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Echoing Silences as a Paradigm for Restorative Justice in Post-conflict Zimbabwe: A Philosophical Discourse

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Abstract *Drawing corroborative data from* Echoing Silences (1997), *an internationally acclaimed Zimbabwean liberation war novel written by Alexander Kanengoni, the article explores some perspectives on the history of violent pasts and restorative justice that can be of use to post-conflict Zimbabwe. Considering that Zimbabwe is a country freighted with a history of violent pasts starting from the armed struggle in the 1970s, the Matabeleland atrocities in the 1980s as well* as *electoral violence from the 1980s to date, the article argues that the message of violence and the project of restoration canvassed for in* Echoing Silences *present important insights that can be useful to efforts aimed at national healing and development. The effects of the history of violence on individuals, nation and community have largely received cursory attention, and in a number of instances, these effects have been left unattended for political expediency since addressing them would create a counternarrative to ZANU PF's revolutionary mission by exposing and accepting the violent nature of nationalism before and after the attainment of political independence. For that reason, the article argues that the violent pasts, as portrayed in the historical novel, need to be acknowledged and effectively dealt with on the basis of people's lived experiences. Both the wronged and the wrongdoers need to be involved in this exercise in order to unburden the past, the present and the future.*

Introduction Generally, the exegesis of Zimbabwe's liberation war historical literature evinces the armed struggle fought in the 1970s as a vast zone of conflict, violence and gruesome contest. Thus the liberation war becomes a part of the violent pasts that characterise Zimbabwean history from the colonial to the neo-colonial phase. While depicting this history of violent pasts, some few liberation war historical narratives attempt to camouflage and dwarf the violence and varnish the violent pasts; especially violence committed by guerrillas against civilians or against fellow guerrillas. These narratives

are not inseparable from "elite-generated narratives to prevent other pasts from articulating themselves" (Alexander, 2006: 105). Similarly, in these narratives, which are published mainly in the early 1980s or generally in Shona and Ndebele, violence has a dual nature. As Kaarsholm (2005: 5) observes:

> The violence of the security forces is ruthless and against nature, while the violence of the guerrillas is sanctioned by spirits and natural forces, and by their efforts to re-establish an 'authentic' African life of dignity.

As a result, the overarching impression is that the guerrillas who fought in the armed struggle are immune to the trauma and stress triggered by the 'bloody and pitiless atmosphere'. It is worth noting that Shona and Ndebele are Zimbabwe's official African languages used in schools. Literature published in these two languages, particularly under the tutelage of the now defunct government funded Literature Bureau, is more easily swayed in favour of the nationalist ideology. This narrow idealisation of the history of violence in Shona and Ndebele novelistic discourse is countered in liberation war historical literature written in English and published in the late 1980s and beyond. Essentially, this discourse drifts from a tendency to give narrative eminence to the dual image of Rhodesian security forces violence as 'ruthless' and guerrilla violence as a liberating and 'healing force', and contributing towards the humanisation of the enslaved African. It debunks the promulgation of 'patriotic history' which sanitises the use of violence in government, media and the nation as a whole. The narratives underline the violence perpetrated by guerrillas on fellow guerrillas and civilians, which in fact is an intellectual mode of parading nationalism as violent. Of note is the fact that they bring out the dehumanising and destabilising effect of violence on ordinary guerrillas and civilians who are the victims. Part of the reasons for such an outlook are that this literature is published at a time when there is growing disillusionment with nationalism in the nation and the introduction of the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP) in the 1990s which orchestrates the collapse of social and economic security in-toto. Again, historical literature published during this time not only revisits the past in order to articulate counter truths, but also marshalls history as discourse of protest and opposition.

Beyond political events raised in historical literature on the liberation war, neo-colonial Zimbabwe has also been a battlefield of gory internecine contests. In other words, almost three decades after the attainment of political independence from Britain, the pattern of violence in defence of, or in defiance of nationalism has remained unchanged. It is this unbending history of violence that led to the intervention of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU) after the widely televised violence that accompanied the March 2008 presidential

elections. The Extraordinary Summit of the Southern African Development Community held in Dar-es-Salaam on 29 March 2007 and endorsed in Lusaka on 12 April 2008 and further endorsed in the AU Summit held in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt from 30 to 1 July 2008 was a tacit recognition of the local violence at an international level. Even the preamble to the Global political Agreement (GPA) signed between ZANU PF and the two MDC formations on the 15th of September 2008 clearly acknowledges the history of violent pasts and the need for healing and reconciliation. One of the items in the preamble reads: "DEDICATING ourselves to putting an end to the polarisation, divisions, conflict and intolerance that has characterised Zimbabwean politics in recent times" (http//www.sokwanele.com, downloaded on 17 March 2009 3:53PM).

It is against this background that *Echoing Silences* marshals historiography with a view not only to unravel the density of violent pasts but also to reconcile these violent pasts and the anticipated peaceful future. The history of the violent pasts is comprehensively represented in order to generate a strong case on the need for restorative justice and in confronting what appears to be reluctance by the political elite to accept historical responsibility over the violent pasts and fulfill their obligations. Seen in this light, *Echoing Silences* represents "the most intense expression of horror and disillusionment with the war yet published in Zimbabwe" (Ranger, 1999: 696), and becomes an historical and political narrative in quest of national sanity. Through the central character, Munashe, an ordinary, brutalised and traumatised guerrilla who emblematises the history of the violent pasts and a projected peaceful future, the novel metaphorically and ontologically traces the violent history of the nation-state and the lives of the ordinary Zimbabweans and comes to the conclusion that Zimbabwe is a nation in fundamental need of healing and restorative justice.

It calls upon the so-called ordinary people to play a very important role in this scheme because the political leadership, which has a historical responsibility to lead in healing the nation, has not done so. In this regard, Munashe becomes a quintessence of everything that has gone wrong in Zimbabwe and what possibly needs to be done and even the urgency, too. In particular, the representation of the fact that violence and murders in the armed struggle fought during the 1970s exposed participants or perpetrators to the wrath of *ngozi* (avenging spirits) makes *Echoing Silences* a novel that denounces "the silencing of still controversial aspects of the nation's memory" by the political leadership (Alexander, 2006: 110). It is possibly out of this realisation that the narrative privileges the bottom-up approach to national healing and reconstruction.

The Conceptual **Construct of Restorative Justice**

Restorative justice is a concept or philosophy of justice that emphasises first and foremost, the need 'to repair damage, loss or harm engendered by 'criminal' behaviour, of which politically motivated violence is a part. The most critical aspect in restorative justice is restoration rather than retribution or mere punishment. Restorative justice is not meant to benefit only the justice system, as retributive justice often does; it benefits both the victim and the offender, ensuring that the two parties continue to live together in peace and harmony (Mangena, 2007: 171). Mere punishment or retribution does not benefit the offended particularly in a context where he or she has lost material possessions or even life. The reason is that with retributive justice, the emphasis is on the offender, that is, the offender must receive appropriate punishment and the punishment must mirror the crime committed. Attention is not given to the victim. On the other hand, restorative justice requires cooperative and participatory efforts that involve both the offenders and the aggrieved with a view to compensate the victim.

Processes involved in restorative justice in general include but are not limited to Victim offender Mediation (VOM), Family Group Conferencing (FGC) and Community Restorative Boards (CRBs) (Mangena, 2007: 173). The processes involve dialogue between the victim and the offender, which dialogue is meant to build bridges. VOM is a face-to-face meeting between victim and the offender in the presence of a mediator. It is not always used in Shona society since it involves a smaller number of participants and is often the only option available to incarcerated offenders due to limits on the number of visits allowed to see. a prisoner at any given moment. Many restorative meetings, especially among the Shona, take the form of FGC which has a wider circle of participants, that is to say, in addition to the primary victim and the offender, participants may include people connected to the victim and those connected to the offender. In most cases, these are blood relatives and such meetings are mediated *by ngozi* (avenging spirit), and so the conferencing has a spiritual dimension brought about by the presence and force of this *ngozi* (Mangena, 2007: 175). CRBs can also be used to initiate the restorative dialogue where a wider community is involved and the chief in this case becomes the mediator between the offended family and the guilty family.

In this article, and also in line with the creative vision advocated in *Echoing Silences,* we conceptualise restorative justice from an Afrocentric philosophical perspective, particularly as enshrined in Shona epistemological and ontological exigencies of existence. Afrocentricity is a theory that emphasises the placement of "African ideals at the centre of any analysis that involves African culture and behavior" (Asante, 1998: 2). In the same vein, Keto (quoted in Selepi, 2008: 100) explains that: "The Afro-centred

perspective . . . rests on the premise that it is valid to posit Africa as a geographical and cultural starting base in the study of peoples [of Africa and] of African descent." With this in mind, African societies in general and the Shona people in particular have evolved an array of conflict resolution codes that favour restorative justice. This whole gamut of conflict resolution codes is part of the indigenous resources and technologies chiselled out of the African worldview with its emphasis on harmony, balance, peace, inclusion, restoration and participation. Ani (1980: 6) avers that:

> The determining mode of the African worldview is harmony. The goal is that of discovering the point of harmonious interaction, so that interferences become neutralised, allowing constructive energy to flow and to be received.

Seen from this Afro-centred vantage point, restorative justice becomes a way of life and a mundane philosophy in most African communities. For that reason, by clamouring for post-conflict restorative justice solely through the prism of the Shona people's lived and liveable experiences, and encouraging interaction between the wronged and the wrongdoer as well as the participation of the affected communities, *Echoing Silences* demonstrates that the concept of restorative justice is also culture/context and people specific. If well implemented, the idea of restorative justice can help restore confidence and mend relations in societies and among individuals emerging from conflict as the ones presented in the novel. Given the past/recent history of violence that has defined the nation, this discourse can be of very important use to Zimbabwean authorities, community leaders, individuals and civic organisations and "the family which is the nucleus of the nation" (Muwati, 2005: 84).

As indicated earlier, the concept of restorative justice, especially after the murder of a person, is codified in *ngozi* (avenging spirit). *Ngozi* can be differentiated on the basis of the wrong done and the demands made by the avenging spirit. Generally, *ngozi* can be characterised as the ravaging spirit of a wronged person who dies before the wrong is corrected. In most instances, *ngozi* is a result of justified or unjustified violent murder of another person and this is the type that is depicted in *Echoing Silences* where violence runs through the novel with alarmingly insatiable consistency. The avenging spirit, which is in search of justice, arrays the offending family, group or individual in a systematic and consistent **manner**. This is not meant to be an act of retribution; rather it is intended to make the concerned group take action and restore what the murdered person and possibly his or her next of kin have lost as a result of the murder. This view is vindicated by Skelton and Batley (2006: 13) in their observation that, "restorative justice is not aimed primarily at the offender, but at dealing with the needs of the victim."

Culpable individuals, families or communities can be assailed by incessant misfortunes, mental derangement or any other strange behaviour that makes it difficult to ignore the avenging spirit and its needs. The consistent and systematic attacks by the avenging spirit made the Shona people come up with 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. The concerned or affected persons are forced by the might of the avenging spirit to engage the family of the wronged person in order to pay reparations. This brings the wrongdoers and the aggrieved together where *ngozi* or the spirit of the aggrieved person categorically outlines its demands.

The wronged person makes his or her demands and, in most instances, this is in the form of human life or cattle which are symbols of the concept of restoration itself among the Shona people of Zimbabwe. These demands are not retributive but are restorative. They are meant to replace the potential of creation that the aggrieved family has been divested of as a result of past violence. Once this is done, peace returns to the family of the wrongdoer or to the wrongdoer himself/herself. The discussion of *ngozi* as a form of restorative justice is critical in the discussion *of Echoing Silences* because, the author, Kanengoni, effectively uses the spirit of the murdered woman that torments Munashe to explore the complex interplay of the history of violent pasts and the unstable social, economic and political life facing the new nation-state.

Signalisations of the Violent Past in *Echoing Silences*

In the words of Kaarsholm (2005: 18), the absolutisation of the history of violent pasts in *Echoing Silences* makes it part of,

> the literary history of post-independence Zimbabwe [in which] authors [have been] struggling to understand and articulate the contradictions of a violent past and present - of confronting the lies and silences surrounding violence, and interpreting **its meaning** ... The 'coming to terms' with violence, which the literature represents, is a process of ongoing discussion and contestation - and has helped to create expanded spaces for debate and meeting places for disagreement.

The novel is a revelation of the horrifying experiences during the liberation war. It brings out this horror through Munashe, a victim of the liberation war who is forced to inhumanely murder the wife of one of Nhari's companions together with her baby. Nhari (a real life character in Zimbabwe's liberation war history) is a former junior ZANLA commander (Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army) who rebelled against the

top command, accusing it of mismanaging the war. As a result, he and others involved in the rebellion were summarily executed. Because the author is a former freedom fighter who fought in the liberation war, the novel makes use of authentic and veritable historical information. It is important to quote from the novel the soul-shredding description of the murder as it significantly signalises the history of the violent past and the extent to which nationalist violence is said to undermine the humanity of the participants as well as that of the intended beneficiaries. It is also this murder which necessitates the need for restorative justice. The author describes the dehumanising incident as follows:

> Then he looked at the haggard figure of the woman and it lost its shape and its edges got torn and the baby on her back became a protrusion of her hunched back and then he swung the hoe, and he heard the blade swishing furiously through the air...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 (Kanengoni, 1997: 21).

This episode, in particular, and indeed other violent incidents in the narrative in which fellow guerrillas victimise their fellows bring out historical information that has been hidden from the public for a long time. The incident permanently dehumanises and destabilises Munashe's mental balance and inflicts him with psychopathology. He gets traumatised and completely loses his balance. As a result, "when he was finally sent back to the front ... he moved 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). While this incident is part of the sad remembrances of the 1970s liberation war, it is very critical in unravelling recent trends, debates and contestations in violent politics in Zimbabwe. It possibly can be read as a metaphor for an intractable and insatiable culture of violence that has gripped Zimbabwe since the days of the armed struggle; that is, it defines the violent character of nationalism from the 1960s to the new millennium. Nyamfukudza's novel, *The Non-Believer's Journey* (1980), also articulates this history of nationalist violence in a revealing and uninhibited style.

Each ferocious blow struck by Munashe against the defenceless woman is a symbol of the perniciousness of the violence and its perpetuity. Equally, the ferocious blows stand "as markers of a history of violence -'intractable traces of the past', 'felt on people's bodies, known in their landscapes, landmarks and souvenirs' (Werbner 1998 quoted in Alexander, 2006: 109). The woman and the innocent baby carried on the woman's back stand for the fact that in most instances the same violence has been carried out against the defenceless and already vulnerable members of society. Using a

hoe with a broken handle instead of a gun makes Munashe the perpetrator and victim highly culpable and vulnerable. The fact that he is close to the woman and feels the effect of every delivered blow makes the violence morally and psychologically debasing. Using a gun, which is a distancing and non-personal device that cannot be morally judged in its death-dealing functions, would have been less enervating because it produces its deadly effects at a distance without identifying the face of the victim. In the nation's politics after independence, violence has severely eroded national unity, social cohesion, leading to the collapse of social security. It is against this background that we argue that the message in *Echoing Silences* canvasses for the remembrance of violent pasts and the urgent need to implement restorative justice as the indispensable panacea for community rebuilding in post-conflict Zimbabwe.

Avenging Spirit of the Murdered Woman as Metaphor for Nationstate Instability

As already explained in this discussion, Zimbabwe has been making international headlines as a politically, economically and socially unstable nation. It has been discussed at regional and international fora, particularly after the violence that accompanied the 2000 government sponsored referendum which the majority of Zimbabweans rejected. In this section, we contend that the avenging spirit of the woman who was murdered by Munashe during Zimbabwe's armed struggle symbolises various forms of instability in the nation - political, social and economic. It is an aggrieved spirit that seeks justice. It represents the voices of many people who are victims of violence in the nation. They are voices that seek justice and refuse to be silenced, marginalised, forgotten or condemned to the periphery of society. They seek recognition and clamour for their creative potential to be restored back to their families and communities who have lost vital **assets.** The fusillade impact of these aggrieved voices functions to subvert individual and national development and stability. In the narrative, some of the characters who represent those in the category of forgotten victims of violent pasts apart from the murdered woman and her baby are the three guerrillas who "had been hastily buried" after one of the guerrilla commanders shot them, characters like Kudzai, a woman guerrilla who is incessantly raped by a guerrilla commander before killing her (21). Another guerrilla in the same company with Munashe says about Kudzai's fateful experience, "the bastards raped her before killing her! . . . Munashe remained standing, looking down at the angry corpse of his beloved Kudzai..." (69).

Others in the same category are represented by, characters massacred by the Rhodesian security forces at Chimoio in Mozambique wherein the

author describes the incident as: "Corpses were littered everywhere [including] the tiny abandoned bodies of suckling babies..." (55). Yet many others are represented by guerrilla characters such as Bazooka who "had died alone when the worst was almost over [and] they stumbled upon his decomposing body more than a day later... ", and Gondo who was decaying alive from unattended gun wounds. When he eventually died, his collegues "slowly ... sealed the mouth of the cave with stones and left" (8, 14).

Paradoxically, in the new Zimbabwe that came with independence in 1980, some of these victims of the history of violence were either hastily forgotten or remotely remembered through the symbolism of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier. While this is a commendable act of remembrance, it is not consonant with Shona/Ndebele people's lived traditions because no one is nameless or unknown. Every individual has a name, belongs to a family and clan where he or she is expected to rest among his or her kin and contribute to the family as *mudzimu* (ancestral spirit). The concept of the tomb of the Unknown Soldier which amounts to a subtle act of forgetting the violence of the past and skilfully avoiding the obligation to confront the effects of violence was contested by former guerrillas. According to Alexander (2006: 110):

> Former guerrillas wondered how a soldier could be 'unknown': they wanted to know who he was, where he was from and they wondered what purpose a single soldier could possibly serve. The substitution of the Unknown Soldier for the many hoped-for historical figures indicated the silencing of still controversial aspects of the nation's memory ...

It is these numerous voices that are reincarnated through the avenging spirit of the murdered woman with a baby on her back. Literally and metaphorically, Munashe's complex identity becomes that of wrongdoer (representing all those who have committed acts of violence), victims of violence as well as an expression of a nation that has not devised any programme to appease the restless spirits/souls as well as compensate for loss through deliberate restorative initiatives. He therefore receives the blows of the avenging spirit which are meant to push him into taking restorative action. Because his strange behaviour as a result of the avenging spirit manifests in full view of the public, the author exposes the failure of the nation-state to come up with restorative policy measures. It further debunks the culture of denial that defines Zimbabwe's political elite who appear not to want to take any form of responsibility over the history of violent pasts. As it stands, the general impression among some in Zimbabwe is that Zimbabwe is a nation that is under the curse of an avenging spirit. This curse is believed to be responsible for the unstable and erratic political, social and economic conditions of the nation. It is also responsible for the continued marginalisation of the ordinary citizens and the 'strange'

behaviour of the leaders who appear to view violence as a normal way of life. Guns have continued to be used in Zimbabwean electoral politics more than two decades after the attainment of political independence from Britain.

The avenging spirit of the murdered woman ceaselessly attacks Munashe and makes it difficult for him to plan and settle down. It is a part of his daily life. During the armed struggle while fighting in the bush, the ghost of the murdered woman persistently makes itself available, thereby completely obfuscating Munashe's vision and paralysing his actions. After the attainment of political independence in 1980, Munashe's condition degenerates to some form of neurosis and mental derangement. The combined effect of the avenging spirit, ghosts from the war and other experiences from the liberation war that ended several years severely traumatise him and those around him, particularly his wife. At one point Munashe tells his wife: "I don't want to think about the war but I am pursued by ghosts. They will not let me go" (30). His wife, too, having to contend with "her husband's nightmares: the tearing screams and drenching sweat", says this is about her husband: "The night becomes a window into his life during the war...His dreams are all about killing and dying ...It's as
if the war had begun all over again" 29).

During a trip to Mutare, Munashe falls asleep and is,

> immediately plunged into a nightmare at Nyadzonia with Kudzai, a day after the massacre.. .but the corpse that seemed to stand out was that of a young woman with a dead baby on her back: it brought the memory of the woman standing calmly in her shallow grave gently rocking the baby keening on her back and a sharp pain pierced his heart and the pain clove to the roof of his skull and he heard a single shot and he screamed and the old woman sitting next to him leapt from her seat and all the passengers turned and stared at them in astonishment... (36).

At his work place, the woman with the baby on her back makes it very difficult for him to concentrate. The finance manager, who is Munashe's boss, has to struggle to pin him down. Because of the power that Munashe has, he shouts for help from others. The ghosts from the war and the murder he committed are part of Zimbabwe's history of violence. Munashe's unstable and neurotic condition after independence is an indictment of the nation-state's inability to come up with a clear policy on dealing with the consequences of violence committed in the past. It is a counter-narrative to elite-generated narratives of history and nationalism which tend to emphasise a stable past and a humanising nationalism. The same neurotic and unstable condition also underlines the fact that once committed, violence and its consequences cannot be ignored for political expediency. It needs to be addressed in order for individuals, communities and the nation to realise peace and meaningful development.

In this regard, both the violent murder of the woman during the war and the power and destabilising effect of her avenging spirit become symbolic in Zimbabwe's past and recent politics of violence. Correspondingly, this violent past, symbolised through the ghost of the murdered woman, threatens both the present and the future of the communities and the nation as a whole. Since this avenging spirit *(ngozi)* was unfairly treated during its life, we argue that it is an indigenous instrument symbolising the inevitable and indispensable demand for truth and justice. As shown above, its power to frustrate and interfere with Munashe's personal life as well as the lives of his relatives is an indication that in most human communities post-conflict healing is the basis and foundation for lasting peace. Bridges must be built (Mangena, 2007: 181). Among the Shona people, restorative justice in the form of restitution and the payment of other reparations is indispensable. *Ngozi* becomes an effective instrument in the full realisation and concretisation of the philosophy of restorative justice.

Through the use of *ngozi,* Kanengoni seems to suggest the nation-state has an inescapable obligation to comprehensively deal with the consequences of the violent pasts in order to attain a peaceful future. At this point, it can be argued that *Echoing Silences* calls for a re-examination of the entire nationalist/national infrastructure which absolutises violence in order to put the present into its proper perspective. The history of nationalism has largely been narrated from a muzzled point of view, thus disenfranchising the citizenry from the truth. In a context where commitment to the truth is non-existent, the restorativeness of restorative justice is also compromised. It is for this reason that *ngozi* fights from the metaphysical front for truth, restoration and justice to be realised.

Restorative justice in *Echoing Silences:* An Indigenous Cultural Path When the force of the avenging spirit and its impact on Munashe become uncontainable, his relatives in town take him to his rural home, Mhondoro, where his parents reside. A traditional ceremony attended by most family members and many villagers is conducted. Within the context of Shona conceptions of restorative justice, this type of traditional ceremony marks a very important phase of acceptance; that there is a problem and a commitment to redress the consequences of violence. The family's spirit medium, Manhokwe, chastises the family elders and in particular, Munashe's father for taking such a long time to attend to the effects of post-conflict violence. Her authoritative voice of admonition is by extension directed at the nationalist leaders, the so-called fathers of the nation, who took over leadership of the nation at independence but failed to institute a deliberate national policy on managing the effects of violent pasts:

> Manhokwe was nature fighting against nature. She leapt higher into the air... "Silence!" snarled the lioness. “Why did it take you so many years to do what you are doing today? Who were you waiting for to teach you to be the man of the family? Are you still a baby with milk on your nose? Is the anything in those trousers?" (57).

The spirit medium berates the abandonment of the duty by the leaders and failure to fulfill their obligations as custodians of national sanity. The no holds barred questions testily emphasise the urgency with which the consequences of violence need to be addressed. They also pass nationalism as a movement that has brought more questions than answers to ordinary people’s lives. People want answers (solutions) to their lives rather than questions (problems). As a representative of the spirit world, Manhokwe’s anger expressed through the above set of questions appears to point to fact that the management of the effects post-conflict violence in the new nation-state has taken too long.

As the ceremony gains momentum, the spirit of the murdered woman manifests itself through Munashe and also communicates with the living through him. In some kind of conferencing between Munashe’s family as the wrongdoers and the woman as the wronged, she is asked about her identity, her people as well as her home. In one instance, the voice of the murdered woman expressed through Munashe says:

> "How can you ask such a question as if you don’t know who I am Oo-o how glad I am to have arrived? I am tired of wandering. My whole life has been spent wandering in the wilderness. Now I have returned… You know who I am and where my home is.,” the woman said, taking the crying baby off her back and putting it to her breast (77).

Clearly, the voice of the murdered woman is happy to be acknowledged and restored of people. The restlessness of her aggrieved spirit as she states is a cause of instability. Her expression of gratitude that the Mungates (Munashe’s people) have accepted culpability and that now she can possibly lay back a little makes restorative justice indispensable in post-conflict settlement.

With the guidance of the spirit of Manhokwe and the possessed Munanshe, the Mungate family heads for Mutare, some 300km east of Harare, the capital city. Mutare is the home area of the murdered woman. Through this gesture, the two families are brought together in another form of family group conferencing. The family group conference presided over by the spirit medium dwells on a number of issues including drought, diseases and the hardships facing the nation. The atmosphere is more of a truth and reconciliation commission in which the truth is told, families, communities, the living, and the dead reconcile and peace is established. In African cosmology this is important because:

Umuntu cannot **attain *ubuntu*** without the intervention of the living dead.

> The living dead are important to the upkeep and protection of the family of the living. This is also true with regard to the community at large. For this reason, it is imperative for the leader of the community, together with the elders of the community, to have good relations with their living dead. This speaks to the *ubuntu* understanding of cosmic harmony (Ramose, 1999: 64).

For instance, in establishing a meaningful dialogical encounter between Munashe's and the murdered woman's people, Manhokwe, the spirit medium focuses on the subject of their shared penury, regardless of the sacrifices they made during the war:

> What with the entire drought, and the strange new incurable disease, and the dark shadows stealing across the land, none of us understand what's happening down here any longer. All we do is gather every day not to pray but to weep for those of you left behind. I am glad you realise that you can't blame these people from the vast and open plains [Mhondoro]. Your problem and their problem is the same (85).

Manhokwe, the spirit medium, becomes the arbitrator in the negotiations between the wrongdoers and the wronged, which are negotiations for justice and restoration. Because this is a very emotional issue, her intervention makes *Echoing Silences* a novel that foregrounds local or indigenous methods in resolving the history of violent pasts. The emotional density of this issue is manifested through the magnitude of Rudo's mother's wailing. The murdered woman's mother wails uncontrollably the moment her daughter reveals herself through Munashe. She expresses her pain thus:

> Is this you Rudo, my daughter? Is this how you have decided to come back to your mother? Is this the grandchild that you promised you would bear for me a long time when you were at school... Is this our harvest for all our effort during the war? Is this the harvest we are reaping **after all** our pain and sacrifice? Is this our reward for sleepless nights, and all the shooting and the dying in the dark?" (84).

Rudo's mother mourns the death of her daughter 23 years after she was murdered. She is joined by several other women in what appears to be community mourning/wailing over the excesses of nationalism. Arguably, this emblematises the paradox of nationalism in Zimbabwe where the ordinary people who sacrificed for change are victims of the same nationalist ideology or movement, several years after the war ended. The uncontrollable wailing reveals the painful emotions engendered by the violence of the past and the healing that was not done. As she wails while at the same time saying out the things that had burdened her soul for several years, one can only hope that healing finally takes place. This reasoning is averred by

Ranger's discussion of 'war, violence and healing in Zimbabwe.' Ranger (1992: 705) writes of,

> Brother Chishiri, a black Jesuit, [who] worked with urban refugee widows, whose husbands had been left unburied in the rural areas, people 'who were lonely indeed, people who had lost hope, for whom life had become meaningless'. Chishiri developed a ritual drama in which the widows, supported by a volunteer 'community', were enabled first to give wailing voice to their grief and anger; then share in community mourning; and then share in the integrative process by confessing 'their thoughts of despair and suicide'.

In the novel, the murdered woman, whom we now know is Rudo, is restored back to her rightful family and community. Her people now know that she is officially dead. The assumption here is that the family from which the avenging spirit belongs will have been deprived of a critical lifeforce in the line of production. For that reason, the performance of culturally sanctioned ritual acts of cleansing not only restores and reaffirms justice and harmony, but also reunites the avenging spirit with the living so that it can become part of the family. While the issue of reparations is not discussed in *Echoing Silences,* it is however the aspects of restoration and reconciliation that receive distinguished resonance. These are key issues in the realisation of restorative justice.

As clearly shown in the novel and also emphasised in this discussion, the spirit medium mediates and helps the two families to come together as well as to understand and accept each other. Viewed symbolically, the spirit medium's role can be interpreted as a suggestion in the novel that the possible panacea to neo-colonial problems should be sought from indigenous knowledge, culture and history. The logical geography of this idea is such that the acceptance or rejection of outside help should be negotiated from this premise. The above position on the indigenous solution of problems is logical when viewed against the background of "the widespread belief that Zimbabwe's liberation war had been supported by the ancestors" (Alexander, 2006: 111). It was a practice in Shona culture to ritualistically cleanse all warriors returning from battle. This was done to prevent all the restless war spirits from pursuing and tormenting the soldiers as they came back to lead normal lives in society. It was also a way of managing the devastating effects of violence whenever neglected.

At independence, the 'ritual resolution of the history of violence' was not undertaken. There were no ceremonies to thank the ancestors for their guidance in the war. The leaders "had failed to 'report' properly to the shrines, to thank the spirits and the High God Mwali for their support (at Matopos rain Shrines in Matebeleland South), ... and to lead the way in cleansing the nation of the effects of war" (Alexander, 2006: 111). From a

Shona cultural viewpoint, the new nation belonged to the ancestors and as such they were supposed to be consulted on how it had to be run. Therefore, failure to thank and consult the ancestors (the owners and guardians of the land) was a serious ritual error. Prominent culturalists in Zimbabwe always emphasise the need for the leaders to have ritually presented the nation to the ancestors to tell them that they had accomplished the mission of liberating the country. One of these leading culturalists *Sekuru* Musonza interviewed by Itai Muwati in 2000 said:

> *Hapana kuitwa biko rokuenda kuMabweadziva kunotenda kuti hondo yapera, ivhu tave naro zvino todii?* (There was no ceremony of thanks-giving that was conducted soon after independence or going to the great ancestors' shrine, Mabweadziva, to inform them about the end of the war, the repossession of land by its people and ask them about what was to be done next.)

For instance, the vision in *Echoing Silences* is such that if the cultural path had been taken, the aggrieved spirits who are the victims of violence would have been restored to their rightful places as sanctioned by tradition. The philosophy of restorative justice informed by Shona cultural assumptions would have been fully implemented bringing the wronged and wrongdoers together. Ranger (1992: 706) explains thus:

> The High God cult, indeed, has propagated the message that such individual cleansing must be accompanied by rituals in which the whole society comes to terms with the violence of its past ... It asks that Mugabe and Nkomo come for cleansing and repentance.

The novel *Echoing Silences* traces the history of violence in Zimbabwe and exposes policy errors, particularly the impact of violence and the effects of violent pasts. However, the burden of neglecting the effects of violence is huge. There is therefore a fundamental need in Zimbabwe today for "public acknowledgement and for ritual resolution of the history of violence" (Alexander, 2006: 109). As explained already, the interaction of the families shows ordinary people taking the initiative to solve the effects of post-conflict violence in the neo-colonial dispensation. National healing is null and void if it does not target the family, which is the smallest unit in the nation and, yet it is the most severely affected. It can then be argued that the novel *Echoing Silences* advocates that the implementation of effective healing and restorative justice should start at family and community levels before there can be any talk of national healing, hence the need to establish FGCs and CRBs as African resources to initiate the process. The narrative depicts the necessity of ordinary people's agency, particularly the family, in redressing the effects of post-conflict violence.

Projects on post-conflict healing have often been enunciated from above. However, in the Zimbabwean context where the history of the violent pasts

remains a volatile and fiercely contested turf capable of igniting even more violence, *Echoing Silences* proposes the operationalisation of restorative agency from below. The so-called ordinary people, who are often the victims and perpetrators of the violence (on behalf of politicians), should take the initiative and not wait for politicians to enunciate policies on national healing. The narrative privileges a bottom-up approach as opposed to the vapid and often convoluted enunciation of national healing from above. Correspondingly, politicians should not stand in the way of such efforts from below but should be seen to be encouraging the practice. There should also be shared ground between views from the top and views from below in order for national healing and conflict resolution to take place. But most important is the fact that, restoration, through available mechanisms of executing restorative justice, is the only logical solution. Pronouncements of national healing should be made to fit into an already existing framework from below. The Global Political Agreement signed by ZANU PF and MDC in September 2008 to put an end to the internecine violence proposes the setting up of an organ on national healing whose operations up to now have been very vague and ineffective, solely because it is an elite arrangement not informed by the lived experiences from below.

The Urgent **Need for Restorative Justice Following Recent Political** Violence

The clear message in *Echoing Silences* is that the resolution of the effects of violence through culturally derived restorative mechanisms is an important aspect in community rebuilding as well as individual and national development. This message provides important lessons for the people of Zimbabwe today. The neo-colonial period has seen the continuation of violence leading to loss of human life, destruction of property and fragmentation of families and communities. This history of violence has been extensively covered in the international media and in independent local media. In the 1980s when Zimbabwe attained independence, the Matebeleland region experienced severe violence which resulted in the death of many civilians and the dislocation of families and communities. Elections held after every five years have been preceded or accompanied by vicious acts of violence. Considering the polarised nature of the Zimbabwean society due to almost three decades of intermittent violence, the new government of national unity is challenged to avoid the luxury of conveniently 'burying' the violent pasts.

There is an urgent need to explore various ways in which the 'erstwhile' fighting communities can be reconciled. It is also critical to draw policy frameworks that lead to the implementation of restorative justice. This involves bringing together the murderers and the 'murdered', those who have taken advantage of the chaos to steal from their fellow citizens and

those from whom everything has been stolen. Such a conferencing provides an opportune environment for reconciliation, forgiveness, 'apology, acknowledging human dignity and worth, restitution' (Skelton and Batley, 2006: 6). This is vital and urgent because some of the victims of violence were breadwinners and their unceremonious departure resulted in the vulnerability of their dependants. It is against this background that the message in *Echoing Silences* cannot be ignored in any well-intentioned attempt at rebuilding Zimbabwe. Historical resources are marshalled for the benefit of the past, the present and future of Zimbabwe. The vision resembles the African concept of Sankofa as enunciated in Stewart (2004: 3): "It is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot." "Sankofa teaches us that we must go back ... in order to move forward". Baldwin (1995: 14) expertly teaches us that "the past is all that makes the present coherent ... The past will remain horrible as long as we refuse to assess it honestly."

Conclusion *Echoing Silences* is a narrative that instrumentalises history not only to debunk the narrow and narrowing interpretations of the past, but to "facilitate reconciliation" (Barkan, 2005: 229), restorative justice and healing. The narrative clearly operationalises history for the purposes of exposing the violent pasts and canvassing for restorative justice on the basis of indigenous and "local methods of dispute resolution used in the past" (Barkan, 2005: 229). This makes it a historical, philosophical and political narrative whose version and use of history is aimed at advancing national **interests** for the benefit of the majority. Denying the violent pasts and the urgent need for restorative justice is an affront to any attempts at national healing and nation-building. The violence of the past and its effect in the post-conflict era have not been officially acknowledged in Zimbabwe. The failure to publicly acknowledge the violent pasts and their effects has petrified and ossified any meaningful attempts at authentic national healing and rebuilding. Those in positions of power have tended to selectively interpret violent pasts and use this as "legitimating discourse" (Kriger, 2003: 5). For instance, only violence perpetrated by the Rhodesian forces **against** civilians is officially remembered, and it is this practice that *Echoing Silences* challenges.

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