

## CHAPTER THREE

### PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES ON VIOLENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON FAMILIES

#### 3.1 VIOLENCE: A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The violence which affected the families in the present study can be situated within a context which was characterized by inequality in social relations due to the apartheid structures. Baron, (1977) and Depennar (1990), in McKendrick & Hoffmann, 1990) have defined violence as the intentional use of physical force, involving the violation of physical, social and psychological integrity of another person.

Gil (1981, in Bulhan, 1985:134-135) positioning himself in a humanistic psychological framework sees,

“violence as human originated relations, processes and conditions, which obstruct free and spontaneous unfolding of innate human potential, the human drive towards growth, development and self-actualization, by interfering with the fulfilment of inherent biological, psychological and social needs”.

Bulhan (1985) further calls for the broadening of the concept of violence as he sees human violence as inhibiting human growth, negating inherent potential, limiting productive living and causing death. For instance, he sees human violence as occurring at personal, institutional and structural levels.

Of the three forms that Bulhan (1985) refers to, personal violence is the easiest to identify and its effects are the easiest to assess. It is also a phenomenon expressed in dyads or triads which often involves direct actions and means and is restricted to place as well as time. It is therefore possible to identify a specific perpetrator whose aim can be verified and a victim whose injuries can be assessed in this type of violence. There also usually exists a perpetrator - victim relation preceding or subsequent to the violent incident. Violence can permeate the relationship as a whole in some cases. Nonetheless, personal violence permits the ordinary procedure of imputing intent, rendering judgement and exacting retribution (Bulhan, 1985).

Structural violence is said to be a feature of social structures. It is thus inherent in the established models of social relations, distribution of goods and services, and legal practices of dispensing injustice. It determines the models of relations and practices that permeate everyday living (Bulhan, 1985). This is so because individuals are born and socialized into it as nations or perpetrators and they play out their ascribed roles which then cause structural violence hard to discern. Such structural violence leads to hidden but lethal inequities, which can lead to the death of those who lack power or influence in the society. Thus, according to Kotze (1978), structural violence is simply underdevelopment of a society, which arises from unfair distribution of material and non-material commodities as a result of a racially or class-based stratification system. The connotations called forward by this term are applicable to the South African context. Shramm and Shuda (1991) see structural violence as present when individuals are manipulated or forced into a position where their actual realisation is below their potential realisation.

The institutional aspect is at the intermediate level of complexity and duration and it mediates personal and structural violence (Bulhan, 1985). Although institutional and structural violence are higher order phenomena that subsume and supercede personal violence, all three forms of violence are related and neither of them can be understood without reference to the other two. All three also reinforce and depend on one another. Also their expression varies from one society to another (Bulhan, 1985).

Bulhan's (1985:135) proposal of a succinct definition of violence, though related to that of other authors (Newman, 1979, Wolfgang, 1976, Straus & Steinmetz, 1974 and Gelles & Straus, 1979) is defined as:

"Violence is any relation, process or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social and or psychological integrity of another person or group"

Some psychological theories locate the cause of violence as internal to the personalities of the abuser (Segal, in Dangor, 1990). These then focus on personality traits, internal defence systems and the presence of mental illness or psychopathology. According to McKendrick & Hoffmann (1990), the theories of Freud (1948), Hartman (1949) and Storr (1970) attributed the cause of violence to instinctual conceptions of aggression. Violence is thus linked to a human need to be aggressive.

Because of the difficulty of defining this concept of violence, it is often used interchangeably with the concept of aggression. This is so because aggression and violence are aspects of human life that according to Siann (1985) quite understandably give rise to considerable alarm and concern. To explain these two concepts, Siann (1985) has given a summatorial description of them both as discussed below.

### **3.2 AGGRESSION VERSUS VIOLENCE**

According to Siann (1985) aggression involves the intention to hurt or dominate others and does not necessarily involve physical injury. It may also not be regarded as being underpinned by different kind of motives. In addition, it is not always sanctioned but is more likely to be so when one of the participants does not enter willingly into the interaction. Siann (1985) further states that the label aggression, when applied in a pejorative manner to a person or persons, is a matter of subjective judgement on the part of the labeller. The labeller will be afflicted both by his or her perception of the extent to which the person or persons to whom the label is applied is acting provocatively or defensively.

In contrast to aggression, violence involves the use of great force or physical intensity and is often impelled by aggressive motivation. It may occasionally be used by individuals engaged in a mutual interaction which is regarded by both parties as intrinsically rewarding. Violence tends always to be negatively sanctioned and the use of great physical force is often legitimised or condemned, depending both on the values of the person making the judgement and the extent to which the use of force is seen as provocative or defensive.

The above characteristics include the aspects of intentionality and the use of physical force emphasized in the definition of violence, since the perpetrator's actions may result in humiliation or the destruction of the self-respect of the victim.

McKendrick & Hoffman (1990) describe violence by distinguishing the following three types:

#### **(a) Illegitimate force**

This has to do with the legalistic definition that is usually advocated by governments. This is the illegitimate or unauthorized use of force to effect decisions against the will or desires of others.

(b) **Injurious physical force**

Here violence is narrowly defined as behaviour designed to inflict physical injury to people or damage to property.

(c) **Avoidance injury**

Violence is suffered not only when a person is caused physical pain or disabled or killed, but also when he is deprived of freedom, opportunity or pleasure. This broader definition of violence includes not only overt physical violence but also hidden institutional violence.

From the above definitions, both McKendrick and Hoffman (1990) conclude that the manifestation of violence falls into two broad categories, those accruing in nature and those made by people. All in all, violence in all its manifestations at family, community, national and international levels affects people and tends to be destructive. The experiences of violence in these situations are invariably socialized into a cycle of violence which can be manifested or perpetuated in wider society in many forms, thus affecting both interpersonal and community life. In the present study violence will be explained from the Systems' Theory, Social Identity Theory and Integrated Theory of Political Violence perspectives.

### **3.3 SYSTEMS' THEORY OF VIOLENCE**

From the Systems' Theory perspective, the concept of violence can be seen as a process in which certain ideals or causes and effects exist but is often in practical terms, destructive behaviour which escalates in vicious cycles inherently disrespectful of human life and values. For instance, Nell & Butchart (1989) seem to be convinced that racial domination and oppression created very sharp differences between the living conditions of the oppressed and the oppressor and an exceptionally high level of violence.

These differences and inequality of the racial groups in the South African context culminated in protests against the State by the oppressed, political movements which intensified as activists called for equality amongst all people of South Africa. This provoked the State to curtail these political activities through various mechanisms like arrests, torture in detention, abductions or disappearances of family or relatives of some families, in this context. From the systemic approach this political violence, associated with oppression and divisions in the community,

points to interacting and distinguishable factors. It did not only remain a confrontation with the State. Much violence was directed at businesses, such as business owners and their customers. Frantz Fanon (1968) has observed that oppressed people tend to internalize the cruelty and viciousness of violence and make it their own. In South Africa this has been demonstrated by high the rate of “black on black” violence that spilled over since 1983 as Black municipal policemen were killed in the communities, and by such massacres as Boipatong (Kane-Berman, 1993).

Secondly, violence can not only be understood in terms of cause and effect. It can thus be described as a process and although certain moments can be punctuated, for example, victim or attacker, both are part of a sequence of events or behaviours in the process of violence taking place. Although it is possible to describe one person as the attacker and the other as a victim, both are part of a larger system of which violence has become a part.

This is illustrated by the fact that even after democratic changes in South Africa, violence did not end, instead it escalated. This suggests that these changes, though they reflected positive intentions, threatened the stability in the system, highlighting that change and stability in a system go hand in hand. According to Keeney & Ross (1992), for change to take place, attempts should be made simultaneously to establish stability, as the conflict between change and stability processes may result in discomfort.

It can be argued that the Manichean Psychology (Fanon, 1968) and the violence that nurtures it were unambiguously reflected in all manner of things, actions and attitudes during the apartheid era in South Africa (in Bulhan, 1985). The contrasting arrangement of the environment, the unequal distribution of economic resources in relation to white and black cities resulted in the legitimized violence of the State. This largely affected most black families, as police harshly enforced (Bulhan, 1985) influx control and pass laws. Even prisons and the educational system privileged whites. All these institutions and laws were designed to destroy blacks, subject them into becoming insecure, obedient, underpaid labourers. The rejection of the oppression resulted in antagonistic attitudes towards the State. These attitudes were expressed in political protests and boycotts of white owned shops and stayaways from work and schools. The rejection of Bantu Education was epitomized in 1976 by the Soweto school uprisings which aimed at destabilising the government. However, these attempts led to victimization of black family members who were opposed to the apartheid system as they were arrested, tortured in detention or even disappeared without trace. These events affected the

families and introduced changes into their life world.

A recent development in the field of psychology is towards making a theoretical shift from a cause and effect model, that is, from a linear point of view, towards a circular model of thought. This suggests that positivistic thought is replaced by a constructivist perspective. From this point of view, there is a shift away from emphasizing observed systems to emphasizing observing systems (Keeney & Ross, 1992). In the context of violence or any social research, this means that the researcher is not removed from such a researched context. Similarly, the people involved in violence, cannot objectify their thoughts and feelings on their experience of violence, and the researcher on violence can only co-create experienced reality with the participation of people in the context of violence.

### **3.4 SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY AND VIOLENCE**

Foster (1991) provides a detailed critical review of social psychological theories of crowd violence in the light of their ability to account for political violence in South Africa. He concludes that Social Identity Theory provides the most useful existing framework for understanding this phenomenon.

According to Tajfel (1972:3), Social Identity Theory has been defined as, “the individual's knowledge that he belongs to certain social groups, together with some emotional and value significance to him of group membership” . Turner (1982:15) understands a social group as, “two or more individuals who share a common social identification of themselves, or, which is nearly the same thing, perceive themselves to be members of the same social category” .

Foster (1991) goes on to point to the concept of ideology as a key conceptual tool for expanding Social Identity Theory to give an account of the social context of identity formation and, in particular, the impact of power relations on identity. Foster(1991:385) conceptualizes ideology in terms of the following four components:

- “a set of significations and representations (meanings) historically and collectively constructed and organized;
- which is analytically distinct from but closely related to material and institutional social relations;

- which assists in the creation, maintenance and change of individual's social identities;
- and serves to maintain power relations of discrimination”

According to Campbell (1992a), Social Identity Theory views violent behaviour as a recipe for living, coherently related to social group memberships and power relations. This is in line with the general trend in the most recent literature on collective violence, where there has been a general move away from analyses of violence either in terms of mob psychosis and deindividuation or as the product of anomic and chaos brought on by factors such as social disintegration and poverty. Crowd violence is viewed as a comprehensible response by a particular group of people to a particular set of social circumstances, a coherent form of intergroup conflict.

Applying Social Identity Theory to crowd violence, one would say that within a crowd, individuals define themselves in terms of particular group membership. Manganyi (1990:293) also applies this framework to the South African situation as he postulates,

‘According to this perspective, individuals define themselves in terms of membership of a social category. This condition of self stereotyping on the basis of a social category is the dynamic which influences how the ideological content of a particular identity is translated into crowd behaviour. This means that in the contemporary South African politics of resistance, a crowd member is likely to self-stereotype either as a comrade or a ‘system’s’ person and so on’.

Under particular circumstances this presents crowds with the behavioural possibility of violent action against political enemies or targets as one potential recipe for living associated with that group membership. For instance, one person in the crowd behaves in a way that seems to represent the feelings of other group members in an extreme and exaggerated way, for example, by throwing a stone at a policeman. His behaviour becomes the current recipe for living for all the crowd members who may then all begin to throw stones.

The significance of self-categorization according to Reicher (1987), is that a category membership becomes salient, so the individual conforms to those attributes which define the category. The consequence is that the content of group members’ behaviour is dictated by the definition of a social category, which itself is social and an ideological product.

As described in the introduction of this chapter, the events in the South African context during the political struggle seem to be explainable by the Social Identity Theory. To maintain the dominance of those who were in power during the apartheid era, the State oppression confronted protests by the disadvantaged who established comradeship within the liberation movements which were groups separated by different political ideals. It was not uncommon for the individual during those times to find himself/herself a victim of the comrades, especially if he/she was suspected of being a systems' person. For instance, participants in the crowd which killed Maki Skosana acted on the basis of the definition of themselves as members of the Duduza Community, a community that was poor, oppressed and subjected to violent repression by representatives of the State. Maki Skosana was believed to have been one of the collaborators. Therefore in identity terms, Maki was an enemy of the community and there existed an ideological advantage in attacking her.

In the same vein, individuals who opposed the State, became victims of the State (in the 1980's) in South Africa. The State produced law and order violence as a social form of control and violence in the name of social and political change. The victims were later detained and tortured in prison. In extreme incidents, victims disappeared from their communities and were later discovered to have been abducted by the agents of the State and eventually stories were told about how these individuals met their deaths in prison.

Reicher (1987) emphasizes that the behaviours that occur in the immediate context of the crowd situation need to be located in terms of the broader ideological context of the intergroup relations between the group membership of those involved in the encounter. In their applications of these principles to concrete instances of crowd violence in South Africa and Britain, writers such as Manganyi (1990) and Reicher (1987) focus on power relations of race and class as the broader ideological contexts of crowd behaviour.

One would argue that there is a relation between these theories and the family. Hoffmann (1990) states that violence within the wider society is related to experiences of violence in childhood and family life. Because the family is a microcosm of society, the prevalence of violence in a particular society is invariably linked into a cycle of violence manifested in families and perpetuated in wider society in many forms (McKendrick & Hoffmann, 1990).

Analyses of the violence that affected families in the South African context during the political struggle could be linked to a macro-system level of that time where ideology sanctioned power



relations between the poor and the wealthy, the ruling classes and the governed. Most black families then, were the governed and were opposed to the inequality between the oppressor and the oppressed. This resulted in intergroup conflict explicable in terms of power relations between the different participants in the conflict, for example the crowd belonging to the communities and the police who arrested people who were protesting against the State. The argument posited here links with Social Identity Theory and is thus helpful in understanding how violence, which is based on ideology, resulted in victimization of the families in the present study.

### **3.5 TOWARD AN INTEGRATED THEORY OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE**

Gurr (1970) writes that the institutions, persons and policies of rulers have inspired the violent wrath of their nominal subjects throughout the history of organized political life. In such institutions it is not uncommon to find political violence. Political violence refers to all collective attacks within a political community against the political regime, its actors, including competing political groups as well as incumbents or its policies. The concept subsumes revolutions, ordinary defined as fundamental socio-political change accomplished through violence. It also includes guerilla wars, *coups det'ats*, rebellions and riots. Political violence is in turn subsumed under 'force', the use of threat of violence by any party or institution to attain ends within or outside the political order. Authoritative coercion in the service of the State is a crucial concept in political theory and an issue of continuing dispute. Some have identified the distinctive characteristics of the State as its monopoly of physical coercion. Max Weber, in Mohr (1958:494) wrote that violence is a "means specific", to the State and that, "the right of the physical violence is assigned to all other associations or individuals only to the extent permitted by the State, it is supposed to be the exclusive source of the right to use violence".

This theoretical point of view becomes congruent with violence which had an impact on the families in the present study, as they were affected by overtly political acts of resistance to the Apartheid regime on the one hand, and the attempts by the State and its allies on the other hand to contain and eliminate this resistance. For instance in April 1986, violence reached high levels with attacks on residents by vigilantes. The occupation of the township of Alexandria by security forces in June 1986, was marked by a week of violence which came to be known as 'Alexandria's six day war' (Mahabela, 1988). While overt violence was reduced in the following months, it is widely perceived that harassment, intimidation and detentions continued throughout the townships in South Africa.

The basic model of conditions leading to political violence incorporates psychological and societal variables. According to Gurr (1970) the primary causal sequence in political violence is first, the development of discontent, second the politicization of that discontent, and finally, its actualization in violent action against political objects and actors. He further argues that discontent arises from the perception of relative deprivation which is the basic instigating condition for participants in collective violence. The linked concepts of discontent and deprivation comprise most of the psychological states implicit or explicit in such theoretical notions about the causes of violence as frustration, alienation, drive and goal conflicts.

Relative deprivation is defined as perceived discrepancy between mens' value expectations and their value capabilities. Value expectations are the goods and conditions of life to which people believe they are rightfully entitled to. Value capabilities are the goods and conditions they think they are capable of attaining or maintaining, given the social means available to them. Societal conditions that increase the average level of intensity of expectations without increasing capabilities, increase the intensity of discontent. Societal conditions that decrease mens' average value position without decreasing their value expectations similarly increase deprivation, hence the intensity of discontent (Gurr, 1970).

The issue of relative deprivation which is well known in South Africa cannot be over-emphasized here. The political philosophy of Apartheid which was practised in South Africa for more than forty years contributed to the exceptionally high rate of political violence to which these families in this study were subjected to. Turton (1986) notes and links this to problems such as poverty, unemployment and these are factors which are in turn linked to the material effects of Apartheid policies in education, labour laws, accommodation, influx control, health and welfare and others. Although it is impossible to prove if the township conditions mostly occupied by the blacks would have been different under other political structures, Lilli and Rehm, 1988, (in Berry, Segall and Kagitcibasi, 1988) point out that social categorizations lead individuals to make evaluative judgements about other members of other groups. For instance, the sharp differences of the social conditions between the oppressor and the oppressed which existed during the Apartheid regime cannot be discounted. When social identities are enhanced by intergroup comparisons, devaluation of out-groups can lead to conflicts worse when persistence of being negatively categorized or labelled occurs. For example, even the fragmented education system which existed in South Africa over forty years was aimed at training blacks for cheap labour and to keep them inferior. This conventional education system was part of the Apartheid political system hence it resulted in social unrest and burning of the schools by school children during

the 1976 uprisings. Manganyi (1976) states that this has contributed to black South Africans internalising negative views about themselves and their low status in South Africa.

The point of argument here is that many of the attitudes and societal conditions that facilitate political violence may be present and relatively unchanging in a society over a long period. They become relevant or operative in the genesis of violence only when relative deprivation increases in scope and intensity. Gurr (1970) argues that intense politicized discontent also can be widespread and persistent over a long period without overt manifestation because a regime monopolizes coercive and institutional support. A weakening of regime control or the development of dissident organizations in such situations is highly likely to lead to massive violence as it did in Hungary in 1956, and in China in 1966 to 1968. According to Mc Kendrick and Hoffmann (1990) the mobilization of resources in South Africa at political, economic and ideological levels during the Apartheid regime increased resistance to minority rule. This was a State's response to defeat liberation movements without engaging in full-scale conventional war. However the military approach adopted by the State which engaged in forced removals, monitoring protest demonstrations, suppressing resistance to homeland independence, strike-breaking and maintaining beach apartheid was met with acts of counter-violence from the liberation movements. The State was faced with a revolutionary onslaught which weakened the regime as national and international calls were made for apartheid to be dismantled. The arguments explained in this theory, while reflecting the understanding of victimization experienced by the families in the present study, also espouses discussions revealed by both the Systems' and Social Identity Theories above.

The theoretical perspectives in this chapter attempted to explain the context of violence in which families under investigation in the present study found themselves. The explanatory power here lies in the fact that individuals, families, communities and even societies can be understood in terms of their mutual interconnections. Systems do not represent physical bodies but what transpires between the parts, the underlying meaning - a social construction. This meaning as described is that of both the victim and the attacker which have been part of the larger system in the context of political violence which affected their families. The three theories discussed above are insightful in providing an expanded analysis of accounts of violence, and this knowledge will provide a better link with the following chapters. The next chapter will explicate the method.