



WRITING VIOLENCE INTO PERSPECTIVE: A 21ST CENTURY ZIMBABWEAN SHORT STORY GENRE APPROACH

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Abstract:

In this paper, we seek to explain why and how violence has been an instrument and method of choice in the political, social and economic spheres of the Zimbabwean society. The motivation is that the 21st century in Zimbabwe has been characterized by far-reaching forms of violence that have formed the backdrop of many literary narratives, particularly the short story whose genre characteristics have enabled the timely capturing of unfolding events from a fictional-historical viewpoint. In analyzing the manifestations and levels of violence, particular focus was placed on the short story writings from the year 2000. The selected short stories were: "Sewage Pipe" by John Appel; "The Sellout" by Huggins; "Torn Posters" by Gugu Ndlovu; and "The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa" by Edward Chinhanhu. Postcolonial theory and genre criticism are some of the theoretical approaches that were adopted in the analysis of the selected short stories. The arising conclusions were that the analysed short stories revealed that acts of violence, represented through the various characters, interrupt and even terminate social and political relations thereby increasing antipathy and acrimony in a Nation State such as Zimbabwe. It is, therefore, befitting that in the final analysis the discussion revealed and recommended that violence is avoidable for the ultimate mutual existence and socio-political development of 21st Century Zimbabwe.

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1. Introduction

Violence, in the generality of Zimbabwean history has been employed to pursue political and economic power or economic exploitation. Violence implies intense force on individuals; groups or nation and this force can be overtly physical or covertly psychological. Hence the paper explores various forms of violence leaving the reader wondering whether violence can be rated or better still justified. The reader is also made to ponder on the various reactions to violence by the violated. Is there a correct and justified reaction? This study has been guided by the general observation that there is an appreciation of different forms of violence, both physical and emotional, that have bedevilled Zimbabwean society and these have been retraced to the different historical periods, for example, colonialism, the political and economic crisis of the year 2000 to the time leading to the formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) in 2009 and beyond. Arguably, violence, whether politically, socially or economically induced, has affected men, women and children at their various levels of calling thereby impacting negatively on the family fibre and development at both family and national level. Sachikonye (2011, p. 28) has given a political facet to the understanding of violence that *'there is common tendency to view violence as spontaneous or random. Those who conceive or plan violence as a strategy can be a handful of leaders or organisers of a party or movement'*. He has further added that, *'these leaders or organisers rely on a mass of supporters or special groups who do not necessarily need to understand the overall strategy or intended outcome to implement the violence'*.

1.1 Objectives

- To identify the reasons why violence exists in society.
- To reveal the main perpetrators of violence.
- To bring out strategies that can be used to combat violence in society.
- To explore the literary approach to the presentation of violence in short stories in Zimbabwe.

1.2 Why the Short Story?

The short story genre has been chosen for its distinct characteristics that include among others, its timely attribute in capture of events. Anny (2011) has put forward that the idea behind the short story genre is to convey a message or a point to the reader in a small amount of words. In this regard, the short story is more pointed and more

economically detailed as to character, situation, time period, and plot than a novel. Usually short stories have an abrupt beginning and endings, in some instances ending could be inconclusive. As noted in the short stories under discussion, every part of a short story is important. This aspect refers back to the economy of words that characterise the short story as a distinct genre. Over and above aiming at unity of effect, one notable recurring attribute of the discussed short stories is the focus on a creation of mood rather than narration of a story. It is, therefore, significant that one bears these characteristics in mind as they attempt an understanding of how the selected short stories have been instrumental in writing violence into perspective. The '*swiftness of reportage close to the heels of actuality*' discussed by Gerard (1986) has seen the short story prompt in presentation for acts of violence that have characterised the twenty-first century Zimbabwe, particularly in terms of political, economic and social rungs which the novels and textbooks could have taken years and volumes of papers to draw to the fore.

1.3 Selected Short Stories and Violence

Three short stories were selected in pursuit of the objectives identified above. The short stories are briefly summarized and analysed as means of revealing the cause for violence, the violence perpetrators and the literary approach of each story.

1.3.1 "Sewerage Pipe" by John Appel, [2007], *White Man Crawling*.

John Eppel in his short story collection *White Man Crawling* published in 2007 presents one of the short stories "Sewerage Pipe" (pp.71-73) which focuses on various facets of violence in Zimbabwe. Set in Bulawayo, one of the metropolitan provinces and the second largest city after Harare the capital city of Zimbabwe, Eppel foregrounds the microcosm in terms of permeation of violence. Interesting for this analysis, the period 2007 is situated within the peak period of economic meltdown in Zimbabwe. Problems of food scarcity and food riots; hoarding of basic commodities; parallel market and political violence (manifest at the coming into the political arena of the Movement for Democratic Change) were characteristic of 2007 onwards. In addition, the year 2007 marked the political watershed in Zimbabwe with the looming decisive elections of 2008. The elections were decisive in the sense that the Zimbabwe African National Union- Patriotic Front (ZANU-PF) had never faced such political competition as they had from Movement for Democratic Change (MDC). Eppel alludes to the reign of the ZANU-PF led government when he says,

'The government, which had been in power since independence in 1980, looked as if it was going to remain in power for ever- unless the suffering masses took to the streets in their tens of thousands, in their hundreds of thousands (leave millions, billions, and trillions to fiscus) and protested' (71).

Allusion to the government's tenure in power is a deliberate attempt by Eppel to expose the conditioning circumstances to violence. The citation states the issue of governance, disgruntlement (otherwise if there was peace and contentment there would be no need to call the masses to protest), and inference to the Zimbabwean fiscus that had exacerbated the suffering of the masses due to the Zimbabwean dollar that had plummeted. Zimbabweans were now talking of millions, billions and trillions of dollars in their transactions. Meanwhile, the suffering of the ordinary Zimbabweans had reached unprecedented levels. Earlier on in the story, the narrator says, *'Coins had been out of circulation for months in Zimbabwe. Only the brown, \$20 000 Bearer Cheques were of any value: about six potatoes of value'* (71). The compounding effect of economic suffering, among other ingredients to violence, is presented by Eppel as fertile ground for protests and violence. The economic crisis of the decade beginning in 2000, which Eppel alludes to, compounded the regressive authoritarianism and significantly undermined what remained of the social contract between Zimbabwean citizens and their state. As an Afrobarometer survey observed, deprivations were not widely felt in Zimbabwe where 75 per cent thought they were personally disadvantaged, and where 50 per cent thought their group lagged behind (Bratton et al., 2005). The findings portrayed a Zimbabwean population that was shell-shocked by rapid contractions in living standards and where gross economic disparities had opened up between ordinary people and privileged party elites.

The short story begins with insinuations of violent acts being contemplated by the protagonist Shorn Coleridge, who, as is characteristic of the short story genre presentation technique, is the character around whom the experiences of violence are centred. Shorn is contemplating suicide, or 'sewerage pipe' on which the title of the story is derived. Reference to, 'a bullet in the mouth pointing brainwards, hanging self with three metres of sash cord and poisoning self with Ratkill' are all destructive and unnerving acts used by most suicidal individuals in taking their own lives. It is not coincidental that Eppel presents Shorn as brooding over his death which is conceived as a way of escapism from suffering. The aforementioned acts of omission were popular with most people who decided to commit suicide. Only the fittest stood to survive in Zimbabwe, and this meant the financially fit.

Eppel has alluded to the other factors that have fuelled violence in Zimbabwe, for example, vote rigging, politicisation of the police and the armed forces, the judiciary, the church, chiefs, domestic pets even. Most of these mentioned ingredients for violence and protests have been the outcry of the opposition parties in Zimbabwe, particularly Movement for Democratic Change (MDC) who have seen ZANU-PF as enemies of democracy and champions of violence. Politicisation of the uniformed forces has been described as institutionalised violence. Sachikonye (2011, p.20) has argued regarding institutionalised violence that;

“... there is both a qualitative and quantitative difference in the scale of political violence between the periods before and after independence... state institutions are systematically deployed to repress dissent and weaken opposition parties (MDC in the 2000s). There is a steady drift towards the exploitation of state institutions such as the police for partisan purposes during elections... those institutions charged with protecting the law and dispersing justice have abdicated their responsibility. This explains the breakdown in the rule of law particularly from 2000.”

ZANU-PF has been accused of instigating violence among Zimbabweans by using state arms for selfish political aggrandisement particularly against members of the MDC.

As much as the narrator alludes to Bulawayo as a town within which to initiate the protest, it should be noted that Bulawayo, as earlier referred, is just referred as a microcosm of the macrocosm. Bulawayo itself has once been an economic and industrial powerhouse of Zimbabwe but lately, it has suffered deindustrialisation due to unfavourable investor policies by the ZANU-PF government. It is therefore not coincidental that Eppel has inferred a historical truth by citing Bulawayo as a place to stage a protest, *‘why not initiate a mass protest right here in Bulawayo’* (71). It is again no error that the narrator refers to Bulawayo that, *‘the town was already teeming with the unemployed, and with school children whose parents could no longer afford the fees’* (71). Nkrumah (2011, p. 10) has reported that the same conditions prevailed in Egypt in a run-up to the “Youth Revolution” whereby *‘the rich got richer, the elite got more Westernised, and the poor Egyptians, who constituted 90% of the population, got poorer and more desperate as their living standards declined and job prospects disappeared’*.

As a short story writer, Eppel has succeeded in insinuating the spate of revolutions and protests that have taken place in Africa during the first decade of twenty first century. For example, in referring to the uprising to be initiated in Bulawayo, the narrator says, *‘News of the uprising would quickly spread to Harare, thence to Masvingo, Mutare, Gweru, Kwekwe, maybe even Colleen Bawn. The masses would rise up, and*

the government would fall' (71, 72). One is summoned to draw parallels with political revolutions that transpired in Libya and Ivory Coast where the Presidents, Muammar Al Gathafi and Laurent Gbagbo respectively fell-off with their constituencies. The same happened in Tunisia (leading to the demise of the presidency of Zine El Abidine Ben Ali after 23 years of unchallenged rule) and the ensuing protests led to violent altercation between the protestors and the police supporting the government, hence the genocides. Ankomah (2011) has argued that the events of the year 2011 have happened around the world in four months making 2011 look like it was already a decade old. Leaders who abdicate their responsibility and constitutional mandate stand to face revolt from their followers. It is during such protests that insults and slogans are hailed at the supposed evil practices, for example, *"DOWN WITH ZANU-PF POOFTAS"* (72). The foregoing is a down-dressing of the government *'that has ruled since independence'*.

In compounding violent acts, the narrator has drawn parallels to the protest life of survival of the fittest within the city. Over and above the unemployed who wandered aimlessly about, the story has it that, *'Beggars there were [sic], and street kids aplenty: rivals, for junk food scraps, of pied crows, sparrows, pigeons, and rattus rattus alexandrinus'* (72). *The fierce fight between human beings and birds is symbolic of the order of the day that has characterised the impoverished urban dwellers. They cannot even afford a newspaper as they only hover near the news-stands in the hope of getting a free read of the Chronicle...* (72).

In his description of the churning of violence in Zimbabwe, Eppel has alluded to what Sachikonye (2011) has described as *'institutionalised violence in Zimbabwe'*; enshrined in the title of his book *When A State turns on its Citizens*. The narrator says;

"Enough, however, for a pack of teenage militias, recent graduates from one of the Border Gezi training Camps, who had been taught that any kith and kin of Blair and his gay gangstars, was Zimbabwe's enemy number one. There were three girls and six boys, identically dressed in green combat outfits, black boots, black belts, and black batons" (72)

The teenage militias were a product of "The Government" that Eppel has chosen to refer using an understatement for fear of victimisation. Such institutions as Border Gezi training Camp, named after the former Minister of Youth Development Border Gezi, were condemned by most Human Rights Organisations and Zimbabweans at large for being tocher-chambers for the victims of political violence in Zimbabwe. The camps were set in the guise of installing a sense of patriotism among the youth, and yet the same youths came out of those institutions as rogues, totally unnerved of respect to human life. In the least, they went about terrorising villagers and own parents whipping them into *'the government'* line. The vulnerability of the youth has been

observed by Sachikonye (2011) who has argued that the youth are easily 'rented' for promises of jobs and adventure, cash and alcohol, amongst other inducements, particularly during election campaigns. Commenting on the institutionalisation of violence through such training of youths, Sachikonye (2011, p. 21) has said that;

"More cynically, the state itself created other institutions trained in the administration of political intimidation and violence. These were the militia whose recruiting ground was trainees from national service (Border Gezi) training camps as well as war veterans. Drawn predominantly from youths in their teens, national service camps imparted political indoctrination that extolled the pre-eminence of ZANU-PF in the liberation struggle and government. The indoctrination also painted opposition parties as 'sell-outs' and 'western puppets'.... Significantly, this militia worked closely with both the ruling party and state institutions such as the police and army. "

A staging of any form of unsanctioned protest is something that has not been tolerated in Zimbabwe. "The government" enacted into law, the Public Order and Security Act (POSA), whose mandate was to quell any form of so-called unsanctioned gathering to which the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) descended heavily. Shorn's gathering or protest is presented by Eppel as having been out of the bounds of POSA, hence an exposition of lack of freedom of expression and respect of human rights. As everything turned physically violent, a gruesome picture of the fate that has met most protestors in Zimbabwe is graphically explored;

"As they converged on Shorn, the small crowd he had attracted quickly dispersed to a safe distance from where they could watch the action. The street kids dropped the banner and took to their heels. Down came the batons, in went the boots; and as consciousness began to fade from Shorn's mind he regretted only that his death wouldn't achieve anything useful. He as vaguely aware of screaming, as one of the broom handles rammed into his bottom, or 'sewerage pipe', as the militias jokingly called it" (72, 73)

The appalling degree of brutality against Shorn who is left to face the militias alone exposes the lack of collective spirit among Zimbabweans despite the simple fact that they have been pushed to their limit. A stark contrast can be drawn to the protest in Tunisia that was driven by collective action. As Yedder (2011, p. 22) reports, *'Tunisians collectively organised themselves to fight off the militias which the government had set on the streets to wreck havoc and instil fear and instability. And despite the sad loss of innocent lives, victory was achieved- the Ben Ali days of covert repression was truly over!'*

Unlike the case in Tunisia, it appears from the short story that Shorn is the only courageous character who challenges the government.

The futility of any protest is that those who have taken part have died unrecognised, to borrow from the narrator's words, "without achieving anything useful". As is characteristic of the hanging ending of the short stories, Eppel concludes that, "*He [Shorn] was vaguely aware of screaming, as one of the broom handles rammed into his bottom, or 'sewerage pipe' is synonymous with waste, as the militias jokingly called it*" (73). Shorn is beaten to pulp. "Sewerage pipe" is synonymous with waste, as if to imply that waste (which has prompted Shorn to rebel against 'the government') has to be forcibly beaten out of him. What ultimately happens to Shorn's body or corpse is vaguely left to the reader to conclude.

Eppel has brought in reference to ZANU-PF and its castigation, coupled with the beatings of citizens like Shorn to highlight the fact that, 'the post- independence state did not make an effort to pre-empt or contain political violence. It was a participant in that violence directly or indirectly (Sachikonye, 2011, p. 22). The beating of Shorn exposes the brutality of the government of the day. As further argued by Sachikonye this is not uncommon in an authoritarian state. In such a situation, the state turns against the interests of citizens and denies them freedom to exercise political rights. Shorn is denied his right to express both political and economic discontent with the despotic regime.

1.3.2 "The sell out" by Huggins, [2004], *Stained Earth*

Huggins also published a collection of short stories in 2004, *Stained Earth: A Collection of Short Stories*, which focuses on the manifestations of violence within the Zimbabwean society. Of particular interest is the short story "The Sell-Out" where violence is overtly and covertly presented. The story is quite interesting and incredulous, particularly when the community wakes up in the morning to find a white owned store reduced to '*charred, smouldering and acrid remains*' (23) yet the other businessman across the road claims to have heard nothing during the night. Tafirenyika the businessman is questioned by Creg Stanyon from the CID over a fire that razed down the entire business complex across the road. It is interesting to note that Tafirenyika did not hear both the crackle and roar of neither fire nor explosion from chemicals and paint.

Stanyon is invited by Mashonganyika to his prosperous farm. Mashonganyika reveals that he has been receiving letters threatening him and his family and has been labelled 'sell-out'. He claims that the community hates him because he listens to the white government hence his success of wealth. However, he is not prepared to reveal his enemies in fear of being killed and is also not prepared to be guarded in case he

becomes vulnerable when the guards leave. He also does not want to join the movement against his will.

The story is thus set against the volatile state of the nationalist movement as a way of exploring manifestations of collective violence. Although the actors Tafirenyika and Mashonganyika do not reveal the perpetrators of violence it becomes evident that there is an element of mistrust, jealous and envy in the community. The story thus explores violence in a community which is at the verge of independence. Whilst there are some success stories from a farmer like Mashonganyika who due to strict instruction and recommendations from the white government's Agritex extension officers produced fruits, the nationalist regard the successful ones as 'sell-outs'. Ironically, the story begins with an arson case of a store '*standing at the crossroads on the border between the commercial farming area and the Tribal Trust Lands*' (23). This setting depicts the mood of the people. The community is really unsettled and at crossroads about which route to follow; the Whiteman's shown to bring success like Mashonganyika's example or the nationalist movement depicted by Tafirenyika.

The burning down of the store is a case of physical violence. The reader suspects that the nationalists have rightfully targeted the white owned store because the whiteman is regarded as an enemy to their movement. The violence is intentional and brings satisfaction to the perpetrators. Thus, even if the fire burns with so much noise, crackling and roaring, roof falling in a crash, sparks flying into the night Tafirenyika claims to have not heard anything because to him it was probably a mission accomplished. Whilst on the other side of the road there were charred smouldering remains at the store site, at Tafirenyika's store young man were playing table soccer, '*They whirled the handles with great energy and shot the ball back and forth along the table at speed and amid great excitement*' (24). One wonders if this could be celebration or frustration.

The story also explores internal violence and its effects. According to Walker (2007, p. 1) "*physical violence may be evil, but sinning against another person's spirit or emotional violence is the worst sin of all*". Mashonganyika is driven to experience emotional violence through the notes scribbled on pieces of paper and left by his entrance. Mashonganyika believes that this occurs because people are envious of his success. He suspects the nationalists are responsible just as they petrol bombed the store. He might suspect them but he is afraid of them. He is emotionally tortured because according to the notes, '*sell-outs will be burnt out of their homes and be killed*' (26). As a result of this Mashonganyika lives in fear and according to him it was even worse when the store was burnt down perhaps because he might have thought he was next.

Mashonganyika feels 'scared', 'isolated' and in need of protection. Perhaps telling someone provided solace but according to Stanyon one has to face violence with violence. As a result, Stanyon advises Mashonganyika to 'arm' himself, to get a gun. Mashonganyika, however, is a different nationalist. He claims to love his country, to love his land and would also love to see the country independent. He is not an extremist and thus does not favour nationalist meetings and their violent ways. Instead, he says he could not get a gun, *'I am a nationalist at heart.... I am a man of peace. I do not believe in their violent ways'* (28).

Although Mashonganyika is a man of peace he has to face the violence that surrounds him. He has to stand up and fight or die. That would mean sacrificing his morality and principles, otherwise Stanyon might come in the very near future to investigate his murder after he and his family have been burnt and only charred remains found. That picture obviously brings fear. The easiest option however is that Mashonganyika should join the movement. That is internal torture to him because he would be doing something that would be against his principles. Stanyon replies thus, *'Don't be stupid, brave and die: why should one be termed stupid because of his desire to follow his principles?'* (28). Mashonganyika admits that his heart is heavy because,

"We Africans are not permitted to be ourselves, to think for ourselves, to choose our own way. We always have to belong to the party, carry a card, to attend meetings, cheer in the right places and follow their ways. If we resist we are beaten. We then live in fear if we are not killed outright" (29)

Mashonganyika's fears are paralleled to lack of freedom of expression and association raised by John Eppel through the character Shorn Coleridge in the earlier discussed short story 'Sewerage Pipe'. The foregoing excerpt brings forth the main theme of the story which unfortunately portrays political violence as instigated by political parties. Politics survives through intimidation and threats. Unfortunately, no peaceful ways of protection can be found as seen in Mashonganyika's case. According to Stanyon, the whole issue is a 'curse'. People just have to stand up and fight as a means of getting protection; otherwise the only other solution is to join them. The questions that immediately follow are: whether physical peace and protection will lead to internal peace? Whether violence can be positive or it always remains a negative encounter? Why should those who embrace violence be protected even by those subjected to the violence? Commenting on a related issue, Sachikonye (2011:90) has argued that, *'nothing has been as profoundly disillusioning and symbolic as seeing perpetrators*

remain scot-free and going further to brag that they would not be touched by state authorities. Perpetrators view themselves as part of the state apparatus and 'above the law'.

It gets interesting at the end of the story when CID Mangobo reveals that he picked up a piece of paper at Mashonganyika's farm written, 'sell-out' in red crayon. It emerges that the same red crayon has been used by Tafirenyika to record his sales. According to Mashonganyika, Tafirenyika has been newly elected as the nationalist chairperson. This discovery creates a clear lead as to who the instigator of violence is. One arising question is whether people should be killed in the name of politics because they hold different views from us? As Sachikonye (2011, p. 90) would conclude *'the outcome has been a society that muddles through with festering scars that could develop into future conflicts of retribution, thus reinforcing the cycle of violence. But the cycle of violence cannot be broken if the system of impunity of those who perpetrate violence remains'*.

1.3.3 "Torn Posters" by Gugu Ndlovu in Staunton, [2003], *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe*

Gugu Ndlovu in her short story "Torn Posters" cited in the collection *Writing Still: New Stories from Zimbabwe* edited by Staunton (2003) dwells on the concept of violence within the various facets of the Zimbabwean society. The story is set against election time when parties in Zimbabwean politics have to fight their way into government. Whilst one party, ZANU-PF, flights posters as a campaign strategy, one group of 'a small but fierce guerrilla squad' (179) sets out to destroy these posters, a duty they do with razor like precision.

The stand-off between the political parties is caused by dissatisfaction amongst the people of Matabeleland who have not received the promised fruits of independence. To make matters worse, a group of soldiers have mercilessly killed and murdered the Matabele villagers under an order to kill a minimum of 100 Matabele people each (180). Men disappear without trace causing all men to live in fear. Butho's father is also kidnapped and tortured at Chikurubi Maximum Prison. When the family visit him in prison, they are surprised to see *"a shrunken older man with white hair and in a brown khaki prison uniform shuttled in"* (188). There is painful silence and eventually all family members cry, but their father says to them, *'Don't let them see you cry...if they see you cry they will feel they have won over you'* (188). The story thus has many examples of painful violence scenes- painful because the violence is deep and internal. One could also describe it as hurtful; driven by hatred, anger and at times mere malice. After reading the short story one is left wondering whether violence can be rated- one worse than the other. It is also interesting to note how reaction to violence varies among the violated. Why should people seek to exert their dominance so violently even when they have

won the election? But what remains is that the violated will always find strength and will-power to find solace and peace no matter how painful the situation might be. Perhaps the issues raised above could be understood through an analysis of each group in isolation of which these groups are poster destroyers and disguised soldiers or the dissidents.

Poster destroyers

They are driven by anger and dissatisfaction. They represent a community that has been betrayed. As a result they justify their violence as a performance of a patriotic duty. Their raids are planned and done with razor-like precision. The use of the word 'razor' could also depict the sharpness of their pain within. They also describe themselves as "*fierce guerrilla squad*" to show that they have accepted their purpose for violence. Whenever a poster is identified, to them the poster is a live representation of the enemy. They are not merely tearing off a poster but they are crashing and crumbling an enemy.

These posters are described as 'bloody posters' to display '*the bleeding hatred within*'. Just the sight of these posters they would be "*engulfed by bitter rage*" and '*that hatred rose like bile in their throats*'. This was enough to send the young guerrillas screaming war cries as they tore and crushed the posters. In their angry and hateful imagination they were not tearing mere papers but the actual people on the posters, hence they talk of "*ripping into their flesh,... each blow killing him and his fat greedy ministers*" (179). As a result they likened their act to treason which was punishable by death hence they had to hide all evidence, "*the carcasses*" by stuffing everything into anthills. This was seen as a valuable contribution to the election hence it left them with, "*an ironic sense of pride*". But can any form of violence be justified?

Disguised Soldiers or the Dissidents

To the villagers, the men wrecking havoc to the community were disguised soldiers whilst to the government the same men were from an unsettled group of Ndebele army. The government identified these men as dissidents. However, what remains was that both groups were associated with violence.

The presence of dissidents, although heard from distant realities, caused both physical and psychological violence to the Matabeleland villagers. Huts were set ablaze with sleeping families in them, "*mass graves in abandoned mines; mothers stripped naked and forced to watch their children's throats slit*" (180). As if this was not enough, elderly women were beaten and raped. Due to this torture and violence the villagers had abandoned their homesteads so abruptly that they left their pots still on fire. This is a sure sight of the mercilessness of the violence that had descended on the community.

Once the group appeared it was either you vanished or you would be killed.

"The deep-seated nature of anger is demonstrated by the narrator when she says, 'People's hearts were heavy with grief for their losses. That grief quickly mutated into dark bitterness, as we all tried to make sense of it' (181). Man's dignity had been violated because their wives and daughters had been raped in their presence. The girls had lost their treasured womanhood to strangers and the women had been embarrassed by being violated in the presence of their children. As a result, everyone and the children in particular, "inherited that bitterness as a predisposition" (181).

Despite all the pain and torture, Butho and Thandi's father is able to smile at them when they visit him in prison, with eyes that shone as they always did. Thus, despite all violence that can be inflicted upon someone, the comfort shared with a loved one cannot be broken. Whilst tears will bring relief to the injured (the father and his family), the enemy might consider it his triumph, thereby injuring you more, hence their father says, *"If they see you cry they will feel they have won over you"* (189). This results in bottled bitterness which can be passed from generation to generation. There is no forgiveness and the enemy gets to be your enemy as long as you live. According to the narrator, *'if this is a game of chess therefore, 'there would be no checkmate while I was alive'* (181) and that is an unforgiving vow, violence begetting violence.

1.3.4 "Minister without Portfolio" by Chingono in Staunton [ed. 2007] *Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*

The short story, "Minister without Portfolio" in the collection *Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe* edited by Staunton foreground the violence encountered by the Chauffeur at work. The relationship between the minister and the chauffeur is clearly that of master-servant, with no room for human error. The communication between them reflects it all- it is one way communication, Mhofu just listens and does as is required. Furthermore, the language is harsh and the minister is actually calmed down by the woman, after all it was all because of the potholes which the driver could not control. Readers are compelled to sympathise with the chauffeur who is also assigned to be the chef's "diary" as the latter says, *'Mhofu, record that in my memory machine'* (7). Underlying the relationship between the chef and chauffeur is the subculture of social disadvantage and aggression, that is, physical or verbal behaviour intended to hurt someone. The chef's aggression and hostility spring from anger.

There is evidence of immorality shown by the fact that Agnes belonged *'to the body of women hangers- on....'* (8) These are commercial sex workers. The chef gets close to some self-admonition when he says, *'...it's these old men who take advantage of you flowers....'* The metaphorical reference reduces women to objects or items that are used for decoration just like flowers.

The short story also conveys covert violence in the form of war and military games. The liberation war is celebrated as having been positive violence that was meant to liberate the black majority and their land, hence constant reference to '*the blood of gallant fighters*' (9, 10). The concept of destruction is further shown through the veld-fires which destroy the environment. The environment is vulnerable, just like young women who are forced into prostitution.

Abuse of children is evidenced by the fact that some children are digging for mice when they are expected to be at school. The foregoing is an austere example of the violation of children's rights to education. Abject poverty and illiteracy are bound to be permanent aspects of farm-workers and their children. According to Armstrong (1989), abuse is, '*...a criminal act against another person, it also incorporates exploitation, discrimination, the upholding of unequal economic and social structures, creation of terror, situation of threat and reprisals and many other forms of coercion*'.

1.4.5 "The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa" by Edward Chinhanhu in Staunton, [2007], *Laughing Now: New Stories from Zimbabwe*

Edward Chinhanhu's short story, "The Chances and Challenges of Chiadzwa" brings to the fore themes of deprivation and deficiency as key triggers to violence. There are poor harvests and local people suffer reprisal after voting for the opposition political party. One is tempted to conclude that there are '*strings attached*' to the food in convoys of trucks (17). The abuse of children is also visible in this story. When school teachers and their pupils abandon education to go and get the precious diamonds, then there is a total breakdown of order. The nurses, teachers and other civil servants also join. Such activities poignantly reflect on the evils of socio-economic stratification in the country. There are extremes of wealth and poverty, hence the violent acts by the wealthy are meant to safeguard their treasures against invasion by the poor.

The locals are forcibly 'pushed out' and the area is declared government property. One immediately sees human greed under the guise of 'order to the mining processes'. This too is some form of violence that is reminiscent of the violence that characterised the repossession of the farms that were formerly owned by the white minority at the expense of the landless black majority. Even the environment consequently suffers as a result of the mining activity in Chiadzwa.

There is physical violence inflicted by the security agents such as members of the police force against smugglers. During the meeting chaired by Magwegwe, it becomes clear that locals want justice. When the villagers reflect that God has comforted them from their economic distress and spates of drought, they are told to stay away (20). As a last resort, members of the community become dishonest to the extent of faking death

and also abusing sick leave in order to go and scrounge for diamonds. In essence, the short story presents politicians as perpetrators of violence directly or indirectly.

2. Conclusions

The final analysis of the discussed short stories somewhat qualifies what Thornton (1985) says that violence is only “visible” after the fact and rarely before and that the causal models cannot readily be constructed in advance. Unlike other mediated or emotionally charged social interactions, acts of violence interrupt and even terminate social relations. What cannot be denied is that violence evokes terror. The UNESCO (1981) article on the causes of violence cited in Joxe (1981, p.5) asserts that, ‘*at all levels of research into the causes of violence, scientific discussion generally holds that violence is explicable and that, because it is explicable, it is avoidable*’.

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