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## Wounds of Memory and the Narrative of Healing in Veronique Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana* and Helon Habila's *The Chibok Girls*

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### Abstract

This paper offers another critical response to the one hundred days massacre in Rwanda in 1994 also known as Rwanda genocide and the kidnapping of Chibok school girls in Nigeria, represented in Veronique Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana* and Helon Habila's *The Chibok Girls* respectively. The paper is literary research and thus, relies on close reading of the primary texts for analysis of some extrapolations, using trauma theory as theoretical framework. Findings in this paper reveal that, although the fratricidal massacre in Rwanda and the mindless kidnapping of innocent school girls in Nigeria may have come and gone, the experiences remain as fresh as ever, and has left scathing wounds in the memory of the survivors and their loved ones. The situation, expectedly, has subjected the victims to acute trauma that defines their existence. However, the paper notes that some victims defy the speech fright that accompanies trauma and openly narrate their experiences, as a way of renegotiating, healing and transcending their traumatic experiences. The paper concludes that an exploration of language could be therapeutic in times of trauma.

**Keywords:** Memory, Wounds, Rwanda Genocide, Chibok Girls, Trauma

### Introduction

Ever since the wind of independence blew across Africa some decades ago, the continent has perpetually and, in what looks like a curse, consistently been embroiled in cataclysmic wars and other armed conflicts, and has, unfortunately, in the words of Akpan (2021), "become an agonising index of deformities that characterise the socio-political space of the postcolonial African nation states" (28). This is not to infer that wars and conflicts are peculiarities or stereotypical of African nations, as the global media space is daily and constantly awash with war-related fatalities, as well as, strained diplomatic relationships among nations, communities and even families. Thus, it could conveniently be stated that war is a universal reality, as there may be, in practical terms, no human society that has never tasted its bitter pills. However, war seems to have tightened its grip on African nations, and holds a very traumatising mirror up to the deformities of the postcolonial nation's conception and birth. Suffice it to say that the continent has achieved notoriety for civil strife, conflict and wars. Adedeji (1999) reveals that "between the 1960s and the 1990s, there were about 80 violent changes of governments in 48 sub-Saharan African countries. This continued to the dawn of the millennium, which saw as many as 18 countries facing armed rebellion, with 11 facing severe political crises" (5). With this, it could be inferred that very few countries within the bounds of the continent enjoy, though very fragile, some levels of social and political stability.

One of the most horrific and cataclysmic wars that has ever been fought in the continent of Africa is the Rwanda civil war of 1994 popularly known as Rwanda genocide. The war broke out in 1994 following a long strained history of internecine conflict between the majority Hutu population and the minority Tutsi, orchestrated largely by Hutu extremists against Tutsis and some Hutu moderates. The massacre coincided with the global football event held in the United State of America (FIFA World Cup). It also happened at the time when the world was looking forward to the outcome of the maiden election in the Post-Apartheid South Africa. Thus, as the war raged into its escalation, those two significant events, indisputably, had taken the centre stage of the global media space. And so, despite the maniacal and diabolical dimension of this massacre, and its attendant horrific footages, it received little or no widespread media attention and was commonly depicted and dismissed, especially by the Western media viewers, as merely another incident of unceasing inter-ethnic or tribal violence that define the post-independence African nation states.

The attendant consequence was that, those who bothered to report were impersonal in their reportage and failed to condemn in strong terms or show indignation for the war. Moeller (1999) reveals that “When media coverage of the events later expanded, those images of the genocide which circulated throughout various news outlets also failed to generate large-scale indignation or to facilitate identification with the Rwandan plight within the international community (283). Also, the global power blocs knew that massacre was going on in Rwanda, but they were very tardy to react and even to admit that what was taking place was genocide. It was noted that a moderate military intervention force by the UN peace keeping force would have halted the carnage from the onset, if there was a little effort. At the end, it was France that intervened through Operation *Tarquoise*. The France soldiers actually saved lives, but also created a loophole within their safe humanitarian zone, which saw greater number of the murderers escaped. Very unfortunately, African writers and intellectuals were also culpable of the lethargic and impersonal attitude with which the Western world estimated the war, as they failed to show solidarity as witnesses to the horrors of the genocide. This informs Diop's (2024) assertion that: “Later recognizing their own failure to acknowledge the genocide, some African artists and intellectuals, including Diop, express shame and guilt at their previous inability to bear witness to the Rwandan victims and survivors (74). Djedanoum (2024) also confesses that, “When I went to Rwanda, I realized to the full how much I had failed as a human being. It was necessary to show to Rwandans our solidarity as Africans and in our own way, through literature, fight against forgetting” (Quoted in Tadjó: “Genocide: The Changing...,” 382). It was this new consciousness and the quest to deconstruct the distortions that characterised the Western mainstream media viewers and the need to show solidarity to the people of Rwanda that later preoccupied the contents of some African writings at that period.

According to Hitchcott (2015) “The desire to combat this indifference and to challenge Western media distortions of the war in Rwanda became major factors leading to the creation of the commemorative literary project ‘Rwanda: Écrire par devoir de mémoire’ (Quoted in Cavour, 2). The above project was a literary mission aimed at critically interfacing with both the victims and perpetrators of the genocide for possible healing and reconciliation. Hitchcott (2015) further reveals that:

The project involved sending ten African authors of various nationalities to Rwanda for a two-month residency in 1998. Touring Rwanda's genocide memorial sites and holding difficult conversations with survivors and perpetrators alike, these authors were tasked with writing about the 1994 genocide from multiple African, non-western points of view” (“A Global African... 153).

Thus, Tadjó's book becomes one of the non-Western literary responses to the genocide that strangled the very soul of Rwanda and Africa.

In 2014, twenty years after the Rwanda genocide, the global media space was routed by the kidnap of 276 girls from a school in Chibok, a community in Borno State, North Eastern part of Nigeria by a faceless and brutal Jihadist group known as ‘Boko Haram. According to Ntamu et al (2013)

The word boko haram is gotten from Arabic words to mean...people committed to the propagation of the prophet's Teachings and Jihad better known by its Hausa name Boko Haram. Boko Haram is a Selifist Jihadist terrorist organisation based in the north-eastern part of Nigeria. It is an Islamic movement which strongly opposes man-made laws...the organisation is a Muslim sect that seeks to abolish the secular system of government and establish a sharia system in the country (366).

The group considers its activities as an assignment from Allah and a duty to all Islamic faithfuls which is to create a state and society based on Islamic laws. They abhor Westernisation in its entirety and, unlike some religious fundamentalist groups, resort to coercion, killings and kidnappings as a means to achieving their aims. However, Okpiliya and Akpan (2020) contend that:

Going by the Islamic scriptures, the holy Quran clearly states that killing is a great sin, except on grounds of punishing a murderer, which requires a rigorous process in an Islamic court. The Quran equates killing one human being as killing the entire humanity. The ‘holy’ book puts it thus: “Whoever kills a soul, without (its being guilty of) manslaughter or corruption on earth, is as though he had killed all mankind, and whoever saves a life is as though he had saved all humanity (Quran 5:32).

Based on the above premises, it becomes an inexplicable contradiction when Boko Haram members harp on killing as a command from Allah. It is also against this backdrop that Bradley and Hamda (2016) reveal “a disturbing “aesthetic-political dogmatism” where religion is concerned: Islamism, in particular, is frequently and

reductively depicted as the embodiment of a retrogressive authoritarianism, fanaticism, and violence" (448). Thus, for more than two decades now, Nigerians, especially those residing in the Northern region, have continually been plunged into untold devastation and trauma, following unrestrained terror and wantonness orchestrated by members of Boko Haram sect.

In the recent years, banditry, believed to be an offshoot of this deadly group, has emerged and has equally continued to yoke the country in a conflagration of terror. Just like Boko Haram group, there is no discernible ideological persuasion underpinning banditry beyond theft, extortion, and wanton violence. Bandits are primarily motivated by the alluring prospects of wealth in a region blighted by poverty and poor socioeconomic outcomes. And so they effectively colonise the farming areas and sometimes collaborates with insurgent groups to undertake attacks, especially large scale kidnappings of innocent indigenes and school children in their focal communities. They take ransom from their victims to fund operations and acquire sophisticated armory. Thus, with the existence of both environmental and operational convergence between bandits and boko haram, Nigeria seems to pose an ugly picture of spectacles of a bloodletting footage with grave repercussions on the socio-political and economic life of the country. This accounts for why the paper maintains that Boko Haram and other insurgencies are part of postmodern fragmentation with its tributes of violations which contradict the very ethos of what religion represents

It is against the backdrop of the above that this paper analyses the trajectories of the above issues imagined in Helon Habila's *The Chibok Girl*, and adduce to the traumatising experiences of terror victims in the text. Like Tadjó, Habila believes that allowing the victims, as well as, the perpetrators to recount their experiences holds the potential of alleviating their pains. According to Sanka et al. (2020) "Habila's style of storytelling, allowing the victims to tell their own story in what resonates a dialogue between the characters and the reader is amazing. This technique allows the characters talk to the reader, involving the reader and seeing the reader as a participant in their plight" (16). Bakhtin (1986) had also earlier posited that "Everything which is said and expressed is then located outside the "soul" of the speaker and, thus, ceases to only belong to him because "the author (speaker) has his own inalienable right to the word, but the listener also has his rights" (46). The technique does not only establish the immediacy of the situation, it prepares the reader to identify with the relatives of these victims, especially on the psychological weight of assuming one's beloved is gone forever.

It is pertinent to state at this point that, although Nigeria is battling the deafening effect of terrorism, like war, it is a global decimal, one that spreads its grim net of woes across cities, towns and countries. This is aptly captured in the introductory pages of Razaq Gbolahan's *The Other Names of Grief*:

The terrain is grim, and it's all ours. From Gwoza to Kaduna, Damascus to Tripoli, and all other troubled tributaries, screams of pain have found their ways into the stream that feeds our souls. How do we, today, go through the day without contact with some news item that breaks the spirit? (vii).

Thus, this paper also examines the gripping crisis in the Nigerian sphere of global terrorism as captured in Habila's text.

### **Fictionalising Trauma and the Reader Response**

Fictionalising trauma and the reader response is one of the thrusts of this paper. The concept is derived from one major assumption in Dominick LaCapra's book: *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, that writing trauma is different from writing about trauma. LaCapra (2021) in this text describes 'writing about trauma simply as a practice of "historiography related to the project of reconstructing the past as objectively as possible...while writing trauma entails "processes of coming to terms with traumatic 'experiences,' limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combinations and hybridized forms" (Quoted in Cavour, 6). This practice imbues trauma victims with voices and initiate participatory relationship with the voices.

One of the results of writing trauma is what LaCapra describes as 'Empathic Unsettling' in the reader and this involves "attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others" (Quoted in Cavour, 7), and further define it as "a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place" (In Cavour, 7). Here, LaCapra seems to posit that writing trauma places the reader in the same pedestal with a traumatised character and shares the burden of the traumatic experiences almost equally.

Both Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana* and Habila's *The Chibok Girls* are typical examples of writing trauma in relating the experiences of the genocide in Rwanda and the kidnap of Chibok School girls in Nigeria. Both texts evolved as a product of literary mission conceived to provide a platform for both the victims and perpetrators of

those sad events in the two African countries. Through this, the survivors are able to bare their minds on the events, thereby remaking themselves and reestablishing relationship with the world.

There is no denying the fact that the physical and psychological scars left by the brutality of the genocide and the brutish uprooting of innocent girls into captivity continue to bruise the survivors and their relatives long after the incident. This confirms a common position that traumatic events, especially the ones inflicted by others, most often shatter, dismember and disintegrate oneself in relation to the others and disconnecting the past, present and future. It destroys the belief that one can be oneself in relation to others. Brison (1999) argues that

contrary to the involuntary and intrusive nature of traumatic memories, narrative memory can be empowering in the sense that it is a voluntary act, chosen and not inflicted or endured. These narrations, or "speech acts of memory" can "defuse" traumatic memory, "giving shape and a temporal order to the events recalled, establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self" (40).

It is against this reason that Culbertson (1999) avers that: "To return fully to the self as socially defined, to establish a relationship again with the world, the survivor must tell what happened. This is the function of narrative. The task then is to render body memories tellable, which means to order and arrange them in the form of a story" (179). Thus, this paper lends itself with Brison above, that memories play a crucial role in shaping an individual's experiences and perception and often form the core of literary works, enabling authors to depict the complex nature of human emotions and the lasting impact of past events. This is most often observed when authors probe deeper and delve into the depths of their character's memories and traumas to provide a greater insight into why they behave the way they do. This informs why Tadjó and Habila opted to fictionalise the Rwanda genocide and the kidnap of the Chibok school girls. This allows the reader gain a deeper understanding of the intricacies of memory, as well as, how trauma shapes one's identity and hold up the possibility of healing and reconciliation in the face of adversity.

It is believed that unlike photographic and journalistic accounts, fiction establishes a kind of pact with the reader and opens up a space for empathy. According to Tadjó (2013), "Fictional accounts of the genocide, "give back to History its human dimension so that the reader can identify with the characters" (382). Diop (2004) corroborates this in interview with Tadjó when he avers that "literature certainly cannot do everything, but we cannot ignore it... It has managed to make the deaths in Rwanda more real" ("Interview with Boubacar" 429). Nwabueze (2005) is also of the opinion that "literature constitutes the best and brightest expressions of all humanity. It helps to solve real problems: the problem of existence, the problems of being human" (5). Thus, through fictional representation of the Rwanda genocide and the kidnap of the school girls, the authors, to a greater extent establish a cordial relationship with the reader and possibly open a space for empathy and identification. The authors, through writing trauma, also hold the potential of gaining a deeper understanding of the themes being employed in the texts. This is because traumatic experiences more frequently find expression only by appealing to metaphor or to the language of transcendence

### **Memory, Trauma and the Narrative of Healing in Tadjó's *The Shadow of Imana* and Habila's *The Chibok Girls*.**

The concept of memory discourse is one of the fundamental domains of human knowledge and play significant roles in shaping personal identities and experiences. It is a complex cognitive process that involves the encoding, storage, and retrieval of information, and usually influenced by emotions, attention, and the passage of time. However, Simine (2018) is of the opinion that:

Memory studies have moved on from the idea of remembering as retrieval and recollection of faithfully stored stable information, picturing memory not so much as a fixed product but as a fluid and imaginative process in which the memory is remade every time remembering happens. Operating in a perpetual present, it reveals a past reworked in relation to the current needs, fears, desires and wishes. Memory indicates a relationship to past events that is shaped by, and in turn profoundly impacts, how we think, live in the present (140).

Memory, unlike trauma, has the potentiality of building identity, therapeutic and redemptive power.

It is commonly accepted that the narrative integration of a traumatic experience contributes to the process of recovery. Although such narration may be fragmented and contradictory, expressed through recollection of memories, intrusive flashbacks, hallucinations and re-enactments, it could cause the survivor not only to restore the subversion of the time sequence brought about by trauma, but also to start mastering the return of intrusive memories (Brison, 46). This implies that the verbalisation of the traumatic event has the potential to assist in reintegrating the fractured personalities that were created during the event.

The above position forms one of the major thrusts of *The Shadow of Imana*. Tadjo is emphatic about this when she reveals that the cardinal purpose for embarking on the journey to Rwanda is because she "...had long felt a need to exorcise Rwanda....I did not want Rwanda to remain forever a nightmare, a primal fear" (3). To achieve this purpose, she is guided through popular genocide sites where she witnesses horrific footages and ugly vestiges of wanton killings and destruction of lives. In the course of visiting these sites, she occasionally interfaces with survivors who bare their minds on the genocide. Through this, the author sets herself up on the quest for mourning, exploration and discovery, and in doing this, opens up a vista for therapeutic process. Naya (2009) argues that "Travel narrative have always been about recording sites and experiences. Observation, therefore, is central to travel narrative" (37). The writer also exploit this avenue to witness first hand, one of the worst cases of humanitarian crises and this qualifies the text as a narrative of witnessing.

At the beginning of this novel, it is noticed that normalcy seems to have returned in Rwanda amidst pains and trauma hidden behind the skins of the lucky survivors. This is captured in the description of the seeming calm and tranquility that envelope the post-genocide Rwandan cities. The narrator posits that:

From a distance, the city seems to have forgotten everything, digested everything, swallowed everything. The streets are full of people. The flow of cars is never-ending. ... Everything seems to be going along quite normally. ... In the face of so much tranquility, how can you conceive of the violence that filled these very streets, took these very same meandering paths, invaded this very space. ... The truth is revealed in people's eyes. Words have so little value. You need to get under people's skins. See what's inside (9-11)

The above excerpt buttresses the argument of Semujanga (2016) in his exploration of novels dealing with Rwanda genocide that:

Language alone cannot correctly describe the unspeakable nature of the Rwandan genocide. Therefore, the writer must use '... aesthetics and rhetorical tools as an antidote to a realistic illusion of an event like genocide, by using the artifice of narration or rhetoric' the writer can more thoroughly communicate the emotions and horrors of the genocide to the reader (2).

Semujanga seems to say that through literary works, writers make use of language to represent the genocide so that the reader is invited to critically think about narratives on genocide. It is for this reason that the narrator explains the role of a writer in attracting global condemnation to the genocide and why silence may wrought more havoc in the collective memory of the Rwandan people who have been strangled into pieces by the 100 days of the massacre.

Silence is the worst thing of all. We must destroy indifference. We must understand the real meaning of the genocide, the accumulation of violence over the years. Is Africa's orality a handicap to the collective memory? We must write to give information some permanence. The writer pushes people to listen to his voice, in an attempt to exorcise the buried memories (27).

Through this excerpt, the author seems to suggest very strongly that writing about and making people talk about the genocide may not only be the needed balm on the wounds of the people's memory, but may also open up a space for healing and hope. Tadjo (2013), in an essay entitled "Lifting the Cloak of (In)Visibility: A Writer's Perspective" also posit that "Repeated exposure to the horrific images of the genocide along with the magnitude of the killings had rendered victims and survivors of the massacres as well as their individual experiences of those events, invisible" (4). It is against this backdrop that she contextualises the massacre as an event and also projects the experiences of the victims and survivors through fictionalising the genocide.

According to Mizouni, () "Tadjo achieves the above objectives by employing three distinct styles of testimony in her text: direct testimony, indirect testimony, and testimony in absentia" (69). Mizouni further explains that:

The first category encompasses those autobiographical sections of the text relating to Tadjo's observations as a witness to the repercussions of the genocide, four years after its occurrence.... Indirect testimony refers to those sections of the narrative in which Tadjo acts as a secondary witness to survivors who narrate their own embodied memories of the genocide within Tadjo's text... Lastly, testimony in absentia specifically pertains to those fictional portions of the travel narrative which recount the experiences of the dead, the victims of Rwanda's genocide (70-75).

Thus, the testimonial posture of this narrative forms the structure of the text and establishes the author as a witness to the witnesses.

The text has a complex plot structure and this hints at the complexity in appreciating the different testimonies recounted by those struggle daily to live through trauma. The text contains six chapters and each of the chapters is also divided into shorter sections within the chapter. Each of the subsections also contain subsections highlighted by italics. Mizouni (2015), argues that “these various sections can be divided into three categories of testimony: direct testimony, indirect testimony, and testimony in absentia” (69). In terms of narrative technique, Tadjo employs realism and trauma aesthetic to detail the experiences of the victims and survivors in the 100 days massacre, using the three forms of testimony. The testimony of the Kubwimana family, in this narrative, falls under direct testimony and poignantly highlights the author's ability to transform traumatic memory into narrative memory. The testimony projects the people's quality of life after the genocide and opens up the evil and nuances of violence inherent in the massacre. This affirms Muyawajo and Behaddad's (2004) position that “genocide does not consist of only one type of violence. It's not only the violence of death or physical torture. It destroys you from within, it makes of you what the other wants you to be: nothing, even less than nothing. Even while alive, you cease to exist” (153). This is what befalls Therese, as she engages the narrator on the hypocrisy of the Rwandan people on the genocide.

Her testimony, though characterised by distortions and momentary disruptions, touches on the devastating aftermath of the war. In the course of this testimony, she reveals how her sister lost almost everything to the war. For example, her house is forcefully taken from her after the war, and the husband is framed up and thrown into prison but is later released for lack of evidence. Amidst a hallowed laughter and, in a manner that typifies one that is acutely traumatised, she absentmindedly maintains that “The Rwandan people are a nation of liars. They will never tell the truth to anyone” (20) and will repeat this statement many times in the course of the day.

Therese's position must have been informed by the Rwandan authority's hypocrisy in protecting the vulnerable during the massacre. “The authorities had asked the people to gather together: Assemble in the churches and public places, we will protect you... (13), only to abandon them at the mercy of the Hutu's bullet. Even “the Belgian priest was no longer there when the massacre took place” (13). In Ntarama church, one of the genocide sites, the narrator reveals that “here too, Belgian Priests administered the parish: four Flemings and a Walloon. They left just before the massacre” (15). This informs Brison's argument that, “severe trauma has been described as “the undoing of the self” which includes a breakdown in trust, and emotional numbness” (40). Her brother, who is also trauma stricken, reveals that: “During the war, the militia were taking young people by force and making them fight and kill: ‘if you do not kill, we will kill you. If you do not kill them, they will kill you!’ (22). This scenario buttresses Emenyonu's (1973) assertion that during war time, “human reason had fled to brutish beasts. The world is peopled by unthinking human beings and thoughtful beast with foresights” (20). His parents want him back in school but “school no longer holds any interest for him, the future for him is too distant, too uncertain” (21). These testimonies configure gory image of how the genocide has impacted the lives of the survivor-victims and their ability to, and at times, their inability to overcome the trauma that has struck them.

Tadjo's encounter with Nelly at the Migina suburb near the Amahoro stadium in Kigali also falls under direct testimony. Nelly's testimony evokes the physical and emotional effects of trauma in a genocide survivor. As Nelly painfully introduces her family members, the reader notices one who is struck with ugly experience of being raped. Mujawayo and Belhadad (2004) describe the situation as another form of “dying” (196). Nelly's utterances manifest the psychological and physical symptoms of a rape victim, which include memory loss, incessant anguish and being hunted by the impression of being insane. For example, amidst an uproarious laughter, she slaps her little grandson on the buttocks and describes him as a product of genocide and so will not have anything to do with him. “I don't want this one. He was born of the war. What are we to do with him? As she says this, she is preparing to hit him” (35). Mujawayo and Belhadad (2024) further reveal that “for these women, although often paradoxically, being raped had saved them from being killed, they emerged from the horrors of the experience reluctantly, because they now had to live through a “hell worse than death”(197). The perpetrators merely left them to live, and to later die by instalment. Thus, Nelly knows she will die soon or later, as her body looks thin, frail and shows signs of sickness. Her imminent death is captured in her plea to be remembered. “Remember Nelly. When I die, you must come to my funeral” (36).

Tadjo, in this narrative, later shifts to indirect testimony by employing realist approach and trauma aesthetics to project the experiences of the victims and survivors of the genocide. As stated earlier, indirect testimony refers to those sections of the narrative in which Tadjo acts as a secondary witness to survivors who narrate their own embodied memories of the genocide within Tadjo's text. A typical example of this form of testimony is that of the young Zairean woman who resembles a Tutsi. Even without being told of the contents of the young woman's account, the narrator's description of her disposition speaks loudly about one who has been overwhelmed by trauma. In fact, the narrator describes her as being lost “in another world as she relieves those terrible events” (88). Through the use of trauma aesthetics, Tadjo evokes the physical and emotional effects of trauma in this

character. This affirms the position of Tidd (2005) that “the experience of trauma, which is often described as a form of 'dying' by trauma survivors, takes on various guises: one of its manifestations is the fracturing or multiplication of the self during which a victim "creates a second 'self' due to conflict in the 'original self'" (412). Through this, the victim becomes strange and distances himself from the reality of the traumatic experience.

As the massacre rages unabated, the woman, whose name is not mentioned in the text, is reminded by the house boy of her striking resemblance with the Tutsis and advised to run into hiding. “You look too much like a Tutsi, you must go quickly or they will kill you...” (89). Hutu extremists occupy her area in a frenzied murderous madness and so she, with her baby, runs into the home of a neighboring Hutu woman's house and hide under the bed. As the raiding intensifies, her baby cries and this draw the attention of murderers who hurled them out from under the bed. In the heat of the argument to ascertain her nationality, the baby is brusquely taken from her and killed in her presence. “He put his pistol to my face and he lifted up my baby, I screamed, they killed my baby right there in front of me and then threw him into the yard and I collapsed” (90). This is how far she could remember. Her situation is not only that her child is killed but exacerbated by being serially raped by the extremists. Cavour argues that: “Through this young woman's indirect testimony, the text not only conveys the traumatic murder of the woman's child, but also resumes the association between the trauma of genocide and the trauma of sexual violence” (51). The situation also confirms the fact that, historically speaking, sexual violence was a major reality of the genocide.

Following this traumatic violation, the young woman's will to live is so absent that she searches for a means to kill herself within the destruction that lines the road but is stopped by one of the PFR soldiers who discovered her. This affirms de Beer and Synman's (2015) argument that: “One form of 'dying' that is strongly associated with the genocide of the Tutsi in Rwanda, is the experience of being raped” (4). Mujawayo (2004) further argues that “for these women, although often paradoxically, being raped had saved them from being killed, they emerged from the horrors of the experience reluctantly, because they now had to live through a "hell worse than death" (197). Thus, rather than relying solely on the account of the Zairian woman, who has been overwhelmed by grief and trauma, the reader simply needs to reconstruct the events of the trauma through the evidence her body supplies. Tadjo also employs realism and trauma aesthetics in the third form of testimony known as testimony absentia. This is done such that the writer becomes a witness and also speak on behalf of the victims who are acutely traumatised and may not have survived to tell the story on their own. In this text, the story of Anastase and Anastasie fits into this form of testimony. This is because the events leading to Anastase's trauma and shame predates the genocide. The author intentionally refuses to contextualise the injuries bruising Anastase in the present, to allow the reader reconstruct the events through some elements of realism and trauma heavily deployed in the text.

It is later in the text that Tadjo reveals that Anastase's sense of trauma, injury and shame is link to his sister, Anastasie's rape by him. He had hoped that the wounds had healed even before the genocide set in “but the sores remained opened” (61). The scenario underscores the canonised tradition of addressing the intersection of sexual violence and the violence of genocide and affirms Tadjo's practice of going “beyond voice by focusing closely on the emotional aftermath of sexual violence” as an embodied experience (Jean-Charles 171, Quoted in Cavour, 55). Since Anastase and Anastasie's story references event that predates the Rwanda genocide, this paper views the incestuous violence perpetrated by a brother on a sister as metaphorical of Rwanda; one nation torn into pieces by the owners through the war. Habila's *The Chibok Girls*, like Tadjo's *The Shadow of Imana*, is also a travel narrative that constructs a gory and wanton insurgent space through identification of parents and relatives of victims of the Chibok kidnapping and exploration of their state of being in the aftermath of event. As stated earlier in this paper, travel narratives have always been about recording sites and experiences and in doing this, the writer eventually becomes a witness to different testimonies arising from the sites and experiences. Habila mixes faction and fiction, and also shows a commendable deployment of symbols, realism and trauma aesthetics to paint a sombre picture of the atmosphere of terror-stricken north eastern part of Nigeria, where killings, kidnappings and bombings remain a recurrent decimal. His narrative technique of imbuing the victims with voices to tell their own stories does not only trigger affective unsettlement in readers, but also opens a space for therapy. This affective unsettlement on the reader continues throughout the text, especially in the testimonies of the victims.

Apart from the kidnapped girls, their parents and relatives who are directly traumatised, it could be posited that every passionate Nigerian is in one way or the other traumatised and eagerly awaits the return of these girls. For example, the repetitive phrase and the uncontrollable outburst on Habila and the JTF member by a soldier at the checkpoint affirms the above claim and buttresses the position of Yadok and Lukden (2022) that “Psychological issues of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are not restricted to individuals, rather, they could be triggered by communal issues in which the traumatic experiences of an individual are understood through the social and cultural context” (91). Although, the soldier is constitutionally undertaking his duty of providing security in times

of crises, it is traumatic to be perpetually consigned to a checkpoint, dismembered from his family and love ones for many months and most times, without salary.

More so, he claims to have lost many of his friends to the Boko Haram attack and at the moment feeling sick. "So you are civilian JTF? So what? Four months we have been here without salary, our friends are killed by Boko Haram, and I am sick. Four months no pay..." (15). Through this aggressive yell, one notices that the soldier's coping mechanism is repression and suppression and he vents this out during this encounter. The soldier's outburst also underscores the fact that trauma is not a specific experience of an individual rather it seeks to affirm that an individual's trauma originates from a collective pool of experiences that are repressed and shared by members of a specific clime. Therefore, understanding trauma is a function of understanding societal state.

The testimony of Reverend Philip Madu: chairman, Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) Chibok branch evokes the physical and emotional effects of trauma and thus, opens up a space involved in the trauma experienced by the victims of the Chibok kidnapping. In his testimony, Reverend Madu, reveals that the operation took place in the night without any resistance from the military and other security agents. It is in the morning that information got to villagers that their daughters have been weeded off their dormitories. As they rush to the scene, "we saw the girls' clothes and uniforms scattered all over the place. Parents started crying, but there was nothing they could do" (27). Expectedly, the shock trigger off trauma, as many of them develop high blood pressure and other kinds of ailments associated with trauma and finally die. This underscores the fact that some traumatic experiences, in the word of De Beer and Synman (2015) are "Invivable"; "that which is impossible to live or unbearable" (15). The narrator is equally trauma-stricken, as he intermittently hisses and occasionally shakes his head in the course of his testimony. His two nieces are among the victims, while he and family members escape death by whiskers during the attack.

However, the reader gets to understand that, despite this traumatic experience, the narrator is weaving a thread of hope for the return of the kidnapped girls when he posits that: "we put our trust in God. We don't trust in people or any power. If God has plans for them to return someday, they will return" (28). His hope for the situation to return to normalcy seems to be the only thing he anchors on, and this is revealed in the course of narrating his experiences during the attack. This echoes Brison's (1999) argument that "Narrative integration helps the survivor not only to restore the subversion of the time sequence brought about by trauma, but also to start mastering the return of intrusive memories" (46). More so, the verbalisation of the traumatic event has the potential to assist in "reintegrating the fractured selves" that were created during the event. Yana Galang, one of the mothers of the kidnapped girls also recreate the day the girls were taken in a way that renders signs of trauma, as her testimony is permeated by grief and loss. Her trauma is so severe that "...each time I heard the gunshots my stomach would turn and I had to go into the bush to defecate" (32). As the attack begins, she escapes to a neighbouring village and returns to Chibok in the morning, and decides to visit her father, where she learns about the kidnapping of the girls. This marks the turning point in her life, as she is completely overtaken by grief and trauma such that: "for two weeks after, I couldn't eat or sleep. I'd put food in my mouth and then throw it out again. I would go to the toilet but nothing would come out. I would walk up and down thinking..." (32). Her experiences embodies what has established as being characteristic of traumatic events, as her symptoms correspond to those of a victim who are living in trauma.

She is constantly tired, wants to close her eyes and sleep. Sleeping becomes a metaphor for death, and she longs to disappear into forgetfulness. In the midst of the trauma, Yana Galang tries to remake herself and this is demonstrated in her regaining of her voice and telling her story. This is depicted in her response to the question on the possibility of the girls returning. "I believe though, that someday, something will happen. I don't know how, maybe through one of the girls, someone who truly believes in God. He will use one of them to do something. I believe that" (32). Through this, she creates a space for therapy and recovery.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to demonstrate how Tadjo and Habila deploy realism and trauma aesthetics in projecting the trauma of the Rwanda genocide and Chibok kidnapping victims in their texts. The paper notes that the authors, to a greater extent, have succeeded in writing the trauma of the victims by paying commendable attention to both victims and survivors' embodied memories of the traumatic events, in order to detail not only the affective disruption of those experiences, but the historical undercurrents that orchestrated the events. Also, the fusing of realism and trauma aesthetics in the text have triggered off empathic unsettlement for the readers, such that they are unconsciously drawn into the experiences of the victims and survivors. The paper has further shown that victims and survivors can return to self as socially defined and establish a relationship again with their social world, if they can narrate their experiences

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