

Farida Karodia's *A Shattering of Silence*: Colonial Violence and the Politics of Female-Driven Sympathetic Pushback

by

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Abstract

This article sets out to analyze how colonial violence carries the germs of absurdity and the significance of compassionate resistance to oppression by utilizing Farida Karodia's novel, *A Shattering of Silence* (2010) that is about a childhood shattered when witnessing a massacre in a village in Mozambique, and the quest to find wholeness. Thus, the work touches on the nature of female resistance to the shackles of oppression as women in the novel are involved in a cultivation of love and compassion as a cost-effective means of fighting injustice.

Key words: colonization, compassion, pushback, wantonness, 'Fanonian', violence, language

Introduction

Farida Karodia is a South-African born novelist and short story writer, steeped in the ideals of humanity; she went through the gauntlet of apartheid strictures owing to the searing content of her apartheid-era opus against the immorality of institutionalized racism and its exponents. Indeed, she had her passport withdrawn at one time. More importantly, she had to bite the bullet of immigrating to Canada when she was faced with the daunting possibility of forced internment in South Africa, then under the rule of the National Party. Even so, the psychological cum physical toll of exile did not put a damper on her moral duty as a woman of conscience and writer to castigate the sanctimoniousness of apartheid.

Some of her novels were both written and published in Canada while she was exiled there. Not until 1994 did she return to her native South Africa. Since the inception of her literary career, she has written six novels: *Daughters of Twilight* (1986), *Coming Home and Other Stories* (1988), *A Shattering of Silence* (1991), *Against an African Sky* (1994), *Other Secrets* (2000) and *Boundaries* (2003). She has had literary awards conferred upon her thanks to *Other Secrets* (IMPAC Dublin Award) and her first novel, which was nominated for the Fawcett Literary Prize in Great Britain.

Colonialism reeks of oppression. As a result, violence whether it be physical or moral cannot be divorced by any stretch of the imagination from the workings of colonialism. For one thing, the politics of dehumanization and dispossession as well as economic exploitation attendant upon the practice of colonization is a glaring epitome of violence. When it comes to defining violence as such, the search for a clear-cut definition is a testament to its complexity.

In his introduction to *Understanding Violence*, Graeme Newman points out that “*violence is anything but a unitary phenomenon. Rather it is a catchall word that is used to refer to a wide range of often very different events and behaviors.*” (5). Even so, given its paramountcy in our analytic project, and for ease of readability it is useful to go through some definitions of violence which, arguably, capture both its breath and intricacy. Hence, according to Newman violence is ‘*that which leads to physical injury or damage, since historically and statistically it is the only aspect of violence that we are able to observe or record.*’ (2). Still Marvin Eugene Wolfgang does not march in lockstep with Newman as to the definition of violence. He conceives of the term as “*the intentional use of physical force on another person or noxious stimuli invoked by one person to another.*” (Subculture of Violence 316). In a 1966 article, Wolfgang is a little more precise: “*It is probably safe to assert, however, that violence is generally perceived as the display of behavior which inflicts physical injury*” (A Preface to Violence 2). As regards The *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*, it views violence as “*violent behavior that is intended to hurt or kill somebody*”. These definitions, insightful though they are, have a weak commonality, i.e. they are scrappy in that they foreground the physical facet of violence to the detriment of the psychological one. Actually, violence as a crime can take on different guises: physical, psychological, moral, you name it. A more comprehensive definition is provided by the World Health Organization, hence:

The intentional use of physical force or power, threatened or actual, against oneself, another person, or against a group or community, that either results in or has a high likelihood of resulting in injury, death, or psychological, maldevelopment or deprivation (World report on violence and health 5).

This definition of violence is encompassing as it takes account of the multifaceted fallout from acts of violence. The endgame of the intentional use of violence may be well and truly calculated to exact physical or psychological damage with the unconscionable intent to make the recipient toe the line. This nefarious function of violence is up and running in a colonial setting. In an endeavor to break down the indigenous will to pushback against an all-out drive to turn a person into a nonbeing, the colonizing person taps into unwarranted physical force, sleep deprivation, destruction of anything linking the colonized to history, culture, and the like.

The kind of violence that culminates in “*the destruction of the indigenous social fabric*”, and demolishing “*unchecked the systems of reference of the country’s economy lifestyles, modes of dress*” (Fanon 6-7) is cruelty writ large. The late Frantz Fanon, a Martinique-born thinker whose seminal study of the colonial world is more topical than ever, posits that violence is the colonizer’s recipe for holding in check the colonized subject. His following description of the colonial society captures the violent nature of the ideology of colonialism itself:

A world compartmentalized, Manichean and petrified, a world of statues: the statue of the general who led the conquest, the statue of the engineer who built the bridge. A world cocksure of itself, crushing with its stoniness the backbones of those scarred by the whip (15).

This ‘Fanonian’ sidelight on the make-up of the colonial world is, arguably, a measure of the solipsistic mindset of the colonist. To be sure, the resort to wanton physical violence paves the way for the success of the colonizer in unabashedly reducing the colonized to ‘thingification’¹ (Césaire 9). Colonialism comes about through violence and sustains itself through violence.

A Shattering of Silence: A Synopsis

A Shattering of Silence is a swinging critique of colonialism in any shape or form that recounts the story of Faith, whose parents are Protestant missionaries who have relinquished a cozy life in Manitoba (Canada) to settle in a Mozambican village with a viewing to minister to the needy; their arrival in Mozambique happens prior to Faith’s birth and against a background of colonial occupation. Life for ordinary denizens borders on hell due to the strictures of the colonial society and the backwash effect of a war of liberation pitting Portuguese-backed government forces against indigenous rebels.

Faith's life takes a horrendous twist when, against all expectations, her parents, Rebecca and Alex Merrick, "*those indefatigable sources of love and security*" (17) as Faith calls them, get slain as a result of a collective punishment meted out on the inhabitants by the colonial administration. Their gruesome fate is all the more undeserved and senseless since both of them have pulled their weight in terms of assuaging the destitution and squalor of the village, as well as giving medical attention to war casualties. The traumatic experience of witnessing her parents slaughtered at close quarters becomes a game changer as it marks the ground zero for an appallingly uphill life for Faith, hence she says: "*The enormous sense of loss and confusion about the events of the past few days had paralyzed me emotionally. I had lost everything: my parents, my home, my memory and my ability to speak.*" (17).

Orphaned in her prime, Faith is sent from Catholic missionary to Catholic missionary as she tries to pick up the pieces of her shattered life and move on. At last! She encounters her road to Damascus: Dona Maria del Gado Cadoso, "*a generous benefactress*" (63). Indeed, thanks to the latter, Faith eventually leaves the notorious hellhole of São Thomas for the Convent of Santa Teresa "*located about fifteen miles out of the city*" (59), and where she receives "*formal tutoring in sign language in the morning, after prayers and morning chores.*" (65). After an unspecified spell at the convent, Dona Maria uses her pull to secure Faith a position at the Clinic for the Deaf where she "*was to teach sign language to the children who were being treated at the clinic.*" (78). Even though Faith has had a raw deal out of life, she has the likes of Dona Maria to thank for her eventual success in making something of herself.

Descent is anathema to colonial authority. Any move meant to redress the wrongs inflicted on the indigenous people is stamped out cold-bloodedly. The "*compartmentalized, Manichean, and petrified*"² nature of the colonial world that implies the sustenance of a dead hand of subjugation feeds on wanton violence and intimidatory tactics of any ilk. And in their unwholesome drive to win full observance of the established order, colonists stop at nothing to coerce the natives into compliance. The gruesome plight of colonized people in *A Shattering of Silence* glaringly highlights the preposterous edge to the use of violence in a colonial environment. At the outset of the novel, the reader discovers a glum atmosphere in a northern Mozambican village where the stultifying effects of living in squalor, coupled with a sickening war take a heavy human and psychological toll amongst the indigenous population. Thus, many of the woes of the people stem from a bunch of estate owners who ride roughshod over the peasantry, immune from prosecution by the colonial government:

They [The estate owners] had always controlled every aspect of village life, determining everything from what the villagers ate to what they could grow and where they could sell their cash crops. Many of these estate owners were a law unto themselves, their dictatorial actions either condoned or ignored by the colonial government (7).

In the world of *A Shattering of Silence*, landownership is heavily weighted in favour of Portuguese-backed property developers who are allowed full rein to unabashedly exploit the “*chibalos*”. The latter are “*men without rights, used as forced labour.*” (7). Working conditions are appallingly abysmal and village men have nothing to show for their hard work. Nonetheless, when it dawns on them that the likelihood of seeing an end to their suffering is very slim, they get their act together with the help of Alex Merrick in order to redress the balance. Despite being associated with the oppressors by the colour of his skin, Alex is a kind of conscience objector whose sorrow over the dog’s life of the ‘*chibalos*’ is measureless. Little wonder that he goes the extra mile to “*arbitrate on behalf of the workers*” and encourage “*the election of a spokesman from amongst the elders.*” (8). Faith’s father views this ploy as “*a civilized way to deal with the situation.*” Conversely, top brass amongst the landed gentry have a jaundiced view of any move (civilized or otherwise) whose end game is to uplift the peasantry. Any concession to the ‘proletariat’³ is regarded as the treacherous and, more importantly, an existential threat. Not surprisingly, those who are at the forefront of the drive to win labor organization against the will of the ‘bourgeoisie’ put their lives on the line. Actually, they wind up paying the ultimate price: “*There was a long history of political and labour organisers ending up like the elders’ spokesman, their bodies strung up in the forest as an example to others.*” (8-9). Either way, in an endeavor to show that they mean business the ‘*chibalos*’ present a list of grievances to Senhor Morais, a high profile member of the propertied gentry, thereby ignoring what they are letting themselves in for. Witness the hanging of their first representative, and the gruesome collective punishment that is visited upon the villagers. From page 9 to 18 the narrator gives a blow by blow description of how a group of well-armed soldiers get off a chopper and start firing indiscriminately on powerless people, mowing down a whole village. The following excerpt is an eye opener:

One of the men pointed his rifle at a woman known as Firipa, who wearing a bright yellow headscarf. In her arms she held her six-month-old son, Xavier. She got to her feet and shuffled forward, her son perched on her hip. She stood before her executioner as he levelled his rifle. A single shot rang out and she fell at his feet. Her son disengaged himself from her lifeless arms and crawled close to her body, wailing loudly.

After the attackers killed the children and infants, smashing their skulls against the hard ground, they slit open the bellies of the three pregnant women, destroying the foetuses. Finally, they corralled the young girls, each of the men raping them in full view of the other women. Then, only then, did they raise their rifles to put the women out of their misery (15)

The wantonness of colonial violence is captured through its absurdity. Part of the singularity of the colonial world lies in the fact that suffering, whether it be emotional or physical, is meted out blindly for self-serving ends. Sigmund Freud, the prime mover of psychoanalysis, is then justified in pointing to “*our relations to other men*” as a source of suffering which “*is more painful to us than any other.*” According to Freud, “*we tend to regard it gratuitous addition, although it cannot be any less fatefully inevitable than the suffering which comes from elsewhere.*” (24). In a colonial environment, the colonizer does not recognize any attribute of humanity in the colonized. The social and economic pecking order is heavily weighted in favour of the colonist who brazenly lives off the masses through exploitation of their labour. The relationship between the colonizer and the colonized subject is warped from the outset because it is underpinned by might:

The relationship between colonist and colonized is one of physical mass. Against the greater number of the colonist pits his force. The colonist is an exhibitionist. His safety concerns lead him to remind the colonized out loud: “Here I am the master.” The colonist keeps the colonized man in a state of rage, which he prevents from boiling over (Fanon 17).

The systematic resort to violence is a cost-effective means of ensuring compliance and respect for the colonial order. Fanon is bitter about the enslavement of the colonized, the more so as he suffers the double whammy of land dispossession and the unwarranted destruction of his cultural heritage:

For a colonized people, the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity. But this dignity has nothing to do with “human” dignity. The colonized subject has never heard of such an ideal. All he has ever seen on his land is that he can be arrested, beaten, and starved with impunity (Fanon 9).

Farida Karodia reminds us in *A Shattering of Silence* that the land is part of the nitty-gritty of life in the colonial context. Land possession, to be sure, affords social status and power. Conversely, being dispossessed of it or experiencing its lack spawns low self-regard and ultimately alienation.

If anything, the colonized masses' woes in *A Shattering of Silence* stem from their all-out drive to recover their dignity lost in the aftermath of being deprived of their bread and butter –the land. The harrowing retribution that Faith's parents have been subjected to is a gruesome reminder of the meaninglessness of colonial violence. Rebecca and Alex Merrick, as it turns out, pay the ultimate price not at the hands of the natives but of the colonial government. The meanness of their grisly killing lies in the fact that they relinquished a snug life in Canada to come to settle in rural Mozambique for the sake of alleviating the ordeals of the people. By the skin of their colour they are associated with colonists whose race-based practices wreaks no end of havoc in Mozambique. Be that as it may, they draw the line at condoning the cultural and economic enslavement to which indigenous folks are subjected. Arguably, they are cast in the mould of colonizers who refuse to be to colonizers. Albert Memmi writes that, in a colonial context, the likes of the Merricks have two alternatives:

If every colonial assumes the role of the colonizer, every colonizer does not necessarily become a colonialist. However, the facts of colonial life are not simply ideas but the general effect of actual conditions. To refuse means either withdrawing physically from those conditions or remaining to fight and change them (63).

There exist men and women of conscience in every society, even in the most unjust and oppressive, whose common hallmark is their abhorrence of injustice in any shape or form. Rebecca and Alex Merrick are part of that bunch. Upon bedding down in the middle of nowhere in northern Mozambique, the sight of pervasive squalor and unconscionable exploitation of the masses brings home to Faith's parents the full-scale horrors of colonialism. The moral imperative to help assuage human suffering overrides self-serving interest. Rebecca and Alex Merrick make it a labour of love to solace the downtrodden in their hour of need. They attempt to push back on the dead hand of the organization of colonial injustice in the face of overwhelming odds. Here's how Faith describes her father's involvement in the lives of the indigenous people to make a difference:

In the time that he'd [her father] been there, he'd made many changes, especially in the way the school was run. One of the changes was to dispense with the practice of having students memorise the names of early Portuguese explorers like Vasco de Gama, Bartholomew Diaz and Prince Henry the Navigator. He believed that none of the early colonial history drummed into students by previous missionaries, had any relevance in this remote part of the world. At best, he claimed, it could only reinforce the sense of inferiority instilled by the colonialists. He wanted to teach students about their own history. To this end he documented many of the stories handed down in the oral tradition (7).

Here, Farida Karodia flags up the significance of cultural violence in the process of enslaving a people. The colonizer is at pains to mar the mental universe of the colonized in order to pave the way for the success of his nefarious enterprise. Shanghaing the indigenous folks into jettisoning their mores and traditional beliefs is a crucial feature in the lead up to colonization proper. The depth of cultural colonization in *A Shattering of Silence* is captured through Faith's venting her displeasure over the harshness of life in São Lucas:

I had very little interest in being at school. The medium of instruction was Portuguese and children were discouraged, on pain of punishment, from speaking any of the local languages. Those who came to São Lucas had to forsake their heathen beliefs and traditions. Children who wore ritual amulets or charms were punished severely. The only charm allowed on the premises was a crucifix (23).

The issue of language bulks large in the spate of ploys calculated to make the colonized buy into the idea that he is shorn of culture and history. Not only is language a means of communication but, more importantly, it embodies meaning in terms of tradition and the construction of identity. Frantz Fanon appositely writes in *Black Skin, White Masks*: “*To speak means to be in a position to use a certain syntax, to grasp the morphology of this or that language, but it means above all to assume a culture, to support the weight of a civilization.*” (8). Kenyan sophisticated thinker, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, sees eye to eye with Fanon as to the significance of language, and makes a point of underscoring its linkage with memory:

Language is the clarifying medium of memory or rather the two are intertwined. To starve or to kill a language is to starve and kill a people's memory bank. And it is equally true that to impose a language is to impose the weight of experience it carries and its conception of self and otherness- indeed, the weight of its memory including religion and education (20).

Farida Karodia's espousal of the symmetry between language and memory is encapsulated in Faith's agony over the traumatic events that climaxed in her parents' demise as well as her subsequent loss of the ability to speak: “*The enormous sense of loss and confusion about the events of the past few days had paralyzed me emotionally. I had lost everything: my parents, my home, my memory and my ability to speak*” (17). Her predicament is an untoward offshoot of her parents' well-meaning call to move against the tide of an oppressive history for the sake of human dignity.

In the world of *A Shattering of Silence* folks of African stock may live under the yoke of colonial rule. Yet they do not take it in strides. A large-scale multifaceted pushback against the jackboot of colonialism is noticeable, and, to be sure, women are at the forefront of it. Faith's mother to all intents and purposes blazes a trail in terms of female resistance. Rebecca's medical attention to expectant mothers and malnourished children as well as to war casualties is a monument to her rejection of injustice and to her sense of "loving-kindness"⁴:

My mother, who ran the clinic and dispensary, never had the time to participate in village life to the same extent as my father and I did. In the small clinic, no bigger than our kitchen, my mother weighed babies, examined women, mended broken limbs and even performed emergency surgery (5).

The astounding pervasiveness of suffering offers Rebecca Merrick a scope to put up resistance in the form of compassion. Despite the odds being stacked against her she strives with every fiber of being to bring succor to the needy, to the extent that she does not have downtime: "*I don't remember my mother ever sitting down to enjoy a moment of relaxation. She was always busy.*" (5). Come to think of it, the Merricks embark upon an unswerving endeavor to atone for the atrocities committed in the name of Western civilization. They are humanists in their own rights. Their social dedication is deeply anchored in a moral drive to uphold the universality of human dignity. Notwithstanding, in a world where disregard for human rights is a fillip to relentless bourgeois exploitation of the peasantry, the Canadian couple's philanthropic bent is unavoidably bound to ruffle the landed gentry's feathers. Not surprisingly, upon learning about Rebecca and Alex's activity, the estate owners regarded as a hardline bunch who "*were a law unto themselves, their dictatorial actions either condoned or ignored by the colonial government*" (7) wasted no time in cold-bloodedly stamping out what they construed as a nascent challenge to colonial authority. Witness how the female narrator describes the gruesome nemesis met by her parents:

We [Faith and her friend Lodiya] could see my parents waving their arms and gesturing at their attackers. I recognized the man with the red beret and the tattoo. I watched as he raised his rifle. There was a sickening knot in my stomach because, as young as I was, I knew what was about to happen.

My parents were dropped with two shots. I might have run to them had Lodiya not dragged me back. I sank to the ground, hugging my knees, my back pressed against the wall of rock. I buried my face in my knees, sobbing bitterly (14).

No one in the village is spared by this killing spree which is, doubtless, calculated to serve as a deterrent to would-be trespassers. Children, women, men, babies are indiscriminately gunned down (9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). If anything, the relationship between oppressor and oppressed in a colonial setting is underpinned by might. Colonists regard any forbearance vis-à-vis the colonized as the thin end of the wedge. From a Fanonian vantage point, the numerical advantage of the masses pales beside the military juggernaut of the masters:

The relationship between colonist and colonized is one of physical mass. Against the greater number the colonist puts his force. The colonist is an exhibitionist. His safety concerns lead him to remind the colonized out loud: "Here I am the master." The colonist keeps the colonized in a state of rage, which he prevents from boiling over. The colonized are caught in the tightly knit web of colonialism (17).

Impervious to the possibility that the colonized have genuine wants and grievances that deserve addressing, the "masters" are hell-bent on subduing them every step of the way. Yet, in Terry Eagleton's book, it would be wrong-headed of a dominant social class to solely rely on force as a way of bringing their subjects to heel:

A dominant ideology has to recognize that there are needs and desires which were never simply generated or implanted by itself; and the dystopian vision of a social order which is capable of containing and controlling all desires because it created them in the first place is thus unmasked as a fiction... If the oppressed must be alert enough to follow the rulers' instruction, they are therefore conscious enough to be able to challenge them (46).

Either way, the harrowing collective punishment perpetrated by government soldiers, arriving in a chopper, marks a watershed in the female resistance to colonial oppression. Likewise, it is the ground zero for Faith's orphaned existence, which has led her to an array of Catholic institutions. Faith has lost the ability to speak from the backwash of witnessing her parents' grisly death at close quarters. But she is put in the care of nuns. Her first port of call is the mission station of São Lucas run by Father Fernando described as "a small man remarkably fragile in appearance, but enormously strong and courageous" (32). Her spell in this Catholic mission was a mixed blessing: it heralded her "immersion into Catholicism" and offered her a kind of escapism from loneliness. Additionally, she felt stunned by the beauty of the scenery.

However, the raw deal that she got from Sister Luisa hampered her enjoyment of life there: “*Had it not been for Sister Luisa and the constant recollection of the tragic circumstances that had taken us there São Lucas might have been as good a place as any for us to heal emotionally*” (28). Sister turns out to be the bane of Faith in São Lucas, singling her out for punishment over the slightest misdemeanor:

Despite my attempts to avoid her, no matter where I turned, she always found me, pouncing unexpectedly, finding fault with my unkempt hair, or the fact that I might be unwashed, or that I hadn't finished my chores. As punishment for one of these transgressions, she'd have me kneel for hours on the hard ground until my legs felt like rubber (24).

Faith's ill-treatment at the hands of a nun is a one-off. But the introduction of this episode into the narrative can be interpreted as the author's wish to call attention to the real life existence of child abuse in Catholic missions. At any rate, Sister Luisa's shameful misconduct vis-à-vis Faith compounds the psychological distress spawned by parental death: “*The loss of a loved one is one of the most intensely painful experiences any human being can suffer. And not only is it painful to experience but it is also painful to witness, if only because we are so impotent to help.*” (Loss and Sadness 7). The self-regard that she develops at times is but an outgrowth of a lack of a staunch attachment figure of sorts to mitigate the emotional blow of her parents' demise. Her saying that “*my parents had never struck me, not in anger or in punishment*” underscores how distraught she is, cum her wistfulness as to the cocoon of a caring family. Yet when Father Fernando breaks to her that she has to be transferred to the São Thomas orphanage since the Catholic mission of São Lucas has come a gutser in its endeavor to help her out of her inability to speak, Faith teeters on the brink of snapping: “*...I didn't want to leave. I didn't want to abandon what I already had for a new life at São Lucas, and now I had to leave. What if Lodiya returned and I was gone, how would she ever find me?*” (33). Lodiya is the Black woman who saved her skin during the killing spree that climaxed in the death of Faith's parents. To boot, she was Faith's shoulder to cry on prior to suddenly leaving São Lucas for an unspecified destination. She acted as Faith's 'substitute mother' who, from John Bowlby's vantage point, refers to “*any other person to whom a child is willing to temporarily direct attachment behaviour*” Attachment and Loss 26). Plainly, Faith cannot brook the prospect of going through another excruciatingly painful separation, especially from someone with whom she strongly bonds. She is upset no end about the bishop's decision to send her away, to the point of rudeness: “*With my eyes still fixed on that distant point, I withdrew my hand from his.*” (33).

From a psychoanalytic perspective, gruff attitudes like this are par for the course under certain circumstances: “*Since the goal of attachment behavior is to maintain an affectional [sic] bond any situation that seems to be endangering the bond elicits action designed to prevent it*” (Attachment and Loss 7). Indeed, Faith’s dogged effort to thwart Lodiya’s departure is telling:

She tried to get up, but I held on to her. I realized that she meant to leave that day, that moment. And I couldn’t let her go. She was the only connection I had to my past. I loved and trusted her. How could this be happening again, I clung to her arm. She tried to loosen my hold, making an impatient clicking sound with her tongue. I began to cry then, tears pouring down my cheeks (29).

Needless to say that Father Fernando’s assurances that “*The sisters at the Sanctuary of São Thomas have more experience in these things. They may be able to help you*” (33) cut no ice with her. Grieving inwardly, she wraps up being sent “*on the back of a donkey cart*” to the São Thomas orphanage which is, actually, a sanctuary of sorts. What Father Fernando built as a haven was not. Anything but. Rather, it is a hellhole:

Life at the São Thomas was no better than it had been at São Lucas. There too I was just one more child crippled and orphaned by acts of barbarous violence. Half-starved, ragged and barefoot, a steady stream of children constantly arrived at the orphanage...And it wasn’t much of a sanctuary (35).

Faith’s chance lies in the fact that she does not fit into the category of the ‘lost children’, i.e. “*the hopeless cases who would eventually be shipped out to some distant place, never to be heard from or seen again*” (35). Even so, she has more than her fair share of the harshness of life at the orphanage of São Thomas: “*Many of us suffered from cramps and diarrhea, which made eating almost impossible*” (37). Additionally, “*The fare was the same for all of us; the difference was that we sat at a table, while the others sat on the ground in the courtyard.*” 37). Arguably, her stint in São Thomas, appalling though it was in terms of living conditions, turned out to be blessing in disguise. Mama Ria, a woman full of the milk of human kindness, seeks her out at the orphanage and offers to be her foster mother. The intoxication of the prospect of getting out of the abysmal squalor that reigns supreme at the São Thomas orphanage shines through Faith’s sigh of relief:

I wanted to be part of a family, I wanted a home. I wanted to be loved and knew that Mama Ria wanted me. I sensed her sincerity and her goodness and I knew that with her I would be safe. It was worth the risk, for no place could have been worse than the orphanage (41).

Here, Farida Karodia emphasizes as crucial the significance of the family in developing high self-regard, and a sense of safety. The family setting is sort of a foolproof hedge against threats to the child from the outside world. Likewise, parents are the foremost providers of love and care to their offspring. The emotional fallout from the absence of either parent be it through death or divorce can exact a heavy psychological toll on the child. As Abraham Maslow appositely writes: “*The central role of the parents and the normal family setup are indisputable. Quarrelling, physical assault, separation, divorce or death within the family may be particularly terrifying.*” (40). Faith’s anxiety is not so much over parental outbursts of hissy fit or threats of punishment but about the gruesomely brutal way in which she has been estranged for ever from her parents. The fact of her being thwarted at every turn in her wholesome desire to enjoy safety and steadiness in affectionate bonds makes her reminiscent of her halcyon days under the protective wings of her parents. Faith may be on the receiving end of traumatic woes but she is not left to her own devices. As it turns out, the large-scale suffering that folks go through in the world of *A Shattering of Silence* brings out the best in women. The latter’s resistance to the absurdity of colonial oppression comes in the form of charity actions. Rebecca Merrick, Mama Ria, Dona Maria Del Cardoso, Rita, and even Faith live and breathe a key tenet in Jeremy Bentham’s moral philosophy: “*Seek the happiness of others, -Seek your own happiness in the happiness of others*” (17). They are conspicuous by their unwavering drive in what is in Benthamian terms “*the exercise of virtue*”⁵. In spite of earning “*most of her humble income doing laundry for the city’s wealthy families*”, nicknamed the “*familias grandes*”, Mama Ria unfailingly pulls her weight in terms of proving succor to Faith on top of six other orphans. Cognizant of the far-reaching significance of schooling, “*Mama Ria was determined that all of us should have a chance to be educated*” (48). The good Samaritan’s dedication to charitable work is steeped in the consciousness of her lofty ancestral lodestar: “*Mama Ria came from a tribe that had a long tradition of resistance to Portuguese colonial rule*” (43). Faith’s life in the aftermath of parents’ demise seesaws from despondency to hope and disappointment. Just as she starts to find her feet in the township, so is she sanguine that she can gratify her ‘belongingness needs’, which is a brainchild of Abraham H. Maslow. However, having been taught a lesson she’s philosophical enough not allow life’s quirks of fate get her down: “*For a while things seemed to be going a lot better than they had in a long time, but from experience I knew that one could not take anything for granted. Life had a way of turning on those who were too content, and I lived with constant anxiety that whatever little bit of happiness I had could be wrested from me at any time*” (48).

Sometime down the line, her percipient wisdom is vindicated: *“I was right. One day, without any prior sign of illness, Mama Ria collapsed and went into a diabetic coma. She was rushed to hospital, but died that same evening”* (48). Faith is in search of what J.J. Godfrey calls ‘Ultimate hope’, which he defines as being *“always hope with an aim, focus, objective-an event or state both desired and believed possible”* (146). Granted. But her dogged ultimate hope is at times hedged around with ‘ultimate fear’ which, according to J.J Godfrey, occurs *“where the objective is not desired but dreaded”* (146). Faith steadfastly yearns for the return of her ability to speak, and a permanent shoulder to cry on. But she is continually nagged by the ultimate fear of always hitting a snag. In answer to her friend Rita’s advice against *“hoping for a miracle”*, Faith says as if showing that she knows better: *“She was right. What was the point of hoping for things like the return of my speech, or that someone would come along and take me home with them? If anything were to happen it would only end in disappointment. I didn’t want to contemplate the future, afraid that something would again come along to shatter my dreams”* (49). She makes no bones about craving to recover her ability to speak, for it some kind of brings closure.

Doubtless, Mama Ria’s passing is a game changer in Faith’s life; it is, indeed, a blessing in disguise. After Ester *“the adult relative who came to take care of Rita, Aesta and Margareta”* shrinks from taking her in, Faith feels compelled to double back to the hellhole of São Thomas. All the same, she just spends a span of five months at the notorious orphanage before leaving for a township that houses a convent. She is put into the care of a prominent woman, gone by the name of Dona Maria del Gado Cardoso, whose selflessness and sympathy to the downtrodden is beyond measure besides being known to all and sundry. The prospect of shaking the dust of São Thomas off her feet, thanks to Dona Maria, gives a much-needed uplift to Faith: *“Sister Claudia also reminded me of how lucky I was that a woman like Dona Maria Gado del Cardoso had taken an interest in me. The nuns could not praise her enough for her generosity to the orphanage. In the end I felt privileged that such a woman would be concerned about my welfare”* (50). As it turns out, she is transferred to the Convent of Santa Teresa which is, according to the Mother Superior, *“a place of religious study and contemplation, a place of humility and service to God”* (63). Much as she oftentimes vents a lot beef about the sternness of life at the convent, she learns to come to terms with it. After all, since the inception of her physical and emotional ordeals she has never heard such soothing words: *“Both doctors you have seen feel that eventually you may speak again. They say your condition is curable, that it may be some kind of hysterical paralysis of the vocal cords. The cause lies somewhere in here...’One day when you overcome this problem, you’ll be able to speak again”* (63). The Mother Superior ends her uplifting discourse with a caveat as if prevailing upon her not to get carried away: *“It might take days, weeks or even years for you to recover your speech”* (64). By her own admission, she craved human contact. But her longing has been allayed since arriving at the convent, with Sister Angelique acting as a solace to her and an instructor in sign language as well (61, 32, 63). Thanks to Angie, as she affectionately calls her, she manages in less than no time to speak with her hands (69).

The means by which she manages to communicate is a measure of the status of sign language as an essentially manual one: *“It is manual language with its own linguistic complexities and rules. The hands, the body and facial expressions are used to communicate without sound”* (American Sign Language 3). Actually, Faith is blown away by the jaw-dropping improvement to her life since her arrival at the convent: *“I had learnt so much since my arrival at the convent, and I found within myself a new enthusiasm for fresh challenges”* (69).

Dona Maria’s insistence on Faith getting schooled in sign language, pending the eventual return of her speech, speaks volumes about the significance of literacy as a steppingstone to what Abraham Maslow calls ‘self-actualization’: *“It refers to man’s desire for self-fulfillment, namely, to the tendency for him to become actualized in what he is potentially. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one idiosyncratically is, to become everything that one is capable of”* (46). Dona Maria Gado del Cardoso is cast in the mould of those to whom such human sicknesses as injustice and suffering are anathema. Compassion fatigue is a stranger to her. Her social dedication to the needy in the world of *A Shattering of Silence* vindicates Maslow’s assertion that *“The only way to heal evil men is to create good men”* (10). Rather than going down the path of violence as a weapon of struggle against oppression she ploughs her lonely furrow in human betterment. Dona Maria’s no-nonsense preference of charity actions to rabble rousing discourse or violence finds its effectiveness in Faith’s new-found confidence and enthusiasm for weathering life’s challenges. Arguably, Faith and her friend Rita take a leaf out of their benefactor’s book through their well-meaning call to decide on a career in nursing. Faith, thanks to Dona Maria’s pull, secures a position at the *Instituto de Medicina* to *“to teach sign language to the children who were being treated”* (78). She is astounded to realize that the in-patients at the medical facility number five and that all of them are kids *“from well-to-do Portuguese families, born with congenital hearing defects that could not be rectified”* (78). As a matter of fact, the kind of patients she *“would have liked to have seen at the clinic”* are those on the receiving end of abuse and landmines. Her astonishment is all the more bitter since young Mozambicans, who plumb the depth of suffering in the backwash of colonial violence and for whom sign language means nothing, are excruciatingly lacking in medical attention. She registers, that is, her *“love for the children’s ward”* and, accordingly, puts her downtime in the service of children: *“When I was not at the Clinic for the Deaf I was helping out on the paediatric wards, doing menial work as part of my basic training”* (80). Arguably, Faith feels kinship with the kids, and her unyielding drive is bent to their recovery. Likewise, Rita does not lag behind when it comes to pulling her weight in terms of mitigating the distressing predicament facing children. In the beginning, she won’t be drawn when tackled by Faith about the reasons why she has taken up a position at the clinic in the first place; but in the end she comes clean unequivocally: *“...I’m there for the right reasons. As far as I know it’s the best surgical unit in the country. I need the training and the experience because I eventually want to work in the trauma unit”* (80).

The grim atmosphere that obtains in their environment and its attendant strictures is an albatross around these women's effort to make a different. Still they stop short of caving in to the force of evil. In *A Shattering of Silence*, women are a study in purposefulness through their dogged determination not to yield to despair. According to John W. Newton purposefulness is the bedrock to human being's search for a better world:

Purposefulness is the cornerstone of man's quest for the ideal. The concept covers a wide range of human behavioral issues. It includes moral worth and virtue. It covers honesty and trust. It further includes a belief in the human capacity for unconditional love (157).

The purposefulness of a man or woman of conscience is always worth its weight in gold in the midst of trying times. An unshakeable faith in human dignity can triumph over the juggernaut of evil. Dona Maria and other like-minded women are living proof of that. In a moving shout-out to the marvelous women who have passed through her life, Faith says:

All of them [Mama Ria, Dona Maria, Lodiya, etc] were great women who, each in her own way, had braved and fought adversity for the survival of their children, their families and their communities.

In the absence of their men, who were arrested, beaten, demoralized, maimed and killed in war, the women carried on...Most women, though, were veterans of another kind of war, the war of survival fought on the battleground of their homes and their townships (147).

Indeed, women's 'effective benevolence' knows no bounds. Their open-handedness is sort of parochialism-free. When rumours were out that shady folks fished in the troubled waters of the war to smuggle children out of Mozambique to Arab countries, Dona Maria was appalled. The attack and torpedoing of an Egyptian cargo vessel by the guerrillas brought home to people the full scope and horror of the alleged traffic in children (181). Not unexpectedly, Dona Maria feels honour bound to make sure that this horrendous story reaches the outside world:

One afternoon Dona Maria and I met at the Hotel Polana for lunch. She was planning a trip for Lisbon and wanted to find out whether we'd been able to get hold of some documents. The United Nations Children's Agency and Amnesty International both required documentation to initiate an investigation into the illegal trade in children (196).

Thankfully, Faith manages to secure the ship's manifest through a friend of hers. But she is in hot water as she is suspected by the colonial government of subversive activity. Meanwhile, Rita who was secretly providing medical assistance to the rebels were shot and seriously wounded (180, 202, 207). Fearful that powers that be may “hound [Faith] to the ends of the earth if need” Dona Maria, as she is wont to do, steps up to the plate to save her and her boyfriend: “I will arrangements for you and Juan to get to London” (228). After cheating death on several occasions along the way, Faith eventually gets to London via Dar es Salaam. She slowly but surely recovers her ability to speak “after months of sessions with a young therapist who tried new and innovative methods” (274). Farida Karodia encapsulates in Faith's woes the vulnerability of children in war time. As Faith earnestly confesses: “I was an example of what war was doing to children in the country” (276). Her moving speech in front of the UN committee is two-pronged in terms of purport. For a starter, it is designed to make the international community sit up and take notice of the vulnerability of children in war time. Secondly, it can be spun as an awesome tribute to the effectiveness of compassionate resistance as against the abhorrence of violence. For Faith's ride all the way from war-torn Mozambique to the headquarters of the United Nations has not been easy by any stretch of the imagination. In *Seeking Justice: The radical Compassion of Jesus*, Keith Hebden extols the virtues of compassionate resistance:

Being compassionate is an act of resistance; it is different from being caring and passive. Compassion literally meaning 'to suffer with', is rooted in our loving desire to be alongside one another in our common struggle for a better spiritual and social reality. Compassion is an act of resistance because the compassionate cannot rest until all suffering is ended. Compassionate is the recognition that none of us are free until we are all free.

The choice of pushing back through compassion against injustice is tantamount to a refusal to cave in to inhumanity. Also, epitomizes the rejection of self-preservation in favour of the common interest. Conversely, repelling force with force is conducive to a vicious cycle that has the potential for shutting the door on the advent of peace. Man's greatest asset is love and compassion –they are supposed to come in handy when one's brother is upon the rack. Despair and helplessness are, on the other hand, mortal foes as they work against man's possibility of survival.

When all is said and done, suffice to say that *A Shattering of Silence* is a scathing indictment of the wantonness of colonial violence. Colonialism is inhumanity writ large owing to its multifaceted ravages on the colonized subject. The violence that is attendant upon the nefarious enterprise of subjugating a people is multifarious. Colonized folks are made to feel subservient and somewhat amenable to colonial narrative through an elaborate process of brainwashing. Arguably, the novel is also a testament to the cost-effectiveness of combatting evil without inflicting harm. The foregrounding of characters who successfully put up sympathetic pushback on race-based oppression is doubtless a measure of the author's misgivings about resorting to violence as a bulwark against injustice.

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2. Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss. Volume I Attachment* [1969]. New York: Basic Books, 1982. Print.

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3. Césaire, Aimé. *Discourse on Colonialism* [1955]. Trans. John Pinkham. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000. Print. ¹ 'Thingification' is a brainchild of Aimé Césaire, the late Martinique-born thinker famous for his steadfast anticolonial stance. In his seminal work, *Discourse on Colonialism* one of the most brilliant intellectuals of African descent in the twentieth-century offers an in-depth analysis of the ins and outs of the colonial system.

He first and foremost takes pains to debunk the idea that colonialism, unlike what its proponents peddle, is “*neither evangelization, nor a philanthropic enterprise, nor a desire to push back the frontiers of ignorance, disease, and tyranny, nor a project undertaken for the greater glory of God, nor an attempt to extend the rule*” (p.32). In his estimation, the so-called civilizing mission is but a smokescreen the purpose of which is to conceal the real driver of that harrowing race-based ideology- economic exploitation and racism. He equates colonization with ‘thingification’ owing to a lack of ‘*human contact*’ between colonizer and colonized. Instead, there only exist “*relations of domination and submission which turn the colonizing man into a classroom monitor, an army sergeant, a prison guard, a slave driver, and the indigenous man into an instrument of production.*” (p.42).

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5. Fanon, Frantz. *The Wretched of the Earth* [1961]. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2004. Print. ²This is Frantz Fanon’s brainchild. In what qualifies by several accounts as a primer about colonization, he looks on the colonial world as split into two groups along racial lines: White and Black people. Owing to their hegemonic clout, whites embody good whereas Black people are cast as evil. In Fanon’s estimation, this nefarious typology means that, in a colonial context, the colonized subject is on the receiving of dehumanization of the blackest dye. Shorn of his true identity in addition to being robbed of his land as well as his dignity, the colonized passes off as a nonentity to the colonist: “*The colonial world is a Manichean world. The colonist is not content with physically limiting the space of the colonized, i.e., with the help of his agents of law and order.*” He goes on to write: “*As if to illustrate the totalitarian nature of colonial exploitation, the colonist turns the colonized into a kind of quintessence of evil.*”P.6.

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10. Malenfant, Hannah. "American Sign Language: Culture, Community, and Identity".
11. Marx, Carl & Engels, Frederick. *The Communist Manifesto* [1848]. Trans. Samuel Moore in cooperation with F. Engels. Print. ³ From a Marxist standpoint, the term 'bourgeoisie' applies to « *the class of modern capitalists, owners of the means of social production and employers of wage-labour* » whereas 'proletariat' refers to "*the class of modern wage-labourers who, having no means of production of their own, are reduced to selling their labour-power in order to live.*" It is Marx's contention that the arrangement of society into these two antagonistically hostile forces is what the history of existing society boils down to. The climax of the binary class struggles, in Marx's estimation, is "*a revolutionary reconstitution of society at large, or the common ruin of the contending forces.*"
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16. Schopenhauer, Arthur. *The Basis of Morality* [1840]. Trans. Arthur Brodrck Bullock. London: Swan Sonnenchein & Co, 1903. Print. ⁴Arthur Schopenhauer is a nineteenth-century German thinker who considers justice and loving-kindness as "*cardinal virtues*" in that "*from them all others not only in fact not only in fact proceed, but also may be theoretically derived.*" Compassion, which the "*primary ethical phenomenon*" is the basis of morality. He is at pains to emphasize in *The Basis of Morality* the significance of compassion as one of the three springs from which human conduct derives: Egoism (the self's desire for his/her own well-being), malice (the desire for the woe of the others, which may develop to the utmost cruelty) and compassion (the desire of the weal of others). Interestingly, in Schopenhauer's estimation, there is a dual degree to the spring of compassion: the avoidance of inflicting pain to another and the moral imperative of helping a fellow brother on the rack. I do not deserve the adjective "human" if I do wrong to another being or wittingly refuse to help him in his hour of need. PP.176-7.
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