

The Colonial Boomerang: A Comparative Analysis of the Traumatic Effect of the Violence of War in Alexander Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* and Alexandra Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat*

Yuleth Chigwedere

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8079-5963>

Women's University in Africa,
Zimbabwe

yulethc@yahoo.com

Isaac Choto

<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6461-8606>

Chinhoyi University of Technology,
Zimbabwe

chotoisaac@yahoo.co.uk

Abstract

This literary analysis explores how the repercussions of violence had both metaphysical and traumatic consequences for those involved in the war that led to the liberation of Zimbabwe, regardless of which side they fought for. This scarring of the psyche is vividly explored in Alexandra Kanengoni's *Echoing Silences* and Alexander Fuller's *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier*. The main character in the former text is a black Zanla freedom fighter, while the protagonist in Fuller's text is an ex-Rhodesian white soldier. This allows for insightful comparative analysis. Despite their differing socio-political cultures and positions within the war—one seeking to perpetuate colonial hegemony, the other to destroy it—in the post-war era neither of them escapes the boomerang effect of the wartime violence. The premise of this analysis is therefore, encapsulated in the Shona proverb *Hapana mhosva isangaripwe* ("There is no crime which does not carry a fine or reparation"). A psychoanalytic theoretical framework informs the examination as we reveal the traumatic experiences the two protagonists encounter, and trace their journeys as they revisit and re-member their sites of violence during the war in a quest to purge themselves of their "demons" and achieve psychological redemption.

Keywords: *ngozi*; psychoanalytic theory; restitution; trauma; violence; war

Introduction

Only the dead have seen the end of the war. Plato

In his seminal text, *By Any Means Necessary* (1992), renowned American civil rights activist Malcolm X argues that war and bloodshed are necessary modalities for enduring peace and liberation. In ordinary civilian life, violence is abhorred, yet in war it may mean the difference between life and death. The fact that war is a bloodletting, destructive and counterproductive experience does not diminish the potential it has for bringing liberation and the fulfilment of life it encapsulates. War is therefore, always a paradoxical experience. This is why war narratives tend to valorise the cathartic effect of war, while often ignoring the enduring physical, emotional and psychological damage that it causes. In the first decade of independence in Zimbabwe, this valorisation was evident in the nation's celebratory literature on the war, which was born out of the euphoria of black self-determination. Such narratives included Moses Makata's *Gona ReChimurenga* (1982) and Edmund Chipamaunga's *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983), amongst others. In such literature, the narratives tend to "romanticize and deodorize the liberation struggle" (Chiweshe 2004), portraying the war in idyllic terms and concentrating more on its causes and its positive, rather than negative, after-effects. The redemptive outcome of the war enjoyed pride of place in these narratives.

Although some of this literature portrays the fact that "the violence of the guerrillas is sanctioned by spirits and natural forces, and by their efforts to re-establish an 'authentic' African life and dignity" (Kaarsholm 2005, 5), this endorsement does not annihilate the psychic traumatic experiences that are inevitably a result of the violence orchestrated by war. Other narratives, especially those by writers who were directly involved in the armed struggle, provide more realistic depictions of the war, exposing the emotional and psychological scarring that war veterans suffer as a consequence of exposure to the monstrosities of war. Examples of such literature are Freedom Nyamubaya's *On the Road Again* (1986), Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and Isheunesu Mazorodze's *Silent Journey from the East* (1989). These writers do not embellish the undeniably violent nature of the experience of war, notwithstanding its emancipatory role. Neither do they ignore the fact that "[o]ne cannot experience such horrors, either as a witness or as a perpetrator, and hope to emerge out of it unscathed" (Chigidi 2009, 47), especially for those who were at the battlefield. Similarly, when writing about the wars fought in Western societies Micale and Lerner (2001, 16) acknowledge how many soldiers suffered severe breakdowns as a result of the "mechanized slaughter and inhumane trench conditions" that they experienced. What these critics allude to is the psychic trauma that results from any war and that continues even long after the war is over.

Very few literary analyses or critiques of narratives of the Zimbabwean liberation war have explored the devastating effects of the war across the racial divide. This analysis

therefore, foregrounds the metaphysical and traumatic consequences of the war that Alexander Kanengoni and Alexandra Fuller depict in their literary texts, *Echoing Silences* (1997) and *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African soldier* (2004), respectively¹. The analysis illuminates the boomerang effect of the violence of Zimbabwe's war from an interracial perspective as the narratives analysed represent the trauma experienced by fighters from different sides of the front. Both Kanengoni and Fuller are seasoned writers. Apart from *Echoing Silences*, Kanengoni has penned other war narratives such as *Effortless Tears* (1993) and *When the Rainbird Cries* (1987). In contrast to *Echoing Silences'* focus on war veterans, *Effortless Tears* is a collection of short stories that captures the traumatic effects of the liberation war on black civilians. There are several stories in the text, which reveal the contradictions and betrayals of the war, its crude violence and the perilous position, which the black civilians occupied during it. *When the Rainbird Cries* (1987) highlights the evil nature of war, such as the massacre of villagers and school children by the Rhodesian forces and the violation and abuse that village women faced at the hands of the comrades. Fuller's other books include *Don't Let's Go to the Dog's Tonight* (2001), a memoir of the childhood experiences of a white girl growing up in Africa with a racist and manic depressive mother, and *Cocktail Hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness* (2011), which is an exploration of Fuller's family life on the African soil. In *Scribbling the Cat*, however, Fuller moves away from the family as a subject to exposing the trauma faced by ex-Rhodesian soldiers in the aftermath of the war.

The protagonist K in *Scribbling the Cat* is a white Rhodesian soldier fighting to maintain the colonial hegemony of a white settler regime, whereas Kanengoni's main character, Munashe Mungate, is a black guerrilla fighter putting his life on the line to liberate his people from colonial oppression. The psychoanalytic framework espoused in the trauma theory shows that despite their cause, or which side they are fighting on, neither combatant is spared the trauma of the war as both suffer the psychological repercussions of their experiences. The analysis reveals how the brutal acts of violence inflicted on civilians during the war affect both K and Munashe and haunt them long after the war is over. How both the black and white soldiers in the narratives deal with, or fail to manage their post-war trauma, is also pertinent in this exploration, since coping mechanisms are obviously racially and culturally based. This juxtaposition demonstrates how war mocks any claim to outright victory by its participants.

Alexander and McGregor (2004, 74) posit that in a war situation, trauma is indicative of "the ways in which former civilians and soldiers cope – or fail to cope – with disturbing memories of violence." Terr (1990) states that psychic trauma is quickly internalised in the victim's mind after the traumatic event/s. It is therefore, a reaction to an event that is so overpowering that it causes psychological damage to the person

1 "Scribbling" is Afrikaans slang that means "killing".

experiencing it. Some trauma theorists, however, extend this definition to include the belated effect of such a traumatic episode. Caruth, for example, explains that “[t]o be traumatised is precisely to be possessed by an image or event” (1995, 5). She redefines trauma in order to account for the “*structure of its experience*” (1995, 4, italics in the original) where the traumatic event is experienced belatedly.

The trauma theory has however, been criticised as being an essentially Eurocentric theory as it has its origins in the Holocaust of the 1930s (Craps 2013; Rothberg 2008), which may not be the most appropriate framework when considering the legacy of violence in a postcolonial context (Craps 2013). This is because the western understanding of trauma of violence, and how it should be dealt with may not readily apply in a postcolonial African context. Although the colonial experience fractured African societies and upset Afrocentric belief systems and philosophies of life, spirituality remains a powerful force within these societies. As Visser (2011, 279) argues:

The western trauma model does not acknowledge spirituality as a reference point; indeed, its deconstructivist mode denies the possibility of regeneration through ritual and belief systems. The hegemonic trauma model thus obstructs entry to meanings underlying vital cultural non-western practices and beliefs. This makes it inadequate for an engagement with indigenous literatures that explore trauma in the context of ritual and ceremony.

In the Shona culture in Zimbabwe for example, the trauma experienced as a result of violent atrocities, and how perpetrators deal with the consequences of the violence has always been addressed from a communal level, not just from an individual one. Any murder committed, whether during a war scenario or in other circumstances, may impact not only on the perpetrator but also on members of her/his family. As such atonement for the murder is done for the benefit of the perpetrator of the murder, the perpetrator’s family, the victim’s family and the community at large. It is believed that if none of these ceremonies is carried out, the dead will always come back to seek vengeance or wreak havoc in the lives of the perpetrators and their families. This may result in the madness or mysterious deaths of family members. Therefore, the avenging spirit can only be assuaged if the necessary rituals are performed and compensation offered to the aggrieved family. From a Shona perspective then, “speaking” of the trauma, without proper recompense would not provide a lasting solution, as the analysis of texts later on will reveal.

On the other hand, some critics (Ward 2007; Durrant 2004) believe that despite its weakness, the trauma theory is valuable in the study of the postcolonial subject, as evident in African psychiatrist Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* (1967). As Zimbabwean critics, we do not readily dismiss the theory’s applicability to the Zimbabwean context as “these thinkers [of trauma theory] ... offer a critical vocabulary

for, and ways of thinking about, trauma and memory which are highly valuable to a psychological exploration of the postcolonial” (Ward 2007, 196). Although realising the usefulness of the trauma theory within an African context, as evidenced by its application in this analysis, we acknowledge that there is still a need to broaden it to accommodate the important nexus between the individual and the community that is central to African belief systems.

The first part of our analysis dwells on *Echoing Silences* and exposes the cruelty, vulnerabilities and nightmarish events of the war. It emphasises Munashe’s trauma during and after the war. There is not much linearity in the structure of Kanengoni’s plot, which is disjointed in seeming reflection of the protagonist’s fragmented psyche. The past and the present overlap, as if echoing not just the silences, but also Munashe’s traumatic experiences. Kanengoni’s narrative can thus be construed as a cathartic re-enactment of the harrowing war-time experiences that aims to facilitate therapeutic release.

The second part concentrates on *Scribbling the Cat*. Fuller’s account is an equally horrifying rendition that reveals how the supposedly invincible are not spared from the physical, emotional and psychological wounds inflicted by the war.² The story of K intertwines with that of other white ex-soldiers—St. Medard, Dingus and Mapenga,³ amongst others—to merge into a strange tapestry that illustrates the paranoia, grief and schizophrenia that are these men’s legacies of the war. Through their stories, Bobo, the narrator, goes to great lengths to expose how the traumatic violence of the war renames, redefines and re-characterises its victims. The final part of our analysis evaluates how this traumatic experience occurs across the racial divide. It also considers some of the strategies the characters who have survived the war use to cope with their trauma.

Traumatic “Re-Membering”⁴ of the War in *Echoing Silences*

Munashe, the protagonist in *Echoing Silences*, opts out of university education to pursue a nobler cause of fighting against the colonial establishment. This he does partly at the instigation of his high school Irish priest, Father Erasmus. The priest’s sermons “liberate the spirit” (Kanengoni 1997, 18) and imbue Munashe with the inspiration to free his

2 During his rule Ian Smith perpetuated the settler racist myth of the invincibility of the white man that was popularised by the song “Rhodesians will never die” by Clem Tholet and Andy Dillon, which was released in 1973.

3 In Shona, *mapenga* literally means “you have gone mad”. Significantly here, Fuller’s choice of name seems a deliberate one, given the mental instability of the character that bears the name.

4 The hyphenated form of the word “re-membering” as popularised by writers such as Toni Morrison is significant in that it refers not only to a simple recalling of the past, but to what Bhabha (1994, 63) describes as “a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present.”

country. In his final year at high school, he receives a letter from Father Erasmus that states (Kanengoni 1997, 19):

The most honourable fight in which one can engage is the active pursuit of freedom. So one day, when you are a man among free people, those of you – alive or dead – who were involved in the fight for freedom, will stand to be acknowledged as the heroes of your struggle.

This thought of freedom is clearly what prompts Munashe to join the war. The violence and unwarranted cruelties that come with the war seem just a pale shadow against the nobler call to liberate his people. The war scenario, however, turns out to be nothing Munashe had envisioned. In normal circumstances, the loss of life is grieved and the sanctity of life is paramount. Munashe discovers that war subverts this logic and human life becomes expendable. It routinises or normalises the abnormal. The combatants who survive the throes of the war trauma however, mostly do so with fragmented psyches and broken bodies.

Munashe is thrown completely off-balance by the ominously horrific reception he receives the first time he gets to the guerrilla camp in Zambia. The suspicion and hostility of the section commander psychologically disorients him. Added to this, the unexpected harassment and torture he experiences mark the first fracturing of his psyche; it engenders a crisis of expectations. Munashe finds that war is a “violent time when people thought about nothing else except killing or being killed” (Kanengoni 1997, 30). Amid the violence and brutality, these are the two unenviable choices he has, to kill or be killed. War normalises the para-normal through its daily exposure of the grotesque and macabre. *Echoing Silences* exposes how human beings’ existential sense of self is diminished by the war in which death is all pervading. Similarly, in *Scribbling the Cat*, K acknowledges this fact when he says: “we’re all just a bloody corpse waiting to happen” (Fuller 2004, 69). Both K and Munashe are reduced to subhuman “killing machines” (Fuller 2004, 26), as repeated killings and exposure to bloodletting experiences dull their affective responses. In the battle that they fight, they simply act as “automatons” because, as Munashe stresses, “[t]here were no real people in the war” (Kanengoni 1997, 30). Both narratives highlight how war modifies and transforms normal human behaviour. Yet, the wounds wrought by this alteration remain etched on both the bodies and minds of the fighters who survive long after the war has ended.

Munashe’s traumatising experiences in the war leave many unforgettable imprints on his mind. He can never forget, for example, the image of a young man whose arms “were tied with copper wire around the elbows behind his back so he looked like chicken being held by the wings” (Kanengoni 1997, 6)—neither can he erase the memory of the woman who tied a string around his testicles, or the situations of hunger and thirst that made guerrilla fighters drink their own urine. All these re-memberings constitute the grotesque reality of the war and he is possessed by them. They are re-memberings that

steadily nibble and peel away the layers of his sanity, leaving him in a precarious state where “nightmare and war became interchangeable” (Kanengoni 1997, 21).

The turning point in Munashe’s guerrilla life however, is marked by the incident where he is forced at gunpoint to use a hoe handle to batter to death an innocent woman with a baby on her back. This gruesome murder of mother and child flies in the face of reason and psychologically breaks him (Kanengoni 1997, 21):

The woman fell down with the first vicious blow and the sound of Munashe’s jarred and violent cry mingled with that of the dying baby as the hoe fell again and again and again until Munashe was splattered all over with dark brown blood and the base commander held him back and he refused, shouting that he wished that someone had killed him because he could not live with such a memory.

From the moment he begins to strike the fatal blows, Munashe is completely traumatised by the event. His closeness to the woman makes him feel “the effect of every delivered blow”, making the whole incident “morally and psychologically debasing” (Muwati, Gambahaya and Mangena 2006, 7). This is exactly the reason why this image haunts him even after the war of liberation has culminated in independence. Not only had he killed the woman, but also a baby that “hasn’t done anything wrong” (Kanengoni 1997, 4). This violent act is one of the many breaches to the “code of military operational ethics” (Kanengoni 1997, 28) outlined by the Geneva Conventions. It leaves Munashe in such a traumatic state that he feels a sense of dissociation from his body, which Brison explains as an “undoing of self” (1999, 39). It is this splintered sense of self that spirals out of control, leading to Munashe’s uncontrolled hallucinatory experiences and psychic fracturing.

In a similarly traumatising event in *Scribbling the Cat*, K cruelly tortures a young girl of about 16 or 17 to get her to reveal the whereabouts of guerrilla fighters suspected to be in the area. He describes how he puts a spoonful of hot *sadza* (thick porridge) into her vagina: “[a]nd I shoved and kept on shoving and by now she was screaming, so I put more *sadza* in there” (Fuller 2004, 151). Two weeks later, she dies from the infection of the wounds of this violent act. As K re-memembers his viciousness, he regrets his action: “I didn’t need to do that to her, I was an animal. An absolute ... savage” (Fuller 2004, 152). More than 20 years after the war has ended, he still cannot erase the image of this young girl from his mind. The memory of it all makes him “cry with his whole body” (Fuller 2004, 153). The crying signifies K’s broken masculinity and psychic vulnerability. These heinous acts, perpetrated on civilian women, permanently haunt both Munashe and K. Chinodya also highlights such violence in *Harvest of Thorns* in the incident where Benjamin, a guerrilla fighter, beats to death a woman accused of being a spy. This kind of brutality against civilian women is not peculiar to these texts. Murray (2011, 142–143) identifies several texts in which this happens:

In *Without a Name*, *The Stone Virgins* and *Under the Tongue*, the women who are brutalised are not active participants in the front of the struggle. Rather, Mazvita, Thenjiwe, Nonceba and Zhizha are all civilians who are violated by men who have, in some way or another, been traumatised by the experience of war.

Mapenga, an ex-soldier in *Scribbling the Cat*, acknowledges the criminality of such atrocities when he says: “[M]an, if there was a war crimes tribunal, every damn one of us – from both sides ... we’d all be up for murder. We’d all be in jail. War’s shit!” (Fuller 2004, 196).

When Munashe goes back to the warfront in Chimanda he experiences an existential loss of self as he moves “in a dazed way, seeing the things around him as if they were not part of him, being there but not feeling there” (Kanengoni 1997, 21). In the war he fights, he feels “cold-blooded and ruthless. He no longer had a self. He was the war” (Kanengoni 1997, 28). Malluche (2009) explains this removal from the self as a necessary defense mechanism when an individual encounters stressful situations. The dissociation results in a disruption of memory that accounts for Munashe’s sense of futility after the war is over. There is no celebration for him, no reunion with his family (Kanengoni 1997, 45):

What with all this death and killing and blood on his hands, could he return home to begin his life all over again, pretending that nothing had happened? No, he would not go home ... He would return to the place that represented the most violent part of his life during the war and attempt to reconcile himself, quietly, on his own, with the ghosts of the war.

This attempt to recover the memory of the war and reconnect it with the present reveals Munashe’s disrupted psyche and overwhelming sense of loss of self. Munashe has to return to the place where his crimes were committed because without this remembering, reconciliation or restitution cannot begin.⁵ However, it is critical to note that Munashe faces a daunting task, given the difficulty of curing the psychological wounds inflicted by war.

From a Shona metaphysical perspective, Munashe’s vicious killing of the woman with her baby strapped on her back results in *ngozi* (an avenging spirit), therefore requiring healing at a communal level, not just at an individual level. Mutekwa (2010) posits that such a spirit would inevitably seek retribution and justice for such evil acts. Muwati et al. (2006, 5), support this notion as they believe that “[g]enerally, *ngozi* can be characterised as the ravaging spirit of a wronged person who dies before the wrong is corrected”. Tirivangana (2011), however, contests this conception, arguing that because the term *ngozi* has no English equivalent, it is erroneously interpreted to mean “avenging

⁵ According to Galtung, “the act of restitution is an implicit admission of guilt” (1998, 69).

spirit.” He considers *ngozi* to specifically refer to a crime committed that violates the principle of the sanctity of human life. Despite their different conceptualisations of the term, all critics stress what is at the crux of this analysis—*hapana mhosva insingaripwe* (“there is no crime that does not carry reparation”). What this implies is that there must be some sort of restitution for Munashe’s murder of the woman and the baby on her back. Muwati et al. (2006, 6) stress that in the Shona culture, there is

[a] philosophical saying which teaches citizens about the only available solution to combat *ngozi*. The saying is: *mushonga wengozi kuiripa* (the only solution to appease the avenging spirit is reparations or restitution). As a result, the first step by the wrongdoer is acceptance of liability and preparedness to pay reparations or some form of restitution.

In *Echoing Silences*, this reparation that is necessary for healing to take place occurs through a cleansing ceremony carried out (*bira*) at the family homestead of the woman Munashe had killed. Through this ceremony, the spirit of the dead woman is brought back home—there is restitution. Munashe experiences the reconciliation of forgiveness as he surreally envisages, just before he dies, the woman he killed with a baby on her back saying to him: “[i]t wasn’t your fault” (Kanengoni 1997, 88). Unfortunately for Munashe, this ceremony comes too late, but at least, as is believed in the Shona tradition, that it has rid his family of the *ngozi*. His death at the end of the narrative brings him the peace he hungered for in his life after the war. For him, death becomes the ultimate salvation because as Chan (2005, 374) notes, with redemption “[t]he longer one waits – like Munashe—the harder the process, and probably the higher the price.”

We argue here though that Munashe is not only traumatised by the kind of heinous acts he committed during the war that require the cleansing ceremony discussed above. He is also traumatised by the violence he suffered to his physical being, the violence he witnessed and the horrendous tribulations he suffered alongside his fellow soldiers. The trauma from such experiences can hardly be assuaged only by the ritual he goes through at the end of the narrative. Before his death, Munashe also attempts to attend to his trauma by narrating his ordeals, since “narrative is a powerful and empowering therapeutic tool, enabling integration of the traumatic experience and aiding healing and recovery” (Visser 2011, 274). Furthermore, if we assume that *Echoing Silences* is a semi-autobiography and that Munashe’s experiences during the war are representative of Kanengoni’s own, then the very process of writing is, perhaps another cathartic way of seeking healing. It is a process of re-telling. The author allows his war-inflicted psychic wounds to speak through the pages of his narrative, achieving the kind of psychotherapy that narrative disclosure permits.

Journeying into the Psyche of a White Rhodesian Ex-Soldier

Unfortunately for K the peace that comes with Munashe's death is not something he is able to experience. Fuller highlights this through the journey motif, which structures *Scribbling the Cat* as she delves not only into K's psyche but also into the psyche of his war-time colleagues, Mapenga and St Medard. This motif is carnivalesque in its revelation of the normally suppressed emotions of these men. It is also therapeutic, as this analysis reveals. Fuller affords us a glimpse into these white men's grappling with the haunting experiences of the war and takes us beneath the layers of pretence to reveal the tortured minds and souls of the otherwise brave-looking and masculine ex-soldiers. Bobo, the white woman who is the narrator, steers the voyage in which K "volunteered his demons" (Fuller 2004, 6) to her. She is significant as she bears witness to his "exquisite torment" (Fuller 2004, 62) as his thoughts come out "raw, unfiltered and untested" (Fuller 2004, 24). For a traumatised person to be able to get over his/her trauma, there is a need to externalise the event. This healing process therefore, requires a listener who bears witness to the testimony (Felman and Laub 1992; Brison 1999; Craps 2013). Bobo plays a significant role in providing K the opportunity to tell, and re-enact his traumatic war experiences. In *The Centre Cannot Hold: My Journey through Madness*, Saks (2007, 89) vividly reveals the significance of this need to tell, to recall trauma:

[T]he best way to take away the power of trauma is to talk about what happened ... If and when they can, people who have been traumatized will tell what happened to them, over and over. The telling and retelling may become tedious for friends, but it is healthy and important.

Through the mediation of Bobo as an empathetic listener, K's narrative becomes therapeutic. The telling, however, reveals that the pugnacious and feared K is nothing more than a pitiful and haunted man. His recurring dreams about death, the regular but uncharacteristic emotional breakdowns and tears that reveal his broken masculinity, as well as the blockages in his thought processes all point to his trauma. As he unburdens himself to Bobo, like Munashe, K acknowledges that he cannot reconcile himself without returning to the places where he committed the violent acts. So with Bobo, he goes back to Mozambique and areas near its border, which were the sites on which the war-time wounds were inflicted on his body and psyche.

The narrative reveals how K endures five years of being "on the wrong side" (Fuller 2004, 250) of the war. He was part of the Rhodesian Light Infantry, the "only-all white unit, highly trained white boys whose 'kill ratio' and violent reputation were a source of pride for most white Rhodesians" (Fuller 2004, 26). Their "neurotically graded system of racial classification" gave them a need to "believe in white superiority in all things, even the ability to kill" (Fuller 2004, 219). We witness how K is destroyed not only by the war, but also by this whole indoctrination of white supremacy that teaches

white people to view their black counterparts as inferior and the subaltern “other.” For the Rhodesian soldiers then, the war was all about maintaining white domination as well as the social and economic privileges that come with the status quo, especially the ownership of the land. Bobo attests to this in the following words (Fuller 2004, 219):

K was what happened when you grew a child from the African soil, taught him an attitude of superiority, persecution, and paranoia, and then gave him a gun and sent him to war in a world he thought of as his to defend.

This accounts for the casualness with which the white ex-soldiers viewed the killing of black people, as is reflected in the many words they use to describe it: “‘scribbled,’ ‘culled,’ ‘plugged,’ ‘slotted,’ ‘taken out,’ ‘drilled,’ ‘wasted,’ ‘stonked,’ ‘hammered,’ ‘wiped out,’ ‘snuffed.’” (Fuller 2004, 39). This casualness, however, belies the trauma that results from the violence of these killings. K is enlisted at the age of 17 and like many other Rhodesian soldiers, has little choice about participating since “all able-bodied white and coloured men between the ages seventeen and sixty were on permanent or semipermanent call-up ‘in defense of Rhodesia’” (Fuller 2004, 36). This is unlike the guerrilla fighters, who mostly went willingly into the war.

After the war, K lives an extremely miserable and solitary life. His wife has divorced him and his only son dies at a very young age. K sees his son’s death and his own loneliness as God’s punishment for all the atrocities he committed during the war. He lives on a farm in Zambia as a total recluse, “miles from anywhere” (Fuller 2004, 16), with “no phone, no computer, no radio, no television” (Fuller 2004, 52). In an age of technological advancement, this seems an indication of his psychic abnormality. He, however, mistakenly believes that living this kind of life will bring him “utter peace” (Fuller 2004, 50). However, this “inner peace is so dear and elusive as to be almost unattainable” (Fuller 2004, 250). This is evidenced by the fact that his face reveals “the look of the returned soldier—the haunted look of someone who has seen his fair share of horror” (Fuller 2004, 38). The demons of the war are forever haunting him. At this stage, it is pertinent to highlight that one of his greatest torments is his part in the death of the young black girl he tortured during the war, as mentioned earlier. His rushing into the river on his farm to save a black woman who is being attacked by a crocodile, therefore, seems an act of atonement on his part for the young girl’s death. It is apparent that the quality of the life he lives now makes K, like Munashe, perceive his life after the war as futile. His belief in God is the only thing that stops him from committing suicide.

Fuller also reveals the trauma of the white ex-soldier through some of the other characters in the text. Mapenga, for example, acknowledges his own trauma: “I tormented people, but perhaps the person I tormented most was myself” (Fuller 1997, 197). He is outwardly valiant and carefree, yet so traumatised that he is a danger to himself. His pet animal (a lion), for example, is his way of dicing with death, which he

seems to wish on himself in order to escape his demons. Also, the narrative reveals that in the past, he would get into a fight almost every weekend and that during some bouts of mental instability, he would break anything in his house made of glass and wood. He is just one of the many ex-soldiers who “shout away their ghosts at night” (Fuller 2004, 127) during fitful sleep. This is because during slumber, the subconscious comes to the fore and gives rare and unnerving expression to the suppressed inner self. St Medard, another ex-soldier, has an astounding carelessness about life and a characteristic vulgarity that is deceptive. His habitual drunkenness, uncontrollable laughter, violent behaviour and the seemingly inexplicable episodes of silence all point to a wounded and traumatised mind. The nightly screams, sobs, shouts of obscenities and compulsive laughter, which he experiences seem to provide a spontaneous form of cathartic release; they contrast sharply with the unrestrained stubbornness and fearlessness that he exhibits in his conscious state during the day. This, we argue, is his way of verbalising his trauma that is the legacy of the war. However, because his trauma remains largely repressed, he remains its victim.

Trauma beyond the Racial Divide

Munashe and K are archetypal figures of all the veterans of the war who have been physically and psychologically wounded by its extreme violence and brutality. Both become an extension of the war and through the respective narratives, their minds, in particular, are turned into a theatre where the tragic drama of the war is repeatedly enacted. Neither is able to live a normal life in its aftermath, as they both suffer from mental instability and emotional vulnerabilities. Chenai, Munashe’s wife, describes how “he had become ... a monster” (Kanengoni 1997, 85). She bears witness to “her husband’s nightmares” and “[t]he tearing screams and drenching sweat”, where “[t]he night becomes a window into his life during the war ... it is as if the war has begun all over again” (Kanengoni 1997, 29). Similarly, Fuller’s depiction of K shows a man who has been left “tortured, angry, aggressive, lost” (Fuller 2004, 165). He is a man who, despite having fought more than 200 men in his lifetime is easily reduced to tears. Both protagonists personify the many black and white men in Zimbabwe who have lived, or are still living, with the demons of the war. In *Scribbling the Cat*, Fuller acknowledges how the trauma of war transcends the racial divide (Fuller 2004, 38):

Both sides were brutalised by the experience. The guerrillas terrorized villages, raped civilian women, killed alleged ‘sell-outs,’ murdered innocent families, and desecrated churches; the Rhodesian security forces tortured and murdered their prisoners, burned villages, raped civilian women ‘sympathisers.’ And at the end of it all, soldiers of all colours and political persuasions were left washed up and anchorless in some profound way ... War is not the fault of soldiers, but it becomes their life’s burden.

When the border between sanity and insanity is traversed in a manner that Fuller describes above, it results in a surreal and delusional quality of life for the war veterans.

That the psychological imprint of such trauma is indelible is evident in the shattered psyches of the characters we encounter in both Kanengoni and Fuller's literary texts. What is evident in both texts is that the trauma of war indiscriminately cuts across the racial divide. Perhaps, what is peculiar to each race is the manner in which the emotional and psychological repercussions of traumatic events of the war are dealt with, and both *Echoing Silences* and *Scribbling the Cat* elucidate some of the coping mechanisms that may be adopted in the face of trauma.

Firstly, some war veterans perpetuate the violence that they had become accustomed to during the war. This clearly illustrates how the legacy of the violence of the colonial war remains apparent in the postcolonial era. In *Stone Virgins*, for example, Vera illustrates how after the war, Sibaso, a man who willingly fought in the war for the liberation of Zimbabwe, metes out violence on two sisters, Nonceba and Thenjiwe. He brutally kills one and rapes and mutilates the other. Yet as Vera describes his atrocities, she succeeds in arousing pity in the reader for this war veteran, whose war experiences have been of such extreme bodily and mental pain that they leave him "a hunted and haunted guerrilla, a man of death" (Ranger as quoted by Muponde and Maodzwa-Taruvinga 2002, 206). In *Scribbling the Cat*, post-war violence offers some form of release for K, Mapenga and St Medard—the calm after a violent episode becomes therapeutic and soothing to their tortured minds. St Medard, for example, has become "numbed to violence and accustomed to horror" (Fuller 2004, 205). The brutality, though deployed as an assertive survival strategy, masks an acute failure to heal. It is used by these men to camouflage their internal frailties. Alcoholism or drug addiction provides another coping mechanism. Fuller illustrates how St. Medard abuses alcohol in an attempt to exorcise his demons and cope with his trauma. Unfortunately, alcohol proves to be a futile form of escapism for him as it does nothing to rid him of his ghosts and instead, leaves him a nervous wreck in his sober state.

Mapenga has a cocktail of coping strategies. The furniture in his house for example, is made out of iron to prevent him from destroying it during his madly violent episodes. Of all the ex-soldiers in *Scribbling the Cat*, Mapenga seems to have the best insight into his troubled mind. This self-awareness makes him amenable to external or mediated intervention measures. After nearly killing his own brother he also deals with his madness by seeking professional help from both a psychiatrist and a psychologist, demonstrating a realisation of his inability to handle his psychic scarring on his own. His belief that 90 per cent of the people who fought and survived the war are "mad" (Fuller 1997, 197) is quite insightful. There is some sort of acceptance of his plight, evidenced by his dutiful intake of the prescribed medication. The treatment, however, does not entirely stop Mapenga from having periodic traumatic attacks, which manifest themselves as repeated episodes to which the reader is witness. Through Mapenga, Fuller demonstrates the persistently painful and recurring nature of trauma.

In *Echoing Silences*, a man in Nyanga, who witnesses Munashe being possessed by the spirit of the murdered woman with a baby on her back suggests that “[p]erhaps the only people left whom we can ask to wash away our pain are those beyond the sky” (Kanengoni 1997, 85). He no doubt refers to the spirituality that anchors most people’s lives. About spirituality, Waller (2001, 1) asserts:

Spirituality is the domain of human existence that pertains to the essence of every human being, the very core of our personhood and its relationship to something greater than ourselves. Human beings call this “something” by many names. Whatever name we use, it is our relationship to the divine and the way each of us perceives it.

And indeed the two protagonists in Kanengoni and Fuller’s narratives eventually turn to spirituality for their salvation, albeit in different ways. Whereas Munashe and his clan turn to the spirituality embedded in their Shona traditional religion, as revealed earlier, K embraces the Christian God in his search for deliverance from the demons of the war. He states: “the Almighty God forgives us all. It doesn’t matter ... how much of a shit you are, how much you’ve destroyed” (Fuller 2004, 24). This submission to a higher power has a disciplining and partially curative effect on him. Having broken all laws and conventions of humanity, his characteristic nihilism can only be tempered by a force he acknowledges to be greater and transcendental. As Fallot and Blanch (2013, 377) note, spiritual discipline “engages the individual’s capacity to control often uncontrolled affective states and to make meaning of the violent events.” We would want to argue however, that K’s private and unmediated discourse with God may be perceived as another dimension of his dementia. There is a somewhat delusional quality to his spiritualism. Bobo’s scepticism and the dismissal of K as a madman by his ex-wife point instead, to a very complex traumatic condition. Although “the war has ended for Munashe” (Kanengoni 1997, 89) as he finds peace at last in death after the cleansing ceremony and the surrealistic events thereafter, unfortunately for K, his belief in God does not seem to fully heal his trauma, although it does give him the strength needed to endure it. What is potentially emancipating is the courage he has mustered to express his trauma as he narrates his participation in the violence of the war. Therein lies the beginning of his healing. As mentioned earlier, narrating traumatic experiences can set one on a path that leads to psychological redemption.

At the end of *Scribbling the Cat*, K continues to live the war’s nightmares in a life of continuous penance, a life where he is never entirely free of his demons. Despite the optimistic ending in *Echoing Silences*, and the pessimistic one in *Scribbling the Cat*, both literary texts point to the fact that what is needed for all war veterans, regardless of race or creed, is some sort of cleansing or healing. This analysis has shown that this restoration may only begin to be achieved if victims of trauma are able to get a narrative platform and an empathetic audience. This is where the support of family members and professional experts, such as counsellors and psychiatrists, become significant in the victims’ quest for forgiveness and reconciliation.

Conclusion

Through their narratives, Kanengoni and Fuller give compelling evidence of the trauma of war that soldiers on either side of the front go through. Clearly, only those who have actually participated in a war can fully grasp the “stain of sanctioned murder” (Fuller 2004, 127). This analysis has, however, attempted to give some insight into this trauma, as well as highlight some of the coping mechanisms the two texts have identified. The instigation of psychological and spiritual healing from violent traumatic events may come through the traditional religious rituals practised by black Zimbabweans, as shown in *Echoing Silences*, or it may be attained by turning to Christianity, as evidenced by K in *Scribbling the Cat*. Regardless of the choice made, we argue that what is inevitably required is some sort of “reversibility through restitution” (Galtung 1998, 34) in order for healing from the psychological wounding orchestrated by the war to begin. The fact that both Munashe and K seek divine intervention, rather than just medical recourse in order to purge themselves of their ghosts of the war signifies the importance of spirituality to human existence. However, the spiritual recourse alone is not enough as there is a need for psycho-social support mechanisms, which enable victims to achieve catharsis through the telling and re-telling of the events that have traumatised them. The victims of war trauma need to be able to *speak* their way out of their debilitating experiences.

References

- Alexander, J., and J. McGregor. 2004. “War Stories: Guerrilla Narratives of Zimbabwe’s Liberation War.” *History Workshop Journal* 57: 79–100. <https://doi.org/10.1093/hwj/57.1.79>
- Bhabha, H. 1994. *Location of Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Brison, S. 1999. “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self.” In *Acts of Memory Cultural Recall in the Present*, edited by Mieke B., Crewe, J. V. and L. Spitzer, 39–54. Hanover: University Press of New England.
- Caruth, C. (Ed.). 1995. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Chan, S. 2005. “The Memory of Violence: Trauma in the Writings of Alexander Kanengoni and Yvonne Vera and the Idea of Unreconciled Citizenship in Zimbabwe.” *Third World Quarterly* 26 (2): 369–382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0143659042000339164>.
- Chigidi, W. 2009. *A Study of Shona War Fiction: The Writers’ Perspectives*. Pretoria: UNISA.
- Chinodya, S. 1989. *Harvest of Thorns*. Harare: Baobab Books.
- Chipamaunga, E. 1993. *A fighter for Freedom*. Gweru: Mambo Press.

- Chiweshe, L. 2004. "Local Writers Romanticize the War ... except Kanengoni, Nyamubaya." *Sunday Mail*, October 10, 2004, E2.
- Craps, S. 2013. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. Palgrave: MacMillan.
- Durrant, S. 2004. *Postcolonial Narrative and the Work of Mourning: J.M. Coetzee, Wilson Harris, and Toni Morrison*. Albany: State of University of New York.
- Fallot, R. D., and A. K. Blanch. 2013. "Religious and Spiritual Dimensions of Traumatic Violence." In *APA Handbook of Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality Vol. 2*, edited by Pargament, K, 371–387. The American Psychological Association. <https://doi.org/10.1037/14046-019>.
- Fanon, F. 1967 [1952]. *Black Skin, White Masks*. Translated by C. L. Markman. New York: Grove Press.
- Felman, S., and Laub, D. 1992. *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Fuller, A. 2001. *Don't Let's Go to the Dog's Tonight*. New York: Penguin Random House.
- Fuller, A. 2004. *Scribbling the Cat: Travels with an African Soldier*. London: Penguin Books.
- Fuller, A. 2011. *Cocktail Hour under the Tree of Forgetfulness*. London: Penguin Press.
- Galtung, J. 1998. *After Violence: 3R, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, Resolution*. Princeton, New Jersey: Transcend.
- Kanengoni, A. 1987. *When the Rainbird Cries*. Harare: Longman.
- Kanengoni, A. 1993. *Effortless Tears*. Harare: Baobab Books.
- Kanengoni, A. 1997. *Echoing Silences*. Harare: Baobab Books.
- Kaarsholm, P. 2005. "Coming to Terms with Violence: Literature and the Development of a Public Sphere in Zimbabwe." In *Versions of Zimbabwe, New Approaches to Literature and Culture*, edited by Muponde, R. and Primorac, R, 3–23. Harare: Weaver Press.
- Makata, F. W. 1982. *Gona reChimurenga*. Gweru: Mambo Press.
- Malcolm, X. 1992. *By Any Means Necessary* (2nd ed.). New York: Pathfinder Press.
- Malluche, D. M. 2009. "Dissociation, Coping Styles, and Prior Trauma as Predictors of Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms Following a Traumatic Physical Injury." PhD Thesis, University of Miami.

- Mazorodze, I. V. 1989. *Silent Journey from the East*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Micale, S. M., and Lerner, P. 2001. *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870–1930*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511529252>.
- Mutekwe, A. 2010. “The Avenging Spirit: Mapping an Ambivalent Spirituality in Zimbabwean Literature in English.” *African Studies* 69 (1): 161–176.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00020181003647264>.
- Muponde, R., and Maodzwa-Tarvinga, M. (Eds). 2002. *Sign and Taboo: Perspectives on the Poetic Fiction of Yvonne Vera*. Oxford: James Currey.
<https://doi.org/10.4314/tvl.v48i2.68308>.
- Murray, J. 2011. “Remembering the Short Stories of Yvonne Vera: A Postcolonial and Feminist reading of *Why Don't You Carve Other Animals?*” *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde* 48 (2): 136–154.
- Muwati, I., Gambahaya, Z., and F. Mangena. 2006. “*Echoing Silences* as a Paradigm for Restorative Justice.” *Zambezia* 33 (1 and 2): 1–18.
- Nyamubaya, F. 1986. *On the Road Again*. Harare: Zimbabwe Publishing House.
- Rothberg, M. 2008. “Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response.” *Studies in the Novel* 40 (1 and 2): 224–234.
- Saks, E. 2007. *The Centre Cannot Hold: My Journey through Madness*. New York: Hyperion.
- Terr, L. 1990. *Too Scared to Cry: Psychic Trauma in Childhood*. New York: Harper and Row.
- Tirivangana, A. M. 2011. “Towards a Theory of Africa-Centred Metaphysics: A Critical Exploration of the Ngozi Theme in Selected Zimbabwean Fiction. PhD Thesis, University of Zimbabwe.
- Vera, Y. 2002. *The Stone Virgins*. Avondale: Weaver Press.
- Visser, I. 2011. “Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies.” *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (3): 270–282. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449855.2011.569378>.
- Waller, M. A. 2001. “The Spiritual Dimension for Assessing Human Functioning.” *Human Behavior in the Social Environment: A Multidimensional Perspective*, Ashcroft C. LeCroy and E. Lorties, 1–11. Pacific Grove, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Ward, A. 2007. "Psychological Formulations." In *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, edited by McLeod, J, 190–201. London: Routledge.
https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203358085_chapter_17.