

Genocidal Action and Framing in Vera's *The Stone Virgins*

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Summary

The article is a literary analysis of Yvonne Vera's *The Stone Virgins* tracing the effects of genocide on society as represented in the novel. Existing criticism of the novel either focuses on the poetry and lyricism of the novel or the terror and violence of the war. This article draws on genocide theories to unpack the stages of genocide and its aftermath as represented in the novel. It argues that without understanding the dynamics that led to the violence in Matabeleland, there is likely to be a repeat as people are unaware of what to avoid.

Opsomming

Die artikel is 'n literêre onleding van *The Stone Virgins* van Yvonne Vera wat die uitwerking van volksmoord op die gemeenskap soos wat dit in die roman uitgebeeld word, naspour. Bestaande kritiek van die roman fokus óf op die poësie of liriese aard van die roman óf op die gruwels en geweld van die oorlog. Hierdie artikel gebruik volksmoordteorieë om die stadiums van volksmoord en die nadraai soos wat dit in die roman uitgebeeld word, te ontleed. Die artikel redeneer dat indien daar nie begrip is van die dinamika wat aanleiding gegee het tot die geweld in Matabeleland nie, daar 'n herhaling kan wees aangesien mense nie bewus is van wat om te vermy nie.

Introduction

The Stone Virgins is classified as Historical fiction because it has the backdrop of events that actually took place in Zimbabwe from 1950-1986. Alex Freedman (2005) notes that

Vera writes and recovers history, performing her own historiographical dance. Reminding us of martyrdoms that saved no one, and of where relief waits silently inside amalgamations of contrasting contradictions and bitter similarities. Weaving quiet whispers of deliverance for those who have forgotten how to ask or take.

(<http://www.africanwomenwriters.typepad.com>)

The critic is almost as poetic as Vera but serves to highlight that the novel is not as straight forward in its historiography as some critics have made it

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sound. They zero in on the violence perpetrated by the Mugabe regime without analysing the violence unleashed by Sibaso as a representative of the dissidents. The story centres on the violence against Thenjiwe and Nonceba by Sibaso, and the violence by the state soldiers on Thandabantu store. The contradictions in the actions of the perpetrators of violence are what this paper seeks to analyse as they point to the fact that genocide is not an event but a process that can be checked before it results in mass killings and violence.

Theoretical Framework

The article is informed by Berel Lang's (2000) ideas on representation and Judith Butler's (2009) frames of war who argue that representations of war and genocide are informed by the author's ideological positioning and genre used to express the ideas. Lang's arguments are made in the context of Holocaust representations pointing out that all representations are valid in as far as they reveal different aspects of the experience. Butler argues that the way an event is framed influences audience reaction in terms of empathy or condemnation. Vera's *The Stone Virgins* (2002) is a literary representation of the violence in Matabeleland in the 1980s aimed at opening dialogue on the experience. Stanton (1996: 2) observes that

Prevention of genocide requires a structural understanding of the genocidal process. Genocide has eight stages or operational processes. The first stages precede later stages, but continue to operate throughout the genocidal process. Each stage reinforces the others. A strategy to prevent genocide should attack each stage, each process. The eight stages of genocide are classification, symbolization, dehumanization, organization, polarization, preparation, extermination, and denial.

Literary authors are mainly concerned with the effect of violence on the ordinary people which points to the dehumanisation effect of genocide. Vera frames her story to depict the main players in the conflict; the armed (dissidents and army), women (Thenjiwe, Nonceba and female guerrillas) community (graphically represented by Thandabantu store) and civil service (Cephas). Through the various characters, Vera attempts to address Stanton's features of genocide and hence point to possible solutions to challenges of genocide as the following analysis reveals.

Summary of Text

The story is set in the city of Bulawayo and rural Kezi. It is written in two parts to capture distinct historical epochs: 1950-1980 and 1981-1986. The story mirrors the racial discrimination that leads to the war of liberation, as

well as the post independent discontent that leads to dissidents and the heavy handed intervention by the soldiers. These historical events affect and inform the actions of the characters in the novel as ordinary people. Sibaso joins the liberation struggle to free his country from colonialism but turns dissident after independence, harming the people he had earlier defended. He kills Thenjiwe, rapes Nonceba and cuts off her lips. Women who fought in the liberation struggle come back home with pride and gain the right to sit with men in Thandabantu store and smoke cigarettes. The state soldiers, in response to the likes of Sibaso, destroy Thandabantu store and kill everyone they find there on the accusation of being subversive. Cephas, the historian, comes to Kezi to rescue Nonceba and takes her back to Bulawayo with him for hospitalisation and social healing. By the end of the novel Nonceba has found a job and can move on while Cephas aims to rebuild Bulawayo, the ancient city of Lobengula as a national heritage site.

Sibaso's Obsession with the Stone Virgins

Stanton (1996) notes that most genocide acts are related to war situations. Sibaso is a guerrilla soldier based in the Gulati hills to fight colonialism. At independence in 1980, the combatants come back home to the admiration of the community. The men are described as "solid men suddenly in their midst make their mothers mist tearful with the wonder of their safe return. They are here. They wear lonely and lost looks but have a touch wild as honey" (47). The women combatants continue to wear camouflage and heavy bound boots (*The Stone Virgins*, pp. 51-52).

They sit on empty crates, like the men, then from here they watch the sun as though the watching of a sunset is simply a pastime; but watching the sun from Thandabantu Store and watching the sunset from the bush with a gun in your hand are related but vastly different acts. They are learning, with patience and goodwill, how it is to watch the sunset from Thandabantu. To watch a sun setting without a gun in your hand, so in this fair pursuit they forget that they are male or female but know that they are wounded beings, with searching eyes, and an acute desire for simple diversions. It is an intimate quest.

What is clear from the quotations above is that war has a negative effect on the combatants. They are back home as heroes but something is broken inside them that makes reintegration with the community difficult despite their willingness to do so. The fact that they have killed people hangs between them and the people though no one says it out loud. Consequently the combatants look lonely and lost. However their desire to reintegrate makes them willing to relearn their old life. This contrasts with Sibaso whose mind seems to have been taken over by the war. He has embraced death and it has become a part of him. He is therefore a willing instrument of death. Life is no longer sacred

to him because he has desecrated sacred shrines in Gulati. Sibaso's analysis of the paintings in the cave celebrates death:

Disembodied beings. Their legs branch from their bodies like their roots. The women float, away from the stone. Their thighs are empty, too fragile, too thin to have already carried a child. They are the virgins who walk into their own graves before the burial of a king. They die untouched. Their ecstasy is in the afterlife. Is this a suicide or a sacrifice, or both? Suicide, a willing, but surely, a private matter? Sacrifice means the loss of life, of lives, so that one life may be saved. The life of rulers is served, not saved. This, suicide. The female figures painted on this rock, the virgins, form a circle near the burial site, waiting for the ceremonies of their own burial. Here, the rock is almost pure. The knees have been eaten by time; the ink is blotted out. Something is hidden: the legs are wavering strokes of blood-lit tendrils, on rock. Far from that alarming grace of the arms, the face raised high from the shoulders. Down, below the waist, the light washes over them. Perhaps they have been saved from life's embrace. Not dead. I place my hand over the waist of the tall woman, on an inch of bone, yet forty thousand years gather in my memory like a wild wind (*The Stone Virgins*, p. 95).

The title of the novel is derived from the cave paintings described in the passage above. The virgins are fated to die in service to their king. Sibaso reflects on the classification of the death as either suicide or sacrifice or both. In this the virgins are cast as willing to die. Death is attractive as it embodies a reward in the afterlife in the form of "ecstasy". The statement that "The life of rulers is served, not saved", is seminal to Sibaso's attitude to life. He realises that the ruled are not of any significance to those who rule except to advance their own goals. It follows that as a renegade serving his own interests, Sibaso subordinates all life to serve him. The image of the stone virgins is so etched in his memory that he does not see Thenjiwe and Nonceba as ordinary beings but as stone virgins that enable him to play out his fantasies. Thenjiwe's posture as she carries the bucket of water "has the alarming grace of arms, the face raised high from the soldiers" and hence is killed as if in ritual, with style.

In that quickness, moments before that Nonceba sees the right arm pull back and grab the body by the waist, a dancing motion so finely practiced it is clear it is not new to the performer. It is not the first death he has held in his arms, clutching at it, like a bird escaping. It is not the first death he has caused. The body falls forward and he stumbles and then pulls the body back, bone bright white from it, neckbone pure, like a streak of light the bone vanishes into the stream of blood oozing out, the knees buckle forward and the body twirls on its heels, the legs together, then dragging sideways- a soft ankle held to the ground. He flips the body to his left and the legs turn their weight, and death, over, an ankle held soft and dead, to the ground (*TSV*, p. 68).

The dance continues for a while and Sibaso seems to be in a trance. He holds Thenjiwe's waist just as he puts his hand over the waist of the tall woman in the cave painting.

As soon as he puts Thenjiwe's body down he swiftly grabs Nonceba whom he uses for sexual gratification and ritual mutilation. Sibaso rapes Nonceba but commands her to hold him as if it were by mutual consent. This reveals Sibaso's hunger for ordinary life and touch like all humans but which has been distorted by his experience of war. "He lifts her legs off the ground and places her across both knees, like a bride. He guides her thumb to his temples, pulsing" (65). He speaks to her and reveals his dark motives encapsulated in his admiration of predator instincts in spiders. Even as he holds Nonceba the war memories overwhelm him (*TSV*, p. 71):

He thinks of scars inflicted before dying, betrayals of war, after war, during war. Him. Sibaso. He considers the woman in his arms.

He sees her dancing heels, her hands chaste dead bone, porous thin, painted on rock. Her neck is leaning upon a raised arrow, her mind pierced by the sun. She is a woman from very far, from long ago, from the naked caves in the hills of Gulati. She does not belong here. She bears the single solitude of a flame, the shape and form of a painted memory.

He thrusts the body to the ground: a dead past.

Sibaso is under the illusion that he is living the experience of the cave painting yet his actions are terrible and fatal for two ordinary village women. After this vision, he cuts off Nonceba's lips. She narrates her ordeal as follows (*TSV*, pp. 71-72):

His motion was simple. It was soft and almost tender but I did not know that it was no longer his touch tracing my chin, not just my lower lip, but more than that. For a moment all this was painless. I felt nothing. He sought my face. He touched it with a final cruelty. He cut smoothly away. He had memorised parts of me. Shape and curve; lips unspoken.

Vera's narrative performs what Butler (2009: viii) urges:

The critique of war emerges from the occasions of war, but its aim is to rethink the complex and fragile character of the social bond and to consider what conditions might make violence less possible, lives more equally grievable, and, hence, more livable.

Generally dissidents are portrayed in the negative by highlighting their deeds without highlighting what motivates them to act the way they do. Vera shows that all who went to war were damaged by it needing rehabilitation. The government failed to provide such psycho-social support for the war veterans. It also failed to address those that felt betrayed like Sibaso. This would have been the first step to stop genocide acts. Sibaso's sick mind is convinced

women are born to be exterminated in the cause of the rulers. The gun he wields gives him power to commit gendercide defined by Mary Anne Warren (1985) as follows:

The Oxford American Dictionary defines genocide as “the deliberate extermination of a race of people”. By analogy, gendercide would be deliberate extermination of persons of a particular sex (or gender). Other terms, such as “gynocide” and “femicide”, have been used to refer to the wrongful killing of girls and women. But “gendercide” is a sex-neutral term, in that the victims may be either male or female. There is need for such a sex-neutral term, since sexually discriminatory killing is just as wrong when the victims happen to be male. The term also calls attention to the fact that gender roles have often had lethal consequences, and that these are in important respects analogous to the lethal consequences of racial, religious and class prejudice.

(quoted by Jones in Dirk Moses 2010: 388)

Sibaso deliberately seeks to violate women, the stone virgins of his diseased mind. He exhibits four of Stanton’s stages of genocide. Classification is when he concludes women are ideal symbols of suicide and sacrifice which is symbolisation. Dehumanisation is when all women become the stone virgins of the cave paintings therefore subject to manipulation. The extermination becomes easy because it is equated to making adjustments on the cave paintings and hence a form of creativity as evident in Sibaso’s dance with Thenjiwe’s dead body. His actions are informed by his cultural/ religious prejudice embedded in the idea of virgins being buried with the king. Living in the wild for a long time turns him into a predator with a “feline imagination” (107), just like the spiders he closely observes. The effect of such a representation is that while the reader is appalled by gendercide acts, one is also drawn to sympathise with Sibaso thereby making both the victim and the perpetrator’s lives grievable. It then leads to solutions being sought for both challenges rather than simply vilifying the perpetrator and in turn future gendercides are averted.

State Soldiers’ Genocidal Intervention in Kezi

The bus from Bulawayo to Kezi stops at Thandabantu store. It is the social hub where lovers meet, those coming from the city pick the latest news before going home. At independence, Thandabantu store is where the combatants recline and watch the sun before going back to Assembly Points, especially the female combatants who are admired by many. No one is discriminated against at Thandabantu which literally means “love people”. Mahlatini accepts every one’s money and responds when they talk to him but avoids eye contact with them (*TSV*, pp. 120-121).

The storekeeper, Mahlatini, keeps his hands on the till and never looks up, he laughs, but never looks up, he agrees, disagrees, and never lifts his eyebrows. He shrugs his shoulders, slips a bill into the drawer, and clamps it under a tray, he slides coins into the box. He leans back and laughs at something said. He does not want to remember who said what and when. He does not want to know who heard him say what, and when. He picks the murmur of voices, this tone, that intuition, the terror in the other voice. The rumour, the gossip, the number of soldiers killed, the war. Mahlatini keeps his eyes down and his fingers on the till. When the shop is finally empty he looks up, through the doorway, and sees men lingering. He sees a woman selling baskets under the marula shade, the sun in violent waves.

Thandabantu store is a model of democracy. It is a viable economic entity but also allows the people social freedom to express themselves (intuitions, fears, rumours, gossip, debates). People feel free to express themselves regardless of realities in society. In colonial Rhodesia soldiers harassed people for information. That is why Mahlatini does not look up so that when interrogated he truly does not remember who said what, and when. After independence, Mahlatini uses the same model of operation but it lends him into trouble with the state soldiers seeking dissidents who are a threat to national security (*TSV*, pp. 121-122).

Mahlatini. They made a perverse show out of his death, accusing him of offering a meeting place where anything could be spoken, planned, allowed to happen. He was said to be an expert at discarding the future. Mahlatini had no time to protest, neither was he invited to. The soldiers announced that they knew him, remembered him from the period of the ceasefire when Sondela Assembly Camp was located down the valley. Did he not remember that one of the ceasefire camps was in front of his shop in 1980? Right on top of his forehead? They know every grasshopper and blade of grass in Kezi; they know him. As far as they were concerned there was absolutely nothing Mahlatini could add or deny about what they believe to be his current activities.

The above quotation clearly outlines Stanton (1996)'s stages of genocide. Mahlatini is classified as a threat to state security by providing a meeting place for subversive meetings (classification). To the soldiers, Mahlatini is clearly a symbol of subversion, against the "future" of the nation and therefore not worthy of human respect (symbolisation, dehumanisation). The soldiers reveal that they have systematically watched Mahlatini in order to come up with the conclusion that separates him from the rest of society (organisation, polarisation, preparation) culminating in his extermination (a perverse show of his death) and those of similar classification. It follows then that the soldiers assume everyone in the store to be part of a subversive meeting against the state and hence deserve to die (*TSV*, p. 121).

Mahlatini, long the storekeeper of Thandabantu store has died. Those who claim to know inch by inch what happened to Mahlatini say that plastic bags

of Roller ground meal were lit, and let drop bit by bit over him till his skin peeled off from his knees to his hair, till his mind collapsed, peeled off, and he died of the pain in his own voice. He was dead by the time they tied him to a chest-of-drawers and poured petrol over the goods and the fabrics for sale and the body lying down, no, the bodies, for the soldiers had walked into Thandabantu at sunset and found over twenty local men there, and the children buying candles, and the old men who should have been at the ancient Umthetho rock dying peacefully but preferred the hubbub at Thandabantu and therefore went there each day, all these. The soldiers shot them, without preamble – they walked in and raised AK rifles: every shot was fatal.

The irony in the quotation above is that all who die are not a threat to the state in any way. They are an expression of the new dispensation's failure to embrace diversity, which is Mahlatini's main crime. His death is therefore symbolic of the death of multiculturalism. The people in the store are exterminated like vermin and burnt to ensure total eradication because the soldiers are convinced that they should die. The local men are in the store as a source of information, collecting parcels from the bus and maybe having a drink after a day of hard labour. The children buying candles are evidence of the tardiness of mothers who only realise that they are out of candles at sunset. The old men have lived through Ndebele culture symbolised by Umthetho rock, adopted colonial culture that instituted the store that they now enjoy but are denied to enjoy the fruits of independence by the soldiers. The word *umthetho* loosely translated means law, it is ironic that the new laws do not allow the old men (Mahlatini and the children) to die peacefully. The loss of all these human lives are grievable and must be recognised as genocide.

The last stage of genocide is denial. Vera's narrative published in 2002 brings out issues that were largely wrapped in silence. Literary representation (novel) enables her to bring out the Gukurahundi experience couched in fiction and hence absolves her from legal persecution. Within the novel itself, the massacre at Thandabantu is cast as hearsay, "Those who claim to know inch by inch what happened." This has a double effect of either confirming those who deny the events ever taking place in the sense that they are only claims known as genocide denial (Dirk Moses 2010) or has the effect of a testimony by those who know and may have told the literary narrator of the story. There are layers of a storytelling which serve to authenticate the story and draw the attention of the reader and those willing to listen to the alternative voice other than the official narrative. The effects of genocide denial are highlighted in the following passage:

Mahlatini's death will not be registered. There would be no memory desired of it. It was such a time; such a death. He did not challenge the accusations he knew to be false. His mind was racing like a wind past the guns and the deliberate industry of these soldiers, past the liberation war and its years and years of hope that for him stretched first from his veranda to the hills of Gulati, only then did the years extend to the various lands of the country which he

would not live to see or imagine, where the war too had been fought; raced, beyond ceasefire, the grace and power of celebrations for independence, the belief, the expectation, the ecstasy, past his own death till his mind was no longer whirling and turning, but empty. Separate. Quiet. Dead with the agony in his body melting. He could no longer hear the voices, the gunshots, the chaotic movements inside his store. Everything he knew to be happening seemed to take long. *What was clear, and obvious was that he was not important. What was a place called Kezi compared to the charmed destinies of these men? Who was Mahlatini? He was only a storekeeper whom they could skin alive and discard.* (emphasis mine) (TSV, p. 122).

Mahlatini's existence is trivialised as "only a storekeeper" which implies more valuable occupations than his. Ironically he is central to Kezi community and therefore very significant. The deaths are considered less grievable by the state but individual lives continue to be affected by the loss of this time. Vambe (2012) registers these losses in his research on the effects of Gukurahundi in Matabeleland and Midlands thirty years after the event. There are many children without birth certificates because their parents have no death certificates. Affidavits cannot be written to the effect of what is officially denied. The actions of the soldiers disregard individual aspirations (years and years of hope). What matters is the soldiers' vision and interpretation of events at the expense of all other narratives. The passage above highlights Mahlatini's point of view projected by Vera through an omniscient narrator. It states that he was innocent and loved his country which is contrary to the soldiers' narrative. Implicit in this is that nations would be stronger if all lives were equally valued (or grievable in Butler's words). No one records the death of exterminated vermin in their houses. Similarly, the framing of Mahlatini and others at Thandabantu store as subversive vermin to be exterminated makes their deaths not worth recording but casts a shadow on the future of their surviving progeny. The burning of Thandabantu was only the beginning. It continued "way past the hills of Gulati, deep into campsites where many others were being held, tortured, killed and buried in mass graves (TSV, p. 124)". A major effect of the soldiers' action has been to alienate the people of Matabeleland from the state and make Zimbabwean society highly polarised as highlighted by Ncube and Siziba (2015) who classify the violence as ethnic cleansing. The tone of their article expresses chagrin at the years of silence on the genocide pointing to genocide denial.

Healing: The Aftermath of Genocide

Cephas, the historian working for the National Museums and Monuments, hears of the violence in Kezi (TSV, p. 59).

GENOCIDAL ACTION AND FRAMING IN ...

The war begins. A state of emergency. No movement is allowed. The ceasefire ceases. It begins in the streets, the burning of memory. The bones rising. Rising. Every road out of Bulawayo is covered with soldiers and police, teeming like ants. Road blocks. Bombs. Landmines. Hand-grenades. Memory is lost. Independence ends. Guns rise. Rising anew. In 1981.

The passage above captures the contradictions and tensions of the moment. The people no longer celebrate independence and are surrounded by danger in the form of bombs, landmines and hand grenades which all point to organised violence against the people. Movement is not allowed but Cephas takes a risk, pushed by memory of his lover Thenjiwe to go to Kezi to check on Nonceba, the sister, he meets in Mpilo hospital after reading of their tragedy in a newspaper. This is phenomenal because they had never met before this incident and hence are literally strangers to each other. Nonceba is amazed by Cephas' actions (*TSV*, p. 135).

He has ignored her indifference and followed her all the way from Bulawayo to Kezi, to this same spot on which she is standing now watching him and wondering at his claim, but how? Who is he? How has he come from Bulawayo when the roads are blocked and a multitude of soldiers are disturbing the peace of the land? Is he a policeman, perhaps? Someone who can understand crime and criminal minds and the right punishment to mete out to a deceased past, her past; a man who could uphold what was left of the law? Is this his special pursuit? For she cannot imagine why else a stranger would follow her from Bulawayo having waited a whole afternoon in her hospital bed watching her say nothing at all unless he is on guard over some truth which he has to protect, even with his own body.

It is ironic that Nonceba associates Cephas with the law as a saviour to her situation. When he reveals his plan to take her to Bulawayo with him for her safety, her initial reaction is anger at him for presuming to know her pain, what is best for her and assuming she will follow him as a stranger (142). This shows that the path to healing is not smooth as faith in people and systems is eroded. Nonceba is then moved when Cephas pleads with her (as opposed to the use of force) that she allows him to help her. Cephas is therefore the antithesis of Sibaso, he is an embodiment of life while the latter represents death. It is only when Nonceba "sees the longing in his eyes, the despair, old and well kept" (146) that she realises he fully understands her pain and yields to his request. This marks a human connection unpolluted by any ideology (tribalism, political affiliation, nationalism) that those who kill use to justify their actions. Nonceba is drawn from thought of vengeance based on law to simple acceptance of love and connecting at a human level. The pioneers of genocide studies were lawyers and when Lemkin (1944) coined the term, it was to ensure a category of convicting perpetrators of genocide in the international court of law. Vera seems to suggest that law without the human

connection can lead to genocidal actions and mistrust of the systems. Cephas therefore provides the alternative way suggested through literary projection.

Cephas offers to restore Nonceba's dignity with no strings attached. He does not take advantage of her situation to sexually manipulate her regardless of his loneliness (*TSV*, p. 153).

It has been a year since moving to the city and life has assumed an even pace for Nonceba. When she first arrived in Bulawayo she went into hospital for more surgery, several times. With some powder on, she looks almost unharmed. Almost. At least, no one stares. No one turns to look. No one asks questions.

Cephas has done exactly as he had stated he would do when he came to see her in Kezi. He placed her in the bedroom across from his own. They live together. He deals with the hospital bills and arranges everything for her there; he enables her spirit. She finds strength through each of his unexpected gestures. They live together, they live in each other's solitude. In a way, they live separately.

What unites Nonceba and Cephas is their love for, and grief over Thenjiwe's brutal death. Cephas ensures that Nonceba is restored as penance for Thenjiwe's death. Unlike Sibaso who views women as objects to be subdued to satisfy his fantasies, Cephas believes in serving women, and allowing them to pursue their dreams regardless of his personal feelings. He allows her to choose between a job he finds for her and one she finds herself and seems to give her a great sense of achievement. The narrator says (*TSV*, p. 164):

He needs a sterile solution, to wash the wounds; an ointment, to wash both their wounds. He is an amalgam, man and martyr. No. It is not much to sacrifice love, he does not deserve the term at all. He is not a martyr. He has nothing to surrender. What has he got to sacrifice? If he turns to look, whose life has been saved?

The metaphor of healing is extended to mean both their emotional and social healing from the scars of the genocide. The image of Cephas as a healer is etched in the reader's mind through a vivid description of him removing bandages from Nonceba's face and replacing the dressing after surgery (164). This is juxtaposed with a hospital card that spells out mutilation by Sibaso that makes the healing a necessity. The last paragraph of the novel points towards healing on a national level and a shift from personal healing.

He must retreat from Nonceba, perhaps he has become too involved in replicating histories. He should stick to restorations of ancient kingdoms, circular structures, bee-hive huts, stone knives, broken pottery, herringbone walls, the vanished pillars in the old world. A new nation needs to restore its past. His focus, the bee-hive hut, to be installed at Lobengula's ancient kraal in KwoBulawayo the following year. His task is to learn to recreate the manner

in which the tenderest branches bend, meet, and dry, the way grass folds smoothly over livable places within; deliverance.

(p. 165)

Deliverance to the nation will come by carefully examining the past with the aim of building, not destroying. Every aspect of the nation must be taken into consideration as represented by the tenderest branches and grass, broken pottery. The bee-hive hut becomes a symbol of the nation which must provide shelter and protection for all its citizens and be a “livable place”. The process of making the nation habitable for everyone is a delicate process just like the weaving of bee-hive huts and mending broken pottery to ensure all pieces fit together to make one whole. It requires patience and gentleness as exhibited by Cephas in his relationship with Nonceba.

Conclusion

If genocide is to be understood as a phenomenon, there is need for multi-disciplinary approaches that enact Lang (2000)'s idea that every genre sheds more light on the phenomenon as depictions are limited by genre. Vera's novel gives a multi-layered narrative of the genocide in Matabeleland through various narrators and narrative viewpoints. In this regard one is able to find examples for the theories of genocide in a concrete manner. The reconstruction of the genocide privileges the ordinary person and women, showing that their lives are equally grievable as the heroes projected in national narratives. The details of their lives shows that ideology has casualties in its wake and is a major culprit in perpetrating genocide. Main lesson drawn is that people need to be tolerant of other people's views that may not necessarily tally with their own. That helps in avoiding derogatory classification of others that dehumanises them and makes genocide killing easy. Post genocide also requires looking beyond revenge and personal hurt in order to rebuild the nation as exemplified in the relationship between Cephas and Nonceba that transcends tribal (Shona/Ndebele) and gender (male/female) dichotomies to represent human interconnectedness.

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