Violent Crime and Apartheid Philosophy: The Inextricable Twins of Social Disorder

Dr. Tsoaledi Daniel Thobejane
Senior Lecturer
Institute for Gender and Youth Studies
University of Venda
South Africa

Abstract

This paper analyses the psycho-social effects of Apartheid (racism) and violent crime in South Africa and argues that it is due to the history of apartheid rule which subjected the oppressed and exploited to subjugation, inhumanity and self-hate ;that ultimately unleashed a culture of violence and lack of respect to human life in this country. This is witnessed by the way in which crime in this country has turned so violent. This analogy arises from the study that was conducted amongst the women who reside in Mokopane(Mahwelereng) township, about 200 Kilometers from Tshwane (Pretoria).The study relied on the method of triangulation(where a mixed method approach of collecting data was embarked on).Feminist epistemologies (eg; post-modernism) are also employed in understanding the yearnings and frustrations of the women who are victims of violent crime who volunteered to share their experiences in relation to this scourge.

Introduction

The ideology of racial oppression and exploitation as well as apartheid in South Africa created a context of violent crime where the perpetrators of this scourge do not hesitate to go at length to cause untold harm to the victim even after helping themselves to the latter's belongings or assets.People who are exposed to poverty and de-humanization are prone to commit heinous crime.

Crime and violence are the inextricable twins.Human history contains a great many descriptions of how people have used physical violence,both individually and collectively,to control and assume power and authority over others (Kruger et al ,2002:3, cited by Kgosimore,2007).Violence can be attributed to the destabilization of economic patterns in society.Macro-economic policies such as structural adjustment programmes.globalization and the growing inequalities they have created have been linked to the increasing levels of violence(Unicef,June:2000).

An overview of violent crime in South Africa

South Africa has reached an epoch of human predicament where the society does not fully understand or know what good governance is all about. Our people are gradually disenchanted by the present political climate, and are seeking ways to vent their frustrations. Crime can be another way of doing this. Guns can also be used by thugs as an excuse to further their ill-perceived notions. Liberty is the power which compels a man to do no harm to his fellow human being. Security is the supreme social concept of a civil society. The society exists only in order to guarantee for each of its members the preservation of their personhood. Hegel calls the civil society "the state of need and reason". A human being, regardless of race, colour or creed, has imprescribable rights to be free. We have moved from a feudalistic mode of existence where mankind would simply threaten the livelihood of another for the sake of appearing powerful like the biblical goliath. Political emancipation behoves upon us the right to self-determination in the present human polity.

Theoretical framework.

On the writings Frantz Fanon and dehumanization

There are social theories that opine that when a people have suffered many years of oppression and exploitation, they gradually lose the moral fibre that defines them as human beings.A closer look at Fanon and Biko's ideologization of Black people's collective suffering (and dehumanization) is worth critiquing. Frantz Fanon's writings speak of millions of Blacks men who were skillfully injected with an inferioritycomplex and sispair to an extend that he loathes everything black (i.e. his culture, norms and value systems).Fanon argues that for the former oppressed to attain true humanism, he has to break the mental chains that hold him to perpetual servitude to his white counterparts. He further argues that a Black man is not a man because he also wants to emulate those who are superior to him in this case, the white man). If there is an inferiority complex, argues Fanon, it is the outcome of a double process:primarily economic. Subsequently, the internationalization or the epidermalization of this inferiority (Fanon,1968:11).

Fanon says that this lack of esteem of self as an object worthy of love has grave consequences.It keeps the individual in a state of profound inner insecurity, as a result of which it inhibits or falsifies every relation with others. The lack of effective self-valuation is to be found only in persons who in their early childhood suffered from a lack of love and understanding.

Affective self-rejection invariably brings the abandonment-neurotic to an extremely painful and obsessive feeling of exclusion, of having no place anywhere, of being superfluous everywhere in an affective sense. To be the "other" is to feel that ne is always in a shaky position, to be always on guard, ready to be rejected and loathed.
In psychiatry, there are latent forms of psychosis that become overt as the result of a traumatic experience. The majority of South African criminals suffered a traumatic experience under apartheid rule. This experience reduced them to a level of subhuman. Most of them do not see the value of human life anymore. This is exhibited by the way in which they commit crime. The brutality and violence that characterizes their criminal acts bear testimony to this.

Apartheid shattered the psychological mechanisms of the oppressed majority. There are relationships between consciousness and the racial context. The social context of the formerly oppressed majority is filled with squalor, poverty and dehumanization. Respect for life is therefore nullified. Their collective psychological inferiority therefore unleashes a vacuum that is witnessed by the nature of their criminal acts on the unsuspecting victim.
Imagine having grown up in a situation wherein you are robbed of your self-worth on a daily basis and being told that you are a parasite of the world-and that you are of no use to the world.You will obviously suffer from an inferiority complex. Your psychic structure will be in danger of disintegration(to use Fanon's words). The following have been proposed by Herman to be pointers to the rootcauses of violence:

A history of subjugation to totalitarian control over a prolonged period of time, Alterations in controlling how one feels and behaves, including suicidal thoughts,self-injury,explosive or severely inhibited anger, and /or compulsive or inhibited sexuality, Alterations in self-perception, including a sense of helplessness, paralysis, self-blame guilt, and aloneness.

Amongst these criteria, the history of subjugation to totalitarian control over a period of time augers well for all victims and perpetuators of violence. The victim (of domestic violence) may experience the trauma of living in a household that is dominated by totalitarian control, while the perpetrator might have suffered under a totalitarian regime (in this instance, an apartheid regime) which has dehumanized him/her.

The writings of Biko vs-a-vis dehumanization

Steven Bantu Biko, a human rights activist who was killed violently by the former apartheid regime, asserted that the system of apartheid saw Blacks as additional levers to some complicated industrial machines waiting to be exploited. In this system, blacks competed with fellow blacks, using each other as rungs up a step; ladder leading them to white values (Biko, 1998:155).Blacks, most of whom were/are involved in violence today, need to realize the need to rally together to rid themselves of the shackles that bind them to perpetual servitude, group pride, and self-determination to attain the envisaged self is dead within black communities.

How can this be visible in Black communities which are led by adventurous leaders who are more interested in self-aggrandizement and self-fulfillment? Biko further argued that a man who succeeds in making a group of people accept a foreign concept in which he is expert makes them perpetual students whose progress in the particular field can only be evaluated by him (Biko:2004:159).

Biko asserts that in being forced to accept the Anglo-Boer culture, the Blacks have allowed themselves to be at the mercy of the white man and to have him as their eternal supervisor.He further cautions us to reject the individualistic cold approach to life, and says that we must seek to restore to the Black man the great importance we used to give to human relations, the high regard for people and their property and for life in general; to reduce the triumph of technology over man and the materialistic element that has crept into our own society.

Blacks have been part of an exploitative society and culture in South Africa. No wonder that they react so shamelessly and violently to anyone who threaten their being. Biko says that capitalist exploitative tendencies. Coupled with the overt arrogance of white racism, have conspired against the Black man.Furthermore, violence(be it domestic or otherwise)can be seen as a continuous process influenced by socialization toward gender roles,cultural beliefs or practices,law and politics.

Some Post-Modernist thoughts

Post-modernists see the struggle against domestic violence and other forms of crime, rooted deeply in the androcentricity of our society. At the core of this struggle is their fight for what they call "an androcentric/phallocentric notion of knowledge which can be defined as men's experiences and priorities being seen as central and representative of all (Robinson,p.2). Feminists begs of us to look at the power relations inherent in current knowledge , and who has access to this knowledge, how it is evaluated and how meanings are encoded in order to create men's studies(or a man's world). The connection between the academic world and the society is very essential in the development of our societies. Though Post-Modernism is rooted in Women's studies in the academic world, there is also a link with its approach to the world and the socio-economic and political conditions which are hostile to women. This discipline deconstructs the traditional disciplines of education which are seen to be male dominated, and in turn, creates a violent society that we are witnessing today. Behind the theories of Post-Modernism is Radical feminism, liberal feminism and Marxist Feminism, all of which are premised on the fight against capitalism and patriarchy. This fight, in as far as they are concerned, will ultimately usher in an egalitarian society that will be anti-violent and anti crime in nature (for an in-depth study into these feminist theories, see Wolf: 1998, Lather: 2003, Alcoff: 2002, Robinson'1997).

Immersion into the research

The approach of this research has taken a feminist epistemology which is premised on the fact that in order to achieve the status of knowledge, beliefs are supposed to break free of, or to transcend-their original ties to the agendas and beliefs of the dominant class in the society. According to Wolf (2002)'thought has to start from the marginalized lives and take everyday life as problematic.

Feminist researchers are of the belief that insufficient care and rigour in following existing methods and norms of research is the cause of sexist and androcentric results which end up supporting the status –quo and the views of the dominant in any society. Therefore, my research was more participatory in nature and involved the lived experiences of victims of violent crime in the Mokopane region.The challenges of the conceptions of the dominant research methodologies as the only methods to generate knowledge, is highly challenged by feminists. "Good science" and good philosophies are seen to be only inherent in the male dominant methodologies of doing research. These sciences have been blind to their own sexist and androcentric research practices and results. This mind set has to be challenged in order for us to lay the groundwork for a participatory research methodology which seeks to break the chains of is called androcentric research paradigms.

This participatory(or feminist research approach) is premised on the notion that Knowledge claims are always socially situated, and the failure by dominant groups critically and systematically to interrogate their advantaged social situation and the effects of such advantages on their beliefs leaves their social situation a scientifically and epistemologically disadvantaged one for generating knowledge(Wolf,1998).

Feminists opine that In societies stratified by race,ethnicity,class,gender,sexuality,or some other such politics shaping the very structure of a society, the activities of those at the top both organize and sets limits on what persons who perform such activities can understand about themselves and the world around them. It is based on this assumption that my research focused primarily on those women who experienced violence and crime. There is also a realization that Women's lives can provide the starting point for asking new, critical questions about not only those women's lives but also about men's lives and most importantly, the causal relations between them, and to also question the violent nature of most of the men in our society. Notwithstanding the fact that it is most of them who are swelling the ranks of prisoners in South Africa, and that it is them who are in most cases, perpetrators of violent acts.

Views from the participants

All the participants are of the view that a criminal mindset is very unpredictable. There has to be an attempt by the society to rehabilitate those who were involved in violent crime by "unlocking" their consciousness so as they can desire for a harmonious world. "Their action, argued another participant, will then be put to action towards the social structures that made the perpetrator prone to violence and crime.

Another participant chimed in by saying that how does one explain the phenomenon of domestic violence where a man beats his wife beyond recognition, and ends up raping his daughter? My opinion is that there is a perennial thaw that goes beyond the system of patriarchy, propelling such a heinous act", argued the participant. At the core of such an act lurks a psychopathic mindset that is a combination of many factors such as Socio-economic deprivation, cultural upbringing, poverty and self-hate, amongst others.

The fourth participant questioned the reasons that propel men (and to a less extend women) to batter their wives when we know that a family is equated with sanctuary, a place where individuals seek safety, love, security and shelter? The other answered by saying that what breeds such drastic forms of violence in the domestic sphere is usually perpetrated by males who are, or who have been in positions of trust and intimacy and power such as husbands, boyfriends, fathers in law, stepfathers, brothers, uncles, and sons. Participant number five said that we can hold governments accountable for violations against women. But until we address the psycho-social factors that lead to such barbaric acts, then we are still far away from addressing the daunting issues behind the causes of this scourge.

Conclusion

Judging from the views of the participants , a newly liberated nation in South Africa cannot necessarily tear down all barriers between different sections of the people. However, this move should be encouraged by the government. This can only be done by discouraging egotistic notions that only help to alienate ourselves from one another. Our heroic devotion to clean our country of violent crime is just but a step towards creating a more humane society. This humane society can be created by way of liberating ourselves from the psychological oppression that was meted out to us by the apartheid superstructure. This is in line with Bantu Steven Biko's explanations of the tenets of Black Consciousness, when he said that

> *the black man is oppressed by an external world through an institutionalized machinery. Through laws that restrict him from doing certain things, through heavy work conditions, through poor pay, through very difficult living conditions, through poor education. These are all external to him. And the black man has developed a certain state of alienation. He rejects himself precisely because he attaches the meaning white to all that is good. That is why he can act with utter violence, to anyone without regard to what human life is all about* (own emphasis).

I believe what Biko said still resonates well with our present predicament. Crime, disregard for human life and rampant violence stems from the fact that we have lost the meaning of a civil society because black people were never treated in a civil way for the past three hundred years. Crime in many societies, are a direct consequence of a system that fails to distribute wealth equitably amongst its citizenry. While South Africans of all creed are clamouring to get rid of crime that destroy our civil liberties, we should also realize that we cannot easily magic away crime by simply talking about it.There should be some intervention methods that are geared to rehabilitate our society. These methods should be clear and precise.

Bourgeois nation states as advocated by the ruling party(class), have always meant privilege of the bourgeoisie , and not nationalism to promote universal principles of social and economic justice and equality for all. During our national struggle, proletarian and bourgeois nationalism in South Africa have been married by our common struggle against racial capitalism. Today, these distinct classes are increasingly negating each other. The proletariats have supported the bourgeois class unconditionally because of the reasonable past alliances borne out of our common oppression and denigration as an oppressed mass, In the struggle for national liberation.

There is a feeling that the recent spread of democracy especially in Africa is a sham and that the staging of elections is no guarantee that there will be people-centered democratic governments. That is why other critics call democracy in Africa "donor Democracy" or low-intensity democracy.We should re-install a culture of popular participation of people in all sectors that govern their lives. Democracy in the form of ballot boxes/or multi-partysm is just but a sub-set of mass or popular participation in the day to day challenges of our country. Seventeen years of our democratic rule in South Africa has proven that democracy is still far from being adequate. For as long as this equilibrium is not balanced,crime will continue to be the order of the day. We should always seek to address circumstances that breed violence, poverty, inequality and a concentration of the wealth of our country in the hands of the few. These phenomena are obstacles to good governance and development. The anti crime campaign should be seen in the context of improving human resources capacity in education, health and the maintenance of law and order which are a cornerstone of a civil society.

References

Biko,B.S.(

Burnett,C(1998).School Violence In An Impoverished South African Community.Johannesburg.Rand Afrikaans University.

Fanon ,F.(1967).Black Skin,White Masks.ParisGroove Press,INC.

Kgosiame,D.L(2007).Workplace violence: A criminological Analysis of a Violent Labour Strike in South Africa.Limpopo.Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice.University of Limpopo.

Creswell,J.W(1994)Research Design:Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches.Carlifornia.Sage Publications.

Jarviluoma,H.et al.(2003).Gender and Qualitative Methods.California.Sage Publications.

Wolf,D.L.(1996).Feminist Dilemmas in Fieldwork.Colorado.Westview Press

Schaefer,R.T. et al. (1992).Sociology.Forth Edition.New York.McGraw-Hill,INC.