

## **Zimbabwean Children's Literature and the Challenge of Bullying in Schools: Kudakwashe Muzira's *Farai and the School Gangsters***

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### **Abstract**

*Bullying in schools is a universal phenomenon. It takes many forms, which are both physical and psychological. In many schools in different parts of the world, bullies have tormented their victims and have become a huge menace to school systems, and indeed to the health of a society, considering how the effects of bullying extend beyond the classroom. There are many factors associated with bullying, and to better appreciate some of these, this paper utilises Farai and the School Gangsters (Muzira, 2015) to examine the extent to which children's literature provides an opportunity for opening discussions around bullying in schools, its (possible) causes, and to offer avenues for lasting and sustainable solutions. Part of the challenge lies in broaching the issue thus, the paper considers whether (and how) the issue of bullying is tabled for discussion and how different stakeholders at school (students, teachers, administrators, support staff, and parents) contribute towards resolving this major impediment to the health and well-being of victims. By engaging the theory of moral disengagement by Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli (1996), the paper thus analyses how utilising children's literature can offer a holistic, engaging and creative way of addressing bullying. Of importance, therefore, is how textual analysis affords an entry point for effective and sustainable interventions to address bullying in schools. Further, since boys tend to dominate the category of the bullies, an effort will be made to reflect on new models of masculinity that emerge from engaging with some of the creative works.*

**Key words:** Bullying, Zimbabwean children's literature, moral disengagement, gangsters

### **Introduction**

Bullying in schools is an all-pervasive phenomenon. It is hoped that this study will provide a novel and strategic exposition of this challenge and thereafter inform critical interventions that will contribute towards mitigating the occurrence and impact of bullying in schools. The study appropriates children's literature to mobilise communities to think and act together to address the challenge of bullying. This would be a major contribution towards shaping healthier African futures. The envisaged mode of engagement also pushes the children into this debate as well as sensitise them to bullying and its ills. The question that this study responds to is: How can children's literature be utilised to address bullying in Zimbabwean primary schools?

There are many and varied definitions of bullying (Brown, Riley, Butchart & Kann 2008; Kudenga, 2017; Olweus & Limber, 2010), and within this maze, the paper is grounded on and informed by this illuminating perspective:

Bullying is any kind of ongoing physical or verbal mistreatment where there is unequal power between two or more people – such as bigger children picking on smaller ones or bullying a child who is thought to be different. It occurs when a child purposely and repeatedly holds power over another with the intent of hurting another (Huston & Bailey, 2008, p. 1).

In addition to the power dynamics identified above which are at the centre of bullying, there are also diverse forms which the victim must endure. These include suffering physical assaults and psychological terror. Fleming and Jacobsen (2009, p. 73) emphasise this when they state that: “Bullying is the intentional peer-victimization, either physical or psychological, that can involve teasing, spreading rumours, deliberate exclusion from group activities and physical violence such as hitting and kicking....” The adverse effects of bullying are usually immediate and have both short-term and long-term consequences on the victims (Juvenen & Graham, 2014).

This study examines the extent to which children’s literature provides an opportunity for opening discussions around bullying and, thereafter, offering avenues for sustainable solutions. Creative works in children’s literature, particularly *Farai and the School Gangsters* (Muzira, 2015), can be used to open honest and liberating dialogues on bullying in schools. This will contribute towards securing young people’s futures and deepen the foundation for cultures of peace within communities.

### **Statement of the problem**

Bullying is a widespread and worrying phenomenon in Zimbabwean schools. While there is an abundance of literature on bullying in Zimbabwe, in Africa and globally to help us understand this social cancer in schools, what is absent are creative approaches to discussing and managing bullying. Of specific importance is whether (and how) the issue of bullying is tabled for discussion and how different stakeholders at school (students, teachers, administrators, support staff, parents) contribute towards resolving this major impediment to the health and well-being of victims of bullying. This study analyses how utilising children’s literature can offer a holistic, engaging, and creative way of addressing bullying.

### **Literature review**

Bullying is not a new phenomenon the world over, and it has been recorded much among learners. In this section, we, therefore, focus our attention on outlining and discussing the various forms through which bullying manifests in schools. Within a school environment, Zindi (1994) outlines that there are “various forms of bullying such as name-calling, kicking, intimidation, confinement, being asked to do older pupil’s homework,” and this assertion resonates with Suckling and Temple (2001, p. 69) who state that

“bullying is a form of aggressive behaviour which is usually hurtful and deliberate. It is often persistent, sometimes continuing for weeks, months or even years and it is difficult for those being bullied to defend themselves.” Normally, the newcomers to a school are bound to be targeted and bullied. In all these scenarios, bullying is clearly a form of violence that emerges even from the lower grades and needs to be handled earlier. If allowed to continue, bullying will recur in the future and affect the victims and the villains. This is the reason why bullying is a serious matter that must be addressed even at primary school level.

There is a growing recognition that bullying is a major challenge to the health and well-being of children and young adults. The UNESCO report (2017) examined the scope, extent, and impact of school violence and bullying. It provides examples of initiatives aimed at addressing bullying in schools, including the programmes in Finland, Norway, Croatia and Ghana. The report identifies 6 priority areas, namely: 1. Strengthen leadership, 2. Promote awareness of school violence and bullying, 3. Establish partnerships and engage children and young people, 4. Build capacity of education staff and learners, 5. Establish systems for reporting and, 6. Improve data and evidence (UNESCO, 2017, p. 51-53).

There is substantial material on the extent of bullying in Zimbabwe. Zindi (1994) provided one of the earliest studies on bullying in boarding schools in Zimbabwe. Studies by, among others, Musariwa (2017), Kudenga (2017), Magwa and Ndlovu (2016), Ncube, Muranda, Tshabalala, & Mapolisa (2015) have all drawn attention to the extent of bullying in Zimbabwean schools, both primary and secondary. This stresses how bullying is a challenge that needs to be understood, thus this research. In addition, this research goes further to explore how to dialogue on the issue and how to map the future in a creative manner by looking at the use of the novel as source material.

Cyber bullying has emerged as a new form of harassment. Chiwapu (2015) has analysed the prevalence of cyber bullying in Zimbabwe. This is a particularly challenging type of bullying as it extends into the school holidays and beyond. Social media has given bullies another platform where they can induce fear in their victims from afar. Drawing from these new sources of bullying and using new data sources, creative writing in particular, this study further explores the extent to which children’s literature can be exploited to address bullying in schools.

Several studies have explored the interface between bullying and gender. Across the different contexts, there are more adolescent boys than girls who are bullies (Rosen & Nofziger, 2019; Rodkin & Berger, 2008). In addition, whereas boys are mainly bullied by boys, girls tend to be bullied by both boys and girls. A study on bullying in Nigeria (Adekeye, Alao, Chenube, Adeusi, Agoha, Igbokwe, & Ezinne, 2016) noted that more boys than girls are bullies in school settings. Our study is sensitive to this gender

differential, and as a form of response to such worrying statistics, utilises children's literature to appreciate new models of youth masculinity which are not expressed through negatives such as bullying.

There is scholarly unanimity that bullying has serious effects on the victim as well as the perpetrator. Wet (2008) observes that bullying influences the victim's physical, emotional, social, and educational well-being. Gomba and Tsai (2012) analyse teachers' views on bullying and its effects. Our study establishes the extent to which the various stakeholders are aware of the effects of bullying in Zimbabwean primary schools and, critically suggests the steps that can be taken to mitigate its impact going forward. In a related study, Latorre-Coscolluela, Sierra-Sánchez, Rodríguez-Martínez, & Agualeles-Alonso (2021) demonstrate how teachers affirm the need for maximum monitoring of learners and offering help to both the perpetrators and victims. Hence, the need to train teachers so that they have the skills to deal with bullying and violence in schools.

Bullying in this study is considered from a wide viewpoint of how it is treated within African children's literature. This literature is centred on diverse artistic products that seek to provide entertainment, knowledge and skills to African children and young adults (Chitando, 2009). The literature has been produced to deepen children's and young adults' (those within the 4 to 18 age groups) understanding of fundamental issues in society and their place within it and in the future. These issues include identity, HIV and AIDS, disability, the rights of girls, and protecting the environment (Chitando & Madongonda, 2012). In this study, we focus principally on one such text on children's literature whose focus is on addressing bullying in schools. This work of literature offers a unique opportunity for opening conversations on bullying, as well as generating possible and sustainable solutions to the challenge of bullying.

## **Theoretical framework**

Informed by the theory of moral disengagement (Bandura *et al*, 1996), this article examines the dynamics that relate to bullying. According to Bandura (1999), moral disengagement is the process of assuring oneself that there are certain circumstances where ethical standards do not apply. Ordinarily, in moral discourse, individuals embrace values of right and wrong that work as regulators and restraints for conduct. They behave and operate in ways that satisfy and give them a sense of being worthy persons. Therefore, self-regulation plays an important role in keeping behaviour consistent with moral standards and controlling callous deportment. To avoid undesirable outcomes, people often desist from involvement in forms of behaviour that are detrimental to their moral standards. However, in instances where individuals are drawn to behave immorally, they try to find ways to vindicate their decisions by separating

self-regulation from the unethical behaviour (Fiske, 2004). During this process, the individuals deliberately re-configure harmful practice as being ethically tolerable.

Bandura *et al* (1996) assert that moral disengagement functions in the perpetration of inhumanities through moral justification, understated tagging, beneficial evaluation, shifting responsibility, turning a blind eye to, or distorting harmful effects, and brutalising the victim. In this article, we argue that moral disengagement enables bullying to take place, as represented by Muzira's literary work under study. In many ways, moral disengagement almost acts to justify bullying by raising all sorts of flimsy reasons to try and explain why it occurs in the first place and why perpetrators act the way they do. In an environment where bullying is allowed to fester, any efforts to promote cultures of peace, as advocated by Sustainable Development Goals, Number 4 (Quality education), and Number 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) become ineffectual. This study, thus, interrogates how children's literature can be deployed as a strategy to build healthy and peaceful communities and enable the sustainable development and growth of communities.

We also consider Bakhtin's (1981) notion of polyphony where he speaks of the many voices that exist in a text. This multi-voice to bullying allows us to interrogate the various manifestations of bullying and how the vice is also perpetuated by those who are supposed to protect the victims. This concept of polyphony will offer a narratological entry point and enquiry of the text in a way that not only exposes bullying but also proffers solutions to it. Bakhtin (1981, p. 3) writes that, "we consider Dostoevsky one of the greatest innovators in the realm of artistic form. He created, in our opinion, a completely new type of artistic thinking which we have provisionally called polyphonic". Polyphony allows various voices to an issue to be placed under the scalpel and this allows us to reflect on these voices that we encounter in the literary text and to appreciate how each voice, in its own unique manner, contributes to our reading and understanding of bullying as an exercise that requires urgent and consistent action.

## Methodology

Employing literary analysis as its principal tool of exploration, the study examines how Muzira's (2015) *Farai and the School Gangsters* deals with the theme of bullying in primary schools. Since the study is qualitative, a textual analysis of *Farai and the School Gangsters* is deployed to validate the functional disposition of children's literature in not merely highlighting but mitigating bullying in schools.



## **Farai and the School Gangsters: An Abridgment of the Story**

Muzira's *Farai and the School Gangsters* (2015) is a story about bullying at Fundo Primary School. Farai Mutandwa is the protagonist. Farai's family leads a luxurious life in Harare. However, the fictionalised Zimbabwean economy deteriorates. Farai's family, caught in the throes of the worsening economic environment, ultimately relocates to their Murewa rural home. Farai and his sister Rudo are transferred, first from a private school to a public school in Harare, and finally to Fundo Primary School in rural Murewa. It is at Fundo Primary School that Farai witnesses unconcealed bullying. His new school has a culture of violence that seems to be sanctioned.

When he gets to his Grade Seven class at Fundo Primary School, he chooses to sit next to a sad-eyed girl (Rachel), and not any of the big boys with unfriendly eyes. Right in front of him is a girl with long braids (Nyasha) who mainly pays attention to her looks, and not to the teacher.

When the teacher, Mrs Gondo goes out to answer her cellphone, Farai talks to Rachel. The conversation does not last as Nyasha warns Farai against talking to Rachel, lest he becomes an outcast within the class. When Farai seeks to understand more about it, Rachel just says it is a long story and advises him not to talk to her if he wants to stay happy at the school.

At break time, Farai asks his cousin Tendai why he would be an outcast if he talked to Rachel. Tendai's responses are based on rumours. Farai also learns from Tendai that all the boys at Fundo Primary School are divided into two camps/gangs; The Hawks, led by Big Sam the Godfather, and The Cobras, led by King Kudzi the Cool Ruler (Nyasha's brother). Farai would rather not join either of the camps. Apparently though, it would not be possible for any boy in the school to choose to be neutral because both camps would not tolerate that.

Farai befriends Nyasha, who also influences him to join The Cobras. Before Farai even makes up his mind whether to join any of the gangs or not, he is bullied by the boys from the two camps as a way of showing him what happens to those who choose to be neutral at Fundo Primary School. Farai is hopeful that his situation would be redeemed if he reports the bullies to the School Head. However, Tendai discourages him from doing that, arguing that it would worsen his situation. Farai hates gangs and fighting but is falling in love with Nyasha and wants to please her.

Trouble begins when Giant Joe breaks Rudo's pencil to demonstrate what happens to neutrals and their families at Fundo School. Farai is enraged by what has happened to his sister. In a bid to protect Rudo from the bullies, he pounces on Giant Joe and punches him. Unfortunately, for Farai this means that he has dared Giant Joe to a fistfight at the Green Grass. The venue, date and time for the fight between Farai

and Giant Joe are set. Farai trains for the match and gets a lot of encouragement from Nyasha, who even cooks up stories to infuriate Farai and spur him to fight Giant Joe.

Farai wins the fight through a technical knockout. Because of this victory over Giant Joe, Farai becomes the new champion of the Green Grass. However, he does not want to continue with these fights. He only fought Giant Joe because he had harassed his sister. He does not want to belong to any of the two gangs. Nonetheless, Nyasha continues to push him to defend the new title of being the Champion of the Green Grass.

### **Manifestations of bullying in Muzira's *Farai and the School Gangsters* (2015)**

Bullying in the literary text begins right in Harare when Farai goes to buy economy beef, that came in the form of bones and is mocked by Thabani. The conversation continues with Farai warning Thabani that, "He who mocks others will not die with a full set of teeth", (Muzira, 2015, p. 7). Farai and Thabani depict bullying in a subtle way. Probably, the author uses this to prepare the reader for the gross bullying that takes place when Farai goes to his rural home.

Tendai, Farai's cousin, also fuels bullying for his personal benefit. He wants to be recognised through Farai's fame. This explains why he says to Farai, "... spread the rumour that I am your trainer. It will make me popular and will help me land a pretty girl" (Muzira 2015, p. 57), confirming that there are "multiple forms of bullying such as name calling, hitting or threatening others and spreading false rumours", (Afroz & Husain, 2015, p. 43). Furthermore, it shows how bullying is a vicious cycle, fuelled by those who benefit from it, without being victims themselves. Tendai seems not to see the violence in bullying if it happens to someone else and better still, if it earns him a girl.

According to UNESCO (2017), bullying affects the health of the learners just as it also infringes on their rights. The learners will not feel safe when they are bullied and this compromises their physical, emotional and psychological health, and overall, it impacts on their performance at school and in life in general. For example, Farai's night training is exhausting, yet he perseveres so that he could beat Giant Joe. Farai's concentration in class is compromised, "I never paid much attention to the teacher. I was too tired and too worried to concentrate on the lesson. Sleep weighed my eyelids and I tried without success to keep my eyes open, (Muzira, 2015, p. 34). Farai also chooses not to perform with Rachel in the class presentations for fear of victimisation by Nyasha. This shows how bullying affects the general performance of learners as those spaces that ought to be safe and that students consider harmless are trampled upon by those who seek to impose their dominance and superiority.

Girls are also not spared the bullying as depicted through Rachel's misery. Rachel suffers from what Pepler, Craig, Jiang and Connelly (2008, p. 243) refer to as prejudice related bullying where she was bullied because of her big breasts. She falls victim to the naming led by Nyasha's jealousy, and without any shred of evidence, is called a prostitute. The potential that Rachel has suffers under the strain of this bullying she endures and this limits her engagement in class and with others elsewhere. The bullies certainly hold all the cards at the school and have both superiority and power over the other learners. Their position is especially strengthened by their backgrounds of privilege as the two gang leaders are children of powerful people in the community.

The power of the bullies is, according to Menesini and Salmivalli (2016), achieved through their knowledge of their victims' vulnerabilities. Rachel, for instance, was bullied because of what the other learners, led by Nyasha, described as her big breasts which this localised community frowns upon and considers abnormal, or befitting of a woman who is sexually active, or, at worst, a prostitute. Conversely, the bullied can reclaim their power by disarming the bullies. Farai helps Rachel do this to Nyasha. When he tells the class that Nyasha wears fake breasts, Farai helps Rachel to reclaim her power while taking it away from Nyasha who had appropriated it before. What this critically points out is the fact that often-times the bully loses power the moment the victims speak out and expose him or her.

Bradshaw, Waasdorp, O'Brennan, and Gulemetova (2013) assert that teachers play a significant role in preventing bullying, in addition to coming up with intervention strategies. Teachers have to keep on the lookout to be of any help to the bullied and to even nip the behaviour before it gets out of hand. In the text, the English teacher, Mrs Gondo, unfortunately, fails to pick up the "red flags" from what the learners said. She fails to pick up the elements of bullying from her interactions with the learners. For example, Farai admits within Mrs Gondo's earshot, as a cry for help and to make the teacher aware, that, "I had nightmares about him. In my nightmares I was in jail after killing him" (Muzira, 2015, p. 34). Had she picked earlier on what this implied, she could have made a follow up on these conversations.

Farai's parents do not do much to help him deal with bullying at school. Farai's father seems to find nothing wrong with the physical fights at school and seems to actively support the fact that Farai fought for his sister, "Come on, honey, dad said. He did well. He was protecting his little sister" (Muzira, 2015, p. 30). The mother, who seems to be against this behaviour initially, is silenced and ends up not taking up the issue with the relevant school authorities. Farai used violence to solve his problems and to protect his sister. This incident shows a school environment that has normalised violence and bullying and where young people are taught to use the same to solve their problems. Unfortunately, violence breeds violence. School authorities abdicate their responsibilities and the culture of bullying is hardly abated by them,



leaving the children to their own devices; in this case to more violence to abet this bullying. Farai stops his mother from reporting to the headmaster by lying. This demonstrates how victims tend to perpetuate bullying by not coming out for help; in fact, by hiding their ordeals. Instead of telling the truth, they lie and, in the process, the bullying continues. Farai rejects help on three occasions: first, when his mother asks him; second, when Chenge and Munya ask him; and finally, when Rachel asks if she could report to the headmaster. The school and teachers do have a role to play as far as bullying and violence are concerned, Latorre-Coscolluela *et al* (2021).

Farai fears the label of ‘coward’ that usually is planted on those who report to the authorities and he affirms this when he says, “If I go to the headmaster everyone will think I am a coward” (Muzira, p. 31). The quotation depicts how some learners will continue to be victims of violence for fear of being labelled cowards if they report their ordeals. Boulton, Boulton, Down, Sanders, and Craddock, (2017) maintain that reasons for failure to report bullying among students include the fear that peers would disapprove; those who disclose the bullying would feel weakened, and that they would also prefer autonomy. In the same manner, Farai does not disclose to the school authorities when he is bullied. He only becomes a hero at a later stage when he stands out for the truth, with the help of his cousin Tendai, who, ironically, uses violence to break violence, when he takes out a kitchen knife to stop Farai and Giant Joe from fighting. Nonetheless, it is refreshing to note that by the time the novel ends, there are more liberating and positive ways of promoting peaceful societies, for example, through sport.

### **An analysis of the names and their implications on bullying in Muzira’s *Farai and the School Gangsters* (2015)**

In *Farai and the School Gangsters*, (2015) the names of the boys are critical indicators to how bullying pans out and thus cannot be left undiscussed. Ngonyani (2001, p. 126) argues that “names often play a significant role in the narratives and lend a special aesthetic quality to stories”. Some of these telling names in the novel are, King Kudzi, Big Sam, Giant Joe, Tough Thomas, Hard Hamu and finally, Farai earns the name Forceful Farai after beating Giant Joe at the Green Grass. All these names denote violence, stressing in the process how bullying is itself a violent act. The bullies acquire a sense of power through the names they give themselves. These tags represent the violence which defines bullying, together with how the same is celebrated within this school environment and beyond it. Farai is also named City Guy, a name that makes him appear different from others as he was coming from the city. His coming to learn at a rural school is not an elevation though, and being a newcomer, he is bound to be bullied by the gangsters as even his city origins and affiliations do not save him.

On the other hand, we have Munya and Chenge, the boys who train Farai in preparation for his fight with Giant Joe. Their names are quite paradoxical. For example, Munya promotes violence, yet his full name, Munyaradzi, is a Shona name that denotes a comforter and someone who brings peace. Far from ushering peace, Munya fuels violence. Chenge's name, derived from Shona, commonly known as Chengetai in full, suggests a keeper, but ironically, he achieves this by training Farai in violent conduct. In his own way though, he does keep Farai safe by training him, but his actions do not put a stop to bullying and violence. Rather, Munya and Chenge give Farai confidence to continue fighting and unwittingly maybe, contribute to the unending cycle of violence within which bullying thrives.

The Green Grass is a critical and ironic name in the novel, considering how green is supposed to be a life-giving colour, and the green grass should have been a place of peace where conflicts are resolved in an amicable manner. Green symbolises life but in the context of the school, it is a place of blood where the bullies use vulnerable boys for their personal, selfish benefits, even earning money through placing bets on the fights they impose on others.

The name of the school also speaks of the kind of society that the writer is advocating. Fundo Primary school is derived from *fundo*, a Shona word that means education. Farai becomes the voice of the writer as he declares that he had come to school to learn and not to fight. The writer is portrayed as calling for a school environment that is conducive to learning; the school should be a haven for all children despite their backgrounds. Generally, schools have the right people and the right spaces for bullying to be tackled, just as they have fertile ground for it to thrive, if not curbed properly. Latorre-Coscolluela *et al* (2021) become significant here as they advocate training of teachers so that they can effectively deal with bullying issues.

### **Hope at the end of the tunnel? Lessons from Muzira's *Farai and the School Gangsters* (2015)**

In this section we discuss the ending of the story and demonstrate how the story ends on an optimistic note. We are told that on the Sunday of the week of the rematch between Giant Joe and Farai, Tendai and Farai decide to go for a walk, exploring the surrounding hills and bushes. Unknown to them, Nyasha, King Kudzi, Big Sam, the school Janitor, Mr Pasi, and Mr Kwari, the Grade Six teacher are having one of their regular meetings in the same bush, where they bet on the fighters from the two gangs (Muzira, 2015, p. 61). The encounter reveals that adults in positions of authority, who are expected to have the responsibility to contain these vices at Fundo School, are also involved in the gangsters' activities. This

realisation forces Farai to dissociate himself from Nyasha, King Kudzi and the fights at the Green Grass. The responsible authorities are complicit, leaving Farai to handle the issue his way. Nonetheless, if the responsible offices fuel violence, the victims will resort to other means of protecting themselves, that could also be violent.

Markedly, Farai asks Tendai to accompany him to Rachel's home for the arts performance rehearsals that they had been tasked to do by their class teacher. On the day of the class presentations, Farai and Rachel's stage performance is rated one of the best. Apart from the passionate enactment, the message has hopeful, reconciliatory and progressive undertones, "Now that we are free, ... Let's develop our country together as one," (Muzira, 2015, pp. 76-77).

The novel ends on a happy note, with Farai having been made the school Cricket Captain. Hard Hamu and Giant Joe (former gangsters) join cricket, to be trained by Farai. Rachel is a competent cricket player who makes Farai's training sessions a lot easier, and encourages Hard Hamu, Giant Joe and the others to do better in cricket. The novel concludes with Farai's father being recalled to work by the company that had retrenched him. Farai chooses to remain in Murewa instead of going back to Harare, to complete Grade Seven at Fundo Primary School. This demonstrates that Fundo Primary School was restored to be a good learning environment.

### **Critical reflections on the literary text**

The text highlights critical issues that allow bullying to be discussed and thereafter tackled. The primary schools form the foundation of future societies and if the children are damaged at this level, violence will be rife, and 'tomorrow would be lost'. Communities are not built on violence, but on peace. The fact that both bullying and its evils, as well as spaces for its end are found within the school, is telling of the author's vision that solutions to bullying are contained within localised spaces. He insists that solutions are not far from the source of the challenges. What is also significant from the text is the fact that bullying affects both the bullies and those who are bullied. We further note how onlookers are also affected as they are forced to witness violent acts that will also affect them psychologically.

In this study, we discussed critical issues that are fictionalised in the literary text. These include the following:

- Social background and physical appearance should not be used to discriminate against learners.
- Participation of school authorities in acts of bullying should be condemned.

- Perpetrators should be punished to curb bullying. Rehabilitation of both the perpetrator and the victim should be prioritised. In the text, sport is used for rehabilitation and reintegration.
- Teachers, school authorities, parents and guardians play a critical role in protecting and monitoring learners. For example, Mrs Gondo should have noticed the sadness that Rachel carried on her face in the same way that Farai noticed it. Even the School Head only appears towards the end of the story, after many young souls have been violated.
- There is need for all stakeholders to have a hands-on, proactive approach to engaging with learners so that the red flags are picked and handled properly.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined Muzira's *Farai and the School Gangsters* (2015) and how it represents the challenging phenomenon of bullying. The focus was to identify the various ways that bullying manifests in the text as a way of attempting to suggest solutions to related acts of bullying in some schools in Zimbabwe. The analysis revealed how in some instances those who are expected to protect the children in the schools are also perpetrators as they fuel bullying for their own benefits, as is witnessed through the bets that were placed by the janitor as well as the Grade Six teacher.

Overall, courage is required on the part of the victims to speak out and seek help from the right people. Children's literature, therefore, can be used as a resource to address bullying in schools and to cultivate cultures of peace among adolescents.

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