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Memory and violence: Displaced Zimbabwean rural communities reliving the memories of the March 2008 political violence.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is premised on the argument that a distinct kind of narrative ('truth') about political violence, a narrative of the first-person experience, a narrative that is valued for its power to counter totalising historical narratives, is thought to reside in the subjective experience of each individual. Be that as it may, this study aimed to answer the question: What meanings do rural Zimbabweans who were internally displaced by the March 2008 state-sponsored political violence attach to this violence? In particular, the study investigated these meanings in a context where the victims remain(ed) in close proximity to the perpetrators during and after the violence. It also examined these meanings in an alleged silence by the state and local communities, and how these meanings have shaped the victims' present socio-political identities. In order to answer the question, in-depth narrative interviews were conducted with purposively selected respondents. The study assumed a qualitative exploratory design which was underpinned by the phenomenological and constructionist theoretical approaches.

It was concluded that the victims' interpretation of the state-sponsored political violence is negotiated and mediated in the course of interaction. The personal narrative of the memory attains some latent political and redemptive value when it is interpreted in a social context. The meanings of the violence particularly assume a complex moral and ethical plane in a scenario where the perpetrator remains a permanent feature in the victim's physical and social space, without any recourse. The complexity is imminent as the victim has to contend with the socio-psychological effects of the daily direct interface with their unpunished aggressor especially due to the communal nature of rural life.

It was also concluded that the 2008 state-sponsored violence was increasingly interpreted as unfinished business by the victims. More so, it was also understood to be synonymous and complicit with silence at the communal and national level. Thus, the silence was synonymous with adaptation to power relations, cultural censorship, and liminality. In terms of identity, the victims suffer an identity crisis. They have developed personalities that have arguably, failed to internalise a sense of self as trusting and trustworthy. Last, the identification of the violence as unfinished business has also led to the reaffirmation of the victims' spiritual identities as they have invoked bewitchment to avenge the death of their loved ones and in the process try to reconnect with them spiritually by invoking their spirits to seek revenge.