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DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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**LOST CHILDREN: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CHILD SOLDIERING IN
UZODINMA IWEALA'S *BEASTS OF NO NATION* AND ISHMAEL BEAH'S A
LONG WAY GONE: MEMOIRS OF A BOY SOLDIER.**

BY

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PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY DEGREE IN ENGLISH**

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DECLARATION

Candidate's Declaration

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own original work towards the attainment of an MPhil degree at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. It does not contain material previously published by another person or has been presented for another degree in this university or elsewhere, except where due reference and acknowledgment has been made.

.....

Date

Paul Otoo

Supervisor's Declaration

I declare that I have supervised the student in undertaking the study submitted herein in accordance with the guidelines of thesis submission laid down by the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology and confirm that he has my permission to present it for assessment.

.....

Date:

Dr. (Mrs.) Philomena A. O. Yeboah

(Supervisor)

Certified by

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(Head, Department of English)

“Wars are always started by adults – yet it is children who often face their most tragic consequences. There is no place for children in conflict, and we must not allow conflict to trample on the rights of children.”

Antonio Guterres – General Secretary, United Nations

ABSTRACT

In the Child Soldiers International Annual Report (2017-2018), it is revealed that globally, over 10,000 children were formally released from armed forces and groups during 2017. Delivering his annual report on children and armed conflict to the Security Council in 2021, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, revealed that more than 8,500 children were used as soldiers in the year 2020 in various conflicts across the world. Obviously, the high numbers of child soldiers witnessed over the years, especially in Africa is clearly indicative of the need for an unremitting discussion on the topic with the aim of ending this repugnant enterprise. It is for this reason that this thesis through textual analysis, anchored on the trauma theory and supported by the theory of literary realism, critically analyzes the child soldier phenomenon in Uzodinma Iweala’s novel, *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), and Ishmael Beah’s memoir, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007). This research work concentrates on how the child soldier as a result of his traumatic experiences is rendered lost: a child who is robbed of his childhood and innocence and for that matter, transitions from a victim of war to a victimizer. By discussing the child soldier as the narrative voice, this research is able to explore the traumatic experiences of child soldiers through their own narrations. The child soldier’s loss of innocence and childhood is further highlighted after the war and during the period of rehabilitation. The difficulty experienced by the child soldier at this stage communicates how lost he has been rendered.

KEYWORDS: Civil War, Child-soldier narrative, Child soldier, Trauma theory

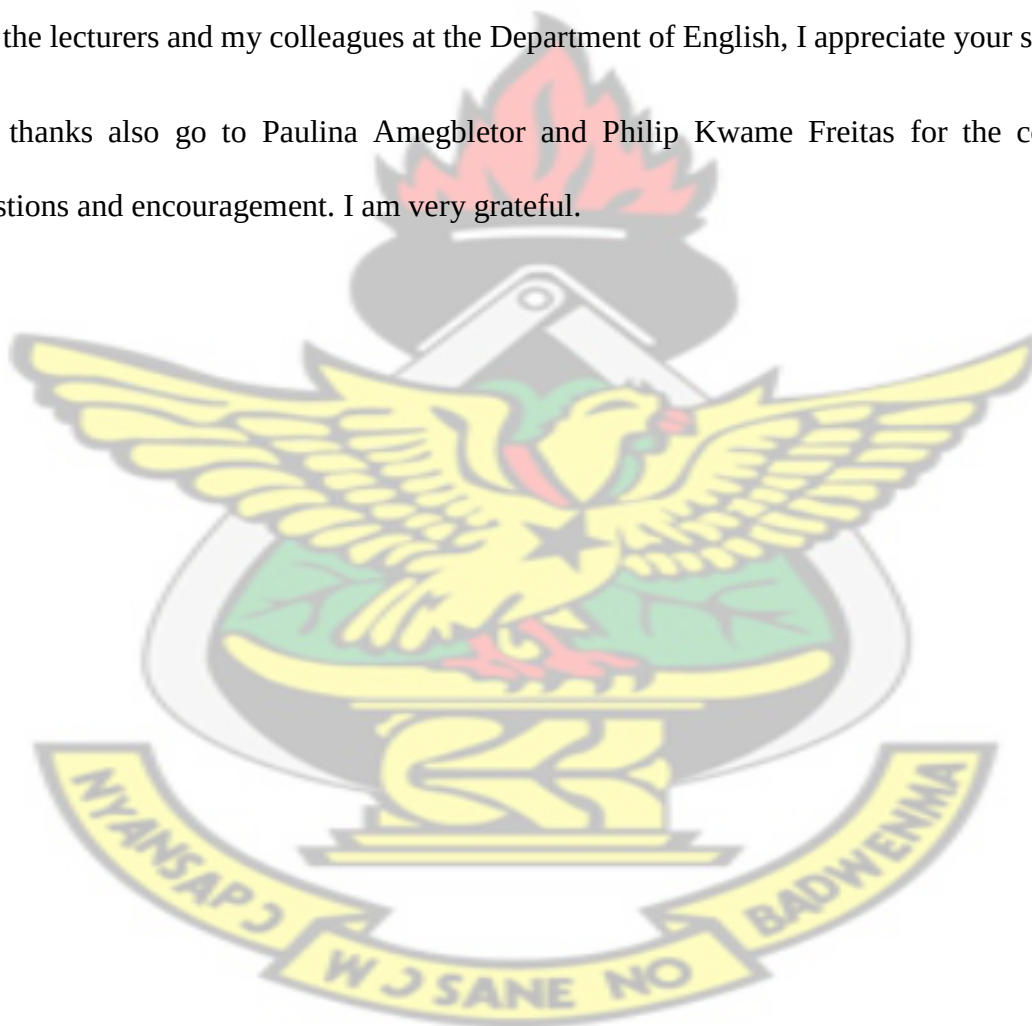
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DEDICATION

To my father and siblings: John Otoo, Felix Otoo, Ferdinard Evans

Otoo, Anna Esmelda Otoo and Alberta Helberta Otoo

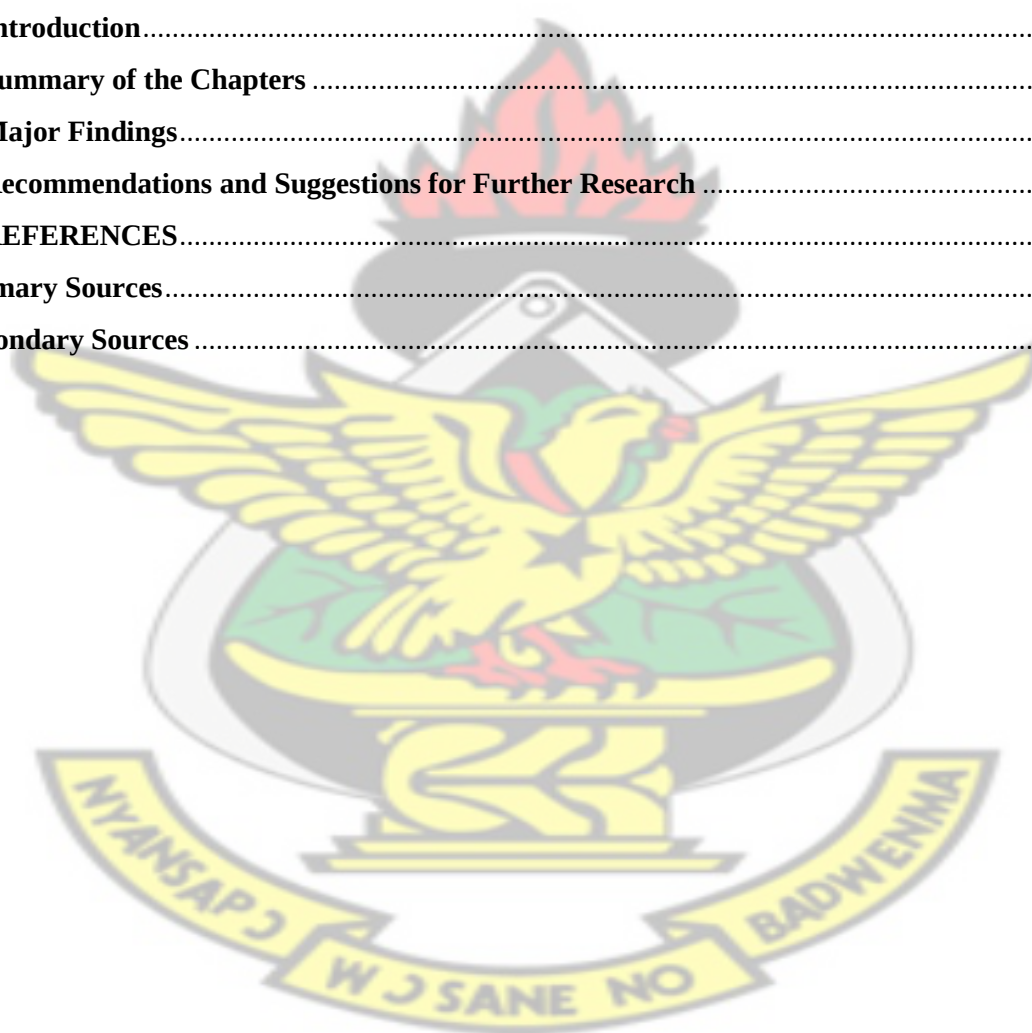
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction /Background

Many writers in post-independence Africa have written extensively about civil wars in various parts of the continent with some even sharing their personal experiences. These include Flora Nwapa (*Never Again*, 1975), Chukwuemeka Ike (*Sunset at Dawn*, 1976), Elechi Amadi (*Sunset in Biafra*, 1973), Buchi Emecheta (*Destination Biafra*, 1982), Alfred Obiora Uzokwe (*Surviving in Biafra: The Story of the Nigerian Civil War*, 2003), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*Half of a Yellow Sun*, 2006), Chinua Achebe (*There Was a Country*, 2012) and many others. This shows how the topic of war has acquired for itself a prominent space in African literature. Traore (2022) therefore asserts that Africa has known her fair share of civil wars. Unfortunately, the tragedy has persisted to such an extent that the continent is now associated with civil wars. In order to impinge on the minds of readers the atrocious and brutal nature of civil wars, it is essential to attempt an explanation of the term. Differentiating between civil wars and interstate wars, Mitton (2015) explains civil war as “involving the very collapse of the political order of the state and its monopoly on violence. They are typically regarded as stemming from, or caused by, social and political collapse. The institutions and structures that regulate behaviour are violently disrupted. Without these restraint in place, so the logic goes, violence takes on ever more brutal and anarchic forms”. (p.40). Mitton’s explanation of civil war foregrounds the devastating effects of war and how conflicts erupt where there is an absolute collapse of a country’s political and social system. This aptly reflects the events in Beah’s memoir and Iweala’s novel. One thing that is striking in these two literary works is the involvement and role played by children who are recruited into armed groups during times of conflict. This is the foundation upon which this thesis is built.

The child-soldier narrative which falls under the bigger umbrella of war narratives has within the last two decades become a prominent genre in African literature with novels and memoirs including Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah Is Not Obligated* (2002), Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier* (2007), Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007), Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007), Emmanuel Jal's *Warchild* (2009) and Tchicaya Missamou's *In the Shadow of Freedom* (2010). These novels and memoirs accurately depict the predicaments of innocent children recruited by military forces and rebel groups and turned into blood-thirsty killers against their wishes. These novels and memoirs while recounting the periods of war in Africa, also incite readers to condemn the outrageous disregard for children's right during conflicts due to their vulnerability. Because child-soldier narratives may also be personal narratives of former child soldiers as seen in newspapers, magazines, articles, psychological and anthropological studies, activist or humanitarian pamphlets, television shows and films, it is imperative to contextualize the use of the term in my work. Just as Kaoma (2017), the researcher uses the term "child-soldier narratives" with reference to long-form literary works or full-length published novels or memoirs. A child-soldier narrative is therefore "a deliberate literary work primarily about the fictional and non-fictional experiences of child soldiers." (Kaoma, 2017: 16). From this backdrop, Uzodinma Iweala's novel, *Beasts of No Nation* (fiction) and Ishmael Beah's memoir, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (non-fiction) can be termed appropriate for this discussion since they perfectly fit the above description of child-soldier narratives by showcasing the experiences of the protagonists (Agu and Ishmael). Having put the term "child-soldier narratives" into perspective by disregarding non-literary forms, it is also important to put into context the term "child soldier" since the entire work revolves around such persons. According to the Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups (2007), a child soldier is "any person, eighteen years of age or younger, who is or

has been recruited or used by an armed group in any capacity (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund – UNICEF, 2007). Reiterating the views of UNICEF, Machel (2000) also defines a child soldier as “any child, boy or girl aged less than eighteen, who is recruited compulsorily, by force or otherwise with the intension of using him/her for combat by armed forces, paramilitary forces, civil defense units or other armed groups. Child soldiers are used for sexual services or as combatants, forced spouses, messengers, porters or cooks”. It is clear from these definitions above that the use of the term “child soldier” is restrictive since it does not cover entirely the role the child soldier is made to perform. This is why the International Committee of the Red Cross (I.C.R. 2007) points out that “children can be used for the purposes other than direct participation in hostilities; they can be used as spies, messengers, domestic servants, sexual slaves, etc.” (p.6). It is important to acknowledge that whatever the role a child soldier is made to play, the mere act of recruiting him/her is a blatant abuse of the child's right: they are deprived of basic amenities like food and shelter, they are sexually abused, deprived the education they deserve as children and their right to grow naturally in a conducive environment.

Justification for the Selected Texts and Background to the Texts

In this study, two African literary texts serve as primary data sources. These texts are: *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) by Uzodinma Iweala, and *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007) by Ishmael Beah. These texts were selected using the purposive or purposeful sampling method since they provide the most relevant information necessary for the study (Patton, 2002). Both texts are about civil war and have a common thread of the child soldier figure (their protagonists are child-soldiers). Even though Beah's memoir is based on real events and experiences (the Sierra Leone Civil War), and Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is

based on fictitious events and characters, they prove to be apt combination for the study since they both help corroborate the violence that surrounds civil wars in Africa and also project the plights of the child soldier. The two texts showcase the truism in Gehrman's (2011) argument that "fiction can contribute to a better understanding of situations of political and social crisis, moments of extreme violence and trauma through creative imaginations about what might be the psychological landscape of children at war, who become symbolic figures for the breakdown of human values in general." (P.38). For me, Beah's memoir which was written in 2007 seems to validate majority of the fictitious events in Iweala's novel which was written in 2005. This indicates that the selection of a novel and a memoir for this study was not coincidental but a deliberate action.

Background of the Authors

Uzodinma Iweala, a writer and medical doctor, was born in Washington, D.C. in 1982 to Ikemba Iweala, a surgeon, and Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, an economist at the World Bank and Nigeria's finance minister for many years. He received his education in the United States and graduated from St. Albans School and Harvard University. He returned to Nigeria where he worked as a volunteer in refugee camps and did research on HIV and AIDS. *Beasts on No Nation* was published in 2005 and was inspired by a news magazine article on child soldiers. The novel has won numerous awards, including the Art Seidenbaum Award for First Fiction from Los Angeles Times Book Prizes, the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize for First Fiction from the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

Ishmael Beah was born in Sierra Leone in 1980. At the age of thirteen, he was recruited as a child soldier for the government army during the Sierra Leone Civil War. He lost his parents and two brothers to the war. He fought for more than two years until he was rescued by UNICEF and moved to the United States in 1998 and finished his last two years of high

school at the United Nations International School in New York. In 2004, he graduated from Oberlin College with a Bachelor of Arts in political science. As a member of the Human Rights Watch Children's Rights Division Advisory Committee, he has spoken before the United Nations, the Council on Foreign Relations, the Center for Emerging Threats and Opportunities (CETO) at the Marine Corps Warfighting Laboratory, and many other NGO panels on children affected by the war. His work, *A Long Way Gone*, has appeared in the New York Times Magazine, Vespertine Press, LIT, Parabola and numerous academic journals. (Macmillan Publishers).

Synopsis of Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*

Employing the first-person narrator, *Beasts of No Nation* relates the traumatic story of Agu, a 9-year-old boy, who is forcefully recruited as a child soldier in a civil war that has erupted in an unspecified African country. The story opens with Agu hiding from a group of rebel soldiers who are terrorizing and killing the people of his village. Unfortunately, he is found by the rebel army in his hiding place. He is so much gripped with fear and terror that he finds it impossible to move. The fear that engulfs Agu as a result of war is so great that it inhibits his movements and ability to speak. He is unable to instantly remember his name due to the trauma that accompanies the maltreatment the rebels subject him to and the commotion caused by the war in general. He is then coerced and threatened to join the rebel group. Considering the level of chaos brought about by the war, and the quest for survival, Agu thinks it wise to join the rebel group.

From then on, fear and emotional terror take hold of Agu's young life. As an act of initiation, he is brainwashed and made to kill an unarmed soldier with a machete. This act turns out to be a turning point in Agu's life as he loses his innocence and childhood. He immediately transforms from an innocent child to a blood-thirsty killer. He is indoctrinated to think that it

is only normal to kill as a soldier. Even though he consoles himself with sayings like, “I am not a bad boy...”, the guilt that he carries and the traumatic events that he encounters are so overwhelming that he often hears voices in his ears. To alleviate his trauma, Agu sometimes sings but it yields no result. Executing his duties as a typical child soldier, he is compelled to participate in sexual abuse, murder, and violence. However, Agu constantly reminisces about the time before the war - when he went to school and church, when he had friends he played football with, when he loved to read and was loved by his family and friends, and when he was appreciated and lived peacefully with his family. This depicts the dilemma that the child soldier encounters: an innocent child forced to commit atrocious acts. This flashback, which is sharply antithetical to his current life as a child soldier, helps readers appreciate better, Agu’s transition from an innocent young boy to a ruthless ‘soldier’.

Even though Agu struggles to find a way out of this predicament, his fear and respect for the Commandant frightens him. He describes the Commandant as a man “so tall that looking at him is like climbing tree, so big that if he is standing next to you, then his shadow is blocking the sun. He is so strong that I can be seeing the vein on his arm...he is walking like his leg is wooden pole that is not bending for anything.” (p.33). Despite his enormous physical stature, the commandant sexually abuses Agu. This and many other traumatic experiences leave a psychological scar on Agu.

Agu befriends a mute soldier, also a young boy, called Strika. Just like Agu, Strika has had his fair share of the psychological effect of war and child soldiering. Throughout, the novel, Strika remains mute since the trauma he experiences: the killing of his parents by the rebels in his presence and the many other atrocities he witnesses and commits, has affected his ability to speak. He therefore resorts to writing on the ground whenever he wants to communicate with Agu. This is how he tells Agu about the murder of his parents – “over and over again, he is drawing the same picture of man and woman with no heads because their

head is rolling away on the ground.” (p. 36). As ‘soldiers’, they are later assigned the important task to work as bodyguards for the Commandant. Agu’s days as a child soldier end when Rambo, one of the soldiers, revolts and kills the Commandant. Agu and Strika join the ex-soldiers to find a way back to normal life. Unfortunately, Strika, Agu’s only friend, dies. Even though Agu is now at a rehabilitation centre and is far away from the battlefield, he fights a new form of a war – a psychological war with himself and his conscience. He battles with the experiences and memories of his war days that belatedly haunt him. He sometimes hears bullets and screams in his ears and thinks of death as the only way to rid himself of these memories. Even though at the rehabilitation centre, they adopt many techniques to help reintegrate the child soldier into the society and purge him of the guilt he carries, they do not achieve their full and intended purpose. Agu is put in a safe and serene environment, given enough food to eat: a luxury he never had during his days as a child soldier, and provided the services of a priest (Father Festus) and a psychologist (Amy) who counsel him. In spite of these attempts to help Agu regain his normal life, it is obvious that his war-time memories are firmly etched in his mind and the scars that his child-soldiering days have left on his psyche cannot be erased that easily.

Synopsis of Beah’s *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*

Published in over thirty languages, nominated for a Quill Award in 2007 and named as one of the top ten nonfiction books in 2007 by the TIME Magazine, Beah’s *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* tells the story of the author, (Ishmael Beah), who experienced firsthand the Sierra Leone Civil War. On the eve of the attack on his village, Ishmael and his friends leave to practise for a talent show in Mattru Jong. He tries to return to his family but he later realizes they have disappeared because of the war, unsure whether they are dead or alive, he tries relentlessly to gather information concerning their whereabouts but all his

attempts prove futile. When the war finally reaches Ishmael, the chaos and violence separate him from his friends. He has to single handedly deal with the dangers of being in the jungle. Trying to escape the war and survive the atrocities that come with it, Beah takes to the woods which is full of dangerous animals (wild pigs and snakes) that attack him. While in the forest, Ishmael relies on nameless fruits for breakfast, lunch and supper. He constantly laments the loneliness that overwhelms him in the forest and how unbearable it is for him. Alone, he fights himself mentally to rid his mind of the violence, brutalities and killings he experiences but all to no avail. He cannot sleep for fear that his suppressed thoughts and experiences will rush back to him in his dreams. Ishmael passes through burnt villages where dead bodies of men, women and children are scattered. He witnesses heads being cut off with machetes, smashed by cement bricks and rivers filled with human blood. These scenes are so traumatizing that even though he often closes his eyes to avoid thinking about them, it proves a futile act.

Ishmael later reunites with his friends but realizes that the village he thought his family had escaped to has been attacked and destroyed by rebels. This leaves him devastated and disappointed. Together with his friends, they move from one village to another in search of food and a safe haven. Unfortunately, they find none as they are instantly mistaken for spies and beaten brutally by the villagers.

Even before Ishmael is recruited by the government army as a child soldier to fight the rebels, he displays some level of violence that shows how the chaos he witnesses as a child has altered his identity and how the war in general has robbed him of his innocence, turning him into some kind of monster. This is seen when he accuses Gasemu, a man he knew in his village before the war, for being the reason why he does not get the opportunity to get to his family in time. He attacks him violently. This foreshadows the atrocious acts that Ishmael will be capable of committing when he is finally recruited by the military.

Ishmael and his friends are taken to a government camp where they are conscripted into the army to fight as child-soldiers for the government army. Together with other child soldiers, he is given drugs and fed on American movies so that he can kill without any hesitation. Ishmael suddenly moves from an innocent child to a blood-thirsty killer. He loses his sense of humanity as he commits the same atrocities perpetrated by the rebels. Ishmael is later rescued and sent to a rehabilitation centre in the capital before he is later sent to live with his uncle. Even at the rehabilitation centre, Ishmael misses the violence that once dominated his life. He misses the guns and the drugs. Enraged by the idea of being told what to do by civilians, Ishmael and the other child soldiers maltreat the nurses and some other staff at the rehabilitation centre.

Ishmael struggles to fit into his new environment as memories of the war keep hunting him. He learns about a trip to the United Nation and he applies. He passes an interview and is selected to travel to New York to address the General Assembly of the United Nations on the war and his experiences as a child soldier. When he returns to Sierra Leone, the war has reached the capital where he lives with his new family. Many are killed including his uncle. For fear of becoming a child soldier again, he flees to Guinea and contacts Laura Simms, a friend he made in New York, who adopts him and moves him to the United States.

The Sierra Leone Civil War

While a vivid account can be given for the Sierra Leone civil war as presented in Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, no clear account can be given for the civil war presented in Iweala's *Beast of No Nation* since it is fictitious. Without sufficient and convincing evidence, some scholars like Osiki, et al (2021), however, claim that *Beasts of No Nation* portrays the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970). Discussing the vulnerability of child soldiers in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Nabutanyi (2013) clarifies that in an interview with the Centre for Global

Development, Iweala explains that the writing of his novel was not inspired by the Biafran war as many scholars have speculated but from a Newsweek Magazine article about child soldiers in Sierra Leone. This seems to explain the similarity of events in Beah's *A Long Way Gone* and Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* even though the former is a memoir and the latter in fiction.

According to Mamodu (2017), the Sierra Leone Civil War started on March 23, 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh, with the support of Liberian rebel, Charles Taylor and his group, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NFPL), attempted to overthrow the government of Sierra Leone headed by Joseph Momah. For Twum-Danso (2003), the war began when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Foday Sankoh, invaded the country from Liberia at two diamond-rich points: Bomaru in Kailahun District and Mano River Bridge in Pujehun District on 23 March, 1991. Concerning the socio-economic context within which the war emerged, Twum-Danso (2003) points out that:

At the outbreak of war, there had been a growing resentment towards the authoritarian regime of the All-People's Congress (APC), which had been in power since 1968. Corruption in all sectors was rife. It was also believed that because of government neglect, the health and sanitation services had deteriorated and this, in turn had led to an alleged life expectancy of twenty-one years in 1987. Since the middle of the 1980s the education system had also suffered... (p. 18).

The above observation shows that the Sierra Leone civil war erupted due to diverse social, political and economic factors. For the economic factor, the competition between the government and the RUF to seize control of the country's lucrative diamond-producing regions is considered the main cause of the war. According to Stohl (2000) as quoted by Jang (2012), the RUF made a profit of about 200 million dollars yearly in 1991 and 1999 from the diamond trade. This indicates the extent to which diamond regions were important to both

factions and how they are significant regarding the motivations for the war. From the political perspective, it is believed that the authoritarian regime of the All People's Congress coupled with incessant cases of corruption in various sectors of the government caused the war. Lastly, from the social angle, the cause of the war for many can be attributed to the hardship brought about by bad governance – the deplorable state of the educational and health sectors, high cost of living and many others. This is what led to grievances on the part of the people of Sierra Leone and eventually led to the formation of the RUF.

The war in Sierra Leone resulted in the deaths of over 30,000 civilians as well as the displacement of over half of the country's population both internally and externally. (Twum-Danso, 2003, p. 18). The Sierra Leone Civil War was one of the bloodiest in Africa in which more than 50,000 people died and half a million displaced in a nation of four million people. (Momodu, 2017). Twum-Danso (2003) and Momodu (2017) posit that the war was particularly violent and prolonged due to its privatization – both the RUF and the Sierra Leone government were funded by “blood diamonds” mined with slave labour.

During the first year of the war, the RUF took control of the diamond-rich territory in eastern and southern Sierra Leone. On April 29, 1992, President Joseph Momah was ousted in a military coup led by Captain Valentine Strasser who created the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC). Captain Valentine Strasser claimed the corrupt Momah could not resuscitate the economy, provide for the people of Sierra Leone and fend off the rebel invaders.

The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) in March 1993 sent mostly Nigerian troops to Freetown, the capital, and assisted the Sierra Leone Army to recapture the diamond districts and push the RUF to the Sierra Leone-Liberia border. Many observers by the end of 1993 thought the war had ended because the RUF ceased most

of its military operations. However, what had begun as a civil war now had international implications because while the Sierra Leone government was supported by ECOMOG, Great Britain, Guinea, and the United States, the RUF was backed by Liberia (under the leadership of Charles Taylor), Libya, and Burkina Faso.

The Sierra Leone government in March 1995 employed Executive Outcomes (EO), a South Africa-based mercenary group who finally defeated the RUF. Consequently, a civilian government was elected into power in 1996. The RUF therefore signed the Abidjan Peace Accord, bringing an end to the fighting. In May 1997, however, a group of Sierra Leone Army officers staged a coup and established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) as the new government of the country. They invited the RUF to join them, and the two factions then ruled Freetown, the nation's capital, with little resistance. The new government headed by Paul Koroma declared an end to the war. However, looting, rape, and murder mostly perpetrated by the RUF forces quickly followed the new government's announcement revealing its weakness. ECOMOG forces returned and retook Freetown on behalf of the Koroma government but could not pacify outlying regions. The RUF continued the civil war. In January 1999, world leaders intervened to promote negotiations between the RUF and the government. The Lome Peace Accord was signed on July 7, 1999. This agreement gave Foday Sankoh, the commander of the RUF, the vice presidency and control of Sierra Leone's diamond mines in return for a cessation of the fighting and the deployment of a UN peacekeeping force to monitor the disarmament process. RUF compliance with the disarmament process was inconsistent and sluggish, and by May 2000, the rebels were again advancing on Freetown. With help from the United Nations forces, British troops, and Guinean air support, the Sierra Leone Army finally defeated the RUF before they could take control of Freetown. On January 18, 2002, a newly installed

President, Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, declared that the Sierra Leone Civil War had finally ended.

Statement of the Problem

Many research works that discuss the concept of child soldiering have concentrated on the trauma of the child soldier to the neglect of how the traumatic experiences of the child soldier leave him lost in the society. These works include Gurley (2007), Anthonissen (2009), and Fisher (2018). This research however, concentrates on the extent to which the traumatic experiences of the child soldier reduce him to a lost being - a child lost in a world which neither understands the content of the child soldiers' trauma nor the repercussions associated with this trauma. Ultimately, the child soldier feels there is no hope and so resigns himself to a life of futility. It is this sense of loss and hopelessness that this work concentrates on and illustrates to serve as a caution to anyone who dares to recruit children as soldiers during conflicts. Since literature must serve the interest of humanity, this research intends to caution against the recruitment of child soldiers by analyzing the trauma and the sense of loss created in the child soldier during times of war. This will be achieved through a deeper interrogation of the authors' writing styles and the child soldiers' language which include the figurative use of language (exaggeration, symbolism, imagery, etc), the breach of linguistic and grammatical rules, capitalization, the use of onomatopoeic words, the constant use of the continuous tense, rhetorical questions and many others.

Objective of the Study

The academic space has witnessed over the last decade, a plethora of research works on child soldiering. However, the majority of these works are often viewed from a non-literary perspective. These include works by Honwana (2005, 2009, 2011), Schauer & Elbert (2010),

Wylan (2011), Kakhnta-Banda (2014) and Kingsley (2017). Only a handful of studies have tried discussing the topic from a literary standpoint. These include Minga (2012), Kaoma (2017), and Muthusi (2019). With this study, the researcher seeks to contribute to the discourse on child soldiering from the literary point of view and throw more light on the consequences of engaging children as child soldiers.

The main objective of this study is to critically analyze from a literary perspective, the phenomenon of child soldiering in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by concentrating on how the child soldier as a result of his traumatic experiences becomes a lost being – a child who is robbed of his innocence and childhood as a result of war.

Firstly, this study will examine how the child soldier is characterized in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. Unlike previous works, this study does not only expose the traumatic experiences of child soldiers but treats these traumatic experiences as a means to an end. Thus, the child soldiers' traumatic experiences coupled with their quest for survival in a life-threatening environment leave them lost in the society. They become children who transition from innocent victims to ruthless victimizers.

Secondly, this study will examine how the child soldier, who is presented by both authors as the narrative voice, reiterates the content of his trauma. Here, a deeper interrogation of the protagonists' use of language to express his trauma will be attempted.

Thirdly, this research examines how the child soldier recounts his loss with the aim of understanding his plights even after the war. This is realized in the difficulty that accompanies his reintegration or rehabilitation.

Research Questions

1. How is the child soldier characterized in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*?
2. How does the child soldier as the narrative voice reiterate his traumatic experiences?
3. How does the child soldier recount his loss?

Methodology

Since this work involves a critical analysis of literary texts (Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone*), the researcher finds qualitative content analysis which Biber (2017) also refers to as textual analysis to be most suitable. Leavy (2017) as cited by Duncan (2021) explains qualitative content analysis as the systematic investigation of texts to understand meanings that are present in them. Having used the same mode of analysis to interrogate masculinities in some selected African texts, Duncan (2021) justifies his choice that "this type of analysis therefore encourages a critical reading of texts to reveal patterns, and shed better light on representations in ways that promote a better understanding of concepts." (p. 25). Through critical reading of the texts that will be used in this study, this method of analysis will help the researcher identify the common patterns in the discussion of the trauma and loss of the child soldier and also help provide concrete and verifiable answers to the research questions identified.

Even though the researcher does not primarily set out to undertake a stylistic analysis of the texts, particular attention would be given to the author's writing style and the protagonists' diction in order to make tangible the objective of the thesis: how the child soldier becomes a lost being as a result of his traumatic experiences. The researcher regards this component of the research as necessary because a deeper understanding of how the child soldier's trauma leaves him lost in the society and trauma narratives in general indubitably requires an

interrogation of how certain parameters of language like choice of words (diction), sentence structures, punctuations, breach of grammatical rules regarding tenses, concord, etc and the density and types of figurative languages foreground the extent of the loss of the traumatized child soldier.

Significance of the study

The United Nations has adopted many resolutions and conventions to tackle child soldiering. These include The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and many others. Despite these efforts by the international community to eradicate completely the phenomenon of child soldiering, the numbers keep increasing while discussions on the issue keep declining. Kingsley (2017) confirms that “in the year 2001, the continent of Africa was estimated to have anywhere from 120,000 – 200, 000 child soldiers ranging from 5 – 16 years”. (p.6) Based on the U.N report on children in armed conflict, he indicates further that as of 2014, child soldiers were actively recruited in various conflicts across the continent.

This work is significant since it will rejuvenate the discussion on the consequences of child soldiering and dissuade people from recruiting children as “soldiers” and abusing their rights in the process. As cited by Nabutanyi (2013), Honwana & De Boeck (2005) states in “Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa” that children constitute the majority of Africa’s population. It thus flows from the study that by protecting the rights of children during conflict, we would be indirectly protecting the future of the African continent.

The researcher in this thesis agrees with Haer’s (2018) argument that among the various approaches used and individuals who investigate the child soldier phenomenon – those who investigate the influence of the general and structural factors, those who emphasize the importance of the supply side of child soldiering, those who examine the demand side and

those who are primarily interested in the consequences of child soldiering, research done on the latter (the consequences of the child soldier) has received very little attention as compared to the other areas. With this thesis, the researcher would add to the scholarship on the consequences of child soldiering: not just the traumatization of the child soldier as a result of war but also, how this trauma leaves the child lost. Considering the fact that literature is a reflection of life, the researcher believes that the authors whose works have been used for this study have accurately represented the situation. Consequently, with the discussion and analysis in this study, I hope to not only revive the conversation on the use of children in conflict but also motivate policy makers to remain relentless in their quest to protect the rights of children during conflicts. Again, the researcher shares in Fischer's (2018) view that "academic research on child soldier literature is, however, still rare". (p. 1). Haer (2018) holds a similar view when he asserts that research on child soldiering is fairly sparse because they are often done by civil societies and not academics. The researcher is therefore optimistic that this research will increase awareness, rejuvenate interest in the topic of child soldiering on a broader scale, enhance deep critical engagement on the issue in the academic space, encourage further research in the area and ultimately frustrate the sensibilities of those who recruit children to fight during wars – it is this singular act that will put a stop to this menace.

Organization of the study

This study is organized in six (6) main chapters. Chapter one deals with the general introduction to the work and background to the study where the researcher presents background information of the authors, summary of the texts and also provide a brief historical background of the Sierra Leone Civil War which is represented in Beah's *A Long Way Gone*. A background to the war in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is absent because, the fictitious nature of the text makes it difficult for the researcher to relate it to a particular civil war even though some scholars like

Osiki, et al. (2021) have attributed it to the Nigerian Civil War. This chapter also contains the statement of the problem, objective of the study, the research questions, methodology, the justification for the selected texts and organization of the thesis.

Chapter two contains empirical literature and theoretical review. Here, the researcher provides insight into the general concept of civil wars and traces the origin of child soldiering. A review of literature on the selected texts (*Beasts of No Nation* and *A Long Way Gone*) and the concept of trauma in some other African texts is done in this chapter in order to establish how this work is similar and different from other works done in this area of study. Concerning the theoretical review, the researcher highlights the development of the trauma theory from the field of psychology (Sigmund Freud) to literature (Cathy Caruth). Since the thesis is also supported by the theory of literary realism, the researcher explains how this nineteenth century concept helps the authors (Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah) to represent the concept of child soldiering in an unfiltered manner and without idealization or romanticization.

Chapter three which the researcher titles “**From a Victim to a Victimizer**” analyzes how the child soldier transitions from a victim of war to a victimizer. Here, the researcher draws a line between the child soldier’s hitherto peaceful and innocent life before the war and his horrendous life during the war with the aim of making his transition and loss more pronounced. We also understand in this chapter, how the child soldier is lured, manipulated and initiated into child soldiering.

Chapter four which the researcher titles “**Telling the War: Expressing the Content of the Child Soldier’s Trauma**” analyzes how the child soldier, as the narrator of events, journeys readers through his traumatic experiences and facilitates an understanding of conflict from the perspective of the child. Being a first-person narrator, the child soldier’s use of language and how it helps reveal his trauma is explored.

Chapter five which the researcher titles “**Traumatized and Lost: The Burden of the Child Soldier**” explores the life of the child soldier after the war and the challenges he faces in his attempt to fit back into the society. Some of the challenges identified include personality crisis, post-traumatic stress disorder, the display of physical violence and the lack of trust. A comparison of how Agu and Ishmael welcome reintegration is also done in this chapter. Chapter six presents the summary of the findings and makes recommendations for further research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlights the introduction and background to the study where the researcher presents background information of the authors, summary of the texts and also provides a brief historical background of the Sierra Leone Civil War. The chapter points out the objectives of the study from which the research questions that drive this work are derived. This chapter further highlights the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, methodology, justification for the selected texts and the organization of the entire thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

This section of the study will review works related to this study and reveal the gaps that exist which my work seeks to fill. It will explicate key concepts such as civil wars in Africa and the child soldier figure in Africa by reviewing works that have already been done in these areas. This section of the thesis will review literature on the selected texts that will be used for the thesis and finally review literature on the concept of trauma as depicted in other literary texts. This will show how different or similar my work is compared to other studies done in the same area.

Civil Wars in Africa

Supporting the view of Rosen (2005) that “war is a constant companion in human life” (p. 3), Osiki, et al. (2021) claim that “in the bigger perspective, wars have erupted within and among communities so often that one can say that the end of wars among the human race is almost impossible” (p. 150). This shows the position that war occupies in the human race. The term ‘conflict’ which I alternatively use for ‘war’ in this work can be explained from three main perspectives according to Mayer (2000). These are, ‘conflict as perception’, ‘conflict as feeling’ and ‘conflict as action’. Explaining conflict as a perception, Mayer (2000) argues that conflict is often the conviction that one’s own needs, interests, wants, or values are incompatible with someone else’s. As a feeling, he is also of the view that conflict can be expressed through several emotions including fear, anger, bitterness, sadness, hopelessness or

a combination of these. Finally, concerning conflict as action, he explains that they involve actions that may be violent or destructive.

With regards to the causes of civil wars in West Africa, Afolabi (2009) points out that “conflicts in West Africa have been notably fuelled by multiple interrelated causal factors including poverty, human rights violations, bad governance and corruption, ethnic marginalization and small arms proliferations”. (Fithen, 1999, Voz di Paz and Interpeace, 2010, Vinck et al, 2011, Keili, 2008).

Even though conflicts are not always brutal, one cannot confidently say it is the case with civil wars that have plagued some African countries since they are often characterized by extreme violence, brutalities and senseless killings. According to Afolabi (2009) as quoted by Annan (2014), for decades, countries such as Liberia, Sierra Leone, Cote d’Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau were crippled by conflicts and civil strife in which violence and incessant killings were prevalent. Adding to these countries, Twum-Danso (2003) argues that “eighteen of the fifty-three countries on the continent are currently involved with, or emerging from armed conflict. Violent conflicts have devastated countries such as Algeria, Angola, Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR), Congo-Brazzaville, Chad, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Eritrea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, Sudan and Uganda” (pp.16-17). Describing the violent and inhumane nature of African civil wars, Twum-Danso (2003) cites specific examples from some conflicts that have plagued the African continent like Sierra Leone, Liberia and Rwanda. She opines that:

Indeed, recent African civil wars have been particularly brutal and bloody. Violence against civilians, a characteristic of modern warfare, has been excessive and extremely explicit. In Sierra Leone, villagers were forced to watch public beheadings in which the victim’s neck was cut, working from back to front with a blunt blade. Civilians were also mutilated and maimed. There were two particular ways of torture common to the wars in Sierra Leone and Liberia which should be described: “tabay” and “halaka”. To tabay a person involved tying them so tightly with wet ropes that their arms and shoulders were permanently damaged. Halaka was a system whereby civilians were stripped naked, had their arms and feet tied, and beaten

from point to point while lying prone. In Liberia, women were raped by friends of their sons. One child soldier, fighting for Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL), was forced to bayonet his pregnant sister to show his loyalty to the force. The Rwandan genocide provides examples of some of the worst atrocities known to man. Women and children were tortured, buried alive, burnt or hacked to death. Babies had their heads smashed against walls as their parents watched. Women were raped in front of their husbands and children and then had to watch whilst their families were killed before they were. The Prime Minister of Rwanda, Madame Agathe Uwilingiyimana, was forced to strip naked in the presence of her mother, husband and children, before being bayoneted through the vagina repeatedly until the bayonet emerged through her throat. (p. 17).

The excerpt above accurately describes the atrocious nature of civil wars experienced in Africa in the last few decades. It is therefore not surprising that the topic of civil war has in recent times, occupied a significant space in the literary circles with novelists like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Chris Abani, Ishmael Beah, Emmanuel Jal and Uzodinma Iweala thematizing the topic in their works. This is why Amma Darko in reflecting the "mirroring" role of literature states in an interview with Mary Ellen Higgins that if "a country is going through a crisis, and people are writing around the time, they will be drawn to writing stories that would deal with those crises." (p. 115). In this thesis, the researcher concentrates more on the child-soldier, who is victimized but later, recruited into the army and made to unleash terror as seen in the extract above. The trauma that follows is what the researcher in this thesis argues is extremely overwhelming and traumatizing that it renders the child soldier lost. The trauma and loss that the child soldier experiences upon his recruitment during times of war and after the war is what this research sets out to explore.

The Child Soldier Figure in Africa

This section reviews studies on the child soldier with the aim of providing a better understanding and appreciation of the phenomenon. Tracing the origin of the child soldier phenomenon in his work titled "Kindergarten Killers: Morality, Murder and the Child Soldier Problem", Faulkner (2001) argues that child soldiering is not a twentieth century

phenomenon and that history is replete with many examples of the use of child soldiers. He argues:

During the Middle Ages, young boys were apprenticed as squires to serve knights by undertaking armouring duties, such as maintaining the knight's body armour, performing simple logistical tasks and acting in a general supportive role. According to the same source, children seem to have long been recruited to act as spies, lookouts and messengers. There is also a tradition of young boys fulfilling roles as drummer boys. (p. 494)

This clearly indicates that the use of child soldiers is nothing new but a phenomenon whose origin can be traced to many centuries ago in the human history. Sharing the same view as Faulkner (2001) but situating her argument in the first half of the twentieth century, Denov (2010) quotes Watson (2006):

The Crusades, the Napoleonic Wars, America's War of Independence and its Civil War, and the Fascist wars in the first half of the twentieth century all embroiled children in armed conflict (Marten 2002; Mazurana et al. 2002; Rosen 2005). The Children's Crusade in 1212 recruited an estimated 30,000–50,000 children, both boys and girls, as untrained soldiers under the assumption that divine power would enable them to conquer the enemy. Children set out from France and Germany with the aim of capturing Jerusalem and redeeming the Holy Sepulchre (Shahar 1990). None reached their destination, and few returned home, with most being sold into slavery or drowning in the Mediterranean Sea. (Watson, 2006).

These views advanced by Faulkner (2001) and Watson (2006) prove that the use of child soldiers is not a twenty first century phenomenon but can be traced back to the first half of the twentieth century and even as far back as the Middle Ages. However, with regards to the representation of the child soldier in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, it is clear as this thesis will reveal that the child soldier in the last two decades has advanced with regards to his duties and responsibilities. Now, the child soldier does not only perform logistical duties like cleaning ammunitions but engages in the war itself. They perform military duties ranging from being

spies and engaging in combats on the frontlines. The trauma and loss that comes along with this transformation is what this thesis explores.

Faulkner (2001: 450), therefore, makes it clear that even though the child soldier phenomenon is as old as the history of man, the child soldier in recent times has "moved up the military effectiveness order to take on a more 'proactive' profile, and now engages in combat duties alongside (or in front of) his or her adult colleagues." In a paper titled "Child Soldiers: The New Faces of War", Singer (2021) makes this point much clearer when he argues that:

By the turn of the 21st century, child soldiers had served in significant numbers on every continent of the globe except Antarctica. They have become integral parts of both organized military units and nonmilitary, but still violent, political organizations, including rebel and terrorist groups. They serve as combatants in a variety of roles: infantry shock troops, raiders, sentries, spies, trench diggers, and porters. In short, the participation of children in armed conflict is now global in scope and massive in number. (p. 2)

In the above extract, even though Singer (2021) points out the role played by child soldiers in recent times, he fails to highlight the trauma that these children battle, which in my view is a different form of war: a war devoid of ammunitions yet plagues the child's mind and personality even when the fighting ceases. This sense and chronic feeling of loss is what the researcher explores in this thesis.

Obviously, the roles that child soldiers played during the Middle Ages have in recent times, specifically after World War II, transformed and increased on a more alarming and violent scale. Wylan (2011) explains that:

While children have carried out some of the tasks associated with war as far back as Medieval times, such as a lookout or messenger, the use of children as the perpetrators of violent war crimes and atrocities today is a disturbing trend in the modern era" (Dallaire, 2010; Fox, 2005; Pugel, 2006; Singer. 2006; Wessells; 2009) (p.15.)

Fox (2005) as cited by Wylan (2011) sums up this argument perfectly when she writes: “It is important to stress that the contemporary child soldier phenomenon is very new indeed, for in the post-cold war era it has reached proportions—both in terms of scope and extremes—that stretch far beyond any previous occurrences in human history. It is simply unprecedented. (p. 15). In the case of Africa, it is believed that in almost every war, child soldiers were recruited. Denov (2010) accounts that:

During the civil war in Burundi (1993 -2005), children were recruited by the primary opposition group, the Forces Nationales de Libération (FNL) in their rebellion against the government...In Central African Republic, two main armed groups, the Popular Army for the Restoration of the Republic and Democracy (APRD) and the Union of Democratic Forces, have used children since the outbreak of hostilities in 2005... Two main opposition groups in Chad continue to recruit children including the Front Uni pour le Changement (FUC) and the Socle pour le Changement, l'Unité et la Démocratie. The FUC has reportedly recruited children as young as 12 and more than 25 per cent of its forces are estimated to be children (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2008) ... The conflict in Côte d'Ivoire began in 2002, with the majority of hostilities ending in 2004. However, reports have suggested that children were recruited by the opposition group Forces Armées des Forces Nouvelles (FAFN) until at least late 2005... Estimates put the total number of children implicated in the war in the DRC at 30,000 for both government and insurgency forces (Warchild UK 2006, p. 3) ... In Sierra Leone, thousands of children were recruited into numerous armed groups during its 11-year civil war from 1991 to 2002 including the Revolutionary United Front, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council and the Civil Defence Forces... Political instability in Somalia since the 1980s has facilitated the military recruitment of thousands of children by all warring parties... Clashes in Sudan's Darfur region led to the recruitment of thousands of children by government-backed militias and armed groups between May and June 2006 alone (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, 2008)... Armed conflict in the northern districts of Uganda has created a steady threat to the security of children since 1986. Over the past two decades, the rebel Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) has forcibly abducted approximately 25,000 children (Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers 2008). [p. 26-27].

The above extract only provides us with figures and helps us understand the roles that children have been made to play in civil wars that have plagued the continent. However, there

is no mention of how these children who are recruited during these periods are left traumatized and how their traumatization subsequently leaves them lost in the societies in which they find themselves. With this thesis, the researcher does not only expose the numbers of children who are actively made to participate in wars across the continent but also highlight the feeling of loss that inevitably engulfs them as a result of the traumatic experiences that they are exposed to.

Discussing the involvement of children in armed conflicts within the African context, Twum-Danso (2003) identifies three main groups of children who are vulnerable to recruitment as child soldiers. The first group are children from poor or otherwise disadvantaged sectors of society, the second group are children from the actual conflict zones themselves and the third group are children from disrupted or non-existent family backgrounds. Among these three groups, she identifies the third to be exceptionally susceptible to recruitment by armed groups since they lack families meant to provide them with physical protection. Faulkner (2001) shares a similar view with Twum-Danso (2003) as he adds that children who are prone to recruitment by armed forces during conflicts may include; “children with little or no education, those from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic groups, children separated from families, usually in the fog of conflict, orphans, street children, refugees, the internally displaced and children from disrupted backgrounds”. (p. 450). Singer (2021) also shares the views of Faulkner (2001) and Twum-Danso (2003) as he opines that children who are at a particular risk of being recruited as child soldiers are homeless or street children, refugees and internally displaced children. The common thread that runs through these views is that children who are most susceptible to being recruited as child soldiers are displaced children and children from broken homes. Singer (2021) helps us glean the devastating nature of child soldiering in Africa by citing the horrific situation in some war zones as examples. He writes:

The areas where child soldiers have been present read like a master list of the continent’s worst zones of violence. In Somalia, boys 14 to 18 regularly fight in warlord militias. In Rwanda, thousands of

children are thought to have participated in the 1994 genocide in which Hutus killed hundreds of thousands of Tutsis. For example, one rehabilitation camp alone housed some 486 suspected child genocidaires. The boys were all younger than 14 when they allegedly took part in the mass killings of thousands. Across the border, in the ongoing fighting between Hutus and Tutsis in Burundi, up to 14,000 children have fought in the war, many as young as 12. Indeed, at the start of the war, Hutu rebel groups sent between 3,000 and 5,000 children to training camps in the Central African Republic, Tanzania, and Rwanda. Since then, refugee and street children in these countries and Kenya have also been recruited for the fighting in Burundi. Similar practices prevail in fighting to the east in Congo-Brazzaville and Côte d'Ivoire (where there are some 3,000 child soldiers), while to the north, large numbers of Ethiopian youths fought in their country's war with Eritrea. (p. 4)

This proves that child soldiers over the years have played significant roles in various conflicts in Africa. Twum-Danso (2003) claims that even though some child soldiers are recruited against their will, others join voluntarily and “in some cases, child recruits go beyond what they had been ordered to”. (p. 26). She justifies this act of some children joining armed forces voluntarily by stating that it includes a desire for revenge, adventure, fun-seeking, a sense of belonging and peer pressure. She however adds that the primary reason is for survival. With this thesis, I caution that it is not entirely accurate to refer to these children as joining rebel and military forces voluntarily because it is evident from the texts used for this thesis that they join due to forces beyond their control – the need for survival and protection.

Aside children sometimes joining military forces willingly or recruited by force, Singer (2021) adds that some children are also lured or manipulated to join these military forces. Citing specific examples from the Sierra Leone and Liberian war, he writes:

Innocent children have been tricked into joining with extraordinary or impossible promises to which only gullible children would give credence. In Sierra Leone, for example, the RUF promised poor rural children that fighting would help them escape the poverty and misery many of them had known all their lives. As one child fighter describes, “they told us we’d all have our own vehicle. They told us they’d build houses for us. They told us many things”. In Liberia, Charles Taylor promised that every child fighting for his group would get a computer if he won the war. (p. 9)

Even though child soldiers from the above assertions are said to be recruited through various means and with various motivations, one thing that the discussions in this thesis will make clear is that regardless of the mode of or motivation for recruitment of children into soldiering during times of war, this act damages them and leaves them lost in the society. They become children with no sense of direction or purpose – a struggle which seems impossible to overcome. The trauma that oppresses them both physically and psychologically seems incurable. They become children with distorted personalities. This is why Bloom (2018) while discussing childhood trauma argues that “it is very possible, and by clinical experience probable, that the damage done to some of these children in early childhood is irreversible by any means presently known to psychiatric science. (p. 19). Quoting Martins (2013), Osiki et al. (2021) delineate perfectly the tragedy of child soldiers during conflicts as follows:

Children involved in armed conflict are frequently killed or injured during combat or while carrying out other tasks. They are forced to engage in hazardous activities such as laying mines or explosives, as well as using weapons. Child soldiers are usually forced to live under harsh conditions with insufficient food or little or no access to healthcare. They are almost always treated brutally, subjected to beatings and humiliating treatment. Punishments for mistakes or desertion are often severe. Girl soldiers are particularly at risk of rape, sexual harassment and abuse as well as being involved in combat and other tasks (p. 652).

This portrays the innocence, vulnerability and fragility of the child soldier in the absence of the protection they rightly deserve from the family and the society at large. Osiki, et al. (2021), however, caution that “while literary works on child soldiers may expose the effects of wars and conflicts on the childhood of child soldiers, they are not actual historical accounts of everyday life or conditions in which child soldiers operated during civil wars in Africa”. (p.146). Using *Beasts of No Nation* as an example of such narratives, they theorize that “*Beasts of No Nation* serves to illustrate the creative and literary interpretation of the Nigerian Civil

War...” (p.146). It is therefore important to acknowledge that the events in war-related texts might not fully represent the actual events that took place. However, it is equally important not to undermine the role trauma narratives play in helping trauma victims deal with traumatic experiences. One might question the authenticity of a war narrative, but with this thesis, the researcher believes that the traumatic experiences that accompany war can be fully represented in a narrative that is lucidly told from the point of view of an actual victim. That is why this thesis does not only dwell on prose fiction (*Beasts of No Nation*) as its primary source of data but also relies on a memoir (*A Long Way Gone*).

Having explored diverse views of scholars concerning children who are susceptible to recruitment by armed groups and the methods employed in their recruitment, it is important to interrogate why these children are targeted in the first place. For Faulkner (2001), children are usually targeted by armed groups because:

Children can also act relatively inconspicuously in war zones, observing troop deployments, dispositions of weapons and noting logistical arrangement without attracting undue attention. This type of activity is not that surprising, considering that military forces, preoccupied with enemy movement and rapidly evolving battlefield conditions, may render children ‘invisible’ – they are there, but of no great consequence in the general scheme of local conditions. (pp. 494)

This explains the motivation behind the recruitment of children by military forces during conflicts. Their swiftness, inconspicuous nature, innocence, and their tendency to follow instructions without questioning authority make children susceptible to recruitment by rebel groups and military forces during conflicts.

Aside Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* and Beah’s *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, the child soldier figure has been represented by many writers with some even sharing their personal experiences. The publication of Ahmadou Kourouma’s last novel, *Allah is Not Obligated* (2000) is mostly regarded by literary critics as what set the pace for the discussion on child soldiering two decades ago.

Kourouma's masterpiece tells the story of a ten-year-old Birihima, who leaves his native village in Ivory Coast after the death of his mother in search of his auntie, Mahan. While crossing the border into Liberia, he is captured by rebels and forced into military services as a child soldier. He experiences untold trauma as he fights in a chaotic civil war with many other child soldiers. He witnesses death, torture and dismemberment. These are indeed experiences that are very traumatic for a young boy.

With the conversation on child soldiering already opened by Kourouma, Emmanuel Dangala joins the conversation with the publication of *Johnny Mad Dog* in 2005. Unlike Kourouma and many other authors, Dangala, who in 1997 together with his family fled their home in Brazaville in the wake of a brutal civil war, approaches the issue of child soldiering from two different narrative perspectives. He employs two teenagers, Laokoles and Johnny Mad Dog, to tell the story. While Laokoles wants to complete high school and become an engineer, Johnny Mad Dog joins an armed rebel and unbridles terror. Torregrosa (2005) summarizes Dangala's novel as follows:

Dangala's novel, narrated by two 16-year-olds, a girl named Laokolé and a boy who calls himself Johnny Mad Dog, begins after a bloody coup in a West African country, presumably the author's homeland, the Congo Republic. Laokolé, whose father was murdered in a previous coup by soldiers who also maimed her mother, is forced to leave home with her mother and young brother after hearing that military rebels are taking over the city and that a period of looting has been proclaimed. Carrying essential possessions in a bundle on her head, Laokolé pushes her crippled mother in a wheelbarrow down rutted roads overrun with thousands of other families fleeing from advancing troops and teenage militias armed with AK-47's and Uzis. It takes no time for terror to set in. In 48 hours, Laokolé loses her brother in the stampede and her mother in a rocket attack. At the same time, Johnny Mad Dog and his cohort, the Death Dealers and the Roaring Tigers, go on a joy ride of killing, raping and looting in the name of their tribe, the Dogo-Mayis, who are not to be confused with their rival tribe, the Mayi-Dogos.

(The New York Times)

It is clear that Dongala masterfully uses dual narrators, both of whom are teenagers, to portray the effects of war on children and how children who are recruited as child soldiers leave behind their innocence to commit atrocities.

In 2007, the conversation on child soldiering in the African literary space continued. This time, authors began to tell their own stories. They sort to recount their personal experiences in the wars that have devastated the African continent. These writers include Ishmael Beah (*A Long Way Gone*) and Grace Akallo. With the publication of her autobiographical work, *Girl Soldier*, Akallo widened the scope of the child-soldier figure in Africa to include the female gender. On October 10, 1996, rebels from the Lord's Resistance Army raided Grace's school when she was only fifteen. This was the beginning of her life as a child soldier. Together with other girls, they were forced into soldiering and made concubines of army commanders. These girls who became known as "Aboke Girls" (missing school girls who came to symbolize thousands of children who were kidnapped in Northern Uganda by rebels), were forced to endure savagery, starvation, and abuse. Akallo tells her story with the help of an American researcher, Faith McDonnell, who provides an in-depth insight and background to the brutal war in Northern Uganda.

Aside Akallo's *Girl Soldier*, the year 2007 also saw the publication of another child-soldier narrative titled *Song for Night* by the Nigerian-born novelist, Chris Abani. Born in 1966 at the beginning of the Biafran-Nigerian civil war, Abani did not personally experience the war but through fiction, he is able to create a vivid picture of the concept of child soldiering. His novel revolves around a 15-year-old boy soldier called My Luck. He is trained as a sapper (a soldier who specializes in laying and clearing mines). Together with other soldiers trained in this area, they roam ahead of their comrades, scouting for mines and disabling them. Early on in their training, their commanding officer ordered that they have their vocal chords cut off. The novel involves a journey beginning immediately after the explosion of a mine that has knocked out My Luck. When he regains consciousness, the other members of his platoon are gone. He goes

to look for them, wandering through dangerous areas that may or may not be enemy territory. With his search for the rest of his team, Abani presents to readers, the struggle of a child soldier on a journey to understand his place and identity in the world. The trauma that My Luck suffers comes to him in dreams as he is often haunted by the people that he has killed and a woman that he had raped. A significant thread that runs through these child-soldier narratives is how the authors dwell on the concept of childhood to highlight the effects of war on children. They do this by employing an African child as the narrator of events – a method which became prominent after the publication of Camara Laye's *African Child* (1954). This is why Maxwell Okolie in his section of Eldred D. Jones' *Childhood in African Literature* which is titled *Childhood in Africa: A Literary Perspective* argues that "In fact, the African child did not become a subject of literature until the early fifties in the wake of negritude controversies." (p.29). He acknowledges Camara Laye as the writer to have set a precedent in discussing the theme of childhood and making it possible for subsequent novelists and writers like Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah to integrate it in their works. Just like the child protagonist in Kourouma's novel, Agu and Ishmael in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* respectively, to some extent, seem to flaw the assertion that childhood is a period of innocence and vulnerability. This is because of the brutal roles that these children are later made to take up as child soldiers upon their recruitments and the atrocities they commit in their quest to survive the war. Jenks (1996) therefore rightly asserts in his work, *Childhood* that:

Certain behavioral propensities, including the capacity for aggression, are common to virtually all human. This does not only mean that they are genetically determined...humans have a capacity to be both aggressive and altruistic...the behaviour shown depends on a host of developmental, social and circumstantial factors. (p. 29)

The above explains why child soldiers, even though are children, are capable of inflicting such pain and maltreatment on others when they are exploited by warlords, recruited and turned into

killers. These child-soldier narratives just like the texts used for this thesis, reveal how the innocence and childhood of child soldiers are compromised. The events they experience and personally narrate to readers are unimaginably traumatic and disturbing. However, this thesis draws attention to an area that is often ignored or has received very little attention: the consequences of the trauma on the child soldier's life during the war and even after the war has ended. The trauma experienced by the child soldier is so destructive that it drastically and insensitively alters the child's personality and life in general, leaving him lost. Even when the war is over and the child soldier is far away from it, because the war memories are firmly cemented in his psyche, he is forced to relive these experiences as they have become acquainted to his shadow and follow him regardless of time or geographical boundaries.

Review of Literature on the Concept of Trauma in other Texts

Post-independence African writers have adopted the concept of trauma in areas ranging from colonialism to bad governance in Africa. This is why Mambrol (2018) claims that trauma studies explore the impact of trauma in literature and society by analyzing its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural significance. Writers like Chinua Achebe, Ferdinand Oyono, Mongo Beti, Peter Abraham, and many others have condemned the colonial enterprise by inculcating the concept of trauma in their works. This enables them to aptly reveal the devastating nature of colonialism, which included oppression, racism, subjugation, physical and psychological torture. For instance, Oyono through his characters Meka and Toundi in *The Oldman and the Medal* and *Houseboy* respectively, paints a picture of the inexplicable trauma that Africans experienced at the hands of the Europeans. These traumatic experiences of the protagonists are usually manifested mainly through physical, psychological and racial abuse. Through these characters, Oyono retells the evils, suffering, injustice, racial discrimination and the level of exploitation that was prevalent during the colonial era in Cameroon and Africa at large. On his

first day as a houseboy for the Commandant, Toundi in Oyono's *Houseboy* bemoans his traumatic experiences. He recounts:

The Commandant grabbed me by the hair, swung me round and peered into my eyes...he shot out a kick to my shins that sent me sprawling under the table. The Commandant's kick was even more painful than the kick of the late Father Gilbert. He seemed pleased with his effort. (p. 23)

The physical abuse that Toundi suffers at the hands of his European master is very graphic and disturbing. One can only imagine the physical and psychological pain inflicted on him in the extract above as he compares the strength of the Commandant to the trunk of a mahogany. Tundi further reveals "my master is thickest. His legs have great muscles like the legs of a pedlar. He is the kind of man we call "mahogany trunk" because the trunk of the mahogany tree is so strong that it never bends in a storm..." (p. 22). The overwhelming stature and strength of the Commandant as revealed by Toundi depicts the depth of the trauma Toundi suffers as the Commandant kicks him. In another instance, while Toundi performs his usual duties as a go-between for the Commandant's wife and her secret lover, the Prison Director (M. Moreau), he witnesses two Africans being tortured, beaten and treated like animals on the suspicion of stealing. This scene makes Toundi question Christianity, and bewail the social stratification that exists between the Europeans and the Africans. He narrates the incident as follows:

The prison-director was busy with two Africans suspected of stealing from M. Janopoulos. He was 'teaching them how to behave. With the help of a constable, he was giving them a flogging in front of M. Janopoulos. They were stripped to the waist and handcuffed. There was a rope round their neck, tied to the pole in the Flogging Yard, so that they couldn't turn their necks towards the blows. It was terrible. The hippopotamus-hide whip tore up their flesh. Every time they groaned, it went through their bowels. (p. 75)

This scene which young Toundi witnesses is awfully traumatic for a boy his age. By using the words "stripped", "handcuffed", "flogging yard", "hippopotamus-hide whip" and "groaned", it becomes obvious that this is a scene that can haunt an individual for life unless he/she is

given the needed psychological help. However, this scene becomes an epiphany, opening Toundi's eyes to see the true identity and agenda of the white man. He laments:

I thought of all the priests, all the pastors, all the white men, who came to save our souls and preach love of our neighbours. Is the white man's neighbour only other white men? Who can go on believing the stuff we are served up in the churches when things happen like I saw today...It will be the usual thing. M. Moreau's suspects will be sent to the 'Blackman's Grave' where they will spend a few days painfully dying. Then they will be buried naked in the prisoners' cemetery. On Sunday, the priest will say 'Dearly beloved brethren, pray for all those prisoners who die without making their peace with God.' M. Moreau will present his upturned topee to the faithful. Everyone will put in a little more than he had intended. All the money goes to the whites. They are always thinking up new ways to get back what little money they pay us. How wretched we are. (p. 76)

While Toundi reveals the brutal treatment of black prisoners, he does not hesitate to condemn the hypocrisy of the white man. He now acknowledges that the church has been a tool used to oppress and exploit the Africans. He realizes that the church is only an agent aiding and abetting the imperialists' agenda and that their claim of civilizing the Africans is just a pretext.

Some writers aside using the concept of trauma to condemn the oppressive underpinnings of colonialism, they have also adopted this concept to explore how women are oppressed, subjugated and discriminated against in some African societies. These include writers like Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie (*Purple Hibiscus*), Mariama Ba (*So Long a Letter*), Buchi Emecheta (*Joys of Motherhood*), Binwell Sinyangwe (*A Cowrie of Hope*), Bayo Adebawale (*Lonely Days*) and many others. Sinyangwe and Adebawale in their novels, *A Cowrie of Hope* and *Lonely Days* respectively, showcase how widows are blatantly and senselessly abused by male-dominated societies. These novelists often focus on the female identity by portraying how women are subordinated and downtrodden. By bringing to light the traumatic experiences of the female protagonists, these novelists set out to rebel against a patriarchal society and give women a voice. In a paper titled "A Comparative Study of Widows' Plight in Binwell Sinyagwe's *A Cowrie of Hope* and Bayo Adebawale's *Lonely Days*", Moussa

(2020) argues that “the plight of African widows is deplorable in African societies where the weight of customs and traditions makes them suffer a lot. In those societies, the maltreatment that the men inflict on them is usually inhumane”. Moussa (2020) highlights an instance of such act of maltreatment against a widow by the elders of the society as depicted in *Lonely Days*.

Cut her hair down to the roots. Even if the skin on the head has to be bruised in the process! Bruise it, for goodness sake! We hope your razor is sharp enough to do the job the way we want it done? Cut this woman’s totally down to her scalp! Sprinkle her head with wood ash and oil it with paraffin ointment. (p.27).

Clearly, this inhumane treatment of widows in *Lonely Days*, which can be seen as a microcosm of the plights of widows in many African communities, is what makes the treatment of trauma as it relates to women glaring. The scars and bruises often left on their psyche is capable of destroying any human. This idea of traumatic experiences of the oppressed woman leading to a physic injury is majorly explored by Mariama Ba in her novel, *So Long a Letter*. The emotional and psychological torture inflicted on Jacqueline, the wife of the medical doctor, Samba Diak, as a result of his womanizing nature is one instance that cannot escape the attention of readers. The trauma that Jacqueline experiences is so overwhelming that she feels physically sick even though she is not. After repeated and regular check-ups that proved futile, it takes the comforting and assuring words of the doctor to make her realize that she is only depressed. The doctor reveals to Jacqueline “Madame Diack, I assure you that there is nothing at all wrong with your head. The X-rays have shown nothing, and neither have the blood tests. The problem is that you are depressed, that is ...not happy.” (p.47). This shows the extent to which the trauma experienced by oppressed women can damage them, not only physically but mentally and emotionally.

In a paper titled “Traumatic Experiences of Nigerian Women: An Archetypal Representation in Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*”, Abubakar (2016) further highlights the concept of trauma that stems from the abuse and oppression of women, especially widows. She argues:

The trauma of being a widow is heightened, when the society tends to interfere in family matters, the shattering situations grow worse rather than better. In reality a bereaved person on losing a spouse is actually at the weakest moment of one's life. At such a time, the loss of a loved one, especially a spouse, surely leaves one with an emotional void and feelings of insecurity and pain seem to hit the survivor the most. On humanitarian grounds, one is expected to be treated with more love, care and tenderness, to cover for the irreparable loss and make efforts in sustaining life and build endurance to survive the devastating situation. However, in some traditional parts of Africa, the reverse is the case. Widows are treated with harshness and cruelty; in some parts, they are forced to drink the water used in bathing the corpse. The belongings of the family are confiscated by members of the dead husband's extended family and the bereaved family is dispossessed of their inheritance. (p. 606).

The above reflects the plights of Uju's mother in Chika Unigwe's *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, who is thrown out of her husband's house together with her daughter after the demise of her husband. She is accused of killing her husband even though it is obvious that he died as a result of road accident. The narrator recounts, "supervised by Uju's uncle, her father's oldest brother, Uju and her mother had been sent sprawling out of their modest three-bedroom flat in New Lay Out, to a less modest one room face-me-I-face-you flat on Obiagu Road, their property trailing behind them like unwanted children. The only things that the widow had been allowed to take out the house were her clothes" (p.28). The use of the concept of trauma to unravel and interrogate various levels of oppression and subjugation suffered by some women in the African society is so common in the literary space that some poets employ this concept to also expose and ridicule such acts. A typical example of such poems is Kristina Rungano's poem, "The Woman". This poem attempts to describe the inexpressible pain and cruelty the persona has to endure as a wife who finds herself in a patriarchal society. Even though she carries a baby in her womb and she is worn out, she must work tirelessly everyday just to fulfill her obligations as a wife and a woman. She is often physically abused and raped by her husband. Even though she detests these acts of cruelty against her and the unborn

child, she cannot revolt against them because it will mean one woman battling the powerful forces and ideals of an African patriarchal society. These lines from the poem substantiate the traumatic experiences of the oppressed woman as her husband, in his drunken stupor, forcibly sleeps with her and assaults her. She narrates:

Then you came in,
In your drunken lust
And you made your demands
When I explained how I was tired
And how I feared for the child – yours – I
Carried
You beat me and had your way
(*The Woman: Kristina Rungano*)

By incorporating the concept of trauma in this poem, Rungano is able to perfectly paint a vivid picture of how the rights of such women are usurped by patriarchal powers and how it affects both the psychological and physical wellbeing of the woman. It is not surprising that Chinua Achebe through Ikem in *Anthills of the Savannah* asserts that, “the women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world...” (p. 98).

Outside the domain of colonialism and feminism, some writers have also used the concept of trauma to condemn bad leadership and poor governance in Africa. These include writers like Chinua Achebe (*Anthills of the Savannah*), Okey Ndibe (*Arrows of Rain*) and Helon Habila (*Waiting for an Angel*).

Trauma that results from bad governance is usually explored in literary works that seek to condemn military or dictatorial regimes. A typical example is Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*. This novel, which commences with a coup and ends with a coup, chronicles the continuous struggle of a society to overcome a history of suffering and trauma brought about by bad governance. Asika (2011) in a paper titled “Military Dictatorship in Nigerian Novels: A Study of Helon Habila’s *Waiting for an Angel* and Chinua Achebe’s *Anthills of the Savannah*” describes the era of dictatorial rule in Nigeria as “an era of blood, tyranny, oppression, brutal killings, terror and alarming rate of corruption”. The maltreatment suffered

by characters like Chris and Ikem, who are against Sam's military government is very traumatic and inhumane. Even before Chris and Ike meet their untimely deaths, they face constant abuse, victimization and suppression. This is captured in the words of Asika (2011) below:

The military era was one of tyranny; denigration, molestation and complication where the citizens are but only slaves and mere worshippers of him, their great god. His excellency like the manner of all military leaders hate anything that portrays truth. This was what made Ikem Osodi a victim of his injustice. Ikem Osodi, the Editor of the 'National Gazette' took it upon himself to write nothing but the truth; to expose and satirize the corruption and dictatorial nature of military rulers. This was a great threat to the government of His Excellency and Ikem must be stopped by all means... Ikem paid heavily for saying the truth, he was arrested and murdered! (pp.280-281).

In fact, the scenes in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* do not only leave characters traumatized but are also capable of traumatizing an entire nation. Just as revealed by Isika (2011), a similar sentiment is shared in Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. Thus, "terror, anguish, victimization, molestation and slavery meted out to citizens of Nigeria during the military era in politics" (p. 283). In this novel, the author captures the era as a period filled with an "atmosphere of blood, fear, terror, hunger, diseases, starvation, denial of self-rights and denigration." (p.283). With these descriptions, it is obvious that the concept of trauma plays a significant role in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*. According to Asika (2011), "Habila's novel delves into the psychological disposition of many individuals to expose the traumatic effects of military government on them." (p. 284). For instance, Lomba, a journalist in Habila's novel, is jailed for over two years without any hope of a trial for speaking against the military government. Jane, the girlfriend of the prison superintendent describes Lomba's situation as follows:

And you know that he is never going to be tried. He would be kept here forever, forgotten.' Her voice became sharp and indignant. 'How can you be so unfeeling? Put yourself in his shoes. Two years away from friends, from family, without the power to...there was very little to be done for a political detainee... (p. 284)

The extract above also depicts the fates of journalists like Ikem Osodi in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ade Cooker in Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* who are molested and even lose their lives as a result of bad governance.

The trauma suffered by journalists under such harsh and cruel military regimes is also depicted in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*. As a postcolonial writer, Ndibe in his novel sets out to expose the ills and political challenges of a fictional state called Madia. He highlights the brutalities and oppression unleashed on innocent and powerless citizens. The narrator reveals one of such instances when a photojournalist is physically abused and killed by military men. Bukuru narrates:

At one point in the morning one of our photographers staggered in, dripping blood, the right-side of his head swollen. Shakily, he told us how a group of soldiers had beaten him at a checkpoint, upset that he had taken their picture. (p.194).

Indeed, the trauma that follows the abuse described in the extract above does not only affect the family of the victim or members of the press, but it affects the entire nation. The narrator also describes a graphic scene, where a character (Iyese) is brutally tortured and killed for not allowing Issa to claim legitimacy of her new-born baby. The innocent and vulnerable baby is not spared the cruelties meted out on to the citizenry. Bukuru narrates:

Iyese was sprawled on the floor, naked, her baby clutched to her chest. Her eyes were wide open, her mouth agape, a trail of blood ran out across the floor...stepping closer, I saw a gash on the baby's leg, an ugly knife from which blood still flowed. (p179).

These descriptions have the capacity of leaving a reader traumatized and make him/her feel the same amount of pain is being inflicted upon him/her. This idea of trauma as incorporated in Ndibe's novel help paint a vivid image of the horrors of military governance in Africa and calls on readers and relevant stakeholders to denounce such oppressive governances.

It is clear at this point of the discussion that the concept of trauma in African literature is not a new discourse but one that is as old as the colonial era. Even after independence and in

contemporary times, it has been adopted by many African writers to put their messages across to readers even in the form of fiction. This is why Whitehead (2004) argues that “literary fiction offers the flexibility and the freedom to be able to articulate the resistance and impact of trauma” (p. 87). Anthonissen (2008) adds that “in their fiction, trauma writers thus want to make readers aware of the problems trauma survivors have to deal with and of the obstacles and difficulties that exist in communicating trauma.” (p. 30). This clearly substantiates the significant role that the concept of trauma or the trauma theory has played and continues to play in the literary space, especially in Africa.

The factors that illicit the trauma in the texts reviewed in this section vary. These include trauma brought about as a result of colonialism, patriarchal tendencies, bad governance, gender inequality and many others. In this study however, the trauma experienced by both protagonists is as a result of child soldiering and the violence that accompanies war - a phenomenon which is intrinsically linked to the concept of trauma. The sense of loss that follows this trauma is what this thesis sets out to explore in order to discourage the engagement of children in conflicts by rebel and military forces.

It is also obvious from the review so far that even though the trauma expressed in the novels (and other literary texts that incorporate the concept of trauma) leaves the protagonists with physical and psychological scars, these protagonists are not presented as being lost as seen in the case of Agu in *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. In the case of Agu for instance, we are introduced to the highest form of child traumatization as he constantly seeks solace in death and questions his own self, identity and purpose. In Ishmael’s case, his trauma is so deeply buried in his psyche that even though he leaves the war zone and is now staying in New York, a little screech awakens his repressed memories and sends him back to Sierra Leone, reliving his violent and painful life as a child soldier.

Review of Literature on the Selected Texts

This section of the literature review examines studies that have been carried out on the selected texts. Having reviewed in the previous section a considerable amount of literature on the key concepts (civil war and the child soldier) that drive this research, the review of works in this section is intended to establish how this research is similar or different from previous studies on the selected texts with the aim of identifying and establishing a research gap. Obviously, both Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* play an indispensable role in exposing and raising awareness of the child soldier epidemic.

Anthonissen (2009) explores the representation of trauma in Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*. Even though I use the same texts used by Anthonissen (2009) in this research, the difference in motivation and objective is however very striking. Anthonissen (2009) chooses Beah's memoir and Iweala's novel with the intention of exploring the two authors' use of different narrative forms to reveal the traumatic experiences of child soldiers. In my case, I find Beah's memoir and Iweala's novel to be a suitable combination for this thesis since Beah's narration which is real and has a historical backing (the Sierra Leone War), will go a long way to authenticate the traumatic experiences of child soldiers and the general issue of civil wars as represented in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* considering the similarities of events in both works. Again, even though Anthonissen (2009) seems to concentrate only on the representation of the traumatic aspects of child soldiering in her work to the Western world, I go a step further in mine to discuss the physical as well as the traumatic representation of the child soldier from both the authors' and the child's perspective, discuss the difficulties that accompany the reintegration or rehabilitation process and how the child soldier is rendered lost as a result of his trauma. Just like some critics believe that child soldiering is an African phenomenon, Anthonissen (2009) makes the point that traumatic experience triggered by child soldiering is an "alien"

experience to the Western reader. I strongly disagree since I find the issue of child soldiering to be a global phenomenon rather than a phenomenon peculiar to African countries alone. My claim is supported by the Child Soldiers International Annual Report (2017-2018), which reveals that globally, over 10,000 children were formally released from armed forces and groups during 2017. Kaoma (2017) shares the same view as she dismisses the assertion that child soldier narratives are mostly purely an African genre. She argues that this mindset is the kind of Orientalism (the desire to see Africa specifically as a place of violence and lost innocence) that Edward Said addresses.

Just like Anthonissen (2009), Fischer (2018), focuses on the representation of the child soldier's trauma in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Emmanuel Jal's *Warchild*. Fisher (2018) investigates how Uzodinma Iweala and Emmanuel Jal employ different narrative forms (fiction and autobiography) to represent the trauma of child soldier protagonists. One thing that runs through my work and that of Anthonissen (2009) and Fischer (2018) so far is the concept of trauma. However, I treat the concept of trauma as a means to an end. Thus, it is these traumatic experiences of the child soldier and his quest for survival that leaves him lost. In order to deal with these traumatic experiences and also provide for himself a safe space during such chaotic moment, the child soldier transitions from a victim to a victimizer. The researcher agrees with Fischer (2018) when he asserts that "the topic of child soldier goes hand in hand with the topic of trauma and traumatization". (p. 1). This is true considering the fact that the repeated exposure of the child soldier to overwhelming danger and life-threatening experiences indubitably leads to a severe mental ill-health such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and personality conflict. This makes the discussion of the child soldier phenomenon incomplete without the backing of the trauma theory. It is not surprising therefore that Anthonissen (2009), Fischer (2018), myself and some other scholars adopt the trauma theory in discussions surrounding the child soldier.

In her work titled “The Child Soldier Experience in Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*”, Gurley (2007) discusses the identity struggle of the main character (Agu) as a result of his recruitment as a child soldier. She argues that “Agu struggles to maintain his identity during his exposure to and forced involvement in rape, thievery, and murder”. (p. iii). As part of my discussions and analysis, I will make a similar point made by Gurley (2007) concerning identity crisis of the child soldier but I will go further to postulate that identity crisis together with psychological trauma, the display of violence and the lack of trust stemming from the protagonists’ experiences as “soldiers” make reintegration into the society very difficult and render Agu and Ishmael lost. While discussing the predominance of war in Africa as one of the extreme cases of geopolitical illness in Africa, Osiki, et al. (2021) in their paper titled, “War as Postcolonial African Illness in Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*”, examine the psychological implications of wars on children making reference to the events in Iweala’s novel. They discuss how the concept of illness can be applied to the results of devastating socio-economic and political realities that shatter the psyches of individuals especially child soldiers. Using Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone* and Senait Mehari’s *Heart of Fire*, Muthusi (2019) explores how the use of the child’s voice functions as a narrative critique of a distorted adult world. He concludes that the child’s voice indicates that adult-led national, international, socio-political and economic networks and practices are responsible for violations of the child’s rights. He also shows that the child’s voice exposes how adults within child-soldier spaces and beyond, are flawed and limited by their participation in social, cultural and ideological institutions and discourses. While Muthusi (2019) uses the child soldier’s voice in his work as a critique to expose the flaws of the adult world and demand accountability for historical, political, economic and social injustice against child soldiers, I concentrate on the voice of the child soldier to provide a general understanding of war from the child’s perspective and reveal from the child soldier’s own words, the traumatic experiences that he is subjected

to as a result of war. This enhances a better appreciation of the loss that the child soldier suffers. I basically use the child's voice to corroborate his representation as an individual who transitions from a victim to a victimizer by the authors of the texts used for the study.

Theoretical Framework

The principal theory upon which this thesis is anchored is the trauma theory. Since Iweala's novel and Beah's memoir recount the traumatic and overwhelming experiences of their protagonists as child soldiers during civil wars, the researcher finds it apt to adopt the trauma theory as the principal theory to steer the discussions in this thesis. This research will also be supported by the theory of literary realism. By employing the theory of realism in support of the trauma theory, the researcher will be able to depict the issue of child soldiering, its associated trauma and repercussions as a reflection of a real-life situation.

The Concept of Trauma

The word "trauma" is said to have originated from a Latin word which is derived from the Greek word "Traumatikos" meaning "a serious wound to the body". In a paper that discusses gender and trauma in Maya Angelou's *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Adhikary (2020) identifies some experiences that could be described as traumatic. These include events like physical torture, witnessing violence, rape, physical and emotional abuse, sudden death of a loved one and many others. Since the protagonists, Agu (*Beasts of No Nation*) and Ishmael (*A Long Way Gone*), around whom this discussion revolves, witness violence brought about by war, it makes the application of the trauma theory not only appropriate but necessary. Abubakar (2017) shares a similar opinion as he ascribes the growth and development of trauma to the ruins and destructions that have occurred in human history. In my opinion, these ruins and destructions certainly include civil wars which have devastated many African countries and

tend to subject the protagonists in the texts under study (Agu and Ishmael) to various forms of psychological and physical stress.

Trauma Theory: From Sigmund Freud to Cathy Caruth and other Contemporaries

From a Freudian perspective, trauma is theorized as not a physical wound but a psychological wound. Freud understood trauma to be any emotional wound leading to psychological injury or an event that causes great distress. Due to the close relationship between trauma and psychoanalysis, it is almost impossible to discuss the theory of trauma without mentioning Freud's Psychoanalysis. In a public lecture delivered by Rick Curnow Adelaide (a psychoanalyst and training analyst at the Australian Psychoanalytical Society) titled "Trauma: A Psychoanalytic Perspective", he argues that the trauma theory sprung out of Freud's Psychoanalysis where Freud believes that "all neurosis was a result of previous traumatic experience". In an attempt to reveal the link between the trauma theory and psychoanalytic theory, Kurtz (2018) points out that "the core concepts in our present model of trauma were laid out over a century ago in the therapeutic practices of late nineteenth century European neurologists like Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Josef Breuer, and Sigmund Freud". (p. 3). Freud's early theories in *Studies of Hysteria* (1895) which was co-authored by Joseph Breuer and his theories in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) is the foundation upon which contemporary trauma studies is built. In *Studies of Hysteria* (1895), Freud and Breuer make reference to the "latency period of deferred action" with respect to traumatic experience from sexual assault. They theorize that the original event is not traumatic in itself but only in its remembrance. Consequently, for Freud and Breuer, it is the process of remembering that inflicts the psychological pain or trauma. This is why Kurtz (2018) explains trauma from a psychoanalytic perspective as "an event so overwhelming that it cannot be processed normally at the time of its occurrence, so that its memory is effectively blocked but returns to haunt the victim until appropriately confronted and dealt with". (p.3).

Freud defined the traumatic wounding of the mind as a widespread rupture or breach in the ego's protective shield, which he explains in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) as a barrier or a shield that defends the psyche against external stimuli. This rupture is thus the consequence of a traumatic event which is, as stated before, not fully experienced by the victim at the moment of its occurrence. Mambrol (2018) from this backdrop, also defines trauma as “an event harbored within the unconscious that causes a splitting of the ego or dissociation”. Supporting the idea that the trauma theory is closely linked to the Psychoanalytic theory, Andrew Barnaby, in his section of Kurtz's *Trauma and Literature* which is titled, “The Psychoanalytic Origins of Literary Trauma Studies”, posits that “Freud often used the word trauma and its variants in an almost generic sense. At one point in his pre-psychoanalytic treatise project for a scientific psychology (1895), for example, he refers to trauma simply as an experience of pain or in somewhat Freudian terms, a release of unpleasure. He adds that trauma from a simple Freudian perspective could mean any physically undesirable experience.” (p.23). In recent times; however, as seen in the case of child soldiers, it has taken a more complex form.

The concept of trauma theory in literature is increasingly gaining research attention globally and it is still regarded as stemming from Psychoanalytic criticism. To support the claim that trauma theory in recent times has become an amalgam of psychological studies with the humanities, Abubakar (2017) posits that even though the concept of trauma has been theorized in the field of sciences such as psychology and medicine, it has in contemporary times been theorized in the field of literature by scholars like Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman who have been working on the intersection of trauma, literature and psychoanalysis since the early 1990s. It is for this reason that in contemporary times, Cathy Caruth has been recognized as the pioneer of trauma theory with her critical introduction to a collection of essays titled *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* (1995) and the publication of her work *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*

(1995), Caruth regards trauma as “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (p. 4). A common thread that runs through Freud’s concept of trauma and that of Caruth is the breach in the brain’s protective shield. Caruth believes that this is caused by the individual’s lack of preparedness for the shocking event. It is for this reason that the individual mostly experiences the traumatic effects of an incident later after the incident has occurred. Just like Freud, Caruth also stresses on the belatedness of trauma. She believes that the traumatic event is so overwhelming that the mind cannot integrate it at the time of its occurrence, which then leads to the belated return of the trauma in forms such as flashbacks and nightmares. This is what some trauma critics like Bessel van der Kolk and Cathy Caruth term “dissociation” – an inherent latency within the experience itself, since the traumatized individual does not repress or forget the traumatic event afterwards, but because he or she does not consciously experience the event itself as it happens. The individual is thus dissociated from the event at the time of its occurrence since the experience is so overwhelming that it cannot be registered by the mind. The concept of dissociation is further explicated by Bessel van der Kolk, a psychotherapist, in a neurobiological way by investigating different brain mechanisms. Quoting Leys (2000), Anthonissen (2009) explains Bessel van der Kolk’s understanding of dissociation that “the traumatic event is not stored in the mind in the same way as normal memory, but that it is preserved in the memory with a timeless accuracy that accounts for the long-term and often delayed effects of PTSD” (p. 14). Van der Kolk as explained by Leys (2000) argues that traumatic memory is not the same as “declarative” or “narrative” memory, which enables the individual to talk about past events, but that traumatic memory is more like “implicit” or “nondeclarative” memory, which consists of “bodily memories” and which resists “verbal-semantic-linguistic representation” (Anthonissen

2009:14). It is important to note that Freud and Caruth's concept of dissociation of the trauma victim from the traumatic event presents a paradox since some critics like Judith Herman, Dori Laub and Dominick Lacapra, a contemporary of Cathy Caruth, also believe that one major way a victim can deal with trauma is by talking about it. Quoted by Anthonissen (2009), Judith Herman argues in *Trauma and Recovery* that “remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.” (p.22). The question therefore is, how can a trauma victim narrate his/her traumatic experiences to someone with the aim of achieving some sort of relief if the victim, at the time of experiencing the traumatic event, was unable to register it in the mind or fully grasp it as claimed by Freud and Caruth? This brings the accuracy of the narratives of trauma victims into question. However, in an attempt to clear the air, Whitehead (2004) in *Trauma Fiction* states that “despite the complexities and paradoxes that exist in talking about trauma, critics still agree that testimonies of survivors remain fundamentally accurate.” (p. 30). In addition to narration as a means of dealing with trauma, Dori Laub also proposes an emphatic listener, who listens attentively to the testimony of the traumatic victim. This, he believes, goes a long way to offer some relief to trauma victims just like narration. Emphasizing the importance of a listener in traumatic healing, he cautions that if no one listens to the victim, the act of retelling does not bring relief but could be traumatizing itself. For Dori Laub, according to Anthonissen (2009), “the listener not only invites the testimony, but he or she also has to protect it and guide the trauma victim through it. By being so involved in the testimony, the listener even partially experiences the trauma of the victim” (p.26). Dori Laub quickly cautions, however, that the listener must in no way assume the position of a victim but rather preserve his own special place, position and perspective. (p.58). In my opinion as I will indicate in my analysis of the texts used for this thesis, I hold the view that the trauma experienced by a victim cannot be easily wiped away just because he/she talked about it. This is why Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* ends inconclusively as readers are unsure whether rehabilitation

helps Agu erase his trauma. Also, in the case of Ishmael in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, he still experiences hallucinations and flashback even though he leaves Sierra Leone and is now in New York. I acknowledge that talking about one's trauma provides some sort of relief but I strongly hold the view that it does in no way relieve the victim completely of his/her trauma. This is what makes the loss experienced by trauma victims especially Agu and Ishmael, who are the focus of this thesis, very glaring.

A historian and a contemporary of Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, examines the reaction of a traumatized individual to trauma. He identifies three ways a victim of trauma may react to a traumatic experience: denial, acting-out, and working-through. The first category, denial, can be understood as “the act of disavowal” – to refuse to acknowledge or accept the fact that one is traumatized. Explaining denial as a normal reaction to extreme stress or trauma, Gallagher (2020) posits that it is “an unconscious, self-protective defense that allows us to pretend that shock has not taken place.” Clearly, with regards to denial, a trauma victim refuses to acknowledge a triggering situation. He or she therefore belittles the consequences of his or her trauma with seemingly self-soothing statements like “it's fine, I can handle it, etc” As a result, the victim of trauma also tends to deny the symptoms of his or her trauma.

In his work, “Writing History, Writing Trauma” which focuses on the interpretation of historical traumas such as the Holocaust, LaCapra concentrates primarily on the distinction between “acting-out” and “working-through” as the two fundamental reactions to and ways of remembering trauma. As quoted by Anthonissen (2009), LaCapra explains acting-out as:

a situation in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes – scenes in which the past reforms and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop. In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene. (p. 21)

From LaCapra's perspective, acting-out can be understood as the compulsive repetition of past traumatic experiences in the present in such a manner that the victim seems helplessly glued to

his/her past. It is almost as if there is a total collapse between the past and the present. LaCapra reiterates that there is a tendency for the past traumatic experiences to affect the victim's future because the victim of trauma during acting-out, relives a "past that will not pass away" (p.124). For him, this does not only cause confusion between the present and the past but affects the victim's future as well. Aside acting-out, LaCapra further identifies "working-through" as a response to trauma. He explains working through as follows:

an articulatory practice: to the extent one works through trauma (as well as transference relations in general), one is able to distinguish between past and present and to recall in memory that something happened to one (or one's people) back then while realizing that one is living here and now with openings to the future. (p. 16).

With working-through, the traumatized individual is able to distinguish between the experience that overwhelmed him/her in the past and his present life. Unlike acting-out, the trauma victim in working-through, is not wholly trapped in the past. This means that even with working-through, the traumatized individual does not totally overcome his/her trauma, but integrates the traumatic experience into his normal or current life without forgetting these experiences totally. This clearly indicates that a trauma victim cannot completely overcome his/her trauma. The best that the victim can do is to integrate the trauma into his normal life (working-through). Even that, LaCapra warns that it has the potential of leading to a relapse (acting-out).

Just like Caruth and Whitehead, LaCapra also proposes narrative as an effective way of working-through trauma. He opines that representing trauma in literary texts or putting one's trauma into a narrative offers one some distance from the traumatic event as it is inherently curative. He however, adds that the trauma must not be expressed in a traditional linear narrative but rather, the writer must adopt postmodern techniques in literature to describe the traumatic event. These techniques include; fragmentation, language, hesitations, textual gaps, non-linearity, repetition, disruption of chronology, and many others. These techniques are often consistent with the symptoms of trauma victims: the disorientation of their psyche and

personality. According to Anthonissen (2009), with these techniques, the writer is able to depict the disorienting effects of trauma and the difficulty that accompanies its communication.

In his work, “Trauma Studies”, LaCapra (2004) sums up the importance of narrative in working through one’s trauma. He says:

I have already indicated that working-through need not be understood to imply the integration or transformation of past traumatic into a seamless narrative memory and total meaning or knowledge. Narrative at best helps one not to change the past through a dubious rewriting of history but to work through post traumatic symptoms in the present in a manner that opens possible futures. It also enables one to recount events and perhaps to evoke experiences, typically through nonlinear movements that allow trauma to register in language and its hesitations, indirections, pauses, and silences. And particularly, by bearing witness and giving testimony, narrative may help performatively to create openings in existence that did not exist before. (Pp. 121-122).

This clearly indicates that narrative is an important technique in working through trauma. It is not surprising that many trauma victims (through autobiographies) and non-victims (through novels) employ literary texts to engage readers’ powers of emotional identification and sympathy on one hand and critical reflection on the other. Through trauma texts, writers are able to communicate their traumatic experiences – experiences that ordinarily are incommunicable, unspeakable and defies the ordinary process of remembering and comprehension. From this backdrop, Christa Schonfelder in her work, “Wounds and Words: Childhood and Family Trauma in Romantic and Postmodern Fiction” (2013), summarizes the importance of literary trauma narratives when she argues that literary trauma writing performs a complex balancing act regarding the (un)speakability, un(narratability) and (in)comprehensibility of trauma. One can argue that Ishmael Beah, whose memoir is one of the primary sources of data for this thesis, resorts to narrative – the writing of his autobiographical work, *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, as a way of working- through his trauma. Trauma theorist, Sophia Richman, as quoted by Anthonissen (2009) asserts that “writing is particularly well suited for the integration of cognitive and emotional aspects of self (Lepore

& Smith, 2002), especially when it is autobiographical...in my experience, memoir writing especially lends itself to the restoration of a sense of continuity that was disrupted by trauma” (p. 55). Even though writing the book could offer the writer some relief, it does not erase the trauma completely. Hence, revisiting his past and putting them into words in the form of a book doesn’t completely heal Ishmael Beah from his past because the writing process could even be re-traumatizing. Beah acknowledges that “I don’t think I could ever forget what happened, but I have just learned to transform my experiences into something positive. (O’Reilly, 2008). Through his narration, Beah has helped to raise awareness and draw attention to the issue of child soldiering on the African continent and the world at large.

The Theory of Literary Realism

The issue of child soldiering is illustrated or showcased as a metaphorical stench eating into the very fabric of childhood in Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah’s *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. These two authors are concerned with a reality which they set out to portray with fidelity. There is no idealization of the child soldier who has been coerced to think that he is a staff of the militia. The rebel that the child soldier has been rendered is presented as lost. The two author’s realism is beyond the quest for objective truth and accuracy. Their realism is laced with some exaggeration, even sensationalism in order to establish the motif that child soldiering results in the loss of childhood and renders the child soldier confused, frustrated and dejected. Through their stuck and arresting presentation of the plights of the child soldier, Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah confront what Gikandi (1987:74) describes (in reference to Ayi Kwei Armah’s *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*) as “confronting the rotten underbelly of the society.”

Derived from the Latin word “realis – material/real” and beginning as literary or artistic movement in the 19th century, realism is a way of expressing life through images in accordance

with real events. According to Zarnigor (2019) in a paper titled “The Realistic Genre and its Development in World Literature”, realism is a literary method or direction that requires that the writer consistently adheres to the principle of living and true reflection of reality. Realism demands honesty and artistic sensitivity so as to portray life truly and effectively with all of its contradictions. Professor Izzat Sultan, a renowned literary critic, theorizes that realism is “the true understanding of reality and its perception of artistic images in all its contradiction”. Zarnigor (2019) argues that realists have no intention of covering up romantic situations and criminal events. He further posits that since realism involves a vivid portrayal of the characters’ character, historical portrayal and observation of its “rise and fall”, the works of realists have their plots and structure related to particular characters.

In the mid-nineteenth century (1861-1914), Realism, a new movement which was seen as rebellion against romanticism, emerged. This literary movement originated from in France after the 1848 Revolution, and then spread widely throughout Europe and the United States. This movement rejected the fantastical works of the romantic era and vehemently described them as being out of touch with real life. Realism aims to interpret the actualities of any aspect of life, from subjective prejudices, idealism, or romantic colour and stresses the real over the fantastic. Realists grew tired of the fantastical exaggeration of the romantics and sort to create more realistic representations of life with truth and accuracy through the use of relatable, everyday characters and situations. Realism rejects idealism (writing about things in only their ideal forms) and nominalism (the belief that ideas are only names and have no practical application). Unlike romanticism, realism possesses ethical tendencies since realists concern themselves with the effect of their readers and how they can impact lives positively. Some of the major Realist writers include:

- Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880)

A French writer who authored *Madame Bovary* (1856).

- Alexandre Dumas fils (1802-1870)

A French writer mostly known for *The Lady of the Camellias* (1848)

- Henry James (1843-1916)

An American writer who authored *The Art of the Novel*, originally written around 1909. He also wrote a popular essay titled, *The Art of Fiction* (1884).

- Mark Twain (1835-1910)

An American writer who authored *The Gilded Age* (1873), *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884), and *The Prince and the Pauper* (1881).

- Charles Dickens (1812-1865)

An English author who wrote *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860), *Bleak House* (1852), and *Oliver Twist* (1837).

- Fedor Destoyevsky (1821-1881)

A Russian author who wrote *Crime and Punishment* (1866) and *The Insulted and Humiliated* (1861).

It is worthy of note that even though the above writers lived and wrote their works many decades ago, the realistic nature of their works makes them relevant even in contemporary times as they sort to tackle societal issues in a realistic, truthful and accurate manner. This portrays the significance of realism as a literary movement then, and a literary theory now. It will therefore not be out of place to describe Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah, whose works are used for this thesis as realists since they seek to portray civil wars in Africa and the concept of child soldiering without idealization but instead, reveal the brutal consequences of civil wars in Africa and how children's rights are inhumanely infringed upon during such times. This is why Ferguson and Godin (2022) posit that even though literary Realism as a movement fizzled out a bit by the mid-twentieth century, its subsequent writers were inspired by the movement and still seek to create relatable characters and situations.

Basic Tenets of Realistic Literature

Richard Chase in his work, “The American Novel and Its Tradition”, posits that realistic literature has specific social, political and artistic characteristics that set it apart from other genre. He summarizes these characteristics as follows:

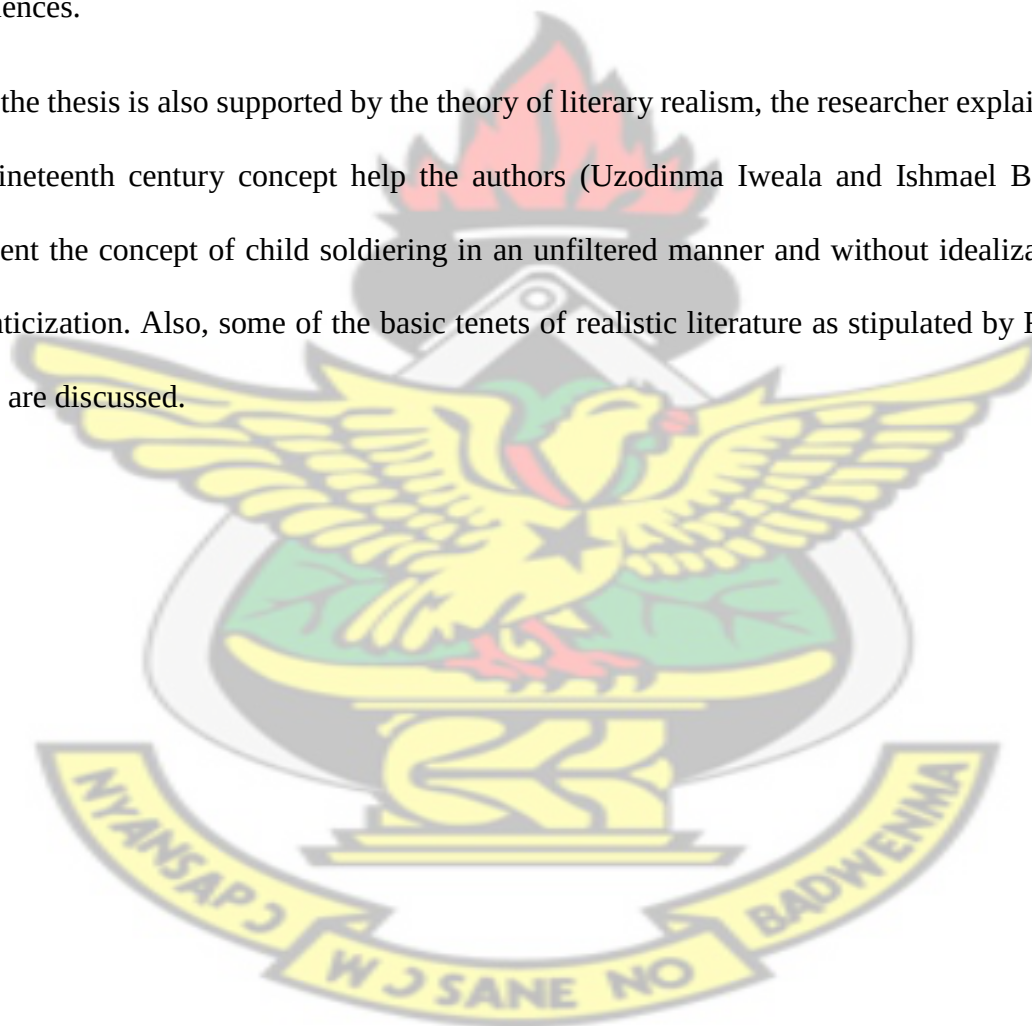
- Realistic literature renders reality closely in comprehensive detail. There is a selective representation of reality with an emphasis on verisimilitude, even at the expense of a well-made plot.
- Character is more important than action and plot. The character dictates the plot and the main characters are usually round or dynamic.
- Complex ethical choices are often the subject of realistic literature.
- The purpose of realistic literature is to instruct and entertain.
- Realistic literature avoids the sensational, dramatic elements of naturalistic novels and romances.
- Realistic literature depends more on images than symbols. The use of symbols is controlled or limited.
- Realistic literature is a vehicle that carries realistic philosophy, subject matter, and morality. Emphasis is therefore placed upon scenic presentation, de-emphasizing authorial comment and evaluation.
- Realistic literature shows rather than tell. Consequently, imagery is highly utilized.

Chapter Summary

This chapter concentrates on the empirical literature and theoretical review. Here, the researcher provides insight into the general concept of civil war and traces the origin of child soldiering. A review of literature on the selected texts (*Beasts of No Nation* and *A Long Way Gone*) and the concept of trauma in some other African texts is done in this chapter in order to

establish how this work is similar and different from other works done in this area of study. Concerning the theoretical review, the researcher highlights the development of the trauma theory from the field of psychology (Sigmund Freud) to literature (Cathy Caruth). The researcher realizes from the review done in this chapter that many researchers discuss the consequences of child soldiering by only exposing the trauma that the child soldier suffers while paying very little or no attention to the effect that the trauma has on the child. With this research, I explore the feeling and sense of loss brought about by the child soldier's traumatic experiences.

Since the thesis is also supported by the theory of literary realism, the researcher explains how this nineteenth century concept help the authors (Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah) to represent the concept of child soldiering in an unfiltered manner and without idealization or romanticization. Also, some of the basic tenets of realistic literature as stipulated by Richard Chase are discussed.



CHAPTER THREE

From a Victim to a Victimizer

Introduction

In order to paint a vivid picture of the child soldier phenomenon and the harrowing experiences that child soldiers must endure upon their enlistment and the sense of loss that follows, it is only appropriate to understand from the discussions in this chapter, how the child soldier's peaceful life before the war is directly antithetical to the violence that surrounds his life during the war. Basically, by exploring how the protagonists, Agu and Ishmael, are characterized by the authors, this chapter seeks to critically explore and analyze the child soldier's transition from a victim of war to a victimizer: a transformation that reveals the loss that the child soldier suffers. Even though the National Children's Advocacy Centre (2017: 5) and some trauma scholars including Dr. Sandra L. Bloom (2018: 19) have associated the victim-victimizer concept of childhood trauma mostly to sexual abuse and criminal violence, the trauma brought about by war and child soldiering as seen in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* is equally capable of turning innocent children (victims) into monstrous predators (victims).

Analysis

With regards to the iconography of the child soldier, one striking feature that cannot escape the minds of critics of Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* is how Agu and Ishmael transition from being victims of war to victimizers who inflict indefinable pain on others. This is why Osiki et al. (2021) rightly assert that "all child soldiers, upon their recruitment, begin a journey from innocence to brutality in their wartime

experience.” This, the researcher in this thesis believes is an integral part of the composition of the child soldier.

In Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*, readers are instantly introduced to Agu, a young, innocent and naive boy, who is hiding from a group of rebels as they invade his village, killing many including his father. The killing of his father, the destruction of his village and the physical abuse that innocent and vulnerable Agu is subjected to when he is found by one of the rebels (Strika) at his hiding place clearly presents him as a victim of war. He cries:

He is sniffing like a dog and stepping to me KPAWA! He is hitting me. Again and again he is hitting me and each blow from his hand is feeling on my skin like the flat side of machete. I am trying to scream, but he is knocking the air from my chest and then slapping my mouth. I am tasting blood. I am feeling like vomiting. The whole place around us is shaking...he is grabbing my leg, pulling it so hard that it is like it will be coming apart like meat, and my body is just sliding slowly from the stall out into the light and onto the mud. (p.3)

Even though a child, Agu is not spared the harsh treatments that accompany war. Agu’s choice of words and language from the extract above clearly depict him as a helpless victim of war. Through the use of simile, he compares his oppressor’s blow on his skin to the flat side of a machete. He further compares the pulling of his leg to meat being torn apart. These comparisons reveal the level of pain inflicted on Agu and enhances a visual representation of the entire scenario. This is further intensified through the hyperbolic statement, “the whole place around us is shaking”. The use of imagery and exaggeration in the extract above, even though paint a vivid picture of the pain that Agu suffers as a victim, they also help reveal the realities of the consequences of war on children. The use of the present continuous form of verbs like sniffing, slapping, vomiting, shaking, sliding and grabbing highlights the continuous and persistent nature of the trauma that Agu is subjected to. The helplessness that overwhelms Agu, who at this point is a victim of war is further revealed in the extract below:

The smell of rainwater and sweat is coming into my nose and I am feeling my shirt is so wet it is almost like another skin. I want to be moving, but my whole bone is paining me and my muscle is paining

me like fire ant is just biting me all over my body. If I can be slapping myself to be making it go away I am doing it, but I cannot even move one finger. I am not doing anything. (p.1-2)

In order to make obvious the helplessness that engulfs Agu and ultimately delineate the senselessness of war and child soldiering, Iweala makes great use of imagery, exaggeration and simile as seen in the extract above. Agu compares the physical pain he experiences at this point to the bites of fire ants. The adjective “fire” that modifies this particular species of insects depicts the magnitude of the pain that accompanies their bites: a burning sensation that even though goes away in some few minutes, leaves a white-fluid-filled blister on the human body that can last for days. Paralyzed by pain, Agu’s use of simile (like fire ants) depicts his struggle with an unfamiliar kind of pain which ordinary use of words cannot register. Agu only resorts to the use of simile to imply that this kind of pain is not just overwhelming but also searing. The fear that Agu experiences as a victim is devastating and lethal for a young boy his age that it inhibits his ability to move. The fact that he cannot do anything to salvage the situation reiterates his trauma and helplessness. This is why Bloom (1999) states that “a victim is both helpless and powerless...helplessness is a noxious human experience”. (p. 11).

These experiences mark the beginning of Agu’s transformation from a civilian to a “soldier” as he is immediately recruited by the rebels. It is important to note that Agu does not join the rebel group willingly but he is emotionally blackmailed by the Commandant to think that he will have a better life with the rebels and also get to avenge his father’s death. The Commandant tells Agu, “If you are staying with me, I will be taking care of you and we will be fighting the enemy that is taking your father...everything will be just fine.” (p.11). Agu, as innocent and naive as a child could be, accepts to join the rebels as he reminisces his fascination with soldiers before the war. He narrates:

I am thinking of before war when I am in the town with my mother and
I am seeing men walking with brand-new uniform and shiny sword

holding gun and shouting left right, left right, behind trumpet and drum, like how they are doing on parade and so I am nodding my head yes. (p.11)

One thing that makes Agu's trauma and confusion obvious to readers is his constant use of the present continuous tense to narrate past happenings. This is indicative of the impact of his trauma on not just his past and present life but also his future. Aside the Commandant preying on Agu's immaturity, innocence and grief, he also instills so much fear in him that Agu sees no other alternative than to join the rebels if he wants to stay alive and not end up like his father. We glean this when he says, "I am seeing all the soldiers with gun and knife and then I am thinking about my father just dancing like that because of bullet. What am I supposed to be doing? So I am joining." (p. 11). The rhetorical question, "what am I supposed to be doing" shows Agu's helplessness as a child who is exposed to such chaotic environment. If his father, a fully grown man is made to dance because of bullet, how much more a little boy. It is clear from the foregoing that Agu is driven to join the rebel group by his infantile fascination with soldiering which only substantiates his naivety as a child and primarily the need for survival. Zack-Williams (2013) as quoted by Pallua (2016) observes that "life with the army provides some excitement away from the drudgery of life on the street: food is certain and one does not have to hustle all the time for a living. The uniform and the gun brought status and power and the opportunity to take revenge against previous transgressors." (p.17). Agu understands that the entire village has been consumed by war and there is no place he can run to seek refuge. In order to live, Agu realizes that his best chance is with the rebel group. This is why he admits that "I am fearing because I am seeing that the only way not to be fighting is to die. I am not wanting to die." (p. 143). Presented with this conundrum, his only way out is to put on the mask of a victimizer even if he does not want to. Bloom (1999: 10) calls this "trauma-bonding" – "people who are terrorized, whether as adult victims of torture, or domestic violence or child victims of family abuse, experience their

abuser as being in total control of life and death. The perpetrator is the source of the pain and terror, but he is also the source of relief from the pain.

He is the source of threat but he is also the source of hope”. Indeed, even though the rebel group led by the Commandant terrorizes and maltreats Agu, he joins them and forms a bond with them in order for him to survive. Agu perceives that by joining the rebel group that oppress him, he will eventually be relieved of his fear and pain. It can also be deduced that Agu is not only driven by fear to join the rebel group but also his inability to think and analyze situations critically when under stress makes joining the rebel group the only way out. This is in fact a behaviour typical of victims of trauma and stress. Bloom (1999) explains further that:

Our capacity to think clearly is also severely impaired when we are under stress. when we perceive that we are in danger, we are physiologically geared to take action, not ponder or deliberate. In many situations of acute danger, it is better that we respond immediately without taking the time for complicated mental processing, that we respond almost reflexively to save our lives or to protect those we love. When stressed, we cannot think clearly, we cannot consider the long-range consequences of our behaviour, we cannot weigh all possible options before making a decision, we cannot take the time to obtain all the necessary information that goes into making good decisions. Our decisions tend to be based on impulse and are based on the experienced need to self-protect...in such situations, people demonstrate poor judgement and poor impulse control.” (p. 5)

It is clear from the discussion so far that Agu does not join the rebel group on his own volition, but he is manipulated and forced by the Commandant. His quest for survival in a life-threatening environment and his inability to think critically under stress compel him to join the rebel group and loses his innocence in the process. Agu just like many other child soldiers becomes a child soldier not by choice. They are programmed by fear, intimidation and insecurity into believing that the only way to ensure their own survival and also justice for their murdered parents, siblings and friends is to fight. Clearly, Agu’s vulnerability and

innocence just like many other child soldiers make them susceptible to military and rebel recruitments during times of war.

In the case of Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, the level of victimization the protagonist (Ishmael) suffers as a result of war before he is recruited into the government army is much intense as compared to Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*. At the age of ten, Ishmael even though has not yet witnessed war personally, he has heard stories and seen refugees from war-torn villages pass through his town in search of shelter and solace. Traumatized and lost, the children among these refugees would "jump at the sound of chopping wood or as stones landed on the tin roofs flung by children hunting birds with slingshots." (p. 1). This attests to the fact that these refugees have witnessed the terrible and unspeakable side of war – something that constantly plagues their minds and haunt them. The only war that Ishmael has witnessed is what he has read in books and seen in movies. Clearly, the peaceful life of Ishmael at this time, is directly antithetical to the refugees whose lives have been devastated by war. This is a foreshadowing technique that hints at the trauma and suffering that Ishmael would have to endure and live through when the war finally reaches his town.

Ishmael's direct experience of the war begins at the age of twelve when the rebels finally attack Mattru Jong, where he initially thought as safe. He recounts the invasion:

At that instant several gunshots, which sounded like thunder striking the tin-roofed houses, took over town. The sound of the guns was so terrifying it confused everyone. No one was able to think clearly. In a matter of seconds, people started screaming and running in different directions, pushing and trampling on whoever had fallen on the ground. No one had the time to take anything with them. Everyone just ran to save his or her life. Mothers lost their children, whose confused, sad cries coincided with the gunshots. Families were separated and left behind everything they had worked for their whole lives. My heart was beating faster than it ever had. Each gunshot seemed to cling to the beat of my heart. The rebels fired their guns toward the sky, as they shouted and merrily danced their way into town in a semicircle formation...There was only one escape route out of town. Everyone headed for it. Mothers were screaming the names of their lost children, and the lost children cried in vain (pp. 36-37).

The extract above is a clear indication of the chaotic atmosphere that accompanies wars and how it suddenly tears families apart. To depict this chaotic atmosphere, the author makes use of sensory imagery and simile as he compares the sounds of gunshots to the sound of thunder striking the tin-roof of houses. With this comparison, the author synchronously appeals to our senses of sight (visual) and hearing (auditory) to foreground the image of chaos that accompanies war: fear and confusion reigns just as thunder nullifies everything else. This depicts a senseless display of power calculated to inject fear in the people. The idea that mothers lose their children and they scream for the names of their lost children while lost children cry in vain, arrests and injects fear into readers and facilitates a reflection on the senselessness of war and how it displaces families. This petrifying and chaotic atmosphere leaves Ishmael confused and hinders his ability to think clearly. The use of the continuous tense form of the verbs “screaming”, “trampling”, and “trampling” shows a sequential buildup of inordinate behaviour propelled by fear that accompanies war. The author’s recourse to arresting images and exaggerations, the brutal nature of war does not only become perceptually prominent and gripping, making it impossible to escape the mind’s eye but also helps achieve verisimilitude. Acquah (2012) as quoted by Yankyerah (2021) calls this “foregrounding an image” - the act of bringing a specific image to the fore by placing a special emphasis on it. Through the use of personification and exaggeration, “each gunshot seemed to cling to the beat of my heart”, the consequences of war on young Ishmael are paraded. As a victim of war, Ishmael underscores the levels of trauma he experiences. Through defamiliarization, the word “cling”, is used in a way that suggests a psychological overthrow of Ishmael’s peace of mind and foreshadows the violence that will become an indispensable aspect of his life so far as the war continues and the psychological torment that will plague his psyche even after the war has ended. No wonder for Ishmael, their escape from Mattru Jong, is only the beginning of “real trouble”. Traumatized and lost, Ishmael recounts a rather suffocating scene:

We dodged from bush to bush and made it to the other side. But this was just the beginning of many risky situations that were to come. Immediately after one explosion, we got up and ran together, with our heads down, jumping over fresh dead bodies and flames of burnt dried trees. We were almost at the end of the clearing when we heard the whizzing of another rocket grenade approaching. We sped up our steps and took dives into the bush before the grenade landed, followed by several rounds of machine gun fire. The people who were right behind us were not as lucky as we were. The RPG caught up with them. One of them caught the fragments of the RPG. He cried out loudly and screamed that he was blind. No one dared to go out and help him. He was halted by another grenade that exploded, causing his remains and blood to sprinkle like rain on the nearby leaves and bushes. All of it happened too fast. (p. 38)

The kind of language used by Ishmael signals his initiation into military tactics. This initiation injects in Ishmael a kind of fearlessness laced with selfishness. We realize from the extract above the rapid nature of Ishmael's transition from a naïve boy to an icon of a survival strategist. The sequential progression of events depicts the incessant violence that comes with the use of heavy artillery during war and also heightens the terror that consumes Ishmael and his companions. By announcing that "this was just the beginning of many risky situations that were to come", suspense is built and the readers' mind is warned and prepared for worst things to come. From one explosion to another, Ishmael and his friends must dodge from bush to bush and take dives into the bush just to avoid being torn apart by rocket grenades and machine guns. This seems like an unending cycle: a life-threatening routine that will become part and parcel of Ishmael's life so long as he is a victim of war. He and his companions are forced to come up fast with strategies of escape since the chaos has elicited selfish behaviours – no one seems to care about anyone as it is now clear that survival is an individual affair. By describing dead bodies as fresh, the author does not seek to only heighten his language but rather, calls on readers to sympathize with Ishmael and the other victims. In all of these, the reader is forcefully immersed into the occurrences and literally made to journey not only with the author but most importantly, with the protagonist for a clearer understanding of his plight.

Having been separated from his family, Ishmael together with his companions must embark on a perilous adventure for survival – sleeping in the jungle full of snakes and wild animals, sleeping in abandoned villages, ingesting food that is barely edible due to extreme hunger and moving from one village to another where he is constantly maltreated as he is instantaneously mistaken for a rebel or a spy. He recounts an instance where he began to feel his ribs when he touched his sides because of extreme hunger. He narrates:

WE WERE SO HUNGRY that it hurt to drink water and we felt cramps in our guts. It was as though something were eating the insides of our stomachs. Our lips became parched and our joints weakened and ached. I began to feel my ribs when I touched my sides. We didn't know where else to get food. The one cassava farm that we ravaged didn't last long. Birds and animals such as rabbits were nowhere to be seen. We became irritable and sat apart from each other, as if sitting together made us hungrier. (p. 44)

The author's use of words like "cramps", "weakened", "ached" and "parched", communicate the pain that these children must endure as victims of war: experiencing extreme hunger laced with trauma. Through language, hunger is made tangible. Through the use of personification (a figurative comparison in which the symbolic term is a human), hunger is given a human face and a visual representation, hunger thus becomes a heartless torturer with no sense of empathy. The level of hunger experienced by Ishmael and his friends shows the extent to which hunger can bring about disunity even among friends. Their quest for survival especially food, causes them to disregard danger. This is revealed in Ishmael's statement that; "so hunger drove us back to Mattru Jong again. It was dangerous, but hunger made us not care that much." (p. 45). Here, hunger, the body's mechanism of alerting the brain to look for food, is represented as being more threatening than the war that is ravaging Mattru Jong. While a senseless human action (war) inflicts untold pain on these boys, nature (hunger) also remains insensitive to their plights. In their attempt to escape the war and survive the atrocities that come with it, this idea of nature being indifferent to the pain of Ishmael and his companions is further highlighted as they are compelled to travel for days on foot, moving

from one village to another under harsh weather conditions. The use of words like “hot”, “burning”, “pain”, “bleeding”, “perspired” and “shuddered” in the extract below is indicative of the onset of trauma. His helplessness and disorientation as a result of the trauma he experiences is very much realized through the depiction of levels of pain ranging from heat, tightness of his muscles to engulfing pain. Even though “sunset” is symbolic of serenity and tranquility, it rather intensifies Ishmael’s pain as it causes the veins in his feet to tighten. This is seen in the extract below:

We walked on the hot, burning sand until sunset. I have never longed for a day to conclude as I did that day. I thought the arrival of sunset would heal my pain. But as the heat died down, the anesthesia also wore away. Each time I lifted my feet, the veins in them tightened and I felt the sand particles digging into my bleeding soles. The next several miles were so long that I didn’t think I would be able to make it. I perspired and my body shuddered from the pain. (p. 79).

Since Agu and Ishmael are victims of war, it is only appropriate that both authors present them as innocent children who are subjected to both physical and psychological pain as they struggle to survive the war.

In *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu’s days as a brutal murderer and a beast begin after his recruitment and he is ordered by the Commandant to kill a soldier. This is where we begin to witness Agu’s transformation from an innocent victim of war to a victimizer. The Commandant tells Agu, “Do you see this dog! he is shouting. You want to be a soldier enh? Well—kill him. KILL HIM NOW!” (p. 26). This act of killing is likened to the act of “falling in love” since according to the Commandant, it is devoid of reasoning. The Commandant also likens it to the act of “killing a goat”. This scene can be understood as some kind of initiation rite. Here, the Commandant becomes some kind of a teacher, a perverted instructor for that matter. War has thwarted Agu’s dreams of becoming an engineer or a doctor. Instead of being taught in a civilized and accepted manner (formal education) how to achieve these dreams, he is mentored by

the Commandant to become a ruthless killer. While Osiki et al. (2021) see war as a post-colonial illness that plagues the African continent, it can also be seen as a cankerous and corrupted pedagogue that turns innocent children into ruthless killers. The Commandant's instruction to Agu to view opponents as animals (dogs/goats) to make it easier on Agu to kill them is in tandem with the meaning of the name "Agu" which translates as a "beast". If Agu as a name refers to a beast, then Agu's killing of opponents viewed as goats or dogs is just normal. The question then is, was Agu fated to kill like a beast? The literary technique of a character living by the tenets of his/her name is seen here. Charactonym being the literary technique employed here reveals that probably the Commandant may be aware of the significance of Agu's name and thus, forces him to act in line with that. Being just a child who once had a family, who was loved and had never taken the life of another man, Agu laments his current state:

I am starting to crying and I am starting to shaking. And in my head I am shouting NO! NO! NO! but my mouth is not moving and I am not saying anything. And I am thinking, if I am killing killing, then I am going to hell so I am smelling fire and smoke and it is harding to breath, so I am just standing there crying crying, shaking shaking, looking looking. (p. 18)

In the extract above, in order to limn the fear that arrests Agu, the writer makes use of repetition to depict his trauma. The repetition of the word "NO!" accompanied by an exclamation mark only tells the overwhelming and traumatic nature of the scene. Again, one cannot lose sight of the capitalization of the word "NO!" which strongly communicates Agu's resentment to the act of killing another human being and brings to light the instances of coercion that dictate the lives of child soldiers. It helps identify Agu at this point in the novel as a victim who is forced to commit an inhumane act against his will. This ultimately helps foreground Agu's innocence. This means that the author's writing style – his use of capitalization and some punctuation marks (graphology) help communicate Agu's plight as a victim of war. This is what Bilal and Cheema (2012) as

quoted by Yankyerah (2021) explain as “a graphological discussion of style”. They posit that:

A graphological discussion of style among other features entails the foregrounding of quotation marks, ellipses, periods, hyphens, contracted forms, special structures, the full stop, the colon, the bold prints, capitalization, small print, spacing, italics etc...

The repetition of the words “crying”, “shaking”, and “looking” is also very significant to understanding Agu as a victim of war. Even though one can easily attribute the use of repetition to the influence of African oral storytelling as a result of performance, it also helps reveal the repetitive nature of Agu’s trauma. The wrong use of grammar is a unique feature of Iweala’s novel. In almost all of his narrations, Agu violates linguistic and grammatical rules and breaches conventional code of the English Language, to give prominence to his state of mind as the story unfolds and also make real Agu’s disorientation as a result of his trauma. By saying “it is hardening to breath”, Agu unconventionally turns an adjective “hard” to a verb “hardening”. This is what in the area of Literary Stylistics, Yankson (1987) calls “Violation of Category Rule”. Yankyerah (2021) explains that “a violation of category rule is said to have occurred when a deliberate misplacement of a lexical item is employed by a writer or a literary artist. For instance, if a writer intentionally employs a noun to perform the work of a verb in a sentence, it means that there is a violation of a grammatical rule. (p. 174). This violation as seen in Agu’s narration is consistent with the disorientation that accompanies his first kill as a child soldier. The use of parallel structures also helps highlight the plight of Agu. This is a writing style that may involve the repetition of a single word, a phrase or an entire sentence. Parallelism can be understood as a literary feature in which portions of sentences have the same or similar grammatical structure. This technique is employed extensively in Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* to help make perceptible the plights, trauma and loss of Agu. He says:

I am starting to crying / I am starting to shaking

Subject + verb + to infinitive

It is clear from the example above that even though the two statements do not have the same words repeated throughout, there is a repetition in terms of the grammatical structure.

This helps readers appreciate how Agu is left traumatized and lost at various levels – physically, psychologically and emotionally. It is not surprising that Nkansah (2009) posits that the general notion of parallelism is a woven scheme on the manipulation of the many forms of repetition where the recurrence happens in the line of the text. Consequently, through the use of parallelism, the author reveals how child soldiers are continually manipulated, brainwashed and coerced to take up the identities of heartless “soldiers” and “rebels”.

Obviously, Agu is petrified to kill another man, but being a “soldier” now means taking orders without questioning. So, with the help of the Commandant and Strika, Agu eventually kills the soldier he ironically perceives and has been brainwashed to believe to be his enemy (the ones who killed his father). Agu narrates:

He is taking my hand and bringing it down so hard on top of the enemy's head and I am feeling like electricity is running through my whole body. The man is screaming, AYYYYIII, louder than the sound of bullet whistling and then he is bringing his hand to his head, but it is not helping because his head is cracking and the blood is spilling out like milk from coconut. I am hearing laughing all around me even as I am watching him trying to hold his head together. He is annoying me and I am bringing the machete up and down and up and down hearing KPWUDA KPWUDA every time and seeing just pink while I am hearing the laughing KEHI, KEHI, KEHI all around me. Then I am hitting his shoulder and then his chest and looking at how Commandant is smiling each time my knife is hitting the man. Strika is joining me and we are just beating him and cutting him while everybody is laughing. It is like the world is moving so slowly and I am seeing each drop of blood and each drop of sweat flying here and there. I am hearing the bird flapping their wing as they are leaving all the tree. It is sounding like thunder. I am hearing the mosquito buzzing in my ear so loud and I am feeling how the blood is just wetting on my leg and my face. The enemy's body is having deep red cut everywhere and his forehead is looking just crushed so his whole

face is not even looking like face because his head is broken everywhere and there is just blood, blood, blood. (p.21).

The extract above is replete with powerful images. The words, “AYEEEEIII”, “KPWUDU”, “KEHI” immediately appeal to the reader’s sense of hearing (auditory imagery). The author thus, presents to readers a child protagonist who is yet to acquire the appropriate language to express the horrors that he sees and experiences. This is why Agu constantly describes traumatic scenes and experiences by resorting to the use of onomatopoeic language (making reference to a thing or action via a vocal imitation of the sound that comes with that particular thing or action). The author, therefore, makes use of ideophones. These are words that evoke an idea in sound, often a vivid impression of certain sensation or sensory perception. This sound-communication element in the text is what helps readers hear with their minds’ ear so they can better appreciate the senselessness and violence that surrounds war and how it induces physical pain on victims. Agu compares the blood flowing from the soldier’s head to milk spilling from a coconut. The abundance of water in the coconut is compared to flowing milk – at this point, Agu’s initiation is complete – for to compare oozing blood to flowing milk is to source great satisfaction in an act that led to the death of a perceived enemy. The comparison of blood to milk is not just frightening; it hints of an insatiable desire on Agu’s part to spill more blood. This is because the sight of spilled blood is fulfilling just as one gets filled with milk. This hyperbolic statement foregrounds the atrocities that Agu will commit later in the novel as a child soldier. The author even though allows the narrative to develop obtrusively, it is clear at this point that he also relies on the imaginative capacities of the reader to take in bit by bit the trauma and senselessness of the whole episode. This ensures an intense emotional engagement between the reader and the narrative.

Although Agu is initially hesitant, one cannot help but notice the enthusiasm and zeal that later engulf him as he begins slaughtering the soldier. This particular scenario is perfectly

explained by Bloom (1999: 11) in her paper titled “Trauma Theory Abbreviated” in which she discusses how victims of trauma later transform into victimizers. She quotes

When we understand the effects of trauma, it is easier to grasp how someone could be victimized and turn away from the victim role and towards the victimizer role instead. A victim is both helpless and powerless, and as we have seen, helplessness is a noxious human experience. Human beings will do anything to avoid feeling powerless. If you have been victimized, one of the possible outcomes is to assume the power of the one who has hurt you by becoming someone who terrorizes and abuses others. Such behavior can reduce anxiety while providing a certain excitement and the combination of these two effects can become habit-forming. (Real, 1997)

At this point, it is obvious that Agu is in denial – a traumatic stage where a trauma victim ignores or represses his trauma by engaging in acts that under normal circumstances, he or she would not have. The trauma victim ignores his or her trauma and his or her emotions become numb. By consoling himself with seemingly-assuring thoughts like “I am not bad boy. I am not bad boy. I am soldier and soldier is not bad if he is killing....So if I am killing, then I am only doing what is right”. (p. 31) and hooked unto hard drugs, Agu becomes a ruthless killer. He tells himself:

Yes, it is good to fight. I am liking how the gun is shooting and the knife is chopping. I am liking to see people running from me and people screaming for me when I am killing them and taking their blood. I am liking to kill... I am feeling like man with big muscle and small head and I am thinking that nothing can be stopping me and nothing can be slowing me down—not even the hill we are climbing. I am like leopard hunting in the bush.” (p. 53).

Agu likens his skill at killing to that of a leopard who roars, ambushes and launches an attack on its prey. This reveals that Agu gets satiated anytime he kills. This masochistic delight at killing, scary as it may look, reveals a desperate desire to see the blood flow. The depth to which Agu has sunk is complete as he takes on the posture of a beast. By ironically comparing himself to a man with big muscles and a leopard, Agu’s transformation from a victim to a victimizer becomes very obvious. He becomes a hardened and a remorseless

torturer. He now seems to take pride in the monster that he has become: a sadist who takes pleasure in the screams and cries of his victims. This is seen in the constant use of the clause, “I am liking...”. Under the duress of hard drugs, Agu together with Strika and some other soldiers molest and rape a woman and her daughter during a raid in one of the villages. Agu narrates:

Under the bed there is woman and her daughter just hiding. She is looking at us and worrying worrying so much it is looking like somebody is cutting her face with knife. She is smelling like goat and we are wanting to kill her so we are dragging her... Strika is pulling down his short and showing that he is man to this woman while I am holding her one leg and another soldier is holding the other. She is screaming, DEVIL BLESS YOU! DEVIL BORN YOU! ... AYIIIEEE! woman is just looking at me and screaming. And I am shouting, SHUTUP! SHUTUP! SHUTUP! This woman is enemy. She is killing my family and burning my house and stealing my food and making my family to scatter. And this girl is enemy. She is killing my father and making me to run from my home. I am pulling the girl, but she is not letting go of her mother's arm. She is holding holding her so the two of them are like one animal. I am with Strika and we are pulling the girl, pulling until her leg is cracking, but she is not letting go. She is screaming and I am seeing her breath is coming out from her mouth, just coming out and coming out. Then Strika is taking his knife high above his head and chopping and everybody is coming apart. The girl is having no more hand. She is not screaming or shouting or making any noise. She is just having no more hand. Commandant is saying that she is enemy, she is stealing our food, and killing my family because she is enemy. I am jumping on her chest KPWUD KPWUD and I am jumping on her head, KPWUD, until it is only blood that is coming out of her mouth. You are not my mother, I am saying to the girl's mother and then I am raising my knife high above my head. I am liking the sound of knife chopping KPWUDA KPWUDA on her head and how the blood is just splashing on my hand and my face and my feet. I am chopping and chopping and chopping until I am looking up and it is dark. (pp. 56-57).

Readers glean Agu's transformation much more in the extract above where we see the highest form of disregard for human life. Agu compares the smell of the woman to the smell of a goat. This animalistic comparison shows how these children have been brainwashed to consider their supposed enemies as non-humans who do not deserve to be treated with dignity. At this point in the novel, Agu's sudden transformation from

an innocent boy who once lived a peaceful life together with his family with aspirations of becoming a doctor or an engineer to a blood-thirsty and ruthless killer becomes apparent. The Commandant brainwashes them by filling their heads with reasons to hate their supposed enemies and kill them. In order to numb their emotions as they rape and commit the atrocities seen in the extract above, Agu and Strika shout constantly. They repeatedly shout ‘SHUT UP!’ in order to drown the cries and voices of their victims and distance themselves from any form of pity. In doing so, they seem to put on a mask of machismo just so they can carry out these horrible acts. The repetition of the cacophonous sounds “KPWUD” and “KPWUDA” as Agu jumps on his victim’s chest and head showcases how violent and remorseless these child soldiers become. It also

makes obvious the pain that the vulnerable in the society must suffer as a result of war. Agu mutilates (chopping and chopping and chopping) his victims until he later looks up and realizes it is dark. The fact that Agu seems to love the violence he perpetuates at this point to the extent that he loses track of time shows how lost he has become. His sanity as a human being has been completely shattered and compromised at this point and his natural growth process interrupted.

In Beah’s *A Long Way Gone*, the protagonist’s transformation from a victim to a victimizer is not as swift as Agu’s in *Beasts of No Nation*. The reason for this can be attributed to Ishmael’s prolonged days as a victim of war before he is finally recruited by the government military. Living through violence and constantly witnessing atrocities at such a young age, Ishmael unconsciously turns vicious at some point even before he is recruited as a child soldier to fight the rebels. This shows how the war has robbed him of his innocence and turned him into some kind of a monster. This is portrayed when he accuses Gasemu, a man he knew in his village before the war, for being the reason why he does not get the opportunity to re-unite with his family in time. He attacks Gasemu violently:

If we hadn't stopped to rest on that hill, if we hadn't run into Gasemu, I would have seen my family, I thought. My head was burning as if on fire. I put my hands on both ears and squeezed them in vain. I didn't know what was happening to me. I got up, walked behind Gasemu, and locked his neck under my arms. I squeezed him as hard as I could. "I can't breathe," he said, fighting back. He pushed me off, and I fell next to a pestle. I picked it up and hit Gasemu with it. He fell, and when he got up, his nose was bleeding. My friends held me back. (p. 119)

This scene only foreshadows the atrocious acts that Ishmael will be capable of when he is finally recruited by the military, trained, indoctrinated and fed with drugs and American action movies. By stating that "my head was burning as if on fire, I put my hands on both ears and squeezed in vain" Ishmael showcases his burning desire for revenge. The violence that he exhibits out of desperation at this point is indicative of the beast that he is gradually becoming. Having condemned the maltreatment and eventual killing of an old man by some young rebels earlier in his narration, the reader would never have anticipated that Ishmael would be capable of inflicting almost the same amount of pain on an elderly man. Just like in the case of Agu, Ishmael is also recruited into the army with the head of the government army, Lieutenant Jabati, preying on his innocence and the loss of his parents. The Lieutenant addresses the children:

Some of you are here because they have killed your parents or families, others because this is a safe place to be. Well, it is not that safe anymore. That is why we need strong men and boys to help us fight these guys, so that we can keep this village safe. If you do not want to fight or help, that is fine. But you will not have rations and will not stay in this village. You are free to leave, because we only want people here who can help cook, prepare ammunition, and fight. There are enough women to run the kitchen, so we need the help of able boys and men to fight these rebels. This is your time to revenge the deaths of your families and to make sure more children do not lose their families. (p. 131)

Even though Ishmael and the other boys seem to be given a choice to either join the army or not, the fact that they will be denied food and not be allowed to stay in the village means they

are technically being blackmailed to join the army against their will. Just like Agu, Ishmael joins the army because of the need for protection and ultimately, for survival. The lieutenant gives these children a “justified” reason for them to enlist as soldiers: to avenge the deaths of their families. He lays down their duties as child soldiers which include cooking, preparing ammunitions and fighting. This makes readers appreciate the enormous responsibility often placed on the shoulders of child soldiers even though they are just children hoping to survive a senseless war. It is also clear that their superiors succeed in recruiting them through coercion and manipulations of their infantile minds and emotions. Alhaji, one of Ishmael’s companions reiterates their dilemma and loss:

The rebels will kill anyone from this village because they will consider us their enemy, spies, or that we have sided with the other side of the war. That is what the staff sergeant said,” Alhaji said, explaining the dilemma we faced. The rest of the boys, who were lying on their mats, got up and joined us as Alhaji continued: “It is better to stay here for now.” He sighed. We had no choice. Leaving the village was as good as being dead.

The above extract emphasizes the extent to which the child soldier gets submerged within the dictates of the army. Having convinced them that refusing enlistment will not guarantee their safety because the rebels will kill them if they leave the military, the children get torn between two worlds that neither understand their plights nor care about their safety as children. They have become children forced into adulthood as they must make critical and life-changing decisions all on their own. This means that Ishmael and his friends have no option but to stay with the military, fight, and victimize others in order to safeguard their own lives. After his recruitment, Ishmael together with his friends are indoctrinated just as the Commandant does to Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*. Ishmael narrates:

The lieutenant went on for almost an hour, describing how rebels had cut off the heads of some people’s family members and made them watch, burned entire villages along with their inhabitants, forced sons to have intercourse with their mothers, hacked newly born babies in half because they cried too much, cut open pregnant women’s stomachs, took the babies out, and killed them...The lieutenant spat on the ground and continued on, until he was sure that he had

mentioned all the ways the rebels had hurt every person in the gathering. “They have lost everything that makes them human. They do not deserve to live. That is why we must kill every single one of them. Think of it as destroying a great evil. It is the highest service you can perform for your country.” The lieutenant pulled out his pistol and fired two shots into the air. People began shouting, “We must kill them all. We must make sure they never walk this earth again.” (p. 113)

The children who are mostly between the ages of thirteen and sixteen are made to believe that they are fighting for a good cause and that there is no sin in slaughtering the enemy who killed their parents and loved ones. To make them efficient killers, the child soldiers are taken through rigorous training. They are taken to a banana farm where they are taught to stab and kill the enemy using banana trees as their target. The corporal instructs the children:

Visualize the banana tree as the enemy, the rebels who killed your parents, your family, and those who are responsible for everything that has happened to you,” the corporal screamed. “Is that how you stab someone who had killed your family?” he asked. “This is how I would do it.” He took out his bayonet and started shouting and stabbing the banana tree. “I first stab him in the stomach, then the neck, then his heart, and I will cut it out, show it to him, and then pluck his eyes out. Remember, he probably killed your parents or worse. Continue. (p. 138).

Being ordered by the corporal, “visualize the enemy, the rebels who killed your parents, your family, and those who are responsible for everything that has happened to you” (p. 138), the children perfect the art of killing. They are taught to kill without mercy. The banana imagery presented in the above extract is calculated to detach the children from any emotional engagement with the pain they inflict on their supposed enemies. The dialogue between the Commandant and the child soldiers registers the presence of two semantic networks, one signaling fear and the other persuasive force. The commandant is intentional and strategic in his teaching process. He likens their enemies to animals who deserve to die and plants in order to evoke pent-up anger in the children. At the end of the training sessions, Ishmael seems to have completed his transition from an innocent boy to a monster as he imagines killing rebels by setting them on fire and laughing from a distance. He says:

There had been no time to think all day, but now I could. I could become angry, yes, begin to visualize scenarios of shooting or stabbing a rebel. “The rebels are responsible for everything that has happened to you.” I imagined capturing several rebels at once, locking them inside a house, sprinkling gasoline on it, and tossing a match. We watch it burn and I laugh. (p. 139).

This shows the extent to which Ishmael has been brainwashed and turned into a killer without any sense of empathy. Robbed of his innocence, Ishmael now longs to put to practice what he has learnt so he engages in fantasies of capturing and sadistically killing rebels. With the combination of drugs like “marijuana, brown brown, cocaine mixed with gunpowder” and the constant training he undergoes, Ishmael confesses, “I had no problem shooting my gun” (p. 120) and “killing had become as easy as drinking water.” (p. 122). This is a powerful use of simile that makes Agu’s transition from a victim to a victimizer very apparent. Water is critical to survival just as killing has become so critical to Agu’s nature. On his first day as a combatant, Ishmael who initially was traumatized by the sounds of gunshots but later acclimatizes and begins killing the rebels. He brags about his shooting skill thus:

I raised my gun and pulled the trigger, and I killed a man. Suddenly, as if someone was shooting them inside my brain, all the massacres I had seen since the day I was touched by war began flashing in my head. Every time I stopped shooting to change magazines and saw my two young lifeless friends, I angrily pointed my gun into the swamp and killed more people. I shot everything that moved, until we were ordered to retreat... We heard footsteps on the dried grasses and immediately took aim. A group of gunmen and boys emerged from under the bushes, crouched, and took quick cover behind trees. As they got closer, we opened fire, dropping those who stood in front. The rest we chased into the swamp, where we lost them. There, crabs had already begun feasting on the eyes of the dead. Limbs and fragmented skulls lay on top of the bog, and the water in the swamp had been replaced by blood. We flipped the bodies over and took their ammunition and guns. (p.145-156)

Ishmael has his first kill as a “soldier”. However, just as Cathy Caruth explains the belatedness of trauma, the act of killing a man naturally causes Ishmael to relive all of

the atrocities that he has witnessed. His transition from an innocent victim to a monstrous victimizer becomes more evident as he now has no problem taking the life of another man. In the midst of all these, Ishmael still communicates to readers through the use of powerful imagery the horrors of war: crabs feasting on the eyes of the dead, fragmented limbs and skulls that lay on top of the bog and the water in the swamp turning blood. Here, the narrator strategically draws readers into his world so they understand chaos that usually surrounds war. Ishmael at this point has completely lost his innocence. It is not surprising that he destroys his rap cassettes which one can argue symbolizes his innocence. By destroying the cassettes he used to love so much as a child, he literally destroys his innocence and childhood as he takes on a different personality as a child soldier – a killer and a drug addict. He no longer spends the day playing football like he used to do before the war but rather smokes marijuana and executing his duties as a “soldier”. He narrates:

In the daytime, instead of playing soccer in the village square, I took turns at the guarding posts around the village, smoking marijuana and sniffing brown brown, cocaine mixed with gunpowder, which was always spread out on the table, and of course taking more of the white capsules, as I had become addicted to them. They gave me a lot of energy. (p. 148)

Clearly, Ishmael seems to have been robbed of his childhood. With his new identity as a child soldier, he can no longer behave like any ordinary child. He has been forced to break ties with his childhood life. Unlike any ordinary child, Ishmael now guards posts, has become addicted to marijuana and cocaine. This is why he says, “I would try desperately to think about my childhood, but I couldn’t. The war memories had formed a barrier that I had to break in order to think about any moment in my life before the war.” (p. 179). By comparing his war memories to a “barrier” that he must break, Ishmael reveals the loss he has suffered and the near-to-impossible task of reclaiming his innocence as a result of his trauma. Denov (2010) in an interview with a former RUF Commander provides an explanation as to why

child soldiers are mostly fed on hard drugs. This, she documents in her book titled *Child Soldiers: Sierra Leone's Revolutionary United Front*. The former commander explains:

We were very much aware of the effects of drugs on children...drugs and alcohol were prevalent and served as a prerequisite for combat activities. Fighting with a gun is not an easy task because it puts so much pressure on the mind. So we needed to free the mind by taking drugs, and it worked. (p. 100)

This explains why Agu and Ishmael are introduced to the smoking of marijuana, cocaine and other harmful substances without recourse to their health or their ages. This seems a strategic effort to desensitize and numb their sense of humanity so they can joyfully kill their supposed enemies without compassion and take orders without hesitation. It is obvious from the discussion so far that Ishmael in *A Long Way Gone* just as Agu in *Beasts of No Nation* are robbed of their innocence as both authors characterize them in their works as children who transition from being victims of war to victimizers. It is worth stressing that these children never wish to commit these atrocities, but they are compelled to do so by circumstances beyond their control. Having lost their families who are meant to protect them and their villages within which they find comfort, they are left with no other alternative than join these military forces in order to survive the brutalities of war. This is why both Agu and Ishmael in *Beasts of No Nation* and *A Long Way Gone* respectively, constantly state that they abhor what they do but they have no other option if they want to survive. This is why I agree strongly with the assertion that child soldiers are nothing but pawns of powerful warlords. (Denov, 2008)

Chapter Summary

In this section of the discussion, the researcher has examined how both Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah characterize or depict the child soldier in *Beasts of No Nation* and *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* respectively. The researcher finds that, both authors represent the child soldier as an individual who transitions from a victim to a victimizer in order to

survive the brutalities of war. This means that for Agu and Ishmael, joining the military group and executing all the duties and responsibilities that come with it is a defense mechanism against their trauma. Readers get to appreciate the plights of child soldiers and also understand the factors that necessitate their transition into “monsters”. It also exposes how these children are robbed of their innocence and childhood.

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CHAPTER FOUR

Telling the War: Expressing the Content of the Child Soldier's Trauma

Introduction

While the previous chapter of this thesis looked at the two authors' characterization of the child soldier as an individual who transitions from an innocent victim to a brutal victimizer just to survive the war, this chapter discusses how the child soldier as the narrator of events journeys readers through his traumatic experiences and facilitates an understanding of conflict from the perspective of the child. As a first-person narrator, the child soldier's use of language and how it helps reveal his trauma and loss is explored.

Analysis

In Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Beah's *A Long Way Gone*, both authors adopt a child as the narrator of events. This is what I believe helps the child protagonists communicate their war-time experiences and trauma to the readers. According to Roberts & Henry (1992: 60), narrators are "the story's focus, the angle of vision from which things are seen, reported and judged." In his discussion of the child's narration of war as depicted in Ahmadou Kourama's *Allah is Not Obligated*, Bainito (2014) clarifies this further when he argues that:

It is through a child narrative voice that we can enter a child's sensibilities and depict insights into how they experience and make sense of various awful experiences they are faced with during times of war; including sexual and drug abuses, being orphaned, their recruitment in war and how they adapt to these painful experiences. (p. 3)

Discussing the complex role of the child or youth protagonist in an article titled "Ora na-azu nwa: The Figure of the Child in Third-Generation Nigerian Novels", Hron (2008) as cited by

Nabutanyi (2013) describes the use of children as narrators and protagonists by writers as “the rich tradition of adopting the child focaliser”. (p.2). Considering the seriousness of war, it is obvious that many writers would prefer to tell the events from an adult’s perspective in order to enable readers fully grasp the social, political and economic underpinnings of conflicts. In the case of the texts used in this study however, the authors deliberately adopt children as narrators with the intention of exposing the role played by children during warfare, the effects it has on children and also help readers understand perfectly the traumatic experiences of the child soldier through his own narrations. I therefore agree with Bainito (2014) that a narration from the perspective of the child is ideal because, the adult’s imagination lacks a deeper insight into a child’s consciousness since the experiences of childhood are lost to him. Stressing on the importance of the child narrator or “the child focalizer” in exposing the ills of the society, Nabutanyi (2013) posits that “by deploying a child narrator or protagonist and subtly nuanced narrative textures, such texts can offer alternative interpretations of challenges afflicting particular African societies.” (p.2) This is true considering the fact that it is through the child’s voice that readers of Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* and Beah’s *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, get to appreciate the devastating effects of child soldiering and conflicts in Africa. It is therefore not surprising that Iweala and Beah find the child and the first-person narrator to be apt. According to Meyer (2012), the first-person narrative (I or we), allows writers to inject emotions into their works. Explaining the concept of first-person narrator, Schipper (2007) points out that:

First person narrators take different positions with regards to the narrated event: first, they can tell a story in which they are or have been the hero/heroine; second, they can tell a story in which they mainly figure as observers; third, they can tell a story which has been transmitted to them by someone else. (p.348)

From the foregoing, it is obvious that Iweala and Beah, whose protagonists fit the above description, employ this form of narration to help them (Agu and Ishmael) personally voice out the content of plights and all its ramifications. Quoting Jones (1998) in *Childhood in African Literature*, Bainito (2014) supports the assertion that African authors use child narrators to disclose the “grim reality of cruelty, harshness and the vulnerable child’s experience”. (p.7). Aside the child’s voice helping readers to see through the eyes of Agu and Ishmael in the texts, Muthusi (2019) quotes Steinmetz (2011: 1) that child narrators and child perspectives provoke adult readers’ reaction and thinking about or questioning established worldviews. Unlike adults, children have fewer filters when they meet the world and exhibit innocence and uniqueness in how they see it.”. This shows the appropriateness of the use of child narrators in the texts. Through the use of the child as a protagonist or narrator, he/she is provided the illocutionary space which under normal circumstances and in most cases, is denied him/her in an African society, to freely express his/her thoughts and emotions. Honwana (2006) as cited by Nabutanyi (2013) observes that:

Children have rarely been listened to, and when their voices are not silenced, their talk is never unconstrained...children’s voices reach a broader platform only in rare, and sometimes tragic, cases, but even then, these subaltern voices are often immediately recuperated, transformed, and inserted into different narratives and agendas set by other interest groups. (p. 8)

This observation made by Alcinda Honwana concerning the use of the child narrator in post-colonial Africa is validated by some African texts in which the society tries to stifle the voices and opinions of children. At best, the child, in most African societies can only evaluate adult behavior in repressed assessment. Ama Ata Aidoo’s short story, *The Girl Who Can*, is a typical example of such literary works: a seven-year-old girl, who although possesses an innate desire to express her views, is forbidden to do so. She is constantly ridiculed by adults, especially her grandmother whenever she tries to express herself. However, through the authors use of a child narrator, Adjoa is able to chase her dreams and not kowtow to the

discriminatory prescriptions of the society. This shows how significant child narrators are in the African literary space: giving voice to children who as a result of their young age have had their voices considered subsidiary voices.

Agu's distinctive form of the English Language in *Beasts of No Nation* which Hron (2008) describes as "rotten English" cannot be overlooked since it does not only make the text very unique but also symbolizes his traumatization and confusion. Justifying the use of this form of language, Hron (2008) as quoted by Anthonissen (2009) argues that it helps readers to "viscerally (experience) Agu's victimization, trauma, or remorse" (p.74). Quoting Hron (2008), Anthonissen (2009) again posits that the grammatical errors present in Agu's English "poignantly reproduce the problematic, if not incommunicable, worldview of the child soldier" (p. 72). The grammatically incorrect sentences, the mixing of the verb forms, the erroneous use of the plural words, the haphazard use of the present continuous tense all contribute in trying to represent the traumatic reality of child soldiers. The language mimics the confusion that is typical of trauma and as such the reader experiences a similar feeling of disorientation. Describing how he is found by the rebel group at his hiding place, Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*, makes obvious his confusion and traumatization through his use of language – the constant use of the present continuous tense in rendering past events, the faulty grammatical structures and unusual grammatical constructions. This can be seen as Agu hides from the rebel group that attacks his village. He narrates:

Somebody is knocking. KNOCK KNOCK. But I am not answering. Then they are angrying too much and just kicking so the whole of this place is shaking and the roof is falling apart small small so that more light is coming in. And the wood everywhere is cracking until I am hearing PING PING and seeing screw falling from the door into bucket near my feet. The sound is fighting the wall, bouncing from here to there, through the net of light, until it is like the sound is pushing the door open so there is so much brightness. BRIGHTNESS! (p. 2)

The extract above, like all others found in the study injects authenticity in the narrative since it reinforces Agu's educational level and the gaps in his use of the English language. Agu's simple diction and ungrammatical structures in the opening part of Iweala's novel as seen in the extract above depicts his fear and affirms his position as a child. Aside his language underscoring his traumatization and confusion, it can also be argued that the constant repetition of words and the use of the present tense foreshadows the aggravation of his interminable trauma as the story unfolds. The use of auditory imagery and the onomatopoeic expression "PING PING" in the above extract is indicative of Agu's attempt to put into words the enormity of his trauma – a feeling which often defies language. Justifying Agu's ungrammatical language, his child-like register and the use of the pidgin language, Nabutanyi (2013) argues that aside the fact that they reveal Agu's trauma, they also help substantiate Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead's concept of how trauma is anti-language and often unspeakable. Nabutanyi (2013) advances his argument thus;

Firstly, nonstandard English locates Agu's traumatic experiences in the Nigerian and African civil war context. This is because Agu's register with its sprinkling of West African pidgin English locates the text in a recognizably West African linguistic landscape. The use of West African pidgin establishes a connection between the novel and the numerous civil wars that have plagued this region. Secondly, it authenticates his childhood, since it shows a child who has yet to master the use of a foreign language. Thirdly, it gestures to class dynamics in postcolonial conflicts in Africa. It is more often the children of the poor who are abducted and conscripted as child soldiers. Fourthly and most importantly, as Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead eloquently argue, it demonstrates the fact that trauma is anti-language. (p. 56)

It is obvious from the foregoing that even though this chapter focuses on the child soldier's voice as helping reveal his trauma, it must be mentioned that it also helps depict the vulnerability of children during times of war. Right from the beginning of *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu through his narration presents to readers the untold trauma coupled with the

physical violence that children are subjected to as a result of war. When he is found at his hiding place by the rebels and asked of his name, he finds it difficult to speak. He says:

I am trying hard to remember, to be squeezing my thought for my name, but I am not getting anything... I am shaking my head trying to remember as Commandant is just reaching to his belt and showing me one black gun like that. I am wanting to cry and I am feeling like I am having to go to toilet, but I am knowing if I am doing this, he will be killing me just like that so I am shaking my head and looking at his red eye until I am remembering just like that how in my village everybody is calling me Agu. (pp.16-17)

The fact that Agu in the extract above feels like having a bowel movement as he faces the unjustified wrath of the Commandant is indicative of his anxiety and the trauma that he experiences as a young boy. This situation is referred to by Pappas (2011) in an article titled “Psychological Trauma Linked to Bowel Disorder” as Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) – a disorder that causes abdominal pain, constipation and diarrhea. It is argued that emotional and psychological trauma just as experienced by Agu is capable of resulting in this disorder. The fact that in a literary work, there is such telling evidence of scientific expression and truth reveals the beauty of Iweala’s novel – science meets fiction. Here, there is a conversation between two disciplines which reinforce the view that literature in itself proves right scientific truth. Agu’s bowel disturbances which is in direct response to the fear he is experiencing is not just to captivate the emotions and render readers emotional, it is actually a medical condition orchestrated by trauma.

Again, Agu’s inability to instantly remember his name only shows the extent to which he has been left traumatized by the violence of war. His attempt to remember his name by squeezing his thought as if it was something concrete only shows the intensity of the trauma that has overwhelmed him. The metaphorical expression (squeezing my thought) and the futility of this act since it yields no positive result for Agu also shows how the trauma he experiences has affected his psyche, memory and his ability to speak. With the Commandant and his troops flaunting ammunitions at his face, Agu becomes emotionally distressed. His condition

and state of mind at this point is perfectly explained by Bloom (1999) in her work “Trauma Theory Abbreviated” when she theorizes that:

We talk in words, of course, but we also think with words. The person we identify as “me” is the person who thinks and has language. When we need to recall something, we go into the appropriate category (of the brain) and retrieve the information we need. But under conditions of extreme stress, our memory works in a different way. When we are overwhelmed with fear, we lose the capacity for speech, we lose the capacity to put words to our experience. (p. 5).

The above assertion also explains the reason behind Strika’s silence throughout the novel. Having witnessed the deaths of his parents and being constantly abused sexually by the Commandant, Agu’s friend, Strika, loses his ability to speak. The horrors he constantly witnesses as a child render him speechless. Since Strika is unable to speak, he resorts to writing on the ground as a way of expressing his thoughts. Agu reveals, “On the ground he is writing HUNGRY and I am wanting to say to him, I am hungry too. I am hungry too, but the words are not coming out of my mouth.” (p.45). Bloom (1999) explains this consequence of extreme trauma or stress as follows:

Without words, the mind shifts to a mode of thinking that is characterized by visual, auditory, olfactory, and kinesthetic images, physical sensations, and strong feelings. This system of processing information may be adequate under conditions of serious danger. But the powerful images, feelings, and sensations do not just “go away”. They are deeply imprinted, more strongly in fact, than normal everyday memories... At the time of the trauma they had become trapped in “speechless terror” and their capacity for speech and memory were separated. As a result, they developed what has become known as “amnesia” for the traumatic event – the memory is there, but there are no words attached to it so it cannot be either talked about or even thought about. Instead, the memory presents itself as some form of nonverbal behavior... (pp. 5-6)

From this backdrop, readers get to understand the effect of trauma on Agu – his inability to immediately remember his own name and it also explains Strika’s inability to express his thoughts through speech but rather, resorts to sketching and writing on the ground (acting out

his trauma). Strika's situation resonates with that of the Greek mythological figure, Philomela. Although the myth has several variations, the Roman poet, Ovid, presents a detailed account in Book VI of the *Metamorphosis*. Philomela is violently raped by her sister's husband, Tereus. He threatens Philomela to remain silent. However, she remains bent on telling her sister about her ordeal. To prevent this from happening, Tereus cuts off her tongue and abandons her. Bent on telling her sister about her traumatic experience, she weaves a tapestry (a robe) that tells the entire rape scene and sent to her sister. One might argue that unlike Philomela whose tongue is severed, Strika's tongue remains intact yet cannot speak. While this comparison depicts the extent and impact of Strika's trauma, it also reveals that even in silence, traumatized persons sometimes find alternatives (non-verbal means) to communicate their experiences. While Strika resorts to sketching on the ground to communicate her trauma, Philomela resorts to the weaving of a tapestry to tell her story.

Agu reveals another instance where Strika resorts to non-verbal means to express a traumatic experience: the killing of his parents in his presence. He narrates:

I am finding him sitting under tree far away from the other men, holding stick and scratching picture into the dry ground. Over and over again he is drawing the same picture of man and woman with no head because their head is rolling away on the ground. Strika, I am calling to him, and he is looking up at me. No noise from him. He is not saying anything, I am telling myself. Since I am becoming soldier, I am never hearing the sound of his voice, but now, I am knowing what is his problem. His picture is telling me that he is not making one noise since they are killing his parent. (p. 36)

The fact that Agu seems to have noticed Strika making the same sketch of the killing of his parents by rebels on the ground more than once proves the steadiness of Strika's trauma: how it is etched in his memories and how he constantly relives the scene. Strika's inability to express his trauma through words or language as seen in the extract above is explained by James (1994) as quoted by Bloom (1999):

Without words, the traumatic past is experienced as being in the ever present "Now". Words allow us to put the past more safely in the past

where it belongs. Since a child's capacity for verbalization is just developing, their ability to put their traumatic experience into words is particularly difficult. In cases of childhood terror, language functions are often compromised. Instead, children frequently act-out their memories in behaviour instead of words, they show us what happened even when they cannot tell us. (p. 6-7)

Obviously, Strika's inability to express his trauma through language will make healing extremely difficult because just as revealed by Freud, Caruth and Bloom, in order to deal with trauma and its belated return to the victim, one must put one's traumatic experiences into a narrative, put them into words and share it with themselves and others.

Again, through Agu's own voice, readers are made aware of how the Commandant even though appears to like Agu and sometimes gives him (Agu) nice treatments, sexually abuses him. Agu narrates his ordeal:

He is taking off my clothe for me and then he is sitting down next to me and breathing hard...Then he is beginning to touch me all over... Commandant is touching me and bringing my head to where he is standing at attention.... after making me be touching his soldier and all of that thing with my hand and with my tongue and lip, he was telling me to kneel and then he was entering inside of me the way the man goat is sometimes mistaking other man goat for woman goat and going inside of them. If you are watching it, then you are knowing it is not a natural thing. But me, I was not struggling because I am knowing that he will be killing me if am struggling and since I am not wanting to die, I just let him be moving back and forward even though it is hurting me so much. (pp. 84-85).

Agu's language in the extract above which is replete with the progressive tense form, repetitions and both olfactory and tactile imagery makes glaring the issue of sexual violence that child soldiers often have to deal with. Through this vivid description, readers are repulsed and get to understand the plights of Agu who is a representation of many other child soldiers who are sexually abused by their superiors during times of war. Through the use of the progressive tense, Agu freezes time within the narration to illustrate the extent to which his trauma has ordained itself on his psyche. Metaphorically, Agu compares this pedophilic sexual violation by the Commandant to a sexual intercourse between a "male goat" and another

“male goat” who is mistaken for a “woman goat”. Through this animalistic comparison, even though Agu’s innocence as a child is accentuated, it most importantly reveals his repulsion and makes readers commiserate with him, leaving them outraged by this sexual exploitation of a young boy. Even though Agu detests what the Commandant constantly does to him, he is in no position to protest since it would mean an end to his life. The fact that Agu has to stay in silence as the Commandant sexually abuses him only shows his helplessness in the face of fear. He recounts;

I don’t want his finger creeping all over my body. I don’t want his tongue to be touching me and feeling like slug should be feeling if it is on your body...And I am thinking it is not good for Commandant to be doing this to me. But I am not saying any of this. I am not saying anything at all.’ (p. 103)

Agu’s resort to the use of animal imagery (goat, slug) to illustrate the repulsive nature of his abuse. He sees the Commandant as a beast whose actions can turn a young boy into a beast as well. He clearly expresses his disgust towards the Commandant’s act. He describes the commandant’s fingers as creeping all over his body – this crawling, dawdling and lackadaisical movement of the Commandant’s fingers on his body portrays how he is plundered by the Commandant over time. Through the use of simile, he expresses his repugnance and discomfort by comparing the feeling of the Commandant’s tongue on his body to a slug (a shell-less nocturnal animal that moves slowly just like a snail and feeds on plants and flowers).

Agu’s silence as he is abused further substantiates the extent to which he has been overwhelmed by these traumatic experiences since the commencement of his narration in the novel. In as much as he detests this sexual violation, he also understands as a child who is striving to survive in such a chaotic environment that it is a necessary bargain for protection and survival. This is not a situation peculiar to Agu because another child soldier, Strika, is also subjected to the same violation. Agu reveals:

That first time after he is finishing and I am leaving him, I was going to lie down, but I could not. I was asking Strika whether his own was hurting so much the first time, and he was drawing me picture in the mud of man bending down with his hand on the ground and gun and bullet shooting up his buttoom. (p.85)

Strika, who is overwhelmed by these traumatic experiences to the extent that he finds it difficult to put them to words, helps readers to appreciate through his drawings, the horrific nature of their situation and how physically ruptured they have become as a result of the homoerotic and paedophilic actions of the Commandant. In the above extract, by metaphorically, euphemistically and satirically representing the commandant's manhood with a gun and bullet that is shooting up his bottom, Strika through his infantile thoughts communicates the harsh, brutal and damaging effects of the Commandant's action on them. Strika's drawing on the ground makes picturesque how Agu is made to kneel as the commandant continually thrusts his "soldier" in and out of him. Even though the act leaves Agu bleeding and in pain all the time, it does not stop the commandant as it becomes a constant routine that Agu must learn to live with if he wants to survive and remain the Commandant's favourite. This makes Agu nothing more than a sex object that is meant to satisfy the Commandant's sexual needs as and when the need arises. He narrates:

But now he is doing the same to me over and over and over and I am used to it somehow even though it is also making me to feel as if I am still feeling it for the first time. He likes to be whispering to me as if I am woman and this time when he is finishing, he is running his hand up and down my back to wipe away the sweat, and then he is rubbing my head like I am still little boy. He is quieting when we are finishing, so quiet I can hear him cleaning himself with his handkerchief and then sitting back down on the cot. (p. 87)

In the extract above the repetition of the word "over and over and over" with the help of the coordinating conjunction "and" communicates the repetitiveness of this trauma that Agu is subjected to by the Commandant. It has happened so many times that Agu has become used to it and the pain that comes with it. This is why Cathy Caruth in trauma narratives emphasizes repetition as a crucial feature of trauma writing, one that expresses ideas of compulsion and

acting out, of being caught up in endless cycles of suffering and of a fatalistic sense of doom. (Schonfelder, 2013:32).

As the narrator of events in the novel, Agu reveals through rhetorical questions his internal conflict as a child soldier and the confusion that has taken over his young mind. He sometimes tries so hard to understand the fast-paced movement of events in his life as a “soldier”. He says:

Time is passing. Time is not passing. Day is changing to night. Night is changing to day. How can I know what is happening? It is like one day everything is somehow okay even if we are fighting war, but the next day we are killing killing and looting from everybody. How can I know what is happening to me? How can I know? Everything is inside out like my shirt I am wearing. (p. 52).

Aside rhetorical questions limning Agu’s confusion and frustration, the use and repetition of progressive verbs like “changing”, “passing”, “killing” and “looting” illustrate how events are moving quickly in Agu’s life and he seems to have no control over them. Through lexical repetition, Agu sums up his daily routine as a child soldier. All they do is “driving driving and walking walking and driving driving and walking walking and fighting and soldiering and running from road into bush and bush onto road. That is all we are doing.” (p. 94). The repetitions mixed with the present progressive tense of the verbs is indicative of the unending nature of Agu’s trauma as a child soldier. It seems that nothing is certain in Agu’s life now except fighting as a soldier. He says:

It is night. It is day. It is light. It is dark. It is too hot. It is too cold. It is raining. It is too much sunshine. It is too dry. It is too wet. But all the time we are fighting. No matter what, we are always fighting. All the time bullet is just eating everything, leaf, tree, ground, person—eating them—just making person to bleed everywhere and there is so much blood flooding all over the bush. (p. 117)

The juxtapositions in Agu’s language (day/night, light/dark, wet/dry, and rain/sunshine) reinforce his confusion as a result of the trauma that he is constantly subjected to as a child soldier and how he cannot coherently process these traumatic events as a child. He is never fully aware of his surroundings because of how events in his life evolve drastically with

nature being indifferent to his plights. In order to make his trauma more pronounced, Agu resorts to the use of personification and exaggeration. By giving “bullet” the human quality of eating everything including leaf, tree, ground and even humans, we glean the devastating nature of war and how it consumes and destroys everything. The inharmonious and harsh nature of events in Agu’s life which depict his overwhelming trauma can also be gleaned from his use of cacophonous diction. (Consonant sounds that are articulated in a rather loud and harsh manner). This is evident in the extract below:

But there is so much bombing and bombing and shelling and shelling and sending helicopter to come and shine light on us and kill us. All the time, the ground is shaking and the tree is shaking and the air is smelling of smoke or the air is beating in your ear BOTU BOTU BOTU and you are not even having one second to be thinking anything. (p. 118)

The protagonist’s constant use of cacophonous sounds like /b/, /k/, /t/, /d/ and “ing” form of verbs like “bombing”, “shaking”, “beating”, “shelling”, “smelling” even though tells of the continuous nature of Agu’s trauma, also reveals the harsh, destructive, dreadful, distasteful and unpleasant conditions of war that Agu must endure as a child soldier. We can also not lose sight of Agu’s use of onomatopoeic diction – BOTU BOTU BOTU- to appeal to our sense of hearing. Even though this is typical of children his age, his language provides the imagery needed to connect readers to the horrors of war and help them understand his trauma and condemn the use of children as “soldiers” during warfare. Agu’s plight is deeply felt by readers as he describes how as a result of severe hunger, they are forced to feed on almost everything (edible or inedible) with little or no regards for their health. Agu laments:

All the time we are sick and going to toilet, shitting water. We are hungry too and living off anything we can find. Lizard, we are eating them. Insect, we are eating them or even better, if we are finding, we are eating rat and every other kind of bush animals. Sometimes we are eating this leaf or that leaf, but leaf is what is always making my belly to turn so I am not eating it so much...I so hungry I can be eating wood if it is making me to hungry less, but it is hurting my belly and making me to vomit and shit. I am so hungry I can be

eating my skin small by small if it is not making me to bleed to death.
(p. 117-118)

Hunger in the extract above has been made tangible as it unsympathetically inflicts pain on Agu and the other child soldiers. In order to cope with the situation, they are forced to consume lizards, insects, rats, leaves, wood and even his own skin. Out of desperation, these children are turned into animals that feed on other animals and plants. In order to survive in the absence of food, Agu practices self-cannibalism by sometimes eating his own flesh. In the field of science, this practice which is often called autocannibalism or autosarcophagy is considered a mental health disorder whereby an individual involves in eating parts of the body like the skin, hair, and nails. The idea that hunger makes Agu and the other child soldiers sacrifice their health for things that are not comestible or fit for human consumption substantiates the extent to which these children have been made anomalous human beings. The queerness of the situation in the extract above, helps readers appreciate better the trauma of the child soldier. Though highly exaggerated through the use of personification, metaphor and imagery, it is a deliberate attempt to make readers feel what Agu feels as a child soldier so they can instantly condemn the abuse of children's rights during conflicts.

In *A Long Way Gone*, the protagonist, Ishmael, goes through similar traumatic experiences which he personally reveals to readers as the narrator of events. Typical of literary autobiographies, Ishmael Beah adopts a simple, clear and plain language that is typical of a child narrator and can easily be understood by readers. This is why Afejuku (1990) in his section of Eldred Jones' "Childhood in African Literature" which is titled, "Aspects of Language in the African Literary Autobiography", argues that "just as these autobiographies strive to heighten meaning through richness of language achieved, for example, through poeticization of setting so also do they attempt to make their narratives appealing through simple, plain writing; writing that is straightforward from the point of view of syntactic construction." (p.62). It is obvious from Beah's *A Long Way Gone* that even though the

author consciously or deliberately utilizes the resources of fiction, most especially a highly literary language, to transform his facts and reality into something else (Afejuku, 1990: 54), he also employs simple and plain language to enable the child narrator to freely voice out his experiences and trauma without the adult's influence.

Even before Ishmael is recruited into the army, he experiences first-hand the violence of war. He is left traumatized to the extent that his own shadow sometimes scares him and causes him to run for miles. Ishmael recounts one of such traumatic experiences and the toll it has on his psyche. He narrates:

I had passed through burnt villages where dead bodies of men, women, and children of all ages were scattered like leaves on the ground after a storm. Their eyes still showed fear, as if death hadn't freed them from the madness that continued to unfold. I had seen heads cut off by machetes, smashed by cement bricks, and rivers filled with so much blood that the water had ceased flowing. Each time my mind replayed these scenes, I increased my pace. Sometimes I closed my eyes hard to avoid thinking, but the eye of my mind refused to be closed and continued to plague me with images. My body twitched with fear, and I became dizzy. (p. 66)

Just like Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*, Ishmael also makes great use of visual imagery as seen in the extract above to communicate his war-time experiences. In the extract above, through the use of simile and exaggeration, Ishmael compares the dead bodies of men, women and children strewn all over to scattered leaves after a storm. One would think that death would end their pain, but even in death, the corpses of these people are gripped with terror. This illustrates the "madness" that Ishmael witnesses as a child and the intensity of the trauma that plagues his mind. By describing the war as "madness that continued to unfold", Ishmael communicates to readers the absurdity and futility of the war and the horrors he witnesses – "heads cut off by machetes, smashed by cement bricks, and rivers filled with so much blood. Through the use of exaggeration, Agu sums up the psychological impact of the war on his young mind when he says that even though he closes his eyes to avoid his painful memories, the eyes of his mind would not close. This reveals the level of stress that plagues Agu's

young mind. The trauma that these child soldiers often experience as portrayed in the excerpt above, are always to some extent related to their psyche and becomes part of their deepest selves. This is why Bloom (1999) in explaining psychic trauma quotes Lenore Terr (a child psychiatrist who did the first longitudinal study of traumatized children) as saying, “Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, overwhelming, intense emotional blow or a series of blows assaults the person from outside. Traumatic events are external, but they quickly become incorporated into the mind” (Terr, 1990: 8). Ishmael’s trauma is unbearable for a child his age so he has recurring nightmares. And reliving these traumatic experiences in imaginations. He tells readers:

In my mind’s eye I would see sparks of flame, flashes of scenes I had witnessed, and the agonizing voices of children and women would come alive in my head. I cried quietly as my head beat like the clapper of a bell. Sometimes after the migraine had stopped, I was able to fall asleep briefly, only to be awoken by nightmares. One night I dreamt that I was shot in the head. I was lying in my blood as people hurriedly walked past me. A dog came by and began licking my blood ferociously. The dog bared its teeth as my blood sweetened its mouth. I wanted to scare it away, but I was unable to move. I woke up before it started what I was afraid it was going to do to me. I was sweating and couldn’t sleep for the rest of the night. (p. 127)

From the extract above, we realize the internal conflict that has subdued Ishmael’s young life since every attempt to rid himself of these traumatic scenes seems fruitless. By comparing the pain in his head to the clapper of a bell, he impinges on the minds of readers the intensity of his agony while appealing to our sensibilities. The nightmares that prevent Ishmael from having a sound sleep after a long struggle with his trauma-filled psyche is representative of the perpetuity of his trauma. Narrating his dream, Ishmael makes vivid his trauma through the use of words like “shot”, “bared”, “ferociously” and “blood”. These words instantaneously paint a picture of a horrendous and traumatic scene. Ishmael’s diction is obviously a reflection of his trauma. Reliving in the form of dreams and nightmares the violent experiences of war show how deeply these traumatic events are buried in Ishmael’s sub-

conscious. In another instance, after his first mission as a child soldier, his traumatization is revealed in the form of a dream. He narrates:

I had a dream that I was picking up Josiah from the tree stump and a gunman stood on top of me. He placed his gun on my forehead. I immediately woke up from my dream and began shooting inside the tent, until the thirty rounds in the magazine were finished. The corporal and the lieutenant came in afterward and took me outside. I was sweating, and they threw water on my face and gave me a few more of the white capsules. I stayed up all night and couldn't sleep for a week. (p. 147).

From the excerpt above, it is clear that Ishmeal's trauma has left him so disoriented that it is almost impossible for him to differentiate reality from illusion. With his violent dream interrupted by another soldier and awoken from his sleep, he is unable to differentiate the world of dream from the world of reality. Consequently, he discharges thirty rounds of bullets into the air. This shows the extent to which Ishmael's trauma is embedded in his psyche and how impossible it seems for him to detach himself from these horrific events.

Anthonissen (2009) explains the above by referring to what Sigmund Freud calls "latency" (the period between the traumatic experience itself and its effect on the traumatized individual). This is why even though Ishmael experiences these traumatic events, he is later haunted by them in his dreams. For a better understanding of this concept of latency, Freud makes reference to a train collision scenario. He says:

It may happen that someone gets away, apparently unharmed, from the spot where he has suffered a shocking accident, for instance a train collision. In the course of the following weeks, however, he develops a series of grave physical and motor symptoms, which can be ascribed only to his shock or whatever else happened at the time of the accident. He has developed a "traumatic neurosis". This appears quite incomprehensible and is therefore a novel fact. The time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the "incubent period", a transparent allusion to the pathology of infectious disease...it is the feature which one might term latency. (Caruth, Unclaimed Experience, 16-17)

Based on Freud's train collision scenario, Anthonissen (2009) explains that, "the trauma victim seems unharmed as he walks away from the accident, because he did not consciously experience the crash as it happened. After a period of time, however, the repressed traumatic event belatedly returns to haunt the victim. (p. 8). One can argue that as a child, Ishmael finds it difficult adopting mechanisms to help deal with his trauma. Consequently, he is often haunted. This is why Bloom (1999) opines that "Children who are traumatized do not have developed coping skills, a developed sense of self, or self in relation to others. Their schemas for meaning, hope, faith, and purpose are not yet fully formed." (p.8). In order to make the child soldiers efficient killers, they are given hard drugs without any regard for the repercussions. A typical instance is when Ishmael and the other soldiers prepare for their first mission after their recruitment. He says, "A young soldier came by with a plastic bag full of some kind of tablets. They looked like capsules, but they were plain white. He handed them to each of us with a cup of water. "The corporal said it will boost your energy," the soldier announced with a secretive smile on his face." (p. 142). With these drugs in their bodies, the children become beings without any sense of empathy and conscience. They are therefore unable to draw a line between good and evil as soon as the drugs begin to function. These drugs give the children some kind of temporary peace as they hardly think about events that would under normal circumstances, traumatize them. The drugs tend to help them deal with the mayhems they experience and perpetuate. As pointed out by Herman, Caruth calls this "numbing" – "a state of detached calm" in which pain and terror disappears. However, Caruth clarifies that it is not a solution to trauma.

In all of these, the innocence of the children is obvious since they are often gripped by fear.

Moving out for his first mission as a child soldier, Ishmael reveals:

I have never been so afraid to go anywhere in my life as I was that day. Even the scuttle of a lizard frightened my entire being. A slight breeze blew and it went through my brain with a sharp swoop that made me grit my teeth in pain. Tears had begun to form in my eyes, but I struggled to hide them and gripped my gun for comfort. (p. 142)

Even though Ishmael is given hard drugs to make him strong, he cannot hide the fact that he is only a little child and not a soldier. The fear that engulfs him at this moment is capable of destabilizing even an adult. With bullets flying all around him and dead bodies strewn all over, Ishmael narrates his first traumatic experience as a child soldier on the battle grounds thus;

I lay there with my gun pointed in front of me, unable to shoot. My index finger had become numb. The forest had begun to spin. I felt as if the ground had turned upside down and I was going to fall off, so I clutched the base of a tree with one hand. I couldn't think, but I could hear the sounds of the guns far away in the distance and the cries of people dying in pain. I had begun to fall into some sort of nightmare. A splash of blood hit my face. In my reverie I had opened my mouth a bit, so I tasted some of the blood. As I spat it out and wiped it off my face, I saw the soldier it had come from. Blood poured out of the bullet holes in him like water rushing through newly opened tributaries. His eyes were wide open; he still held his gun. My eyes were fixed on him when I heard Josiah scream. He cried for his mother in the most painfully piercing voice that I had ever heard. It vibrated inside my head to the point that I felt my brain had shaken loose from its anchor. (p. 144).

The chaos described in the extract above is compelling and representative of Ishmael's trauma. This explains his use of a highly exaggerated and picturesque language. As a child caught up in the chaos of war, Ishmael's mind is so destabilized that the forest seems to spin while the ground seems to have turned upside down. By describing the blood flowing from the body of a soldier as water rushing through newly opened tributaries, Ishmael carries on the wings of simile, an awful and bloody scene that will indubitably create for itself, a permanent place in his psyche and memory. No wonder the screams of pain that surround him vibrate in his head making his brain loosen from its anchor. This hyperbolic statement emphasizes the depth of the fearful experience and the extent to which Ishmael's trauma has left him helpless and has affected his brain – the most complex part of the human body that controls most of its activities: the command centre for the human nervous system. Ishmael's disorientation and his inability to shoot back as he witnesses the rebels attack his colleagues

is indicative of the trauma that overwhelms him. The events he witnesses are so traumatizing that his reflexes are instantly anaesthetized.

It is obvious from the discussions in this section of the study that by adopting the child soldier as the narrator of events, the authors of the texts get to present the war from the perspective of the child. The child tends to present to readers his war-time experiences in an unfiltered manner and without the influence of the adult world. Consequently, readers get to fully appreciate the trauma and the psychological wounds inflicted on child soldiers as a result of war and child soldiering.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the researcher focused on how the protagonists, Agu and Ishmael, communicate their trauma and their war-time experiences. As first-person child narrators, a critical examination of their language and choice of words was done with the aim of understanding war and the child-soldier phenomenon from the perspective of a child and how through their narrative, they connect readers to their trauma. The researcher finds that in order to express their repulsion, appeal to the sensibilities of readers and primarily reveal their trauma, Agu and Ishmael adopt a language replete with imageries, simple diction, repetitions, onomatopoeia, similes, personifications and juxtapositions. Their language does not only portray them as children but most importantly, mimic the trauma and confusion that seem to have engulfed their young lives. The ungrammatical structures in Agu's language and the constant use of the present continuous tense particularly reveals the child soldier's confusion and disorientation as a result of his seemingly endless trauma.

CHAPTER FIVE

Traumatized and Lost: The Burden of the Child Soldier

Introduction

This chapter focuses on establishing the loss of the child soldier as a result of his traumatic experiences. Here, particular attention is paid to the child soldier's life after the war and his preparedness towards reintegration back into the society. The difficulty that accompanies this exercise is what makes obvious the loss of the child soldier. Even though he is far away from the war, he becomes a troubled and lost child who struggles futilely to erase his war-time memories. This loss is often manifested in the form of extreme violence, post-traumatic stress disorder, identity crisis and the lack of trust.

Analysis

A common thread that runs through Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* is the struggle of both protagonists to reintegrate into the society after they have been taken away from the battle field. This can be seen as another form of war because the rehabilitation of the protagonists, Agu and Ishmael as seen in the texts turns out to be a very difficult process - the war time experiences of these children haunt them even though they are far away from the battle grounds. They become children who exhibit extreme violence and also find it difficult establishing trust (especially in the case of Ishmael). This is why Dodge and Raudalen (1991) based on their research in Uganda, Sudan, and Mozambique identify Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (P.T.S.D) as one of the psychological consequences of engaging children in warfare. I also argue that it is one of the main factors that makes the reintegration of both Agu and Ishmael difficult since they

are constantly compelled to relive the violence that once dominated their lives. This shows how lost these children have become as a result of the trauma they experienced during their days as child soldiers.

Agu and Ishmael seem to welcome the idea of rehabilitation differently. While Agu is willing to welcome his transition from a “soldier” back to a civilian but not without difficulties, Ishmael welcomes the idea of reintegration adamantly. This could be attributed to the level of attachments that each one of these protagonists build during their days as child soldiers. After the death of his commandant, Agu says:

And then I am thinking of all the thing I am doing. If they are ordering me KILL, I am killing, SHOOT, I am shooting, ENTER WOMAN, I am entering woman and not even saying anything even if I am not liking it. I am killing everybody, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, soldier. It is all the same. It is not mattering who it is, just that they are dying. I am thinking thinking. I am thinking that I cannot be doing this anymore. Then I am getting up from where I am sitting and wiping the mud on my hand onto my short. I am looking at my gun and I am saying to it, I am not needing you anymore. Just stay where you are. My shoulder that it is always sitting on is hurting so much, but I am feeling it jubilating because it is not having to be obeying gun anymore. (p. 136)

Agu summarizes and denounces all the heinous crimes he was forced to commit during his days as a child soldier: killing, shooting and “entering women” (raping). Even though Agu is no longer a “soldier” and does not witness or commit atrocities, he still makes use of the present continuous tense in his narrations. This is very important as it points to the fact that the horrors he experienced and committed as a child soldier have been cemented firmly in his psyche and cannot be erased just by a change of environment. Although he lives in the present time, he is also caught up in the past. The use of the present continuous tense in rendering past events indicates Agu’s continuous reflection of the horrific events that once dominated his life. By capitalizing the words “KILL”, “SHOOT”, “ENTER WOMAN”, the author emphasizes the horrific acts carried out by Agu during his days as a child soldier. The repetition of

the word “thinking” shows how Agu is engaged in a battle with his psyche in order to make meaning of his former life. This is an internal and psychological battle that seems impossible for a child or even an adult to win. It emphasizes the extent of the internal conflict that he is engulfed in. The fact that Agu ponders over his actions and acknowledges that he is happy that he will no longer obey the gun only shows his readiness to be reintegrated into the society as a normal child. This does not mean that Agu’s reintegration is devoid of challenges. Unlike Agu, Ishmael in *A Long Way Gone* does not welcome reintegration with open arms. When he is selected by his Lieutenant to be part of a rehabilitation programme, he becomes disappointed and feels betrayed. The idea that Ishmael will be taken away from the war zone leaves him exasperated and he showcases his displeasure in a violent manner. He says:

I hid my bayonet inside my pants and a grenade in my pocket. When one of the soldiers came to search me, I pushed him and told him that if he touched me I would kill him... Why had the lieutenant decided to give us up to these civilians? We thought that we were part of the war until the end. The squad had been our family. Now we were being taken away, just like that, without any explanation. (pp. 158-159).

It is clear that Ishmael has become addicted to his life as a child soldier to the extent that he finds it difficult leaving it behind. The rhetorical questions in the extract above show Ishmael’s unwillingness to part ways with his violent life style. Having been taken away from the rest of the soldiers, he even confesses “I missed my squad and needed more violence.” (p. 149). Based on these observations, it can be argued that after spending so much time living in violence, the child soldier may either welcome reintegration readily or not depending on the level of attachment and dependency they develop during their days as “soldiers”.

Even though this concept of reintegration is given much attention in Beah’s *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*, it is discussed only briefly in Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*

since the novel concentrates more on the child soldier's war time experiences than his days after the war. Agu gains his freedom after one of the soldiers, Rambo, kills the Commandant. Agu is then taken to a rehabilitation centre which he describes as "heaven". He tells readers:

I am not having to worrying about anything from war, like bombing or shelling, or dying. At night we are sleeping inside with fan instead of outside in heat or rain. They are giving us much of food and telling us that we can be sitting down to eating it at the table in room with wall that is painting blue and floor that is just white. They are giving us as much food as we can even be wanting. We are not having to ask if we are wanting more. They are just letting us to take it. Plantain, rice, meats, chicken, fishes—anything we are wanting we are having. Sometimes I am eating even if I am not hungry too much because I am fearing that the food is finishing and I will not be eating any for the next day. (p. 138).

At the rehabilitation centre, Agu is introduced to a whole new environment which he takes time to describe its tranquility through great use of imagery: sleeping under a fan in a room, having so much to eat even when he is not hungry and not worrying about bombs, shootings, dying and the war in general. These are luxuries he could not afford during his days as a child soldier. Living in such a calm environment now, it is only right for readers to assume that Agu has completely broken ties with the past and can now move on as any ordinary child. However, this seems not to be the case. Even though Agu is far away from the violence of war and is now in a serene environment, he struggles mentally to erase the memories of war from his mind. This depicts the psychological wound that leaves him lost. In his conversation with Amy, an American woman who is possibly a psychologist or a therapist, Agu reveals:

And sometimes I am telling her, I am hearing bullet and scream in my ear and I am wanting to be dying so I am never hearing it again. I am wanting to lie down on the warm ground with my eye closed and the smell of mud in my nose, just like Strika. I am wanting to feel how the ground is wet all around my body so that if I am sweating, I am feeling like it is the ground sweating through me. And I am wanting to stay in this same place forever, never moving for anything, just waiting waiting until dust is piling on me and grasses is covering me and insect is making their home in the space between

my teeth. I am telling her that I am thinking one Iroko tree will be growing from my body, so wide that its trunk is separating night and day, and so tall that its top leaf is tickling the moon until the man living there is smiling. I am saying to her sometimes, I am not saying many thing because I am knowing too many terrible thing to be saying to you. I am seeing more terrible thing than ten thousand men and I am doing more terrible thing than twenty thousand men. So, if I am saying these thing, then it will be making me to sadding too much. (p. 141).

Now that Agu is no longer a child soldier, he seems to feel its psychological impact even more. He suffers from severe hallucinations to the extent that he thinks only death can save him from these awful memories and alleviate his pain. This shows the extent to which Agu has been shattered beyond repair. The fact that Agu is hallucinating is evident of the depth to which he is haunted by scenes from his previous life as a child soldier. This depicts the psychological stress and conflict that he faces in his bid to find his way back into the society as a normal child. This is what Bessel van der Kolk, a trauma researcher, calls the ‘traumatic memory’. In *Trauma Culture*, Ann Kaplan explains van der Kolk’s idea of traumatic memory as follows:

Since only the sensation sector of the brain, the amygdala, is active during the trauma, the traumatised individual can only feel emotions. He or she cannot make sense of the traumatic experience due to the fact that the meaning-making [sector of the brain] (in the sense of rational thought, cognitive processing), namely, the cerebral cortex, remains shut down because the affect is too much to be registered cognitively in the brain. (p. 34)

This explains why Agu experiences flashbacks and hallucinations of his war-time experiences even though he is now in a serene environment. Even though some scholars have argued that Agu reclaims his sanity, this research proves otherwise – although Agu is no longer a child soldier, he is still haunted by his war-time memories. He cannot erase them from his mind, but continually and compulsively relives these awful memories and experiences. This shows the extent to which he has been shattered emotionally and psychologically by the horrors he witnessed as both victim and victimizer during the war. His

war-time experiences have been consolidated into his long-term memory and constantly triggers post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D). This usually manifests in the form of hallucinations and nightmares – “I am hearing bullet and scream in my ear and I am wanting to be dying...” (p. 141). This reveals how these traumatic experiences have impaired Agu’s quality of life. A similar situation is highlighted in one of the most celebrated and important modernist novels, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925). Through the character Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran who is traumatized by his war-time memories, Woolf depicts the lonely, petrifying and depressing experiences of trauma victims. Having suffered depression herself and having written a novel (*Mrs. Dalloway*) to illustrate the effects of trauma, Virginia Woolf herself could not be healed completely of her trauma. Though Woolf seems to understand perfectly the effects of trauma on the human mind and how it renders people lost, she committed suicide – the apex of a traumatized mind.

Even though Septimus is away from the battle field, just like Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*, he fights another form of war that is equally horrific though devoid of grenades and guns: the compulsive return of his war time memories. Through Septimus and through Woolf’s own suicidal end, she seems to question the efficacy of the curative techniques employed to help such individuals. This is why McCotter (2020) in the article, “Septimus Smith Had to Die: An Examination of Virginia Woolf’s Frustration with the Mental Health System After WWI” argues that “Virginia Woolf deliberately included an extreme case of shell shock in *Mrs. Dalloway* to express her discontent with the way mental health issues are treated.” (p. 12). Woolf showcases the devastating effects of trauma on a person by presenting Septimus as a traumatized character who commits suicide to end it all. This begs the question: if trauma could compel a grown man, Septimus, to commit suicide, how much more a child, Agu? The memories that intrude on Agu’s mind even at the rehabilitation centre does not only overwhelm him but also, the psychologist who is supposed to listen to Agu without any

emotional attachments and help him salvage the little that is left of his humanity. Agu reveals this when he says:

When I am saying all of this, she is just looking at me and I am seeing water in her eyes. So I am saying to her, if I am telling this to you, it will be making you think that I am some sort of beast or devil. Amy is never saying anything when I am saying this, but water is just shining in her eye. (Pp. 141-142).

This shows the intensity of Agu's trauma. The idea that his story troubles Amy, the psychologist, to the point of almost shedding tears only makes his trauma and loss more obvious to readers. It is therefore justifiable to argue that this exercise cannot help relieve Agu completely of his trauma, grief and pain. It is not surprising that Agu explains that "every time I am sitting with her I am thinking I am like old man and she is like small girl because I am fighting in war and she is not knowing what war is" (p. 140). This shows that the "talking cure" of trauma as developed by Sigmund Freud in the 1880s and later upheld by some scholars like Judith Herman, does not completely relieve trauma victims of their trauma. It only does so partially. The "talking cure" as proven in the case of Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*, seems to be an insufficient curative technique because it only provides a space for Agu to explore and process his traumatic experiences. Although it helps Agu to normalize his difficult and painful memories in his present world, it does not erase these memories from his mind. This communicates the sense of loss that engulfs child soldiers even after the war has ended. From this backdrop, it is important to state emphatically that children as seen in the case of Agu must not be conscripted as soldiers because no amount of rehabilitation can heal them completely. The near-impossibility of erasing trauma from their minds and the horrors they have experienced as victims and carried out as victimizers signals a critical caution to anyone who imagines conscripting children into wars. I strongly agree with Caruth (1995) that "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be

simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time.” (p. 9).

At the rehabilitation centre, a priest, Father Festus, comes in every Wednesday and Sunday to pray with the former child soldiers and help them forget about their past. Agu makes known the unrealistic nature of this exercise as he reports:

I am always thinking Confession and Forgiveness and Resurrection. I am not knowing what all this word is meaning. They are not making any sense to me anytime his is saying them...I do not know if I am believing him, but I am liking to hear it” (p. 140).

Clearly, this exercise and the whole idea of rehabilitation even though tend to give these former child soldiers some sort of hope, purpose and comfort, they are not entirely relieved of their pain and awful memories. Their mental bruises and scars like the spots on a tiger cannot be easily wiped away so it even shatters Agu’s faith and belief in God. This is why Bloom (2018: 22) says that “for people who have held firm religious or spiritual beliefs, traumatic experiences may also shatter their faith...whatever a person’s belief system is preceding a traumatic event, they will inevitably question the previous foundations of their moral existence.” This only communicates the intensity of the trauma that troubles Agu even at the rehabilitation centre. It shatters the assumptions and beliefs upon which his sense of safety and freedom were previously built upon. The only comfort and hope that Agu acquires seems to only stem from his basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter being catered for at the centre. This is affirmed by Agu in the extract below:

Now I am strong again. My arm and my leg is carrying me again and when I am walking my bone is not cracking and the whole place is not spinning around and around anymore. I am wearing new clothe - one new shirt that is white with black strip across my chest and new trouser that is blue and fitting well well. I am liking it very much because it is clean and dry and it is not having any hole from bullet or blood from the last person who is wearing it. (p. 138).

Undoubtedly, at the rehabilitation centre, Agu is given a new life that is devoid of the drudgeries of his former life as a child soldier. In the extract above, through the use of personification and imagery, Agu establishes the contrast between his former life as a child soldier and his current life at the rehabilitation centre. He was weak but he is now strong and he now walks without his bone cracking. He used to wear dirty, wet, and blood-stained clothes, but now he wears clean and dry clothes.

Even though Agu is given a comfortable life at the rehabilitation centre and does not worry about the war anymore, the belated return of his trauma and the fact that rehabilitation does not stop his war-time memories from haunting him show the extent to which he is lost; the prayer sessions with Father Festus and the therapy sessions with the psychologist, Amy, does not help Agu to totally regain his sanity. Having been taken away from the war fronts and given a comfortable life, Agu still laments “I am remembering sound of people coughing and screaming, and the smell of going to toilet and dead body everywhere. This is the only thing I am knowing” (p. 140). Here, the continuous use of the progressive tense becomes very significant in understanding the insistent return of Agu’s trauma. Even though his child soldiering days are over, he still uses the present tense in his narrations. This depicts the extent to which the traumatic experiences of war weigh down Agu. The weight of killings, rape and torture, all combined, render Agu lost even though he is now in a comfortable environment.

In Beah’s *A Long Way Gone*, the factors that make reintegration problematic for Ishmael and make glaring his loss goes beyond psychological ill health (specifically P.T.S.D). Just as identified by Twum-Danso (2003: 32), “the use and abuse of children by armed groups can result in low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, violent behaviour, shame as well as lack of trust and confidence.” In the case of Ishmael, aside being haunted by his experiences during the war, he becomes extremely violent and finds it difficult to trust anyone. Ishmael confirms the psychology trauma they (child soldiers) experience after the war when he says, “But we were

still traumatized, and now that we had time to think, the fastened mantle of our war memories slowly began to open.” (p. 145). This powerful use of simile is indicative of the belatedness of trauma. It confirms the opinion held by many trauma scholars like Cathy Caruth that trauma is much realized in its belatedness. During the war, the traumatic memories of the child soldiers are restrained by a fastened mantle, but away from the war, the fastened mantle loosens and they are violently attacked by these memories in the form of hallucinations, nightmares and flashbacks. Away from the war and introduced to a peaceful environment, their bitter memories begin rushing back. Ishmael reveals:

But at night some of us would wake up from nightmares, sweating, screaming, and punching our own heads to drive out the images that continued to torment us even when we were no longer asleep.” (p. 148).

In the above extract, Ishmael makes known the vicious nature of their trauma since they have to punch their heads in order to drive away these memories. Although this may seem exaggerated, it creates a vivid image of the psychological battle that these young children must fight even after the war. This is substantiated by the use of words like “sweating”, “screaming” and “punching”. The plosives within these words are indicative of the violent and persistent return of their war memories. These memories are so strong that they do not only attack these former child soldiers only in dreams but even when they are awake.

Herman (1997) as quoted by Anthonissen (2009) explains what accounts for Ishmael’s nightmares when she says that, “Most trauma victims also suffer from traumatic nightmares. Like flashbacks, these nightmares can repeat themselves, they can be experienced as if the traumatic event is happening again, and they often consist of exact fragments of the traumatic past. (p. 6). In a conversation with the nurse, Esther, Ishmael recounts one of such memories that haunts him. He narrates:

I shot them on their feet and watched them suffer for an entire day before finally shooting them in the head so that they would stop crying. Before I shot each man, I looked at him and saw how his eyes

gave up hope and steadied before I pulled the trigger. I found their sober eyes irritating. (p. 159)

Denied the hard drugs that numbed his conscience and emotions during the war, Ishmael is now haunted by frequent nightmares and flashbacks of his past life as a child soldier. Anthonissen (2009: 7) explains that, “these visual traumatic memories, in nightmares as well as in flashbacks, can give the trauma victim the impression that he or she is reliving the traumatic event in the present.” Dominick LaCapra, a historian and a contemporary of Cathy Caruth, calls this “acting-out”. In his work titled, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001), LaCapra explains acting-out as:

a situation in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes—scenes in which the past returns and the future is blocked or fatalistically caught up in a melancholic feedback loop. In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving the traumatic scene”. The victim thus uncontrollably relives the past to such an extent that he or she is actually haunted by his or her traumatic past. These re-experiences can seem so real for the traumatised individual that it —feels as if one were back there reliving the event” (p. 119)

The researcher also agrees with Bloom (1999) when she posits that “a traumatic experience impacts the entire person - the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world are all profoundly altered by traumatic experience.” (p. 2). This explains why even though Ishmael and the other former child soldiers are no longer combatant, they still exhibit violent behaviours at the rehabilitation centre. A typical scenario is the violent encounter between Ishmael’s group and the new arrivals who have also been rescued from some rebel forces and brought to the rehabilitation centre. Ishmael narrates this violent encounter:

Alhaji broke the silence. “Where are you boys from?” he asked. The boys widened their eyes and stared at Alhaji as if he had just asked them the wrong question. One of the boys, who looked a little older and had no hair on his head, stood up, clenching his fist. “And who

the fuck are you? Do we look like we are here to answer questions for bastar pekin lek you?” He leaned across the table and looked down on Alhaji. Alhaji got up and pushed him. The boy fell, and when he got up, he pulled a bayonet and jumped on the table toward Alhaji. All of us stood up, ready to fight...I took out my grenade and put my fingers inside the pin. (pp. 161-162).

From the above extract, we glean the damage that has been done to these children. Violence seems to be the only language they understand and the only solution to their problems. The fact that these children still engage in gang fights even at the rehabilitation centre shows how their personalities have been severely impaired. The questions, “and who the fuck are you?”, “Do we look like we are here to answer questions for bastar pekin lek you?”, paint a clear picture of how child soldiering has altered the personalities of these children. It shows how they have imbibed the idea of always resorting to violence even in a non-violent setting. Bloom (2018) therefore quotes Strueber et al. (2007) as saying this about children who have experienced and perpetrated criminal violence:

Their early experiences have done such damage to them that they have become detached from other humans, and they have become incapable of empathy, often on a permanent basis. Because they are so severely impaired in their capacity to form and maintain attachment bonds, they are unable to attach to other people, or to a civilized system of laws and beliefs. They are unable to love and care for the life other than their own, and even their capacity to love and respect themselves is severely impaired or missing on all levels other than that of pure survival. (p. 19)

This corroborates and explains the violent behaviours displayed by these former child soldiers at the rehabilitation centre. The violence intensifies when Ishmael and his friends later realize that the new arrivals fought for the rebels. Ishmael further narrates:

‘They are rebels’, Mambu shouted, and before he could reach for his bayonet, the boy punched him in the face. He fell, and when he got up, his nose was bleeding. The rebel boys drew out the few bayonets they had and rushed toward us. It was war all over again... As the boys rushed toward us, I threw the grenade among them, but the explosion was delayed. We leaped out from underneath the stoop where we had taken cover and charged into the open yard, where we began to fight. Some of us had bayonets, others didn’t. A boy without

a bayonet grabbed my neck from behind. He was squeezing for the kill and I couldn't use my bayonet effectively, so I elbowed him with all my might until he let go of my neck. He was holding his stomach when I turned around. I stabbed him in his foot. The bayonet stuck, so I pulled it out with force. He fell and I began kicking him in the face. As I went to deliver the final blow with my bayonet, someone came from behind me and sliced my hand with his knife. It was a rebel boy, and he was about to kick me down when he fell on his face. Alhaji had stabbed him in the back. He pulled the knife out, and we continued kicking the boy until he stopped moving. I wasn't sure whether he was unconscious or dead. I didn't care. (p. 163-164)

The extract is replete with words that paint an awful image of war and the violence that accompany it – “stabbed”, “punch”, “bleeding”, “charged”, “elbowed”, “kicking”, “blow” and “sliced”. Even though the actual war is over, these boys are certainly dealing with another form of war. They engage in bloody fights as if they were back on the battle grounds fighting their opponents. Here, there is no regard for human life since they have been trained to kill without mercy. These instances accurately depict how much these young boys miss the violence they experienced in their former lives as “soldiers”. They also show the extent to which they have been brainwashed to think that violence is the only way to make their voices heard. Even though, they are far away from the war, they engage in a violent fight that leads to the death of six people with several others wounded. It is shocking as the children indicate that they need the violence to deal with their boredom. This is revealed when Ishmael says, “We needed the violence to cheer us after a whole day of boring traveling.” (p.165). At the rehabilitation centre, one thing that these boys hate is to be associated with the word, “civilian”. They call civilians “sissy” (refers to a man or a boy with female qualities or a coward) and always want to be seen as combatants. We glean this from one of their violent confrontations as Mambu (one of the former child soldiers who fought for the rebels) calls Ishmael and his friends “sissy civilians”.

Ishmael recounts this confrontation:

We are not civilians,” Mambu said angrily, walking toward the boy. “If anyone is a civilian, it is you boys. You are wearing civilian clothes. What kind of army person wears only civilian clothes? Did these sissy civilians who brought you here make you wear those clothes? You must be a weak soldier, then. (p.163)

One cannot help but wonder how these former child soldiers can be easily reintegrated and rehabilitated if they still cherish so much the idea of being seen as soldiers. Herman (1997) rightly explains that “this is a common sentiment among combat veterans. A war veteran is often isolated - by his special status as an initiate in the cult of war. He imagines that no civilian, certainly no woman or child, can comprehend his confrontation with evil and death.” (p. 66).

It is therefore not surprising that Ishmael admits:

IT WAS INFURIATING to be told what to do by civilians. Their voices, even when they called us for breakfast, enraged me so much that I would punch the wall, my locker, or anything that I was standing next to. A few days earlier, we could have decided whether they would live or die. (p. 167)

This is indicative of the pride that the former soldiers took in being “soldiers”. Previously, they assumed the role of God, deciding who lives or dies but now, they seem to have been stripped of this privilege. This tends to enrage them. In all of these, Ishmael reveals that they constantly resort to violence because the drugs in their bodies are wearing off. The frustration that they experience due to their inability to get more drugs makes them more violent. Ishmeal narrates:

During that same week, the drugs were wearing off. I craved cocaine and marijuana so badly that I would roll a plain sheet of paper and smoke it. Sometimes I searched in the pockets of my army shorts, which I still wore, for crumbs of marijuana or cocaine. We broke into the mini-hospital and stole some pain relievers—white tablets and off white—and red and yellow capsules. We emptied the capsules, ground the tablets, and mixed them together. But the mixture didn’t give us the effect we wanted. We got more upset day by day and, as a result, resorted to more violence. In the morning, we beat up people from the neighborhood who were on their way to fetch water at a nearby pump. If we couldn’t catch them, we threw stones at them. Sometimes they dropped their buckets as they ran away from us. We would laugh as we destroyed their buckets... We would fight for hours in between meals, for no reason at all. During these fights, we destroyed most of the furniture and threw the mattresses out in the yard. We would stop to wipe the blood off our lips, arms, and legs only when the bell rang for mealtime. (p. 167-168)

By improvising pain killers as a substitute for hard drugs like marijuana and cocaine which Ishmael is deprived of at the rehabilitation centre, it only shows the extent to which he has become addicted to them. The fact that he just rolls plain sheets and smoke it further affirms his addiction. Ishmael Beah reveals the extent to which he was rendered a lost child as a result of child soldiering. He recounts, “I lost my sense of self. After crossing that line, I was not a normal kid. I was a traumatized kid. I became completely unaware of the dangerous and crooked road that my life was taking.” (When Good Comes from Bad, 2000).

The sense of loss that engulfs Ishmael is again highlighted during his days in New York when his war-time experiences haunt him. Even though Ishmael Beah seems to have successfully worked-through his trauma at the rehabilitation centre (Benin Home) in Sierra Leone and is now staying in New York far away from the war zone, he is still haunted occasionally by his past. He says that “I tried to think about my life in New York City, where I had been for months. But my mind wandered across the Atlantic Ocean back to Sierra Leone.” (p. 19). In fact, the trauma that Beah experiences is overwhelming and etched permanently in his brain that it knows no geographical bounds: it follows him wherever he goes and a little screech sends him back to the battle field in Sierra Leone. This is why Dori Laub posits that “a traumatic experience invariably plays a decisive formative role in who one comes to be, and how one comes to live one’s life.” (p. 86). This is evident of the loss that Beah suffers – a loss so great that even a change of environment seems inadequate to erase the pain and memory.

In an article titled “When Good Comes from Bad”, which was written by Ishmael Beah in August, 2000 and published on the website of the Nuclear Age Peace Foundation (NAPF), Beah personally summarizes his war-time experience: how his peaceful life was interrupted by the war, how he was robbed of his innocence and turned into a killing machine and the sense of loss that followed. He narrates:

I was born in Sierra Leone, West Africa in 1980. During my early childhood years, my country was peaceful and I lived a satisfying life that was full of love, friendliness and happiness. Between the ages of nine and eleven, everything changed. My father and mother separated and a civil war began. When I was thirteen, the civil war that had already been going on for several years, came to my town and changed my life. During that period of chaos, I lost my family and wandered about alone. I had no inclination where I was heading, but the determination to find safety. After months of traveling, sleeping in the bush, and having to eat and drink what the forest provided, I arrived at a village that was occupied by the Sierra Leone Military Forces. Since I was in pursuit of food and protection, I felt that it was safe to be with the military who provided me with nourishment and a place to sleep. As a result of what I thought was generosity, my interaction with the soldiers grew daily. The misery that almost cost me my life awaited just around the corner. After months of staying with soldiers, rebels started attacking the village. The soldiers fought back day after day. They lost most of their men in battle. As a result of fewer soldiers, the rebels came closer and surrounded the village. The military was in need of people to increase their number. All the boys in the village were asked to join the army. There was no way out. If I left the village, I would get killed by the rebels who would think I was a spy. On the other hand, if I stayed in the village and refused to join the army, I wouldn't be given food and would eventually be thrown out, which was as good as being dead. I was briefly trained in warfare and unwillingly became a child soldier. I will never forget being in the battlefield for the first time. At first, I couldn't pull the trigger. I was lying almost numb in ambush watching kids my age being shot at and killed. The sight of blood and the crying of people in pain, triggered something inside me that I didn't understand, and made me lose compassion for others. I lost my real being. I lost my sense of self. After crossing that line, I was not a normal kid. I was a traumatized kid. I became completely unaware of the dangerous and crooked road that my life was taking. In fact, most of the horrible events that I went through didn't affect me until after I was taken out of the army and put into a psycho-social therapy home years later. I had been demilitarized as part as an effort by UNICEF and entered into a rehabilitation center for former child soldiers. At the psycho-social home, I began to experience trauma of another kind. I had sleepless nights. Every night I recalled the last day that my childhood was stripped away from me. I felt I had no reason for staying alive since I was the only one left in my family. I had no peace. My soul felt corrupted and I was lost in my own thoughts blaming myself for what had happened to me. (When Good Comes from Bad: 2000)

Ishmael who is an archetype of many former child soldiers affirms in his own words, the sense of loss that engulfs him right from his conscription as a soldier and his days at the rehabilitation centre. Without mincing words, Ishmael clearly reveals his loss: "I lost my real

being, I was not a normal kid. I was a traumatized kid, I felt I had no reason staying alive, I had no peace, my soul was corrupted and I was lost in my own thoughts”.

Chapter Summary

This chapter set out to establish the sense of loss that engulfs Agu in *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael in *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* by paying particular attention to the depth of their feeling of loss after the war and the negligible effects of the interventions at the rehabilitation centre. The researcher finds in this chapter that although Agu and Ishmael find reintegration extremely difficult, they welcome the idea differently: while Agu seems to eagerly welcome reintegration, Ishmael seems unenthused about it as he feels betrayed by his Lieutenant for selecting him for rehabilitation. Consequently, the researcher argues that the level of attachments that these protagonists build during their days as child soldiers determine how they welcome the idea of rehabilitation. Also, the researcher finds that rehabilitation with all of its techniques, does not completely eradicate the former child soldier's traumatic memories. Though Agu and Ishmael are no longer at the battle grounds, they fight a different form of war which even though is devoid of ammunitions, is very destructive – the belated and persistent return of their trauma. These memories that plague the young minds of Agu and Ishmael are devastating to the extent that they sometimes consider death as the only solution. Although Ishmael travels to New York to escape the war, he is still haunted by his war-time memories. This shows that childhood trauma knows no geographical boundaries.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Introduction

This thesis sought to establish with the help of the trauma theory and literary theory of realism, how the child soldier is rendered lost as a result of his traumatic experiences. Through textual analysis, the researcher carried out this investigation by examining the child soldier as the narrative voice with the intention of highlighting his trauma based on his own narrations. By doing so, the researcher was able to provide an understanding of war from the child's perspective, provide insight into the trauma that the child soldier suffers while carrying out his duties as a "soldier" and make glaring the loss that the child soldier suffers during the war and even after the war.

Again, the researcher examined how the authors, Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah, characterize the child soldier with the aim of drawing a contrast between the child soldier's life as an innocent victim and his monstrous life as a victimizer. The researcher also highlighted the physiological factors that necessitate the child soldier's transition from a victim to a victimizer. This discussion helped the researcher to analyze the causes of the loss that the child suffers even after the war.

The researcher also sought to establish firmly the loss that the child soldier suffers by examining his life after the war and at the rehabilitation centre. Even though some scholars like Anthonissen (2009) and Osiki et al. (2021) suggest that Agu and Ishmael work through their trauma and achieve redemption, this research finds otherwise. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher argues that even though at the rehabilitation centre, Agu and Ishmael are provided their basic needs and made better versions of themselves, the

psychological trauma that haunts them cannot be eradicated through rehabilitation. It becomes a burden that they must carry and a wound they must nurse for the rest of their lives. The fact that Ishmael and Agu are persistently haunted by their past memories indicates how they have been rendered lost by child soldiering.

The researcher finds this investigation to be necessary because even though many scholars have worked on child soldiering both from the literary and non-literary point of view, there seems to be a paucity of literature on the consequences of the trauma that the child soldier is subjected to. This is the gap that the researcher fills with this thesis. I therefore argued with evidences from Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* that the trauma that Agu and Ishmael are exposed to renders them lost - a situation that seems incurable by rehabilitation techniques (especially the talking cure) or even geographical boundaries.

With this research, the researcher has shown that the trauma that children suffer when they are conscripted as soldiers during wars are quickly and permanently cemented in their psyche, interrupts their normal development process and becomes a burden they must carry for the rest of their lives.

In all of these, the researcher did not lose sight of the literary values that help foreground the sense of loss that engulfs the child soldier as a result of his trauma. I painstakingly discuss the elements of language that help make the issue of child soldiering unattractive and help discourage individuals from promoting it.

This research work was divided into six chapters. Chapter one was the introduction and general background of the thesis. Chapter two constituted the literature review and the theoretical framework. Chapter three, four, and five constituted the analyses of the texts.

Chapter six presented the conclusion, summary of chapters, major findings and recommendations.

Summary of the Chapters

Chapter one dealt with the general introduction to the work and background to the study where the researcher provided background information of the authors, summary of the texts and also provided a brief historical background of the Sierra Leone Civil War which is represented in Beah's *A Long Way Gone*. A background to the war in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is absent because, the fictitious nature of the text makes it difficult for the researcher to relate it to a particular civil war in his history even though some scholars like Osiki, et al. (2021) have attributed it to the Nigerian Civil War. This chapter also presented the statement of the problem, objective of the study, the research questions, methodology, the justification for the selected texts and the organization of the thesis.

Chapter two contains empirical literature and theoretical review. Here, the researcher provided insight into the general concept of civil wars and attempted to trace the origin of child soldiering. A review of literature on the selected texts (*Beasts of No Nation* and *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*) and the concept of trauma in some other African texts were done in this chapter in order to establish how this work is similar or different from other works done in this area of study. Concerning the theoretical review, the researcher sought to trace the development of the trauma theory from the field of psychology (Sigmund Freud) to literature (Cathy Caruth) and some other contemporaries like Dominick LaCapra. Since the thesis is also supported by the theory of literary realism, the researcher explored how this nineteenth century concept helps the authors (Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah) to represent the concept of child soldiering in an unfiltered manner and without idealization or romanticization.

Chapter three which the researcher titled **“From a Victim to a Victimizer”** discussed how the authors characterize the child soldier as an individual who transitions from a victim of war to a victimizer. Here, I drew a line between the child soldier’s peaceful and innocent life before the war and his horrendous life during the war with the aim of making his transition and loss more pronounced. Here a particular attention was paid to the aspect of trauma studies which deals with victims assuming the role of victimizers in order to escape the helplessness that comes with being a victim. (Bloom 1999/2018). I argued strongly in this chapter that even though some scholars attribute the victim-victimizer concept mainly to children who have been sexually abused and the violence that accompanies war, child soldiering is also capable of turning innocent victims into victimizers.

Chapter four which the researcher titled **“Telling the War: Expressing the Content of the Child Soldier’s Trauma”** discussed how the child soldier as the narrator of events journeys readers through his traumatic experiences and facilitates an understanding of conflict from the perspective of the child. Being a first-person narrator, the child soldier’s use of language and how it helps reveal his trauma was explored.

Chapter five which the researcher titled **“Traumatized and Lost: The Burden of the Child Soldier”** explored the life of the child soldier after the war and the challenges he faces in his attempt to fit back into the society with the aim of establishing how lost he has been rendered. Some of the challenges identified are post-traumatic stress disorder (compulsive return of their trauma in the form of hallucinations and dreams), the display of physical violence and the lack of trust. A comparison of how Agu and Ishmael welcome the idea of reintegration was also done in this chapter. The researcher realised in this chapter that rehabilitation does not completely heal the former child soldier of his trauma. I argued therefore that child soldiers must not be conscripted into armed forces or rebel groups in the first place during times of war because no amount of rehabilitation can completely rid them of their trauma.

The trauma that these children suffer knows no geographical bounds. It follows them wherever they go and it violently oppresses them in the form of flashbacks, hallucinations and nightmares. Their personalities are gravely altered and identities shattered.

Major Findings

First, the researcher finds that the child soldier in both Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* is characterized as an individual who transitions from a victim of war to an unsympathetic victimizer. This finding is supported by Bloom's (1999) concept of trauma that a victim is likely to assume the role of a victimizer in order to escape the feeling of helplessness. The researcher finds in this research that the child soldier as represented by Agu and Ishmeal undergo this transition purposely to survive the violence that surrounds them. A critical analysis of the texts revealed that these children are often manipulated, coerced and threatened to join warring factions. This transition from a victim to a victimizer is what hints at the child soldier's loss - a loss which is fully felt by the child soldier after the war and he must deal with the belated and the compulsive return of those war-time memories.

Also, I find in this research that by presenting Agu and Ishmael as the narrative voice, these protagonists are able to journey readers through their plights and reveal the loss that they suffer. They personally present to readers the traumatic experiences that they must deal with both as victims and perpetrators. They are made to destroy properties, rape, physically abuse and even kill people. They are in turn raped by their superiors and subjected to harsh weather and living conditions.

Lastly, the researcher finds that the loss that the child soldier suffers is firmly established after the war and during his days at the rehabilitation centre. Here, even though the child soldier is introduced to a new environment which is devoid of the violence that dictated his previous life,

he still fights a different form of war: the belated and compulsive return of his war-time memories. The child soldier as seen in the case of Ishmael even exhibits extreme violent behaviours and unleashes terror even on the staff at the rehabilitation centre. He escapes to New York, but he is still haunted by these awful memories. Even though some scholars have claimed that rehabilitation helps Agu and Ishmael and for that matter former child soldiers to reclaim their stability and sense of self, I find that rehabilitation does not completely heal the child of his psychological wounds since it cannot prevent the persistent return of his trauma no matter the geographical boundaries. This, for me, is indicative of the loss that the child suffers as a result of his trauma

Recommendations and Suggestions for Further Research

Considering the findings of this study, I recommend that the rights of children must always be protected in the society especially during times of war. A traumatic experience just as identified by Bloom (2018), changes people and even though their personality development does not stop, it becomes distorted, veered away from a healthy trajectory and onto a new and often more destructive course. (p. 20-23). If this is the case, children who are always considered the future leaders must be protected and spared these harsh conditions. International organizations like the United Nations (UN), Child Rights International Network (CRIN), Defence for Children International (DCI), United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Children (UNICEF) and the International Bureau for Children's Rights (IBCR) must therefore remain steadfast in their quest to protect the rights of children worldwide during conflicts.

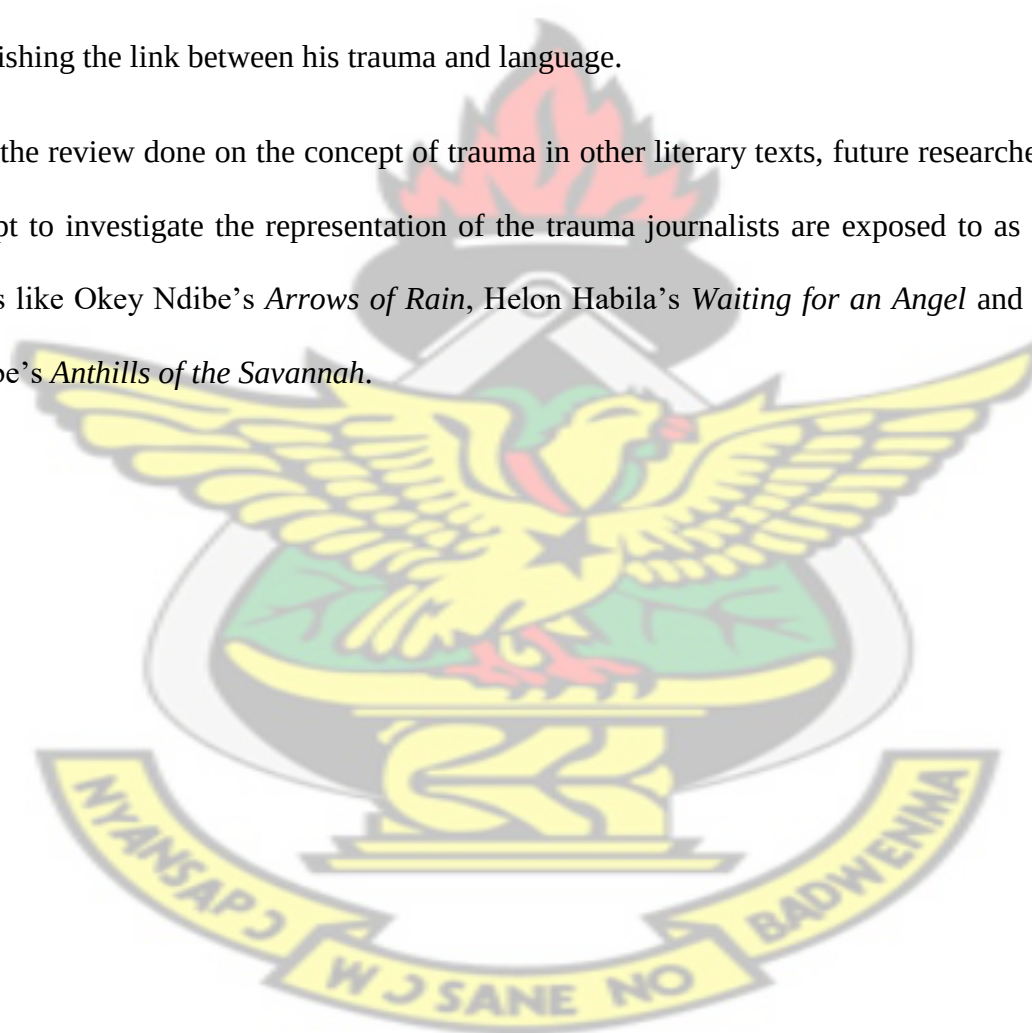
Also, in Ghana, the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social protection, whose core mandate is to facilitate the enforcement of the rights of children and ensure the survival and development of the vulnerable (which include children) in the society, must roll out programmes to educate the citizens especially those in areas prone to ethnic conflicts, on the

devastating effects of engaging children in conflicts as combatants. This will go a long way to disincentivize people from conscripting children as combatants during conflicts.

In view of the complexities of Agu and Ishmael's rehabilitation, I also recommend that future researchers may set out to investigate the viability of the "talking cure" or the effectiveness of rehabilitation techniques in dealing with trauma by paying attention to other trauma narratives.

Considering the density and distinctiveness of Agu's language in *Beasts of No Nation*, future researchers may set out to primarily conduct a stylistic analysis with the intention of establishing the link between his trauma and language.

From the review done on the concept of trauma in other literary texts, future researchers may attempt to investigate the representation of the trauma journalists are exposed to as seen in novels like Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* and Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*.



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