Review

An expose of how the themes of violence, victimisation and brutality preoccupy the short stories in the collection: *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Mozambique Stories*

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The study made an expose of the themes of violence, victimisation and brutality as they pervade the short story collection. Working essentially in the Marxist literary theory, Fanonian critical realism and Marxist criminological theories as the springboard for the expose, it has made ground in highlighting colonial brutality towards the colonised and its inevitable violent dehumanising effects to the colonised.

**Key words:** Violence, victimisation, brutality, alienation, assimilado, criminology, Louis Bernardo Honwana, and Mozambican short stories.

**INTRODUCTION**

This paper seeks to make an expose of how, right from the first story to the last one, violence, victimisation and brutality seem to be the main concerns of the short stories in the collection: *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Mozambique Stories*. Through these short stories, it can be argued that Honwana presents the mental state of the both the colonised and the coloniser as victimiser or perpetrators of violence respectively. The oppressed is pacified and rendered by the brutality and intimidation of the oppressor, while on the other hand the oppressor feels vindicated and superior by the authority he stamps out using violent means. However, the most compelling thing to note is that Honwana does not seem to wallow in despair but bestows hope in the young people, who could as well be termed the future.

**DELIMITATION**

The expose is but limited to the themes of violence, victimisation and brutality in the seven stories of the collection: *We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Mozambique Stories*. The collection, according to Alonso (2007, 67) is “most iconic collection of short stories published in Mozambique prior to independence,” therefore, exudes with denunciation of colonial violence and calls for armed struggle against it.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The analysis makes use of the Marxist literary theory, Frantz Fanon, critical criminological theories of Willem Bonger (1916), who make mention of the economic domination of an underclass by ‘elites,’ as well as feminist criminologist Meda Chesney-Lind who deals with victimization of women and girls. We make use of such theories and theorists since essentially the subject under discussion deals with power differences, sexism and racism which the theorists and theories traverse. There are

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also insights from these works related to how domination leads to criminal behaviour of the underclass which we think is particularly useful in explaining how, in the stories, many females turn to prostitution because they are deprived by the elites as well as why other male protagonists tended to be violent. Feminist criminologists also make these types of claims that could be helpful in fleshing out the themes.

Before making an analysis of Honwana’s text, it is helpful to review some of these to establish a springboard from which the argument develops. Raman et al. (2008) rightly argues that the basic tenets of Marxism are not easy to summarize but two well-known statements by Marx provide a sufficient point of departure:

- It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness.
- The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it. (emphasis is original)

Both statements were intentionally provocative as Marx argues that all mental (ideological) systems are the products of real social and economic existence. The material interests of the dominant social class determine how people see human existence, individual and collective. Legal systems, for example, are not the pure manifestations of human or divine reason, but ultimately reflect the interests of the dominant class in particular historical periods. In one account, Marx described this view in terms of an architectural metaphor: the ‘superstructure’ (ideology, politics) rests upon the ‘base’ (socio-economic relations). To say ‘rests upon’ is not quite the same as saying ‘is caused by’. Marx was arguing that what we call ‘culture’ is not an independent reality but is inseparable from the historical conditions in which human beings create their material lives; the relations of exploitation and domination which govern the social and economic order of a particular phase of human history will in some sense ‘determine’ the whole cultural life of the society. Therefore, Honwana is exposing these relations in his collection.

Marxist criminology is one of the schools of criminology. As in conflict criminology, it focuses on why things change, identifying the disruptive forces in industrialized societies, and describing how society is divided by power, wealth, prestige, and the perceptions of the world. "The shape and character of the legal system in complex societies can be understood as deriving from the conflicts inherent in the structure of these societies which are stratified economically and politically" (Chambliss and Seidman, 1971, p3). It is concerned with the causal relationships between society and crime, that is, to establish a critical understanding of how the immediate and structural social environment gives rise to crime and criminogenic conditions. This theory helps one to understand the prevalence of violence in Honwana’s collection, in the light of Karl Marx’s argument that the law is the mechanism by which one social class, usually referred to as the "ruling class," keeps all the other classes in a disadvantaged position. Thus, this school uses a Marxist lens through which, inter alia, to consider the criminalization process, and by which explain why some acts are defined as deviant whereas others are not. It is therefore interested in political crime, state crime, and state-corporate crime.

As such, Marxism provides a systematic theoretical basis upon which to interrogate social structural arrangements, and the hypothesis that economic power is translated into political power substantially accounts for the general disempowerment of the majority who live in the modern state and the limitations of political discourse. Hence, whether directly or indirectly, it informs much of the research into social phenomena not only in criminology, but also in semiotics and the other disciplines which explore the structural relationships of power, knowledge, meaning, and positional interests within society.

Marxists are critical of the ideas, values and norms of capitalist ideology, and characterize the modern state as being under the control of the group that owns the means of production. For example, Chambliss (1973) examined the way in which the vagrancy laws were amended to reflect the interests of the ruling elite. He also looked at how British Colonial Law was applied in East Africa, so that the capitalist "ruling class" could profit from coffee plantations, and how the law in medieval England benefited feudal landowners. Similarly, Pearce (2003) looks at evidence that corporate crime is widespread but is rarely prosecuted. These researchers assert that political power is used to reinforce economic inequality by embedding individual property rights in the law and that the resulting poverty is one of the causes of criminal activity as a means of survival. Marxists argue that a socialist society with communal ownership of the means of production would have much less crime.

A different issue emerges by applying Marx’s theory of alienation. A proportion of crime is said to be the result of society offering only demeaning work with little sense of creativity. By comparison, in the sociology of deviance, Robert K. Merton borrows Durkheim’s concept of anomie to form the Strain Theory. Merton argues that the real problem of alienation is not created by a sudden social change, as Durkheim proposed, but rather by a social structure that holds out the same goals to all its members without giving them equal means to achieve them. It is this lack of integration between what the culture calls for and what the structure permits that causes deviant behaviour. Deviance then is a symptom of the social structure. Taylor et al. (1988) intend a combination of Interactionism and Marxism as a radical alternative to previous theories to formulate a "fully social theory of deviance". The notions discussed above could be linked to Honwana’s collection as it highlights the existence of
the assimilados.

Further, Bonger (1916) is a Dutch criminologist who believed in a causal link between crime and economic and social conditions. He asserted that crime is social in origin and a normal response to prevailing cultural conditions. In more primitive societies, he contended that survival requires more selfless altruism within the community. But once agricultural technology improved and a surplus of food was generated, systems of exchange and barter offered the opportunity for selfishness. As capitalism emerged, there were social forces of competition and wealth, resulting in an unequal distribution of resources, avarice and individualism. Once self interest and more egoistic impulses assert themselves, crime emerges. The poor would commit crime out of need or out of a sense of injustice. Hence, those with power exercise control and impose punishment, equating the definition of crime with harm or threat of harm to the property and business interests of the powerful. Although the inherent activities comprising, say, a theft, may be identical, theft by the poor will be given greater emphasis than theft by the rich. This will have two consequences: direct which will increase the pressure for survival in an unequal society, and indirect in that it will increase a sense of alienation among the poor. Crime in the streets was a result of the miserable conditions in which workers lived in competition with one another. He believed that poverty alone could not be a cause of crime but rather poverty coupled with individualism, materialism, false needs, racism, and the false masculinity of violence and domination among street thugs. These sentiments can be seen in the story "Nhinguitimo" through the character of Virguila Oito.

In addition, to understand how a system of domination and oppression can, not only exist, but also develop without constant efforts to overthrow the ruling class, Quinney (1980, p.110) suggests that one must understand how the ruling class controls the repressed. Primarily, control is done through the governing of consciousness of the population. One method is to legitimize the actions of the ruling class, and the state that supports them. Part of what is legitimized is Quinney’s notion of crimes of domination. These are corporate actions that include price fixing, and pollution, all in the effort to maintain their status and the capitalist order. Also, crimes of control are legitimized. These are the crimes law enforcement uses to carry out "justice". They include affirmative measures to provoke crime, forms of surveillance, and denial of due process. Social injuries such as sexism, racism, and economic exploitation are also legitimized. In short, these actions/events are not defined as criminal because they work to develop a capitalist political economy. The ruling class induce their own hegemonic ideology to protect themselves, legitimize the system, and thereby maintain the established order. "Manipulating the minds of the people is capitalism’s most subtle means of control".

Another theory that gives a framework, a springboard for the following analysis of the short stories is understanding the process of colonisation. The process of colonisation involves one nation or territory taking control of another nation or territory with force or by acquisition. Colonialism, which Memmi (1965, 65) correctly describes as "one variety of fascism" is based on economic privilege, despite suggestions of more noble goals of religious conversion or civilisation. Its key tools are racism and terror. Racism is ingrained in every colonial institution, and establishes the "sub-humanity" of the colonised, fostering poor self-concepts in the colonised as well.

The process of colonisation has been dealt with in depth by the revolutionary Frantz Fanon in two of his books Black Skin White Masks (1967) and The Wretched of the Earth (1986). In Black Skin White Masks, Fanon investigates the extreme alienation of the colonial subject. He clearly states that principally colonialists’ subjugation and violence have caused this alienation. He says of alienation that results from the theories of colonisation:

No one would dream of doubting that its major artery is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man. Here is objective evidence that expresses it (p.17).

These various theories are racist and are put daily into practice by the white man. To paraphrase, the black man is automatically classified, imprisoned, primitivised and decivilized putting the subject in a frame, fixing him as the picture frame does to a picture. The fixing results in the dilemma it poses on the black man: 'turn white or disappear' (p.100). Therefore, the black man is black in relation to the white man (p.110) resulting in his double consciousness as is highlighted by W.E.B Dubois in The Souls of Black Folk (1989 [1903], 5) who observes that "[i]t is a peculiar sensation this double consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of the other’s" (p.5).

This alienation ultimately splits him (the colonised) - the reason why the assimilado is a fragment or as being fragmented with an inferiority complex. He begins to see the mother country’s cultural (p.18) standards as the new (though still alien) basis of seeing. According to Memmi (1965), the coloniser’s rewriting of history to his glorification removes the colonised from history. The colonised child is taught not his history, but the unknown settings of the coloniser’s history. The colonised become "divorced from history". Thus, the need for the black man to embark on a decolonising process and rightly suggests the ways to do so which the texts under discussion might have considered. Black Skin White Masks (1986, 30) is, however, not all about its author being an ‘exterminating
The *Wretched of the Earth* highlights and questions colonial domination which begets cultural problems and its resultant ambiguities (p.174). These culminate in violence and the pitfalls of national consciousness (p.119-165). The colonized is degraded, brutalized and his dignity denied as he sees or is denied entry into the coloniser's world of luxury while he wallows in extreme poverty, he is excluded and peripheralized. The good thing about Fanon as he argues in *The Wretched of the Earth* is that he advocates that the colonized must seek to free himself. Thus, he urges the colonized to question his being peripheralized `by absolute violence' (p.29). Only violence indicates Fanon (1986, 29), is able to free `the native from his inferiority, his despair and inaction,' it makes him fearless and restore his self-respect.

Therefore, it is evident from the above that the colonised is fragmented. He is stripped of any sense of direction and identity as he is alienated. He is an object as he is at the mercy of the coloniser. In other words, he is pacified by being colonized as is suggested by the District Commissioner in Achebe's (1985, 148) *Things Fall Apart* who is going to write a book entitled "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger." In line with this, the three texts under discussion's key theme(s), therefore, are that of the dilemma that the colonized black man found himself heavy to contain, the dilemma of being a colonial object under colonialism.

Having been paralysed and crippled by colonialism, the black man is left to his own means. Colonialism harrowingly failed to locate the place for the black man. On one hand, one is told to scorn his 'primitive', 'inferior' African way that they should strive 'to be white' yet on the other hand, the colonizer fails to recognise or accept the uprooted man. Hence the colonised is marooned and alienated as is presented in *Wide Sargasso Sea* where V.S Naipaul (1989, 29) remarks that an order that has collapsed and some people are 'marooned'... a world that appeared simple is now to be diseased and is no longer habitable (Naipaul, 'Dog's Chance', p.29). Thus, this becomes the major preoccupation of the text in discussion, a presentation of a deracinated colonised with no sense of direction and identity.

**OVERALL SUMMARY OF THE SERIES**

*We Killed Mangy Dog and Other Mozambique Stories* is a collection of short stories by Mozambican writer Luis Bernardo Honwana. The book was originally published in Portuguese in 1964 and translated into English in 1969. The book consists of seven stories, including one with the same title as the book: "We Killed Mangy Dog," "Papa, Snake, and I," "The Hands of Blacks," "Inventory of Furniture and Effects," "The Old Woman," "Ninguitimo," and "Dina." The writer, who is also a documentary filmmaker and photographer, wrote the novel when he was twenty-two years old, while a political prisoner of the *Policia Internacional e de Defesa do Estado* (PIDE) (International and State Defense Police), which was a security service agency during the regime of António de Oliveira Salazar in Portugal during the *Estado Novo*. According to Chabal (1996), Honwana greatly influenced the post-colonial generation of younger prose writers and has rightly been regarded as stylistically accomplished. The Mozambican world is at the centre of analysis in each of his narratives. Several of the stories are told from the point of view of children. The innocent and naive characters are used to expose the inherent racism in the Portuguese colonial government, contends Ferreira (1986). Moreover, Honwana's stories were written for a greater purpose than entertainment and amusement. In this light, Laranjeira (1995) rightly argues that they raise questions about social exploration, racial segregation, and class and education distinctions. Each character in every story represents a different social position (white Portuguese man, the assimilated black, the indigenous black and mixed race).

Further, in *Lusophone Studies* 2, a volume in a series published by University of Bristol, Mark Sabine (2007) analyses the aspects of gender, race, and violence found in Honwana's short stories. According to Sabine (2007, 24), "focusing almost exclusively on male protagonists and their humiliation and disenfranchisement, Honwana depicts colonial rule as the literal emasculation of Africa." In addition, Sabine (2007, 24) describes the act of killing Mangy Dog as a painful initiation into a grown-up social order: "The killing constitutes a grotesque substitute for the elaborate rites marking a boy's passage to manhood in indigenous cultures" (34). The aggressive effacement of the figure of the black patriarch not only necessitates the valorization of violence as 'manly,' but also marginalises the values which Honwana ascribes to an indigenous paradigm of masculinity: bravery, endurance, dignity and deference to elders" (25). Sabine also states that "Ginho's gang prizes physical prowess, power, and aggression." The reasoning behind it is that "Ginho lacked a role model who stresses the ideals of courage, leadership, compassion, and the dedication of physical strength." This lack of proper role model in addition to the "corrosive impact on an indigenous social order" led to the atrocious murder of the dog.

In the stories, the institutional denial of equal human rights to colonised Mozambicans is apparent and linked to the betrayal of an implicit promise based on shared masculine identity: "Men classified as *assimilados or civilizados*, who have assumed a Portuguese cultural identity on the promise of equal civil rights, might expect equal access to the patriarchal dividend" (29). Ginho is the victim of both racial and gendered discrimination when in the story Quim and Gulamo call him "*maricas*" (sissy) and "*Preto de merda*" (you black shit) for not being...
able to kill Mangy Dog. In addition to being insulted with a racial epithet, he is emasculated by the other boys.

As Sabine also notes, “Honwana’s women are most often not protagonists capable of acting and learning, but a social resource under the control of men” (42). There are three women in the story of Mangy Dog: Ginho’s mother, his teacher, and his classmate Isaura. Ginho’s mother attempts to discipline him but her protests are futile as he leaves the house with his father’s rifle. Isaura attempts to stop the killing, but is yelled at by the boys’ leader Quim and told to leave. Her values of compassion and pacifism are considered “feminine” by the boys and the colonial patriarchy they serve (Sabine, 43).

AN ANALYSIS OF THE STORIES LAYING BARE THE THEMES OF VIOLENCE, BRUTALITY AND VICTIMISATION.

As the researchers contend, this paper explores the various ways in which the Mozambican writer, Luis Bernardo Honwana, displays colonial trauma and oppression in We Killed Mangy-Dog and Other Mozambican Stories through an exposé of how the themes of violence, victimisation and brutality preoccupy the short stories in the collection. We demonstrate how the writer uses specific characters, objects and actions to display the traumas and psychological fragmentation affecting colonial subjects and illustrate how these are directly linked to the brutality of the Portuguese colonial regime. Particular attention is given to self-oppression, internalised oppression, the various coping mechanisms developed by the colonised subjects and how these constitute symptoms of an alienated society where individuals lose their spiritual, emotional, psychological and rational integrative connections, becoming unconscious beings who cannot be, or have great difficulty being, ‘whole’ again, ‘seeing’ the full spectrum of their lives and envisaging a ‘freer’ state of being. This picture can be better understood as it is explained in the following analysis.

“Dina”

In first story, “Dina”, a white farm Overseer rapes a young girl within hearing and seeing distance of her African father. It is most shocking and disturbing. The story deals with the emasculation of the African society by its colonial masters. It focuses on Madala, the old father. In the opening scenes, the Overseer delays in heeding the call to lunch and Madala continues to work. Or does he? One is not quite sure whether Madala’s pulling on stalks is real or imagined. Whatever the case, Honwana weaves in a rather sympathetic portrayal of this old man such that when the shameful act occurs, the reader and the other farmhands are both outraged at the pain and dishonor done to this man and his daughter. The reader is led on and expects a rebellion. Instead, another tragedy occurs.

In this first story “Dina”, labourers such as Madala and his co-workers are exploited physically and psychologically by the colonial boss. Madala, who is considered an elder, fails to assume that role and even ‘allows’ his own daughter to be sexually exploited by the boss while he is silenced and pacified with liquor by the same boss. Afolabi (2001, 58) rightly argues that in this sense the title of the story “Dina” (Dinner) foregrounds the process of being devoured or “eaten”. Taken figuratively, Madala and his co-workers are exploited since their labour nourishes all forms of the colonial master’s appetites, that is, physical (sexuality), psychological (pleasure in demeaning blacks) as well as materially – the money he gets after exploiting blacks and paying them “peanuts”.

The above can be connected to Marques’ (2008) correct argumentation that in the story ‘Dina’, certain psycho-analytical concepts known as dissociation and displacement illustrate the dynamics of oppression, repression, and self-oppression, dynamics that tend to be fostered within the unequal context of colonizer/colonized societies. Honwana is fundamentally political: he does have ‘something to say.’ Honwana’s literature could be described as ‘the literature of the eye’, taking after Alain Robbe-Grillet, who is considered the father of the nouveau roman (Robbe-Grillet, 1965). Honwana is more interested in ‘displaying’ than overtly ‘saying’ or explaining. Rather than ‘saying’ and explaining via the use of overt discursive techniques, the latter skilfully uses certain narrative methods such as metaphor or metonymy, silence or ambiguous language to demonstrate the degree of trauma and oppression affecting the lives of colonised subjects in Mozambique. The author’s ambivalent narrative techniques become themselves, in some ways, the reflection of the repression, trauma and unconsciousness experienced by the subjects of his stories. By only hinting at, but never overtly saying, what needs to be said or discovered, such techniques mimic the very problems faced by the subjects in question, for they also cannot say or see what needs to be said and seen and understood in order to attain what we can call the ‘cure’ or at least the beginning of the cure: in other words, the end of colonial oppression.

Another form of brutality and victimisation depicted in “Dina” is that of the colonial master’s negligence and indifference towards the workers. Pitarossi is said to have died of a snake bite while working in the fields and left a wife, Maria who had to turn to prostitution for survival, clearly showing that the colonial master only cared for one while they were alive and provide labour. In this sense, the employer-worker relations have been reduced to mere labour relations, typical of Karl Marx’s view of capitalism. It is only after profits.

The Overseer is also an oppressive and abusive man. Even during dinner time, the man still wants the men to work. He says of n’Guiana and Muthakati who were
already standing up to go for "dinner":

When it’s time to start you’re forever scratching yourselves, but
when it’s time to knock off, then it’s at the double, isn’t it
my little black bastards? Just keep on like this and I’ll tan
your hides for you!... (p.5).

In the above quotation, the Overseer is not only
oppressive, exploitative and abusive, but he is also
patronising as he sees the labourers as his “little black
bastards.” Through the Overseer again, the abuse of
women is also highlighted. He raped or slept with Maria
without her consent and Afolabi (2001, 62) has aptly
taken this incident sexual assault to symbolise Portuguuese’s rape
and abuse of Africa-Mozambique, hence
the coloured population. His violent nature is also
exemplified in his utterances and actions to the labourers.
He says:

Swine! Bastards! Get to work, you bastards! ... Black
bastards ... Hurry up!
Hurry up! ... The youth of the Kraal gang was hit with the
wine bottle and
split his scalp open and the Overseer’s boots crushed
into his face with fury.
Son of a bitch! (p.18).

The vivid images above go on to show the brutality and
violence of the colonial system, represented by the
Overseer that preoccupies the first story.

However, in as much as Honwana preoccupies himself
with the violence and brutality of colonialism he seems to
be bestowing hope for the future in the young man who
questions colonial brutality and sees the wrongs that
blacks are victims to. This young man spits at the old
man – Madala’s passivity and subservience in the face of
colonial brutality. In the same manner, the youths of the
Kraal Gang are also rebellious as explicitly shown on
pages 15 and 18. Therefore, in this light, it can be
asserted that Honwana sees the potential to tackle
colonialism in the youths though this cannot be
overemphasized.

“Inventory of Furniture and Effects”

In the second story, “Inventory of furniture and effects,” a
young girl relates her family’s possession and describes
their living situation. The reader might be lulled into
thinking that the story is about nothing much really. But a
closer reading allows one to infer intellectual life lived in
genteel poverty and a child’s anger at the absence of her
father.

Although this particular story seems not to contain
incidents or images of explicit violence, it carries over-
tones of colonial injustices and unfairness which one
could infer to symbolise some form of violence as the
family strives to transcend the colonial economic
restraint. Hamilton (1975:216) argues that the story, a
depiction or description of crowded living quarters with
makeshift furniture as well as foreign news magazines
(Time and Life) but in orderly and clean arrangement,
offers an effective social statement on an aspect of
African life in transition. In this light, this family is striving
to transcend poverty and acquire a certain status of
ownership of property. All this is brought out through the
reliable first person narrative technique of the young boy
who reveals everything including the pertinent minute
details of the dirt and smoke on the walls and clothes to
highlight the poverty of the African family.

An interesting insight into the story can be read from
Marques (2008) who correctly argues that, when he
focuses on the interaction between humans and things
(as he does so intensely in ‘Inventory of Furniture and
Effects’) he wants to show how those things reflect the
social position or even the psychological framework of
the character in question. It is evident that by carefully
describing and focusing on specific objects, plants,
people, external gestures, movements, characters’
positions, and through the use of linguistic metaphors
and metonyms, the narrator of the story is indeed telling a
very specific story – one of oppression, self-oppression,
alienation, helplessness, humiliation and trauma. The
mere object of focus of the narrating eye is always
charged with psychological and socio-political meanings,
often bringing on accusations against the colonial system
and directing the reader to see a world of racialised
oppression and self-repression and unconsciousness.

“The Old Woman”

It is about a nameless young man who is violently
beaten. Significantly, the reader enters his mind and,
thanks to the use of a first person narrative, experiences
the beating from his perspective. Despite the different
setting from the first story (we are now in an urban con-
text, with the attack taking place in a bar), the violation
of human rights is similar. The crucial point however, is the
different outcome. For, in this story, the youth is
eventually able to voice his pain to someone who will
listen, namely his mother. Initially, when she probes him,
he denies having been beaten at all. When she insists,
she is met with a laconic remark (86). But even-tually,
once his younger siblings are in bed, he opens up (87).
The speaker is aware that physical violence is com-
pounded by the dehumanising emotional abuse he has
undergone.

Thus, “The Old Woman” exposes the brutality and
humiliation that Quito suffers at a bar during a scuffle with
white people. Afolabi (2001, 63) sees Quito’s boldness in
attempting to stand up for his dignity leading to his
humiliation and beating. Furthermore, he sees Quito as
symbolically setting the tone for Mozambican resistance of colonial domination in agreement with the view that hope is bestowed in the young people, as this young man stood up to defend his dignity. This violence becomes a regeneration means by which Mozambique could only free herself as Marxism propounds the notion of violent overthrow of oppressive system when it sees "violence as the midwife of freedom".

"Papa, Snake and I"

In *Papa, snake and I*, a young boy grows closer to his father on a day his father is humiliated by white neighbour.

"It's nothing, Mother, but you know, our son believes that people don’t mount wild horses, and that they only make use of the hungry, docile ones. Yet when a horse goes wild it gets shot down and it’s all finished. But tame horses die every day. Every day... Day after day, after day – as long as they can stand on their feet... Do you know, Mother, I'm afraid to believe that this is true, but I also can’t bring myself to tell him that it’s a lie... He sees, even to-day he saw... I only wish for the strength to make sure that my children know how to recognize other things...” (p.39).

In this story, "Papa, Snake and I" violence together with victimisation are explicitly brought out. Ginho violently kills the snake that was in the chicken run. Hamilton (1975:218) is of the view that the snake is an intruder; it represents the outside world that has intruded on the domestic tranquillity of the Tchembene household. Thus, in this light, the snake could be seen as a representative or symbolism of colonial intrusion into Africa, of the Portuguese’s colonisation of Mozambique. Thus, Ginho's killing of the snake could also symbolise the fighting of colonialism and the hope bestowed in the young people as the boy boldly faces and confronts the intruder and kills it, although this cannot be taken too much further.

Again, in this story, Senhor Castro victimises Tchembene (Ginho’s father) by forcing him to pay seven hundred escudos for having his dog (Pointer) killed by a snake bite he sustained in the latter’s yard. Mr. Castro did not even wait for Tchembene to explain what had happened further emphasising the unfortunate occurrence that illustrates the precarious conditions of an African family with aspirations for social betterment in a white dominated world. This episode reveals a typical example of an oppressor-oppressed relationship, an unequal dynamic that defines the conflicting discourses emanating from socio-economic and political positions.

Afolabi (2001, 48) contends that “Papa, Snake and I” depicts the socio-economic and political inequality between the colonised Mozambican and the more affluent colonialist. Typically, through the use of fear and intimidation, Senhor Castro challenges Tchembene to defend himself while being the latter’ fear of further humiliation and retaliation. In their decisive encounter, both players in the game of intimidator-intimidated seem to be aware of their different statuses. On the one hand, Senhor Castro’s tone is domineering and authoritative, while Tchembene is submissive and weak. On the other hand, Senhor Castro is charging Tchembene from an accusatory viewpoint while Tchembene simply compromises although he was in the right. Even the “underdog” concedes defeat; Senhor Castro seems to push still further by setting the terms of payment respectively: “Mr Castro! You owe me seven hundred bucks ... We’ll see to that later! I give you till the end of the month...” (p.72).

Afolabi (2001) goes further to say that this encounter reveals more than Tchembene’s encounter with a colonialist but also his son’s search for answers to his father’s conditioned silence and conformism in the face of humiliation and dehumanisation, an observation true enough of Tchembene as he feels “weakened” and humiliated by Senhor Castro’s oppressive tone and language. In the same vain, he is ashamed by his protracted silence in the face of oppression. He could not defend any of his positions either with the oppressor or with his equally humiliated son. On the one hand, he feels obliged to contain his anger in order to avoid inviting additional wrath of the oppressor, but his silence to the crucial question posed by his son is a tactic of saving his already shamed person. The question, “Why did you not say that Son-of-a-bitch! To his face?” is quite innocent yet laden with the fundamental questions of the human condition in colonial Mozambique.

To “…say it to his face…p.74” means losing whatever minimum privileges he is currently enjoying as a “good colonial subject” who can be intimidated and cajoled to a point of assuming a false guilt. In this case, Tchembene is not responsible for the death of Senhor Castro’s dog although he is relieved and consoled that the snake bit the dog and not his children. An interesting irony stems from the fact that Tchembene’s household has been losing its chickens to snake bites and did not have any recourse for compensation. While weak blacks become targets of Senhor Castro’s rage upon losing his dog, Mozambican Blacks can only vent their frustration on each other, especially within family ranks, just as when Mama, Tchembene’s wife, angrily charges her husband to find out what has been killing the chickens. Another observation of hope in this story stems from the fact that Ginho sees colonial dehumanisation and urges his father to “say it to his face ... that is ... son of a bitch!” to show that he did not accept what Senhor Castro did to his father. Thus, he could be argued to harbour potential revolt against the status quo.

In the same way that Tchembene’s courage to console his son about the need to have hope about the Mozambican future;

> No, my son, there must be hope! It must exist! Even if it all denies Him, He must exist!... even a poor man has to have something. Even if it is only a hope! Even if it’s a false hope! (p.46)
Distills the extent of the psychological damage inflicted on the colonised, the process of degeneration has been so systematically perfected that the colonized can only wish, hope even if that hope is a false hope, without any concrete plans to attack and reverse the situation. Thus, in this light religion can be argued to be “the opium of the people” as it hinders the awakening of their conscience but lead them to believe in a false hope.

“*We Killed Mangy Dog*”

In “We Killed Mangy Dog,” violence, brutality and victimisation is also epitomised by the violent and brutal killing of the dog by Toncinho and his gang. Varying symbolisms can be deduced from the story by inference as the beguiling simplicity style employed by Honwana does not readily expose these meanings. For Atolabi (2001, 35), the physical description of the dog along with additional background information on how it came to have its disgusting look and peculiarities, compels the reader to visualise this ambivalent character: neither dog nor human, neither black nor white, suggesting that the dog has a lot of metaphoric explanations and inclinations to it. This could largely be thus as Honwana was compelled to use metaphor and satire to critic at colonialism violated, brutalised and dehumanised the blacks. From the above quotation it is evident that indeed the colonised, the process of degeneration has been so systematically perfected that the colonized can only wish, hope even if that hope is a false hope, without any concrete plans to attack and reverse the situation. Thus, in this light religion can be argued to be “the opium of the people” as it hinders the awakening of their conscience but lead them to believe in a false hope.

The protagonists of the story Toncinho, Isaura (the mentally retarded girl), and Mangy-dog are all victims of a violent and brutal treatment. Toncinho is victimised and is considered of as of low status in the gang because he is black. Hamilton (1975) agrees when he asserts that the fact that Toncinho is black seems to determine in part: his lower position in the pecking order of a youthful gang consisting of whites and East Indians. Be that as it may, Honwana treats these racial juxtapositions in a matter-of-fact manner and thus achieves artistic unity in a story while making a meaningful social comment. It can be argued, Toncinho’s inferior status in the gang relates him emotionally to the outcast dog and the retarded girl. Mangy-dog is also neglected and victimised up to a point of being killed because “he made everyone feel sick.” As a symbol of the blacks, Mangy-dog shows that the black man could be “killed” anytime the white man deems it necessary. Isaura is also insulted and lampooned by her school mates because she is mentally retarded. Therefore, inferences could be made to highlight the white man’s underrating of the black man as sickening as a mangy-dog and retarded. Thus, the black man lacks reasoning and love, so he should be treated like a child and disposed of anytime fitting for the white man.

The violence and victimisation perpetrated on the above mentioned three affects them psychologically; Toncinho is just as withdrawn as both Isaura and Mangy-dog. Psychologically the boy is torn between his low but socially acceptable position among his peers, and his being almost an outcast as Isaura and Mangy-dog.

“The Hands of the Blacks”

“The Hand of Blacks” presents different myths about the origin of the pale palms of the hands of Black people. A mother tells her son that black people are equal to white people in every way even though her reality and the community that she lives in say otherwise.

Psychological intimidation is mostly explicit in “The Hands of the Blacks.” The white man through his associates in intimidation and oppression of the blacks, church and school enforces a number of mystical theories of why the hands of the blacks are lighter than the rest of his body. All of the theories are racist and seek to put the coloniser at a vantage point and the blacks as inferior. Thus, the boy’s mother debunks this myth when she explains that God created the hands of black people the same as those of the white people to show the equality of the two races, as well as to show that the work done by the hands is what matters and not the racial commentaries ascribed to it by the colonisers. Alonso (2007, 79) succinctly puts at as follows:

*Before insurrection explodes ... “The Hands of the Blacks,” once more dwells on a much younger and bemused child narrator, whose inability to understand the damaging implications of the racist explanations proffered to him by a selection of adults in positions of authority is emblematic. Indeed, while the fact that he collects mutually contradictory explanations implicitly points to their folkloric nature and thus invalidates them as so-called scientific explanations, he cannot disprove them by himself. His mother, a lone voice amidst a chorus of racist remarks, however, manages to dispel the prevailing racist ideology by pointing to the notion of equality amongst men. The notion of God-willed equality challenges the legitimacy of the inequalities blatantly obvious in the prevailing colonial system, as portrayed in the core stories “Dina,” “The Old Woman,” and “Papá, Snake and I,” where different generations of black men had had their basic human rights systematically violated whereas the white men were shown to relentlessly abuse their position of power (p.79).*

From the above quotation it is evident that indeed colonialism violated, brutalised and dehumanised the colonised.

“Nhinguitimo”

The penultimate story, “Nhinguitimo,” starts with the
description of pigeons and the havoc they wreak on harvest, talks of an impending storm but ends with one of the most heart-breaking and poignant instances of land dispossession in literature. The pigeons’ flight is essentially practical – it sacrifices the grace of a pirouette or the sweep of a curve to the necessity of arriving more quickly. No one remembers seeing a pigeon intoxicated by the caress of the wind, as often happens to the swallow; no one can affirm that, like the vulture, the pigeon indulges himself in the sensual pleasures of gliding through the dense blue space with his wings unfurled; surely too, no one ever heard of a pigeon spending a whole morning combing his stomach for lice, fluffing out his chest, smoothing his feathers, as the lazy secua goose does.

Similar to “Papa, Snake and I,” “Nhinguitimo,” which can loosely be translated to “Wind” or a violent storm that marks the beginning of the rains, presents a similar case in economic exploitation and colonial intimidation turned violent. Virgula Oito is tricked into revealing to his foreman that he owns a piece of land which is later taken away from him leaving him poor and destitute, driving him into “...a state of dementia and hysteria...” to take Afalobi’s words. (p.51)

Colonial brutality is further emphasised when ironically instead of a reasonable intervention and understanding, the colonial perpetrators of the degenerative process which led Virgula Oito to resort to violence in the first place, respond with a call to arms in search of the “madman” whom they now see as a social threat to be summarily eliminated to avoid further disturbance. Rodrigues says:

Men! Get hold of your guns and let’s go and shoot this guy down before he kills more people. Let’s go quickly before something happens in this village... My God...! (p.74).

This incident further emphasises the preceding one, where colonial brutality is presented as rendering the African man helpless and incapable of any meaningful resistance. After the seizure of his land Virgula Oito ceases to be himself, he feels a total emptiness that only revulsion and rash acts of violent resistance will later relieve. In his inability to cope after losing what he regards as family property, he becomes hysterical and resorts to a killing rampage, even his own people.

This anguish and Helplessness is captured in the conversation between Virgula Oito and his fellow workers who reach out to console him to no avail:

Masinga, we can’t do anything... They’re taking the land from us and we can do nothing... ‘Matchumbutana...’ Virgula Oito spoke very slowly, falteringly; ‘Matchumbutana...ni was born on that land... My father was born there... My whole life belongs there... Maguignana Lodrica has shops, tractors, big farms... Why does he want our land? Why? (p.71).

This sense of helplessness and incompleteness is thus revealed in the rhetoric questions that he continually asks himself as if he expects the heavens to answer his questions. On the same note, emphasis is made through Honwana’s choice of name for this compelling character. According to Afalobi, (2001, 58) Virgula Oito literary means a fraction of a whole (point eight), that is, he is an incomplete figure. Ironically, the character enacts the qualities embedded in his name through the way he is treated and manipulated. At this point, the writer seems to be prompting the reader to say: if Virgula Oito is less than a human being, why must he have rights to a land that belongs to his ancestors. He is another typical example of how the colonialist diminishes and dehumanises the colonised in a subtle yet effective manner, credit to the young narrator’s all exposition technique.

CONCLUSION

It is apparent, therefore, from the above analysis that indeed the themes of violence and victimisation preoccupy the stories in the collection. This violence has a psychological bearing on both the intimidator and the intimidated. The intimidator assumes a superior and authoritative attitude towards his victim as is exemplified by the character of Senhor Castro to Tchembene, while the victims of intimidation are left helpless, dejected and in subservience. Hope is however, inevitable as it is clear that Honwana bestows it in the young people as the older generation is passive. In short, through the depiction of the violence and brutality of the colonial systems, Honwana can be argued to be condemning it and calling upon his countrymen to react meaningfully and resist this dehumanisation and brutalisation just as some young boys in most of his stories sort to do. However, this is not so explicitly shown, so it cannot be seen as the author’s main preoccupation but to highlight how brutal and violent colonialism is.

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