

Violence, crime and fear in contemporary South-African literature

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Violence is part of everyday life in South Africa. As the country is striving to reconcile with its past it also faces many challenges of the present. One of the most urgent problems is the high crime-rate. News of violent crime are so frequent in South Africa that one becomes inured to them. Although the intensity of immediate reactions to violence mitigates, fear increases. Reactions to brutality and fear are various but they all have one thing in common, they distort reality or even overtake it, they become a reality.

In this article I am studying various forms of violence as they are represented and/or explored in contemporary South African fiction (and non-fiction), particularly in the writings of David Medalie, J.M.Coetzee and Mmatshilo Motsei. Through the works of these writers different perspectives on violence are examined, which leads to a better understanding of these complicated issues and raises further questions for consideration.

Violence has been part of African societies and during the many years of colonial history it has often been used as a political tool. South Africa is a country with a past where violence was justified by the struggle for liberation. The fight against domination started with a non-violent, passive resistance and turned into hostilities, which left the country with much to reconcile with. It is a past, which “follows as a shadow” - as the title of a contemporary novel suggests¹ - and effects contemporary life in various unwanted ways. Nevertheless, whereas the motives and goals of violence were clear before – fight against apartheid, for liberation, equality - now they are ambiguous.

According to Lloyed Vogelmann (founder and former director of the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation) “the violence which characterizes South Africa today is rooted in history”². Studying the phenomena of violence through literature illuminates valuable perspectives and contributes to understanding. Debates about violence, crime and fear help answer the questions: To what degree is today’s crime situation in South Africa a

¹ David Medalie, *The Shadow Follows*. Johannesburg: Picador, 2006.

² Lloyed Vogelmann. “South Africa Our Violent Land.” Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation. Race and Citizenship in Transition Series, 2004. 25.aug.2004. <<http://www.csvr.org.za/articles/artvoege2.htm>>.p.2.

result of the apartheid? What is the nature of crime in South Africa? And most importantly:
How long will the shadow follow?