History and National Trauma in Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* and Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*

Onyemaechi Udumukwu
Department of English Studies, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt

Paul Kennedy Enesha
Department of English and Literary Studies, Imo State University, Owerri

Abstract
This paper is animated by the desire to understand how unresolved individual and group trauma rooted in historical past experiences of conflict affects genuine need for national development in sub-Saharan Africa. The paper has used as its focus the experiences from the war of liberation in the then Southern Rhodesia that became Zimbabwe and the Nigeria-Biafra war in the late 1960s. By going beyond the events of national history and viewing the insidious and silent pain of the victims we understand how these unresolved deep-seated pain hinder the possibility of genuine national trust and healing. The paper examines how the representation of child-soldier characters like Benjamin, Agu and Strika in the novels of Chinodya from Zimbabwe and Iweala from Nigeria reveals that children continue to languish in the interstitial condition of the nations in sub-Saharan Africa. Apart from being recruited as soldiers in the continent's war, children are easy prey to sex-slavery and other forms of economic slavery.

I: History, Trauma and the African Novel
In "History as the 'Hero' of the African Novel, Lewis Nkosi adroitly presents a *de facto* case on the relationship between history and the African novel. In his characteristic rigour and measured attentiveness to details that have become the mark of his scholarship and manner of presentation, Nkosi argues a case in response to the question: "what does it mean to have a historical sense?" Following a rhetorical logic he asks whether historical sense can be understood in relation to the works of writers who have sometimes dramatized moments of history, "when events have seemed to loom larger than any individuals" (31). According to Nkosi, these writers with an acute sense of history have followed with keen interest the political movements, the social and economic conflicts which "have shaped some recent African history". Furthermore, he argues, these writers have sought not only to represent but also to explain the meaning of the initial confrontation between Africa and Europe and some of its permanent consequences. Finally, Nkosi submits: "to have a large historical sense is to have an acute vision of history as a collective working out of the people's destiny which perpetually haunts us with the infinite range of possibilities" (32). Consequently, "the history of Africa and the Africans, it is said is one of iron, blood and tears". Drawing from the works of the first generation of writers from sub-Saharan Africa including, Achebe, Ngugi, Sembene, Armah, Abrahams and Oueloguem, Nkosi underscores that it is "the collective fate shared out among members of the community

that provides the novels [by these writers] their single most important source of energy" (31).

Abiola Irele equally subscribes to the view of African history as a "collective working out of the people's destiny" and the "collective fate shared out among members of the community". Irele's viewpoint is expressed in an essay entitled, "Narrative, History, and the African Imagination". He begins by identifying two senses of history. The first is history understood as the configuration of events as such. That is, history as the *res gestae*, a level of experience from the remote or recent past. These events according to Irele are the real concrete facts of historical experience in its immediacy. That is, what happened, or is happening in the past. The second sense of history is the story of these events. That is, their recollection in the form of *diegesis*, telling or narration. As Irele has explained:

> The effort of recollection serves to order the experience of the past in the mind and may well lead to the discernment of a pattern in the events upon which the mind's activity is engaged. (158)

It is within this second sense of history as recollection that we can appreciate the role of the imagination. According to Irele, the imagination plays a crucial role in the recollection of the past (its *diegesis*) since that past is no longer part of the immediate experience of the storyteller. Irele's account of the relationship between African historical experience and the recollection of that experience through the imagination in narrative forms is profound. He has poignantly demonstrated how through recollection and narration a pattern is formed about African experience.

However, we are skeptical of the assumption that the recollection of the past is "the imaginative commemoration of a common past serving to celebrate the collective compact in the present" (160). As he concludes his essay he reiterates that modern African literary expression can be gauged in its interrogation of history as a function of the "collective experience". There is a reference to the extract from Niyi Osundare's poem which appears in the collection, *Waiting Laughters*. The suggestion that the poem "interrogates" the collective consciousness is animated by the assumption that the collective consciousness is unitary. A closer look at the poem even suggests a disconnection between the speaking voice and the object of his address, an alienated subject, "uprooted", "wondering", and uncertain of his identity. This interrogation which is a disconnection between two divergent interests annuls the claim to a common or universal experience.

Our uncertainty of the possibility of a unified common past is bolstered by two key facts. The first is more experiential in nature stemming from the fact of European colonization. Yet European colonialism took a diversity of forms in many parts of Africa. The second point of uncertainty on Irele's sense of a common universal African history is based on the more theoretical fact. In this regard we enlist the postcolonial revision of history by Homi Bhabha especially in the distinction between cultural diversity and cultural difference. The vision of history on the basis of cultural diversity, Bhabha explains, entails the "recognition of pre-given cultural contents and customs"

(Bhaba, 50). As an epistemological construct, cultural diversity privileges culture as an empirical knowledge, that is as the product of a universal history which as Wole Soyinka has earlier avowed is attainable on the basis of self apprehension. Culture here is knowledge particularly derived from the Latin *cognotum* (past participle of *cognoscere*, to know). What these derivations of the word knowledge imply for cultural diversity is that culture emerges as an absolute, the status of which we desire to have knowledge of. Cultural difference by contrast is not knowledge now, the cogito. Rather culture is subject to knowledge production, and hence knowledgeable. The implication of cultural diversity is that it is open to enunciation. It equally problematizes the division between past and present, tradition and modernity. Consequently, from this vantage point it becomes apparent that culture is not a unitary entity.

It is this divergence between cultural diversity and cultural difference and its subsequent implication for African experience that illuminates the apprehension of incidents of trauma in African historical consciousness. This is because the incidents of trauma testify to the immanent and irreconcilable contradictions within the African historical experience; the fact that African history is not a unitary absolute entity. In this regard, while it is convenient to blame away Africa's failure on the collective effect of European colonialism, it is pertinent to ponder on the prevailing contradictions in Africa many years after colonial rule. Why has the leadership in contemporary Africa failed to establish vital contacts with the people of Africa? Instead of looking back to colonialism, when will African leaders begin to take responsibility and be answerable to the people? It is the failure on the part of the leadership rather than the effect of unseen collective historical consciousness that precipitates the condition of trauma in Africa. In other words, the transition from the colonial to the postcolonial has spawned an interstitial condition which is an in-between space, a threshold area populated as Fanon would have represented it by the abjectly wretched.

In a sense it is divergence and difference in historical experience and the need for leaders to become responsible that underwrites the case made by Eleni Coundouriotis. In her chapter, "The Historical Novel in Africa", Coundouriotis begins by asserting that: "Claiming the authority with which to narrate history has been a key preoccupation of the novel in Africa since its inception" (269). Following from this assertion she identifies three cardinal roles of the novel in Africa as an important avenue for historical reflection, as a medium through which the world knows Africa, and as the ground on which the writer establishes the continent's history. In addition, she goes on to pose a fundamental question namely, that what constitutes African history is problematic and not clearly stated.

In order to disambiguate this problem she recalls Nurrideen Farah's preoccupation in his novel, *Crossbones* on "the nature of the historical and the way it is imagined. She juxtaposes Farah with Lukacs, especially in what the latter has described in his *The Historical Novel* as "the derivation of the individuality of characters from the historical peculiarity of their age" (Coundouriotis, 269). The pertinence of this inter-textual link between Farrah and Lukacs is that Coundouriotis shows awareness of the given account on African history in Euro-Western scholarship manifesting in the motif of "the circle of poverty and violence". She insists on the need

to go beyond this "circle" of sameness and to interrogate history in terms of the actual experiences of the people who are taking ownership of their lives in different contexts. It is also from this pedestal that we can understand the relationship between history and trauma in the African novel.

What we have here, therefore, is a distinction between sameness and difference. The Euro-Western perspective constructs Africa on the basis of sameness, the circle of poverty and violence. The real history of Africa begins in difference on the action of people taking ownership of themselves and their lives. The question becomes: have we as Africans made the difference? Or are we trapped in the culture of repetition? The answer points to the negative, the woeful failure of the political leadership to have risen to the occasion. It is this incapacity to make a difference that has ushered in what Elizabeth Brown has in another context called the culture of "insidious trauma". As we will see later in the course of the discussion, it is within this kind of culture that child-soldiering thrives.

Coundouriotis' proposal for countering the circle of sameness in the reading of African history can be reinforced from the perspective of ideological theory. We can follow Terry Eagleton's assertion that "ideology is a convenient way of categorizing under a single heading a whole lot of different things we do with signs" (1991: 193). This view of ideology owes a debt to Louis Althusser's structuralist revision of Marxism. In this regard, Althusser had defined ideology as a representation of the relationship between individuals who function as subjects. Thus ideology establishes a link between a subject, who is a free subjectivity, a centre of initiative and power, and another subject who is the subjected being that submits to a higher authority: "the category of the subject is only constitutive of all ideology insofar as all ideology has the function (which defines it) of 'constituting' concrete individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1971: 171). Our subjection in ideology is achieved through the operation of interpellation or hailing. Accordingly, "ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects" (Althusser 1971: 175). This poses a genuine problem in the context of the African novel and its relation to history. This problem emanates from the implicit paradox in the constitution of the subject. This is because as concrete individuals, subjects can engage themselves in ideological recognition; they can wield a particular ideology to their advantage. Thus, the absence of a homogenous sense of truth, to which all subscribe even within a national boundary such as Nigeria, is testimony to the different things people are doing with signs as subjects in ideology in order to redefine themselves and take ownership of their lives. The obvious advantages are the demystification of the nation and African history as a unitary essence and the understanding of the nation beyond the limit set by the power-elite and by Western imperialism.

The reconstructive ambience on historical truth provided here has also gained from the work of historiography especially that of Hayden White and Frank Ankersmith. Specifically, in his reply to a generalization on his view by Prez Zagorian, Ankersmith asserts: "All that is essential and interesting in the writing of history … is not to be found at the level of the individual statements, but at that of the *politics* adopted by the historians when they select the statements that individuate their

'picture of the past'". Also, he adds, "saying true things about the past is easy … but saying *right* things about the past is difficult" (Ankersmith, cited in LaCapra, 10). The lesson from the foregoing is that literary scholarship on the novel in Africa inspired by the cultural nationalist movement tends to read the truth about African history that is rooted in Euro-Western imperialism. But such truth ultimately tends to pander to a particular type of reactionary politics that interject between "saying true things" and "saying right things". What is "true" and what is "right" tend to animated by a third force, namely, "who is addressed"? In the era of anti-colonial consciousness, for instance, many a writer in Africa followed in the heels and success of Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In that era, to say the true and right thing was to say it like *Things Fall Apart*. This became the status quo until Flora Nwapa tried to be different and interrogated the status quo by saying the right and the true things from the perspective of the woman.

There is, however, a psycho-social explanation on the relationship between history and the African novel that goes against the grain of individual subjectivity and responsibility. This view is articulated in the book by Ogaga Ifowodo entitled, *History, Trauma and Healing in Postcolonial Narratives: Reconstructing Identities*. According to Ifowodo:

> While postcolonial literary and cultural theory has produced an astonishing body of work that explores the politico-cultural dimension of postcoloniality, it has regrettably, lagged sorely behind in the psychological sphere. (Ifowodo, x)

Ifowodo's project is essentially an introduction on how to return to Frantz Fanon the psychiatrist in order to genuinely account for postcolonial crisis of identity and crisis of leadership. Thus he takes us to the occult of the invisible which asserts that for one to be healed, one must know one's self. In other words, the traumatic experiences that characterize African history are indications of the effects of many years of colonization, what Abiola Irele has identified as the "unresolved sequel of a devastating history" (162). Irele underscores that it is this kind of crisis-prone background that animates the "imaginative engagement" with history in the works of modern African writers. More so, even though colonization is technically dismantled as history, its traumatic effects, what Ania Loomba has called, "the iniquities of colonial rule" (7), continue to be experienced in disjointed and nightmarish forms in moments of crises and war. These new forms amount to what Kali Tal has called the "liminality of history" (117). According to Tal "the theory of liminality describes a process of symbolic production based on the traumatic experiences of those entering the transition or liminal state" of history (118). Citing the work of Eric J. Leed on World War I, she has articulated the three stages in the traumatic experience of war veterans. The first stage is encapsulated in the rites of separation, which removed the individual from his accustomed place. The second stage is encapsulated in the liminal rites "which symbolically fix the character of the 'passenger' as one who is between states, places, or conditions" (117).

The third stage manifests as the rite of incorporation (the postliminal rites) that welcome the individual back to the group or community.

The three stages described by Kali Tal appropriately mirror the experiences of Benjamin in *Harvest of Thorns* and Agu in *Beasts of No Nation*. The rites of separation for Agu occurred as the set of events leading to the invasion of his community, the killing of his father and his escape from the violent destruction of his normal community. He narrates to us: "My father is telling me to run, I am saying to Commandant. Run far so the enemy is not catching you and killing you. And then I am just hiding in the bush and running this way and that way not knowing anything"(*Beasts*.., 12). For Benjamin the rites of separation begin with his arrest for demonstrating with other school children. Thus we are told, "he was one of the first to be bundled into the truck" (*Harvest*... 95). But as the principal comes to bail the children from the police, Benjamin and three other children escape, that is literally separating themselves from the group of other school children. From that moment the action shifts as we move into Part Three of the account which contains the experience of Benjamin as a child-soldier. We are told that Benjamin is burdened with anxiety and hoped for a bus ride that will "transport him to the borders of his anxiety" (100). The liminal moments for Benjamin and Agu crystallize in their involvement in combat as child-soldiers in the forest. Benjamin's group retreats into the mountain. And from there they attack and kill perceived enemies. Agu tells us of his incorporation in the conflict as a soldier". He says: "I am learning to march, left right, left right; how to hide in the bush and stay very still so nobody can be seeing where I am" (*Beasts*... 16).

The postliminal stage poses different challenges for both characters and authors. For Chinodya and for his character, Benjamin, the postliminal stage is fundamentally a problem. It is a problem because Benjamin does not find proper incorporation and therefore, rehabilitation. In this sense he serves as a symbol for war veterans in Zimbabwe for whom the war continues to rage because they cannot find a place in the new society and invariably cannot find healing in the new and independent Zimbabwe. Of the war veterans we are told: "They all looked tough and hardened.-their skins were noticeably sun burnt. They wore denim or corduroy or khaki with camouflage caps or cowboy style hats, thick boots, pieces of uniform scattered among them as if half a dozen fatigue kits had been flung among them to share." (*Harvest*...13) In other words, their articles of clothing mark them out as the *other*, the outsider. They exist outside the normal society that is on the other side of the social divide marked by chauffeured cars [that] stopped to drop suited gentlemen at the entrance of a hotel" (13). For Benjamin, his pair of boots becomes a stigma of sorts that attracts a sense of disdain wherever he goes. As he steps into a bar and orders a drink, the waiter recoils on seeing his boots. At the bus terminus, the crowd devoured him with their eyes as they stare at his boots. We are told that he detects "the sly interest in their eyes ... scanning his boots... devouring every second of him as if he were a creature from another planet" (12). Chinodya foregrounds this as the moment of the postliminal stage for the ex-combatants like Benjamin. The war is over but for them there is no place in the new nation. It is indeed in this that for this group of young men and women the

independence in their nation has become nothing but a "harvest of thorns", of disillusionment rather than hope.

Accordingly, traumatic experiences have become the basis for interrogating the claim to history in the African experience. These traumatic experiences originating from war, terrorism, internal displacement and other forms of crises have become the sore, the blight of, and the liminal moment of our postcolonial reality and pose a challenge to our acclaimed independence. Indeed the regularity of these violent occurrences calls for a concerted re-evaluation of our sense of the African history. This re-evaluation has begun to be dramatized in not only the war novel but also in the narratives of child-soldiers and the accounts of internally displaced people who have become the true victims of history.

In a sense, Ifowodo's important work is animated by the sage saying that he who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he began to dry himself. This argument is significant but we are skeptical of its practical utility in the face of the contradictions of the postcolonial experiences. There is no doubt that the psycho-diagnostic ideas and skills of Fanon will provide therapy to the prevailing culture of trauma in the African nations. But redirecting that healing to slavery and colonialism is diversionary and reactionary. There are wars and misrule on the African continent and African children are drawn and massacred in wars that they know nothing about and their future decimated because of what Achille Mbembe and others have called the "banality of power" in the postcolonial nation. Rather than creating a sense of the nation as an "imagined community" as Benedict Anderson had proposed (Anderson, 6), what we now have in postcolonial Africa is that the state becomes a force for perpetuating the unanimity of the ethnic or the corruptive influence of a powerful cabal at the detriment of the people of the nation. It is in this sense of unanimity of the ethnic and power that the nation becomes indeed "the fetish of failed political and cultural interest …"

This "banality" of power manifests in a number of ways. But it is apparent in the omnipotence of governance. This is the assumed "right to rule and command" [which must] discountenance any form of resistance. In explaining this omnipotence of the state Mbembe recalls what A. Sarraute had called "the right of the stronger to aid the weaker" (Mbembe, 35). The thrust of the foregoing is that African intellectual tradition and the political elite that members of that tradition hobnob with should become responsible to itself and to the people of Africa. The feeling that their umbilical cord is still buried in the swamp of slavery and the forest of colonialism, is simply absurd and as we noted earlier, reactionary. While the work of Fanon (both the politico-cultural and the psycho-social dimensions) remains relevant in the interpretation of the African experience, events in the postcolonial context show that the traumatic atrocities of our time are signs to the gross failure in leadership, a leadership that is wallowing in what Claude Ake had called the "culture of inheritance". The narrative of blame woven by the political leadership in postcolonial Africa while accusing the atrocities of contemporary African experience on Western imperialism is simply diversionary and irresponsible.

Recent events in the Nigerian nation beginning from the later part of 2017 testify to the fact that the Nigerian nation is in urgent need for interrogation. The major news networks in the country are inundated with the news of marauding armed men posturing as herdsmen, ravaging rural communities and slaughtering fellow citizens as if they are animals. The trend is spreading like wild fire across the states in the southern and central parts of the country. The trend reached a climax in Benue states and in a day the state buried 73 citizens who became victims of the mass slaughter. And while we are catching our breath and rethinking on whether we are re-living a dream, Taraba state is thrown into mourning and then Nassarawa state. Shortly after that it was Oyo state, Ondo state and then in spite of Governor Fayose's vigilance, Ekiti state is not spared. Can someone say that these heinous crimes are reflections that the umbilical cord of the Nigerian state is still moored in the alluvial soil of slavery and the jungle of European colonization? We rather think that these traumatic experiences that have stunned us into conditions of shock are simply reflections of our failure as a people and a state. They are reflections of social relations of Nigerian capitalism secured through its colonial legacy. These social relations guaranteed even in our constitution in turn impede the full development and proper distribution of the wealth of the nation. They are reflections of our rootedness in the liminal moments of our history. But more importantly we are trapped in this liminal state not as a result of affliction from the outside, but due to our failure to exercise the responsibility to be free.

Our assumption is that history and trauma represent the two sides of the African experience. They are like the recto and the verso of the African text. It is a well-known fact that some of the traumatic events in postcolonial Africa and elsewhere have arisen out of the irreconcilable contradictions that are rooted in the Euro-Western colonization of those places. Others have arisen because the political elite in the new nations thrive on and deliberately promote those contradictions (Mbembe, "The Commandment"). While some critics insist on the need for healing from the Euro-imperialist trap, we are of the view that the political elite in postcolonial Africa have promoted traumatic conditions in order to cultivate their own failures and irresponsibility. Our study of Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* and Iweala's *Beasts of no Nation* is meant to show how the attendant traumatic experiences immanent from the culture of failure affect the African child. The main characters in *Harvest of Thorns* and *Beast of No Nation* represent how the African child is drawn into war situations that they know nothing of and how even after the end of hostilities their lives continue to be haunted by the ugly experience of war. In their different ways Benjamin and Agu care trapped in the liminal condition of postcolonial experiences in Zimbabwe and in Nigeria.

II

The word trauma (from Greek *trauma, taumatos*, meaning wound) is defined as a physical wound or injury, a violent emotional blow especially one which has a lasting psychic effect. Unlike other medical conditions it is not just a wound afflicted on the physical body. It is a wound on the emotions and the psyche. While the wound on the

body is healable, the wound on the psyche though ostensibly not detrimental often resurfaces especially as dreams and nightmares to serve as clear reminders of conditions that are forgotten. As Freud asserts "… in the traumatic neurosis the dream life has this peculiarity: it continually takes the patient back to the situation of the disaster from which he awakens in renewed terror" (Freud, 193).

In the "Preface" to her edited volume, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* Cathy Caruth asserts that: "trauma involves intense suffering but it also involves the recognition of the realities that most of us have not begun to face". The starting point here is the realities. But what is peculiar about these realities is our willingness to ignore them or better to push them out of view. Here we recall Ankersmith's distinction between the historical truth embodied in statements of facts and the implicit politics therein. From Caruth's assertion therefore, trauma's function is to call to view that which we have obscured and covered with the sheen of insensitivity. In other words, trauma exposes the underlying politics of truthful historical facts. It is also on the basis of this, ironically, that mainstream Western scholarship on trauma has ignored the traumatic experience among non-Western communities. So digging into those crises and their traumatic effects will inevitably open the wounds the West and these political elite are not willing to face.

In this sense there is a point of intersection between trauma as a historic-social experience and literature. The lesson from the theory of *defamilarization* is that literature *dehabituates* reality. That is, literature makes strange that which has become familiar and in doing this we recognize that aspect of reality which we have ignored. This intimate link between literature and trauma opens up literary discourse as a strong ally to the field of trauma research.

Most mainstream Euro-Western studies on trauma have found a strong ally in Sigmund Freud especially in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. In the third chapter of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud wonders at the peculiar and sometimes uncanny way in which catastrophic events seem to repeat themselves for those who have passed through them. Freud draws from the work of narrative fiction, a romantic epic entitled "Gerusalem Liberta" by Tasso. In her reading of this story in Freud, Caruth notes that the actions of Tancred (the hero in Tasso's story) evocatively represent the way that the experience of a trauma repeats itself.

It is from this pedestal that we can appreciate the intimate relationship between trauma and literature especially the postcolonial African novel. As in the account of Tancred in Tasso's story through its *diegesis* the novel can take its readers back through flashbacks and the creation of fictional distance to the moment of disaster. The act of going back serves as a powerful strategy of re-examination of the original causes of conflict which have brought the trauma in the first place. It is common knowledge that the feeling of despondency, bitterness and anger are pervasive in most centres of conflict especially in Africa long after the cessation of hostilities.

Such feeling of despair is sustained because the foundation of conflict is hardly attended to. By ignoring the root causes of traumatic events a door of opportunity will be opened for the continuation of such traumatic conditions. It is from this basis that we can understand the fundamental role of literature. By studying the literature that is

borne out of trauma we have the opportunity to hear the voices of those who have survived such conflicts. Since narrative begins in death as Walter Benjamin has underscored, in the wake of the forgetfulness of history and the dizzying effects of official slogans, we have a second opportunity to hear once again the voice of the pain that is repressed in the communal and social unconscious.

In literary discourse trauma narratives are stories of a wound that cries out in order to address its readers in the attempt to tell them of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. Contrary to the Euro-Western perspective, the common themes of postcolonial trauma include the following:

(i) Dispossession and material recovery
(ii) Diaspora
(iii) Slavery
(iv) Segregation
(v) Racism
(vi) Political violence
(vii) Genocide.

In these studies attempts are made to create a bridge between psychological healing and material recovery. Material recovery encapsulates issues of reparation, restitution, the transformation of a wounding political, social and economic system not only rooted in the historical past but unfolding in the present. In their introduction to the special edition of *Studies in the Novel* dedicated to postcolonial trauma, Stef Craps and Gert Buelens underscore that the goal of postcolonial trauma studies is "to break with Eurocentricism through the analysis of novels that bear witness to the suffering engendered by colonial oppression" (2). Craps and Buelens strengthen their analysis by recalling Laura Brown's feminist interrogation of the notion of "normal traumatic events" (Brown, 101).While we agree with Craps and Buelens on the need to rigorously interrogate what constitutes "normality" in our conception of trauma, we doubt the possibility of neatly blaming the insidious national trauma in the postcolonial context on a history of colonialism. As we have shown earlier, there is no denying the obvious fact that the modern nation state in Africa is a child of the colonial era. But the sad history of the nation in the twenty first century is that the leadership in African nations engage itself in a blame game when it comes to explaining the atrocities perpetrated by the political class. Healing in the national psyche can only come when the leadership arises to the occasion and makes itself responsible to the nation.

Beyond the "normal", which often emphasizes the Euro-Western male point of view, Brown redirects attention to what she has called "insidious trauma", that is the "traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit"(107). Brown cites the experience of women living in cultural contexts that consider sexual assault on women as "normal". For her such normality is exemplary of "insidious trauma". With this in mind, therefore, the accounts on widowhood practices within the Nigerian context constitute examples of "insidious trauma". Under the cover

of "culture and tradition" women subject fellow women to harmful processes that amount to "wounds" on the soul.

III.1

Shimmer Chinodya was born in 1957 in Gweru, Rhodesia, now Zimbabwe. He was educated at Goromonzi High School and at the then University of Rhodesia where he studied English Literature. He obtained a masters degree in fine art from the University of Iowa, USA. His novel, *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) is based on the experience of the Zimbabwean war of independence and its traumatic aftermath. The novel won the Commonwealth Writers Prize for the African region and has been translated into German (Killam and Rowe, 68).

The significance of *Harvest of Thorns* is that through it we witness the representation of traumatic experiences in the African experience which offers us the opportunity to rethink social contradictions that are often taken for granted. It is actually this neglect of the moral obligation that is at the centre of Chinodya's narrative. Our concern, therefore, is to ascertain to what extent the novel as a form of narrative has been adopted to serve as witness to traumatic experiences and their effects in Zimbabwe. This becomes pertinent because the nation Zimbabwe has witnessed a decline in growth. This precipitates the thought that the nation rather than thriving in an era of healing and reconciliation has ironically been thrown into a "harvest of thorns". We will negotiate this dilemma by analyzing and interpreting Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*.

The action of *Harvest…* begins within the immediate period after the war of independence in the then Southern Rhodesia that became Zimbabwe. The main narrative path is woven around the Tichafa family. The story opens with the return of Benjamin, the first son in the family, after a period of three years having fought as a combatant in the war of national liberation. The account is organized into four parts. The first part, chapters one to four, covers the account of Benjamin's return. It equally narrates the initial efforts he makes at reintegration. We are introduced to Nkazana, Benjamin's wife who arrives a day after him. Chapter 1 is focused on Benjamin's return. It is recounted from his mother's perspective. It captures her exhilaration of his return from combat. The excitement pervades from the morning through the night hours. This is captured in her outburst. She says: "We're all fine here", he heard her say. "I'm so glad you came back, Benjamin"(4). The degree of her excitement is captured in the preponderant use of active verbs in the first two paragraphs. Thus: "she walked", "she cried", "she looked", "she fished into her long skirts", "she watched", "she stood", "she thought", etc. The first part ends in a crisis in chapter four as Benjamin and Peter visit an old friend and Peter gets drunk. As their mother goes in search of the boys she is insulted as a street walker. As Benjamin and Peter return much later in the night their mother goes into a rage. With this we witness the intensity of their pain and their brokenness. We receive hints that Benjamin's life has been broken by a violent war. The family is broken into pieces especially with the failure of the parents' marriage. Even though the war is over and Benjamin is back, we witness the intensity of the pain they have to bear.

Part 2 develops in the form of an extended flashback that goes back to the 1950s with the meeting of Cleopas Tichafa and Shamiso who will eventually become his wife. The narrator renders a detailed and poignant description of Cleopas Tichafa as a realistic product of his colonial times in the then Southern Rhodesia. Thus we are told:

> He was a young man, probably twenty-three or twenty-four with a smooth, dark complexion. His hair was neatly barbed in the style of the *English cut,* with a small bibo parted on the sideburns sliced off to a clean shave. He had bright black eyes and a straight steep nose. Starched and creased to an intimidating point, his khakhi trousers fitted his slim, neither-short-nor-tall frame very well. There was about him the breezy smell of carbolic soa, shaving cream and hair oil (27).

Observe the detailed description of Cleopas as a messenger in the colonial District Office. The narrator foregrounds his age, complexion, hair style, sideburns, colour of his eyes, shape of his nose, even the texture of the clothes he is wearing and the smell of the soap he used for his bath, the hair oil and shaving cream. Here Chinodya taps into the realism of the novel, its truthful representation of a slice of life in order to project this major character. The delineation of the character is not out of place but in harmony with his context as a British subject serving in Her Majesty's Rhodesia.

Besides, since a relationship will build up between the messenger and Shamiso as a young lady, the first impression she records about Cleopas at this stage will endure. More so, this presentation is given from her perspective and not that of the elder sister. And true to type her impression is sustained and grows from a romance between her and the man and later to marriage.

As the honey moon ends with her living with her husband the marriage is plunged into a series of storm. First the police pay them a visit one early morning and remind the couple to present a marriage registration and to relocate to what is called the couples' quarters. This is followed by a long wait for a child as they drift from traditional healer to a Charismatic Christian group. The storm in the young family is juxtaposed with the gathering storm of nationalist resistance against colonial authority. The family's pacifist religious convictions put them at logger-a-head with the political activists in their community who label them as "sellouts". The atmosphere of suspicion ensnares the members of the family and upsets the emotional development of Benjamin and the other children. Benjamin is bullied at school. But in order to disprove the negative perception of himself and members of his family he joins a group of children to burn down a public facility. While this act of heroism gains him acceptance with his peer group, it positions him in conflict with the church and with his parents. Ironically, rather than the church to which they belong mollify their emotional stress, it complicates their dilemma. We witness this as with the leader of the church excoriating and labeling Benjamin negatively. The father in his fanatic zeal fails to show understanding to his son. The result is that the boy grows up cynical and obdurate. The climax of this emotional crisis for Benjamin is the accidental chopping off of his brother, Peter's leg. Although a typical accident, the leader of the church and

other members including his father explain it as a sign that the boy is indeed possessed and evil. This marks the breaking point in the boy's mind as he eventually runs away from school and runs to the forest to join the guerilla fighters.

The main account of the battle is recorded in Part 3, between chapters 15 to 33, that is pages 97 to 228. This part opens as Benjamin joins the fighters. We witness their gains and losses. It closes in chapter 33 as Benjamin meets Nkazana who will become his wife. The last part in two chapters is the denouement but functions essentially to bring reconciliation between members of the Tichafa's family, between Benjamin and his father, and step-mother, between his sister Esther, her husband and other members of the family. It ends with the birth of a baby for Benjamin and Nkazana.

Shimmer Chinodya is indeed a brilliant storyteller. The more enduring feature in his narration is the delicate subtlety with which he interweaves the present and the past, sweeping through time and connecting events that occurred decades earlier with such flourish. Take for instance the reappearance of Esther and Dickson towards the end of the narrative. Before now we are told that Esther ran off with a man. And it is told in the context of the emotional pain the family has to endure. And so Esther remained rather shadowy in the course of the narration. But she reappears at Benjamin's return with Dickson the man she had eloped with on the same day that their estranged father comes to visit. And the moment of her appearance is filled with strong feelings. She is elegantly attired and vivacious. There are hints from their mother that she is pregnant. And Esther introduces Dickson with flourish as a good man who has cared for her. Perhaps it is her testimony about the young man that endears him to Benjamin.

III.2

It is from this pedestal that we can make sense of the actions and narrative in *Harvest of Thorns*. Its evocation of traumatic experiences in the aftermath of the Zimbabwean war of national liberation is directed at the inevitable need to secure social and material recovery for all citizens.

As we have indicated in the introductory part of this chapter, *Harvest of Thorns* is set against the background of the war of National Liberation in what eventually became Zimbabwe. Thus it does not only look back in order to ask questions about the effects of the war and its aftermath, its unique appeal lies in its perspective on the war. Its perspective becomes a telling through diegesis of the pain and contributions of ordinary men and women who fought as combatants in the war. Official reports after the war tend to celebrate the war as the brainchild of ZANU (PF) and its claim to power. The novel reechoes therefore the criticism made by Teresa Barnes on the official position. According to Barnes:

> Wars are often summed up as the decisions of leaders and the movement of armies. It is often forgotten that all these depend on ordinary soldiers who personally sacrifices to achieve advances and victories, and physically suffer the consequences of retreats and victories. But their experiences are usually

> obliterated in the main factors of history and may even be lost to popular memory. (Barnes, 118 cited in Bhebe and Ranger, 118-138)

Harvest… is the account of Benjamin who fought in the war of liberation as a child soldier. He returns, like others, after the cessation of hostilities to a life that is broken in pieces. His own life as an individual is shattered because he cannot find a place in the new Zimbabwe. While in a bus ride to the city centre he observes with consternation the prevailing contradictions and contrast even after the war. He notices that "certain areas could completely heal, while some festered on like stubborn wounds and others, like the suburbs on the hill, chose to remain untouched by war" (7). The image of wound that stubbornly festers, existing side by side with other areas that quickly heal is evocative of the prevailing trauma in the setting. In other words, even though the war has ended its effect and aftermath remain as a wound that festers. The choice of words in the quotation above testifies that the wound from the war is yet to heal. Benjamin witnesses this contrast suddenly as he rides to the city centre in the same way, as Caruth underscores, the wound on the mind is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known…"(..) As he peers ahead to the area that luxuriates in the healing process, he is amazed to to observe thus:

> He looked at the faces of sparling glass, pine wood, stone, at the marble driveways and blue swimming pools and gleaming cars in half-closed garages, at flawless lawns tended by black garden boys in khakhi and black maids still pushing white babies in prams-after the war and only months after independence"(7).

What is not fully known here as a wound is that the prevailing condition of the "garden boys in khaki and black maids still pushing white babies in prams" as if there had been no war, as if the status quo remains. For these boys and maids the war has not brought any form of material recovery. Independence has not brought any form of restitution.

Benjamin will confirm this lack of material recovery as he and Nkazana go to a shop to make some purchase. As they select their items of grocery the white attendant at the store asks: "Are you sure you can pay for all this?" she asked, looking first at Nkazana, then Peter and settling on Benjamin's boots" (7). The attendant's sneering attitude says volume and reechoes the banality of the white establishment about the black's inferiority. In other words, her mindset has not yet adjusted to the current reality that change has occurred and that the nation is free from colonial rule. Besides, her gaze at Benjamin's boots is symptomatic of the revulsion of the whites at the ex-combatants. Put simply, for this white attendant the boots point to the fact that there is an "enemy" in the shop and her attitude is attuned to that fact. But the combatant spirit in Benjamin is still alert. He quickly berates the negative attitude and affirms: "If you don't like Zimbabwe go to South Africa" (8). Later he fumes: "See what I mean?" "We've been so good to them they think they can treat us as they used to" (8). What is at work here is the "wound" speaking out suddenly. In Benjamin's reaction we witness a confirmation to Fanon's assertion that "the black man's chronically neurotic state of

mind cannot be alleviated as long as the socioeconomic structure that brought it on him remains unchanged…" We should observe nevertheless, that at issue here is not Benjamin's psychology nursing a personal wound. Rather his backlash is spawned by the collective wound that still festers even after independence.

As he goes for rehabilitation at the "demobilization office" he is confronted with the same contradiction of the wound juxtaposed with signs of healing and material recovery. Thus we are told: "As the line slowly moved forward the ex-combatants smoked, played draughts or chatted quietly. Across the road…. chauffeured cars stopped to drop suited gentlemen at the entrance of a hotel" (13). Earlier we are presented a collective image of the combatants. "They all looked tough and hardened-their skins were noticeably sun burnt. They wore denim or corduroy or khaki with camouflage caps or cowboy style hats… scattered among them as if half dozen fatigue kits had been flung among them to share"(13). The collective of combatants in this incident are on the same pedestal with the garden boys in khaki and maids pushing prams. Their condition has not changed and so as they gather they are indicative of the social wound that festers after independence. In all, Benjamin leaves the centre in frustration because without "proper documentation" he cannot be rehabilitated. As he "side stepped" into a bar the cycle of trauma resumes for him.

Beyond the image of the ex-combatants and the officials of the centre lies a system that thrives in forgetfulness. The centre is dotted with slogans such as: "JOIN A BUILDING BRIGADE/FORM A FARMING CO-OPERATIVE/START A STUDY GROUP/JOIN AN APPRETENCIESHIP/JOIN THE NATIONAL ARMY". On the surface these slogans project a genuine commitment to change. But when we read between the lines we discover that they are simply inane forms that thrive in the mistake of the past. These are not real expression of an obligation to complete healing and material recovery. They are not crafted from the needs of the ordinary combatants that have wasted their youth defending the unity of a nation. Take Benjamin, for instance, what he desperately needs is completion of his education in order to regain a sense of direction in life. But he faces a wall of condition: his demobilization papers. So denied the opportunity to be truly integrated into society he runs the risk of drifting again into violence. At the end of *Harvest of Thorns* we reach the conclusion that narrative mediation as in this novel can lead us beyond the hollow phrases and slogans of peace to the inner healing that the nation requires.

VI: *Beasts of No Nation*

The account of *Beast of No Nation* is narrated in twelve chapters through the perspective of the teller-character, Agu, the child-soldier. The account begins with his capture by another child-soldier, Strika, and then his conscription as a soldier by the Commandant. In answer to the Commandant's questions on whether he is a spy and about his identity, Agu reveals: "My father is telling me to run… Run far so the enemy is not catching you and killing you". (12) In other words, with the fall of his community to enemy soldiers and the consequent social disruption, Agu escapes but then is captured by the Commandant's group and persuaded to become a soldier. The process of his conscription is in line with the explanation by Kearney on the factors that push

children into becoming soldiers. (82) For instance, the Commandant reassures Agu that by becoming a soldier he will be able to kill the enemy especially the ones that killed his parents. After the interaction with the Commandant he tells us in the chapter: "So I am joining. Just like that. I am soldier" (13). Agu goes through his first lessons in the art of war: "... thinking all the things I am learning as a soldier" (16). The climax of his learning is the gruesome killing of an enemy soldier. The event is graphically captured towards the end of the second chapter. He tells us:

> 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. (26)

After killing the enemy soldier Agu relapses into a state of revulsion characterized by shock and vomiting. He says: "I am vomiting everywhere. I cannot be stopping myself". These symptoms are indicative of the fact that by going through the act of killing, Agu has "experienced an event that is outside the range of human experience" (Brown, 100). Brown further shows that although this is the standard perception of trauma, "human experience" often mean "male human experience" (101). She argues therefore that "the range of human experience becomes the range of what is normal and usual in the lives of men of the dominant class" (101). For the Commandant and other adult male, war and the killings that go with is within the normal range of human experience. But what is normal for the adult male cannot be the same for children whether male or female. Thus for Agu the brutal killing of enemy soldiers and being forced to carry out the act is far beyond what is normal for a child. Hence he experiences heightened physiological arousal after the heinous act. He says: "I am growing hard between my legs". And he wonders as he searches for normal justification: Is this like falling in love?"(26) As the Commandant has earlier reassured him.

After this event and the bodily reactions that followed it, the narrative shifts in a flashback as he recounts his childhood experiences with his mother as he learns to read. This flashback allows us to contrast the current experience as a soldier from the normal childhood experiences at home and at school. The current experience is well "outside the range" of childhood experience. The aim of the extended flashback into the early moments of childhood apart from serving to reevaluate the earlier events as falling outside the range of the normal, also serves to stimulate a process of hypnotic catharsis or "abreaction". The process of "abreaction" is meant to help Agu receive cure from the earlier traumatic crises he has witnessed. The movement back to memory, Ruth Leys has explained, will help the individual to undergo a moment of amnesia, to delete the earlier gruesome event and replace it with a more acceptable and familiar event in the memory (Leys, 84-85). Observe the dominant images in the flashback which are taken from the normal range of childhood experience. These images include: "the big white Bible", "my mother is reading very very slowly because she is not school teacher" (31). Then from the home he goes to the school: "I was the smartest person in my class, so smart that the only thing I am having to learn is writing"(34). Also he

asserts: “But these things are before the war and I am only remembering them like dream” (35).

Apart from Agu, Stika, the second child-soldier in the account suffers from withdrawal symptoms generally characterized in PTSD literature as “numbing phenomenon”. Agu narrates to us:

> I am going to find Strika. 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 (46)

Observe salient aspects of the assertion above. Stika is sitting “far away from the other men” that is he is withdrawn from others. Also observe: “Over and over again he is drawing the same picture of man and woman”. That while he is withdrawn he engages in a repetitive motion as he draws the picture on the ground. In other words, his withdrawal has produced an occasion for repetitive act. The final segment of the assertion reveals the content of the drawing: that is, the figure of the man and the woman are headless, with their heads decapitated and “rolling away”. In the course of the account Strika who is even younger than Agu is generally mute and hardly says anything. He is devastated by the shock of seeing his parent killed. And the sketch on the ground is a recall of how the father and the mother died. All he can recall from his childish perspective is that their heads are rolling off to the ground.

In explaining the symptom of numbing even as we witness in Strika, we will follow Ruth Leys’ recall of the biological account of neuro-hormonal theory of memory in the research of Van der Kolk and his group (Leys, 254).Van der Kolk, Leys tells us, takes as his starting point, “the organism’s ordinary response to the external environment”. Thus:

> Exposure to certain stressful events is said to activate … receptors and stimulate the secretion of endorphins (endogenous opioids) in the brain. It is thought that these receptors-endorphines responses explain the numbing or analgesia characteristic of trauma (Leys, 256).

In other words, the gruesome killing of his parents has produced the Stika’s numbing symptoms manifesting is his withdrawal and muteness. The drawing on the ground is his own way to recapture the event of the killing and the experience of his rape by the Commandant which he can hardly talk about since these events are outside the range of normal childhood experience.

Although the boy Strika does not talk, it is remarkable that he finds another means of expressing his pain through drawing on the ground. After the account of the rape of Agu by the Commandant the first time we are told:

> 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 bottom. The picture was funny… (105)

In all this Agu discovers contrary to his earlier expectations that "I am knowing now that to be a soldier is only to be weak and not strong" (38). J.A. Kearney observes that this ironic twist is Iweala's interrogation of the complex involvement of children in war (82).

This discussion is animated by the desire to understand how unresolved individual and group trauma rooted in historical past experiences of conflict affects genuine need for national development. This study has used as its focus the experiences from the war of liberation in the then Southern Rhodesia that became Zimbabbe and the Nigeria-Biafra war in the late 1960s. By going beyond the events of national history and viewing the insidious and silent pain of the victims we understand how these unresolved deep-seated pain hinder the possibility ofgenuine national trust and healing. We have studied how the representation of child-soldier characters like Benjamin, Agu and Strika in the novel of Chinodya from Zimbabwe and Iweala from Nigeria reveals that children continue to languish in the interstitial condition of the nations in sub-Saharan Africa. Apart from being recruited as soldiers in the continent's war, children are easy prey to sex-slavery and other forms of economic slavery.

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