from the "older" media (Logan, 2010:4; Lister *et al.*, 2003:38). There are different scholarly understandings of new media. Logan (2010:4) defines new media as "digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing as opposed to 'old media' such as the telephone, radio, and TV". Whilst the foregoing definition foregrounds the digital interactivity aspects of new media, Lister *et al.* (2003:13) provide a different conception that transcends the technological postulation. They understand new media as a "wide range of changes in media production,

distribution and use” (Lister *et al.*, 2003:13). Their focus is not just on technological developments, but on how these innovations are shaping “textual, conventional and cultural” frameworks (Lister *et al.*, 2003:13). This study identifies news websites and other digital interactive spaces, such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, as constituting new media. However, rather than falling into the trap of technological determinism (see section 4.4.1 for a discussion of technological determinism), this study situates new media within broader socio-political and cultural contexts that are shaping the media landscape in Zimbabwe and the resurgence of Ndebele Particularism.

In addition, I am aware of the ideological undercurrents underpinning the notion of “new” in new media (Banda, Mudhai & Tettey, 2009:3; Lister *et al.*, 2003:11). The idea of “new” connotes “the most recent”, “glamorous” and “exciting meanings” (Lister *et al.*, 2003:11). This representation of new media as the “avant-garde” and the “latest thing” is derived from the modernist discourse that conceives technology as an engine of social progress (Banda *et al.*, 2009:5; Lister *et al.*, 2003:11). Within this modernist/diffusion model, the media and technology are regarded as agents for the transition from a “traditional” to a “modern” society (Banda *et al.*, 2009:5). Thus, the notion of “new” carries ideological overtones, as it is premised on Western neo-liberal imaginations and discourses about progress (Lister *et al.*, 2003:11), and the “catching up” of the Third World (Banda *et al.*, 2009:3). However, this “celebratory” approach is being challenged in African scholarship (Banda *et al.*, 2009:3; Nyamnjoh, 2000:1). In contrast to this discourse of “newness”, Bolter and Grusin (1999:1) introduce the concept of “remediation” to argue against the demarcation of “old” and “new” media, as they view new media as the refashioning and remodelling of earlier forms of media.

It is important to explore the various technical features that are associated with an understanding of new media. This study considers elements such as “digitality”, “interactivity”, “hypertextuality” and “multimediality” (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4; Moyo, 2009b:68; Lister *et al.*, 2003:13) as pivotal in appraising news websites as sites of Ndebele collective memory. However, in this undertaking I am attentive to Mabweazara *et al.*’s (2014:4) caution that we should avoid taking a “technicist” trajectory that foregrounds technical features and excludes the socio-historical contexts embedding these technologies. This view is echoed by Lister *et al.* (2003:13), who assert that researchers should not be drawn into “technological essentialism” by presenting these technical elements as the determining features or “satisfactory descriptions” of new media phenomena. Although these technical elements are useful concepts for making sense of new media (Lister *et al.*, 2003:13), the point of departure “should not be a

particular technological field but a particular social context in which ‘new’ technologies are used” (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4).

Firstly, new media are often considered as “digital media” or “media that use computers” (Lister *et al.*, 2003:14). This digitality signifies a change from analogue to digital form, that is, a condition in which data is converted, stored and transmitted in the form of numbers (Lister *et al.*, 2003:14). Secondly, interactivity is another feature that is regarded as a “hallmark of new media” (Moyo, 2009b:68). In contrast to “old” media, which offer “passive consumption”, the assumption is that new media enable interactivity (Lister *et al.*, 2003:20). This notion of interactivity is premised on the presupposition of “user engagement” with media texts (Moyo, 2009b:68; Lister *et al.*, 2003:20) as audiences become “active participants” in the new mediascape (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4; Hermida & Thurman, 2008:343). With this advent of “user-generated content”, internet users are no longer passive recipients of media texts, but can actively participate in the production of media texts by posting comments on news websites, publishing and disseminating their content, and uploading videos on YouTube (Mabweazara, 2014a:44; Hermida & Thurman, 2008:343). In interrogating the role of new media as sites of remembrances, this study probes the ways in which web users are participating in the reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory through the creation of content, sharing and interacting, and posting comments on news articles and forums.

Hypertextuality is another distinguishing characteristic of new media (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4; Lister *et al.*, 2003:24). This term denotes “a text that provides a network of links to other texts that are ‘outside, above and beyond’ itself” (Lister *et al.*, 2003:24). Thus, the focus is on how media texts are enabled to “speak to each other” in a way that broadens the user’s understanding of the news story (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4). This study identifies navigational tools that are connecting media texts, and how this linking of the selected news websites to social networks such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook is promoting and shaping the debates on Ndebele Particularism. The last feature of new media is multimediality, which signifies the “ability of the website to carry multimedia functions such as podcasts, social media, YouTube etc.” (Mabwezara *et al.*, 2014:4). In this regard, this study explores the ability of the selected news websites to combine images, texts, audio and videos to represent and reconstruct Ndebele collective memory.

#### 4.4 New media in Africa: Technological determinist and social constructionist perspectives

The advent of the new information and communication technologies in Africa was received with great optimism in the early 1990s (Wasserman, 2011:148; Banda *et al.*, 2009:1). This “celebratory” and “utopian” euphoria (Banda *et al.*, 2009:1) was underpinned by a technological determinist assumption that the “introduction of new technologies per se will bring about social change and deepen democratic participation” (Wasserman, 2011:148). Arguing against a technological deterministic approach, Atton and Mabweazara (2011:688) note that, in the African context, the trend has been to “uncritically celebrate” the impact of the digital technologies. As a counter to this celebratory and triumphalist rhetoric that equates the uptake of new technologies in Africa with the deepening of democracy and social change, there has been an emergence of scholarship that advances a more nuanced and critical approach to the interplay between technology and society (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014; Atton & Mabweazara, 2011; Wasserman, 2011; Banda *et al.*, 2009; Moyo, 2007). Whilst acknowledging the centrality of digital technologies in promoting dialogue and political participation, these writers are conscious of the various socio-political and technological dynamics that impinge on their uptake and appropriation, such as disparities in access, and socio-economic inequalities (Wasserman, 2011:148; Banda *et al.*, 2009:1).

Nyamnjoh (2000:1) interrogates the digital divide between the Global North and South, and argues that the concept of an Information Superhighway<sup>14</sup> “can hardly be understood in Africa because the highway is yet to be travelled by enough Africans and/or Africa-based users” (Nyamnjoh, 1996:8). Other scholars identify the structural impediments in Africa, such as poor telecommunications networks, lack of infrastructural development, economic inequalities, and the disparities between the urban and the rural population (Patterson, 2013:2; Banda *et al.*, 2009:2; Moyo, 2007:85). Moyo (2007:85), further, posits that the Internet “remains largely an urban phenomenon”. In the light of the criticisms levelled against a determinist approach that uncritically associates new technologies with social change, this study is located within a sociological approach that examines how new media are contextualised and deployed by users

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<sup>14</sup> Information Superhighway is an idea that presupposes the “existence of a highway which has been widened and improved upon to become super”, and hence denotes the interconnectedness being facilitated by the advent of communication technologies such as the Internet (Nyamnjoh, 2005:5).

in the processes of meaning-making (Wasserman, 2011:150). In building upon Nyamnjoh's (1996:15) argument that the study of African media "must be located in African realities and not in Western fantasies", this research explores how news websites are embedded in the politics of Ndebele Particularism as web users appropriate these new technologies to reconstruct and contest their collective past. Although Banda *et al.* (2009:17) acknowledge that Africans are appropriating and using new technologies for political expression and identity construction, they also argue that any research on new media must be located within the "economic, political and cultural realities of the continent". As this study makes sense of new media reconstructions of Ndebele memory, it is important to explore the theoretical perspectives that explicate the interaction between society and technology. This chapter next examines the theoretical assumptions of technological determinism and social constructionism.

#### **4.4.1 Technological determinism**

Technological determinism is the dominant tradition grounded in the view that technologies "form and mold society" (Ling, 2004:23). Thus, the assumption is that technology has "impacts" on society (Pannabecker, 1991:1). This "linear" and "monocausal" model (Berker, Hartmann, Punie & Ward, 2006:1) is associated with the deterministic media effects perspective (Silverstone, 2006:231). In addition, new technologies are conceived of as an "independent sphere" that creates "new societies" or "new human conditions" (Williams, 1974:13). Thus, technological development is viewed as a "self-acting force" (Williams, 1974:14), as it is autonomous of socio-political and cultural forces (Wyatt, 2008:168; Smith, 1994:2). Marshall McLuhan is the leading exponent of this perspective, and his dictum, "the medium is the message", is regarded as the hallmark of technological determinism (Lister *et al.*, 2003:75; McLuhan, 1964:7). Within this deterministic conception, McLuhan (1964:8) insists that technology "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action". As such, this approach privileges technology over the broader socio-political and cultural settings that shape the appropriation and use of these technologies (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4). In contrast, media studies have largely been influenced by Raymond Williams's social constructionist approach to technology (Lister *et al.*, 2003:80). Against this backdrop, this study draws on the social constructionist approach as it takes into account the socio-political and cultural conditions that are shaping and structuring the use of new technologies by Ndebele communities to reconstruct their collective memories.



#### 4.4.2 Social constructionist approach to technology

This approach emerged as a rebuttal of the reductionist and linear technological deterministic postulation (Lister *et al.*, 2003:72; Brey, 1997:59). One of the main strands of this approach is the social construction of technology (SCOT), which was originally developed by Wiebe Bijker and Trevor Pinch (Bijker & Pinch, 2002:361; Brey, 1997:59). Taking a socio-cultural dimension, SCOT proponents postulate that technological change does not follow a “fixed” and “unidirectional” path, and hence it cannot be explained in terms of technological “logic” (Brey, 1997:59). The social constructionist understanding of technology is also known as the “social shaping” approach because of its sociological inclination, as it is underpinned by an assumption that technological development is shaped by social and cultural forces (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4; Brey, 1997:59). As such, research on new media must take into account the wider socio-political and historical environments embedding the consumption and use of digital technologies.

As mainstream media studies and cultural studies have been shaped by Raymond Williams’s critique of McLuhan’s technological determinism (Lister *et al.*, 2003:72), this particular study is situated within this constructionist framework. Consequently, media and technological determinisms have been rejected within the mainstream media studies, as the emphasis is on the historical, social and cultural structures that are shaping the production and consumption of media artefacts (Lister *et al.*, 2003:73). Williams’s main thesis is that technologies, on their own, are incapable of effecting social change (Lister *et al.*, 2003:74; Williams, 1974:14). Rather, he holds, the focus should be on the “practice” and “uses” of these technologies by particular social groups situated in specific environments (Lister *et al.*, 2003:81; Williams, 1974:14). In addition, Williams affirms that the study of new media should focus on the ways in which technologies are developed and mobilised for specific interests and purposes (Lister *et al.*, 2003:81; Williams, 1974:14). Thus, the constructionist perspectives highlight human “interaction” and “agency” in the appropriation and use of technologies (Chiumbu, 2012:195; Lister *et al.*, 2003:81). These theoretical insights are considered useful for this study, as Ndebele cyber-interactions and debates on memory are being shaped and mediated by a complex of social and historical processes, such as the recurrence of Ndebele identity politics, the Zimbabwean Crisis, and the proliferation of Zimbabwean news websites in the diaspora (see discussion in section 1.3.2). As a result, this research is situated within the constructionist approach, as this perspective strikes a balance between technology’s “transformative



capacities”, and the human agency to appropriate, utilise and shape these technologies for use (Chiumbu, 2012:195).

In addition, the amplification theory is another useful constructionist framework for making sense of the interface between technology and society (Wasserman, 2011:163; Agre, 2002:311). This perspective is premised on the assumption that the Internet, or technology in general, does not create new forces, but rather amplifies and consolidates existing relations or forces (Agre, 2002:317). Thus, ICTs are appropriated and used by social groups to strengthen existing social movements and identity politics (Wasserman, 2011:164). Rather than a “revolutionary force”, the Internet reinforces existing structures, as it can be used by participants for empowerment, mobilisation, networking and promoting solidarity (Wasserman, 2011:165). This study examines the ways in which the Internet is augmenting and advancing the cause of Ndebele Particularism by providing a space to connect, bind, solidify and forge these disenfranchised voices into an Ndebele cyber-imaginary.

Considering that the selected Zimbabwean news websites are hosted in the diaspora, it is important to explore the scholarship of diasporic media and the formation of transnational identities. The discourses on Ndebele collective memory and nationalist imaginations are not confined to a spatial location, but are being reconfigured and contested in both Matabeleland and the diaspora. Besides the Zimbabwean crisis of the late 1990s, Maphosa (2013:225) identifies “peculiar” factors that have largely contributed to the “out-migration” from Matabeleland to bordering states such as Botswana and South Africa. These “push factors” include the Gukurahundi violence, which forced some people to flee the region, the persistent droughts, and the “general political, economic and cultural marginalisation” of Matabeleland (Maphosa, 2013:225). Against this backdrop, it is useful to consider Ndebele Particularism as transcending the geographical boundaries of Matabeleland.

#### **4.5 The Internet, diasporic public spheres and the formation of transnational identities**

This study is also a contribution to the body of literature that examines how global processes, such as mass migration and electronic mediation, are fundamental to the reconstruction and shaping of transnational identities (Bruneau, 2010; Kissau & Hunger, 2010; Tettey, 2009; Appadurai, 1996; Basch, Schiller & Blanc, 1994). On the basis of transnationalism, these works draw our attention to the sentiments, attachments and “identities that operate beyond the

boundaries of the nation” (Appadurai, 1996:8). Thus, the emphasis is on the “processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement” (Basch *et al.*, 1994:8). Dispersed across nation-states, these “transmigrants” are able to negotiate their identities by developing social networks that connect and bind them (Basch *et al.*, 1994:8). One of the fundamental assumptions within this scholarship is that nation-states are in “crisis”, as their territorial sovereignties are being threatened by the emergence and growth of transnational spaces (Appadurai, 1996:19). Most importantly, for this study, is the argument that identities are no longer bound by spatial locations, as territorial boundaries are no longer fixed or bounded (Appadurai, 1996:6; Basch *et al.*, 1994:9). Although some scholars (Lewellen, 2003:173) assert that Appadurai, in his seminal work, tends to “exaggerate the demise of the state”, Appadurai insists that his conception does not imply that the nation-state is “out of business” (1996:169). Rather, he conceives the nation-state as only “in crisis” (Appadurai, 1996:169). This view resonates with Banda *et al.* (2009:3), who rightly point out that “we must be careful not to generalise the rupturing of national states and boundaries to Africa”. Instead, Appadurai’s theorisation of the post-national imaginary invites us to “interrogate and deconstruct the primacy of the nation-state without necessarily discarding it” (Desai, 2004:87).

Diasporic spaces such as the Internet are integral in reconstituting, transforming and mediating the collective experiences and shared memories of these individuals located in different geographical spaces (Bruneau, 2010:35; Appadurai, 1996:195). Internet tools such as websites constitute “transnational spaces” (Bruneau, 2010:35), or “diasporic public spheres” (Appadurai, 1996:257) that are instrumental in the construction and maintenance of what Kissau and Hunger (2010:247) refer to as the “shared imagination” of transnational communities such as ethnic groups. Thus, the electronic media are entrenched within the processes of “deterritorialization”, as they are a central feature in the “loosening of holds” between territorial boundaries and identities (Appadurai, 1996:49). Deterritorialisation conjures up a new understanding of a nation-state that encompasses individuals scattered outside the boundaries of nation-states, but who have remained tied and connected to their homeland (Basch *et al.*, 1994:9). This can be applied to the case of Ndebele Particularism, as the discourses on collective memory and identity are not confined to the spatial boundaries of Matabeleland, but are reconstituted and reshaped across the globe.

Within this scholarship of the formation of transnational identities, Mitra (2005:379; 2001:33) examines the ways in which the Internet offers a cultural space for the creation and maintenance

of immigrant identities. In exploring the connection between identities and spatial location, Mitra (2005:377; 2001:29) develops the notion of “voice” as a way of examining the role of the Internet in reconfiguring the cultural space inhabited by Indian immigrant communities. By the metaphor of “voice”, Mitra (2005:377) posits that the Internet has enabled the marginalised and subaltern communities to develop an “ability to utter a point of view”. In other terms, these subjugated groups have been empowered with a space to “represent themselves”, rather than being spoken for by the dominant groups (Mitra, 2005:379). It is through spheres such as the websites that the traditionally dispossessed groups acquire a “voice”, and are able to network and forge alliances as they re-imagine their suppressed historical narratives and renegotiate their identities (Mitra, 2005:379; 2001:20). Thus, the idea of “voice” provides a theoretical lens for making sense of the Internet as a discursive space for the invoking and animation of “unspeakable stories” (Mitra, 2001:30), such as the Gukurahundi atrocities, by cyber-communities in their processes of forging Ndebele identity politics.

Tettey (2009:144) explores the role of the Internet as “deterritorialized spaces” for civic engagement, political expression and the formation of transnational identities by Africans in the diaspora. His main thesis is that ICTs have bridged the gap between the homeland and the diaspora, as they have forged forums for these “connections to be articulated, aggregated, and contested” (Tettey, 2009:145). Due to factors such as technological developments, “transnational politics” has been forged and heightened as the discourses and interactions on identity and citizenship are transcending the spatial boundaries of the nation-state (Tettey, 2009:146). In exploring cyber-discourses of South African and Nigerian diasporic communities, Tettey (2009:148) affirms that the Internet discussion forums, websites, listservs and chat rooms are terrains for political expression and interaction on identity politics. In addition, there is an argument that the Internet is being deployed by the diaspora communities to accentuate, solidify, champion and engage in “long-distance nationalism” (Tettey, 2009:153; Anderson, 1998:58; Appadurai, 1996:22). More significantly, this long-distance nationalism can manifest in cyberspace in the form of “ethnic nationalism”, as the Internet provides an avenue for multiple diasporic communities to “contest others’ rendition of national past and group histories” (Tettey, 2009:156). Thus, the Internet is not only a space for “centripetal” forces that solidify identities as social groups celebrate their national identities and historical narratives, but it also inhabits “centrifugal” forces that signify the fractures and ambiguities as national histories, memories, and identities are contested by various social groups (Tettey, 2009:155; Chan, 2005:339). In the case of Ndebele communities located in different

geographical spaces, it is important to explore how news websites enable these social groups to assert and perform their long-distance nationalism as they celebrate and contest their histories, memories and identities. This study examines the ethnic solidarities that are fashioned in cyberspace, and the tensions that emanate in these Ndebele imaginations.

In addition, there are scholarly works on the intricate relationship of Eritrean nationalism, transnational politics and the rise of the Internet (Bernal, 2006:161; 2004:10). In the light of this, Bernal (2004:10) contends that transnationalism does not undermine nationhood per se, as “nations can be constructed and strengthened through transnational flows and the technologies of globalisation”. Thus, she argues that Eritrean nationalism and transnationalism were not mutually exclusive, as the nationalist cause was advanced in the diaspora and in globalised forums such as the Internet (Bernal, 2004:10). Secondly, Bernal asserts that the Internet provided a space for the Eritrean diasporic communities to reconfigure and renegotiate their national identities and notions of citizenship (Bernal, 2004:10). Thus, the immigrant Eritreans were able to use the Internet as a “transnational public sphere” to reproduce and reinterpret their historical imaginations and national identity politics (Bernal, 2006:161). Drawing upon Anderson’s (1983) postulation of nations as imagined communities, Bernal (2004:10) argues that “there is no reason why imaginations cannot jump oceans, political borders, and other barriers in creating community”. Thus, the Internet can be conceived of as a new version of Anderson’s (1983) “print capitalism” due to its ability to connect and bind geographically dispersed social groups that are forging national imaginations (Lewellen, 2003:173; Appadurai, 1996:28).

Further, Chan (2005:336) theorises the Internet as “liminal spaces” appropriated by Chinese migrants for dual purposes; firstly, to “resist, challenge, and speak against regimes of truth imposed on them by their homeland and host country”, and secondly, to celebrate their national identity by repudiating the hegemony of the USA. Thus, within cyberspace, multiple discourses and imaginations emerge as contributors share, bind and contest the narratives of the nation (Chan, 2005:339). Lastly, Ho, Baber and Khondker (2002:127) explore the role of Internet forms such as websites, chat rooms and forums as “sites of resistance” that promote unconstrained political expression and civic engagement in Singapore.

## **4.6 Summary**

This chapter has provided a literature review of collective memory, history and new media. Moreover, it has explored how these perspectives can provide a framework for examining the

reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory on selected news websites. In exploring the literature on collective memory and new media, this study builds upon the existing scholarship on the role of new media as spaces of remembrance, particularly for social groups such as the Ndebele people, whose collective memories have been marginalised and excluded in official sites of memory. The following chapter provides a discussion of the methodological considerations of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE: METHODOLOGY

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter is a discussion of the methodological considerations of this study. Flowing from the theoretical framework, the epistemological and philosophical underpinnings that influence my choice of the qualitative approach are explored in more detail. This chapter furthermore describes the processes of data gathering and analysis. In the first instance, I endorse the qualitative approach by providing justifications for employing this research strategy. Secondly, this chapter discusses critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an appropriate research design for an analysis of media texts on Ndebele Particularism. Considering that CDA contains numerous models, I selected the discourse-historical approach (DHA) as the study's method of data collection and analysis. The underlining argument in this chapter is that, as recommended by Maxwell (2005:79) and Crotty (1998:2), all the choices and decisions taken regarding the research methodology and methods are informed by the objectives of the study.

### 5.2 Qualitative research

Social research is broadly classified into two methodologies: quantitative and qualitative approaches (Bryman, 2012:35; Creswell, 2003:13). At the same time, researchers may employ a mixed methods approach, which combines both qualitative and quantitative strategies (Bryman, 2012:37; Spicer, 2004:294; Creswell, 2003:18). By methodology, this study implies the “strategy, plan of action, process or design lying behind the choice and use of particular methods and linking this choice and use of methods to the related outcomes” (Crotty, 1998:3). The quantitative-qualitative divide transcends the conventional view that “quantitative researchers employ measurement and qualitative researchers do not” (Bryman, 2012:35). Rather, the distinction is deeper than issues of quantification and measurement, as it involves the epistemological, ontological and philosophical assumptions that underpin social research (Bryman, 2012:35; 1984:76). Ontology denotes the “study of being” (Crotty, 1998:10), or the question of “whether the social world is regarded as something external to social actors or as something that people are in the process of fashioning” (Bryman, 2012:19). At the same time, our assumptions of what counts as knowledge (epistemology) has implications for how social research is conducted (see section 2.2.6 for an extensive discussion of epistemology). It is important to note that the terms “ontology” and “epistemology” are closely intertwined (Crotty,

1998:10). For instance, Bryman (2012:32-33) identifies objectivism and constructionism<sup>15</sup> as the main ontological traditions in social research. On the other hand, writers such as Crotty (1998:63) and Guba and Lincoln (1994:110) conceive of realism and relativism as ontological positions, and objectivism and constructionism as epistemological paradigms. Although these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, for the purposes of this study, realism and relativism are classified as ontological positions, and objectivism, positivism and constructionism are considered as epistemological perspectives. Despite these complexities and nuances in nomenclature, ontological and epistemological presuppositions provide a framework for approaching the research concerns.

Quantitative research is underpinned by the objectivist<sup>16</sup> and positivist<sup>17</sup> traditions (Bryman, 2012:36). Thus, quantitative research is anchored in a positivist belief that the models and principles of the natural sciences are applicable to the study of the social world (Bryman, 2012:36). In other words, quantitative inquiry is hinged upon an idea of the existence of an objective reality, with researchers expected to occupy a detached position from their subjects (Bryman, 2012:36; Creswell, 2003:18). Experiments and surveys are popular research methods employed within the quantitative approach (Creswell, 2003:18). In addition, positivists seek to make inferences about cause-and-effect relationships in order to develop generalisations about social “facts” (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:5). In sum, the epistemological underpinnings of the quantitative approach make it incongruent for this particular study, which is anchored in an assumption that the social meanings of Ndebele Particularism are socially constructed in cyberspace. To this end, I draw upon a qualitative approach, which rejects positivism and places emphasis on the ways in which people construct the meanings of their social world (Bryman, 2012:36).

A qualitative research approach is anchored in various theoretical and epistemological traditions, such as constructionism, interpretivism, symbolic interactionism, and phenomenology (Grbich, 2013:7; Bryman, 2012:380; Creswell, 2003:18; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271). Merriam (2002:3) posits that the “key to understanding qualitative research lies with the idea that meaning is socially constructed by individuals in interaction with their world”. In other words, qualitative researchers stress that meanings of social reality are socially

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<sup>15</sup> The premises of constructionism are discussed extensively in section 2.2.6.2.

<sup>16</sup> See section 2.2.6.1 for the definitions of objectivism.

<sup>17</sup> See section 2.2.6.1 for further discussion of positivism.



and historically contingent (Creswell, 2003:18). The role of qualitative researchers is to make sense of social meanings attached to the social actors as they engage with their social world (Merriam, 2002:15). In addition, studies of a qualitative nature are contextualist and naturalistic, as the emphasis is on the settings and environment in which social meanings are constructed by participants (Creswell, 2003:181). In this vein, Geertz's (1973:3) notion of "thick description" has gained currency within qualitative research, as the focus is on detailed and rich accounts of the phenomena in their social contexts (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:272). Drawing upon these insights, the main concerns of this study are new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. This foregrounding of contextual information in qualitative research is in stark contrast to the "context stripping" evident in the quantitative strategy (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106).

Qualitative research, furthermore, draws upon interpretivism, with the aim of exploring "the ways that people make sense of their social worlds and how they express these understandings through language, sound, imagery, personal style and social rituals" (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:6). Thus, the aim of a qualitative researcher is to make sense of people's interpretations of phenomena (Grbich, 2013:7; Creswell, 2003:8). Max Weber's notion of "verstehen" (Crotty, 1998:67) is a popular notion within qualitative research, because the purpose of social research is to "understand" rather than "explain" phenomena (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271; Schwandt, 1998:221). Thus, qualitative researchers seek to understand a phenomenon from an "emic" perspective (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:271; Guba & Lincoln, 1994:106), that is, from the "point of view of those who live in it" (Schwandt, 1998:221). In the light of this, this study makes sense of the reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory on news websites by exploring the social meanings and interpretations from the perspective of various participants. Methods of data collection and analysis associated with a qualitative study include participant observation, focus groups, interviews, ethnography, semiotics, discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis (Bryman, 2012:383; Creswell, 2003:185; Merriam, 2002:6).

### **5.3 Quality in qualitative research**

The question of what constitutes quality research is highly contested in social sciences, as criteria such as validity, reliability and generalisability have come to be considered as problematic concepts within qualitative research (Bryman, 2012:389; Maxwell, 2005:106; Creswell, 2003:195; Seale, 1999:465). Central in these debates is the postulation that validity, reliability and generalisability cannot be used as criteria for evaluating quality, as they are

anchored in epistemological assumptions that are incongruent with qualitative research (Bryman, 2012:389). Thus, it is held that these notions were developed within the worldview of quantitative research (Maxwell, 2005:107; Seale, 1999:465). The idea of “validity” connotes “truth” (Silverman, 2005:210), or “correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account” (Maxwell, 2005:106). In addition, reliability refers to the “consistency of a measure of a concept” (Bryman, 2012:169), or the “question of whether the results of a study are repeatable” (Bryman, 2012:46). In essence, the problem with employing validity and reliability as standards for evaluating quality is that these concepts are anchored in a positivist assumption that a “single absolute account of social reality is feasible” (Bryman, 2012:390).

Generalisability, another popular concept within quantitative research, refers to the extent to which “findings can be generalised beyond the confines of the particular context in which the research was conducted” (Bryman, 2012:176). However, Babbie and Mouton (2001:277) note that qualitative researchers are not interested in generalising results, as the findings are context-specific. Lincoln and Denzin (1998:413) assert that the poststructuralist renunciation of positivist and post-positivist claims of validity signal a “crisis of legitimation”, that is, the problem of evaluation in qualitative research. Despite the repudiation of positivist assumptions of evaluation, quality “does matter in qualitative research” (Seale, 1999:471), as alternative criteria and mechanisms have been proposed (Bryman, 2012:390; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:276; Guba & Lincoln, 1994:114). However, “no specific alternative criteria for evaluation have gained widespread acceptance” (Taylor, 2001:319). In the absence of fixed standards for evaluation, Taylor (2001:323) posits that “the onus is on the researcher to present arguments for the value of each particular study”. Against this backdrop, I identify two sets of criteria for evaluating quality: trustworthiness (credibility, transferability, and confirmability), and authenticity (fairness), as proposed by Guba and Lincoln (1994:114).

Trustworthiness is concerned with the neutrality and credibility of the findings and decisions taken by the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:276; Guba & Lincoln, 1994:114). This study provides a rich and detailed description of the socio-historical context to demonstrate the credibility of the researcher’s interpretation of the social meanings of media texts. In addition, I examined the divergent narratives on Ndebele Particularism that are emerging on the selected news websites. The news articles selected for analysis reflect the diverse recollections of Ndebele collective memory, rather than a singular perspective.

In addition, as recommended by Bryman (2012:392) and Babbie and Mouton (2001:277), the transferability of the findings is guaranteed in this study by providing a “thick description” of the context underpinning this research (see section 1.3 for a detailed description of the socio-historical context of this study). However, I do not make a claim that the findings from this specific study can be generalised to other contexts. Further, confirmability is one of the criteria for judging the quality of a study in which the researcher must show that he/she “has not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations manifestly to sway the conduct of research and the findings deriving from it” (Bryman, 2012:392). Whilst it is acknowledged that objectivity in research practice cannot be attained, as we are all products of social and historical contexts, and that we have our own preconceived beliefs and values (Moon, 2008:77; Maxwell, 2005:108), it is pertinent for researchers to demonstrate that they have conducted themselves in “good faith” in order for their research work to be considered as of good quality (Bryman, 2012:392). Thus, researchers are called upon to show integrity and honesty by being conscious of and articulating possible biases that can undermine their research findings (Maxwell, 2005:108). Cognisant of the dangers of depending on “a few well-chosen ‘examples’” that fit within the researcher’s worldview or beliefs (Silverman, 2005:211), this study averts this likelihood by taking a nuanced, dynamic and broader approach in selecting articles for analysis. A detailed report of the steps undertaken in the selection and analysis of media texts is provided. In this particular study, triangulation is achieved in two ways. Firstly, I drew on different historical accounts of the discursive events such as relating to the Gukurahundi in order to have a comprehensive and detailed understanding of the phenomenon. Secondly, this study analysed sets of empirical data drawn from different genres, such as news stories, opinion columns, interviews and YouTube. Moreover, I spent a lengthy period of time (17 months) immersing myself in data collection and analysis. This strategy of prolonged engagement with texts or participants enable researchers to have a broader understanding of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2003:196; Babbie & Mouton, 2001:277).

Lastly, this study considers authenticity as one of the crucial criteria for assessing research that is of good quality. Authenticity is understood as “fairness”, or the researcher’s ability to demonstrate that different perspectives of the phenomenon have been represented fairly (Bryman, 2012:393; Seale, 1999:469). As an Ndebele-speaking subject, I am aware of the possibility of romanticising Ndebele identity in this quest to make sense of new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. In framing this study within social constructionism, rather than an essentialist tradition, this study is able to explore the multiple constructions,

contestations and complexities of Ndebele Particularism (see section 2.2.6.1 for a detailed discussion of social constructionism). This epistemological positioning ensured that I remained conscious of how personal beliefs and values can influence the findings. In the light of this, this study considers being reflexive about the processes of carrying out this study as one of the features of its authenticity. The notion of “reflexivity” has gained momentum within qualitative research (Bryman, 2012:393; Moon, 2008:77; Elliot, 2005:154; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003:413).

Reflexivity denotes “the tendency critically to examine and analytically to reflect upon the nature of research and the role of the researcher in carrying out and writing up empirical work” (Elliot, 2005:153). This “reflexive turn” in social sciences is founded on a constructionist assumption that our analysis of data is a value-laden process, as texts can be interpreted differently (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003:416). Lincoln and Denzin (1998:411) refer to this phenomenon as a “crisis of representation”, which implies that an “unadulterated truth” does not exist. Thus, there is an acknowledgement that researchers are actively involved in the construction of social meaning, rather than “mirroring” reality (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009:9; Elliot, 2005:154). As such, researchers need to concede that “our research narratives are also constructed” (Elliot, 2005:154). Reflexivity denotes the researcher’s self-awareness and self-consciousness that his/her research is shaped by personal, theoretical and epistemological beliefs, and socio-political and cultural contexts (Bryman, 2012:393; Elliot, 2005:153; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003:413). Ultimately, I concede that my analysis of media texts constitutes an “interpretation of interpretation” of empirical material (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009:9). In section 1.1, I provided a description of my “academic and personal biographies” (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003:420), a demonstration of an awareness that this study is a product of a particular socio-cultural and intellectual location. Thus, I am conscious of how my values, beliefs and experiences as an Ndebele-speaking man may influence the interpretation of media texts on Ndebele memory. However, this danger is addressed by the study’s location within social constructionism, which enables me to be critical, fair and balanced, and to offer diverse and multiple interpretations of Ndebele Particularism.

Some of the criticisms levelled against qualitative research are that this approach is subjective, which makes it difficult to replicate and generalise findings (Bryman, 2012:405). However, such criticisms are informed by the positivist paradigm, whose epistemological presuppositions are rejected in this study. CDA was chosen as an appropriate research design for collecting and analysing new media texts, and for probing the reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism.

Before exploring the salient premises and themes of CDA, it is important, at this juncture, to examine Foucault's theorisation of discourse, knowledge and power, as his conceptualisation has informed some scholarly works within the field of CDA (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:10; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:63; Meyer, 2001:18).

#### **5.4 The Foucauldian influence: Discourse, knowledge/power and the subject**

This section examines how Foucault's conceptualisation of discourse, knowledge/power and the subject provides a theoretical entry point for exploring the discursive practices that seek to enact, reproduce and contest the interpretations of Ndebele collective memory. Foucault defines the term "discourse" as a "group of statements that belong to a single system of formation" (Foucault, 1972:107). In this sense, these statements "provide a language for talking about – a way of representing the knowledge about – a particular topic at a particular historical moment" (Hall, 1997a:44). Drawing on this perspective, this study posits that discourses about past events influence our understandings of Ndebele historical events, such as pre-colonial encounters and the Gukurahundi. Foucault's conception of discourse is situated within the social constructionist tradition, as he argues that our knowledge of the social world is produced through discourses (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:13; Hall, 1997a:45; Burr, 1995:48). These discourses not only construct our objects of knowledge, but they also control, regulate, constrain and shape the ways in which we talk about particular topics (Hall, 1997a:44; Foucault, 1981:52). Thus, there are "procedures of exclusion" that construct a "taboo on the object of speech" in order to prohibit certain topics from entering the public domain (Foucault, 1981:52). As a discourse "rules in" and "rules out" (Hall, 1997a:44) certain ways of discussing a particular issue, it is pertinent to examine the discursive practices on news websites that permit and restrict ways of talking about issues such as the Gukurahundi. In rejecting an essentialist conception that knowledge is a reflection of an objective truth, Foucault evokes the notion of "regime of truth" to assert that our social meanings of the social world are discursively constructed (Foucault, 1980:131; Hall, 1997a:49). In addition, Foucault conceives of discourses as socio-culturally and historically situated (Hall, 1997a:46). Ultimately, we should understand new media discourses of Ndebele memory as historically contingent, as they are being shaped by current socio-political conditions. In other terms, this study examines the shifts, ruptures and discontinuities in new media representations of Ndebele Particularism at this historical period, as these imaginations are constantly evolving.

Foucault postulates that knowledge is embedded in power relations (Hall, 1997a:47), a conception that is salient, as it enables this study to examine new media texts as discursive practices that seek to regulate, sustain and challenge the established narratives on Ndebele histories and memories. In the light of this, Foucault develops a new conception of power; an idea that power is not only a “repressive” force weighing on us, but rather, that it “traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, (and) produces discourse” (Foucault, 1980:120). In other words, he advances an argument that power is not centralised, but “circulates” (Hall, 1997a:49), and is “spread across different social practices” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:13). The implication of embracing this position is that it allows this study to make sense of the multiple discourses contesting the social meanings of Ndebele Particularism on news websites. As such, Foucault’s notion of power offers a conceptualisation of a “multiplicity of points of resistance” (Foucault, 1978:95) that converge, intersect, and diverge in the struggles against the hegemonic narratives. Ultimately, this study presents Ndebele Particularism as a manifestation of different aspirations and imaginations, rather than a singular and homogenous oppositional discourse, that contest the hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist discourses. Lastly, Foucault argues that the subject is constructed within a discourse (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:14; Hall, 1997a:56). Eventually, this study examines how the social actors are positioned, discursively, as “Ndebele”, “Zimbabwean”, “tribalist”, “dissident” and “Gukurahundist” through ways and practices on news websites that evoke particular renditions of Ndebele collective memory.

## **5.5 Critical discourse analysis (CDA) as a research design**

### **5.5.1 CDA: Definitional issues and a brief history**

CDA is a broader movement encompassing various approaches that provide theories of and methods for analysing how discourses, as a form of social practice, are implicated in the production and reproduction of asymmetrical power relations (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:60). Anchored upon constructionist and interpretivist assumptions, CDA offers conceptual and technical tools for investigating the constructions of meanings in texts in particular contexts (Richardson, 2007:15). “Discourse” is a term that is widely used, albeit its meaning remains hotly contested (Richardson, 2007:21). In essence, the understanding of discourse can be broadly categorised into two perspectives. Firstly, there is a structuralist understanding that views discourse as a “unit of language ‘above’ ... the sentence” (Richardson, 2007:22).



Secondly, and informing this study, is the functionalist understanding that conceives of discourse as “language in use” (Richardson, 2007:23). Thus, this second, and sociologically oriented, perspective is predicated on an assumption that language is “used to *mean* something and to *do* something” within specific contexts (Richardson, 2007:24). In this functionalist worldview, “language represents and contributes to the production and reproduction ... of social reality” (Richardson, 2007:26). Ultimately, critical discourse analysts focus on social structures and social problems, and postulate that discourses or language use contribute to the production and reproduction of social inequalities, injustices and unequal power relations (Richardson, 2007:26; Wodak, 2001a:2).

The Amsterdam symposium of January 1991, a consortium of scholars, was a defining moment in the development of CDA, as it mapped and solidified this paradigm by enabling various academics to reflect upon the key themes, theories and methods of this tradition (Wodak, 2001a:4). This meeting was attended by scholars such as Teun van Dijk, Norman Fairclough, Gunther Kress, Theo van Leeuwen and Ruth Wodak (Wodak, 2001a:4). As a wider tradition, CDA consists of various approaches, such as the socio-cognitive model of Van Dijk (2001; 1993), the discourse-historical approach of the Vienna School (Wodak, 2011; 2003; Wodak *et al.*, 2009; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001), and Fairclough’s (2010; 1995a) three-dimensional framework. From among these various CDA approaches, this study employs the discourse-historical approach (DHA) as an analytical method for making sense of new media discourses of Ndebele memories (see further discussion on DHA in section 5.5.4).

### **5.5.2 CDA: Premises and themes**

Critical discourse analysts postulate that discourses are a form of “social practice” that contribute in the constitution of the social world (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:5; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:61). In this sense, this study argues that the social realities of Ndebele memories and identities are discursively constructed within new media texts. It is important to note that critical discourse analysts conceive of the relationship between discourses and other forms of social practice as “dialectical”, rather than “deterministic” (Richardson, 2007:26; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:62). In other terms, there is a constitutive relationship between particular “discursive events and the situations, institutions and social structures in which they are embedded” (Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999:92). This implies that discourses are not only constitutive of our social world, identities and objects of knowledge, but they are also shaped and conditioned by social contexts and structures (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:8; Jorgensen & Phillips,



2002:62). Ultimately, this study is predicated on the assumption that the language use on selected news websites contributes to the production and reproduction of Ndebele Particularism, but at the same time these discourses are socio-politically and culturally conditioned.

In addition, critical discourse analysts assert that discourses are historical (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:7). As such, the role of discourses in constituting the social world can only be understood “in relation to their context” (Richardson, 2007:27). In other words, the constructions of Ndebele cyber-memories are embedded within the current socio-historical landscape. Further, CDA has a “critical” impetus, as it explores how language use is embedded in power relations (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:6; Weiss & Wodak, 2003:14; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:63). By taking a “critical” stance, CDA aims to examine the “role of discursive practices in the maintenance of the social world, including those social relations that involve unequal relations of power” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:63). Thus, it analyses the manifestation of social inequalities, power imbalances, prejudice and discrimination amongst social groups as enacted, reproduced and sustained through language use (Wodak, 2011:359). Considering that issues of memory and identity are entrenched in Zimbabwean political struggles, this study examines how representations of the Ndebele collective past are implicated in social structures of domination. It probes how the renditions of the Ndebele past by different social actors and social groups serve to maintain, or subvert, the uneven power structures in the Zimbabwean political landscape. In the light of the Gukurahundi massacres, it is fitting to examine the discursive practices on news websites that seek to cement and perpetuate the silencing of the traumatic memories of the Ndebele people. Needless to say, issues of power and ideology are central tenets of CDA, as the focus is on how symbolic forms, as representations of the social world, serve to sustain and reproduce asymmetrical power relations (Fairclough, 2010:8; Richardson, 2007:27). Critical discourse analysts not only unmask how power imbalances are expressed, perpetuated and reproduced through language, but also examine the possibilities of transformation, and resistance against the status quo (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:8; Wodak, 2001a:3).

Another important feature of CDA is that it does not take a politically neutral stance, as it is committed to social change and hence allies itself with social groups struggling against oppression and social injustices (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:8; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:64; Van Dijk, 2001:96). However, informed by the Vienna School of CDA, it is important to assert that this particular study’s “intervention” is in “analytical” terms, rather than in political and practical ways (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:8). This implies that I critically analyse how the

representations of Ndebele memories on news websites contribute to the reproduction of the hegemonic discourses of exclusion, silence and marginalisation of the Ndebele people, and also expose how these dominant perspectives are being undermined, resisted and thwarted by the subordinated group. Moreover, I critically examine Ndebele memories, probing the nuances and contestations within these new media discourses.

The media constitute a central terrain where identities and other social meanings are formed, reproduced and contested through language (Garrett & Bell, 1998:3). Not surprisingly, a number of scholars have employed CDA approaches in their contributions to media studies (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007; Richardson, 2007; Fairclough, 1995a). CDA scholarship, such as Richardson's (2007) book on analysing newspapers, Fairclough's (1995a) work on media discourse, and Van Dijk's (1988) text on news discourse, are seminal contributions to media studies. With a large quantity of CDA works centred on the media, Garrett and Bell (1998:6) conclude that CDA has "arguably become the standard framework for studying media texts within European linguistics and discourse studies".

### **5.5.3 CDA and social constructionism: Compatible or mutually exclusive?**

The compatibility of CDA and social constructionism is a subject of discussion, as some writers note the epistemological challenges of combining these frameworks (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:178). The underlying argument is that it is difficult to conduct a critical analysis drawing on social constructionism, as the latter cannot determine what is "true" and "good" with regard to social reality (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:176; Burr, 1995:120). As such, a radical social constructionist approach may cause epistemological complications for CDA studies, which aim to expose social inequalities and unjust social relations as they manifest in language. It is important to note that these radical social constructionist accounts are informed by "judgemental relativism" that insists that "all discourses are equally good representations of reality" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:197). The assumption is that it becomes difficult to position some discourses as hegemonic, and others as oppressed, while at the same time subscribing to a radical social constructionist framework that regards all representations of the world as equally true and good. However, this study rejects this radical constructionist approach and holds that social constructionism is compatible with CDA. I dismiss the view that all knowledge accounts are valid and good, and argue that knowledge production is enmeshed in power relations, and hence certain representations of the social world serve to reproduce and sustain unequal power relations amongst social groups. This study represents

the Ndebele people as a marginalised and subjugated social group, as it is a material reality in Zimbabwe that the structure of power is skewed in favour of the Shona ethnic group (see section 1.3 for a discussion of how Ndebele memories and narratives are silenced and excluded in the imagination of the nation-state).

To assert the view that CDA and social constructionism are complementary, this study draws on Jorgensen and Phillips's (2002:175) notion of "critical social constructivist research". In this sense, this study adopts an epistemic relativist strand of social constructionism that holds that "all discourses stem from a particular position in social life" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:197). Thus, what counts as truth depends on one's positioning or social location. In this vein, this research draws on Jorgensen and Phillips's (2002:203) understanding of critical research as a "positioned opening for a discussion". Thus, firstly, I acknowledge, in principle, that all representations of the social world are historically and culturally contingent, and hence "researchers should be open to listening to other people's interpretations" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:205). Secondly, at another level, I concede that "we have no choice but to put forward certain representations of reality at the expense of others" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:205). It is at this second level, argue Jorgensen and Phillips (2002:205), that critical research should detach itself from alternative interpretations of reality "on the grounds that it strives to do something specific for specific reasons". By occupying a position of enunciation (Hall, 1990:222), a researcher can be critical and at the same time make sense of the social world from that particular framework. Thus, Jorgensen and Phillips (2002:204) stress that it is a "general condition for knowledge production that certain representations of the world are promoted at the expense of others". As a result, a researcher "strategically positions" herself/himself in a "particular location in order to see the world from the perspective of particular aims and a particular theoretical framework" (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:209-210). In this particular study, I purposefully situate myself within the vantage point of Ndebele people in order to make sense of how this social group employs new media to reconstruct, contest and disseminate its collective memories and histories. In other words, my positioning is underpinned by the problem statement and research questions, which are centred on the role of new media as sites of memory in the reconstruction of Ndebele collective memory. In essence, through this strategic positioning, the study is able to present some discourses as hegemonic, and others as marginalised, and hence manages to combine social constructionism and critical discourse analysis. This stance does not preclude a critical examination of Ndebele Particularism itself – as indicated in one of my research questions. The following section

discusses the DHA as this study's method of gathering and analysing data. This method was selected because it pays particular attention to the historical context in its analysis of texts.

#### **5.5.4 Discourse-historical approach (DHA)**

DHA, one of the methods of CDA, is a problem-oriented and inter-disciplinary approach that was developed by Ruth Wodak, Martin Reisigl and other scholars within the Vienna School (Wodak, 2011:352; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:95; Wodak *et al.*, 2009:2; Wodak, 2001b:64). It is interdisciplinary in the sense that linguistic analysis is “combined with historical and sociological approaches” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:95). As such, DHA has a socio-political alignment, as it focuses on the discursive constructions of political and historical topics as expressed in texts and genres, and at the same time examines the continuities and ruptures of the discourses cutting across spatial and temporal locations (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:88; Wodak *et al.*, 2009:7). More importantly for this particular study, the distinguishing feature of DHA is that it places emphasis on historical analysis, as “context is understood as mainly historical” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009:26). Thus, the background information about the phenomenon under investigation and the historical context are integrated in the analysis and interpretation of texts (Wodak, 2011:359; 2003:188; 2001b:70). By paying particular attention to the socio-historical context in which discursive “events” are embedded, the DHA is congruent with this study, which explores the cyber-constructions of Ndebele collective memories. Chapters 1 and 3 provided a historical background to the genesis and resurgence of Ndebele Particularism, and explored the literature on memory contestations and identity politics in the context of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. This study is predicated on an understanding that the reconstructions of Ndebele memories on news websites are “context-dependent” (Engel & Wodak, 2013:77). In addition, the principle of triangulation is another significant feature of DHA (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89). Triangulation, according to Wodak (2001b:65), serves as a precaution against a researcher's bias, and I accept this point by drawing data from multiple new media genres (see further discussion on triangulation in section 5.3).

Furthermore, DHA establishes and describes the connection of discourses, genres, fields of action and texts in its analysis (Meyer, 2001:22). The intertwined relationship of these elements is evident in Wodak's (2001b:66) definition of discourse as a:

Complex bundle of simultaneous and sequential interrelated linguistic acts,  
which manifest themselves within and across the social fields of action as

thematically interrelated semiotic, oral, or written tokens, very often as “texts”, that belong to specific semiotic types, that is, genres.

In essence, DHA views a discourse as a “macro-topic” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89; Wodak, 2001b:66), which can, in this particular study, be pre-colonial Ndebele collective events, Gukurahundi, and the imagination of an Ndebele nation. In the light of this, this study examines new media discourses of Ndebele collective memories that are produced, expressed and shaped in the form of these aforementioned sub-topics.

The discourse-historical approach also examines how discourses about particular topics are produced and sustained through texts that can be in written and spoken forms (Wodak, 2001b:66). Texts thus are perceived as “materially durable products of linguistic actions” (Wodak, 2001b:66), or the “outward manifestation of a communicative event” (Garrett & Bell, 1998:3). With both written and spoken expressions recognised as forms of social practice, empirical data for DHA analyses is drawn from oral, written and visual texts (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89; Wodak, 2001b:71; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999:91). In their study of discourses of anti-Semitism in Austrian public spaces, the Vienna School researchers drew their data for analysis from a wide range of visual, oral and written texts, such as radio and TV news, documentaries, newspaper articles and anti-Semitic images (Wodak, 2011:352; 2003:182; 2001b:70). In a similar vein, this particular study does not confine itself to an analysis of written texts, but also selects data from images and videos on news websites that reconstruct the collective memories of the Ndebele people. Thus, this research examines the multimodality of the selected news websites by exploring their abilities to combine written, visual and spoken texts to enact, reproduce and shape collective memories. Van Leeuwen and Kress (2011), in their analysis of discourses, employ the term “multimodality” to designate this phenomenon of combining and integrating different linguistic elements such as semiotic modes and sound forms in the analysis and interpretation of texts. As texts are viewed as “sites of social struggle” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:89), this research examines Ndebele memory contestations that are evoked and animated in these multimodal texts.

Further, DHA is premised on an understanding that discourses are produced through genres (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). Thus, texts belong to specific genres, which shape particular understandings of social reality (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). In essence, a genre is a “socially ratified way of using language in connection with a particular type of social activity” (Fairclough, 1995b:14). In other words, a genre denotes “a group of texts of the same kind” (Stokes, 2013:120). It is important to categorise texts, because different genres contain specific

social “rules”, “expectations”, “conventions” and “purposes” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). In their analyses of anti-Semitic, nationalist and xenophobic discourses in Austria, DHA analysts selected data for analysis from a wide range of genres, such as policy documents (proposals, petitions, etc.), political campaigns, posters and speeches, TV and radio news broadcasts, documentaries, and newspaper articles (Wodak & Richardson, 2013:1-2; Wodak, 2003:182; 2001b:70-71). In contrast to the aforementioned DHA studies, which were comprehensive and covered multiple facets, this particular research is confined to media studies, and hence interprets data drawn from new media genres such as news stories, opinions, news interviews, online forums, YouTube, and readers’ comments. These online media genres have different attributes and purposes, and hence the selection of texts from these different genres provides a varied and richer understanding of the ways in which Ndebele memories are produced, shaped, contested and transmitted in cyberspace.

In addition, DHA developed the notion of “field of action” to draw our attention to the ways in which discourses are situated in and “spread” across discursive spaces (Wodak, 2001b:67). Thus, a field of action is understood as a “segment of social reality which constitutes a (partial) ‘frame’ of a discourse” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). In other words, topics on discourses can be located in one field of action, but then overlap to other fields of action (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90; Wodak, 2001b:67). This study identifies new media as a field of action in which discourses of Ndebele collective memory are mediated and circulated. However, I also explore how new media intersect with other fields of action, such as party politics, parliamentary procedures, commemorations and civic activism, by providing a terrain for the discourses on Ndebele Particularism to be forged and contested.

The notions of “recontextualisation”, “intertextuality” and “interdiscursivity” illuminate the connections amongst discourses, texts, genres and fields of action (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90; Wodak, 2003:37; 2001b:70). Recontextualisation is the process of transferring elements from a specific context to a new context (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). Thus, discursive events acquire new social meanings in the processes of decontextualisation and recontextualisation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). This concept is pertinent, as this study examines how historical events of the Ndebele people are taken out of a specific historical moment and inserted into a new context to acquire new meaning in new media. Thus, discursive events such as the Gukurahundi and pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters assume multiple connotations, as they are invoked and reinterpreted in cyberspace to construct different renditions of Ndebele collective memories. In addition, intertextuality denotes the ways in which texts are connected



to other texts, from the past and present epochs (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90; Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:73). This study explores how Ndebele Particularism is being reconstructed and contested as texts on the selected news websites are intertwined with other texts on other websites, and with social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. Lastly, interdiscursivity is premised on the view that discourses are connected to each other, as they are “open and often hybrid” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:90). Thus, interdiscursivity occurs when “different discourses and genres are articulated together in a communicative event” (Jorgensen & Phillips, 2002:73). Drawing on this notion, this study examines, for instance, how the new media discourse on Gukurahundi articulates, overlaps and intersects with discourses of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past, and Ndebele secession. The mutual relationship of these different discourses provides ways of making sense of the socio-political forces that are shaping the rendition and reproduction of Ndebele historical imaginations, as the reinterpretation of public memories is always dependent on context.

The DHA has been applied in a number of studies examining issues of racism, anti-Semitism, immigration and nationalism (Wodak *et al.*, 2009; Wodak, 2003; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999). Firstly, Wodak *et al.* (2009) employed the DHA to argue that the discursive construction of national identities in Austria is achieved through markers of sameness and difference that contribute to the exclusion of certain social groups. This particular study draws upon this perspective by exploring how the discursive construction of Ndebele collective memories in new media contributes to the construction of an “us”/“them” dichotomy in identity politics. Secondly, other DHA-related works explore the nativist, racist and xenophobic discourses expressed and reproduced in the discriminatory policies and rhetoric directed at immigrants in Austria (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001; Wodak, 2001b; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999), and also in the United Kingdom (Richardson & Wodak, 2009). Lastly, there are studies that explore the continuities and persistence of anti-Semitic and fascist discourses in Austria in particular (Wodak, 2011; 2003; 2001b), and in post-war Europe in general (Wodak & Richardson, 2013; Richardson & Wodak, 2009). More specifically, some of these works focus on how Austria is confronted and burdened by its Nazi past, and hence explore the discourses of silence and denialism surrounding the role of the Austrians in the Holocaust (Engel & Wodak, 2013; Wodak, 2011; 2003). Similarly, this particular study probes whether the hegemonic discourses of silence and denialism on the Gukurahundi are being maintained and reproduced on the selected websites, or whether the Internet has enabled the emergence of oppositional voices resisting and thwarting the forced amnesia regarding the massacres.



It is important to note that Reisigl and Wodak (2009:96) provide eight steps to be followed when conducting a discourse-historical analysis. Of these eight procedures listed below, seven have been applied in this research project.

- **Activation and consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge** (see Chapters 2, 3 and 4 for a discussion of the literature review, and the theoretical points of departure of this study).
- **Systematic collection of data and context information** (see further discussion on data collection procedures in section 5.5.5, and the socio-historical and political contexts in Chapter 1).
- **Selection and preparation of data for specific analyses** (see further discussion on the selection of texts, themes and genres for analysis in section 5.5.5).
- **Specification of the research question and formulation of assumptions** (the research questions are explained in section 1.8).
- **Qualitative pilot analysis** (a pilot study was not conducted).
- **Detailed case studies** (this study uses Ndebele Particularism as a case study to explore the role of new media in the reconstructions of collective memories),
- **Formulation of critique** (see the following chapter, on the data analysis and interpretation of the findings).
- **Application of the detailed analytical results** (see the discussion in the conclusion and recommendations chapter).

Having explored the fundamental tenets and facets of the discourse-historical approach, the following section, informed by the DHA, engages with the practical aspects of data collection procedures. In this basis I discuss the steps undertaken and the decisions made in collecting and selecting data.

### **5.5.5 Data collection procedures – from the perspective of DHA**

The object of analysis in this study is the Internet, and the focus is on how three selected news websites represent Ndebele collective memories and integrate social media (YouTube, Twitter and Facebook) in their processes of reconstructing the past. The units of analysis were purposefully selected, meaning that a purposive sampling method was employed in the selection of news websites and data for analysis. Purposive sampling is a popular and appropriate technique for qualitative research (Bryman, 2012:416; Maxwell, 2005:88; Creswell, 2003:185). In purposive sampling, the selection of units is done non-randomly and

consciously to achieve the objectives of the study (Maxwell, 2005:85; Silverman, 2005:129). In contrast to probability/random sampling, purposive selection entails the selection of units with “direct reference to research questions” (Bryman, 2012:416). In addition, with the application of purposive sampling, research findings are context-specific, rather than being generalised to a wider population (Bryman, 2012:418). It is important to acknowledge that the term “sampling” is “problematic in qualitative research because it implies the purpose of ‘representing’ the population sampled” (Maxwell, 2005:88). At the same time, however, there are scholars such as Bryman (2012:416) and Silverman (2005:129) who use the term “sampling” when referring to the selection techniques in qualitative research. In the light of the aforementioned insights, this study employs the term “sampling” in reference to data selection techniques, but without any assumptions of “representing” a population, as postulated in quantitative research. In this particular study, *Newzimbabwe.com*, *Bulawayo24.com* and *Umthwakazireview.com* were purposefully selected because these news websites provide a terrain for the reconstructions of Ndebele collective memories (see section 1.3 for an in-depth discussion of these selected websites).

The scope of the study, purposefully selected, covers the period from the inception of each news website until December 2015. As such, an analysis of *Newzimbabwe.com* covers a 12-year period (2003 to 2015), whilst a five-year period (2010 to 2015) is covered for *Bulawayo24.com*. Lastly, the scope of the study of *Umthwakazireview.com* is three years (2012 to 2015). This decision to select a particular time frame for each news website was informed by a need to examine how these news websites have represented Ndebele Particularism since their establishment. In addition, the time frame for the data collection process was from July 2014 to December 2015. As this procedure of data gathering spanned 17 months, I immersed myself in the data gathering process, and hence adequately captured and selected relevant texts. Although the selection of data was at my discretion, these texts were selected intentionally to address the research questions. This chapter describes the processes involved in the inclusion and exclusion of certain texts.

Guided by my research questions (see section 1.8.1), I collected data to analyse new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory. Using the terms “Gukurahundi”, “Mthwakazi”, “Matabeleland”, “Ndebele”, “Mzilikazi”, “Lobengula” and “ethnicity” as keywords, I utilised the search box feature on the three news websites to select articles that were related to Ndebele collective memory. The keywords were used deliberately because discussions and debates on Ndebele histories and memories revolve around these pertinent topics. Moreover, by

employing multiple keywords rather than one, I adhered to the principle of triangulation to ensure that this study captures a wider frame of the phenomenon under investigation, as recommended by Reisigl and Wodak (2009:89; 2001:35), and Wodak (2001b:65). From the large amount of data obtained, I excluded articles that were not related to Ndebele Particularism. For instance, “Mzilikazi” and “Lobengula” are not just Ndebele historical figures, but are also the names of suburbs in Bulawayo. As such, I had to exclude articles reporting on events related to the Mzilikazi and Lobengula suburbs, as they did not signify new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. In order to cover multiple facets and achieve triangulation, articles were further selected from the news websites’ categories, such as “opinions”, “history”, “news”, “videos” and “YouTube”.

Thirdly, this study also exploited the hyperlink function on the news websites to select news articles that were related to the one being read. Most of the news articles were hypertexts, as they contained hyperlinks that direct the reader to other articles that provide background information, or other related contents. This networking of articles has the effect of setting up a chain reaction, as readers are referred to other articles, and hence are able to navigate around the news website to select texts. This study considers this process of chain reaction as symptomatic of snowball sampling, which is popular in qualitative research. With snowball sampling, the “researcher samples initially a small group of people relevant to the research questions, and those sampled participants propose other participants who have had the experience or characteristics relevant to the research” (Bryman, 2012:424). Thus, through these hyperlinks, hypertexts are “proposing” or “recommending” related texts on Ndebele collective memory to the reader. By employing these different methods of data collection, the aim was to ensure that this selection process covered multiple facets.

The selected data was downloaded and categorised according to thematic issues that illustrate the ways in which Ndebele Particularism is reconstructed in new media. Thus, by analysing these thematic contents, it was possible to make sense of how Ndebele historical events are selected, interpreted and constructed into a shared cultural knowledge in cyberspace. New media discourses on Ndebele collective memory are hinged on the following three themes:

- Pre-colonial Ndebele collective past
- Gukurahundi
- The imagination of an Ndebele nation

In addition, data was categorised according to new media genres. Firstly, I selected editorials, because they reflect a media institution’s official position on a topic (Le, 2010:3). Thus, an

analysis of editorials exposes the sanctioned position of the selected news websites on the question of Ndebele Particularism. Secondly, data was drawn from opinion pieces, which are viewed as persuasive and argumentative (Dafouz-Milne, 2008:96). It is in large part through these opinion pieces that Ndebele Particularism is shaped and contested in the new media. Thirdly, premised on the assumption that news is socially produced, and hence underpinned by the politics of selection, framing, and the signification of events (Hall *et al.*, 1978:53), I selected news reports in order to explore how Ndebele Particularism is shaped in new media. Fourthly, I considered online forums, as they provide ways of examining the interactive potential of news websites (Moyo, 2009a:59; Mano & Willems, 2008:107). Although the discussion forums section appears on the home page of *Newzimbabwe.com*, this interactive feature was not active, as my attempts to access the forums yielded no results. Similarly, data from discussion forums could not be drawn from *Umthwakazireview.com*, as this news site does not have discussion forums. In contrast to the aforementioned two websites, *Bulawayo24.com* has online forums that have live discussions. Through its online forum facility, *Bulawayo24.com* enables users to set up their own blogs, post topics that trigger debates, and comment on other participants' threads. To register, new members are required to provide an email address and then click on the "invite" text. These discussion forums enable participants to discuss and debate on a number of topical issues, such as politics, relationships, health, games, religion and travel. In the "politics" category, I used keywords such as "Ndebele", "Mthwakazi" and "Matabeleland" to select blog postings that were centred on the aforementioned three themes of Ndebele collective memory. The purpose was to explore how Ndebele Particularism is reconstructed on *Bulawayo24.com* through forum posts and the attached comments.

Furthermore, readers' comments were selected for my analysis of the data. In the light of the euphoria surrounding the interactivity of new media (Banda *et al.*, 2009:1; Lister *et al.*, 2003:20), it is pertinent to explore how web users, through the readers' comments, are actively producing social meanings of their collective past as they discuss and debate on Ndebele Particularism. Readers' comments were drawn from only those articles that were selected for analysis. Thus, from a large volume of user comments on the news websites, only readers' comments that were centred on Ndebele Particularism were included in the scope of this study. Although the user engagement facility is available, no readers' comments had been posted on *Umthwakazireview.com*. As a result, readers' comments were drawn from *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo24.com*. As the three themes of Ndebele collective memories tend to converge, one of the challenges in the processes of data selection and analysis was how to keep these

themes analytically apart, considering that readers tended to evoke memories of the pre-colonial Ndebele past in reaction to an article that is centred on Gukurahundi. In order to develop a coherent and logical argument, I decided to analyse readers' comments on their own, that is, separately from the news articles. Thus, I categorised the readers' comments along the three themes of Ndebele Particularism.

My analysis of online forums and readers' comments was marked by ethical dilemmas. Firstly, I had to grapple with whether informed consent was needed from the research participants. The ethical challenge of analysing discussion forums is that researchers may be accused of "lurking", that is, simply reading and analysing online posts without participating or revealing their identities to the forum participants (Bryman, 2012:657). With regard to Internet research, Bryman (2012:680) stipulates the circumstances that require an informed consent process:

- If the information is not in the public domain.
- If researchers need a password to access the information on the websites.
- If the news site has a policy that specifically bars researchers from using material from the websites.

After careful consideration, and drawing from Bryman's (2012:680) insights, I resolved that informed consent was not required, as the data from the discussion forums and readers' comments was in the public domain. Secondly, I did not need a password to gain access to the information on the discussion forums and readers' forums. Lastly, the selected news websites had no specified policy that prohibited the use of information for research purposes.

In addition to the aforementioned ethical complexities, I had to deliberate on whether I should identify participants using what appeared to be their real names, or protect the identities of these interlocutors. Although most of the participants used pseudonyms, there were some web users who posted comments on *Bulawayo24.com* using their Facebook usernames, which appeared to be their real-life names. Informed by Nyika (2014:346), who also analysed readers' comments on a news website, I decided to use the participants' names that appeared on the websites. Nyika (2014:346) rightly argues that "users of online forums are well aware that they write on a public forum which is the reason why many users make the conscious decision to use pseudonyms". In addition, I am aware that what I might conceive as being the real names of participants might be pseudonyms, as there is no mechanism of verifying the participants' identities. Lastly, it was not anticipated that any harm would befall the research participants, even if real names were used in this study.

In addition, data for analysis was drawn from YouTube videos that were connected to the selected news websites. YouTube is an online site that allows users to upload, view and share videos, at the same time posting comments on these videos (Burgess & Green, 2009:1). Drinot (2011:370) analysed user's comments attached to a documentary on the War of the Pacific (1879-1884) that was uploaded on YouTube, and concluded that YouTube constitutes a "website of memory" that enables online participants to reconstruct and transmit collective memories in "de-territorialised and transnational ways". YouTube videos were selected as a source of data for making sense of the ways in which the pre-colonial Ndebele past, and the traumatic memories of the Gukurahundi are reproduced and circulated in cyberspace. In analysing video contents connected to the three news websites, my aim was to explore how the linking of the selected news websites with YouTube was shaping the ways in which the Ndebele collective past is remembered. Data was drawn from the archives of the selected news websites by utilising the "video" section, which enables web users to access, view and comment on YouTube content. In addition, *Bulawayo24.com* enables users to access videos by clicking on "YouTube" hypertext that appears on the home page of the website. In selecting the videos for analysis, I considered my research questions, the thematic content of the videos, the number of audiences who viewed and shared the videos, and lastly, the depth of the comments attached to the videos. Although I referred to Facebook and Twitter in Chapter 1, the postings and tweets from the Facebook pages and twitter handles of the selected news websites do not feature in my analysis. These Facebook pages and Twitter accounts provide links of articles that appear on the selected news websites, and as a result no new insights was gained. On the other hand, YouTube videos feature in my analysis because they possess audio visual aspects such as oral testimonies that provide insights on the different ways in which the past is remembered, commemorated and preserved.

Further, data for analysis was drawn from opinion polls, as I considered the contents of these polls as demonstrative of the ways in which Ndebele Particularism is being framed and shaped on news websites. In other words, the survey polls indicate the issues that are deemed pertinent by the websites' administrators. In addition, I selected data from interviews, as this new media genre exposes the ways in which news websites are shaping Ndebele Particularism by giving a voice to various Ndebele political and cultural activists. Lastly, I considered the Gukurahundi survivor testimonies that are produced and circulated through news websites. Pinchevski and Liebes (2010:267) argue that the media (radio) enabled Holocaust survivors to reproduce, transmit and share their testimonies. In this particular study, I examined the written and oral

testimonies on selected news websites to make sense of how those who lived through the Gukurahundi are using new media to bear witness to the atrocities, and come to terms with their traumatic pasts.

In the process of gathering and analysing texts (news articles, comments, YouTube videos, etc.), I had to grapple with the question of what constitutes sufficient or adequate data in order to address my research questions. Thus, I had to consider the size of news stories, editorials, opinions, videos, comments and discussion forums in order for this study to meet the quality standards. In other words, the question is, “how do you know when you have collected enough data?” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:199). Since this is qualitative research, my decision on the size and scope of data for analysis was based on the notion of “saturation” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:199; Merriam, 2002:26). Saturation “occurs when continued data collection produces no new information or insights into the phenomenon you are studying” (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015:199). Guided by my research questions, data was collected and analysed until saturation was reached, that is, until I felt that no new arguments, insights or findings were emerging. Having gathered the data from the news websites, an analysis was conducted using the three-dimensional framework of the DHA.

### **5.5.6 Data analysis – from the perspective of DHA**

The DHA provides a method of analysing and interpreting data that focuses on three dimensions:

- The topics/contents of a specific discourse.
- The discursive strategies employed.
- The linguistic means and forms of realisation (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:93; Wodak *et al.*, 2009:31; Wodak, 2001b:72).

#### **5.5.6.1 Topics/contents**

This study identifies the topics/contents as the thematic issues that manifest in new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memories. As alluded to in section 5.5.5, the three topics identified are the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past, Gukurahundi, and the imagination of an Ndebele nation. Firstly, the discussions on the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past revolved around issues of Ndebele myths of common ancestry, myths of origin, myths of founding fathers, and the pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters. As a result, this study investigated the online discussions and debates on these pre-colonial Ndebele evocations and recreations in



order to make sense of the reconstructions of Ndebele collective memories. Secondly, in focusing on Gukurahundi as a topic, this study explored how this violence is remembered and interpreted through new media sites, and how these interpretations are interwoven with Ndebele identity politics. It examined how the memories of this violence are reproduced, preserved and circulated through news websites. As such, I reflected on a number of questions pertaining to the recollections of the Gukurahundi on news websites. What were the perceived causes of this violence? Who are regarded as the perpetrators and victims? Is the Gukurahundi reconstructed as a genocide, ethnic cleansing or a conflict? What is seen as the motivation for the event? Is the Gukurahundi regarded as a closed chapter, or is there a need for truth, justice and reconciliation? By exploring these multiple facets of the Gukurahundi topic, this study is able to make sense of the ways in which Ndebele people are using the Internet to come to terms with their troubled past. Lastly, this study focuses on the imagination of an Ndebele nation in new media. In the light of this, I examined how Ndebele past events are summoned in new media by political activists at home and in the diaspora to construct an Ndebele nation. It is important to explore Ndebele historical events that are mobilised and invoked in cyberspace to imagine this Ndebele nation. Having discussed the thematic contents of Ndebele Particularism, the analysis focused on the second layer of the DHA, as the study examined the discursive strategies employed to construct Ndebele collective memories.

#### **5.5.6.2 Discursive strategies**

By “strategy”, this study denotes an “intentional plan of practices (including discursive practices) adopted to achieve a particular social, political, psychological or linguistic goal” (Engel & Wodak, 2013:78; Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:94). In their research, Ruth Wodak and other researchers identified four types of discursive macro-strategies employed to construct Austrian national identities (Wodak, 2001b:72). This particular study also employs these macro-strategies to examine the ways in which Ndebele collective memories are discursively constructed through utterances and other forms of textual expressions on news websites. More importantly, Wodak (2001b:72) asserts that this analytical typology can be applied to cases beyond the Austrian context. The four discursive macro-strategies identified are constructive strategies, preservative/justificatory strategies, transformative strategies, and destructive strategies (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:43; Wodak, 2001b:72; Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999:92). Firstly, constructive strategies aim at constructing or producing social conditions such as national identities (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33; Wodak, 2001b:72). This study examined the constructive strategies in new media texts that seek to solidify the hegemonic

discourses of Zimbabwean Nationalism through an emphasis on assimilation, unity and legitimation. Secondly, this study has explored the preservative/justificatory strategies that seek to maintain, conserve and reproduce the status quo (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33; Wodak, 2001b:72). In the wake of the growing voices in Matabeleland calling for truth and justice, this study examines how the official discourses on the Gukurahundi are preserved and restored in new media through a number of linguistic strategies, such as minimisation, denialism, trivialisation and euphemism, which sustain the dominant social order. In addition, it seeks to ascertain whether the stereotypical images of Ndebele people as “settlers” and “invaders” are being reproduced and sustained through the nativist sentiments of Shona-imagined nationalist discourses.

Thirdly, there are transformative strategies of which the goal is to effect a “change of national identities” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:43). Thus, this set of strategies constitutes oppositional discourses that are instrumental in transforming the dominant social order (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33; Van Leeuwen & Wodak, 1999:92). This study examined new media recollections of Ndebele collective memories that are seeking to transform the hegemonic nationalist discourses that subordinate and exclude Ndebele myths and narratives from the imagination of the Zimbabwean nation-state. These transformative strategies are aiming to incorporate and integrate Ndebele historical narratives into the imagination of the Zimbabwean nation-state. Lastly, this study also investigated the dismantling of strategies of which the goal is to destroy the status quo of the hegemonic discourses (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:33; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:43). The strategies of dismantlement constitute Ndebele radical secessionist discourses that place emphasis on the ruptures, discontinuities and disruptions of the Zimbabwean nation-state configuration, and the subsequent restoration of a pre-colonial Ndebele nation-state. This study considered these four discursive macro-strategies as closely interlocked and constituting each other. Thus, for instance, the destruction of a social condition (strategies of dismantlement) results in the construction of an alternative social imaginary (constructive strategies). In this particular study, the discursive strategies that seek to dismantle the discourses of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism are, at the same time, constructing collective memories that are instrumental in the imagination of an Ndebele nation-state. In focusing on these discursive macro-strategies, this study was able to examine the contestations of Ndebele cyber-memories.

### **5.5.6.3 Linguistic realisation**

The third dimension is the linguistic realisation of the contents and discursive strategies, and this entailed an analysis of linguistic devices employed in the construction of Ndebele collective memories in new media. The linguistic tools that were analysed included predication, referential strategies, tropes (metaphors, synecdoches and metonymies), argumentation strategies that are reflected in various topoi, presuppositions, lexical choices, transitivity, allusions and euphemisms (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:43; Richardson, 2007:54; Wodak, 2003:194; 2001b:73; Meyer, 2001:27; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:44). Referential strategies denote the ways in which people or events are named or referenced through language (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:45; Wodak, 2001b:73). The naming of individuals is an effective linguistic way of membership categorisation and, ultimately, constructing “in-groups and out-groups” (Wodak, 2001b:73). In acknowledging that “naming” is a political tool, this study examines the social categories employed in naming social actors and past events, and how this referencing illuminates the representations of Ndebele memories in cyberspace. In addition, this study has analysed the predicational strategies employed to label social actors, negatively or positively (Richardson, 2007:52; Wodak, 2001b:73). Therefore, this research examined the attributes, features or traits that are ascribed to particular social groups, and that may contribute to reinforcing stereotypical and derogatory images of such social groups (Wodak, 2001b:73). Thus, this study probes how social actors are represented on news websites through the dichotomies of “positive self-presentation/negative other-presentation” (Wodak, 2011:365; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:31). In other words, I examine the values and traits assigned to the Ndebele, Shona and other social groups, and how the ascriptions construct certain imaginations of Ndebele collective memories.

A metaphor is a linguistic tool that denotes “perceiving one thing in terms of another” (Richardson, 2007:66). By identifying the metaphors used in new media texts, one can make sense of the social meanings of Ndebele memories, as these metaphors shape our understanding of the social world. In addition, lexical analysis involves an examination of how the choice of words convey particular understandings of social reality (Richardson, 2007:47). Ultimately, this study examines how the use of particular words on news websites construct certain understandings of the Ndebele past. A metonym is a linguistic device that “replaces the name of a referent by the name of an entity which is closely associated with it in either concrete or abstract terms” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:43). For example, terms such as “Ndebele”, “Mthwakazi” and “Matabele” may stand for Gukuruhundi victims. Closely related to the metonym is the synecdoche, in which the name of a referent is “replaced by the name of another referent which

belongs to the same field of meaning” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:43). For instance, the name of the territory “Matabeleland” may be used to signify the population of an imagined Ndebele state. Further, this study analysed “hidden or presupposed meanings in texts” (Richardson, 2007:63). Thus, a presupposition is a “taken-for-granted, implicit claim embedded within the explicit meaning of a text or utterance” (Richardson, 2007:63). In this sense, the presupposed meanings on news websites may illuminate the ways in which Ndebele past events are remembered and represented. Transitivity describes “the relationships between participants and the roles they play in the processes described in reporting” (Richardson, 2007:54). The representation of Ndebele social actors, such as Mzilikazi and Lobengula, on news websites provides an understanding of the reconstructions of Ndebele memories.

Argumentation strategies are linguistic devices employed to justify and legitimate the inclusion, suppression, exclusion and silencing of social groups (Meyer, 2001:27; Wodak, 2001b:73). Thus, argumentation occurs in a particular social context, and “is realised through the participants offering arguments which they believe support their standpoint and which are aimed at exerting an influence on the opinions, attitudes and even behaviour of others” (Richardson, 2007:156). In focusing on the use of argumentation in new media texts, this study draws on Aristotle’s three classes of rhetorical argumentation: judicial, epideictic and deliberative rhetoric (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:70; Richardson, 2007:157). Firstly, judicial rhetoric is associated with the past, and the thematic issues of justice and injustice, and hence its function is to defend or condemn someone’s past actions (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:70; Richardson, 2007:157). Secondly, epideictic rhetoric focuses on the present, and its function is to praise or blame someone for an honourable or disgraceful action (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:70; Richardson, 2007:157). Thus, the “rhetor attempts to make the audience admire those referred to because of their goodness or dislike them because of their badness” (Richardson, 2007:157). Lastly, deliberative rhetoric is concerned with the future, and thematically with the desirability or harmfulness of a particular course of action, and hence the function of the rhetor is to exhort or dissuade audiences (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:70; Richardson, 2007:157). The classical rhetorical argumentation was employed by Wodak *et al.* (2009:70) to analyse the constructions of Austrian national identity in commemorative speeches, and by Richardson (2007:155) to analyse the representation of Muslims in the letters to the editor of British newspapers. This study considers opinion pieces and readers’ comments as argumentative, and hence employs these three rhetorical divisions to examine new media contestations in the discourses on Ndebele Particularism. Topoi, which constitute part of argumentation theory, are “content-

related warrants” or “conclusion rules” that “connect an argument or arguments with a conclusion, a claim (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:34; Wodak, 2001b:74). Wodak *et al.* (2009:74) identify “danger and threat” and “culture” as some of the topoi employed to justify and legitimate the exclusion and suppression of certain social groups in the discursive construction of Austrian identity. In addition, Wodak (2003:356) identifies the topos of “we are all victims” as instrumental in the anti-Semitic discourses in Austria.

The analysis of these three levels always took into consideration the socio-historical and political contexts shaping these cyber-constructions of Ndebele collective memories. Since the DHA pursues an “abductive” approach to methodology, this analysis of new media representations of Ndebele Particularism was conducted by constantly moving “back and forth between theory and empirical data” (Wodak, 2001b:70). In answering research question one (RQ 1: representations of Ndebele past and memory that are being produced and sustained in the discourses on the three selected websites), I focus on the three thematic contents/topics (reconstructions of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past, Gukurahundi, and the imagination of an Ndebele nation) to explore how Ndebele myths, memories and experiences are appropriated and contested in news articles, opinions and readers’ comments.

In addressing research question two (RQ 2: how the three selected websites provide a space for the resurgence of a repressed Ndebele history), this study explores how the websites provide additional content from social media and also promote the participation of web users in the construction of an Ndebele history. In focusing on intertextuality, this study investigates how texts on the three websites are connected with other texts on social media such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. It places emphasis on the transformative and destructive macro-strategies that are undermining and thwarting the discourses of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. I analysed utterances and interactions in news articles, readers’ posts and comments to make sense of the resurgence of particularistic Ndebele histories.

This study addresses the third research question (RQ 3: fractures, tensions and negotiations around Ndebele histories) by identifying the historical moments, experiences and narratives that are contested by the Ndebele community on news sites. I interrogated whether there were any selective silences, antagonisms and alignments within Ndebele sub-groups, and the possible ideological persuasions underpinning such strategic decisions. In addition, the study probed the accords and dissents, if any, between homeland and diaspora web users in their Ndebele memory constructions. As such, this study pays particular attention to the discussions and debates on readers’ comments on news websites in order to make sense of contested

Ndebele memories. Considering that Ndebele identity is not fixed but constantly shifting, it is important to probe how language use in new media exposes the fractures within Ndebele identity as different sub-groups construct their own memories and identities.

In answering research question four (RQ 4: how are the discourses on hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism reproduced and perpetuated on the three selected websites), this study examines the justifying, perpetuating and legitimating discursive strategies that seek to naturalise, reproduce and perpetuate the discourses on hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. I identified the exclusions and absences of Ndebele narratives within the hegemonic Zimbabwean historiography.

In addressing the last research question (RQ 5: overlaps with and divergences in news websites), this study explores the similarities and differences of the three websites in terms of their representations of Ndebele history and memories, the utilisation of social functions such as YouTube, Twitter and Facebook, and their interactivity through the use of chat rooms, discussion forums and readers' comments.

## **5.6 Summary**

This chapter has explored the methodological issues that inform this study. It provided the philosophical assumptions underpinning the choice of the qualitative research approach. In addition, this chapter provided a discussion of critical discourse analysis and the discourse-historical approach. As stated in section 1.9.4, two chapters are dedicated to data analysis. The following chapter focuses on the data analysis and findings as I examine how pre-colonial Ndebele collective past events are conjured up on news websites in ways that promote Ndebele secessionist imaginations.

## CHAPTER SIX: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### New media reconstructions of a pre-colonial Ndebele collective past

#### 6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I employ the discourse-historical approach (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:95; Wodak, 2001b:64) to critically analyse the manifestation of the discourses on Ndebele Particularism in texts selected from three news websites. Having established in section 5.5.6 that the cyber-debates on Ndebele collective memories crystallise around three thematic issues – pre-colonial Ndebele collective past, Gukurahundi, and imagination of an Ndebele nation – this study categorised data along these themes for an in-depth analysis. This chapter focuses specifically on one of these themes, that is, new media reconstructions of a pre-colonial Ndebele collective past. The aim was to examine how new media are used by Ndebele people and other social groups as sites for the production, negotiation, contestation and transmission of the social meanings of pre-colonial Ndebele past events. Taking into consideration that memories are socially framed, and also are sites of political struggles, it is important to probe deeply the Ndebele past events that are constructed as memorable and/or forgettable, and the ideological underpinnings of these journalistic renditions. At stake is the question of “who wants who to remember what, and why?” (Burke, 1997:56). Taking cognisance of the multifaceted nature of pre-colonial Ndebele memories, I explore how these competing Ndebele historical imaginations help to perpetuate, or subvert, the discourses of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. The three themes of Ndebele Particularism tend to draw from each other, and hence this chapter also examines how the narratives of a pre-colonial Ndebele past are interwoven with the discourses on the Gukurahundi and the imaginations of an independent Ndebele nation. As discussed in section 5.5.5, data was purposively collected from three news websites (*Newzimbabwe.com*, *Bulawayo24.com*, and *Umthwakazireview.com*).

As explained in section 5.5.8, I employed the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to analyse and interpret the data. The focus of this analysis of texts was on three layers: firstly, the topics/themes of a specific discourse; secondly, the discursive strategies used; and, lastly, the linguistic tools employed (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009:93). As I was submerged in data collection and analysis for 17 months, this research process was conducted with rigour, arguably leading to trustworthiness and authenticity. As stated above, this chapter focuses on the pre-colonial



Ndebele past as one of the three themes of new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. In order to adequately cover the multiple dimensions of new media reconstructions of a pre-colonial Ndebele past, I divided this theme into the following sub-topics/themes:

- Foundation myths of Ndebele identity.
- Fractures and hybridity of Ndebele identity.
- Homeland, memory, and the construction of diasporic identities.
- Pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona relations.

This process of categorising data along sub-themes was a result of inductive reasoning, as these sub-themes emerged from my analysis of the texts centred on the pre-colonial Ndebele past. The first section explores the constructions of the foundation myths of Ndebele identity, and how these narratives of the pre-colonial past are contributing to the forging and consolidation of Ndebele Particularism. In my examination of new media reconstructions of pre-colonial Ndebele memories, the focus is on how different Ndebele historical figures and events are celebrated and commemorated in ways that construct and shape various understandings of Ndebele-ness.

## **6.2. Foundation myths of Ndebele identity: The commemoration of pre-colonial Ndebele figures and events on news websites**

An analysis of editorials and opinion pieces from the selected news websites indicate that Mzilikazi is constructed as the founder of the Ndebele kingdom. The breaking away from the Zulu kingdom is represented as a turning-point marking the cradle of Ndebele identity. In the analysis of the social meanings attached to this pre-colonial Ndebele king, my focus is on how these recollections seek to forge a distinct Ndebele particularistic identity that resists and undermines the dominant Zimbabwean nationalist discourses. Firstly, I analysed an editorial, **King Mzilikazi Day celebrations: Opportunity for serious reflection and action**, which was written by Dube (2014a) and published by *Umthwakazireview.com*. Dube (2014a), an administrator/owner of this website, argues that the commemoration and remembrance of the death of Mzilikazi should “spur” the people of Matabeleland to “seek ways and means to correct the historical wrongs” and “seek independence from Zimbabwe”. The King Mzilikazi Day celebrations, held in Zimbabwe and the diaspora every September, are a commemoration of this Ndebele monarch, who died in September 1868. It is important to examine how, in these cyber-memory recollections, constructive strategies such as “collectivisation”, “spatialisation”,

“autonomisation” and “unification” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:38; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:48) are used to discursively identify and solidify features of Ndebele-ness. An analysis of this editorial reveals *Umthwakazireview.com*'s sanctioned perspective on pre-colonial Ndebele past events and Ndebele Particularism.

Dube (2014a) represents Mzilikazi as the “founder” and the “nation-builder of the Matebele nation”. The terms “founder” and “nation-builder” are predicational strategies – positive attributes – employed to elevate Mzilikazi to the foundational myths of the Matabele “nation”. These myths of descent instil and affirm a sense of belonging by constructing a shared memory of being “descended from the self-same ancestor” (Smith, 1986:24). Through the discursive strategy of collectivisation, Ndebele particularistic identity is forged around the legacy of Mzilikazi. In addition, “Matebele nation” constitutes part of what Billig (1995:93) regards as “banal words”, that is, those “routine words” that we take for granted but that act as “reminders of the homeland”. Billig (1995:117-118) argues that newspapers such as the *Guardian* and the *Times* reproduce British national identity through routine practices, such as weather reports and the demarcation of domestic and foreign news. Drawing upon this insight, I argue that Ndebele Particularism is being reproduced discursively through phrases such as “Matebele nation” that act as reminders for Ndebele readers to identify themselves as a nation. Other routine phrases that are used in other editorials within this publication include “people of Mthwakazi” and “Mthwakazians” (Dube, 2014c). Through these discursive processes of reminding readers about Ndebele nationhood, the Matabeleland secessionist agenda is heightened, as there is a taken-for-granted assumption that the Matabele exist as a “nation”, rather than just a province in Zimbabwe. Considering that the Ndebele kingdom was also referred to as the “Matebele nation” (Lindgren, 2001:123; Cobbing, 1977:67), one can argue that, within the secessionist discourse, the name “Matebele” is disarticulated from its present signification of a region in Zimbabwe, and rearticulated to signify an imagined homeland. This spatialisation strategy is central in the formation and maintenance of Ndebele identity, as Smith (1999:64) argues that the construction of a homeland helps to curb “homelessness” and to “define the nation by marking its boundaries” (Smith, 1999:64). Within this politics of naming, the writer uses the term “Matebele”, rather than “Ndebele”, which can be construed as a discursive manoeuvre of asserting the inclusive, heterogeneous and diverse nature of this imagined nation. The geographical area of Matabeleland is multi-ethnic, whilst the name “Ndebele” can be appropriated to signify the Nguni clan of the Ndebele kingdom, thus excluding other sub-groups such as the Kalanga, Tonga and Venda, who were part of this pre-colonial Ndebele

nation-state. Therefore, the use of the name “Matebele” constitutes discursive strategies of collectivisation and assimilation that counter the narrow interpretation of Ndebele-ness.

An analysis of the tagline of *Umthwakazireview.com* – “pride of the Matebele nation” – reinforces the argument that this news website positions itself as a bastion of Matabeleland secessionist imaginations. It is also important to note that, in this editorial and tagline, the spelling of “Matebeleland” with an “e” is employed, instead of the popular “Matabeleland” with an “a”. I argue that this is not an issue of a spelling error, but rather a form of discursive struggle against colonial representations. This is corroborated by scholars such as Mhlanga (2010:111), who contend that “the spelling ‘Matabeleland’ was inherited from the colonial administration”. As such, this news website plays a counter-hegemonic role, as it enables Ndebele people to speak for themselves, narrate their stories and imagine their sense of being. For the sake of consistency, henceforth I employ the commonly used spelling “Matabeleland”, although this decision does not infer that I am endorsing the ideological underpinnings associated with this spelling. Such is the challenge of analysing discourses in media texts, as noted by Billig (2008:783), who rightly posits that critical discourse analysis “does not, and cannot, exist outside of language”, as our own use of language, as analysts, can be “marked, or corrupted by those ideological factors that we seek to identify in the language of others”. I realise that this paradoxical situation is manifest in this study; although the purpose of this study was to expose power relations in language use, my own usage of terms such as “Ndebele” and “Matabeleland” can be discursive, as these words can be appropriated to signify an ethnic group, a territory and an imagined nation. These terms, like all identities, constitute “floating signifiers” (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007:268; Hall, 1993:111), as they have no fixed or stable meanings. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002:28) define “floating signifiers” as “elements which are particularly open to different ascriptions of meaning”.

In addition, Dube (2014a) venerates Mzilikazi by assigning him attributes such as “great general” and one of the “greatest African icons”. These predicational strategies are employed to epitomise and eulogise Mzilikazi as an extraordinary figure amongst the pantheon of African leaders. As national identities are anchored in the constructions of the “Glorious Dead” (Smith, 2003:218), the memories of this dead Ndebele monarch constitute discursive strategies of dismantlement that are invoked to stir and galvanise the people of Matabeleland to renounce the Zimbabwean nation-state configuration, and to imagine a seceded nation-state. Thus, the memories of the heroic exploits and valiant deeds of an ancestor are conjured up and invested to “inspire faith and courage in their oppressed and decadent descendants” (Smith, 1999:67).

However, it should be pointed out that the heroic exploits and deeds of heroes from other Matabele sub-groups, such as the Kalanga, Tonga and Sotho, are excluded from this imagination of an Ndebele nation-state. Such are the ambivalent nature and tensions of identity formation, as it involves the selection, exclusion and inclusion of certain historical accounts from the narration of the nation (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, 2010:1104; Zerubavel, 2003:5). Further, the writer celebrates “Matebele” as a “nation with a gallant and superior history on its shoulders, rivalling that of the Zulus in South Africa” (Dube, 2014a). The pre-colonial Ndebele past is romanticised through the adjectives “gallant” and “superior”, and the personification of “Matebele” as a nation with “shoulders”. Such memories of valour are a symbol of historical pride for Ndebeles, as they are being reconstructed in order to make sense of contemporary political predicaments. Dube (2014a) posits that the commemoration of King Mzilikazi Day should be a time for the people of Matabeleland to “appreciate their illustrious ability and resolve to survive Rhodesian occupation and colonialism as well as Robert Gabriel Mugabe’s totalitarian rule”. This new media recontextualisation of past events indicates that the recollection of memories is underpinned by present socio-political and cultural settings. Thus, new media constitute spaces of interdiscursivity, as the recollection of pre-colonial Ndebele past events is intertwined with the discourses of secession and Gukurahundi. The writer (Dube, 2014a) identifies “historical wrongs” as the colonisation of Matabeleland in 1894, the union of Matabeleland with “Mashonaland on the 24<sup>th</sup> of January, 1901”, and the Gukurahundi. Thus, memories of the heroic exploits of the Ndebele monarch are conjured up to stir the people of Matabeleland to seek justice for the Gukurahundi atrocities.

Secondly, the writer argues that the unification of Matabeleland and Mashonaland was “forced”, as it was done “without the consent of the Matabele people via a democratic vote” (Dube, 2014a). An analysis of transitivity indicates that the terms “forced” and “consent” are employed to construct the Matabele people as the afflicted social group, and the colonialists as the agents of this affliction. This representation serves as strategies of dismantlement and autonomisation that seek to subvert and annul the Zimbabwean nation-state configuration by reimagining an autonomous Ndebele/Mthwakazi nation. In a nutshell, the arguer reinforces the secessionist discourse that perceives African borders as arbitrary, artificial and colonial constructs (Adebajo, 2010:12; Mazrui, 2010: x). This topos of restoration is predominant, as it is anchored in a nostalgic yearning for Matabeleland to be “restored as a kingdom it once was” (Dube, 2014a). The term “Matebeleland”, metonymically standing for the people of Matabeleland, entices emotional attachment, as it promotes solidarity and sameness. However,

this secessionist politics is predicated on a presupposition that identities are fixed, and inherent, and hence can be rediscovered in their essential state. Such a conception of a pure and unsullied identity fails to take into account the fleeting and hybrid nature of identities as outlined from the constructionist perspective.

This monarchist discourse of restoration is one of the manifestations of Ndebele Particularism. Dube (2014a) calls for a referendum that will enable “Matebeleland to seek independence from Zimbabwe”. Within this secessionist discourse, Matabeleland is constructed as a colony of Zimbabwe. Through the topos of justice and the discursive strategies of dismantlement, the writer infers that Matabeleland is existing under what Mazrui (2010: xxvii) terms the “bondage of boundaries”. In another editorial within this publication, Dube (2014b) reinforces Ndebele Particularism by bifurcating the “people” of Matabeleland and those of Zimbabwe. His main argument is that the “people of Matebeleland are not patriotic to the nation-state of Zimbabwe and neither is the sectarian and tribal state of Zimbabwe patriotic to them” (Dube, 2014b). Thus, this article reinforces Matabeleland secessionist discourse, as the writer posits that the people of Matabeleland do not “identify themselves as Zimbabweans” (Dube, 2014b).

In a nutshell, the writer employs a forensic rhetorical argument to describe the injustices of the past committed against the people of Matabeleland. Furthermore, he uses an epideictic argument to lament the present condition of Matabeleland. Lastly, Dube (2014a) employs deliberative rhetoric to urge the people of Matabeleland to imagine a desirable future, which he constructs as secession from Zimbabwe. As such, the pre-colonial Ndebele memories that are constructed in new media are Janus-faced, that is, they encapsulate a yearning for the past, and also a futuristic imagination. Thus, the analysed articles on this news website are shaping Ndebele Particularism, as the past, present and future are colliding in complex ways that indicate that the past is never rediscovered in its original state, but rather is shaped by the present milieu and future imaginations.

It is important to explore how Ndebele Particularism is reconstructed through the foundational myths that are invoked in opinion pieces on the selected news websites. Firstly, I analysed an opinion piece titled **Top 5 legends of the Nguni golden era**, authored by Tshuma (2014a) and published by *Umtshwakazireview.com*. Tshuma (2014a) identifies King Mzilikazi as one of the “top legends of the Nguni golden era”. The other “top legends” identified are Mkabayi, Cetshwayo, Langa and Shaka. It is important to examine the language use in the description of Mzilikazi, and to probe the possible implications for the ways in which Ndebele past events are remembered. This opinion piece is argumentative and persuasive, as the writer

mythologises and commemorates Mzilikazi as one of the sacred and great figures of the “Nguni golden era”.

The predicate “legends” is employed to magnify the life of Mzilikazi and to preserve Ndebele identity through the collective remembrances of a glorious epoch. This predicational strategy arouses a sense of awe and reverence, as readers are positioned to honour this Ndebele monarch. Thus, at the heart of this narration of the pre-colonial Ndebele past events are the nostalgic memories of the “Nguni golden era”. This mediation of memories resonates with Smith’s (2001:174) affirmation that national identities are reproduced through the constructions of “myth-memories of the communal golden ages”. In this way, this epoch is idealised as an age of “communal splendour”, graced by heroes and heroines who guided the community to achieve its “classical form” (Smith, 1986:191). This myth of a golden age does not only expose a deep-seated longing for a return to a past that is constructed as pure and ideal, but there also is a presupposition that the current social order is in decay and undesirable. As such, the topos of restoration emerges through this acclamation of Ndebele warrior myths that are reinvigorated to renounce the current Zimbabwean socio-political order, and to reimagine a different social formation. Thus, heroic exploits and virtues are chronicled and circulated to fashion the myths of “regeneration”, “redemption” and “revival” (Smith, 1999:87) I argue that this “yearning for yesterday” (Davis, 1979:1), as expressed on this news website, suggests that the past, present and future are intertwined, as collective memories are invoked to make sense of the present condition and to construct future aspirations. In addition, this practice of naming and commemorating this Nguni epoch as a “golden era” authenticates the view that histories are discursively constructed, rather than objective renditions of the past (Rusu, 2013:262; Friedman, 1992a:194). It should be noted that the same epoch being exalted in this article is usually denoted, in some scholarly works, as Mfecane, that is, a period of turmoil and mayhem (Omer-Cooper, 1994:52; 1966:5). As such, historical narratives are positional, and hence Ndebele people construct the era as a golden age in order to celebrate their heroes and past events.

Further, the writer employs war imagery to depict Mzilikazi as a “military genius” who defeated “Dingane’s Zulu army and the Boer laager commandos” (Tshuma, 2014a). The writer does not only use vivid war descriptions, but also depicts Mzilikazi as a leader renowned for his diplomatic skills. The metaphors “silver tongue” and “natural salesman” (Tshuma, 2014a) are deployed to construct the Ndebele monarch as a shrewd diplomat, rather than a savage tyrant as was popular in colonial discourse. Moreover, the phrase “negotiating techniques” is



one of the predicational strategies employed to dislodge the dominant narrative about pre-colonial Ndebele people as brutal and savages who plundered their neighbouring communities, as represented by Vambe (1972:45). In the same vein, Tshuma (2014a) argues that, before reaching the modern-day Zimbabwe, the Ndebele were surrounded by “hostile” nations such as the Zulu, Sotho and Boer, who “consistently raided his towns and took off with his cattle”. An analysis of the representation of social actors indicates that Mzilikazi and his Ndebele people are represented as victims of raids from the neighbouring states. The terms “hostile” and “raided” are used to thwart and dismantle the colonially propagated narrative that tends to portray the Ndebele people as aggressors of pre-colonial raids. Further, the columnist constructs Mzilikazi as a slave trade abolitionist. Tshuma (2014a) argues that Mzilikazi is “widely recognised as the driving force behind halting slave trade in southern Africa”. According to the writer, the Portuguese used to raid Tonga settlements in modern-day Zimbabwe before the arrival of Mzilikazi in the area. As the terms “driving force” and “halting” are used to describe the role of Mzilikazi as instrumental in the struggles against these human rights violations, I consider this depiction of the Ndebele monarch as an inversion of the Euro-centric “civilising mission” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:40), that is, a discourse that was deployed by colonialists to rationalise and justify colonialism. This recontextualisation of narratives on this news website involves processes of “substitution”, “deletions” and “rearrangements” (Van Leeuwen, 2008:17-18) of social actors and roles as new meanings are constructed. Within this new representation of social participants, there is a reversal or inversion of the Euro-centric “savages-victims-saviours” metaphor (Mutua, 2001:201), as the Portuguese (Europeans) are constructed as the aggressors or savages, whilst the Ndebele are represented as saviours. Thus, the reconstruction of Ndebele past events in new media is marked by the breaks with and discontinuities in colonial historiography.

In addition, Mabalane’s (2013) opinion piece, titled **King Mzilikazi reloaded: a story of how we begin to remember**, venerates Mzilikazi as a “nation-builder” who managed to “forge a nation out of diverse ethnic groups”. In this rendition, published by *Bulawayo24.com*, Mabalane (2013) eulogises Mzilikazi’s valiant deeds by assigning him the title of “Bull Elephant”. These predicational strategies are employed to rebuke and denounce hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism, which the writer constructs as “Shona apartheid” (Mabalane, 2013). In this sense, the memories of a multicultural pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom are summoned on news websites as cultural artefacts to challenge and subvert the exclusionary and monolithic



Zimbabwean nationalist discourses. The following sections expound on the constructions of the pre-colonial Ndebele people as a heterogeneous social group.

### **6.3 Fractures and hybridity of Ndebele identity: New media representations of a migrant nation.**

An analysis of opinion pieces, news reports, an opinion poll and a YouTube video exposes the fluidity, tensions and ambivalences underpinning the representations of pre-colonial Ndebele people on news websites. Firstly, I analysed an opinion piece – **The origins of the name Mthwakazi** – that was written by Tshuma (2014b) and published by *Umthwakazireview.com*. Tshuma begins his argument by using a deictic expression, “we”, that not only positions himself as an Ndebele, but also functions as a collectivisation and unification strategy. He develops his position by romanticising Ndebele/Mthwakazi people as “children of the sun”, a celestial metaphor employed not to only exalt and mythologise the Mthwakazi nation, but to construct a sense of shared identity. Through this metaphorical expression, the discursive strategy of collectivisation is realised, as feelings of Mthwakazi nationhood are strengthened and solidified. Thus, the writer invokes a sense of “hiraeth” (Collins, 2014:8; Harris, 2012:1),<sup>18</sup> as there is a deep yearning and a nostalgia for a lost Ndebele nation. In addition, the writer provides contesting viewpoints on the origin of the name “Mthwakazi”. The first perspective is tied to the myth of the ancient San civilisation, as the name “Mthwakazi” is associated with Muthwa, a Queen of the San people. The proponents of this view argue that Mzilikazi was inspired by Muthwa, who died centuries before the Ndebele monarch entered modern-day Zimbabwe, when he named his nation “Mthwakazi”. However, Tshuma (2014b) dismisses this view, arguing that “the San had no hand in naming Mthwakazi nation” as there is no evidence suggesting that Queen Muthwa ever existed.

Rather, the writer is inclined to a second perspective that traces the origin of the name “Mthwakazi” to the period of Mzilikazi’s migration to present-day Zimbabwe, when he encountered the Batlokwa, a Sotho community. The Batlokwa were incorporated into the Ndebele state. According to Tshuma (2014b), the name “Mthwakazi” came as a result of the phonetic and linguistic differences between the Mtungwa (Mzilikazi’s Nguni clan that left

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<sup>18</sup> “Hiraeth” is a Welsh term that can be translated loosely as “longing for home” (Harris, 2012:1), and hence denoting homesickness over a lost homeland (Collins, 2014:8).

Zululand) and the Sotho language. He employs the term “marriage” (Tshuma, 2014b) as a metaphor to signify the unity that was forged as Ndebele-ness emerged through this blending of the Nguni and Sotho cultures. He argues that, through this mixture of cultures, the Mtungwa people came to refer to the Batlokwa as “BaThothwa”, a name that ultimately was transformed to “Mthwakazi”. Tshuma (2014b) posits that the Batlokwa outnumbered the Mtungwa, and eventually the name “Mthwakazi” became a symbol of national identity. Thus, through the metaphor of a “marriage”, and the discursive strategies of unification and assimilation, Ndebele Particularism is celebrated as a diverse and multicultural identity. I argue that, in this article, Ndebele identity is constructed as an interplay between and confluence of different cultures and peoples, or a product of the processes of “creolisation” (Hannerz, 1992:262). By “creolisation” I mean the blending or “confluence of two or more widely separate historical currents which interact in what is basically a centre/periphery relationship” (Hannerz, 1992:264). However, I am aware that the meaning of the term “creolisation” varies in different social contexts, as it can refer to “locally born persons of non-native origin” (Bolland, 1998:1). In this opinion piece, constructive strategies are employed to celebrate the heterogeneous structure of the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom that integrated and incorporated various communities. Thus, Ndebele identity is constructed as a “creative interplay” (Hannerz, 1992:265) between the centre and the periphery, as the intermingling of the traditions, cultures and symbols of the Nguni stratum (centre) and the Sotho people (periphery) resulted in the construction of “Mthwakazi”, a new hybrid social order. The San and Sotho versions of the naming of “Mthwakazi” suggest that Ndebele-ness is not a pure and unsullied identity, but rather has been shaped by temporal and spatial locations through encounters, interactions and interchanges amongst social groups. This view reinforces Bhabha’s (1994:4) assertion that identities are hybrid and contingent, rather than fixed and monolithic. Although the founding myth of Ndebele identity is represented in the cyber-memories as hybrid, fluid and situational, it is essentialised when its current manifestation is positioned against hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. In a nutshell, there is a strategic tension on news websites between representing Ndebele Particularism as hybrid and heterogeneous (part of a founding myth), and projecting it (in the current manifestation of Ndebele identity politics) as a singular and unified essence marshalled against hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism.

I also analysed an opinion piece – **Mthwakazi: Africa’s dying star** – also written by Tshuma (2015), and published by *Umthwakazireview.com*. One of the fundamental arguments raised by Tshuma is that the name “Ndebele” was given to Mzilikazi’s people by the Sotho

communities during the migration to modern-day Zimbabwe. He argues that the Sotho “brought with them” (Tshuma, 2015) to the kingdom the names Mthwakazi and Ndebele. An analysis of transitivity indicates that the material process “brought” is used to represent the hybrid nature of identities and the fusion of different peoples to form Ndebele-ness. This understanding of Ndebele identity corroborates Lindgren’s (2005a:155) assertion that the name “Ndebele” was given to Mzilikazi’s people “during the migration north by Sotho speaking people who called them Matebele, which in Nguni became amaNdebele”. In addition, the writer depicts Mthwakazi as a “rainbow nation” (Tshuma, 2015) to buttress the notion that the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom was an inclusive and multicultural nation-state. Considering that the rainbow metaphor has been invoked in South Africa to symbolise reconciliation, peace and unity amongst diverse people (Bornman, 2006:384; Dickow & Moller, 2002:176), I argue that, within this narrative, Ndebele national identity is celebrated as heterogeneous, and at the same time essentialised to counter hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. Being aware that discourses are social practices that are intertwined with power relations, it is important to probe why these memories of an Ndebele creole and hybrid culture are being evoked at this particular historical juncture.

Firstly, this representation of a broader and hybrid Ndebele identity can be conceived of as a counter-hegemonic exercise that seeks to upset and dismantle what Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009a:160) refers to as a “clannish” understanding of Ndebele-ness propagated by some Shona people who define Ndebeles as Nguni people, and hence “claim that all others without Nguni surnames” within the Ndebele kingdom originated from Mashonaland. As such, collectivisation and assimilation are employed in this article as discursive strategies to solidify a narrative of an inclusive and unified Mthwakazi nation-state. Secondly, this construction of an inclusive Ndebele-ness is embedded in secessionist imaginations, as the imagined Mthwakazi nation is represented as a diverse and multicultural social formation. In the wake of the manifestation of a Kalanga movement in Matabeleland – one of the sub-groups of the supra-Ndebele identity – this representation of an inclusive and unified Mthwakazi nation can be conceived as a preservative discursive strategy that seeks to thwart and contain these internal conflicts attempting to bifurcate Ndebele-ness. To support my argument, I draw on the contents of an opinion poll published by *Umthwakazireview.com*, in which web users were required to choose what they regarded as “**the greatest threat to Mthwakazi nation**”. The predefined answers are: “ZANU PF”, “Kalanga conservatives”, “Nguni conservatives”, and “Matebele based political parties” (The greatest threat to Mthwakazi nation, 2015). Thus, the

presupposition that “Kalanga conservatives” and “Nguni conservatives” are “threats” to the imagination of an Mthwakazi nation is a clear testimony that Ndebele identity is marred by internal fractures and fissures. Considering that identities are contingent and malleable, this news website is reconstructing Ndebele Particularism by discursively seeking to avert the disintegration and fragmentation of Ndebele identity into disparate autonomous groupings.

Ndebele Particularism also is reconstructed on news websites as a product of the struggles in the pre-colonial era between those who wanted to preserve Nguni beliefs, values and imaginations, and those who wanted to incorporate new cultures. New media representations of the succession battle between Lobengula and Mbiko Masuku that marred the Ndebele kingdom following Mzilikazi’s death in 1868 illuminate the internal fissures and ruptures surrounding Ndebele identity. After Mzilikazi’s death, Mbiko,<sup>19</sup> the leader of the Zwangendaba regiment, challenged Lobengula, Mzilikazi’s son and heir to the throne (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012:52; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008c:389). A civil war broke out between Lobengula and Mbiko’s forces in 1869, culminating in Mbiko’s defeat and Lobengula’s ascension to the throne in 1871 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008c:389). It is important to analyse how this incident is narrativised and retold in new media, as these representations provide an understanding of the struggles and fractures of Ndebele identity. In the article – **The battle between King Lobengula and Mbiko** – published by *Umthwakazireview.com*, Watson (2014) chronicles the events of this struggle. Watson (2014) recounts that Mbiko, backed by a number of regiments, “refused to acknowledge” Lobengula’s installation. The bone of contention, according to the writer, was that Lobengula was a “Swazi on his mother’s side, and therefore nominally an Enhla rather than a Zansi, as was Mbiko” (Watson, 2014). The membership categorisation of Ndebeles into the “Swazi”, “Enhla” and “Zansi” social groups exposes the hierarchical and stratified nature of the Ndebele kingdom, as Lobengula was considered not to be of pure blood. As such, the reconstructions of Ndebele-ness have been marred by the strife between the Zansi (Nguni) and non-Nguni stock. Although Ndebele identity is represented as inclusive and diverse, essentialist and exclusivist tendencies that celebrate people of Zansi caste as pure Ndebeles also are perpetuated by Ndebeles. To corroborate my view, this news website exposes these tensions by publishing posts from a Facebook group called *Pure Ndebeles (EzikaMzilikazi)*.

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<sup>19</sup> Mbiko was connected to the royal family, as he was married to Zinkabi, Mzilikazi’s daughter (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008c: 381).

The name of this Facebook group, *Pure Ndebeles*, infers an essentialist and exclusivist understanding of identity, as it promotes an Nguni clannish rendition of Ndebele-ness.

Further, Tshuma (2015) also lays bare the tensions surrounding Ndebele identity, as he posits that “to Mbiko, only Ngunis could rule, and Lobengula’s Enhla mother was reason enough to disqualify him”. Through the nomination processes, Mbiko is represented as an instigator of discriminatory and exclusivist discourses that othered non-Ngunis. On the other hand, Lobengula is constructed as a unifier, as his “army comprised of all the groups, Enhla, Hole and Nguni”. Following Lobengula’s victory, Tshuma (2015) notes that “any prejudice from the Nguni that had survived returned to the nest, angrily in the shadows”. In a nutshell, this metaphorical depiction of the defeat of Mbiko as symptomatic of the subduing of what I call Ndebele “Nguniism” exposes not only the fluid and contingent nature of Ndebele identity, but also how contemporary writers are using new media to recount memories of an inclusive and hybrid Ndebele kingdom in order to construct an essential and unified narrative of an imagined Ndebele nation-state.

An analysis of a news report on *Bulawayo24.com* – **Ndebeles under an apartheid system in Zimbabwe: Zulu singers** – exposes how Ndebele Particularism is being reconstructed on news websites as an offshoot of Zulu identity. In this news story, Sithabile Mafu (2011) reports that Izingane Zoma, a Zulu traditional group in South Africa, had produced a song that calls for the “return of Ndebele people to South Africa”. As this song was performed in the Zulu language, a transcript of the song in English is provided in this article. Firstly, I analyse the contents of this song in this transcript provided by *Bulawayo24.com*:

Our people who fled with Mzilikazi, how are they going to return home?  
We are missing them. When are they going to come back because where they are, Shonas are oppressing them. Whatever happened between Shaka and Mzilikazi that’s a family issue, we can easily talk it over today; it’s nothing. They are suffering in Zimbabwe. How can we get them back, it will be better if they come back home (Mafu, 2015).

In the narrative of this song, which is being re-contextualised, reproduced and circulated in cyberspace, the memories of Mzilikazi fleeing Shaka’s Zulu kingdom are reconstructed in ways that contribute to the re-imagination of South Africa as a homeland for the Ndebele people. The terms “home” and “family” not only signify Ndebele-Zulu kinship ties, but also expose the primordial conception of identities (Van den Berghe, 1981:251; Geertz, 1963:109) that is

being circulated and reproduced in this article. As such, the notions of primordial ties, ancestral roots and common descent are summoned and reinvigorated as strategies of dismantlement that de-spatialise Ndebeles from Zimbabwe, and affirm South Africa as their homeland. Through this topos of restoration, Ndebele Particularism manifests as an irredentist expression, that is, a call to restore Ndebele people to Zululand on the basis of the historical, ethnic and ancestral affiliations of these two social groups. Thus, memories of the historical ties between Ndebele and Zulu people are conjured up by Zulu singers, and appropriated and solidified on this news website in ways that contribute to the reproduction of Ndebele irredentist sentiments. Hall (1993:111) rightly point out that identities are “floating signifiers”, as this article exposes the discursive struggles to ascribe particular meanings of Ndebele-ness.

Further, a hypertext, “click here for the video”, constitutes intertextuality, as it enables readers to navigate from this news story to the song on YouTube. The title of the song, performed by Izingane Zoma, is “Mzilikazi ka Mashobane”,<sup>20</sup> and it was uploaded by *Bulawayo24.com*. The video (Izingane Zoma, 2011) has been viewed by 5 038 people and shared on Facebook by 24 viewers.<sup>21</sup> From the seven comments attached to this video, it is evident that most of these viewers, who self-identify as Ndebeles, concur with the message of the song, namely that Ndebeles’ sense of belonging lies in South Africa, rather than in Zimbabwe. Thus, there is a nostalgic yearning for a pre-colonial era when Ndebeles and Zulus were bound by ancestral ties. IndabaNdaba, one of the viewers, laments that “u Mzilikazi wasenza madoda”, an Ndebele expression that can be translated loosely as “Mzilikazi left us in a wretched state” (cited in Izingane Zoma, 2011). These irredentist sentiments are underpinned by perceptions that the Zimbabwean nation-state has been captured by the dominant Shona group, to the exclusion of other ethnicities. In their study of ethnicity in Africa, Berman *et al.* (2004a:14) describe the aforementioned phenomenon as “ethnic hegemony”, as a particular dominant ethnic group “captures” state institutions and relegates minorities to a periphery position. Drawing from Van Leeuwen and Kress’s (2011:107) notion of multimodality, I argue that this audiovisual artefact on YouTube is one of the multimodal forms that explicate the ways in which events of the Ndebele past are commemorated and mediated in cyberspace. Through this recollection of pre-colonial Ndebele memories on YouTube, one can argue that Ndebele identity is being

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<sup>20</sup> Mzilikazi, son of Mashobane.

<sup>21</sup> As I am aware of the ephemeral and fleeting nature of digital memories (Jones, 2012:390; Assmann & Conrad, 2010:4), I don’t consider these figures as static and permanent.



reconstructed, performed and sung through audiovisual media texts. Informed by Anderson's (1991:145) notion of "unisonance", I posit that it is through the processes of singing and listening to these melodies and verses that Ndebele nationhood is imagined. Thus, through the construction of an "imagined sound" (Anderson, 1991:145), Ndebele people are being positioned to celebrate and reimagine their identity as Zulus, rather than as Zimbabweans.

YouTube thus constitutes a de-territorialised and transnational space (Drinot, 2011:370; Appadurai, 1996:49), which, in this particular case, enables online users to transmit, share, view and reproduce Ndebele memories across national frontiers. In addition, *Bulawayo24.com* constitutes a site of memory, as audiences become connected, through its intertextual features, to YouTube audiovisual texts in ways that contribute to the shaping of Ndebele Particularism. It is through this intersection of triple fields of action (news website, YouTube and music) that memories of Ndebele past are reconstructed, and a shared sense of common history and destiny is forged to cement Ndebele irredentist imaginations. Considering that this news website combines audiovisual and written texts in the reconstruction of Ndebele public memories, it is safe to argue that multimediality is a feature of *Bulawayo24.com*.

An analysis of intertextuality in the form of music videos on *Umthwakazireview.com* indicates that Ndebele-ness is entangled with Zulu identity. The videos section on this website contains South African artists such as Zahara, Ringo and Soul Brothers. Thus, I argue that Ndebele identity manifests in an ambivalent form; first, through the construction of Matabeleland as a homeland, and second, through an irredentist claim of Zululand as their ancestral home. This representation of Ndebele affiliation with Zululand is being fostered by the growing population of people from Matabeleland who are residing in South Africa. But how are these memories entrenched within the constructions of Ndebele diasporic identities?

## **6.4 Homeland, diaspora and collective memory: New media constructions of Ndebele diasporic identities**

This section explores new media representations of Ndebele Particularism that are being forged and reconstructed by people who self-identify as Ndebele in the diaspora. Having noted in section 1.3.1 that the selected news websites constitute diasporic media, it is pertinent to examine the journalistic discourses of Ndebele memories that are constructed by Ndebele diasporic communities, and how these remembrances of a collective past help to shape and reproduce diasporic identities. In the first instance, I analysed an article titled **Agenda4action:**



**Mpho Ncube on UK Mzilikazi celebrations** that was posted by Agenda4action (2014) on *Umthwakazireview.com*. This article was published in the genre of an interview, between Them bani Dube, an administrator of this website, and Mpho Ncube, a spokesperson of Ubuntu UK. Although the interview was conducted days before the Mzilikazi Day celebrations, which were held in Leicester on 8 September 2012, this article was posted in 2014.<sup>22</sup> Ubuntu UK is an organisation that coordinates the King Mzilikazi Day celebrations that are held annually by the people of Matabeleland living in the United Kingdom (UK). According to Dube, the King Mzilikazi Day celebrations were launched in the diaspora in London in September 2008, and Ubuntu UK is the pioneer and flagship of these celebrations, which are also held in South Africa and the United States of America (USA). On the basis of this interview, I explored how language use exposes the ways in which Ndebele people remember their collective past, and assert and negotiate their identities in the diaspora.

According to Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014), the organisation was named Ubuntu UK because the founders wanted to:

Combine the universal values of Ubuntu philosophy with our own Matabeleland heritage so that there is a two-way cultural exchange between where we now live (UK) and where we originally come from (Matabeleland).

Ubuntu is a popular Pan-African philosophy and concept that underpins core cultural values such as “humanness”, “collective sharedness”, “compassion” and “communalism” (Fourie, 2008:62; Kamwangamalu, 1999:26). Considering that Ubuntu is ingrained in the everyday lives of Ndebele people, as it “governs social relations” (Ndlovu, 2013:992), this concept is being invoked in the diaspora and new media to galvanise and construct a sense of Ndebele collective consciousness.

Deictic expressions, such as “our” and “we”, are employed as collectivisation strategies that classify and cement feelings of an Ndebele collective identity. At the same time, strategies of spatialisation and originalisation, such as “where we now live” and “where we originally came from”, function to discursively construct Matabeleland as a homeland, and UK as a temporary dwelling place for the Ndebele people. Two major issues emerge from this construction of an ancestral home. Firstly, it can be noted that “Matabeleland” rather than “Zimbabwe” is

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<sup>22</sup> This article might have been last updated by the administrator on 23 November 2014.

constructed as a homeland, which can be construed as a repudiation of the Zimbabwean nation-state by the people of Matabeleland in the diaspora. Secondly, the pre-colonial Ndebele memories constitute cultural artefacts that are used to construct transnational identities as the Ndebele people negotiate their experiences in the diaspora, and attempt to forge a connection with their homeland. They assert their identity through performances of cultural activities, such as poetry, singing, and dancing. Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014) adds that:

The idea of a King Mzilikazi Day celebration came after the realisation that there is now a big population of people from Matabeleland in the UK but whose presence one would never see or feel in the streets of the UK.

The lexis “celebration” signifies not only the reverence that is bestowed upon this Ndebele monarch, but how social groups assign and invest social meanings of their collective past to bind and connect a community that is dispersed across the globe. Further, Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014) venerates Mzilikazi as a “warrior-king”, a “nation-builder” who bequeathed to the people of Matabeleland a legacy of “tolerance, respect, innovation and multiculturalism”. In this process of commemoration, the social meanings of the life and death of Mzilikazi are conjured up to unify and strengthen Ndebele particularistic identity. As a symbol of unity, the nostalgic evocation of his life is discursively reinvigorating and reanimating Ndebele Particularism. Thus, the Mzilikazi Day event and the news websites constitute fields of action used by diasporic communities to shape and reproduce pre-colonial Ndebele memories. The two interconnected diasporic spaces are shaping the formation of “transnational identities” (Tettey, 2009:143; Appadurai, 1996:8), as they enable the people of Matabeleland to connect, share experiences and assert their memories and identities in the area of their settlement (UK) and, at the same time, forge sentiments and imaginations of their homeland (Matabeleland). As a result, technological innovations such as the sprouting of news websites has facilitated the mobility, fluidity and transferability of memories, as discourses of Ndebele Particularism are being transmitted and reshaped across the globe. Through this process of “deterritorialization” (Appadurai, 1996:49; Basch *et al.*, 1994:9), the reconstructions of Ndebele identities stretch beyond the boundaries of Matabeleland and Zimbabwe. News websites play a crucial role in mobilising, binding and connecting Ndebele people as they forge their diasporic identities. For example, *Bulawayo24.com* published a press release written by Mkhwananzi (2012), titled **2012 USA King Mzilikazi celebrations**, which provided logistical information pertaining to the event to be held in the USA in September that year.

The process of invoking pre-colonial Ndebele memories is deeply entrenched in identity politics, as evident in the phrases that are used in this interview on *Umthwakazireview.com* to imagine an Mthwakazi nation. Firstly, Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014) posits that the objective of the King Mzilikazi Day celebrations is to “provide impetus to the renewal of Matabeleland cultural pride so that we too can take our rightful place alongside other nations of the world”. Through the discursive strategy of naming, Matabeleland is represented as one of the “nations of the world”, rather than a province of Zimbabwe. This practice of signification constitutes “banal nationalism” (Billig, 1995:6), as the idea of an independent Matabeleland/Mthwakazi nation-state is flagged and reproduced through the taken-for-granted discursive forms. This discourse of secession is also realised through the topos of restoration, as terms such as “renewal” are employed to denunciate the current state of affairs as bleak and undesirable. Secondly, Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014) dismisses the King Mzilikazi celebrations being organised by the Khumalo royal family in Matabeleland as a “private affair”, rather than “Matabeleland national celebrations”. Instead, he argues that Ubuntu UK seeks to give “ownership of the commemorations back to you, me and every other citizen of Matabeleland, whoever and wherever they are”. The terms “national” and “citizen” are referential strategies that reanimate, fashion and reinforce Matabeleland secessionist imaginations. Thirdly, the musicians and other performers at the Mzilikazi Day celebrations, such as Lucky Moyo and Albert Nyathi, are nominated by the interviewer as “Mthwakazi artists”, rather than Zimbabwean artists. Needless to say, *Umthwakazireview.com* enables the manifestation of ethnic nationalist sentiments as Matabeleland diasporic communities appropriate this news website to express, perform and assert what some scholars refer to as “long-distance nationalism” (Tettey, 2009:153; Anderson, 1998:58; Appadurai, 1996:22).

However, there are fractures and cleavages that emerge in the new media collective memories of King Mzilikazi, as different social groups invoke memories for particular purposes. Firstly, there is a struggle between the diaspora and homeland over the guardianship of Mzilikazi’s memories, as Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014) delegitimises the Mzilikazi celebrations being organised in Matabeleland as a “private affair”. Some scholars rightly argue that collective memories are not homogenous and stable (Green, 2004:38; Burke, 1997:55), and new media discourses expose that pre-colonial Ndebele memories are marred by contestations amongst Ndebele communities over the appropriate way of commemorating the past. Secondly, the interviewer poses a question to Ncube (cited in Agenda4action, 2014) on whether there are any plans to commemorate Lobengula, the last king of the Ndebele kingdom. Ncube’s response

is that the King Mzilikazi Day is a celebration of the legacy of all founding kings, including Lobengula. However, I argue that the question posed by the interviewer exposes the deep-seated assumptions that Lobengula has been obscured, neglected and marginalised in the celebration of Ndebele past events. My argument is corroborated by an opinion piece – **King Lobengula: The forgotten royal** – written by Mhlanga (2014) and published by *Bulawayo24.com*. Through his representation of social actors and their roles, Mhlanga (2014) argues that Lobengula is a “forgotten” monarch, as Ndebele people “look down on him”, “despise him”, and “sideline him”. Mhlanga rebukes the Khumalo royal family for celebrating Mzilikazi but failing to remember and commemorate his son, Lobengula, who founded the city of Bulawayo. In a nutshell, the two news websites expose the fractures and tensions relating to who should remember the Ndebele past, how it should be remembered, and which historical figures are to be remembered. Thus, memory is a site of power, as these journalistic discourses of the past are shaped by the ideological persuasions of individuals and social groups. The following section probes the representations of the controversial subject of the pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters.

## **6.5 Ndebeles as *mafikizolos*<sup>23</sup> and “violent raiders”: New media representations of pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters.**

Prinsloo (2009:81) posits that there are particular “moments” in society that defy the “way people imagine and construct themselves”. She argues that the media constitute a discursive space where social groups reproduce, sustain and repudiate dominant understandings of social reality (Prinsloo, 2009:81). This section identifies two incidents – Sekai Holland’s utterance on King Mzilikazi, and President Robert Mugabe’s refusal to swear in Welshman Ncube as the Deputy Prime Minister (DPM) of the country – as key “moments” that laid bare, and amplified, the ethnic animosities in the country, and in particular the tensions surrounding the representations of pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters. With data drawn from news reports and opinion pieces, I examine new media reconstructions of a pre-colonial Ndebele past, and probe the possible implications for the understandings of national identity and belonging today. This section also analyses the constructions of cyber-memories in readers’ comments and

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<sup>23</sup> *Mafikizolos* is an allochthone that is employed within the nativist discourses to construct Ndebele people as foreigners in Zimbabwe.

discussion forums. Considering that these readers' comments and discussion forums constitute sites of struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic narratives of history, memory and the nation, this section examines the discursive strategies employed to prejudice, denigrate and cast Ndebele people as settlers and violent raiders, and how these nativist discourses are being thwarted and resisted in new media. Although these derogatory images of the pre-colonial Ndebele people are believed to be a product of colonialist narratives and historiography, these representations are evolving, as they are being re-contextualised and appropriated within the contemporary political setting in ways that contribute to the preservation of the discourses of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism. However, these narratives are also contributing to the resurgence of Ndebele Particularism, as they are strengthening the perceptions that Ndebeles are settlers in Zimbabwe. Firstly, I examine opinion pieces to demonstrate that social groups are using new media to recount pre-colonial Ndebele past events in order to make sense of their present social conditions.

### **6.5.1 New media and the Ncube-Mutambara “moment”: Retribution, injustice and the memories of pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona relations**

The opinion piece, **Welshman Ncube: sins of the fathers**, was written by Macaphulana (2011a), and published by *Newzimbabwe.com*. Macaphulana represents himself as a “Zimbabwean journalist who is studying in Lesotho”. In the wake of Mugabe refusing to swear Welshman Ncube in to the office of Deputy Prime Minister (DPM), Macaphulana (2011a) constructs an argument that Ncube is being sidelined and excluded from power because of his Ndebele identity. The writer argues that Ncube's exclusion is symptomatic of the injustice and tribalism perpetrated against minority ethnic groups. It is important to provide a historical background to this Ncube incident in order to make sense of the representations of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past.

Ncube is the leader of a faction of the Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), the opposition party. The unified MDC split in 2005 after disagreements amongst its leadership over the participation of the party in the senatorial elections (Raftopoulos, 2007:137). As a result of this split, two political formations emerged, an anti-senate faction led by the founding president of the party, Morgan Tsvangirai, and the pro-senate formation, headed by Ncube

(Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:293).<sup>24</sup> Considering that his faction was perceived as an Ndebele party, Ncube countered the ethnic tag by “inviting” a Shona speaker, Arthur Mutambara, to lead his faction (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:227). As the leader of the pro-senate MDC faction, Mutambara became one of the three<sup>25</sup> principals in the unity government and assumed the position of DPM in 2009.<sup>26</sup> In 2011, the pro-senate MDC faction held a congress and Ncube was elected the new leader of the party. However, Mutambara refused to relinquish power and to allow Ncube to assume the position of Deputy Prime Minister in the inclusive government. Despite the High Court ruling endorsing Ncube as the legitimate leader of the party, President Mugabe refused to acknowledge Ncube as one of the principals and appoint him as the DPM.

In analysing this opinion piece, my interest is not so much in the Ncube-Mutambara power struggles, but rather in how this episode sparked the manifestation of new media discourses on pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona relations. Thus, I use the Ncube-Mutambara “moment” to demonstrate how, through language use, Ndebele past events are appropriated and contested on news websites. In employing the three-dimensional model of the discourse-historical approach, I firstly identify the thematic content of this opinion article as the representations of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past. Secondly, I identify transformative strategies that are adopted in this article in order to change or transform the prevailing social order that excludes and marginalises Ndebeles within the Zimbabwean political landscape. The topoi of retribution and justice are instrumental, as they are deployed to reinforce and sustain an argument that the Ndebele are unjustly treated in the current political dispensation due to the “sins” committed by their forefathers against Shona communities. Lastly, an analysis of the opinion article takes into account the linguistic tools, such as predication, naming, allusions and proverbs, which

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<sup>24</sup> Although the causes of this rupture tend to be couched in the senatorial election issue, some scholars argue that ethnic animosities and regional fault lines played a major role in the split (Muzondidya & Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2007:293; Raftopoulos, 2007:131-132). Despite both factions drawing a national support base, Ncube’s faction came to be cast as an Ndebele party, and Tsvangirai’s faction labelled a Shona formation (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:227).

<sup>25</sup> The other two principals were President Mugabe (ZANU PF) and Prime Minister Tsvangirai (anti-senate MDC).

<sup>26</sup> Following the disputed 2008 elections, which were marred by violence, ZANU PF and the two MDC factions signed a Global Political Agreement (GPA) that was mediated by the Southern African Development Council (SADC) in September 2008 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:187; Raftopoulos, 2009:230). The three parties subsequently formed a Government of National Unity (GNU) in February 2009 (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013:187; Raftopoulos, 2009:230).

are employed to position different social actors and social groups in a manner that evokes diverse and complex constructions of Ndebele memories and identities.

The headline “Welshman Ncube: Sins of the fathers” draws the attention of the readers by connecting the social actor, “Welshman Ncube”, to the biblical allusion, “sins of the fathers”. An image of Ncube with the caption “fathers’ sins” amplifies the headline by positioning him as a political victim of the iniquities inherited from his “fathers”. In employing this biblical allusion – “sins of the fathers” – to describe Ncube’s unpleasant situation, Macaphulana (2011a) is advancing a broader argument that the memories of the Ndebeles’ transgressions against the Shona communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century are deeply entrenched in the Zimbabwean political struggles. The metaphor “sins of the fathers” is invoked from the biblical text, Exodus 20 verse 5, and is taken out of its specific biblical context, genre and field of action and recontextualised by Macaphulana to suggest that the Ndebele people are being punished for the sins committed by their forefathers. This narrative of transgenerational sins reverberates in Zimbabwean literary texts, such as Mungoshi’s (2003) work, titled “The sins of the fathers”, which depicts pre-colonial Ndebele people as violent raiders. The lexis “sins” represents the transgressions of raiding and looting, and the “fathers” signifies the pre-colonial Ndebele people who apparently committed these “sins”. By conjuring up the dominant representations of pre-colonial Ndebeles as violent warriors who constantly raided and looted the neighbouring Shona communities, Macaphulana (2011a) employs the topos of retribution to conclude that Ndebeles are victims of an intergenerational curse. The writer’s use of this biblical allusion is predicated on a presupposition that audiences are accustomed to this biblical representation.

Macaphulana (2011a) also buttresses the argument that the Ndebele are “cursed” because of the “sins” of their “fathers” by drawing on the verses of a popular Ndebele song by Lovemore Majaivana, titled “Isono sami”.<sup>27</sup> Macaphulana (2011a) translates the lyrics of this popular song to mean:

no matter how well I dance, even if I go across oceans, whatever it is that I do well, they won’t publish my story because my one and only sin is being Zwangendaba.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> “Isono sami” is translated loosely as “my sin”.

<sup>28</sup> “Zwangendaba” is a name that carries different meanings. Firstly, it denotes the name of a Nguni historical figure who led the Ngoni group during the period of Mfecane, migrating from Zululand through present-day Zimbabwe and settling in modern-day Tanzania (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:106). Secondly, “Zwangendaba” is



This lamentation encapsulates Ndebele grievances and perceptions of being discriminated against and marginalised and excluded by the Shona people from the socio-political and economic domains (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:47). Through this process of intertextuality, the writer appropriates the verses of this song for rhetorical purposes to strengthen the topos of justice as he constructs Ndebeles as an unwanted, sidelined and ostracised social group. The rhetorical efficacy of this intertextuality is anchored in the writer's knowledge of his audiences, implying that Majaivana's music is a cultural artefact that is deeply embedded in the everyday experiences and imaginations of Ndebele people. Macaphulana employs the term "Zwangendaba" as a referential strategy to symbolise Ncube and the plight of the Ndebele people as a minority group. Considering the polysemic nature of language and how social meanings are constantly shifting (Turner, 2003:32; Hall, 1982:75), it is important to note that the writer disarticulates the term "Zwangendaba" from its original meaning of an Nguni historical figure, and rearticulates it to categorise Ndebele people and minority people at large. Thus, "Zwangendaba" is a referential strategy that carries multiple social meanings depending on the context, as in this case it is appropriated by Ndebele people to construct their particularistic identity. This linguistic strategy of defining the boundaries of Ndebele identity has two implications for our understanding of the constructions of Ndebele Particularism in new media.

Firstly, the nomination of Ndebeles as Zwangendabas captures the internal dynamics and nuances of Ndebele identity, as in this case it is discursively constructed as an Nguni identity. This representation corroborates Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2009b:12; 2008b:175) assertion that, from within the "clannish" perspective, Ndebele identity is constructed as having Nguni ancestral roots. However, this view fails to take into consideration the multifaceted nature of Ndebele identity, as it excludes the social groups that are not of Nguni lineage. Secondly, Ncube is represented as a hybrid subject, as he assumes different ethnic and national identities in various discursive spaces. Thus, he is a "de-centred" subject (Hall, 1996:2) as he is positioned as a Zimbabwean, an Ndebele and a Zwangendaba. As such, these multiple constructions support the constructionist view that identities are multiple, fragmented and constantly in flux as social actors assume different identities in different contexts (Hall,

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the name of the constituency of the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom that was led by chief Mbiko Maseko, who challenged Lobengula's ascension to the throne, culminating in the Ndebele civil war of 1869 to 1871 (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012:53; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008c:389). Those who rebelled against Lobengula argued that he was not the rightful heir to the throne because his mother was not of Nguni royal blood (Ndlovu & Dube, 2012:53).

1992:277; 1991b:59). Drawing upon Hall's (1997b; 1993) work on race as a floating signifier, I consider Ndebele identity as a category that is historically and socially shaped, rather than predetermined. As identity constitutes a "point of suture" (Hall, 1996:5; 1990:226), new media are contributing to the positioning and interpellation of social actors and audiences as Ndebele subjects. Thus, new media provide opportunities for representational practices that help to reproduce, negotiate and contest ethnic and national identities.

Macaphulana (2011a) further employs a proverbial expression to underline the argument that Ndebeles have been relegated to the periphery of the Zimbabwean political, social and cultural domains. He appropriates the Ugandan proverb, "No matter how well the hen dances, the fox will never admire her" (Macaphulana, 2011a), to signify the unequal power relations amongst social groups in Zimbabwe. My analysis is informed by Orwenjo's (2009:123) conception that, in African societies, proverbs are deeply embedded in the everyday lives of people, as they are considered a "custodian of a people's collective wisdom, philosophy of life, experiences, fears, and aspirations". In addition, proverbs have rhetorical functions, as they are mobilised in political discourses to advance and strengthen arguments (Orwenjo, 2009:123; Mieder, 1997:7). In his article, Macaphulana (2011a) recontextualises a Ugandan proverb to persuade his readers of the discrimination against Ndebeles. By using this proverb, the rhetor assumes that this conventional wisdom resonates with the experiences and imaginations of his readers. In this proverbial expression, the "hen" symbolises Ncube, and the "fox" depicts ZANU PF and MDC-T.<sup>29</sup> This construction implies that Ncube is a capable and talented politician, but his qualities and merits are rejected in Zimbabwe due to his Ndebele ethnicity. In addition, the writer employs this vivid allegory of the hen and the fox to construct Ndebeles as an unwanted and oppressed community that is in danger of being devoured by ZANU PF and the MDC-T. This is aptly expressed in the statement that, "for fox, the hen is just a meal whose talents must never go beyond filling his tummy" (Macaphulana, 2011a).

An analysis of predicational strategies in this article indicates that terms such as "talented", "shadow" and "unpeople" (Macaphulana, 2011a) are employed to signify the subservient and peripheral position of the Ndebeles. In contrast, terms like "anti-Ndebele" and "tribalists" are constructed as traits of ZANU PF and MDC-T. In addition, an analysis of transitivity reveals that terms such as "ignored", "marginalised", "undermined" and "hated" (Macaphulana,

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<sup>29</sup> MDC-T is the anti-senate MDC faction that is led by Tsvangirai.

(2011a) are used to represent Ndebeles as objects or the “afflicted” (Richardson, 2007:75), whilst the lexis “block” represents ZANU PF and MDC-T as agents of this discrimination and marginalisation. Thus, the representation of social actors and their roles reinforces the writer’s transformative call for justice and inclusivity. In a nutshell, Macaphulana employs transformative strategies and the topoi of justice and retribution to counter the dominant nationalist ideologies that marginalise and exclude Ndebele people from the Zimbabwean political landscape. He relies on the intertextuality and recontextualisation processes that connect texts and genres drawn from biblical references, popular music and proverbs in order to buttress an argument that the marginalisation of Ndebeles is intertwined with the legacies of the pre-colonial past. In addition, intertextuality is established in this article through the “Related stories” section, where similar texts are recommended to the audience, e.g. “Ndebele president: the secret fear” by Misihairabwi-Mushonga (2010). These additional articles provide background information, and also broaden the contours of the debate on this topic.

Macaphulana’s (2011a) opinion piece demonstrates that Ndebele Particularism is reproduced and shaped in new media by the current political setting, as it is through debates on Ncube’s exclusion from the DPM office that memories of pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters are summoned. It is through such perceptions and feelings that Ndebeles are excluded from and marginalised in the Zimbabwean political and socio-economic domains that pre-colonial memories are evoked and Ndebele Particularism is fashioned and reconstructed in cyberspace. Similarly, *Bulawayo24.com* reproduced an editorial published by *Zimdiaspora.com* (2011) with a headline, “If Welshman Ncube was Zezuru,<sup>30</sup> he would long had been deputy PM”. *Zimdiaspora.com* (2011) argues that Ncube was not sworn in as DPM because of Mugabe’s “perpetual hatred of the Ndebele”. Further, the writer posits that the exclusion of Ncube from power signifies a “tribal conspiracy” between Mugabe and Tsvangirai to maintain “Shona dominance in Zimbabwe”. Although this editorial was produced by *Zimdiaspora.com*, which also suggests the intertextuality of news websites, I argue that by reproducing and circulating this article, *Bulawayo24.com* is contributing to the shaping of Ndebele Particularism. The following analysis of a news story establishes the symbiotic relationship between journalism and memory and, in particular, the role of news in the remembrance of the past.

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<sup>30</sup> The Zezuru are one of the Shona sub-groups (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:38).

### 6.5.2 New media and the Holland “moment”: Nativism, violence, and the memories of pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona relations

The Holland “moment” provides another rich case that exposes the tensions and contestations in new media surrounding the reconstructions of the pre-colonial Ndebele people. Sekai Holland, then co-Minister of National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration,<sup>31</sup> caused a political storm when she allegedly denigrated Mzilikazi, the pre-colonial Ndebele king, during a regional dialogue on agriculture and the environment in Maputo, Mozambique in September 2009. Holland, then member of MDC-T,<sup>32</sup> caused a stir by labelling Mzilikazi and his followers as a violent “mob” and thieves. This remark sparked outrage in Matabeleland, as it was construed as an affront to Mzilikazi and the Ndebele people. Politicians, members of pressure groups and the general populace condemned Holland, with some calling for her resignation from government. In critically analysing the contents of this utterance as represented in new media, this study examines the ways in which Ndebele past events are remembered, and the possible implications for the question of national belonging.

The news story, **Holland slammed over Mzilikazi violence claim**, written by Sifile (2009), was published by *Newzimbabwe.com*. In the headline, Sifile uses the term “slammed” to describe the strong criticism of Holland over her “claim” about Mzilikazi. In the lead of the story, the writer chooses terms such as “shocked” and “claimed” to indicate that the statement uttered was a taboo. Holland (cited in Sifile, 2009) allegedly remarked that:

In an honest way, when we looked at our history, we were shocked to find that we have had 900 years of state-sponsored violence from different chieftaincies and kingdoms which have been in our country ... By the time that Mzilikazi's mob came after stealing the cattle (from Zululand), there was just nothing they knew how to do that had not been done before. And when the Pioneer Column came, they were not as professional as the one (Mzilikazi) who had come before.

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<sup>31</sup> The Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration was established in 2009, in tandem with Article V11 of the GPA, in order to promote national unity, healing and reconciliation. During the period of inclusive government, this Organ was headed by three ministers from ZANU PF and the two MDC factions.

<sup>32</sup> In 2014, Holland, Tendai Biti, Samuel Siphemba Nkomo and other figures broke away from the Tsvangirai-led MDC to form another faction, known as the MDC Renewal Team.

She claimed that “state-sponsored violence” was not unique to ZANU PF, as it was pioneered 900 years ago by the arrival of Mzilikazi and his “mob” of thieves, who were more “professional” than the white settlers in their acts of violence. Firstly, I establish that the thematic content of Holland’s utterance is a representation of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past. Secondly, this study examined the discursive strategies and linguistic tools employed in this news report to construct Ndebele collective memories. I identified the constructive and preservative discursive strategies as being employed in this utterance in seeking to perpetuate, reproduce and legitimate the colonially-propagated narratives that represent the pre-colonial Ndebele people as violent raiders. Discursive strategies such as “criminalisation”, “primitivisation”, “spatialisation” and “originalisation” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:48-52) are realised through linguistic tools such as naming and predication that portray the negative attributes of Mzilikazi and the Ndebele people. Holland employs the term “mob” as a predicational strategy to ascribe negative traits to Mzilikazi and his followers, and as a “criminonym” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:156) that serves to reproduce and sustain the dominant narratives that denigrate and debase Ndebeles as violent warriors who plundered Shona communities. An analysis of transitivity indicates that Holland categorised Ndebeles as thieves who arrived in Zimbabwe after “stealing cattle” in Zululand. Thus, the term “stealing” is a criminonym that is used to prejudice Ndebeles as violent and criminals.

In order to make sense of this politics of memory, it is important to critically analyse the construction of “time maps” (Zerubavel, 2003:29) and moments that are represented as “turning points” (Zerubavel, 1994:73). The entrance of Mzilikazi into present-day Zimbabwe is depicted by Holland as a watershed moment, as it disturbed peace and harmony by establishing “state-sponsored violence”. There is a taken-for-granted assumption that, prior to Mzilikazi’s arrival, modern-day Zimbabwe was a peaceful and prosperous area. Such an idealisation of the pre-Mzilikazi epoch is manifest in Vambe’s (1972:45) work, in which he depicts the pre-colonial Shona communities as having “strong elements of democracy, a national consciousness and a peaceful and civilised way of life in sharp contrast to that of the destructive Ndebele”. However, this romanticisation of the pre-colonial Shona past is challenged by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009b:107), who contends that the “Shona also raided each other”. Within Holland’s membership categorisation, the Ndebeles are othered through the processes of “de-spatialisation” (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:48) that serves to mark them as settlers and foreigners in Zimbabwe. This representation raises pertinent questions about belonging, as Holland’s recounting of the past naturalises and essentialises the Shona as

authentic and indigenous inhabitants of Zimbabwe. Through this strategy of originalisation, Shona communities are constructed as autochthones. Thus, an analysis of the construction of time maps reveals that Holland's utterance seeks to preserve and perpetuate nativist and exclusivist discourses that bifurcate between indigenes/natives (Shonas) and foreigners (Ndebeles).

In addition, Holland's remarks indicate that the colonially propagated memories of Ndebeles as violent invaders are being recontextualised in the post-colonial epoch to serve present needs, goals and purposes. Within the "colonial library" (Mudimbe, 1994: xii), the Ndebeles were portrayed as perpetrators, the Shona as victims, and the colonialists as saviours (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:42-43; Barnes, 2004:142; Lindgren, 2002:47). This process of invoking and recontextualising the derogatory narratives of Ndebeles in order to portray ZANU PF's culture of violence supports Olick (2007:28) and Huyssen's (2003:11) notion that the reproduction of historical accounts is shaped by present environments. Thus, the past is invoked, narrated and mediated through journalistic discourses in order to provide a historical context for making sense of the current political conditions (Edy, 1999:81). In a nutshell, this article is structured in a way that exposes and condemns Holland's nativist discourses that denigrate and vilify the pre-colonial Ndebele people. In addition, the writer counters Holland's rendition by drawing on the arguments raised by Brilliant Mhlanga, an academic, who castigated Holland for distorting history and "denigrating the symbol of nationhood" of the Ndebele people. Mhlanga argues that ZANU PF's violence cannot be equated with that of Mzilikazi's period, as violence in the pre-colonial era was part of state formation and hence "normal at the time". Similarly, in an opinion piece published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, Tshuma (2010), an academic, admonishes Holland for her utterance on Mzilikazi. Tshuma (2010) argues that "the issue of Zimbabwe's political violence and atrocities must be understood in its context, space and time". Further, Tshuma contends that Mzilikazi was not the architect of violence, as there were "fierce territorial wars between the Shona and other tribes, and among the Shona themselves" prior to his arrival in modern-day Zimbabwe. As such, these articles are transformative in the sense that they seek to challenge the hegemonic and nativist narratives that denigrate Ndebele people. Having examined the reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism in new media genres such as news stories, opinion pieces, editorials and YouTube, the following section explores the contestations of Ndebele memories in readers' comments and discussion forums. Within these discursive processes of memory constructions, online participants are not only defending, preserving and justifying the hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism, but are also promoting and

strengthening Ndebele particularistic narratives. As such, I examine how online users are discursively evoking pre-colonial Ndebele memories in ways that shape and reinforce Ndebele particularistic identity.

### **6.5.3 Memory wars: Discourses of pre-colonial Ndebele past in readers' comments**

In exploring the role of new media as sites of memory-making, this section examines how social meanings of pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona relations are generated and contested through readers' comments. As alluded to in section 5.5.5, readers' comments were drawn from articles published by *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo24.com*. In this section, the focus is on the comments that are related to the recollection of pre-colonial Ndebele memories. Data analysis was conducted until saturation was reached. I examined how predicational strategies, nomination and the topoi of nativity and retribution were employed to construct Ndebeles as savages and settlers in Zimbabwe. These new media reconstructions, I argue, have implications for the reshaping and recurrence of Ndebele Particularism. In my analysis of the comments, I identified the online discussants and the articles in which these comments appeared. The readers' comments were drawn from the following articles, which were selected purposively:

- **I witnessed Gukurahundi torture, Speaker** (2014). Article 1.
- **Zimbabwe: Memory, knowledge and future pains** (Macaphulana, 2015). Article 2.
- **SA-loving, anti-Zim Mthwakazi rediscover love for home** (Manheru, 2015). Article 3.
- **Interview: Siwela on Mthwakazi vision** (Mbiba, 2012). Article 4.
- **Gukurahundi continues to haunt Mugabe** (2014). Article 5.
- **King Mzilikazi reloaded: A story of how we begin to remember** (Mabalane, 2013). Article 6.

An analysis of predicational strategies used in these readers' comments indicates that online news sites are domains for the preservation and perpetuation of stereotypical images of the Ndebele people. Through the linguistic devices of positive self-presentation (Shonas) and negative other-presentation (Ndebeles), memories of pre-colonial Ndebele and Shona encounters are invoked by Shona discussants as a preservative strategy to articulate and reinforce a nativist and monolithic rendition of Zimbabweanness. Firstly, Ndebeles are constructed as savages and warmongers. Jukwa (article 1) nominates pre-colonial Ndebeles as an "Mfecane mafia". Similarly, Maramechavio (article 1) refers to pre-colonial Ndebeles as



the “real killers” who used to “terrorise the whole nation, looting cattle, food and women”. Lihle icebo leNkosi (article 3) adds that “the Shonas endured a lot of abuse and suffering from those lazy Ndebele people back in the 19<sup>th</sup> century including murder, [and] looting their harvests”. Preservative discursive strategies, such as criminalisation and primitivisation, are employed by these web users to convey and perpetuate the colonially propagated discourses of Ndebeles as brutal warriors who survived by raiding and looting the Shona communities. Thus, these narratives are sustained through the stereotypical depictions of Ndebeles as “killers” and “lazy”. Furthermore, an analysis of the representation of participants and their roles indicates that material processes such as “murder”, “looting”, “abuse” and “terrorising” are employed to construct Ndebeles as aggressive and violent. In contrast, the lexis, such as “suffering” and “endured”, represents the Shona people as the afflicted social group. Indeed, Barnes (2004:143) rightly asserts that the “narrative of Shona victimisation and Ndebele aggression” is entrenched and widespread in the Zimbabwean society.

However, Beach (1974:633) regards the stereotypical depictions of excessive Ndebele brutality as exaggerations and distortions that were constructed by colonialists to legitimate and “justify the conquest of the Ndebele kingdom by the British South African Company in 1893”. As such, news websites, through the readers’ comments, provide sites for the recontextualisation of these colonially inspired images of the Ndebele people. These discourses are disarticulated from their colonially motivated meanings and rearticulated to serve present goals. As memories, identities and social meanings are fluid, this image of Ndebele brutality is conjured up for various reasons, such as a justificatory strategy to minimise and silence debates on the Gukurahundi (see below for further discussion on the Gukurahundi).

In addition, this process of vilification is reinforced where Maramechavio (article 1) nominates the Ndebeles as the “madzviti”, a derogatory term used by the Shona to refer to pre-colonial Ndebeles as “ferocious raiders” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:106) or “people who fought all the time” (Makoni, Dube & Mashiri, 2006:385). The term “madzviti” also refers to any “stranger” armed like an Ndebele (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2009b:106). Amongst the Ndau communities (Shona sub-group), “madzviti” denotes a “foreign” evil spirit that manifests as an Nguni warrior (Perman, 2011:59). Considering that this derogatory term is expressed, normalised and sustained in Zimbabwean literary texts such as Mungoshi’s (2003) work, one can argue that new media constitute part of this “discursive formation” (Foucault, 1972:31) that preserves and perpetuates this discourse that constructs pre-colonial Ndebeles as violent invaders. Thus, this process of intertextuality affirms an argument that there is a dialectical relationship between

cultural texts and social practices (Dahlgren, 1997:53), as new media discourses not only constitute, but are also shaped by, other discursive practices that reproduce, contest and disseminate Ndebele collective memories. In a nutshell, the nativist narratives not only sustain the hegemonic discourses of Zimbabwean Nationalism, but also contribute to the subject-positioning of Ndebeles as outsiders in ways that amplify and reproduce Ndebele particularistic and separatist sentiments.

Secondly, an analysis of the readers' comments indicates that Ndebeles are constructed by some Shona-speaking people as settlers or non-natives in Zimbabwe. Thus, through the topos of nativity, Ndebeles are discursively constructed as *mafikizolos* (allochthonous).<sup>33</sup> This strategy of originalisation is employed for the classification of autochthones and allochthones (Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:48), and to demarcate between in groups and out groups. The following readers' comments by Shona interlocutors reinforce this nativist imagination of the Zimbabwean nation-state that excludes Ndebeles:

- “Go back to your Zululand, that’s where you belong” by Ruwa (Article 3).
- “Go back to KZN (KwaZulu-Natal) by Avatar Shona (Article 3).
- “Go back to Zululand” by Maramechavio (Article 1).
- “Our forefathers narrated how these warmongers arrived in our country, even European writers can attest to the barbaric culture of the mafikizolos” by Runesu (Article 6).

The terms “Zululand” and “KZN” are constructed as identity markers to de-spatialise Ndebeles from Zimbabwe and construct South Africa as their homeland. This membership categorisation of Ndebeles as outsiders and Shona people as insiders is ideological, as it naturalises and endorses the idea that members of a specific group are authentic citizens, and other social groups are expurgated as foreigners and immigrants. This exclusivist, narrow and nativist interpretation of Zimbabweanness reinforces the argument that, within the hegemonic discourses, Zimbabwe is constructed as a “successor state” to pre-colonial Shona political formations (Mhlanga, 2013:56; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:169). I consider Runesu’s (article 6) predicate of “mafikizolos” as an example of what Reisigl and Wodak (2001:48) term “origonyms”, in that it is exclusivist, as it strips Ndebeles of their citizenship and a sense of belonging in Zimbabwe. Thus, this originalisation, as a discursive strategy, reinforces Mlambo’s (2013:62) assertion that, within “Shona chauvinistic particularism”, Ndebeles are

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<sup>33</sup> *Mafikizolos* is an Ndebele term that can be translated to non-natives or people who originated in a place other than where they are residing.

denounced as “newcomers” to Zimbabwe, and are being told to “go back to Zululand where they originally came from”. Such a narrow and monolithic rendition fails to take into account the multiple and dynamic nature of Ndebele identity, as Ndebele sub-groups such as the Kalanga and Tonga do not have Nguni ancestral roots, as they were incorporated by Mzilikazi into the present-day Zimbabwe. The construction of Zululand as the homeland for Ndebeles reinforces the narrow interpretation of Ndebele identity, which excludes social groups that have no Nguni ancestral roots. Thus, these readers’ comments preserve and perpetuate what I call the “Nguniism” of Ndebele identity, that is, the discursive strategies and tendencies employed by both Ndebeles and non-Ndebeles to confine and essentialise Ndebele Particularism to Nguni lineage, to the exclusion of the imaginations and memories of other Ndebele sub-groups.

However, the construction of Zimbabwe as a Shona nation is repudiated by an online user identifying himself/herself as Queen Elizabeth (article 4), who argues that “Shonas are settlers in the land of the Khoi San and the Tonga people”. Further, the online user posits that the “Shona originated from the Congo Basin area” (article 4). In response to Ruwa’s call for Ndebeles to return to Zululand, Shona Gukurahundi (article 3) asserts that Shona people should “go back to Burundi”. This counter-hegemonic discourse seeks to resist and dislodge the taken-for-granted and naturalised assumptions that Shona people are indigenes, and that their presence in Zimbabwe is inherent and pre-given. It is evident that the question of nativity is central to the debates on Ndebele collective memory in news websites, as the discussants evoke, reproduce and resist nativist discourses, and this lays bare the troubling question of who belongs and who does not belong in Zimbabwe. It is through these cyber-contestations of memory, belonging and identity that Ndebele Particularism is reproduced and strengthened.

Thirdly, the memories of the pre-colonial Ndebele people are invoked by Shona interlocutors to minimise and silence debates on the Gukurahundi. Thus, the following comments indicate that the discourses on Gukurahundi and the pre-colonial Ndebele raids are interwoven:

- “The misguided and dissident descendants of murderous Mzilikazi and his mfecane mafia were hell bent on returning the ‘good old days’ when they invaded and subjugated the indigenous peoples of the western provinces” – Jukwa (article 1).
- “The real killers, we know, are the Dzvitis or Madzviti, marauding Ndebele impis (warriors) unleashed on our peacefully settled people by Mzilikazi and Lobengula, and it is that savagery ZIPRA dissidents wanted to revive. Fortunately, it was properly dealt with” – Lihle icebo leNkosi (article 1).

- “Mthwakazi paid for the 1800s tribal wars through the Gukurahundi” – Phunyukabemphethe (article 1).
- “Gukurahundi can only be addressed together with MaShona massacres” – Hombarume (article 2).
- “If people talk of compensation, who is going to compensate the Karangas for their cattle taken by Lobengula. If Gukurahundi victims must be compensated then the Shonas must be compensated for the war of the madzviti” – Mwana wevhu (article 5).

An analysis of the predication and referential strategies exposes how the discourses of the Ndebele raids are summoned to trivialise and silence the growing calls for justice and compensation for Gukurahundi victims. Thus, through the process of interdiscursivity, these two discursive events are articulated in ways that justify and minimise the Gukurahundi. The interlocutors employ the “shift of blame and responsibility”, and “balancing one thing against another” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:36) as strategies that justify the orchestration of the Gukurahundi. Firstly, the discussants establish a link between pre-colonial Ndebele raids and the Gukurahundi by nominating dissidents as “descendants of murderous Mzilikazi” (Jukwa, article 1). Secondly, an argument is developed that the “ZIPRA dissidents” wanted to revive the “savagery” of Mzilikazi and Lobengula (Lihle icebo leNkosi, article 1). In this sense, political and ethnic identities become conflated, as being ZIPRA is constructed as being identical with being Ndebele. This discursive strategy of equation (Wodak & De Cillia, 2007:332) is used to justify the slaughter of civilians in Matabeleland, as the ZIPRA dissidents are equated with the pre-colonial Ndebele people. Through this process of naming dissidents as descendants of Mzilikazi, the interlocutors shift blame and responsibility for the Gukurahundi from ZANU PF to the pre-colonial Ndebele raids. This justificatory strategy is realised through the topos of threat, which mystifies and deflects guilt and responsibility for the Gukurahundi, as argued by Lihle icebo leNkosi (article 1), that the dissidents were “properly dealt with” because they wanted to revive an era of Ndebele raids, looting and murder. The euphemism “properly dealt with” is a strategy of justification that obscures, mystifies and minimises the crimes committed by the Fifth Brigade on the Matabeleland civilians. This linguistic device seeks to absolve or exonerate ZANU PF and the Fifth Brigade, which perpetrated these atrocities in Matabeleland, by shifting the blame to the pre-colonial Ndebele people (Chapter 7 provides a deeper analysis of the Gukurahundi, probing the discourses of denial and silencing).

In addition, Hombarume's (article 2) argument, that the "Gukurahundi can only be addressed with the MaShona massacres", exposes the ways in which the pre-colonial Ndebele histories and memories are invoked to silence and trivialise Gukurahundi discourses on truth, justice and accountability. The justificatory strategy of balancing one act against another serves as an ideological tool to institute forced amnesia, as the discourses on Gukurahundi are silenced through the processes of remembering pre-colonial Ndebele raids. Within this tension, of remembering and forgetting, the twin discursive strategies of "mitigation" and "intensification" (Wodak, 2001b:73) are employed to tone down and silence discussions on Gukurahundi, and to emphasise and heighten the memories of Ndebele raids, respectively. Thus, this discursive strategy, of forgetting by remembering, indicates the interwoven nature of the discourses of Gukurahundi and the pre-colonial Ndebele raids, which are manifested by the participants' renditions of the Ndebele past. Within this politics of memory, remembering and forgetting are intertwined (Assmann & Assmann, 2010:231; Brockmeier, 2002:15), as pre-colonial Ndebele raids are foregrounded and remembered, whilst the atrocities of the Gukurahundi are minimised and forgotten. This mnemonic exercise is ideological, as what is remembered and what is forgotten depends on who is being identified as a perpetrator and as a victim. In addition, Mwana wevhu (article 5) employs a modal verb to assert that Gukurahundi victims "must" be "compensated" on condition that the "Karangas<sup>34</sup> are compensated for their cattle taken by Lobengula". In the same comment, Mwana wevhu also identifies the "Shona" as the victims of the "war of Madzviti" (article 5). The different constructions of the "Shona" and "Karangas" as victims of Ndebele raids indicate that Shona ethnicity is not essential and stable, but socially constructed, heterogeneous, and multifaceted.

In a nutshell, the stereotypical images of the pre-colonial Ndebele people as brutal warriors and savages have been produced and reproduced in different historical moments to serve different political goals. Firstly, they were produced at a particular historical era by colonialists to legitimate and justify the destruction of the Ndebele kingdom (Barnes, 2004:142; Beach, 1974:633). Secondly, these memories were summoned and reinterpreted in the 1980s by the perpetrators of the Gukurahundi to justify and legitimate the violence that was being unleashed in Matabeleland (Lindgren, 2005b:161; Alexander *et al.*, 2000:222). Phunyukabemphethe (article 1) buttresses the topos of retribution by arguing that "Mthwakazi", a metonymy for the

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<sup>34</sup> The Karanga are one of the Shona sub-groups.

Ndebele people, suffered in the 1980s because of the “1800s tribal wars”. It is important to note that Phunyukabemphethe signifies the Ndebele raids on the Shona as “tribal wars”, in stark contrast to other interlocutors, who define the same events as a “massacre” of the Shona people. Lastly, my analysis of readers’ comments provides new insights, as I argue that the derogatory narratives of the pre-colonial Ndebele people are being recontextualised and reinvigorated as a discursive strategy to trivialise, minimise and silence the debates on Gukurahundi.

#### **6.5.4 Postmemory: The construction, mediation and transmission of pre-colonial Ndebele memories in new media**

An analysis of the user comments indicates that news websites provide an arena for the mediation and transmission of the memories of Ndebele events that were not experienced directly by the discussants. Although none of these interlocutors witnessed the Ndebele raids on the Shona communities in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the memories of these events have become part of their lived experiences. Through the use of hyperbole as a rhetorical device, some of the participants have attempted to emphasise the terror unleashed by the Ndebele upon Shona communities. However, some of these arguments are fallacious, as is evident in The Survivor’s assertion that “I witnessed how the Ndebele brutalised the Shona, raped their children and wives, killed them, took them into slavery, their grain and cattle” (article 1). This claim, that he/she “witnessed” these events, is refuted and ridiculed by Phunyukabemphethe (article 1): “Wow, LOL! You mean you witnessed tribal warfare – how old are you? You must be the only person of that era still living.” From this interaction, it is evident that new media are sites for the production and transmission of collective memories that have been inherited and internalised by the interlocutors. This phenomenon represents the construction of “postmemory” (Hirsch, 2008:103) on these news websites, as pre-colonial Ndebele events preceded the births of the web users, but nonetheless are being “transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, 2008:103). New media are not the only institution used to convey these truth claims about Ndebele past events. Cuthbert (article 6) argues that “our forefathers narrated how these warmongers arrived in our country, even European writers can attest to the barbaric culture of the mafikizolos”. The deictic expressions “our” and “these” constitute a discursive strategy of collectivisation that is employed to affirm one’s identity and to construct a binary world of “us” vs “them”, thus pitting “insiders” (Shonas) against “outsiders” (Ndebeles). These deictic words sustain nativist

discourses that seek to de-spatialise and alienate Ndebeles from Zimbabwe. At the same time, Cuthbert's referencing of "forefathers" and "European writers" as sources of the knowledge about Ndebele past events indicates that these memories, which were constructed and conveyed through oral tradition and colonial historiography, are now being reconstructed and transmitted through new media.

In addition, the invoking of memories of the pre-colonial Ndebele-Shona encounters is underpinned by the perceptions in Matabeleland that the Ndebele people are being marginalised and excluded from the socio-economic and political spheres in the country. Phunyukabemphethe (article 1) posits that "all efforts of the Shonalising Matabeleland are punishment for the sins of our forefathers and it appears that there is no end in sight ... They (Shonas) will never rest until Ndebele people and their language are totally eliminated from Zimbabwe". The appropriation of the biblical allusion, "sins of our forefathers", reinforces Ndhlovu's (2007:142; 2006:307) study on the interplay between language and identity formation, in which he argues that hegemonic nation-building strategies in Zimbabwe, anchored upon "Shona hegemony", have led to the marginalisation, subordination and exclusion of the Ndebele language. The topos of retribution is buttressed by this "Shonalisation wave" (Ndhlovu, 2006:306) – manifesting as linguistic domination – which is conceived by Phunyukabemphethe (article 1) as a punishment for the transgressions committed by the Ndebeles during the pre-colonial epoch. As such, the past and the present are intertwined, and this study reinforces the notion of "presentism" (Edy, 2006:14; Olick & Robbins, 1998:128), as I argue that the recollection of Ndebele collective memories is embedded within the prevailing socio-economic and political goings-on.

### **6.5.5 Reconstructions of pre-colonial Ndebele memories on discussion forums**

As explained in section 5.5.5, the data for analysis was also drawn from discussion forums on *Bulawayo24.com*. The purpose was to examine how interlocutors are using discussion forums to recollect the pre-colonial Ndebele past in ways that contribute to the shaping of Ndebele identity politics. I analyse the discussions attached to the forum post, "Is it fair to compare Mzilikazi or Lobengula to Mugabe?", which was submitted by IndabaNdaba (2012a). The post attracted 22 comments and 12 463 views. All the forum participants posted their comments by identifying themselves as "anonymous" users. Although the discussions on this thread degenerated into insults and threats of an ethnic nature, these debates also provide useful



insights into the shared recollections of Ndebele memories in cyberspace. Firstly, there are participants who equate the two Ndebele kings with Mugabe in terms of brutality. One participant argues that “Mzilikazi murdered Kalanga/Karanga chiefs and their people mercilessly ... skinning people alive and tossing them into fire, looting cattle and women”. Another user adds that the “Ndebele era of dominance is done-over-finished and we are not going there”. In addition, one anonymous user warns Ndebeles to either accept the reign of the “mighty and intelligent Shonas” or else “go back to KZN/Mpumalanga in peace before we bring you to extinction”. Through these referential and predicational strategies, the participants are preserving the nativist and hegemonic discourses on memory in ways that reproduce the Ndebeles’ perceptions of alienation and non-belonging in Zimbabwe. On the other hand, there are interlocutors who celebrate the Ndebele kings and argue that Mzilikazi and Lobengula cannot be compared to Mugabe. One user posits that “any attempt to compare Shona genocidal miscreants to Ndebele kings is treasonable”. Another participant adds that “Mzilikazi and Lobengula cannot be compared to Satanists”. Further, the discourse of the Gukurahundi is entrenched in these debates on pre-colonial Ndebele memories, as one participant argues that “the Ndebele will not be the first to forget a Shona genocide on them and not do something about it”. The references “Satanists” and “Shona genocidal miscreants” not only indicate how the discourses on the Gukurahundi are entrenched within these debates on pre-colonial Ndebele memories, but also the vitriolic language that characterises these discussions. Although this Internet forum is enhancing freedom of expression, some of these Ndebele-Shona cyber-debates constitute hate speech, as language such as “Satanists”, “extinction” and “vengeance” are used by participants to threaten, insult and disparage Ndebeles and Shonas. This phenomenon reinforces Rheingold’s (2002:121) assertion that, in online discourses, “other people use the shield of anonymity to unleash their aggression, bigotry, and sadistic impulses”. In a nutshell, these cyber-memories not only expose the Ndebele-Shona ethnic cleavages, but also underlie the ways in which Ndebele identity is being performed and reconstructed.

## **6.6 New media and cultural studies: The reconstructions of Ndebele cyber-memories**

It is clear from the three news websites that the advent of new media has enriched critical debates on Ndebele past events. *Umthwakazireview.com* is a site for the resurrection of Matabeleland narratives, which are emasculated in the dominant Zimbabwean public spaces. This news website plays an emancipatory role as it provides the people of Matabeleland with

a voice to celebrate their histories and heroes, and to reconstruct their memories. These memories are a counter to the dominant Zimbabwean narratives that are skewed in favour of Shona myths, memories and historical figures, such as Kaguvi and Nehanda (Mhlanga, 2013:57; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:169). Thus, this news website reconstructs historical narratives by giving the people of Matabeleland a “voice” to “represent themselves” (Mitra, 2005:379), rather than to be represented by other social groups. Within these cyber-memories, the colonially inspired narratives of Mzilikazi’s raids and brutalities are sanitised, marginalised and forgotten, a clear testimony that the rendition of the past is a process of remembering and forgetting, rather than an ideologically neutral exercise. *Umthwakazireview.com* romanticises the entrance of Mzilikazi into modern-day Zimbabwe, as he is lauded for his fight against slave trade.

On the other hand, some of the interlocutors on *Newzimbabwe.com* denigrate Mzilikazi and construct his arrival in present-day Zimbabwe as the dawning of massacres, brutality and the enslaving of Shona communities. Thus, memory is a site of struggle, since different “mnemonic communities” (Zerubavel, 2003:4) are forged and consolidated on these news websites, as past events are remembered differently. New media therefore can be conceived of as a furnace for moulding and refashioning public memories for political motivations and agendas. In a nutshell, within these struggles about the social meaning of the past, Ndebele memories are reconstructed, amongst others to preserve and justify the hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist discourses, to transform this status quo, and to dismantle this social order and reimagine an Ndebele nation.

An analysis of the representations of the pre-colonial Ndebele past on the selected news websites supports Neiger *et al.*’s (2011:10) assumption about the twofold role of the media in forging collective memories. Firstly, the media provide a platform for different interpreters and storytellers, such as journalists, academics, politicians, cultural activists and audiences, to recount and reconstruct Ndebele historical imaginations. Thus, new media are an arena for the formation and maintenance of “interpretive communities” (Zelizer, 1993:219; 1992a:9) that seek to endorse their interpretations of the Ndebele collective past. Secondly, new media professionals such as journalists, as well as an administrator of *Umthwakazireview.com*, act as “memory agents” (Neiger *et al.*, 2011:10) who offer their own readings of Ndebele past events. Similar to Zandberg’s (2011) study on the memories of the Holocaust in Israeli newspapers, I argue that, in the articles analysed, journalists conceded authority to cultural activists, intellectuals and politicians, who assumed the right to narrate Ndebele past events.

The Internet provides opportunities for user engagement and interactivity, as these news websites constitute deliberative spaces that enable people to imagine, interpret and contest Ndebele collective memories. Through online user comments, participants are actively contributing to and engaging in the production of the social meaning of Ndebele past events. However, most of these discussants, especially on *Newzimbabwe.com*, use pseudonyms, which may suggest that their freedom of expression could be constrained by perceived security threats. *Bulawayo24.com*, on the other hand, enables readers to post comments using their Facebook user names, which is a testimony to this website's multimediality, as it is connected with social networks. The participants use the online user comments facility not only to express their views on the topic of the article, but also to engage and debate with fellow readers on this subject of pre-colonial Ndebele memories. Although these cyber-interactions also manifest in the form of enraged debates or “flaming” (Papacharissi, 2004:260), such online engagements also provide new insights into how Ndebele past events are historicised. These multiple voices on news websites and the collective authorship of the histories indicate a transformation, as the practices of remembering have become decentralised and democratised, with memories being produced “by the people” (Haskins, 2007:403). This phenomenon is testimony that, within the new media environment, audiences are no longer passive recipients of media texts, but are actively involved in the production of social meaning.

The different interpretations of media texts by readers in the comments section indicate the polysemic nature of messages, as the ways in which the audiences make sense of social reality is context dependent. One of the commentators, Cuthbert, challenges the author of an opinion piece (article 6) by stating that “your knowledge of history is biased, you seem to romanticise the entry of Ndebele people into Zimbabwe”. This reader’s comment affirms Hall’s (1980:138) assertion that audiences can decode “oppositional” readings of texts. It also suggests that audiences have become chroniclers of past events, as the construction of historical narratives is no longer a prerogative of the elite and of academics. Thus, an analysis of online user comments clearly illustrates that insights from cultural studies, social constructionism and media and journalism studies all contribute to a nuanced understanding of Ndebele Particularism. Social constructionism and cultural studies provide a vantage point for examining how audiences employ news websites to make sense of their lived experiences, and to construct, shape and contest the social meanings of past events. Considering that Ndebele past events are turned into news, I argue that journalism and cultural studies have some overlaps, especially in a new media environment. Although these fields differ in their

epistemological underpinnings (Zelizer, 2004:101), this study explicates the symbiotic relationship of journalism and cultural studies, as memory agents (journalists, academics, cultural activists, and readers) are mediating and making sense of their social reality (Ndebele memories) through journalistic discourses.

## **6.7 Summary**

This chapter has exposed the political agendas, interests and goals that underpin memory discourses, as pre-colonial Ndebele past events and people are remembered in different ways by contributors to different news websites for different purposes. This chapter further highlights the role of news websites as memory signifiers that record, interpret, contest and convey the knowledges of Ndebele past events. The following chapter examines new media discourses on the Gukurahundi, unpacking the different ways in which events of this dark episode are reconstructed by different people and groups.

## CHAPTER SEVEN: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### Gukurahundi and new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism

#### 7.1 Introduction

Having explored new media reconstructions of pre-colonial Ndebele past events, this chapter pays particular attention to the post-colonial massacres in Matabeleland as I examine how memories of Gukurahundi are being archived, re-told and transmitted on news websites. Premised on an understanding that the relationship between memory and identity is reciprocal (Zertal, 2005:1), I argue that memories of Gukurahundi that are conjured up and reproduced on news websites are not only shaped by Ndebele identity politics, but also, in turn, are reproducing this Ndebele particularistic identity. Considering the centrality of Gukurahundi in the fabric of Ndebele collective consciousness (Alexander *et al.*, 2000:204), this chapter examines the role of news websites (and social networks) in the narration, commemoration and remembrance of this catastrophic historical episode. Given that the topic of Gukurahundi remains a cultural taboo in state circles, as the hegemonic narratives crystallise around forced amnesia, silences, and denial (Eppel, 2004:46-47), it therefore is imperative to explore how advancements in digital technologies are enabling Ndebele communities commemorate and confront this violent past. In other words, I examine the emancipatory potential of new media in keeping the memories of Gukurahundi alive, and in enabling the Gukurahundi survivors to bear witness to the atrocities.

In examining the complexities and nuances surrounding the historical imaginations of Gukurahundi, this chapter probes how cyber-memories of this post-colonial violence are entrenched in the struggles between hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism and Ndebele Particularism. As Gukurahundi constitutes a site of struggle over the proper way to remember the past, I examine the role of new media in exposing and thwarting the hegemonic discourses that seek to trivialise, minimise and justify these post-colonial massacres. In applying the discourse-historical approach (DHA), careful attention is given to the discursive strategies of justification, legitimation, transformation and dismantlement that reconstruct the memories of Gukurahundi in different new media genres such as news reports, opinion pieces, YouTube videos, survivors' testimonies, discussion forums and readers' comments. As alluded to in section 5.5.4, Gukurahundi is one of the thematic contents of the reconstructions of Ndebele

Particularism identified in this study. By focusing on the overlaps between the two themes (Gukurahundi, and imagination of an Ndebele nation), this chapter interrogates how the social meanings assigned to Gukurahundi are challenging the hegemonic order in ways that shape the imaginations of an Ndebele nation.

## **7.2 Remembering against the grain: Gukurahundi, new media and the de-tabooisation of the discourses of silence**

Wodak (2006:125) rightly posits that “every society has to deal with traumatic events in its past” such as genocide and wars. In contexts where the dominant social groups are yet to assume responsibility for the wrongs committed in the past, the public discourses tend to crystallise around cultural taboos that are often constructed to trivialise, deny and mystify the involvement of these groups in human rights abuses (Wodak, 2006:126). In some cases, it is through much talk that the memories of traumatic past events are silenced and suppressed, as speech can be used as an effective weapon by those in power to frame a particular narrative that establishes and entrenches forced amnesia (Vinitzky-Seroussi & Teeger, 2010:1108). Drawing upon the above insights, I considered the current hegemonic historical accounts on Gukurahundi that are being propagated by ZANU PF officials in state-owned media as a manifestation of “new” silences. These silences are “new” in the sense that they constitute both a continuity and a shift in the hegemonic perspectives on Gukurahundi, as speech, rather than merely silence, is used to repress the memories of the massacres. In focusing on the utterances and statements of ZANU PF officials and adherents, such as Emmerson Mnangagwa, Phelekezela Mphoko and Nathaniel Manheru, my interest lies in examining how these established discourses on Gukurahundi are being exposed and thwarted on news websites through news reports, opinion pieces, readers’ comments and survivors’ testimonies. However, my analysis of the discourses on Gukurahundi is not confined to the online users’ responses to the utterances of ZANU PF adherents. Thus, I explore the role of news websites as sites for the resurgence of subaltern narratives that are dismantling the hegemonic, historical accounts of this post-colonial violence.

In a news report titled **Mnangagwa wades into Gukurahundi row** that was published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, Mnangagwa<sup>35</sup> claims that the Gukurahundi is a “closed chapter” that was resolved by the “unity accord” signed between ZANU and ZAPU in 1987 (Mnangagwa wades, 2011). Mnangagwa adds that people who are raising the Gukurahundi issue are opening “healed wounds” and pursuing “selfish agendas” that seek to “divide the nation” (cited in Mnangagwa wades, 2011). This statement was uttered during an interview with Mnangagwa by the state-controlled *Chronicle* newspaper. These remarks are a manifestation of the hegemonic discursive strategies of perpetuation and legitimation, as the metaphor “closed chapter” is employed to silence and minimise the discussions on Gukurahundi. Thus, these established discourses are reproduced in the state-controlled press to enforce forced amnesia. Vinitzky-Seroussi and Teeger (2010:1104-1105) rightly observe that “certain constituencies do not wish to remember and acknowledge certain pasts, especially if such memories bring up issues of accountability and guilt”. However, this taken-for-granted assumption that the Gukurahundi was resolved in 1987 fails to take into account that the unity accord was elitist, as it excluded participation by the civilians who were affected by these massacres (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:32). Although it ended the massacre of civilians, the unity accord was a “surrender document where the PF-ZAPU politicians threw in the towel and allowed PF-ZAPU to be swallowed by ZANU-PF” (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:48).

In addition, the dominant social order is sustained in state media through the use of the metaphor of a wound, as Mnangagwa posits that discussing Gukurahundi amounts to opening “healed wounds” (cited in Mnangagwa wades, 2011). The signifier “wound” symbolises pain, trauma and bitterness. Within the dominant regime of thought, the presupposition is that the wounds of the massacres were “healed” by the unity accord, and any attempt to discuss the issue of Gukurahundi is regarded as a ploy to undermine peace, reconciliation and social healing. However, a number of studies have shown that Gukurahundi is a “festering wound” in Matabeleland, as there are mounting calls for accountability, justice and truth (Ndlovu & Dube, 2014; Rwafa, 2012; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a; Eppel, 2004). As such, Mnangagwa’s utterance that discussions on the Gukurahundi are undermining social healing and reconciliation can be conceived as part of the official discourses of silence and minimisation

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<sup>35</sup> Mnangagwa is the current Vice-President of Zimbabwe. He served as Minister of State Security during the Matabeleland massacres and is regarded as one of the masterminds of Gukurahundi (Ndlovu & Dube, 2013:5; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2003:30).



that seek to regulate, suppress and prohibit an open dialogue on past crimes. Furthermore, Mnangagwa employs the topos of unity as a discursive strategy of perpetuation, as he reprimands those excavating the Gukurahundi issue for attempting to “divide the nation”. The assumption that addressing the unresolved legacies of the past is akin to dividing the nation demonstrates how the topos of unity is mobilised as a discursive strategy to enforce historical amnesia. Thus, the hegemonic Zimbabwean nation-building discourses are founded upon forgetting the inconvenient historical events, which supports Renan’s (1990:11) assertion that “forgetting” is a “crucial factor in the creation of a nation”. In this manifestation of power, the dominant discourse “rules in” and “rules out” (Hall, 1997a:44-45) certain ways of talking about Gukurahundi. Such hegemonically discursive procedures are designed to regulate, constrain and control what is “sayable” (Hall, 1997a:45) about these traumatic past events. Alternative imaginations that do not conform to the hegemonic worldviews are branded as “deviant” (Prado, 2000:86), such as the oppositional readings of the Gukurahundi past, which are cast as divisive. Against this backdrop, *Newzimbabwe.com* emerges as a site of “de-tabooization” (Wodak & De Cillia, 2007:317) of the hegemonic discourses on Gukurahundi, as this article undermines and foils the official narratives reproduced in state-controlled newspapers that seek to stifle the calls for truth, accountability and justice for the Gukurahundi massacres. Horacio Verbitsky, an Argentine journalist, argues that it is necessary to re-open wounds if they were “badly closed” in order to “cure the infection” (cited in Hayner, 2011:145).

This *Newzimbabwe.com* news report is subversive as it is structured in a way that challenges and undermines Mnangagwa’s official perspective on Gukurahundi. Firstly, the writer draws on a forensic argument – condemning the past actions of an individual – to delegitimise and thwart the official accounts of Gukurahundi. In employing the topos of justice, and predicational strategies, the writer represents Mnangagwa as one of the “chief architects” of Gukurahundi. Thus, through the use of an ethotic argument as a mode of persuasion (Richardson, 2007:160), Mnangagwa’s involvement in the Gukurahundi atrocities is foregrounded in order to resist and discredit the hegemonic discourses of silence. Secondly, the writer quotes Moses Mzila Ndlovu, the deputy secretary general of the Welshman Ncube-led MDC party, who incriminates Mnangagwa as one of the “perpetrators of the genocide” who was involved in the “recruitment and training of the operatives for the massacre of our people” (cited in Mnangagwa wades, 2011). Although Gukurahundi is forgotten as a “closed chapter” within the state discourses, this news article constitutes a site of resistance that reconstructs the

subjugated memories of these massacres in ways that challenge the asymmetrical power relations.

It is important to examine the naming of the victims and perpetrators of Gukurahundi, as these new media practices of signification have implications for the reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. Firstly, Mnangagwa wades (2011) identifies the offenders as Mnangagwa, Mugabe and ZANU PF, and employs transitivity material processes such as “exterminating”, “hunting down”, “presided”, “massacre” and “execution” to implicate these social actors in these events. Secondly, the wronged groups are categorised as ZAPU, people in Matabeleland and Midlands, and Ndebele people. This complexity in the nomination of the victims indicates a tension between the political and ethnic renditions of the causes of the massacres. Ndlovu posits that Gukurahundi was part of “ZANU PF’s grand plan of exterminating the Ndebele people” (cited in Mnangagwa wades, 2011), an interpretation that may promote the recurrence and resurgence of Ndebele secessionist sentiments, as it implies that the victims were brutalised because of their Ndebele identity, rather than their ZAPU political identity (see section 7.3 for further discussion on the politics of naming).

The Nathaniel Manheru<sup>36</sup> “moment” provides another case for probing the role of news websites in challenging the hegemonic narratives on the Gukurahundi. Manheru (2014) caused a political stir when he claimed, in an opinion piece published by the state-owned *Herald* newspaper, that Gukurahundi is a “myth”. This controversial perspective elicited widespread condemnation from different social actors, as opinion pieces, survivor testimonies, news articles and readers’ comments were published by the three selected news websites to challenge Manheru’s version of social reality. The euphemism “myth” is used to entrench trivialisation, mystification and denial as justificatory discursive strategies used by the dominant regime. Thus, by using the discursive strategy of “casting doubt” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:36; Wodak, 2003:193) to contest the material facts of the well-documented Gukurahundi atrocities, Manheru is reproducing and reinforcing the dominant social order that is predicated upon the repression of Gukurahundi talk.

In addition, it is important to pay attention to Phelekezela Mphoko’s utterance that sparked controversy. Mphoko, the second Vice-President of Zimbabwe, caused a political storm when he alleged that Gukurahundi was a “western conspiracy”, and seemingly absolved Mugabe of

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<sup>36</sup> Manheru is a regular columnist for the state-controlled *Herald* newspaper.

responsibility for these atrocities (Mugabe innocent, 2015). In a news story titled **Gukurahundi: Mugabe innocent, says VP Mphoko**, *Newzimbabwe.com* reported that Mphoko had made a remark that Gukurahundi had “nothing to do with Mugabe” during an interview with the state-owned *Sunday Mail* newspaper (Mugabe innocent, 2015). According to Mphoko, the West (USA and Britain) created a “myth” that ZAPU wanted to overthrow the ZANU PF government in order to destabilise Zimbabwe and protect their interests in apartheid South Africa. Thus, the newly independent Zimbabwean state was seen as a threat to Western interests in apartheid South Africa. Mphoko claims that “you can never hear the British condemning” Gukurahundi because “it was their baby” (cited in Mugabe innocent, 2015). Tendi’s (2011:308) argues that, in the 1980s, Britain not only “adopted a policy of silence” on the Gukurahundi atrocities, but also “venerated Mugabe’s leadership”. In the same vein, Phimister (2009:476) asserts that, “in Africa as in the West, Mugabe was showered with praise even as the Fifth Brigade went about its bloody business”. In addition, Mphoko posits that the West wanted to curtail the spread of communism in Southern Africa. Similarly, Phimister (2009:476) argues that Britain and the USA ignored the massacres because they treated Zimbabwe as a “significant regional partner in a Cold War context”.

However, Mphoko rearticulates these arguments, as he uses the phrase “western conspiracy” (cited in Mugabe innocent, 2015) as a justificatory strategy of “blame-shifting” and “blame-deflecting” (Hansson, 2015:300; Wodak *et al.*, 2009:36) for the Gukurahundi atrocities away from Mugabe and ZANU PF to Britain and the USA. This narrative is propagated in the state media to sustain the hegemonic discourses that deny and mitigate Mugabe and ZANU PF’s responsibility for the Gukurahundi atrocities. To suggest that Gukurahundi “had nothing to do with Mugabe” obscures the fact that the militia that committed the Matabeleland massacres was deployed by the ZANU PF regime headed by Mugabe, as elucidated by a number of scholars (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b; Lindgren, 2005b; Kriger, 2003). Considering that Mnangagwa, Manheru and Mphoko’s narratives were produced in state-owned newspapers to reinforce the dominant perspective, and recontextualised on selected news websites to frame alternative social meanings, one can argue that intertextuality between the state media and the selected news websites is a common feature in these memory contestations. Having exposed the reproduction and continuation of the hegemonic definitions of the Gukurahundi in the state-owned newspapers, the rest of this chapter explores how the selected news websites are shaping Ndebele Particularism by narrativising, recollecting and preserving the historical memories of this traumatic past event. In this regard, I examined the conflicting memories of Gukurahundi

on news websites: firstly, the hegemonic discourse that seeks to silence, deny, justify and defend the atrocities; secondly, the transformative perspective that seeks justice, commemoration and reburials for the Gukurahundi victims; and lastly, the dismantlement discourse that advocates truth, justice and commemoration for the purposes of Ndebele secessionist imaginations.

In an opinion piece titled **Mnangagwa: The limits of vuvuzela politics**, published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, Macaphulana (2011b) uses attributes such as “Gukurahundi mastermind” and “genocidaires” as predicational strategies to construct Mnangagwa as a perpetrator of the Matabeleland massacres. Through the topos of justice – an argument that the perpetrators of Gukurahundi must account for their crimes – Macaphulana (2011b) discredits and contests Mnangagwa’s hegemonic perspective that Gukurahundi is a “closed matter”. The rhetor relies on an ethotic argument to thwart the hegemonic discourses of silence by persuading the audiences that Mnangagwa’s character and involvement in “a major case of crimes against humanity and genocide” does not give him moral authority to declare Gukurahundi to be a “closed case”.

In addition, Macaphulana (2011b) draws on pathetic arguments (Richardson, 2007:160) to provoke emotions of anger and pity among his readers. An analysis of the representation of villains and victims and their roles indicates that Mnangagwa is depicted as “dancing on the mass graves”, a metaphor that signifies his lack of respect for the Gukurahundi victims. In summoning the images of “mass graves”, there is an implication that this representation will resonate with Ndebele communities who are calling for the exhumation and reburial of the remains of the Gukurahundi victims. Further, Macaphulana (2011b) invokes images of “unburied bones of the innocents” and “tears of the orphans” to denote the horrors of Gukurahundi, and to reinforce transformative demands for justice and commemoration for the victims. He repudiates the hegemonic discourses of silence by asserting that “it is not in the office of the perpetrator to tell the victims that their wounds have healed” (Macaphulana, 2011b). Similar to Fontein’s (2010:423) assertion that the “resurfacing bones” of the remains of the Gukurahundi victims signify the contestations over “memory, commemoration and the representation of the past”, I argue that some new media representations are conjuring up images of graves and bones to reconstruct Ndebele memories.

Lastly, Macaphulana (2011b) reconstructs and mobilises the memory of Gukurahundi in service to the Ndebele nation. He argues that Mnangagwa’s remarks and the denial of justice for the Gukurahundi victims give credence to the secessionist agitations for “Matabeleland and

Mashonaland to be restored to their pre-colonial boundaries and separate existences” (Macaphulana, 2011b). This naming of “Matabeleland” and “Mashonaland” as different national imaginaries reverberates with the secessionist imaginations that advocate the dismantling of the colonially inherited borders and the restoration of pre-colonial African boundaries (Mazrui, 2010: xxvii; Adebajo, 2005:98). Through this intersection of the discourses of Gukurahundi and secession, Macaphulana (2011b) posits that bitter memories of the massacres have stimulated the people of Matabeleland to repudiate “Zimbabwean nationalism” that has “massacred them”. Thus, as a result of its oppressive and exploitative nature, the Zimbabwean state, as represented by Macaphulana, has become “irrelevant” (Ihonvbere, 1994:57) to the conditions of the people of Matabeleland. Within this secessionist discourse, memories of Gukurahundi are conjured up, endowed with social meanings and transmitted in new media in ways that contribute to the re-imagination of the Ndebele national consciousness. This process of assigning social meanings to the Gukurahundi debacle in ways that promote the restoration of a pre-colonial Ndebele nation-state supports Zertal’s (2005:1) argument about the “politics of death in the service of the nation”. This politics of death denotes the intersection between memory and identity, that is, the ways in which memories of the dead are invoked to reconstruct national identities (Zertal, 2005:9).

In this intersection of Gukurahundi memories and politics, *Newzimbabwe.com* disarticulates the signifier “wound” from the hegemonic narratives of forgetting the past and rearticulates it to reinforce transformative and dismantlement discourses. This process of meaning-making supports the view that language is polysemic (Turner, 2003:32), as there are contesting social meanings of the Gukurahundi wounds and social healing. In a news article titled **Ncube urges Gukurahundi openness**, published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, Welshman Ncube is quoted as calling for “restorative compensation for the victims” of Gukurahundi (Ncube urges Gukurahundi openness, 2013). Further, Ncube appeals to the government to assume responsibility for Gukurahundi crimes and acknowledge that there are people who were “killed”, “maimed”, “lost their homes”, and also were “driven into exile” (Ncube urges Gukurahundi openness, 2013). Through this depiction of the plight of the victims, this news article exposes social domination, as within official discourses, anyone who raises the Gukurahundi issue is censured as “either a tribalist or divisionist”. Doran (2015), in an opinion piece published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, rejects Mphoko’s rendition, which exonerates Mugabe in the Gukurahundi massacres, by positing that Mugabe was the “prime architect of the mass killings that were well-planned and systematically executed”. This article, **Gukurahundi:**

**Chiwenga, Mugabe, Sekeramayi, Shiri and Zvobgo**, originally appeared in the *Daily Maverick*. The writer draws upon the declassified foreign intelligence documents to implicate Mugabe and other ZANU PF officials in the massacres. Predicational strategies, such as “perpetrators”, and transitivity material processes, such as “eliminate”, are employed to reconstruct Mugabe as an offender. Besides Mugabe, the writer exposes other “real culprits” within ZANU PF, such as Sydney Sekeramayi, Eddison Zvobgo, Emmerson Mnangagwa and Joyce Mujuru. The term “real” is a presupposition employed to counter the hegemonic strategies of blame-deflection that are manifested in Mphoko’s claim that Gukurahundi was a “Western conspiracy”.

In an opinion piece published by *Newzimbabwe.com* and titled **Zimbabwe: Memory, knowledge and future pains**, Macaphulana (2015) uses predication to represent Manheru as a “denialist” and as one of the “perpetrators” of Gukurahundi who “continue to harm the victims when they deny that the victims were ever victimised”. In addition, Macaphulana (2015) used the metaphor of a “wound” to rebuke Manheru for thinking that the “victims and survivors of Gukurahundi should remember their colonial wounds and forget their still fresh Gukurahundi wounds”. Thus, the metaphor of “wounds” constitutes a site of struggle, as this signifier is appropriated, rearticulated and used by different mnemonic communities to remember certain historical incidents, and to banish the memories of inconvenient past events. This columnist exposes the justificatory strategy of “equation” (Wodak, 2003:198; Reisigl & Wodak, 2001:108) – counterpoising Gukurahundi wounds with colonial wounds – that is deployed to silence, trivialise and minimise the debates on Gukurahundi. Thus, this intersection of the discourses of colonialism and Gukurahundi in these memory contestations buttresses Brockmeier’s (2002:15) assertion that collective memory is underpinned by the dual processes of “remembering” and “forgetting”. Within the hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist narratives, the memories of colonialism are foregrounded and remembered in discursive ways that seek to erase and forget the memories of Gukurahundi. In a nutshell, *Newzimbabwe.com* constitutes a site for the resurgence of transformative discourses that seek to expose, question and counter ZANU PF’s hegemonic perspectives that cement Gukurahundi denial, silencing and mitigation. Similarly, *Bulawayo24.com* propagates and buttresses the transformative narratives that thwart and resist ZANU PF-inspired renditions of Gukurahundi. In an opinion piece titled **Gukurahundi is not a myth neither is it a closed chapter**, the Heal Zimbabwe Trust (2015) contends that the government must acknowledge the “heinous crimes” and calls for the perpetrators to be brought to justice. Besides deploying the topos of justice as a transformative



strategy, the Heal Zimbabwe Trust (2015) advocates “dialogue”, “reparations” and “counselling” as prerequisites for national healing and reconciliation. In an article titled **Was Gukurahundi really a Western conspiracy V.P. P Mphoko**, Nteletsha we Kezi (2014) reprimands Mphoko for insinuating that the Fifth Brigade that slaughtered civilians was “taking instructions” from “Western capitals”. Thus, in representing ZANU PF and the Fifth Brigade as the perpetrators of Gukurahundi, this news website is shaping an alternative definition of social healing that is underpinned by justice, dialogue and reparations, rather than forced amnesia. Through these articles, *Bulawayo24.com* is reconstructing a narrative that thwarts the hegemonic strategies that silence, trivialise and obscure the memories of Gukurahundi.

In addition, *Umthwakazireview.com* reproduces the historical imaginations that expose and thwart the hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist discourses. In an opinion piece titled **Gukurahundi genocide: A response to Manheru and his political handlers**, Moyo (2014a) accuses Manheru of using state media to “spew ... hatred against uMthwakazi”. By using “uMthwakazi” as a referential strategy to categorise the victims and survivors of the Gukurahundi, the writer is invoking the memories of the atrocities to re-shape and re-imagine an imagined Ndebele nation-state. This membership categorisation of the wronged group as people of uMthwakazi, and the villains as the “Gukurahundist state of Zimbabwe” (Moyo, 2014a), serves as a strategy for unification and dismantlement that shapes and reproduces the Ndebele national consciousness. The term “uMthwakazi”, metonymically standing for the people of an imagined Mthwakazi/Ndebele nation-state, is employed in ways that contribute to the re-creation and reproduction of Ndebele secessionist imaginations. Further, Moyo (2014a) uses the predicational strategies “denialist”, “tribal supremacist” and “Shona supremacist” not only to discredit Manheru’s assertion that the “Gukurahundi genocide and the Holocaust are myths”, but also to reinforce an argument that the Zimbabwean nation-state is anchored upon Shona imaginations. In a nutshell, the three news websites offer sites of resistance that are producing and shaping alternative renditions of Gukurahundi memories. Memories are thus sites of struggle (Sturken, 2008:74; Huyssen, 2003:1), as in this case Ndebele memories are enacted to resist domination and imagine a different social world. Furthermore, the social meanings of Gukurahundi are diverse and multifaceted, as what counts as truth is influenced by the discursive positioning of the chroniclers of these past events. The following section focuses on the politics of naming as I explore the contesting “regimes of truth” (Hall, 1997a:49) about Gukurahundi that are shaping Ndebele identity politics. The different ways in which



Gukurahundi is named and understood on news websites have profound implications for the uses of such memories.

### **7.3 War, genocide or ethnic cleansing: Gukurahundi, new media and the politics of Ndebele nationhood**

The term “Gukurahundi” carries different social meanings, as there are various ways in which social actors are making sense of this post-colonial violence. This section therefore explores how Gukurahundi assumes “chains of significations” (Grossberg, 2005a:158), as its social meaning is disarticulated from a particular regime of thought and re-appropriated to another signification. Premised on the assumption that social relations of power are exercised, entrenched and contested in cyber-memories, this section examines how language use on news websites is contributing to the production, reinvigoration and re-imagination of an Mthwakazi nation in new media. The framing of Gukurahundi on the three websites is marked by ambiguities, nuances and fractures. Although the three news sites generally reinforce counter-hegemonic discourses, there are conflicting representations in the ways in which Gukurahundi is remembered as a genocide and an ethnic cleansing. As Gukurahundi constitutes a floating signifier, this section probes the shades of meaning and probes the implications of invoking and transmitting such collective memories on the formation and consolidation of Ndebele identity. Although *Newzimbabwe.com* published an opinion piece by Mai Jukwa (2013), titled **Gukurahundi was not genocide, not by any stretch**, which endorses the hegemonic narrative, this news website generally propagates transformative discourses. In this article, Mai Jukwa (2013) reproduces and sustains the dominant narrative by asserting that Gukurahundi was “war”, rather than genocide. The topos of “it was war” constitutes a justification strategy that is employed not only to deny, defend and mystify the wanton killings of civilians, but also to entrench what Kaiser (2005:3) terms a “culture of impunity”.

In her study of the memories of Argentina’s military dictatorship, Kaiser (2005:7) argues that “human rights abusers” tend to label traumatic past events as war in order to “conceal the brutality of their actions”. Similarly, Mai Jukwa (2013) posits that the “killings were two-way”, a perspective that can be viewed as a justificatory strategy of minimising the role of ZANU PF in instigating and executing the Gukurahundi atrocities. This argument resonates with Ranger’s (1989b:163) notion of “balance of terror”, which he uses to apportion blame for the atrocities to both the dissidents and the soldiers. However, Phimister (2012:29) censures Ranger (1989b) for failing to mention the “murderous activities of the Fifth Brigade”, and for writing as if “the

‘balance of terror’ was weighed most heavily on the side of dissidents” (Phimister, 2008:205). In addition, Mai Jukwa (2013) employs “blame-shifting” and “transfer” (Van Dijk, 1992:91) as denial strategies by arguing that the “savage massacre” was carried out by “dissidents”. It is through these discursive strategies of denial that the guilt for the atrocities is transferred and deflected from ZANU PF to the dissidents. However, this dominant narrative obscures the general knowledge that the killings, rapes, torture and other horrendous crimes were committed by the Fifth Brigade (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008a:46; Lindgren, 2005b:165; Kriger, 2003:31). Lindgren (2005b:165) rightly states that the “balance of terror” was “quite unbalanced in Matabeleland, with the Fifth Brigade and other army units causing much more harm than the dissidents”. Again, Mai Jukwa (2013) asserts that the dissidents were a “security threat” who “received aid from the local population”. Such an understanding of the past serves to represent the “dissidents” and civilians as perpetrators of the violence, and to sanctify the Fifth Brigade as a force of law and order. In this regard, the writer employs “reversal” (Van Dijk, 1992:94) and “victim-perpetrator inversion” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:36) as justificatory strategies that turn ZANU PF into victims, and the civilians who were slaughtered by the Fifth Brigade into perpetrators. The writer argues that the security forces wanted to “scare the Ndebele generality from assisting the dissidents” (Mai Jukwa, 2013), and ended up committing “crimes” out of “frustration” as they could not subdue the dissidents. The terms “scare” and “frustration” can be conceived of as euphemisms employed to justify the atrocities unleashed on the Ndebele communities. Similarly, Wodak and De Cillia (2007:332) identify the topos of “equation” that has been employed within the hegemonic narratives of Austria’s past, as the “victims of the Nazi terror who were murdered in the concentration camps are discursively placed on the same level as the soldiers who waged the war of aggression”. This discursive strategy of “blaming the victim” (Van Dijk, 1992:94) serves to deny, obscure and mitigate the role of ZANU PF in orchestrating the Gukurahundi. In a nutshell, Mai Jukwa (2013) draws upon the topos of “it was war” to argue that “in war bad things happen”, hence justifying the atrocities perpetrated against the civilians. Similarly, in an opinion article, **There is a bigger picture to Gukurahundi, says journo**, which was published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, Seery (2015) claims that Nkomo wanted to overthrow the government. He argues that, after Mugabe’s victory in the 1980 elections, “ZIPRA secretly began caching weapons across Matabeleland” and claims that “Nkomo was making a grab for power”.

However, besides examples such as those above, *Newzimbabwe.com* is framing an alternative narrative that Gukurahundi was an act of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Thus, the

reconstructions of Gukurahundi are underpinned by nuances, as there is tension between the political and ethnic social understandings of the reasons behind the massacres. Most news stories on this website reconstruct a narrative that Gukurahundi was a genocide that was unleashed by ZANU PF against civilians in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions in order to subdue a dissident movement. Firstly, in an article titled **Gukurahundi was most likely genocide**, Mpala (2013) asserts that Gukurahundi was an act of “genocide”, and accuses Mai Jukwa (2013) of revisionism and thinking that “brutality can be justified and then subsequently forgiven”. The predicative “revisionist” indicates that memories are not singular and unitary, but are socially constructed and contested, as there are different understandings of what constitutes the truth about past events. Secondly, Masikati (2013) rejects Mai Jukwa’s (2013) perspective by arguing that Gukurahundi was “definitely” a “genocide” committed by Mugabe. In an article titled **Gukurahundi was definitely genocide** and published by *Newzimbabwe.com*, Masikati (2013) posits that Gukurahundi “wasn’t targeted at Ndebeles per se”, but at “Nkomo and his supporters”. To augment this political interpretation of Gukurahundi, the writer provides hypertexts that connect audiences to a YouTube video that shows Nkomo’s interview with the BBC in 1985 (see section 7.7.3 for an analysis of this YouTube video). Through this process of hypertextuality, *Newzimbabwe.com* and YouTube are able to “speak to each other” (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4) in ways that enhance audiences’ knowledge of Gukurahundi. In naming the victims as “Nkomo and his supporters”, rather than “Ndebeles per se”, Masikati (2013) is not only reinforcing the political interpretation of Gukurahundi, but thwarting Ndebele secessionist imaginations. Masikati (2013) argues that the Mthwakazi Liberation Front (MLF), a secessionist group, is “misguided”, an indication that, in this article, Gukurahundi past events are remembered in ways that counter and thwart Ndebele secessionist calls. This rendition of the political motivation for Gukurahundi is reinforced in a number of scholarly works (Rwafa, 2012; Vambe, 2012; Nyarota, 2006). In this intersection between memory and journalism (Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014:1; Zelizer, 2008:1), the past events are invoked and turned into news in order to reinforce a particular discursive position.

Macaphulana (2015) challenges the discourses of silence by nominating Gukurahundi as a “genocide” whose “mass graves still open up in Lupane and Maphisa when heavy rains pound”. Thus, the same event (Gukurahundi) is assigned different social meanings, as this article is refuting the denialism and historical amnesia inherent in state discourses, and shaping a narrative that Gukurahundi was an act of genocide. Further, *Newzimbabwe.com* published an

article titled **Gukurahundi was genocide: US group**, which signifies Gukurahundi as a “genocide” that was committed against 20 000 “civilians” in Matabeleland and Midlands. This news story was written after a ruling by Genocide Watch, an international human rights group, that Gukurahundi constituted a genocide. The representations of Gukurahundi as “genocide”, “mass civilian murder” and “crimes against humanity” (Gukurahundi was genocide: US group, 2010) reinforce the transformative discourses calling for the prosecution of the perpetrators of this violence. At the same time, this article exposes the tension between the political and ethnic renditions of the massacres, as Gregory Stanton, president of Genocide Watch, posits that the “Shona Fifth Brigade” and “Shona youth militias” were participants in the slaughter of “ethnic Matabele people” (Gukurahundi was genocide: US group, 2010). This membership categorisation of the perpetrators as “Shona” and the victims as “ethnic Matabele people” helps to reproduce and consolidate the ethnic interpretation of the massacres. The ethnic interpretation is tied to Ndebele secessionist agitations, whilst the political understanding seeks to maintain the current national Zimbabwean boundaries.

*Newzimbabwe.com* exposes the ambiguities and complexities in the recollection of Gukurahundi memories. Doran’s (2015) recollection of the massacres also indicates the tension on *Newzimbabwe.com* between the political and ethnic renditions. The writer, firstly, argues that Gukurahundi was a campaign “well-planned and systematically executed” to “eliminate opposition” and establish a one-party state. Secondly, Doran (2015) exposes the conflation of ethnic and political identities by asserting that ZAPU had an “overwhelming support among Ndebele”, who, as a result, came to be seen by the government as an “impediment” to the establishment of a one-party state. This argument, that Ndebeles were perceived as enemies of a one-party state, reinforces Werbner’s (1998b:92-93; 1996:13) rendition that Gukurahundi was a product of ZANU PF’s “quasi-nationalism”, as the ruling party castigated and unleashed terror upon communities that were perceived to be against a single and unified “quasi-nation”. In addition, Doran (2015) argues that Zvobgo made a revelation about ZANU PF’s central committee’s decision that “there had to be a massacre of Ndebeles”. Such an argument, namely that Gukurahundi was orchestrated by ZANU PF against “Ndebeles” rather than ZAPU supporters, helps to promote and sustain Ndebele Particularism, as it implies that the violence was ethnically motivated.

At the same time, some *Newzimbabwe.com* articles blatantly reject the political interpretation and invoke the ethnic understanding of the massacres. In an opinion piece titled **Zimbabwe: The case for a two-state solution**, Mkhwanazi (2010) posits that Gukurahundi was a “clear

programme of extermination and ethnic cleansing”. In this reconstruction, the rhetor employs referential strategies such as “Mthwakazi nationals”, “innocent nation” and “Mthwakazians” to produce and reinforce the argument that the Gukurahundi victims were killed because of their ethnic/national belonging, rather than their political affiliation to ZAPU. He argues that “Mthwakazians were not massacred because they were ZAPU supporters, but simply because they were Mthwakazians” (Mkhwanazi, 2010). The membership categorisation of the wronged group as “Mthwakazi” and “Mthwakazians” constitutes strategies of dismantlement, which act as reminders of an imagined Mthwakazi nation-state. Thus, the rhetor posits that the victims were slaughtered in their capacity as “Mthwakazi nationals” (Mkhwanazi, 2010), a rendition that stimulates and endorses Ndebele secessionist bids. Mkhwanazi’s (2010) argument is that, if Mugabe wanted to “crush ZAPU support, he would have also targeted ZAPU supporters in Mashonaland”, since this opposition party drew support from across the whole of Zimbabwe. He also asserts that “Shona supporters and leaders of ZAPU” were “spared” and “never molested” by the government, whilst “Mthwakazians” in ZAPU/ZIPRA were “incarcerated”, “harassed”, “forced into exile”, and “cold-bloodedly murdered” (Mkhwanazi, 2010). An analysis of transitivity indicates that material processes were employed to suggest that Gukurahundi was a crusade against Ndebeles/Mthwakazians, rather than ZAPU supporters in general. Mkhwanazi (2010) concludes by asserting that Mthwakazi should seek “total self-rule” from her “colonial master”. This construction of Mthwakazi as a colony of Zimbabwe is part of the discursive strategy of dismantlement that advocates secession and the restoration of pre-colonial African borders (Mutua, 2007:142; Davidson, 1992:10).

*Newzimbabwe.com* published a news story titled **Manheru: Mugabe’s anti-Ndebele agent, MLO**. In this article, Israel Dube is quoted asserting that Manheru’s description of Gukurahundi as a “myth” constitutes an attack on the “Mthwakazi nation” (MLO, 2015). Dube was the Secretary for Information and Publicity of the Mthwakazi Liberation Organisation (MLO), a secessionist group. Besides labelling Manheru and Mugabe as “gukurahundists”, Dube repudiates the Zimbabwean nation-state by claiming that it is founded upon “Shona superiority” and the “marginalisation and oppression of Matabeleland” (cited in MLO, 2015). He proclaims that “we are not Zimbabweans”, and urges the people in Matabeleland and the diaspora to “stand up and defend Matabeleland and regain Matabeleland statehood” (cited in MLO, 2015). In a nutshell, Gukurahundi assumes social significance in the narration and reconstruction of Ndebele national identity, as memories of victimization and persecution are invoked to inspire secessionist sentiments. As such, memory, death and identity are

intertwined, as memories of national cataclysms, debacles and genocide constitute a “nation’s biography” because they are selected, appropriated, mobilised and reconstructed “as our own” (Anderson, 1983:206).

*Bulawayo24.com* propagates a social understanding that Gukurahundi was an act of genocide. The news stories and opinion pieces on this news website demonstrate an ambivalent and nuanced approach to the social meanings of Gukurahundi, as both the political and ethnic explanations are reproduced. Nteletsha we Kezi (2014) signifies Gukurahundi as the “brutal killing of Zimbabwean civilians” in “mostly Ndebele-speaking regions of Matabeleland and the Midlands”. Thus, within this recollection of events, the victims of Gukurahundi are constructed as “Zimbabwean civilians”, rather than “Mthwakazians” as is the case within secessionist discourses. In addition, Mthethwa (2015) challenges the hegemonic narratives in his opinion piece, titled **Why Gukurahundi atrocities in Matabeleland and Midlands is genocide**. The writer draws upon the Holocaust and Rwandese cases to develop an argument that Gukurahundi was an act of genocide against the people of Matabeleland and Midlands. Mthethwa (2015) illustrates the conflation of ethnic and political identities by asserting that “the ZANU PF Shona dominated government referred to ZAPU Ndebele people dissidents”. The nomination and ascription of “Shona” as “ZANU PF”, and “Ndebele” as “ZAPU” and “dissidents”, demonstrate that memories of Gukurahundi are invoked in ways that contribute to the reproduction and consolidation of ethnic identities. The writer posits that Gukurahundi was orchestrated in order to “denigrate, liquidate, and decapitate the whole of the ZAPU constituency and support”, a notion that supports the political understanding that the aim was to establish a one-party state. On the other hand, the rhetor suggests an ethnic interpretation of the massacres, as he argues that Gukurahundi was a product of the “1979 ZANU PF grand plan”<sup>37</sup> of annihilating “Ndebele culture, language and custom”. By drawing upon the blueprint of this grand plan to evoke and reconstruct memories of Gukurahundi, the writer reinforces an argument that the violence was an act of ethnic cleansing (Matshazi, 2007:67). This ethnic interpretation is supported by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2009a:183; 2008a:47), who asserts that Gukurahundi was a manifestation of “Shona triumphalism” that was orchestrated to dismantle Ndebele Particularism. In summary, *Bulawayo24.com*’s narrative on Gukurahundi is complex

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<sup>37</sup> The 1979 grand plan is a “mysterious document” purportedly crafted by “Shona intellectuals” within ZANU PF, which outlines plans for entrenching Shona hegemony, and for the subjugation, marginalisation and exclusion of Ndebele people in the political and socio-economic spheres in Zimbabwe (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2011:27).



and ambivalent, as it reconstructs Gukurahundi as a genocide that was orchestrated against Ndebele-speaking people because of both their ZAPU political affiliation and their ethnic belonging.

*Umthwakazireview.com*, on the other hand, differs from the other two news websites in that it constructs and shapes a narrative that foregrounds an ethnic interpretation of the Gukurahundi. In an editorial, Dube (2014b) posits that Gukurahundi was an act of genocide orchestrated by a “sectarian and tribal nation state of Zimbabwe” against the “people of Matebeleland”. By employing referential and predicative strategies, such as “sectarian” and “tribal”, the writer is constructing the perpetrator of the massacres as “Zimbabwe”, and the victims as the “people of Matebeleland”. The terms “people” and “Matebeleland” are rearticulated within this secessionist discourse to signify an imagined Ndebele national community. Thus, Dube (2014b) draws upon constructive strategies, such as collectivisation and unification, to construct the memories of Gukurahundi in ways that strengthen and solidify Ndebele national sentiments.

In the same vein, Moyo (2014b) authored an opinion piece that represents Gukurahundi as an act of genocide. In an article titled **22 December a celebration of Gukurahundi genocide**, Moyo (2014b) argues that the people of Matebeleland “should” use the 22 December public holiday to commemorate and remember the victims of Gukurahundi, rather than to celebrate the unity accord signed between ZANU and ZAPU. In using the modal verb “should” to champion a secessionist discourse, he argues that Gukurahundi was an “annihilation of Matebele people by the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade of Zimbabwe” under the “instruction of ZANU PF and its supporters”. In this rendition, the writer portrays the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade as a “Shona crack unit that was created for the purposes of ethnic cleansing” of Ndebele people. Thus, from this perspective, the perpetrators are constructed as ZANU PF, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade and the Shona, whilst the victims are depicted as Ndebeles and people of Matebeleland. An analysis of transitivity indicates that Moyo (2014b) constructs Gukurahundi as the “killing” and “massacre” of “Ndebele” people by a “Shona” military unit, a representation of participants and their roles that not only reinforces an ethnic rendition of this post-colonial violence, but also contributes to the reconstructions of Ndebele particularistic identity. Ndebele identity is essentialised, as the victims of Gukurahundi are nominated as “Ndebele” people, which obscures the fact that the Matabeleland and Midlands regions are inhabited by other ethnic groups, such as the Kalanga, Tonga and Venda.



Through the discursive strategies of unification and collectivisation, Ndebele-ness is reconstructed as a national identity that incorporates all the ethnic groups that were victimised during Gukurahundi. The writer concludes by asserting that the “solution for the people of Matebeleland is not to exist in a country called Zimbabwe, but to campaign for the restoration of their state that was destroyed by Cecil John Rhodes”. In this way, memories of Gukurahundi are appropriated and assigned social meanings that help to reproduce the secessionist discourse of restoring pre-colonial African borders. These findings corroborate the arguments that memories of Gukurahundi have strengthened and shaped the Ndebele particularistic identity (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:169; Lindgren, 2005b:156). However, I emphasise that the new media reconstructions of Ndebele nationalist imaginations are achieved by representing Ndebele identity as singular, unitary and essential.

Moyo (2014a) similarly postulates that Gukurahundi was a “holocaust” against the “uMthwakazi people”. Thus, the term “holocaust” is an allusion that equates the plight of the “uMthwakazi” people with that of the Jews in Nazi Germany. Similarly, in an article on an interview written by Dube (2014c) and titled **Agenda 4 action: Paul Siwela defiant as ever**, Paul Siwela represents Gukurahundi as a “genocide committed against Mthwakazi people” by the government of Zimbabwe. He adds that the “only guarantee” that “this barbaric act” will not be repeated against “Mthwakazi nationals” is for the Mthwakazi people to “break away from Zimbabwe and re-establish their statehood”. The article contains an image of the proposed map of the imagined Mthwakazi nation-state, an indication that this map is a sign that metonymically stands for the imagined nation. Like other “symbolic containers” of nationhood, such as flags and anthems (Eriksen, 2007:2), I argue that the map binds people, discursively, into a national collective by demarcating insiders and outsiders. The nomination of the victims as “uMthwakazi people” and “Mthwakazi nationals” (Dube, 2014c), rather than ZAPU supporters, constitutes banal nationalism, as these names are invoked and reproduced as a reminder to the readers of their Mthwakazi homeland. The social meanings of Gukurahundi are complex and nuanced on this news website, as terms such as “Ndebele”, “Matebeleland” and “Mthwakazi” are appropriated and rearticulated to assert that the victims of Gukurahundi were killed as an Ndebele national community, rather than ZAPU supporters. *Umthwakazireview.com* illustrates how death, memory and identity are intertwined in new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory. In the same way that memories of Masada and the Holocaust are summoned and reconstructed in Israel to strengthen Zionist nationalist imaginations (Zertal, 2005:1; Zerubavel, 1994:74; Schwartz *et al.*, 1986:147),

*Umthwakazireview.com* is instilling a sense of shared tragedy and collective trauma in order to forge, cement and reproduce sentiments of Ndebele national identity. Zertal (2005:3) rightly posits that, in the politics of nationhood, the living “exhume the dead”, bestow social meanings on their deaths, and turn them into “historic dead”. Against this backdrop, I argue that *Umthwakazireview.com* is selecting victims of this particular historical cataclysm to appropriate, frame and assign social meanings to their deaths in ways that contribute to the production and reconstruction of Ndebele Particularism.

In general, most articles on *Newzimbabwe.com*, *Bulawayo24.com* and *Umthwakazireview.com* estimate that over 20 000 people were killed during Gukurahundi. However, these news websites also expose the politics of numbers, as Mkhwanazi (2010) believes that “nearly 50 000” were killed, while Siwela (in Dube, 2014c) claims that “40 000 unarmed Mthwakazi citizens” lost their lives. Mazilankatha (2015) argues on *Umthwakazireview.com* that “at the very least 100 000 Ndebeles-Mthwakazians” were “cut down” by the Zimbabwean state in a “genocidal campaign”. This study does not seek to question the veracity of any of these estimates of casualties, but rather to draw our attention to how these different evocations of the past are shaped by the discursive positioning of the chroniclers of the past. In a nutshell, all three news websites repudiate the hegemonic discourses by reconstructing Gukurahundi as genocide, rather than war. However, the referential and predicative strategies used in representing the victims and perpetrators expose the ambiguities and complexities characterising new media renditions of Gukurahundi, as terms such as “Mthwakazi”, “Matabeleland” and “Ndebele” assume a chain of connotations within different regimes of truth.

#### **7.4 A call for the right to mourn: Remembering Gukurahundi victims through news websites**

Considering that repressive legal instruments such as the Public Order and Security Act (POSA) are being deployed by the state to suppress freedom of expression and freedom of assembly (Moyo, 2009a:61; Moyo, 2007:82), this section examines the role of news websites as alternative spaces that enable Ndebele communities to remember and commemorate the victims of Gukurahundi. As alluded to in section 3.7.1, efforts by communities in Matabeleland to commemorate and memorialise the victims have been criminalised and thwarted by the government. Firstly, I probed the role of news websites in commemorating the past by analysing an editorial that appeared on *Umthwakazireview.com*. In this editorial, titled

**Zimbabwe government blocks planned Gukurahundi genocide memorial event again,** Dube (2015) condemns the decision by the government and the police to “block” a Gukurahundi memorial event that had been organised by Ibhethshu likaZulu, a Matabeleland-based pressure group. According to Mbuso Fuzwayo, a member of Ibhethshu likaZulu, the reason given by the police for barring the commemoration was that they feared that the event would have caused “disunity”. The lexis “disunity” constitutes a hegemonic strategy deployed to silence, minimise and criminalise the discussions on Gukurahundi. Thus, within the hegemonic discourses that are hinged upon forgetting the Gukurahundi past, the understanding is that Gukurahundi commemorations are explosive, as they can bifurcate the nation-state along ethnic fault lines. The writer dispels the official discourses by using material processes, such as “blocks, “blocked” and “refused”, to construct the Zimbabwean government and police as authoritarian, and undermining the people of Matabeleland’s right to grieve and commemorate their loved ones. To reinforce the transformative and dismantlement discourses, Dube (2015) employs visual texts for rhetorical purposes. The writer uses a poster of Ibhethshu likaZulu that depicts an Nguni warrior armed with a shield and a spear. The message attached to this image is: “vala ngebhetshu Mthwakazi”.<sup>38</sup> The other message on the poster is: “Ibhethshu likaZulu: commemorating 28 yrs of Matabeleland genocide. In prayer we demand justice”. Thus, through this blending of visual and written texts, the writer is summoning pre-colonial Ndebele warrior myths to galvanise readers to challenge the status quo. The phrase “vala ngebhetshu” is a popular war cry that is ingrained in the imaginations of the people of Matabeleland, as it evokes memories of the Ndebele resistance against colonialism. In this way, the writer is reminding the Ndebele readers about the heroic deeds of their ancestors in discursive ways that seek to arouse them to fight for justice and the commemoration of Gukurahundi. Thus, “vala ngebhetshu” is decontextualised from its pre-colonial context – as a war cry for the struggle against colonialism – and recontextualised to the present socio-political situation to mobilise Ndebeles in their struggle against Gukurahundi injustice.

Secondly, a pressure group called Matabeleland People in Diaspora issued a statement that was published by *Bulawayo24.com*, admonishing the government and police for blocking the Gukurahundi memorial event. This pressure group represents itself as “an organisation of the

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<sup>38</sup> “Vala ngebhetshu” is a popular Ndebele war cry that can be translated loosely as “protect/defend yourself with a loincloth”. This war cry was used by the pre-colonial Ndebele warriors during the Anglo-Ndebele War (Nyathi, 2015; Hadebe, 2001:513).

people of Matabeleland aiming at fighting the injustices that the people of that region are exposed to by the government of Zimbabwe”. In this statement, titled **Mthwakazi condemns the blocking of Gukurahundi commemoration**, Matabeleland People in Diaspora (2015) argues that the memorial event would have given the survivors of Gukurahundi a platform to “seek justice for the atrocities”, “mourn and grieve their loved ones”, and “exhume and rebury their loved”. Thus, the writer draws upon the pathetic emotions of pity and empathy to reinforce the topoi of justice, exhumation and social healing that underpin the transformative discourses of Gukurahundi. Within the transformative discourses, it is held that national unity and healing are to be achieved by remembering and commemorating the victims of Gukurahundi, rather than erasing and forgetting this dark historical episode. Lastly, *Newzimbabwe.com* serialised and disseminated the CCJP and LRF (2007) report, which provides the gruesome details of the Gukurahundi atrocities. Thus, this news site has become an “archive” (Hoskins, 2009:93; Haskins, 2007:401) that preserves and transforms traces of the past.

These news websites are playing a pivotal role in the processes of honouring and remembering the victims of Gukurahundi. Firstly, they enable Gukurahundi survivors to make a call for the right of “recountability”, that is, the right to “make a citizen’s memory known, and acknowledged in the public sphere” (Werbner, 1998a:2). Secondly, news websites are used by Ndebele communities for mobilisation, engagement and networking in ways that preserve and transmit memories of Gukurahundi. In connecting individuals and pressure groups located in different geographical spaces, these news websites are helping to forge and solidify what Mitra (2001:30) refers to as “alliances” or “cyber communities”. These news websites hence constitute “deterritorialized spaces” (Tettey, 2009:144) that are enabling Ndebele communities in the homeland and the diaspora to connect, and preserve and transmit Gukurahundi memories across geographical borders. Increasingly, news websites are constituting not only sites for commemorating the victims of Gukurahundi, but also spaces for Ndebele communities in the diaspora to practise “long-distance nationalism” (Tettey, 2009:153; Anderson, 1998:58) and reanimate their Mthwakazi nationalist longings.

Thirdly, and drawing upon Doka’s (1989) seminal work on “disenfranchised grief”, I consider the experiences and plight of the Gukurahundi survivors as constituting disenfranchised grief, as the Zimbabwean government is hindering and prohibiting them from publicly mourning their loved ones. Disenfranchised grief entails a “grief experienced by those who incur a loss that is not, or cannot be, openly acknowledged, publicly mourned or socially supported” (Doka, 1999:37; 1989:4). In other words, this disenfranchisement denotes the “denial of a mourner’s

right to grieve” (Attig, 2004:197). In this socio-political context, in which grief is disenfranchised and the government officials are unsympathetic to the pains of the survivors, I argue that news websites are providing opportunities for Ndebele communities not only to publicly mourn and remember their loved ones, but also to call upon the perpetrators to recognise the pain they have caused. As the mourning and commemoration of the Gukurahundi victims are constrained and criminalised in “real” public spaces, new media constitute virtual spaces that are providing an alternative platform for Ndebele communities to mediate their traumatic experiences, and grieve their deceased together.

## **7.5 Speaking the “unspeakable” stories: New media and the mediation of written survivor testimonies**

This section interrogates the role of new media in enabling survivors of Gukurahundi to publicly recall and share their harrowing experiences. In focusing on the survivors’ testimonies, the purpose is to examine how news websites are shaping Ndebele Particularism by mediating, preserving and transmitting these traumatic memories. I draw upon the notion of the “voice” (Mitra, 2001:30) and the idea of “media witnessing” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2014:594) as frameworks for analysing the testimonies of survivors that were submitted to *Bulawayo24.com* as letters to the editor. The focus is on the mediation of trauma as a process that “defines an injury, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and elicits transformation” (Pinchevski & Liebes, 2010:270). Testimonies of a traumatic “lived past” denote “representations either by those who have lived through such events or by those who have been either told or shown such lived realities, either directly or indirectly, and have been moved to convey to others what has been impressed upon them” (Simon & Eppert, 1997:176). Thus, testimonies are a means of transmitting knowledge about the past (Simon & Eppert, 1997:176), and for “working through traumatic memories” (Strejilevich, 2006:701). Considering that testimonial accounts are told from an “intimate perspective”, and usually through the “voice of a first-person narrator” (Strejilevich, 2006:706), it is important to state, from the outset, that this study considers these written and oral testimonies on the selected websites as representations or constructions, rather than essential “truths”. As such, I treat these survivors’ testimonies as narratives or perspectives that are shaped by socio-political contexts and media institutional conditions (see section 7.7 for a discussion of audiovisual testimonies). Considering that the writers of testimonies cannot be identified or verified, it is important to acknowledge that their contributions might be fabrications, and hence cannot be treated as essential “truths”. However, such a concession is

not meant to trivialise the traumatic experiences of the Gukurahundi victims, but to underscore that, in this new media environment, it is virtually impossible to establish the factual truth of these particular “testimonies”. At the same time, the writers of these testimonial accounts might be obscuring their identities due to the volatile political environment in Zimbabwe.

### **7.5.1 News websites and survivors’ testimonies: Turning private grief into shared trauma**

Firstly, I examined testimony written and submitted to *Bulawayo24.com* by Concerned Citizen (2015). The narrative, titled **Manheru! I witnessed Gukurahundi brutal killings at 7**, is a response to Manheru’s claim that Gukurahundi is a myth. Strejilevich (2006:710) argues that “witness accounts are important to the effort of defying attempts to disappear the past and absolve those responsible for systematic torture and murder”. The survivor’s testimony was sent to this news website via the WhatsApp messenger application. *Bulawayo24.com* did not publish the mobile number of the sender, but only displayed the country code for South Africa, which suggests the location of the author. Concerned Citizen (2015) relives his/her horrific experience of witnessing “the brutal” killings of a group of villagers by the Fifth Brigade at Gobhi Primary School in Lupane, Matabeleland North, when he/she was seven years old. The writer narrates that the Gukurahundi militia “slaughtered bigger students calling them dissidents”, and “killed Leader Nxumalo, Matholwa Ncube, sekaDojiwe Moyo, and many others” (Concerned Citizen, 2015). It is important to unpack how language is used in this testimony to frame a particular narrative. Firstly, the writer establishes that the victims were “a group of villagers” and “bigger students”, referential strategies that reinforce the argument that the violence was targeted at civilians, rather than dissidents (Phimister, 2009:473). In addition, Concerned Citizen (2015) uses terms such as “slaughtered”, “brutal” and “killing” to highlight the terror unleashed upon the civilians. As such, the social actors and their roles are represented in a way that seeks to counter the discourses of silence that construct Gukurahundi as a myth.

Further, the term “dissidents” can be construed as a criminonym that was deployed by the Fifth Brigade not only to label “bigger students”, but also to denigrate and criminalise Ndebele-ness. This recollection of events reinforces an argument that, during this violent episode, ethnic, political and insurgent categories became interwoven, as Ndebele-speaking people were accused of being “dissidents” and ZAPU supporters (Alexander *et al.*, 2000:222; Alexander & McGregor, 1999:246). In addition, this testimony suggests that *Bulawayo24.com* is a site for the memorialisation of the Gukurahundi victims, as the writer not only recounts his/her



traumatic experiences, but also identifies some of the people who were killed. Considering that the hegemonic forces want the memories of Gukurahundi suppressed, silenced and forgotten, it is safe to argue that, through the testimonies of survivors, *Bulawayo24.com* is attempting to keep memories alive by honouring, remembering and memorialising the victims. Through this journalistic storytelling mode, the Gukurahundi survivors establish and consolidate their position as an “interpretive community” (Zelizer, 1993:219) that reproduces and circulates social meanings of this traumatic past event. Lastly, the use of WhatsApp to send testimonies indicates that this instant mobile message application is contributing to the transmission, preservation and reconstruction of Gukurahundi memories.

I furthermore examined another survivor’s testimony that was also written as a response to Manheru’s remarks on Gukurahundi as a myth. The article, **Gukurahundi horror, parents killed as teen watched**, was submitted to *Bulawayo24.com* by Gukurahundi Victim (2015). The writer describes his ordeal of witnessing, as a 14-year-old, the torture and killing of his father, mother and brother by the Fifth Brigade in Tsholotsho, Matabeleland North. Gukurahundi Victim (2015) gives an account of the gruesome torture and suffering inflicted upon his family by the Fifth Brigade. He recounts the events of 1984, when 12 “Gukurahundi soldiers” (Gukurahundi Victim, 2015) came to his homestead, ordered them to slaughter a goat and prepare food, before torturing and killing his father, uncle, mother and brother. The writer recalls how the soldiers slapped, “kicked” and “raped” his mother, whom they accused of cooking for “dissidents quickly and for them slowly” (Gukurahundi Victim, 2015). The narrator remembers the three soldiers taking his mother to a room where he “heard her scream very hard for a long time”, although he didn’t know at that time that they were “raping” her. In addition, the writer describes how his uncle and brother were ordered to “dig a grave” for his father, before they were also shot and killed. Gukurahundi Victim (2015) also recounts how the soldiers “shouted” in Shona at his mother who was half “naked and bleeding on the mouth”, telling her to “follow her husband” to the grave. Besides recounting the brutalities perpetrated by the Fifth Brigade, the writer narrates the traumatic legacies of this violent episode. He states that, as an orphan, he could not continue with his education because he did not have money for school fees. Gukurahundi Victim (2015) recalls how he was forced to leave the country to seek employment in South Africa, a narrative that exposes the long-lasting impacts of Gukurahundi on Ndebele communities.

An analysis of the referential strategies used in this alleged testimony suggests that the perpetrators are constructed as “soldiers” who were “Shona” speakers, and the victims are



represented as civilians in Matabeleland. This depiction of Shona-speaking soldiers being deployed to commit wanton killings against Ndebele-speaking communities solidifies an ethnic interpretation of the massacres. In addition, this narrative of past events seeks to dislodge the hegemonic position that represents Gukurahundi as a myth, as the survivor's testimony exposes the terror and brutality unleashed by the Fifth Brigade upon Ndebele communities. Material processes, such as "ordered", "kicked", "raping", "shouted" and "killed" are employed to capture the physical harm, sexual violation and other forms of violence inflicted on the civilians. Terms such as "coughing blood", "scream", "naked", "bleeding" and "buried" further depict the gruesome, humiliating and traumatic experiences of the Gukurahundi victims. The depiction of an unknown man buried with the survivor-witness's parents reinforces the transformative discourses of the exhumation and reburial of Gukurahundi victims. At the same time, this testimony highlights the trauma of survivors who were witnesses to the torture and killing of their relatives, and even made to participate in the killing of their loved ones, such as by digging a grave. In a nutshell, the representation of the physical and psychological torture of civilians at the hands of the Fifth Brigade strengthens the transformative calls for truth, justice, counselling and healing for the victims and survivors of Gukurahundi. Through new media testimonies, the survivors are able to produce and disseminate objects of knowledge that have been repressed by the state.

Similar to Pinchevski and Liebes's (2010:267) affirmation that radio enabled Holocaust survivors to mediate and share their traumatic experiences, I argue that *Bulawayo24.com* is shaping and mediating the collective trauma of Gukurahundi survivors. Thus, the "private traumas" are transformed into a "socially shared trauma" (Pinchevski & Liebes, 2010:267) through cyberspace. As these painful past experiences are socially mediated through new media, private grief is turned into public mourning in ways that help to keep the memories of Gukurahundi alive. It is through such testimonies of shared suffering and collective victimisation that Gukurahundi memories are shared, preserved and circulated through new media. As such, *Bulawayo24.com* is transmitting Gukurahundi memories across spatial and temporal locations, and enabling those who never experienced these traumatic events to share in the suffering of the Gukurahundi victims. Further, *Bulawayo24.com* is playing a role in the creation of "postmemory" (Hirsch, 2012:4) through a transgenerational transmission of traumatic Gukurahundi memories, to be inherited by a generation that did not directly experience these atrocities. It is through these survivors' testimonies that the knowledge of that painful past is bequeathed to the "generation after" (Hirsch, 2012:5).

### 7.5.2 New media offering a “voice” for the disenfranchised groups

New media are offering an opportunity for the survivor-victims of Gukurahundi to recount their own stories and to reconstruct their social realities. Following Mitra’s (2005:377) theorisation of the “voice”, I postulate that the traditionally excluded and emasculated Ndebele communities are being enabled by new media to “utter a point of view”. Considering that the survivors of Gukurahundi have been denied a voice in mainstream spheres to remember and commemorate their deceased loved ones, news websites have emerged as an alternative avenue for these marginalised and silenced narratives to emerge. Thus, the survivors are being provided a space to openly speak about their “unspeakable stories” (Mitra, 2001:30) concerning the harrowing Gukurahundi incidents. The survivors are using *Bulawayo24.com* to tell their own stories, rather than be “spoken for” (Mitra, 2001:31), as is the case within official discourses, in which ZANU PF officials frame a narrative that Gukurahundi is a closed chapter, and a divisive topic. This voice has the “potential of being heard” (Mitra, 2005:379), as it “produces a call that the dominant has a moral obligation to acknowledge”. In these cyber-memory reconstructions, the call is for an official acknowledgement and apology for the atrocities, the prosecution of the perpetrators, and the exhumation, reburial and commemoration of the Gukurahundi victims. In other words, *Bulawayo24.com* is producing and shaping an Ndebele “voice” that has previously been silenced and occluded, but now is calling for truth, justice and commemoration for Gukurahundi.

### 7.5.3 Role of new media in witnessing

New media also are playing a role in the witnessing of Gukurahundi events. Drawing upon the notion of “media witnessing” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2014:594; 2009a:1), I examined how witnessing was performed on *Bulawayo24.com* in ways that contributed to the shaping of Ndebele historical imaginations. Media witnessing is understood as the “witnessing performed in, by, and through the media” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2014:596; 2009a:1). Informed by these insights, I argue that the traumatic experiences of Gukurahundi are witnessed and mediated in testimonies given by survivors on *Bulawayo24.com*. It is through the presence of survivor-witnesses on *Bulawayo24.com* that the painful experiences of Gukurahundi are transmitted, preserved, and shared for the benefit of audiences who have no first-hand knowledge of these past events. The testimonies of primary witnesses are produced and circulated on *Bulawayo24.com* in order to give authority to the transformative discourses calling for Gukurahundi justice, commemoration and truth. As survivors establish and sustain their

authority as memory agents by positioning themselves as having “been there” (Zelizer, 2007:408; Peters, 2001:718) when Gukurahundi occurred, I argue that survivors’ testimonies are reproduced on *Bulawayo24.com* to resist and dislodge the hegemonic strategies that are denying, minimising and silencing Gukurahundi memories. In addition, witnessing is performed through this news website by the positioning of “media audiences as witnesses to depicted events” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2014:594; 2009a:1). As they read the testimonies, media audiences who do not have first-hand experiences of the traumatic events are being turned into “potential testimony producer(s)” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009b:300).

It is pertinent to examine the readers’ comments on Gukurahundi Victim’s (2015) testimony in order to make sense of how audiences interpret, mediate and engage with the suffering of the Gukurahundi victims. Kyriakidou (2015:215) developed a typology of media witnessing for analysing how Greek television audiences engage with media reports of “distant suffering”. This “typology of witnessing” consists of four areas: “affective, ecstatic, politicised, and detached witnessing” (Kyriakidou, 2015:219). In the same light, I interrogate how the readers are experiencing and mediating the suffering of the Gukurahundi victims using the user comments feature. Affective witnessing focuses on the audiences’ “emotional reactions” to the distant catastrophic events (Kyriakidou, 2015:220). In this study, I argue that the readers’ engagement with the survivor’s testimony signifies affective witnessing, as feelings of pity, empathy and compassion towards Gukurahundi victims are enacted. Thus, the readers’ comments are dominated by expressions such as “I am sorry” and “very sad”, which suggests a sense of pity and sympathy for the Gukurahundi victims and survivors. Limkani Dewa’s response is: “my deepest condolences, I know the pain ... May your hurting heart be comforted” (cited in Gukurahundi Victim, 2015). Khothamani Ncube adds that “*indaba yakho ibuhlungu mfowethu*” (cited in Gukurahundi Victim, 2015).<sup>39</sup> Through terms such as “hurting” and “pain”, the topos of healing emerges as a discursive strategy of transformation.

Secondly, ecstatic witnessing is similar to affective witnessing, except that there is “intense emotional involvement with the events witnessed” and “unconditional empathy with the people suffering” (Kyriakidou, 2015:223). In this regard, Holy Moyo notes that “It’s like it happened yesterday. My heart is beating faster as I read this all too familiar horror” (cited in Gukurahundi Victim, 2015). This response to the survivor’s testimony indicates that the web user is fully

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<sup>39</sup> This Ndebele sentence can be translated loosely to mean “your story is painfully touching”.

immersed in the plight of the witnessing victim. Further, politicised witnessing is underpinned by political struggles, as there is a “search for causes and the attribution of blame and political responsibility for the events witnessed” (Kyriakidou, 2015:224). In this vein, I identify comments that attribute blame and demand transformation. Limkani Dewa evokes the topos of justice by asserting that “ZANU PF will surely pay” (cited in Gukurahundi Victim, 2015). John Huruva affirms that “perpetrators have to account for this” (cited in Gukurahundi Victim, 2015). Lastly, detached witnessing denotes the “experience of the suffering of others as something remote and ultimately irrelevant to the viewers’ everyday life” (Kyriakidou, 2015:226). From my analysis of the aforementioned written testimonials, none of the comments fit into this category. However, the readers’ comments from audiovisual testimonies on YouTube are characterised by detached witnessing (see section 7.7.1 for further discussion). Therefore, through the readers’ comments facility, *Bulawayo24.com* is inviting audiences to witness and participate in the suffering of “distant others” (Kyriakidou, 2015:215).

#### **7.5.4 The intersection of new media, survivor testimonies and cultural studies**

Cultural studies provide a useful framework for analysing the reconstructions of memories in survivor testimonies and the readers’ comments attached to them. As testimonies enable us to understand an “experience and its aftermath” (La Capra, 2003:209), cultural studies provide a vantage point for making sense of how the Gukurahundi survivors are using new media to create, generate and circulate the social meaning of their lived experiences. It is through testimonial witnessing on *Bulawayo24.com* that the victims are attempting to come to terms with their traumatic past. In addition, audience reception studies (Strelitz, 2000:38) provide a framework for exploring how audiences, situated within a particular socio-historical context, are using the comments facility to interpret the survivors’ testimonies and produce their own social meanings of Gukurahundi. Through this interactive function of *Bulawayo24.com*, the readers are actively participating in the processes of reconstructing and transmitting Gukurahundi memories. This production, sharing and circulation of Gukurahundi memories on *Bulawayo24.com* demonstrates that this news website is a space for the formation and strengthening of “mediated remembering communities” (Jones, 2012:391). This news website is enabling Gukurahundi survivors to recollect their memories, forge a connection, and share their experiences of suffering and victimisation in ways that destabilise the unequal power relations.

## 7.6 History wars: Readers' comments and the multiple representations of Gukurahundi

Having argued that the three selected news websites are discursively contributing to the transformation and dismantlement of the status quo through news stories, opinions, editorials, and written testimonies, it is important to explore how readers are using the online users' comments facility to respond to these articles and reconstruct their social understandings of Gukurahundi. The interactivity feature of news websites enables participants to contribute in the reproduction of the knowledge about Gukurahundi past events. In acknowledging the agency of audiences in their reception of media texts, I explored the multiple representations of Gukurahundi. Although the articles (opinions, news stories, testimonies, etc.) on the selected news websites are framing transformative and dismantlement discourses, the readers' comments constitute a site of struggle between the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic articulations of Gukurahundi. Against this backdrop, this section explores these "history wars" (Tulviste, 2011:217) between the discourses that seek to defend, justify, minimise, trivialise and deny Gukurahundi, and those that seek to transform, thwart, resist and dismantle the prevailing social order. I argue that the referential and predicational strategies employed to represent victims and perpetrators are not only shaping social understandings of the past, but also contributing to the recreation of Ndebele Particularism. The users' comments are drawn from the following articles on *Bulawayo24.com* and *Newzimbabwe.com*:

- **I witnessed Gukurahundi torture, Speaker** (2014). Article 1.
- **Gukurahundi: Chiwenga, Mugabe, Sekeramayi, Shiri and Zvobgo** (Doran, 2015). Article 2.
- **Mugabe massacred 20 000 innocents, MDC-T tells Mphoko** (2015). Article 3.
- **Gukurahundi no closed chapter, rights group** (2015). Article 4.
- **Secessionist group to serve divorce papers on Mugabe** (2014). Article 5.
- **Zimbabwe: Memory, knowledge and future pains** (Macaphulana, 2015). Article 6.
- **There is a bigger picture to Gukurahundi, says journo** (Seery, 2015). Article 7.
- **Mugabe's death not regretted before Gukurahundi apology** (Dzimiri, 2014). Article 8.

- **Gukurahundi killed 80 000, Eddie Cross claims** (2014). Article 9.
- **Was Gukurahundi really a Western conspiracy V.P P Mphoko?** Nteletsha we Kezi (2014). Article 10.

### **7.6.1 Gukurahundi, readers' comments and hegemonic strategies of justification: Topoi of "threat", "national security" and "war"**

There are online participants who are reproducing and sustaining the hegemonic discourses that place responsibility for Gukurahundi on the "dissidents", thus justifying the actions of ZANU PF and the Fifth Brigade. Jukwa (article 1) posits that "Nkomo's divisive and destructive dissidents invited Gukurahundi", and hence they "bear full responsibility for the destruction that they invited upon Zimbabwe". By nominating the "dissidents" as belonging to Nkomo, and using the predicates "divisive" and "destructive" to describe their actions, the interlocutor sustains the dominant discourse that denies and minimises the damage and pain inflicted by the Fifth Brigade upon the people of Matabeleland and Midlands. The term "invited" can be construed as a euphemism that seeks to defend the massacres that were committed by the Fifth Brigade. However, this perspective is rebutted by Guest (article 1), who argues that to "call them Nkomo's dissidents is shameful ... Do not taint Nkomo's legacy by trying to falsely implicate him as the leader of the dissidents". Although Nkomo denied any links with the "dissident" movement (Phimister, 2009:473; Alexander, 1998:153), some participants are blaming him in ways that seek to absolve Mugabe of the massacres. The topos of threat is heightened by Jukwa's claim that the Fifth Brigade was a "legitimate law enforcement group" that was "putting down the criminality of Nkomo's dissidents", who wanted to "destabilise and destroy" Zimbabwe (article 1). Within this dichotomy, the "dissidents" and Nkomo are represented as criminals and threats to national security, whilst the Fifth Brigade is celebrated as a force of law and order. Thus, this topos of national security is mobilised to legitimate and justify the atrocities committed by the Fifth Brigade. However, Huluman (article 2) counters this narrative by asserting that "the government did not go after dissidents. They went to the villages to kill people". This view corroborates Phimister's (2009:473) assertion that "the Fifth Brigade was never put up against such armed dissidents", as "its energies were devoted to the rural civilian population".

Further, Maramechavio (article 1) justifies Gukurahundi by claiming that the "original idea" of the "errant ZIPRA fighters" was the "establishment of an exclusive Ndebele state in

Zimbabwe”. However, Zhii (article 1) responds by labelling Maramechavio and Jukwa as “evil liars” and “morons” who are attempting to “sanitize Mugabe and ZANU”. P (article 1) adds that “ZIPRA people in the army deserted because they were being abused by the Shona ZANU commanders”. This counter-hegemonic narrative corroborates Alexander’s (1998:158) perspective that the “dissidents” fled the army because of the persecution and repression they suffered at the hands of the military personnel. In these memory cyber-wars, different social groups and individuals construct their social meanings of the past in order to maintain, or resist, the social order. Within this dominant discourse, the responsibility for Gukurahundi is attributed to the “dissidents”. Cde (article 1) asserts that “this was a war and there were two sides. It’s like the response of the Israelis to the Palestinians’ firing of rockets into Israel. How dare Palestinians slap a sleeping lion?” Through this topos of war, and the Israel-Palestine allusion, the rhetor justifies the atrocities by asserting that the people of Matabeleland provoked ZANU PF. Further, the victims of Gukurahundi are constructed as “collaborators” with the dissidents. The assumption is that the civilians were aiding the “dissidents”. Cde Manesi (article 1) states that “the dissidents and their collaborators met their comeuppance”. This participant rationalises and defends Gukurahundi by arguing that the Fifth Brigade targeted anyone they “thought could assist the wayward Ndebele dissidents”. Cde Manesi (article 1) applauds “gallant Shiri and Mhangagwa” for “ridding our country of the Ndebele dissident menace”. By nominating the dissidents as “Ndebele” and the civilians as “collaborators”, this topos of war not only justifies the atrocities, but labels Ndebele people as “dissidents”. Thus, by choosing to name the dissidents as “Ndebele” rather than “ex-ZIPRA”, this participant not only criminalises Ndebele identity, but reproduces Ndebele-ness as belonging to a community that was brutalised by the Fifth Brigade.

Some interlocutors are challenging the topos of threat by asserting that the Fifth Brigade targeted Ndebele people, rather than the dissidents. An analysis of the membership categorisation of victims and perpetrators sheds light on new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. Spox (article 2) argues that “from ZANU a dissident was any male who spoke Ndebele. Rural areas became a no go area because the Fifth Brigade were roaming the areas killing Ndebele men”. Phunyukabemphethe (article 3) adds that villagers were forced to “sing Shona songs, in praise of Shona gukurahundi Mugabe”. Further, Proudly Mthwakazi 59 (article 3) posits that the “Shona gukurahundis” targeted “Mthwakazi people”. Similarly, Phunyukabemphethe claims that Gukurahundi was the “handiwork of Shona gukurahundis” (article 3), and labels Cde Manesi and other interlocutors as “Shona tribalists (and)



gukurahundi supporters” (article 1). Through these referential and predicational strategies that are employed to signify the victims as the “Ndebele” and “Mthwakazi people”, and the villains as “ZANU” and “Shona”, the participants are strengthening Ndebele Particularism. Proudly Mthwakazi 59’s (article 3) assertion that the Fifth Brigade was “bayonetting villagers for not speaking Shona” indicates the intersection between language and identity in these cyber-memories. Thus, Shona language constituted a shibboleth, as one’s survival depended upon the ability to speak this language. Derrida (2005:22) uses the notion of “shibboleth” to describe the role of language as a marker of difference, as it includes/excludes social groups. In his study on the intersection between language and identity in South Africa, Siziba (2014:174) deploys the notion of “shibboleth” to argue that language is used to index foreigners as the “Other”. From the cyber-reconstructions of Gukurahundi, language is conceived as a marker that was not only used to construct Ndebeles as “dissidents”, but also to reconstitute them as foreigners/out-groups. Such recollections of the past are reproducing Ndebele identity politics, as they are shaping social understandings of belonging, inclusion and exclusion. In a nutshell, the topoi of “threat”, “war” and “national security” are deployed by online users to legitimate, justify and trivialise the Gukurahundi atrocities.

### **7.6.2 “MaShona massacres” and Gukurahundi: The topoi of retribution and equation as discourses of silence**

As was discussed in Chapter 6, some participants, identifying themselves as Shona-speaking, justify and defend Gukurahundi by evoking the memories of pre-colonial Ndebele raids on Shona communities. The argument is that Gukurahundi was justifiable because the Ndebeles committed crimes against the Shona people in the pre-colonial era. These discourses serve not only to defend and justify Gukurahundi, but also to mitigate and silence transformative calls for justice, commemoration and compensation for the Gukurahundi victims. Equal opportunity racist (article 3) argues that participants should also give “attention to the Shonas that were massacred, raped and displaced when the Mthwakazi people arrived in *madzimbabwe*”. Besides evoking a nativist ideology that positions Ndebele people as allochthonous in Zimbabwe, this participant uses “equation” (Wodak & De Cillia, 2007:332) as a justificatory strategy that balances Gukurahundi with the pre-colonial Ndebele raids, hence silencing debates on Gukurahundi. In this narrative, the people of Matabeleland and Midlands are categorised as descendants of the Ndebele kingdom, a perspective that solidifies Ndebele Particularism. Joemuda (article 2) reinforces this discursive strategy of equation by asserting that “Ndebeles

used to raid the Shonas, taking their grain, killing their men and kidnapping their women. Then came gukurahundi to balance the equation”. Abel (article 2) adds that the Ndebeles “forget what they also did to us in the past”. Further, Hombarume (article 4) remonstrates:

What of the MaShona raids? Why are these issues one-sided? Lobengula and Mzilikazi massacred Shonas as well, how is this going to be addressed? Are Shonas less important? How do you address one side of an act when you all know there are two sides?

Thus, Gukurahundi is counterpoised or neutralised by invoking “MaShona massacres” in discursive ways that seek not only to shield the perpetrators of Gukurahundi, but also to suppress any discussion on these atrocities. It is clear that the justificatory strategy of balancing one thing against another is being used to silence the transformative calls for the prosecution of the perpetrators of Gukurahundi. Similarly, 48Mheta11 (article 5) advises people to “stop raising this issue of Gukurahundi” because the “two people (Ndebele and Shona) have wronged each other”. Although these hegemonic narratives are deployed to silence discussions on Gukurahundi, they are also shaping Ndebele Particularism. By reconstructing Gukurahundi as retribution for the pre-colonial Ndebele sins, this hegemonic perspective endorses the ethnic interpretation that Gukurahundi victims were brutalised because of their Ndebele identity, rather than for their ZAPU political affiliation. As such, Ndebele identity is being reshaped, as all those communities in Matabeleland and Midlands that suffered during the Gukurahundi era are categorised as Ndebele people. This naming of victims as “Ndebeles” constitutes a “regional-geographic” understanding of Ndebele-ness (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2008b:175).

However, some participants who identify themselves as Ndebele question the rationale of using the memories of pre-colonial Ndebele raids to justify Gukurahundi:

So for 100 years you held the hatred in and when the British handed you all the weapons in 80, you started going out murdering innocent mothers and children who were not alive back when the Ndebele were abusing the Shona. TomJoadi15 (article 2).

Who said the so-called MaShona should not be addressed? If they have to be addressed, then why not call on the government to provide a platform for this to happen; instead of springing up from nowhere with this idea only when you hear Gukurahundi being mentioned? Sigelekeqe (article 6).

Who is stopping you from prosecuting Lobengula? He is dead, Mugabe is alive. I am Ndebele and I was not born during those days. I was around during this massacre. Zulu (article 3).

The aforementioned comments rightly expose the fallacious suppositions that Gukurahundi should not be addressed and the perpetrators should not be brought to book because the Ndebele people conducted raids on Shona people in the 1800s. Although the dominant discourses are conjured up and mobilised to enact and sustain forced amnesia in relation to the Gukurahundi atrocities, these perspectives are being resisted and thwarted by counter-hegemonic narratives. Thus, readers' comments constitute a site of struggle between those who want Gukurahundi to be remembered, and those who want it forgotten.

### **7.6.3 Let bygones be bygones: “Let’s move on”, forced amnesia and the discourses of silence**

Other participants apportion blame on the Gukurahundi victims for failing to “move on”. Within this hegemonic discourse, “moving on” entails silence and forgetting about the traumatic events of the past. It seeks to entrench a culture of impunity and forced amnesia, rather than addressing the injustices of the past. Thus, “moving on” is a phrase that carries multiple connotations, as it can be articulated in dominant discourses, as in this case, to entrench forced forgetting of the past, or be rearticulated in transformative perspectives to suggest that the victims have managed to confront their traumatic past. Firstly, there is a group of interlocutors who summon the memories of slavery and colonialism to argue that Gukurahundi survivors should “move on”, in the same way that the victims of colonialism and slavery have also forgiven and forgotten those horrendous experiences. Thus, Muzezuru (article 1) asserts that “the victims of colonialism are still there just as the victims of Gukurahundi are still there. Why should we forgive and forget the atrocities committed by Rhodies<sup>40</sup> and not those by blacks?” This hegemonic perspective is resisted by Bobsled (article 1), who contends that “using colonialism and slavery to justify Gukurahundi madness is beyond stupid”. In other words, through this topos of “moving on”, memories of slavery and colonialism are conjured up to silence transformative discussions on Gukurahundi.

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<sup>40</sup> A derogatory term referring to white people from Zimbabwe.

Secondly, other participants believe that the Gukurahundi issue must not be raised because people should dedicate their energies to more important issues, such as reviving the country's economy. Chilo (article 1) argues that "the politicians will apologize in due time. We need to meanwhile move on, we have a crumbling economy that needs our combined ideas". This discourse that Gukurahundi victims must "move on" and focus on the "crumbling economy", denotes the production and manufacturing of a "consensus" (Hall, 1982:82). Within this hegemonic discourse, the taken-for-granted assumption is that reviving Zimbabwe's economy is more important than addressing the legacies of Gukurahundi. In addition, what is being naturalised and legitimated is a belief that redressing Gukurahundi injustices constitutes a hindrance to the country's prosperity. Thus, the presupposition is that people who are raising the Gukurahundi issue are working against the national interest. Furthermore, there are interlocutors who assert that the Gukurahundi issue was resolved by the Unity Accord. GeorgeBachinche (article 7) states that "the main actors Nkomo and others moved on. Yet here you are failing to move on because you have acquired persecutory syndrome. If Nkomo could move on, so should the children of his so called followers". In this discourse of silence, Gukurahundi victims are told to "move on" because Nkomo "moved on" by signing the Unity Accord that ended the atrocities. Such discourses about the Unity Accord constitute what Phimister (2008:206) terms the "myopic celebration of the peace of the grave in Matabeleland". Thus, the legacy of Nkomo is invoked not only as a symbol of unity and reconciliation, but also as a discursive strategy of silencing and suppressing transformative calls for justice and commemoration for the Gukurahundi victims. Within this discourse of silence, participants who mention the Gukurahundi issue are reprimanded for undermining the legacy of Nkomo. As such, the readers' comments indicate that the Ndebele are experiencing "disenfranchised grief" (Attig, 2004:198; Doka, 1989:4), as they are being told to "move on" in the same way as Nkomo did, and to focus on reviving the country's economy. However, there are counter-hegemonic narratives that are calling for justice, compensation and truth. Some interlocutors (Zhii, article 1) want the government to release the Chihambakwe Commission Report, which details the events of the massacres. Bemphethephunyuka (article 3) advocates compensation through government assistance to the Gukurahundi victims and their children, with "national documentation, education, and employment opportunities". However, other users evoke the topos of retribution when they assert that "Ndebeles should just revenge" (Popiro, article 1). Furthermore, Landilani (article 1) argues that the solution to the Gukurahundi problem is the restoration of the Mthwakazi kingdom. Roman empire 2000 (article 5) views secessionist sentiments as "tribalistic garbage", and Marz (article 5) concurs that Matabeleland secession is

a “tribal fantasy”. In a nutshell, online users want the Gukurahundi issue to be resolved, although these participants have different imaginations on how this closure/moving on is to be achieved.

#### **7.6.4 Memory, new media and unbridled freedom of expression: Hate speech, moderation, and the pitfalls of readers’ comments**

An analysis of readers’ comments exposes the tension between unfettered freedom of expression and hate speech. Thus, flaming insults, stereotypical remarks and other offensive comments of a racist, ethnocentric and sexist nature are part of the cyber debates on Gukurahundi. Readers’ comments attached to an opinion piece by Dzimiri (2014) are a glaring example of the downside of unbridled freedom of expression. In these cyber interactions on Gukurahundi, Patience Museri (article 8) posted a comment that “*maNdevere hamusati machema muchanyatso chema coz inini pandiri kuzoita*<sup>41</sup> head of state I am going to kill each and every Ndebele speaking lizard”. Such a comment constitutes hate speech, as the participant is not only labelling Ndebele people as “lizards”, but is also inciting violence against this group. Thus, this inflammatory remark not only endorses and defends Gukurahundi, but is helping to promote the recurrences of Ndebele secessionist imaginations, as it represents the Ndebele as an unwanted community in Zimbabwe. Patience Museri’s comment was castigated by other participants, with predicates such as “mad woman”, “evil heart”, “filthy tribalist” and “devil” being used in this thread. Zuma (article 8) referred to Patience as “*sidla magundwane*”,<sup>42</sup> which constitutes a stereotypical ethnic image of all Shona people as rat eaters. Besides this perpetuation of ethnic stereotypes, Nothando (article 8) issued a warning to Patience Museri: “you forget you have children whose pictures are all over Facebook”. The above comment indicates the dangers of posting comments on *Bulawayo24.com* using Facebook usernames. In addition, Masauso Karanga (article 8) complained that “Byo24 news is trying to incite hatred among Ndebeles and Shonas by printing unnecessary stories and comments”, and adds that this news website is “trying to create another Rwanda in Zimbabwe”. Thus, Rwanda becomes a symbol of ethnic carnage, as this participant evokes the memories of the Rwandese genocide (Mamdani, 2001b:4) to underscore the dangers of these inflammatory remarks. At another

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<sup>41</sup> A statement in Shona that can be translated loosely as “Ndebele people you haven’t cried/suffered enough, because if I were to become head of state”.

<sup>42</sup> An Ndebele phrase that can be translated as “rat eater”.

level, the Patience Museri “moment” highlighted my dilemma, as a researcher, about whether to publish what seems to be the real-life name of this participant who produced this hate speech, or to protect her/his identity. Upon reflecting on this academic quandary, and assessing the pros and cons of disclosing the identity of the user, I resolved to publish the identity of the user, as it appeared on the thread because the comment appeared in a public space, and also for the sake of the trustworthiness and credibility of my research findings.

Further, *Bulawayo24.com*'s discussion forums are replete with foul language and derogatory remarks. In IndabaNdaba's (2012b) forum, the derogatory name “*maswina*” is used by some Ndebele speakers to label and disparage Shona-speaking people. “*Amasvina*” is a Shona word meaning “the dirty ones” (Musiyiwa & Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 2005:77). The Ndebele tend to use the term “*amaswina*” as a derogatory word to refer to the Shona people (Musiyiwa & Matshakayile-Ndlovu, 2005:79). In addition, in these Ndebele-Shona cyber-wars, terms such as “arrogant”, “crooked”, “lazy” and “thieves” are employed by the participants to attack each other. This problem of hate speech and inflammatory language is not confined to *Bulawayo24.com*, as phrases such as “Shona gukurahundi idiot”, “fool” and “stupid” are commonly used by participants to attack each other on *Newzimbabwe.com*. Rheingold (2002:121) rightly posits that the flipside of virtual communities is that they tend to be dominated by “flamers, bullies, bigots, (and) charlatans”. In one of the vitriolic attacks, Kabhaskoro (article 1) warns Cde Manesi that “we lost families, arrangements can be made for you to be visited for retribution”. In addition, members of the white community who participate in Gukurahundi cyber interactions tend to be expurgated. Derogatory remarks such as “Rhodie”, “Rhodesians”, “colonialist” and “racist” were used to disparage and exclude Eddie Cross from contributing to the Gukurahundi discussions (article 9). In another thread, Slambe (article 10) chastises another participant, Ian Beddowes, for commenting on Gukurahundi by saying, “you even have the guts to comment after your fathers stole so much and slaughtered so many of our forefathers”. Thus, within this discourse, white people are not permitted to engage in Gukurahundi discussions due to the “sins of their fathers”. As such, discourses position subjects in ways that include and exclude them from contributing to the reconstructions of Ndebele memories. There is code-switching on both news websites, as the participants use English, Ndebele and Shona. It is striking to note that the Ndebele and Shona languages tend to be deployed when participants are articulating vulgar or offensive remarks. In contrast to *Bulawayo24.com*, it seems that user content is moderated on *Newzimbabwe.com*, as some participants protest that their comments have been blocked or deleted. Mambo (article

4) complained that “these Ndebele editors deleted my comments about Gukurahundi”. Besides the construction of *Newzimbabwe.com* as a Ndebele news site, this participant’s complaint suggest that comments deemed by the news site’s moderators as offensive or constituting hate speech are blocked. The above comment also reveals the fleeting nature of cyber-memories, as these digital texts can be removed or moderated by website administrators, confirming Chun’s (2008:164) conception of digital memories as an “enduring ephemeral”.

## **7.7 Lest we forget: News websites, YouTube, and a call to remembrance of Gukurahundi victims**

In this section I examine how YouTube is transforming the ways in which memories are created, archived and transmitted across space and time. Drawing upon Van Leeuwen and Kress’s (2011:107) notion of “multimodality”, I analysed YouTube videos that were connected to the selected news websites. Audiovisual, sound and written texts from these videos were analysed in order to explore how new and social media are shaping the discourses on Gukurahundi. Through purposive sampling I selected only YouTube videos centred on the theme of Gukurahundi that also were connected to the three news websites. I used the “YouTube” and “videos” sections on the news websites to select videos for analysis. In addition, I selected one YouTube video by clicking on a hypertext that appeared on an opinion piece on *Newzimbabwe.com*.

### **7.7.1 Gukurahundi, YouTube, and witnessing**

I first present my analysis of a YouTube video that appeared on the archives of *Bulawayo24.com*. This video, titled **Zimbabwe – Gukurahundi – What Bob, Mnangagwa and Msika had to say**, was uploaded by Lyfe Maphosa on 27 April 2010. It contains footage from a documentary that was shot in Matabeleland by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) crew at the time of the Gukurahundi massacres. This YouTube video captures the oral testimonies of survivors in the post-Gukurahundi era as they recount their harrowing experiences. It also represents the conflicting narratives of ZANU PF officials (Mugabe and Mnangagwa) and ZAPU officials (Nkomo and Joseph Msika) on Gukurahundi. The video is 9.52 minutes long, and contains 96 users’ comments and has 50 000 views. The identity of the narrator is unknown. At the outset, the narrator situates the genesis of the Gukurahundi problem by stating that some of Nkomo’s men “went back into the bush to fight on”, and “secret arms” were discovered in the “ZAPU stronghold of Matabeleland”. Thus, within the dominant



discourse, it is assumed that Nkomo and his ZAPU party were plotting to overthrow the government (Meldrum, 2004:50; Alexander, 1998:156). However, the reporter thwarts this dominant narrative by stating that “Nkomo denied any knowledge of them (arms)” (Maphosa, 2010).

The video then shows a group of survivors in a rural setting, recalling and sharing their traumatic experiences of “what happened over 15 years ago”. Four survivors (three women and one man) give chilling accounts of what transpired during the Gukurahundi epoch. These testimonies are shared in the Ndebele language, but the video provides English subtitles. It is important to analyse the contents of these testimonies appearing in Maphosa (2010) in order to make sense of the social meanings of Gukurahundi that are being reproduced and circulated in cyberspace:

They were being beaten and told to lie down. Sticks were used to beat them. After digging a mass grave they were told to go into it. Then they started shooting. When they had finished shooting we were told to use our hands to bury the bodies. (Man 1)

My husband took his passport and his watch and handed them over. Then he went into the grave. We didn't know their songs, but we were told to sing them anyway. (Woman 1)

All we knew was that we were being killed. We had no idea why. We were told to chant ‘Forward with Robert Mugabe! Down with the dissidents!’ (Woman 2).

The grave was full. Otherwise we'd have been forced into it. But it was full. When they had enough people, they told us to cover the grave and sing on top of it. (Woman 3)

The representations of the participants and their roles highlight the horrendous experiences of the survivors and the victims. Thus, the survivors were beaten, tortured, forced to chant ZANU PF slogans, and ordered to “sing on top” of the graves of their loved ones. This transitivity not only represents the physical and mental torture of Matabeleland civilians at the hands of the Fifth Brigade, but also reinforces the transformative calls for truth and justice for the Gukurahundi victims. In addition, the transformative discourses of exhumations, reburials and counselling are strengthened, as the survivors not only recount the traumatic experiences of witnessing their relatives being murdered, but also recall the agonies of being forced to sing on

top of the mass graves. Through these cyber-memories, this video not only represents the physical abuse against the Ndebele people, but also the cultural violence meted out on this social group. Thus, the video not only illustrates the plight of the survivors, who were not able to perform funeral rites to remember and honour their departed relatives, but also depicts the struggles of an Ndebele community trying to come to terms with its painful past. In addition, the Ndebele-Shona ethnic bifurcation is reinforced through the survivors' recollections of events. The Ndebele-speaking survivors remember being forced by a Shona-speaking militia to sing ZANU PF songs in the Shona language. Such a rendition of the past not only illustrates the centrality of issues of language in Gukurahundi memories, but strengthens the ethnic interpretation of the violence. Thus, ethnic identities are enacted and performed through storytelling.

From the above testimonies, one can argue that new media are playing a pivotal role in the reproduction, mediation and transmission of survivors' testimonies. Through the Internet, the survivors acquire a voice to recollect past events and to share these narratives, which hitherto have been repressed by the state. The historical accounts of this "witness generation" (Kaiser, 2005:3) are being archived in new media and handed down to future generations in order to keep the memories of Gukurahundi alive. Van House and Churchill (2008:295) rightly argue that the Internet constitutes "technologies of memory", as it mediates and circulates collective memories. Thus, these digital memories are fluid and are being transported across historical epochs. This process of transforming individual grief into socially shared traumatic memories echoes Pinchevski and Liebes's (2010:267) argument that media play a vital role in transmitting survivors' testimonies and shaping collective trauma. At the same time, audiences are being invited to share in the suffering and traumatic experiences of the "distant others" (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009a:1). Through new media testimonies, audiences (Ndebeles and other social groups) are symbolically transported to a particular historical and geographical location to witness the collective experiences of the Gukurahundi victims. Similarly, Torchin (2007:84) posits that digital media play a key role in the formation of "witnessing publics". At the same time, I acknowledge that, as a researcher who analyses YouTube witness testimonies, I am, in turn, being hailed or interpellated as a potential witness who can share and transmit Gukurahundi memories. Such is the nature of qualitative studies that researchers are not detached from the phenomena being studied (Bryman, 2012:36). In addition, other Gukurahundi survivors are being called upon to commemorate and remember their loved ones, a discursive process that is contributing to the formation and strengthening of a community of

Gukurahundi survivors. Although some of these survivors may never have met physically, they are being connected by their shared sense of suffering that is mediated through new media.

Through YouTube, audiences who did not witness the horrors of Gukurahundi first-hand are being invited to witness, share and confront the suffering of the survivors. By being exposed to this video, audiences are being positioned as secondary witnesses to these disturbing events. In this way, witnessing is not only performed in the media through the presence of survivor-witnesses giving their testimonies in the video, but it is also performed “through the media” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009a:1). This means that the media “interpellates” (Frosh & Pinchevski, 2009b:300) audiences as witnesses of these traumatic events, thus enabling them to experience and engage with the suffering of the Gukurahundi victims. In addition, new media are “bearing witness” (Tait, 2011:1221) to the traumatic Gukurahundi events. By “bearing witness”, the audiences move beyond merely seeing trauma, but they assume responsibility (Tait, 2011:1220; Zelizer, 2002:698). Thus, viewers are called upon to adopt a “public stance by which they become part of a collective working through trauma together” (Zelizer, 2002:698). Through this YouTube video, the public is being invited to participate in the transformative calls for truth, justice and commemoration for the Gukurahundi victims.

This YouTube video furthermore symbolically transports the viewers to the Gukurahundi period in order to reveal how different political actors interpreted this violence. In analysing these different social understandings, the purpose is to probe the possible implications of these digital texts in shaping public memories of the Gukurahundi. Firstly, there is video footage of Nkomo in 1983, lamenting that that the “beatings, the killings, the torture is unbelievable” (cited in Maphosa, 2010). He adds that “people are being taken daily at night and they disappear forever” (cited in Maphosa, 2010). The material processes, namely “beatings”, “killings” and “torture”, expose the suffering of the Gukurahundi victims and demand the violence to end. However, the social meanings of Nkomo’s statement are rearticulated and recontextualised in the present socio-political context to thwart the hegemonic discourses of silence, and advocate calls for truth, official acknowledgement and justice. Secondly, there is footage of Mugabe in 1985 denying that the Fifth Brigade was committing atrocities in Matabeleland:

Wherever you have operations, you are bound to have one or two untoward incidents, but not the mass graves which they talked about. Where are they? You travel the whole length and breadth of Matabeleland and you won’t find a single mass grave (cited in Maphosa, 2010).

Mugabe's interpretation has been conjured within the hegemonic discourses to deny, silence and defend the Gukurahundi atrocities. The lexis "operations" is a euphemism employed to obscure and downplay the violence that was unleashed upon civilians in Matabeleland. However, this dominant discourse of denial is exposed and thwarted by video footage of a mass grave and images of bones. In addition, Mnangagwa buttresses the hegemonic discourse by asking: "How many people died at the hands of the dissidents?" (cited in Maphosa, 2010). Mnangagwa's rhetorical question can be conceived of as a justificatory discursive strategy of blame-shifting and transfer that seeks to absolve ZANU PF and the Fifth Brigade of the atrocities by deflecting the guilt to the dissidents. In a nutshell, this BBC documentary is recontextualised and reshaped on YouTube to reconstruct memories of Gukurahundi by exposing the denial strategies that were used by ZANU PF officials. Although the state-controlled press perpetuated the government discourse, the BBC and other international media outlets, such as the *Guardian* (Britain) and *Newsweek* (USA), provided a counter-hegemonic narrative of the Matabeleland atrocities (Phimister, 2009:475; 2008:200-202).

Lastly, this video reinforces the political interpretation of the motivations for Gukurahundi. Mugabe (quoted in Maphosa, 2010) is shown declaring: "*Pamberi ne ZANU! Pamberi ne one-party state* (Forward with ZANU! Forward with one-party state)." He also proclaims that "the dissident party (ZAPU) and its dissident father (Nkomo) are both destined not only for rejection but for utter destruction as well". Within the hegemonic discourses, the predicational strategies "dissident party" and "dissident father" were employed as attributes to criminalise and denounce ZAPU and Nkomo, and hence justify and defend the atrocities in Matabeleland. Mugabe's speech, I argue, is being conjured up and recontextualised in the current environment to buttress an argument that the atrocities were committed to emasculate an opposition party, rather than liquidate an ethnic group. Bolter and Grusin's (1999:1) conception of new media as the "remediation" of old forms is confirmed in this study, as a documentary from the digital archives of the BBC is being manipulated, uploaded and shared on YouTube and circulated through *Bulawayo24.com*. Thus, through *Bulawayo24.com*'s feature of "multimediality" (Mabweazara *et al.*, 2014:4), this news website carries sound, video and audio texts from YouTube and a BBC film in order to disseminate memories across different generations.

It is important to examine the users' comments attached to this YouTube video to explore their readings of the past. As such, I analysed the audiences' contributions as they interpreted this video and engaged with the traumatic experiences of the Gukurahundi victims. Thus, audiences are not simply consuming media texts, but are contributing to the reproduction of the social

meanings of past events. Firstly, some participants empathised and identified with the suffering being mediated on this video. Magodie (cited in Maphosa, 2010) notes that “we suffered a lot, to see a lot of bones and to never know what happened to your parents is something else”. The deictic “we” is employed as a discursive strategy of collectivisation that not only solidifies a sense of shared suffering, but also reproduces and strengthens the construction of a cyber-community of Gukurahundi victims. In addition, the term “bones” is used as an object of memory, a marker of suffering, death and unresolved legacies of the past. The bones thus are symptomatic of the transformative discourses of commemoration, exhumation and reburial of Gukurahundi victims.

In addition, some participants’ comments are indicative of “politicised witnessing” (Kyriakidou, 2015:224), as the focus is on guilt, blame and accountability for Gukurahundi. In the first instance, there are audiences whose interpretations are in tandem with the social meanings of the video, as they attribute responsibility for the atrocities to Mugabe. Ronnie, for example, asserts that “time has come to hold Robert Mugabe accountable”. However, there are also oppositional readings of this video that reinforce hegemonic discourses. Mataka07 regards this video as a “deception”, “shameful” and “fabrications of white racist colonialists and neo-colonialists” that are “designed to frame Mugabe as the planner of the mass murders in Matabeleland” (cited in Maphosa, 2010). In this regard, this participant places blame for Gukurahundi on the “military intelligence” of the South African apartheid government. Although it is acknowledged that the South African apartheid government was training and arming insurgents known as Super ZAPU to destabilise Zimbabwe (Rwafa, 2012:312; Phimister, 2009:473; Alexander, 1998:156), Mataka07’s rhetoric seeks to absolve Mugabe and blame the apartheid government. Another participant, Zolas, laughs and poses a question: “*hehehe ko kwafa vangani*”<sup>43</sup> under Mzilikazi and Lobengula?” (cited in Maphosa, 2010). This comment can be viewed as constituting a justificatory strategy of “balancing one thing against another” (Wodak *et al.*, 2009:36), as the commentator evokes memories of pre-colonial Ndebele raids on Shona communities in order to defend and justify the Gukurahundi atrocities. The expression “hehehe”, signalling laughter, indicates the callousness of the participant towards the plight and suffering of the Gukurahundi victims depicted in the video, and this

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<sup>43</sup> A Shona statement that can be translated loosely as “how many people died”.

constitutes “detached witnessing” (Kyriakidou, 2015:226). In summary, the users’ encounters with the suffering of the Gukurahundi victims are multifaceted and complex.

### 7.7.2 Gukurahundi, YouTube, and witnessing texts

In this section I report on my analysis of a video titled **Gukurahundi 2** that was uploaded on YouTube by Thebe38 on 9 February 2011. This video appears on the links on *Bulawayo24.com* and *Umthwakazireview.com*. However, I selected the one on *Bulawayo24.com* because it contains users’ comments. The credits on the video suggest that it was produced in 2011 by Omuhle Films, and edited by Busani Ncube. In framing a narrative that Mugabe must be brought to justice for the Matabeleland atrocities, Omuhle Films refashioned the original digital material of Gukurahundi that was produced by the BBC film crew in the 1980s. It is important to analyse how, through this process of hybridity, Ndebele communities are using YouTube to conjure historical memories by refashioning, remodelling and reconstructing narratives that were produced in the 1980s. The oral commentary, subtitles and video footage were taken from the BBC Gukurahundi documentary, whilst Omuhle Films producers added written texts and songs. In analysing the written, sound and video texts, the purpose was to explore how this process of remediation is contributing to the reconstructions and reshaping of Ndebele memories. The video is 14.52 minutes long, and the narrator is David Lomax, a BBC reporter. The title of the video that appears on the screen is “Mugabe’s genocide”, a message that serves to implicate Mugabe in the atrocities committed in Matabeleland and Midlands. In addition, the video shows a mass grave that was filmed by the BBC crew in Nkayi, Matabeleland North. A ZAPU official is shown digging a pit and informing the BBC crew that the mass grave contained an estimated fifty corpses. Lomax reports seeing the remains of a man whose “hands are tied behind his back, tied with wire”. The ZAPU official states that the bodies were brought by “government trucks” to be buried in the pit. Lomax asserts that:

From what we have seen, we are satisfied that most of the allegations of violence and atrocities are true, are recent, and are still continuing ... there seems to be no doubt that most of these acts are being committed either by organised gangs of Mr Mugabe’s own political supporters or certain units of the Zimbabwe national army (quoted in Thebe38, 2011).

The mass grave and the remains of a Gukurahundi victim constitute “witnessing texts” (Tait, 2011:1224; Frosh, 2006:265) that signify the Gukurahundi atrocities. A “witnessing text” constitutes an audiovisual and written sign that “allows participants to make themselves



imaginatively present at the event” (Frosh, 2006:272). These texts help us to construct and mediate our imaginations of the past by symbolically transporting us “there” (Frosh, 2006:274). As such, the mass grave and a victim’s remains constitute visual cues that act as reminders of the brutality that was unleashed upon Matabeleland civilians. In the same way as Zelizer (2002:699) posits that photographs “concretize memory” by enabling audiences to visualise traumatic past events and bear witness, I argue that this YouTube video depicting a mass grave acts as proof or evidence that atrocities were committed in Matabeleland. In this vein, this video strengthens the transformative discourses of justice for and reburial of the Gukurahundi victims. In addition, the referential and predicational strategies, such as “organised gangs of Mugabe’s own political supporters” and “certain units of Zimbabwe national army” (Thebe38, 2011) are employed to represent Mugabe and the Fifth Brigade as the perpetrators of the massacres. This narrative was framed by the BBC to counter the hegemonic discourse that the violence was committed by the dissidents. The BBC film was produced to inform the public about the massacres that were taking place in Matabeleland at that time. However, the same media artefacts have been rearticulated and recontextualised in the present setting in order to reinforce the transformative calls for the prosecution of the perpetrators of Gukurahundi. Thus, through *Bulawayo24.com*’s multimediality and YouTube’s hybrid feature, the narratives of the 1980s are being recontextualised by the people of Matabeleland to remember their traumatic past. In their study of how memories of the Syrian conflict are constructed on YouTube, Smit, Heinrich and Broersma (2015:1) argue that “witness videos” that are uploaded and circulated on YouTube are being “reassembled and remixed by distinct actors along the lines of their own ideological agendas”.

The narrator also reports on the Fifth Brigade’s “reign of terror” in Matabeleland. Video footage shows a man lying down and being flogged by soldiers speaking Shona. Thus, the representation of the perpetrators as Shona-speaking militia strengthens the ethnic interpretation of the violence, which in turn reinforces Ndebele particularistic identity. Furthermore, Omuhle Films provide a written narrative that the “infamous 5 Brigade” that “butchered over 20 000 people in Southern part of Zimbabwe” was trained by the North Koreans, and “drawn from Mashonaland” (Thebe38, 2011). This perspective not only implicates the Fifth Brigade and North Koreans as being the perpetrators of the terror, but also constitutes a binary that constructs the people of “Mashonaland” as villains, and those from the “southern part of Zimbabwe” as victims. The video also shows the BBC crew at Antelope, an area in Matabeleland South that was used by the Fifth Brigade as a “concentration camp”. A



female Gukurahundi survivor relives her harrowing experiences at Antelope, testifying that some Gukurahundi victims were set on fire, beaten to death and shot. The narrator reports that bodies were “thrown down a nearby mineshaft”. New media depictions of Antelope as a “concentration camp” constitute witnessing texts that serve as reminders of these traumatic events, and hence this area is being historicised as a site of Gukurahundi memories. Thus, memories are preserved and disseminated through physical sites such as Antelope, which signify an Ndebele community’s traumatic experiences of suffering, victimisation and death. The makers of the video further note that Gukurahundi was classified as genocide in 2010 by Genocide Watch, and assert that it will “[be] never too late to seek justice”. They declare that “Mugabe must be brought to the Hague” (Thebe38, 2011). In a nutshell, this video was reproduced and refashioned to strengthen the calls for Gukurahundi perpetrators to be prosecuted. Thus, the Gukurahundi past events are invoked and summoned to reinforce the transformative discourse of justice. In the following section I analyse users’ comments to make sense of audiences’ engagement with the traumatic experiences of the victims.

Firstly, there are contributors who are entrenched within hegemonic nationalist discourses. Ziro Tsotsi claims that the video is a product of “racist whites” who are trying to “divide and rule” Zimbabwe (cited in Thebe38, 2011). The participant declares that “Rhodesia is dead”, and vows that the “racist whites” will never “separate or divide Zimbabweans” (cited in Thebe38, 2011). Within this dominant perspective, the rhetoric of racism is invoked to deny and silence discussions on Gukurahundi, as people who talk about the horrors of Gukurahundi are accused of trying to divide a unified Zimbabwe. Some commentators defend and justify the actions of Mugabe and the Fifth Brigade. Tino Popsy argues that “the Ndebele led by Nkomo refused to respect Mugabe as president and would only recognise Nkomo” (cited in Thebe38, 2011). This participant asserts that “Gukurahundi was justified” and regards the video as “white propaganda” (cited in Thebe38, 2011). Within the hegemonic discourses of silence, the dissidents are nominated as “Ndebele”, and Nkomo is constructed as a leader of the “Ndebele” people. Thus, the victim-perpetrator inversion is employed as justificatory strategy to defend the atrocities committed by the Fifth Brigade. Other users are positioned within the alternative discourses. Chinenguwo asserts that Mugabe and Mnangagwa should be “hurled before the ICC in the Hague for crimes against humanity” (cited in Thebe38, 2011). Furthermore, Chica476 declares that he/she supports the idea of “Matabeleland secession from Zimbabwe” (cited in Thebe38, 2011). In other words, this video not only strengthens transformative calls for the prosecution of the Gukurahundi perpetrators, but also reinforces dismantlement

discourses centred on Matabeleland secessionist imaginations. Lastly, some participants, such as Tawana Chaitezwi, are fascinated by the “cool song” in the video (cited in Thebe38, 2011). However, this emphasis on the soundtrack of the video seems to have infuriated some commentators. Gunman gunner posted that “our people died and nobody acknowledged it even now and he goes [on] about a song” (cited in Thebe38, 2011). The multifaceted perspectives drawn from the users’ comments indicate the polysemic nature of media texts. With different audiences producing their own interpretations of this video, the users’ comments are a clear testimony to the fact that the social meanings of cultural artefacts are constructed at the point of reception.

### **7.7.3 Gukurahundi, Nkomo, and the multiple uses of the past in the present**

I furthermore conducted an analysis of a video titled **Joshua Nkomo interview in exile**, which was uploaded to YouTube by Mabonakude on 27 July 2007. As stated in section 7.3, this video is connected to *Newzimbabwe.com* through a hypertext that appears in Masikati’s (2013) opinion article. The video is 9.51 minutes long, has 96 comments and has been viewed 117 252 times. In addition, it has a caption indicating that, in 1983, Nkomo “fled Zimbabwe after three people were killed in his house” (Mabonakude, 2007). Nkomo held this interview with the BBC’s Jeremy Paxman in London. In the interview, Nkomo advocates peace and reconciliation, and downplays the ethnic understandings of Gukurahundi. It is important to examine the contents of this interview, and probe how the past is being evoked and enacted in new media to shape particular social understandings of Gukurahundi. Firstly, Nkomo asserts that he fled Zimbabwe because his life was in danger. He states that the Fifth Brigade “invaded his house” and “killed” three people (Mabonakude, 2007). Secondly, he acknowledges that the Fifth Brigade is “made up of Shona-speaking young people”, but contends that it is “not a Shona tribal army” (Mabonakude, 2007). Nkomo reiterates that it is a “misrepresentation” to assume that the actions of the Fifth Brigade “are actions of the Shona against the Ndebele” (Mabonakude, 2007). In dismissing the ethnic perspective, Nkomo argues that Gukurahundi is a “political issue”, and constructs the Fifth Brigade as a “political party army” (Mabonakude, 2007). The predication strategies “political party army” and “Shona tribal army” are employed to establish and sustain the discourse that Gukurahundi was politically, rather than ethnically, motivated. Thus, the discourses of the 1980s are reinvigorated and rearticulated in the current dispensation by *Newzimbabwe.com* to reinforce the view that Gukurahundi had

nothing to do with Shona-Ndebele ethnic animosities. As alluded to in section 7.3, Nkomo's interview is appropriated and reconstructed on *Newzimbabwe.com* to counter Ndebele secessionist calls. In other words, the narratives of Gukurahundi past events are recollected, recreated and used in new media to resist Ndebele Particularism, and to re-imagine a unified Zimbabwe.

The online users' comments attached to this video confirm Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems's (2010:191) argument that Nkomo assumes "multiple identities and appropriations" in different contexts, as his legacy has been used by different actors for political purposes. Firstly, there are participants who celebrate and glorify Nkomo as a symbol of national unity. Predicational strategies such as "true selfless nationalist", "father" and "unifier" are used by Masina to elevate Nkomo in the narrative of the Zimbabwean nation-state (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). Thus, Nkomo is remembered as a leader who had a vision for a peaceful and unified Zimbabwe. In addition, Masakadza and Bulisile call Nkomo "Father Zimbabwe" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007), a title that was posthumously awarded on him by ZANU PF (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Willems, 2010:201). Vamagara2000 argues that the video shows that "Gukurahundi was not a tribal conflict but just Mugabe's mastermind" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). This commentator adds that "we should all unite, Ndebele and Shona" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). Lilchocoere echoes Vamagara2000's view that "it is now time for Shona and Ndebeles to unite" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). There is no doubt that Nkomo's legacy is central in the discussions of Gukurahundi, and in the debates on ethnicity and nationalism. Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems (2010:204) argue that, in the context of the 2000s, ZANU PF appropriated and reconstructed an image of Nkomo as a hero and a symbol of national unity in order to gain political support in Matabeleland. Considering that identities are fluid and multiple (Downing & Husband, 2005:20), I develop Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Willems's (2010) thesis by arguing that, within the current cyber-debates on Gukurahundi, memories of Nkomo are conjured to resist and counter Ndebele secessionist imaginations.

Secondly, there are some online users who embrace secessionist discourses, as they feel that Nkomo betrayed the people of Matabeleland. Moxide posits that Nkomo was "our biggest liability, we needed a fighter not this kind of a coward" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). This user rebukes Nkomo for his "fantasy feeling that the Shona could unite with Ndebele for one Zimbabwe" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). Timothy Mfecane adds that "Zimbabwe-Shona nationalism is destructive", as it is anchored in a "blatant tribal marginalisation agenda" (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). The participant further claims that "most Shonas hate Ndebeles", and

are the “most tribalist group in Southern Africa” (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). In their interpretations of this YouTube video, these commentators construct Nkomo and the unity accord as symptomatic of the defeat of Ndebele people. In this vein, memories of Gukurahundi are invoked not only as a lamentation of the plight of the Ndebele people, but also as a counter-hegemonic narrative that challenges Shona nationalist discourses. Lastly, some commentators espouse and propagate hegemonic and nativist rhetoric. Deethrem claims that “only 3 000 died” during Gukurahundi, and “most of them dissidents” (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). This discourse of nominating the victims as “dissidents”, rather than civilians, serves to obscure the atrocities committed by the Fifth Brigade upon civilians. Deethrem adds that Mzilikazi “raided Shona camps and killed thousands” (cited in Mabonakude, 2007), a statement that constitutes a justificatory strategy of balancing one act against another in order to justify the killings in Matabeleland. Acel Sean adds that “Ndebeles are like white people to a certain extent in how they came to Zimbabwe ... and stole the Shona women who were so beautiful beyond their women” (cited in Mabonakude, 2007). Thus, through this topos of nativity, memories of Ndebeles as invaders and raiders are invoked and reconstructed not only to defend Gukurahundi, but also to reproduce the hegemonic discourses that Zimbabwe belongs to the “Shona” people. The different subject positionings of Nkomo as a “hero”, “unifier” and “coward” indicate that memories of Gukurahundi are shaping social understandings of ethnicity and nationhood.

#### **7.7.4 The intersection of YouTube, CDA, and audience reception studies**

Cultural studies provide a lens for exploring how the lived experiences of the Gukurahundi victims and the survivors are mediated, preserved and circulated on YouTube. Thus, YouTube analysis can enrich the fields of media and cultural studies, as it enables researchers to examine how cultural artefacts are produced and reproduced to challenge unequal power relations. YouTube contains written and audio-visual texts, survivors’ testimonies and users’ comments, all of which enable scholars situated within cultural studies to explore the meaning-making of people’s lived realities and the reconstructions of historical memory. Through YouTube, ordinary people can upload and share memories of Gukurahundi. As such, this digital technology provides a virtual site for studies on audience reception, as researchers can analyse users’ comments to make sense not only of how media audiences are receiving media texts, but are actively participating in the constructions of social meanings. An analysis of YouTube texts can contribute to the growth of media and cultural studies, as it uncovers an intersection

of CDA and audience reception studies and the role of media discourses in sustaining and challenging unequal power relations. Although the users' comments attached to the videos provide insight into the reconstruction of Ndebele memories, some of the postings are mere insults and vitriol and are vulgar, feeding on sexist, racist and ethnic prejudices. Lastly, the comments indicate the period when they were posted, such as "4 months ago", "1 year ago" and "3 years ago", and hence digital memories must not be conceived as being static and permanent, but as fluid and constantly being refashioned.

## 7.8 Gukurahundi, new media and Ndebele Particularism

The three news websites are mediating the memories of Gukurahundi in ways that are contributing to the recreation and reconstruction of Ndebele Particularism. All of these news websites constitute arenas for the production, negotiation and contestation of Ndebele particularistic identity. Matabeleland secessionist groups, such as MLF and MLO, and pressure groups are given a "voice" to reimagine an Mthwakazi "nation". However, the three sites diverge in their representations of Ndebele secessionist politics. The readers' comments sections on *Bulawayo24.com* and *Newzimbabwe.com* constitute sites of struggle between hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist and Mthwakazi secessionist discourses. *Umthwakazireview.com* positions itself within secessionist discourses, as hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist perspectives are not given any space. All the articles that were analysed suggest that *Umthwakazireview.com* is helping to cultivate, promote and endorse Ndebele/Mthwakazi nationalist imaginations. Further, this news website carries an MLF logo with "Free Mthwakazi" written alongside it, which acts as a reminder to the readers of Mthwakazi nationalist longings. As a nation is a "daily plebiscite" (Renan, 1990:19), the idea of an Mthwakazi/Ndebele nation is being celebrated, affirmed and reproduced through this news website. In addition, Dube (2014d; 2014e; 2014f) wrote profiles of ZAPU liberation war heroes, namely Joshua Nkomo, Jason Ziyaphapha Moyo and Alfred Nikita Mangena. What is striking about these life accounts is that the "nationality" of these figures is produced as "Matebele", rather than "Zimbabwean". In addition, Dube (2014g) authored an Ndebele poem titled "I ZIPRA yodumo",<sup>44</sup> which not only celebrates this ZAPU military unit, but also reconstructs it as belonging to "Mthwakazi". As such, the memories of ZAPU and these

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<sup>44</sup> "I ZIPRA yodumo" can be translated loosely as "the glorious ZIPRA".

nationalists are summoned and invigorated in service to the imagined Mthwakazi nation. Considering that the poems on the imagination of an Mthwakazi nation (Dube, 2014g; Thebe, 2014) are published in the Ndebele language on *Umthwakazireview.com*, it is safe to assume that isiNdebele is the unifying language of this cyber reconstruction of the Ndebele nation-state. Thus, the exclusion of other languages, such as Kalanga, Venda and Tonga, exposes a tension between, on one hand, projecting Mthwakazi nationalism as heterogeneous and inclusive and, on the other hand, grounding it upon a narrow and essential Ndebele language, identity and culture.

## 7.9 Summary

Social constructionism is a useful paradigm for examining the representations of Gukurahundi in new media. It has enabled this study to analyse the multiple and contested social understandings of Gukurahundi. My position is that the historical memories of Gukurahundi are socially constructed, as the renditions of this past are shaped by socio-political and cultural contexts. Thus, the social meanings of this traumatic past event are not given or discovered in their essential state, but rather are being negotiated, mediated and transformed on news websites. Further, these news websites are enabling the formation and consolidation of “mnemonic communities” (Zerubavel, 2003:4; 1998:315) that have different recollections of the past, and whose renditions are underpinned by current political settings. Although these three news websites converge and diverge in their representations of Ndebele collective memories, there is no doubt that memories of Gukurahundi are salient in new media reconstructions of Ndebele Particularism. This chapter has demonstrated that new media have an emancipatory potential, as they are not only enabling Ndebele communities to remember Gukurahundi, as Zelizer (1995:214) puts it, “against the grain”, but also to shape and perform their particularistic identity.

## CHAPTER EIGHT: CONCLUSION

### 8.1 Introduction

This study set out to examine the reconstructions of Ndebele collective memory and history on three news websites. Focusing on the recreations of pre-colonial and post-colonial past events, this research not only explored the role of new media as sites of remembrance and forgetting for the Ndebele community, but also probed the ways in which these mnemonic acts are contributing to the animation and consolidation of Ndebele particularistic identity. This last chapter provides a summary of the research project, and discusses the scholarly contributions of this study on the empirical, theoretical and methodological levels. Lastly, I offer recommendations for future research.

### 8.2 Summary of research project

In **Chapter 1** I introduced this research by laying out the research problem. Given the necessity to situate a study within its socio-political and historical contexts, Chapter 1 traced the genesis and recurrence of Ndebele particularistic identity, exploring how it has been constructed and shaped in the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial epochs. Furthermore, I noted that Ndebele Particularism is predicated on an assumption that Ndebele histories, memories and traditions are being excluded and marginalised within the hegemonic discourses of Zimbabwean Nationalism. Bearing in mind that this study is situated in the Zimbabwean context, where the freedoms of expression, media and assembly are severely curtailed and memories of past events such as Gukurahundi are heavily suppressed by the state, it is fitting that I set out to explore the role of news websites as counter-hegemonic sites for remembering, preserving and transmitting subjugated Ndebele historical accounts.

In **Chapter 2** I identified cultural studies, journalism studies and social constructionism as theoretical perspectives underpinning my understanding of new media reconstructions of Ndebele collective memories. Theories and insights from these approaches, I argue, enabled this study to explore the meaning-making practices on news websites, as Ndebele communities are using new media to mediate their historical experiences. In other words, Chapter 2 support the epistemological assumption that the media do not reflect a reality “out there”, but rather construct, mediate and frame our understanding of the social world.



**Chapter 3** is a review of the literature on nationalism, ethnicity and the African nation-building project. The different perspectives on nationalism and ethnicity were explored, culminating in my endorsement of a constructionist understanding that national and ethnic identities are socially constructed, dynamic and contingent. Ultimately, I affirmed the scholarship that conceives of the media as playing a pivotal role in the reconstructions of ethnic and national identities. By interrogating the interplay between media and identity, Chapter 3 laid a foundation for this study to explore how news websites are contributing to the reproduction of Ndebele Particularism through their renditions of past events. In addition, I explored the literature on the pitfalls, tensions and contradictions in the African nation-building project. More importantly, in this chapter I deeply probed the pertinent question of belonging in Zimbabwe, and reiterated that Ndebele Particularism constitutes a counter-hegemonic discourse to Zimbabwean nationalist imaginations.

The second literature review chapter (**chapter 4**) provides a discussion of collective memory and the role of the media and journalists in the preservation, reconstruction and circulation of historical imaginations. Premised on the understanding that collective memory is a social group's reconstruction of past events, the chapter establishes that public memories are not objective renditions, as the process of recollecting past events involves the selection, interpretation, inclusion and exclusion of certain events by a range of actors. I furthermore underlined the intersection between memory and identity, asserting that historical memories can be conjured up by social groups in order to define and solidify their collective identities. More importantly, Chapter 4 recognises new media as sites that help to forge and preserve historical memories.

In **Chapter 5** I addressed methodological considerations. In the first instance, I framed this study within the qualitative approach. CDA was selected as an appropriate research design, as it provides theories and methods for analysing media texts which align with the ontological and epistemological departure points of this study. The DHA, a strand of CDA, was chosen as the method for analysing the texts from new media genres such as news reports, opinion pieces, editorials, YouTube videos and readers' comments. Drawing upon this methodological framework, two chapters (6 and 7) were dedicated to the analysis and interpretation of texts. **Chapter 6** focused on the memories of the pre-colonial Ndebele collective past, and examined how these events are summoned, reconstructed and contested in ways that contribute to the reproduction of Ndebele identity. In addition, the emphasis of **Chapter 7** was on the post-colonial Ndebele past, and hence I examined how the traumatic memories of Gukurahundi are

enacted and mediated on news websites in ways that help to promote and reproduce Ndebele Particularism. The following section consolidates the research findings by providing a response to the research questions and a summary of the contributions of this study.

## **8.3 Research Questions**

### **8.3.1 What are the representations of the Ndebele past and memory that are being produced and sustained in the discourses on the three selected news websites?**

The selected news websites constitute sites of memory, as they are contributing to the recollection, preservation and dissemination of Ndebele historical memories. However, there are different renditions of the past reconstructed on these websites. In general, *Umthwakazireview.com* evokes and celebrates pre-colonial Ndebele events in ways that express and promote secessionist imaginations. By romanticising the pre-colonial Ndebele kingdom as a hybrid, heterogeneous and inclusive nation-state, *Umthwakazireview.com* evokes nostalgic sentiments in discursive ways to galvanise the Ndebele readers into restoring their Mthwakazi homeland. This news website also conjures up traumatic memories of Gukurahundi in ways that solidify a particularistic Ndebele identity, as this post-colonial violence is reconstructed as an act of genocide and ethnic cleansing of the Ndebele people.

Similarly, *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo24.com* articulate counter-hegemonic narratives that challenge the dominant Zimbabwean Nationalistic representations of the Ndebele past. In genres such as opinion pieces, testimonials and YouTube videos, these two news websites represent Gukurahundi as genocide that was unleashed upon the people of Matabeleland. However, the readers' comments on these websites are sites of struggles between hegemonic and alternative historical imaginations. In short, the three news websites not only provide space for the resurgence of Ndebele subjugated and marginalised historical memories, but also are framing particular understandings of Ndebele-ness.

### **8.3.2 How are the three selected websites providing a space for the resurgence of the repressed Ndebele history?**

The three websites provide a platform for different mnemonic communities, such as political activists, to narrativise, recollect and celebrate Ndebele histories that are occluded and

marginalised in traditional public spaces. Firstly, through genres such as editorials and opinion pieces, Ndebele histories, memories and identities are recollected and mediated in counter-hegemonic fashion. Ndebele mnemonic communities are utilising these genres to celebrate their pre-colonial histories and counter the discourses of silence on Gukurahundi that are perpetuated by the state. Considering that no monuments have been erected or museums built to commemorate the victims of Gukurahundi, I argue that the selected news websites enable Ndebele communities to preserve their memories of this violence. Secondly, the selected news websites offer interactive facilities that enable Gukurahundi survivors to recount and circulate their traumatic memories of the violence. *Bulawayo24.com* enable online users to send their testimonies via the Whatsapp messenger application. In addition to the Whatsapp facility, the three news websites contain YouTube categories that enable online users to view and share the videos that highlight the testimonies of Gukurahundi survivors.

The written and oral testimonies are reproduced on news websites for the purpose of thwarting ZANU PF's hegemonic discourses that seek to silence, minimise and trivialise the memories of Gukurahundi. Similar to Nizkor, an Internet-based project that counters Holocaust denial (Pentzold, Lohmeier & Hajek, 2016:1), and *Cilicia.com*, an online site that commemorates the Armenian genocide (Torchin, 2007:90), I argue that the selected Zimbabwean news websites are countering Gukurahundi denial. Through survivor testimonies and other genres, these news websites are acting as sites of resistance in which Ndebele people can counter the forced amnesia by recounting their traumatic historical experiences. Rather than being spoken for by government officials, the Gukurahundi survivors are able to bear witness to these atrocities and advocate for compensation, apology and justice. Thus, through these news websites, subjugated memories of Gukurahundi are resurrected and kept alive in ways that destabilise the power structures. Lastly, interactive facilities such as readers' comments and discussion forums enable audiences to acquire a voice to challenge the official narratives of the past. Through these facilities, audiences are able to contribute to the recollections of Ndebele histories and memories. *Bulawayo24.com* provides online participants with an option of posting their comments using their Facebook usernames. However, by and large, anonymity is protected on the selected news websites as online participants can express their views freely using pseudonyms.

### **8.3.3 What are the tensions, fractures and negotiations around Ndebele histories that are emerging from the interactions amongst the Ndebele community on the selected news websites?**

The memories that are enacted and forged on news websites expose the contradictions, tensions and nuances surrounding Ndebele identity, as they illuminate the contestations about who constitutes an Ndebele subject. Firstly, there is a struggle between essentialist and constructionist renditions of Ndebele-ness. On the one hand, news websites reconstruct Ndebele-ness as a diverse, inclusive and hybrid identity. On the other hand, a narrow, exclusivist and essentialist conception emerges, as Ndebele-ness tends to be represented as synonymous with being of Nguni lineage, and thus excludes non-Nguni Ndebele sub-groups subsumed within this supra-Ndebele identity. The idea of an unsullied and pristine Ndebele identity thus is sustained on these news websites, as non-Nguni heroes, histories, languages and memories are marginalised and excluded in the narration of an Ndebele “nation”. However, both historical renditions are evoked and reinforced on *Umthwakazireview.com* to disrupt Zimbabwean nationalist discourses, and to re-imagine an independent Ndebele nation.

Furthermore, there are paradoxes and ambiguities in the ways in which pre-colonial Ndebele myths are recollected in the cyber-memory debates. Firstly, some Ndebele web users denounce and subvert the colonially propagated stereotypical narratives that depict the pre-colonial Ndebele people as savage warriors who brutalised the neighbouring Shona communities. However, other Ndebele cyber-communities evoke and appropriate pre-colonial warrior myths in discursive ways to galvanise Ndebele audiences to subvert the Zimbabwean nation-state and imagine an autonomous Ndebele state. Thus, pre-colonial Ndebele war myths are both denounced and celebrated in discursive ways that promote Ndebele Particularism.

In addition, new media reconstructions of the Ndebele past expose tensions over the imagination of an Ndebele homeland. Within the secessionist discourse, Matabeleland is constructed as the homeland for the Ndebele people. Secondly, there is an irredentist imagination, as self-identifying Ndebele interlocutors construct and celebrate Zululand as their fatherland. This irredentist nationalist imagination is evoked and reinforced through songs and other media texts that celebrate the primordial connections and ancestral ties between the Ndebele and Zulu people. Lastly, some non-Ndebele users reproduce a monolithic and nativist Zimbabwean nationalist discourse that denigrates Ndebeles as settlers from Zululand. In a nutshell, these diverse interpretations of an Ndebele homeland not only indicate the conflicted

nature of Ndebele memory, but also underlie the ideological positionings that shape these complex understandings of Ndebele-ness.

Lastly, there are tensions and ambiguities surrounding the new media recollections of Gukurahundi violence. Firstly, there are memory communities that reconstruct Gukurahundi as political violence that targeted ZAPU supporters, and not Ndebeles per se. This rendition of the past tends to be foregrounded by online users seeking to thwart Ndebele secessionist claims. Secondly, there is an ethnic interpretation that views Gukurahundi as an act of genocide against Ndebele people. Within this rendition, the terms “Ndebele” and “Mthwakazi” are used interchangeably to depict the victims as an ethnic/national community, and to promote Ndebele secessionist imaginations. As such, Gukurahundi memories are fractured and conflicted, as this past event is reconstructed as a war, genocide and ethnic cleansing. In essence, these multiple interpretations of Gukurahundi are underpinned by the prevailing socio-political forces and nationalist aspirations.

#### **8.3.4 How are the discourses on hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism reproduced and perpetuated on the three selected news websites?**

Although the selected news websites, by and large, promote counter-hegemonic narratives, the dominant Zimbabwean nationalist discourses surface in some of the cyber-memory debates. These hegemonic discourses emerge in readers’ comments and a few opinion pieces on *Bulawayo24.com* and *Newzimbabwe.com*. Firstly, there are mnemonic renditions that reinforce and sustain the derogatory images of pre-colonial Ndebele people as being militaristic bullies and settlers from Zululand. Within this nativist discourse, Ndebele people are constructed as *Mafikizolos* (newcomers) who do not belong in Zimbabwe. Through the use of justificatory strategies such as victim-perpetrator inversion, the narratives of Ndebele brutality are rearticulated and perpetuated on news websites to silence and minimise the Gukurahundi debates.

Further, the dominant discourse on Zimbabwean Nationalism is reproduced and perpetuated through the discursive strategies that seek to justify and defend the Gukurahundi atrocities. An analysis of readers’ comments and opinion pieces indicates that discursive strategies such as trivialisation, denial and mystification are employed to silence and minimise the debates on the Gukurahundi atrocities. Through the naming of the violence as a “war”, a “myth” and a “closed chapter” on news websites, the dominant social order, which is anchored in forced amnesia, is

reinforced. Inasmuch as these news websites attempt to frame counter-hegemonic historical narratives, the official accounts emerge as a result of the interactive potential of the Internet.

### **8.3.5 What are the overlaps with and divergences in the selected news websites in their representations of Ndebele Particularism?**

All three the news sites constitute alternative spaces, as they propagate Ndebele historical narratives that challenge and subvert the hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist discourses. However, *Umthwakazireview.com* differs from the other two news sites by explicitly positioning itself as a stronghold of Matabeleland nationalist imaginations. This news site commemorates and celebrates Ndebele history and heroes in ways that reproduce and solidify a distinct Ndebele identity. Due to its ideological orientation, this news site romanticises the pre-colonial Ndebele histories, celebrating the heroic exploits of Ndebele heroes, and in turn sanitises the memories of Ndebele raids on neighbouring communities. Furthermore, the memory agents on *Umthwakazireview.com* are mainly Ndebele cultural movements such as Ibhethshu likaZulu, separatist organisations and opinion columnists advocating justice for the Gukurahundi victims and agitating for an autonomous Ndebele state. As a result, this news site frames Gukurahundi as a genocide on the Mthwakazi/Ndebele nation, and appropriates and rearticulates memories of this traumatic past to cement secessionist aspirations.

Although *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo24.com* constitute counter-hegemonic spaces that challenge hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist discourses, these two news sites differ from *Umthwakazireview.com* in that they are not overtly advocating Ndebele secession. For instance, the name “Newzimbabwe” denotes a vision of the rebirth and transformation of the Zimbabwean political structure, rather than dismantling the nation-state, as advocated on *Umthwakazireview.com*. Compared to *Umthwakazireview.com*, which foregrounds the secessionist perspective, the other two news sites constitute sites of memory struggles related to the hegemonic, transformative and secessionist discourses. Some perspectives in the readers’ comments and discussion forums on *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo24.com* perpetuate the hegemonic stereotypical images of pre-colonial Ndebele people as savages who survived by raiding Shona communities.

One of the main differences between these three news sites is that *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo.com* offer more interactive opportunities than *Umthwakazireview.com*. *Umthwakazireview.co*, in contrast to other two sites, does not have discussion forums and active readers’ comments. The dominant genres on this news site are editorials, opinion pieces

and YouTube videos. In contrast, *Newzimbabwe.com* and *Bulawayo24.com* have active readers' comments facilities that enable web users to participate actively in the memory reconstruction processes by posting their comments. *Bulawayo24.com* enables participants to post their comments using their Facebook accounts, a clear testimony to intertextuality. Moreover, *Bulawayo24.com* promotes user engagement, as this site has active discussion forums that allow discussants to recollect and contest Ndebele historical memories. Lastly, all three news websites contain hypertextual functions, as they are connected to YouTube, Twitter and Facebook. These websites have Facebook pages where Ndebele histories and memories are discussed and contested. Furthermore, these sites enable audiences to click on the Facebook icon and share the news articles on their Facebook walls. The three websites not only contain YouTube videos, but also have Twitter handles, and hence readers can follow these news sites on Twitter and share tweets. These hypertextual features allow web users to disseminate and spread Ndebele memories across geographical boundaries. Having provided a summary of how the five sub-research questions were tackled, the following section integrates and consolidates the findings by summarising how the main research question was addressed.

### **8.3.6 What role do new media play as sites of remembrance and forgetting in the (re)constructions of distinct Ndebele collective memory and history in the context of hegemonic Zimbabwean Nationalism?**

This study has shown that the selected news websites are sites of Ndebele memories, as they are continuously helping to evoke, mediate and reconfigure past events. Firstly, they are acting as archives that record, store and preserve the historical memories of the Ndebele people. Thus, the pre-colonial and post-colonial Ndebele past events are recounted and preserved for future generations. As such, these news websites are not only preserving Ndebele memories, but also countering the hegemonic discourses that seek to repress and minimise memories of the Gukurahundi atrocities. These news websites are not fixed, static or permanent digital archives, however, as digital texts are fluid and are constantly being remediated, reshaped and transmitted across spatial and temporal locations.

Secondly, news websites enable the Gukurahundi survivors to confront the collective violent past events. Through oral and written testimonies, new media are enabling Gukurahundi survivors to mediate and share their harrowing experiences. As such, the role of new media is to bear testimony to the Gukurahundi atrocities. In the light of this, the news websites reproduce



and transmit the testimonies of the Gukurahundi survivors in ways that reinforce the call for justice. At the same time, audiences who have no first-hand experience of these traumatic events are positioned as potential witnesses with a role of transmitting and sharing the knowledge of this past.

Thirdly, the role of new media is to commemorate and memorialise Ndebele past events that have been marginalised and repressed in the mainstream. Through these cyber-memorial spaces, the pre-colonial Ndebele heroes and events are remembered, and the Gukurahundi victims are honoured and memorialised. In an environment in which efforts to commemorate Gukurahundi have been thwarted by the state, I argue that these news websites enable the “enfranchisement of grief” (Moss, 2004:78), as Ndebele communities are able to recognise, honour and mourn the Gukurahundi victims in cyberspace.

Fourthly, new media constitute sites of resistance that are reclaiming subjugated Ndebele historical narratives. These news sites are dislodging the hegemonic Zimbabwean nationalist discourses that not only marginalise the pre-colonial Ndebele histories, but justify the Gukurahundi atrocities. *Umthwakazireview.com*, in particular, appropriates and reproduces Ndebele histories and memories in discursive ways that seek to disrupt the Zimbabwean nation-state configuration, and to strengthen Ndebele secessionist sentiments. Furthermore, new media are connecting and binding Ndebele people scattered across the globe to remember their subjugated past. Through these cyber-networks and alliances, Ndebele cultural and political groups are not only keeping their collective past alive, but also are performing and asserting their ethnic nationalism.

New media also play a role as memory agents that are recollecting, interpreting and shaping the Ndebele past. It is through these news websites that the social meanings of Ndebele historical memories are reconstructed and circulated to serve contemporary socio-political agendas. Besides being memory agents, the selected websites provide a platform for different social groups to produce, shape and contest Ndebele histories. As such, digital media are forging and solidifying interpretive communities (academics, journalists, politicians, cultural activists and Gukurahundi survivors) who are shaping their own understandings of Ndebele past events. In a nutshell, this study has shown that news websites are sites of memory that reproduce, mediate and transmit Ndebele historical narratives across geographical borders. The Internet has democratised the processes of remembering, as audiences can participate actively in the production of memories. Thus, new media have decentralised the processes of narrating the past, as ordinary people can use interactive features on news websites to reconstruct their

own historical accounts. However, the flipside of this democratic potential of new media is that the discussion forums and readers' comments are replete with hate speech, inflammatory remarks and vitriolic attacks centred on ethnic bigotry. New media have the potential to act as centrifugal forces that divide the people, stir up emotions and incite violence of ethnic nature. With the surge of separatist sentiments in Matabeleland, the selected three websites could be used as tools to fan the flames of ethnic tensions, and hence ignite conflict in Zimbabwe.

The following section discusses the contributions of this study to the body of knowledge.

## **8.4 Summary of contribution**

### **8.4.1 Empirical contributions**

One of the main contributions of this study is highlighting the role of new media in the reconstruction of Ndebele memories, histories and identities. Considering that there is a dearth of studies that explore the intersection of new media and Ndebele identity politics, this study is a timely introspection on new media reconstructions of Ndebele memories, histories and identities. In this regard, this research has enhanced our knowledge of the ways in which memories of pre-colonial Ndebele collective events and the Gukurahundi are invoked and mediated on news websites to re-animate Ndebele secessionist imaginations. At the same time, this study has exposed the cracks, fissures and paradoxes surrounding the idea of "Ndebele-ness", as well as the potential of new and social media to provide platforms for hate speech and the propagation of violence and extremism.

This research furthermore builds upon the literature on Gukurahundi by providing new insights into the conflicted memories of this post-colonial violence. Considering that, in Zimbabwe, new media tend to be lauded as alternative spaces that counter hegemonic ZANU PF nationalism, this study provides new understandings by probing the hegemonic discourses that seek to justify, trivialise, defend and obscure the Gukurahundi atrocities. The existing literature on Gukurahundi has not delved deeply into how the discourses of silence are being reproduced on news websites in order to entrench collective amnesia. In addition, this study has enhanced knowledge of the intricate relationship between the memories of pre-colonial Ndebele raids on Shona communities, and Gukurahundi. Some scholars have shown that the derogatory depictions of the pre-colonial Ndebele people as brutal savages were produced to justify colonialism (Barnes, 2004; Beach, 1974). Other researchers have noted that the Fifth Brigade summoned the memories of pre-colonial Ndebele raids to justify the killings of civilians in

Matabeleland (Lindgren, 2005b; Alexander *et al.*, 2000). In this study, I provide new insights by positing that, within the current socio-political landscape, the stereotypical images of pre-colonial Ndebele people are evoked and reproduced within the hegemonic discourses in order to silence and mystify the debates on Gukurahundi.

This study has broadened the scholarship on new media in Zimbabwe by focusing on *Bulawayo24.com* and *Umthwakazireview.com*, two news websites that have been neglected in research work. Given that a number of studies have focused on *Newzimbabwe.com* (Mpofu, 2013; Mano & Willems, 2008; Moyo, 2007), it is fitting that I extend this research to news websites that have not received scholarly attention. Furthermore, this study has widened the scholarship on new media and Ndebele identity by exploring the intersection of memory, testimony and new media. This is a novelty in the sense that previous studies have not fully interrogated the role of testimonies in the reconstruction of Ndebele memories. Considering that Zimbabwe is a society haunted by its traumatic past events, it is surprising that there is a gap in studies on media witnessing, and hence this research is a scholarly contribution to this uncharted field as it examines the role of journalism and media in the production, mediation and transmission of Gukurahundi survivors' testimonies.

#### **8.4.2 Theoretical contributions**

In exploring the reconstructions of Ndebele memories on news websites, this research has highlighted the connection of cultural studies, journalism and social constructionism. However, this relationship is complex, as these different traditions only converge at particular moments to provide a vantage point for making sense of the reproduction of collective memories. In essence, this research has broadened insights into the ways in which cultural studies and social constructionism provide theoretical lenses for researchers to explore how new media are used by participants to make sense of their historical and lived experiences. Although journalism and cultural studies generally are regarded as epistemologically incongruent (see section 2.2.2 for further discussion), the analyses of Gukurahundi witness accounts in YouTube videos and other genres illustrate the symbiotic relationship of these traditions. It is evident that cultural studies provide a theoretical standpoint for making sense of the historical imaginations that are relived and mediated through journalistic discourses.

This research has also affirmed Crotty's (1998:8) assertion that "realism<sup>45</sup> in ontology and constructionism in epistemology turn out to be quite compatible". An analysis of the cyber-reconstructions of Ndebele past events indicates that realism and constructionism are congruent. This study concedes that there is a material/physical world that exists independently of our consciousness (realism), as the pre-colonial and post-colonial Ndebele past events are "real" and not mere creations of the media. At the same time, this research explores the meaningful form of this social world (constructionism) as Ndebele collective memories are reproduced on news websites. In rejecting "universal constructionism" (Hacking, 1999:24) that conceives everything as being socially constructed, this study endorses the milder constructionist approach adopted by Laclau and Mouffe (1990:100) and Hall (1997a:44-45), which focuses on the social meanings of the material world. As Keaton and Bodie (2011:192) aptly note, "it isn't the physical composition of an object (i.e. its material arrangement) that is brought into existence, but its social composition, the ideas which define that object within a social context".

Although social constructionism has been criticised for its relativist inclination (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2009:38; Houston, 2001:841; Guba & Lincoln, 1994:110), I have suggested ways in which the social constructionist approach can be applied without degenerating into an extreme relativist position that construes all knowledge claims as equally good and permissible. In embracing Jorgensen and Phillips's (2002:175) notion of "critical social constructivist research", I have attempted to address some of the concerns stemming from critical realists (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002:710; Houston, 2001:848) who claim that constructionism does not provide a framework for critiquing authoritarian ideas. As noted in section 5.5.3, this study favours an epistemic relativist strand that enables researchers to combine social constructionism and critical discourse analysis (CDA) in ways that expose social inequalities, injustices and prejudices manifesting in language use.

### **8.4.3 Methodological contributions**

This study has managed to apply the discourse-historical approach (DHA) in examining new media discourses on Ndebele Particularism. DHA is a useful analytic approach that provides tools for investigating new media reconstructions of memories and identities. Considering that

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<sup>45</sup> Realism is premised on an understanding that "an external world exists independently of our representations of it" (Nightingale & Cromby, 2002:702).

the DHA has not been utilised fully in studies on Ndebele identity politics, this research has laid a foundation for future works on the reconstruction of memories and identities. Secondly, this study suggests that CDA and audience reception studies can complement each other as research methods. My analysis of readers' comments on news websites indicates that the two methods are intertwined. I employed CDA to analyse the users' comments attached to YouTube videos, news stories, opinion pieces and written testimonies. At the same time, the users' comments indicated how audiences were using new media to reconstruct their memories and identities. Further, my own analysis of media texts constitutes a process of media reception. As such, drawing upon insights from both CDA and audience reception studies can extend our understanding of the role of new media in the reconstructions of identities and memories. Lastly, an analysis of YouTube videos and Gukurahundi testimonies is a scholarly contribution, as these units of analysis have largely been uncharted in the research work on Ndebele Particularism.

## **8.5 Future research projects**

Considering that this study has underlined the centrality of witness accounts in new media reconstructions of Ndebele memory, it is pertinent that future studies focus on the role and place of testimony in journalism, and in memory construction. Scholars have yet to pay adequate attention to the intersection of journalism and testimony in the reconstruction of Gukurahundi. Given that the idea of "eye witnessing" is embedded in journalism practice, as journalists invoke the notion of "having been there" to authenticate their accounts of events (Zelizer, 2007:408), it is important to develop our understanding not only of the role of witness accounts in memory construction, but also the place of testimony in journalism practice, and probe how it complements and undermines the role of journalists.

Although this study examined how the selected news websites integrate social media, there is room for the further exploration of the reconstruction of the discourses of Ndebele Particularism and Zimbabweanness on social networks such as YouTube, Facebook and Twitter. Lastly, considering that this study was text-based, future studies can broaden this research field by embracing audience reception studies in order to examine media consumption and memory construction. Thus, there is a need for scholarly works on audiences' reception of new media and memory construction. Through the use of qualitative methods, such as interviews, focus groups and ethnography, future studies can explore the views of Ndebele people on the role of new media in their recollection of memories and articulation of

ethnic/national identities. Such research works can broaden our understanding of the role of text, audiences and context as Ndebele people use new media to mediate their memories and identities in the course of their everyday lives.

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