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Trauma in West African Civil Wars, case studies: Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Kamara's and McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008)

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Dedication

To my beloved ones, my family and friends.

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Abstract

The following research paper deals with the issues of childhood and war trauma in Chris Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Mariatu Kamara's and Susan McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008). The purpose of the study is to compare between the writings of these two African authors, the Nigerian novelist Chris Abani and the Sierra Leonean survivor Mariatu Kamara, who write nearly about similar topics, but in vastly different ways during the same period of time; that is the West African Civil Wars. As a whole, the research aims at examining how African children cope with traumatic experiences and how childhood narratives represent the disarray in Africa's newly independent nations.To attain my objective, I have used Davis, C., & Meretoja, H *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020) in addition to other literary theories and criticism. The first chapter of my discussion analyzes the two works by examining trauma through the lenses of Witnessing and Narrative which are the result of what the characters have been through or seen others go through after experiencing or witnessing traumatic events like amputation, rape, or the loss of loved ones. In the second chapter, I examined the way the two authors portrayed their protagonists, and how those depictions relate to the symptoms of victimization and perpetrator trauma. In doing so, I have shown that the two protagonists; Mariatu and My Luck were not given a carefree upbringing by the adults in their respective lives, who instead instilled on them a sense of responsibility and accountability. This goes without saying that the western media's use of war victims to portray the state of affairs in the war-torn countries is a result of their engagement in the conflict that contributed to the perpetuation of a set of stereotypes which have been utilized in a degrading manner towards these victims. Thus, the traumas of the perpetrators and the victims of violence are tackled in these novels; however, my findings demonstrated that the two sides have the same sets of symptoms which allowed me to make this comparative study possible.

Key words:

Africa, Civil War, Trauma, Victimhood, Violence.

Table of contents

Dedications……………………………..………………………………………….……. I

Acknowledgements……………………..…………………………………………. II

Abstract ………………………………………………………………………………. III

I. General Introduction 1

Review of the Literature 5

Issues and working hypothesis 8

II. Methodology 10

1) Theoretical framework 10

2) Historical background 13

3) Short Synopsis of the Novels 16

III. Results and Discussion 18

Chapter I:

Witnessing and Narrative in *Song for Night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008) 21

a) Witnessing 21

b) Narrative 31

Chapter II:

Victimhood and perpetrator trauma in *Song for Night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008): 39

IV. General Conclusion 54

V. Selected Bibliography. 56

I. General Introduction

Present day Africa, was subject to several tribal conflicts even before the scramble for Africa had begun. Nonetheless, since the arrival of the European settlers and missionaries, ruthless violence has wreaked havoc on the continent under the alleged ploy of bringing culture to the "uncivilized, subhuman savages." Furthermore, Africans were subjected to cruel treatment by their colonizers, and according to Frantz Fanon in *The wretched of the earth* (1963), violence regenerates violence. He believes that "Decolonization is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the "thing" which has been colonized becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself" (pp 36-37); hence, when colonizers dominated the African lands, they also compelled their minds into using the same means. Mazuri, in *Armed conflict in Africa* (2008) considers that the colonization of Africa resulted in cultural wrench and self-loss.

> It must be recognized that the seeds of the postcolonial wars themselves lie in the sociological and political mess which 'white' colonialism created in Africa. The colonial powers destroyed old methods of conflict resolution and traditional African political institutions, and failed to create effective substitute ones in their place. (p 35)

In order to revolt against this subjugation, various movements saw light in the process of reaching independence and overcoming European domination. However, the utopian euphoria of liberation quickly shifted into a dystopian reality. Disillusionment soon emerged in post-independence Africa, which turned into a cradle of corruption, violence, and Civil Wars as a result of Neocolonialism.

In parallel to the course of African history, African literature reflects the distorted reality of African nations. The origins of African literature may be traced back to the oral heritage that was transmitted from one generation to another throughout folklore: myths, legends, folktales, and proverbs. The latter are a significant element in the writings of the first generation of post-

colonial literature, as is the case with Thomas Mofolo's *Chaka* (1925) and Chinua Achebe's *Things fall apart* (1958), since they aimed at the demystification of the colonial myth of "the white man's burden" and demystified the Eurocentric portrayal of Africa. Furthermore, during colonization, the emphasis of African writers was on revolution and breaking the chains of enslavement. Their central aim was to incite natives to defend their lands and embrace their ancestral cultural legacy. After independence, the socio-historical upheavals of post-independence Africa are echoed in various literary works by post-independence writers, including Ayi Kwei Armah's *The beautyful ones are not yet born* (1968), Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Matigari* (1986), and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of no nation* (2005). This literary body of work portrayed the disappointment experienced by African individuals as they recognized that their hopes for cultural rejuvenation, freedom, and prosperity eventually transformed into a form of African pessimism, disillusionment, and the onset of Civil Wars.

The sources of these violent armed conflicts may vary. Poverty, human rights violations, bad governance and corruption, ethnic marginalization, and the proliferation of small arms have all been known to exacerbate conflicts in Africa (Vinck, Pham & Kreutzer, 2011). This survey on the root causes of the Civil War in Liberia showed the following results:

> Greed and corruption most frequently as the causes of the conflict (63%). Another 40% mentioned identity and tribal divisions, while less than one in three adult Liberians mentioned poverty (30%), and inequalities (27%). Nearly one in five said they did not know what the root causes of the conflicts were, and few mentioned land issues (3%) or food issues (1%). (Vinck et al., 2011, p 33)

Furthermore, in *Conflict and peace in west Africa* (2012), the sources of conflict are categorized into "historical factors, socio-economic crisis, legacies of authoritarianism and the politics of exclusion, international forces, and local struggles" (Obi, 2012). In addition to the Cold War, also known as the second scramble for Africa, where both the U.S. and the Soviet Union sought to assert their hegemony and economic dominance over the recently independent African countries, this led to the first Civil War in Congo that took place just after its

independence. Two Civil Wars broke out across the nation, one of which is known as the African World War. In a study conducted by Merchant in a web article entitled *World without genocide-making it our legacy* (2020), these Civil Wars claimed as many as six million lives. What ignited the conflict was that both Joseph-Désiré Mobutu, who was supported by the U.S., and the prime minister, Patrice Émery Lumumba, who was supported by the Soviet Union, sadistically claimed their right to rule the country (Babunga, 2017). Also, while American children were safeguarded during the Cold War, African children were left unprotected and vulnerable, as Abani demonstrates in his book *Song for night* (2007):

> It was simple and straightforward—hide under a desk. Some of those bush fucks in camp were impressed. Me, I could see through the fatal flaws of the logic even then:
> 1. Where would we find desks in this war?
> 2. Would the army provide them and would we have to carry them around ourselves?
> 3. Why would anyone hide from a fireball under a wooden desk? (p. 80)

The Democratic Republic of Congo is just one sample of the numerous post-independence Civil Wars that took place in Africa. The motives may differ from the borders of one nation to another, but the results are similar. The consequences of internal armed conflicts consist of refugee problems, hunger and malnutrition, which caused the death of many newborn babies and kids, total chaos and displacement, in addition to hideous violations of human rights such as sexual assaults, political executions, assassinations, and torture. During their journey and while they are living in refugee camps, a disproportionate number of women, children, and other vulnerable refugees are subjected to acts of violence.

Most importantly, a new form of exploitation began during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s (McNair, 2010), which is the phenomenon of child soldiers. According to *All things considered* from *NPR news* (2005), "Amnesty International estimates that as many as 300,000 children worldwide are ensnared in deadly conflicts." In Africa, this can go back as early as the early 1800s under the reign of Shaka Zulu, who ruled the Zulu kingdom in southern Africa at

the time. Men and boys equally fought in his bloody conquests of the African territories. Nowadays, African child soldiers who experience this upheaval are frequently molded, controlled, and forced into entering military conflicts considering that many of them have no other alternatives or educational opportunities. The latter were coerced into acts of violence such as murdering, raping, and assaulting others, earning them the epithet of "killing machines" as expressed in Beaubien.

> Across Africa child soldiers are some of the most feared fighters on the continent. Whether it's teen-agers wielding AK-47s during Sierra Leone's Civil War or 10-year-olds with grenades in Liberia or the child conscripts of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, child soldiers have become known as brutal killers. And one of the concerns of child advocates is that these kids will grow up to be even more brutal as adults. But a study of 41 boys who fought with rebels in Mozambique's Civil War in the 1980s shows that that's not always the case (2005).

At last, the present dissertation deals with two representative books which represent the outcome of post-independence trauma on children in Civil Wars, namely, Chris Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Mariatu Kamara's and Susan McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008). In other words, his work aims at outlining the themes of childhood trauma and violence in two narratives which convey the stories of My Luck, a fictional male child soldier, and Kamara, a real-life female child refugee. These characters share their traumatic and violent experiences of fear, amputation, rape, and loss. The settings of Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Kamara's and McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008) take place in West Africa during Civil Wars. Throughout the discussion of the above-mentioned novels, my work is an attempt to uncover the violent side of post-independence literature in Africa, a literature that frequently reflects the socio-historical cataclysms of African nations.

One significant factor motivating my decision to engage with two books is my fascination with comparative literature. I am drawn to the prospect of discerning both differences and similarities, uncovering shared elements within ostensibly distinct components. This interest is rooted in the understanding that delving into the connections between literary

works enables us to shape our understanding of similarity and dissimilarity, ultimately enriching my exploration of African literature. Through the study of comparative literature, the African literature is no longer confined to the boundaries of one language, nationality, or cultural background. Although the narratives in my two selected books Chris Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Mariatu Kamara's and Susan McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008) were diverse in terms of plots and character roles, as they were rather opposite to each other, I found that they shared many common threads, including their settings, themes, and character developments, allowing me to initiate this present research. I intend to study the affinity existing between the two literary works, Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Kamara's and McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008), leaning on trauma theory as it is explained in Davis, C., & Meretoja, H., *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020).

Review of Literature

The exploration of humane themes within both literary works Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Kamara's and McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008) has not only garnered widespread attention but has also invited nuanced analysis and scrutiny. In the preface of Mariatu Kamara's *The bite of the mango* (2008), Ishmael Beah extends his appreciation, acknowledging the profound impact of introducing readers to Mariatu's narrative on a global scale (New York, 2008). This acknowledgment serves as a focal point in the doctoral thesis by Ademola Oladipupo Adesola, titled *Representations of child soldiers in contemporary African narratives* (2022).

Adesola meticulously dissects Beah's perspective on Kamara's work, emphasizing Beah's plea for journalists covering stories of war-affected children to transcend a narrow focus on trauma. Instead, Beah advocates for a broader narrative that highlights the resilience of these children and underscores the enduring humanity that persists amidst profound adversity

(Adesola, pp. 69-70). While underscoring the importance of Mariatu's memoir in documenting a deeply personal experience of violence (p. 140), Adesola doesn't shy away from identifying what he perceives as a notable gap in Kamara's storytelling.

According to Adesola, Kamara's narrative lacks a comprehensive exploration of the country's political and historical context, a critical omission in his view. He contends that understanding these broader contextual factors is pivotal for a holistic comprehension of issues such as the "loss of childhood innocence" and the pervasive "impoverishment" that not only devalues lives but also obstructs access to basic necessities (p. 140). Despite this critique, Adesola acknowledges the potential mitigating factor that Kamara was a young person at the time of these experiences, raising questions about the expectations placed on her to provide such an expansive contextual analysis within her memoir. This complex interplay of personal narratives, critiques, and contextual demands underscores the multifaceted nature of literary analysis and the ongoing discourse surrounding representations of impactful social issues.

Another facet that has drawn the scrutiny of both authors and critics centers around the involvement of co-author McClelland in crafting the narrative of the story. In the book *Swords into words: transformational war literature for young people* (2012), Hughes delves into this aspect, arguing and elucidating that McClelland, in her role as a ghostwriter, exhibited a thoughtful and deliberate approach. Hughes suggests that McClelland took great care not to alter or magnify any perspectives within the narrative. This caution is exemplified by the deliberate omission of certain details that might potentially cause discomfort to Kamara's personal life. The attention to preserving the authenticity and sensitivity of Kamara's experiences is underscored by the strategic choices made in shaping the narrative, reinforcing the ethical considerations embedded in the process of co-authorship.

> Mariatu's real-life disorientation is mirrored at times by tangible gaps in the narrative, particularly concerning her sexual assault and bewildering relocation in Canada. These

> gaps also suggest that co-writer Susan McClelland has carefully avoided the major pitfalls of ghost writing— those intrusions into and interpretations of another person's story. This book is testament to the truth that in tumultuous times we depend upon each other to uphold each other's stories. (Hughes, 2012, pp. 10-11)

The book has been equally useful in the field of didactics. In his book chapter, *Mindful and relational approaches to social justice, equity, and diversity in teacher education* (2019), McNeil says that "After reading Kamara's memoir, teachers may be tempted to locate the challenges, deprivations, and extreme suffering of children of war in others, in countries far away." (p. 140). By this, he spotted the possible issues that refugees can encounter at their schools, especially regarding the fact that "many cannot return to their pre-war notions of home and this knowledge is hard to assimilate, comprehend, and accept." by also stressing "especially those who were/are not white." (pp. 137–140).

On the other hand, Abani's *Song for night* (2007) has also received abundant criticism. Cecilia Addei in *Rape or die: war as initiation rite in Chris Abani's song for night* (2018) highlights the contrast between the transitional phase of children in pre-war and post-war environments, in which she argues that *"Song for night* gives a detailed and startling contrast between pre-war socialisation and socialisation in the context of war that influences the development of children into adulthood." She defines "socialisation" as the process through which children come to know how to conform to social norms and become "conduits" for both transmitting and transforming cultures. (P. 21)

In *Writing that fractures rocks: African narratives of child soldiers* (2020), Uraizee portrays the submerged violent alter ego of the protagonist, emphasizing the grim and violent theme surrounding child soldiers. The author provides an overview of this challenging and intimidating issue, presenting it as a formidable aspect of the narrative. He believes that "These heavily dystopic, "nightmarish" works present inner voices being subject to violent fantasies, edging beyond the scripting of violent action genres to have some vague normative educational

lesson.". He also mentions the presence of Judith Butler's notion of a "worthy life," in which she argues that some lives are more valuable than others (p. 3).

Additionally, Puja Senmajumdar emphasizes the value of nature and its sanctity and impartiality to human existence in *Song for night* (2007) in an article entitled *Nature and resistance in Coetzee and Abani* (2021). His ecocriticism demonstrated that the novella is both nature-related as well as spiritual, “where the central characters can interact with nature and land, in certain cases with the spirits of their ancestors as well” (p. 171). He also highlights the fact that Abani decentralizes humans and positions them within a matrix of other natural elements “which exists within a network of other entities: animals, plants, nature, rivers, and water-bodies with the knowledge that human life is not just interconnected but is dependent on cooperation with nature” (p. 171). Majumdar embodied the significance of natural homogeny in the plot, which plays a significant role in the narrative.

Issues and working hypothesis

Considering my above review of the literature, both Abani’s *Song for night* (2007) and Kamara’s and McClelland’s *The bite of the mango* (2008) were targets of an abundant amount of criticism. Yet, none of the critics examined the two narratives simultaneously, overlooking the relationship between both works. Largely because they raise questions that can only be answered by taking a look at matters from a whole different angle. My goal in conducting this investigation is to analyze the similarities between the two texts. In light of the volatile conditions in West African countries at the time, the two authors presented the varied strategies for surviving and the traumas they endured. Therefore, my aim in conducting research is to explore the connections between the two works, relying on the domain of comparative literature.

Luck is portrayed as a child soldier, while Mariatu emerges as a victim of child soldiers. Consequently, each critic concentrated on either the origins or the aftermath of the child soldiers' predicament. However, the common grounds of trauma and violence in both works reinforce the possibility to study the two novels in tandem as a study of affinity. Taking into account the historical setting in which the two novels were written, the two texts will be examined in connection to trauma and violence during post-independence civil conflicts. Furthermore, both Abani and Mariatu Kamara endured a challenging past in their countries, which inspired their book writing.

My aim in this dissertation is to compare Abani's *Song for night* (2007) and Kamara's and McClelland's *The bite of the mango* (2008) in reference to the themes of victimhood, poverty, imputation, childhood, rape, and violation of human rights, in addition to the issue of child soldiers and refugees. Their styles, although distinct, flow into the stream of violent post-independence African literature. Both writers survived traumatic Civil War ferocities and oppressing circumstances in their troubled countries at a really young age, allowing us to bridge the gap between both authors and their creative output in the context of the Civil Wars in troubled West African nations. My hypothesis posits that there is more common ground than differences between both characters. To bridge this gap, aiming to identify shared elements and similarities between the characters. We embark on a comparative study utilizing the frameworks presented by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja's *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020).

II. Methodology

1- Theoretical framework:

The field of literary trauma studies is a relatively new field that investigates how literature reacts to historical and current events such as the Holocaust, genocides, and colonialism. *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020) is a reference book that offers a detailed look at the link that exists between literature and traumatic experiences. This collection of forty articles by several academics highlights the range and dynamism of trauma studies in their contribution to the advancement of our knowledge of literature and other cultural forms all across the world. This book offers an in-depth introduction to the field of trauma studies. It covers everything from the field's beginnings to its present level of development. It also looks at a wide range of literary genres and mediums. Before I begin my discussion, I will introduce the key concepts that I believe are relevant for discussing the two literary works *Song for night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008). In other words, the following section consists of a short outline of the key concepts that I will apply to my corpus depending on Davis, C., & Meretoja, H., *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020) that examines how literature responds to specific traumatic situations and events and provides a thorough history and philosophy of trauma studies.

a) Witnessing **by Carolyn J. Dean and** ***Narrative*** **by Jakob Lothe**

The connection between witnessing and narrative is integral in comprehending trauma. Explored in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* (2020), narratives highlight the sincerity and integrity of narrators. These narrators may choose to share their experiences with readers, reflecting on the painful memories they endured to foster understanding and support (Lothe, 2020, p. 152). The survivors' collective narration and understanding of their

traumatic experience is shaped by the unique responses of individual members as well as their shared historical and cultural contexts which is dubbed as "narrative identity" (Van Alphen, 2018, p. 68). Because of the latter's importance in narratives and in building a sense of self, including the decision of whether or not to discuss traumatic experiences, as argued by Lothe (2020), memory is deemed critical in the aftermath of both psychological and physical traumas, (p. 153). However, people who experience traumatic events include not just those who come into immediate contact with the traumatic event but also everyone who witnesses the event. When a witness testifies to God or to an intense bodily and psychological trauma, they are not only establishing the reality of an event or story, but they are also evoking a potentially transcendent truth in the context of societal acknowledgment and trust (Dean, 2020, p. 111). Because of the convoluted history of the idea of witnessing, which is ingrained in both historical and cultural processes, and its relation to the moral position of the witness, witnessing and narratives are a topic of dispute because of its connection to speechlessness and reliability (p. 111).

b) Victimhood by Susana Onega and *Perpetrator trauma* by Erin McGlothin

According to *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020), Victimhood as a concept has evolved from skepticism to a general indifference to obsession among the Western societies. (Onega, 2020, pp. 92-94). Onega (2020) explained how Van Djik (2009) addressed the benefits and drawbacks of linking the word "victim" to "the sacrificial ones" in Western languages, Hebrew, and Arabic. He stated that this relationship avoids retaliation and endless bloodshed. These "sacrificial items" are compelled to perform a society role of "passivity and forgiveness," depriving them of their independence and power (p. 93). Van Djik (2009) believes that this stigma endangers society since pity leads to hostility when the survivors refuse to play the victim role.

In *The perfect crime* (2002), Baudrillard argued the existence of a 'new victim order' shaped by contemporary technology. He posited that modern civilization tends to define its identity, particularly 'the west' as subjects, by identifying a constant 'Other' as the unfortunate target (pp. 131-141). This concept is perpetuated through mass media, contributing to a system of violence that categorizes victims into those deemed worthy of grief and those who are not. This media-driven division dehumanizes the 'Other' by emphasizing their differences in today's society (Onega 2020, 95-96). On the other hand, the trauma paradigm has sparked considerable attention in the field of social studies, in contrast to perpetrator trauma, which has "an uncanny or ghostly presence" due to its susceptibility (Weigel, 2003, p. 94). Nevertheless, even in its earliest stages, psychoanalysis included not only the victims of violence but also its perpetrators, albeit their integration was discreet at the time. McGlothin explains that the origin of Freud's repetition compulsion is derived from Torquato Tasso's tale of Tancred in La *Gerusalemme liberta* (1581). Yet, neither Freud nor other academics have explicitly acknowledged the distinct trauma experienced by perpetrators. Consequently, the opinion of the critics diverged.

Contrarily to Vice (2013) who considers trauma as "a diagnostic rather than a moral concept" (p. 16), Mohamed (2015) believes that "Trauma is not merely a psychological empathy" but rather "a moral category that identifies its subject as a person who merits empathy and deserves to be heard." (p. 1173). Moreover, "one of the most vexing issues involved in the discussion of perpetrator trauma is the apparent simplicity of the term in relation to the staggering diversity of experiences covered by the umbrella concept of perpetration" (McGlothin, 2020, p.101). It was not until McNair (2002) has coined the term PITS, or Perpetrator-Induced Traumatic Stress, that the issue has been explicitly discussed, stating that PTSD, post-traumatic stress disorder, symptoms can manifest not only "from situations that

would be traumatic if someone were a victim, but situations for which the person in question was a causal participant" (McNair, 2002, p. 7).

For the sake of clarity in the discussion section of my research paper, I will briefly describe the history of Civil Wars in West Africa after I have established the concepts that I have used throughout my study. Readers of this dissertation will be able to make connections between the characters and their overall actions in relation to their nation's history at the time. The settings of the narratives are both held in the same time period and a slightly differentiated geographical locations. Whereas Kamara's narrative is set in Sierra Leone, Abani's *Song for night* (2007) is set in a war-torn non identified West African country.

2- The History of West African Civil Wars:

Several African nations gained independence between 1957 and 1990 some peacefully and others after desperate brutal wars with their grudging colonizers. But it wasn't mere affluence that followed. As evidenced by their literature, African nations faced a shared political, ethnic and religious turmoil that fueled wars across the continent, culminating in bloodshed and dispersion. Interstate conflicts have put several West African economies in danger of collapsing. Inevitably, this has resulted in human suffering and raised humanitarian concerns. Conflicts and battles ravaged several African countries for decades, including Liberia, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Guinea-Bissau. Recent uprisings in the Sahel region, which are affecting the West African countries of Mali, Niger, and Mauritania, and the rise of low-intensity conflicts in countries that are typically very stable, like Ghana, Nigeria, and Senegal, are warning signs that internal and regional violent conflicts may resurface, despite the fact that they are becoming less common in the sub-region. The common causes of these wars include poverty, human rights violations, poor leadership, corruption, the exclusion of some people, and the proliferation of small arms. ECOWAS, civil society, and the international

community have all made attempts to reduce the frequency and severity of conflicts in the area, although resolutions still sometimes take years.

The First Liberian Civil War began in December 1989, when rebel groups led by Charles Taylor invaded Liberia from the Ivory Coast's borders. The latter were trained in Libya by Muammar Gaddafi's regime, which began funding the NFPL, the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, whose goal was to depose Samuel Doe, the dictatorial and brutal President at the time (Ainley et al., 2016). With the assistance of ECOMOG, The Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, violence was minimized, resulting in a ceasefire in 1996. Nonetheless, this apparent calm was fleeting. In 1999, two years after Taylor was elected president, the country was dragged into a second Civil War. During the following five-years, the country was swamped in deadly confrontations between Taylor's NPFL, the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD), and the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), until a Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in 2003.

This conflict flooded across Sierra Leonean borders in 1991, with both the intervention of Taylor and Gaddafi. Plotting a coup against President Joseph Saidu Momoh, Foday Sankoh’s Revolutionary United Front (RUF) took control over broad areas of the country in eastern and southern Sierra Leone. These regions, rich in alluvial diamonds, became trading hubs with Liberia, exchanging diamonds for weapons. However, lack of governmental responsiveness given to these rebellious group prompted the NPRC, National Provisional Ruling Council, to stage a military coup in April 1992. The Sierra Leone Army (SLA) had succeeded in regaining the Koidu and Kono diamond districts in March 1993, with significant backup from ECOMOG forces sent by Nigeria, and pushing the RUF rebels back to the Liberian border by the end of 1993, but in March of 1995, the RUF returned and the fighting continued. (Gberie, 2005). This

decade-long deadly warfare that was proclaimed formally resolved in February 2002, resulted in the deaths of almost 50,000 people. (Richards, 2003).

In addition to these two nations, Nigeria experienced its own internal struggle, known as the Nigerian-Biafran War. Nigeria's mostly Igbo-populated Eastern Region, Biafra, is a West African separatist state that declared independence from Nigeria from 1967 to 1970. A bitter Civil War lead by the military commander, Emeka Odumegwu Ojukwu, was waged in order to achieve autonomy since they could no longer live harmoniously with a federal administration controlled by the interests of northern Nigeria's Muslim Hausa-Fulanis. The fighting officially concluded on January 15, 1970. (Daly, 2020). People were drawn into war with absolutely no training as they were forced into battlefields against trained Nigerian soldiers, reportedly to Christopher Ejike Ago, a former Biafran soldier, “The Nigerians who were pursuing us were trained soldiers... We were drafted into the war, given two days' training.” adding to famine as a result of the Nigerian army's restriction of food supplies "Plus the fact that we were hungry. Some of us, our skin was getting rotten. Nobody can fight a war like that." This also resulted in months of atrocities against the Igbo people of the north. Tens of thousands were slaughtered, and approximately one million escaped to the Eastern Region (Adaobi, 2020).

Civil Wars are raised by poverty, and especially by a shortage of human resources. Many poor communities see their young men leaving or migrating to other nations, either legally or illegally. Teenagers who are out of work have the option of joining a rebel army. In addition to the uneven distribution of natural resources is a major source of conflict. Disagreements, being religious or ethnic have been sparked and deepened by this setback. It is common for roaming militias to plunder the riches of newly acquired territories rich in natural resources in order to secure private finance for continued conflict. Third, wars are more likely in countries with dysfunctional governments and undemocratic economic and political structures. The

destruction of infrastructure and the forced relocation of people as a result of armed conflict are frequent results of such wars. Institutions at all levels, including social, political, and economic institutions, are vulnerable to long-term harm. There are various negative consequences for growth that occur directly from warfare, notably Civil War. Civil War, as we have seen so painfully in Nigeria, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, not only takes civilian lives, but also wreaks havoc on the environment, traumatizes entire generations, drives people to flee their homes and land, and harms social, educational, and health systems.

3- Short Synopses of the Novels

a) Song for night (2007)

The Nigerian-American novelist and poet Chris Abani wrote *Song for night* (2007) as his fifth work of fiction. The narrative centers on My Luck, a 15-year-old protagonist, amidst a fictitious Civil War in West Africa. Details in the story later place it during the Biafran War. My Luck's platoon all of whom have had their voice chords imputed so that they wouldn't scare each other with their screams if they unintentionally tripped a mine. My Luck who has received sapper training belongs to a group of young people who patrol ahead of their comrades, looking for explosives and neutralizing them. He has forcibly and voluntarily partaken in rape and murder, witnessed the murder of his parents. His journey starts right after a mine explodes, knocking My Luck unconscious. The other members of his platoon are vanished when he awakens. He searches for them while pointlessly roaming through potentially hostile country in Nigeria. He passes through a variety of areas that were once supposed to be devastated because of the war but are now just as beautiful and lively as ever. The narrator finds his unit on the river at the end of his journey, but they are unable to hear him shouting and firing his weapon. My Luck finally accepts his death and finds his mother in the afterlife after finally giving up the violence that had blighted his life.

***b) The bite of the mango* (2008)**

Mariatu Kamara, a native Sierra Leonean, was kept hostage by RFU child soldiers when she was 12 years old, shortly after being raped and impregnated by a family member, Salieu. The rebels seized Kamara captive and amputated both of her hands. Despite her injuries, Kamara emerged from the brush to seek help. On the trip to the Freetown medical center, she was reunited with several family members, some of whom had also lost their hands due to the attacks. They moved to an amputee camp in the city, where Kamara gave birth to a child before losing him to the abhorrent circumstances of the camp and her life of begging on the streets of Freetown. As a consequence of interviews with Kamara performed by international media in the refugee camp, her tale grabbed the attention of individuals from all over the world, including a Canadian man who began providing her with assistance. Due to this and other forms of assistance, Kamara was able to go to England. Mariatu's decision to write her autobiography was prompted by Ishmael Beah and her family after she was granted asylum in Toronto, Canada, where she met Susan McClelland, a journalist who had previously been awarded the Amnesty International Media Award and with whom she collaborated on the writing of her autobiography.

III. Results

In delving into an analysis of Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007) and Mariatu Kamara's and Susan McClelland's *The Bite of the Mango* (2008), my findings reveal a remarkable convergence of themes portrayed through parallel perspectives in both works. The framework for my exploration draws inspiration from the insights provided by Davis and Meretoja in *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* (2020). The driving force behind my focus on these two literary pieces lies in the reversal of roles undertaken by the protagonists, Mariatu and My Luck. Both protagonists intricately weave their narratives from a first-person standpoint, emerging as reliable conduits that evoke empathy in readers. This narrative approach not only enhances our understanding of their predicaments but also underscores the profound intersection of literature and trauma.

The contemporary world exhibits an increasingly fixated preoccupation with the narratives stemming from these experiences and memories of individuals grappling with collective and individual traumas. These traumas, rooted in profound experiences and memories, often prove too intricate and demanding to articulate. It is within this intricate tapestry of human suffering that the works of Abani and Kamara, examined through the lens of literature and trauma, become poignant testaments. As society's collective consciousness grapples with an obsessive fascination for such narratives, the imperative emerges for these stories to be preserved and disseminated. Whether through the written word, reading, recording, or visual documentation, the imperative is clear—to give voice and permanence to the unspeakable.

IV. Discussion

The initial chapter of my dissertation undertakes a comparative analysis of the two works, employing a trauma-focused lens based on concepts delineated in *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020), with a particular focus on the concepts of Witnessing and Narrative. Both literary works explore the intricacies of memory, the act of witnessing, and narrative, shedding light on these aspects' broader connections to gender and drawing attention to tragic situations that demand collective acknowledgment. Through this inquiry, I have arrived at the conclusion that both Mariatu and My Luck share strikingly similar experiences and observations of mental and physical traumas stemming from shared tragedies, including amputation, rape, and the loss of loved ones. Despite their diverse backgrounds, their childhood reactions to loss manifested commonalities, and they developed a remarkably similar "narrative identity" evident in both their speech and silence.

Notably, although differing in the origins of their traumas, both Mariatu and My Luck find themselves situated within the concepts of victimhood and perpetration due to war. Additionally, the significance of genealogies in their upbringing, their resilience, and personal growth as individuals are shared aspects. Furthermore, the influence of the authors' personal backgrounds is discernible in the reflections present within both narratives.

In the second chapter, an exploration into the symptomatology of victimhood and perpetrator trauma unfolds, drawing insights from *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020), and examining how the two authors portrayed their main characters. The focus revolves around the characters' responses to trauma, assuming dual roles as both victims and perpetrators. Consequently, we posit that both characters align with René Gerard's concept of "scapegoating," where blame is assigned to innocent parties, such as young soldiers or refugees, to deflect responsibility for the broader societal misfortune during war. My Luck, involved in

actions such as killing and rape as part of his child soldier duties, and Mariatu, whose unintended neglect led to her child's death, share a common experience of guilt and depression resulting from the moral conflicts arising from their actions. Despite the intent behind their actions, both characters are intertwined with the concept of victimhood, especially considering their youth, positioning them as collateral damage and victims of the war's impact.

Chapter I: Witnessing and Narrative in *Song for Night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008)

a) Witnessing

The profound impact of war is agonizing for most individuals who endure it. Consequently, some survivors are hesitant to speak or write about it due to the painful memories it invokes—recollections they wish they had never experienced in the first place. Discussing war serves as a stark reminder of what it has destroyed, including aspects of innocence and righteousness as human beings. However, certain survivors, like Mariatu and Abani, feel compelled to articulate their individual perspectives on their memories. They use narration as a means to make their voices heard as war victims and to draw the world's attention to their perilous past. This act of storytelling also becomes a pathway for healing from their traumas. Geoffrey Hartman (2003) posits that expressing suffering in words forms “a basis for making the wound perceivable and the silence audible.” He suggests that without discussing trauma, the path to healing remains elusive (p. 258).

As demonstrated in the two books, Mariatu, a child refugee, and My Luck, a child soldier, faced difficulty expressing themselves verbally, whether due to mutism or silence. This challenge made it arduous for them to process the witnessed tragedy and reconcile with their experiences. Literature serves as a bridge between the authors, their audience, and themselves, particularly considering the significant role literature has played in representing suffering throughout history. Starting with the concept of witnessing, one might argue that the protagonists of both *Song for night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008) embody what *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020) refers to as “moral witnesses.” They have both witnessed and experienced significant psychological and physical trauma, akin to the

concept introduced by philosopher Avishai Margalit, who characterized the unique moral standing and authoritative power of Jewish Holocaust survivors (Dean, 2020, p. 111).

Having lived through years of civil war in West Africa, in addition to their families' respective traumas, we can safely claim that our characters correspond to this description. Both, Mariatu and My Luck, provide eyewitness accounts of their own amputations as well as the amputations of others in front of them. Mariatu, who refers to children engaged in armed conflict as "rebel boys," She, along with her family and fellow Sierra Leonean citizens, experienced the traumatic loss of both her hands. "'We're not going to kill you,' one boy replied. 'We want you to go to the president and show him what we did to you. You won't be able to vote for him now. Ask the president to give you new hands.'" (Kamara, 2008, p. 31) these violent actions were due so they would not cast their vote for the president that the rebel troops perceived as a dictator at the time. Thus, they cut her hands in spite her incapability of carrying out such a task because she did not even comprehend what the meaning of the word "president." was: "As my mind went dark, I remember asking myself: 'What is a president?'" (p. 31)

> John Wayne was standing by my head, opposite the doctor. I stared at the peculiar cruel glint of the scalpel while the doctor, with a gentle and swift cut, severed my vocal chords. The next day, as one of us was blown up by a mine, we discovered why they had silenced us: so that we wouldn't scare each other with our death screams. Detecting a mine with your bare toes and defusing it with a jungle knife requires all your concentration, and screams are a risky distraction. (Abani, 2007, p. 25)

On the contrary, My Luck, as illustrated in the above passage, underwent the severing of his vocal cords, a fate shared by the other child soldiers in the mine diffusers troop. This measure aimed to prevent them from startling each other in case of an explosion, minimizing the risk of their "death screams" being detected by the enemy lines. The whole journey of the story, as far as I can tell and comprehend, begins with an explosion that results in either My Luck's death, but he is unaware of this fact, or him being under trauma effect after his platoon did not realize

he was alive and abandoned him. Nonetheless, literature is a malleable discipline, and that flexibility allowed me to construct this paper based on my personal interpretation of the narrative, which is inclined towards trauma theory.

Our characters have also witnessed sexual assaults, where My Luck was forced by his commander, John Wayne, to rape a woman the age of his mother, which left him with a great deal of remorse and trauma. Mariatu, on the other hand, has endured a really harsh childhood, she was raped by a much older guy who wanted to marry her at the age of eleven, and genital mutilation was performed on her when she was nine years old, as shown here “In the West, this practice of cutting, known as female genital mutilation, is highly criticized. But in Sierra Leone, girls and women who are not initiated are considered outsiders.” (Kamara, 2008, p. 68). Due to the series of events, Mariatu felt anxious when her son Abdul was conceived and born as a result of her rape. She refused to provide him the necessities of life, including food, affection, and even used him to gain more during her begging in the streets of Freetown. Ten months after his birth, he acquired a severe form of malnutrition that, at the time in Sierra Leone, was untreatable. Desolately, Abdul succumbed to his sickness and passed away. Mariatu blamed herself greatly for Abdul's passing Her unease stemmed from a sense of inadequacy, feeling that she had fallen short in fulfilling the responsibilities expected of a mother, unable to provide for him in the manner deemed appropriate. That's why we can call Mariatu's experience as a Perpetrator trauma.

In contrast, when addressing the trauma experienced by perpetrators in *Song for night* (2007), Abani effectively creates a narrative distance that prevents the reader from solely empathizing. He achieves this by delving into the complex dual role of child soldiers as both victims and perpetrators of human rights violations. Abani portrays them engaging in acts of violence as offenders while concurrently being victims of violence. My Luck has witnessed as

much as twenty losses, and killed as many people too, he was portrayed as both a victim and a perpetrator of violence. Starting with his father who was a victim of religious persecution, a crime he witnessed at a very young age because his dad was a Muslim and his mother was a Catholic. As well as the various crimes that John Wayne, the leader of his troop, had him do, including rape and murder, which led to his death at the hands of My Luck as revenge, with the tragic collateral damage of a little girl's death that caused My Luck great remorse. However, Abani made sure "that amongst all the horror, there was still love." (Abani, 2007, p.58) by preserving clues of My Luck's humanity, such as his connection to Ijeoma, a girl from his troop that he fell in love with. Below are two excerpts from *Song for night* (2007) that show My Luck's ritual after conducting each killing or losing a loved one:

> I cut the first one when my grandfather died; the second I cut when my father died, with one of his circumcision knives. My father the imam and circumciser who it was said betrayed his people by becoming a Muslim cleric and moving north to minister; and all this before the hate began. The third I cut for my mother who died at the beginning of the troubles that led to the war. The rest I have cut during the war: friends, comrades-in-arms. With the one I just cut for Nebu, there are twenty in total. Eighteen are friends or relatives, as I said, but two were strangers. One was for the seven-year-old girl I shot by accident, the other for the baby whose head haunts my dreams. (Abani, 2007, p. 28)
>
> I turn over my right forearm. There are six X's carved there: one for each person that I enjoyed killing. I rub them: my uncle who became my stepfather, the old women I saw eating the baby, and John Wayne, the officer who enlisted and trained us and supervised our throat-cutting and our first three months in the field, the man who was determined to turn us into animals—until I shot him. (p. 28)

Both Mariatu and My Luck have had a lengthy list of unfortunate incidents even before the Civil War has begun. Their relationships with their relatives were complicated, since they were based on a cold and an emotionally aloof connection. Not only with their family but also with their communities both at a local and regional level. Their psychological and physical separation from their parents added an additional layer of complication to the already contentious interactions they had with them. Max Silverman, a Professor of Modern French Studies at the University of Leedsi, illustrates this kind of trauma in his chapter *The Screen Memory* (2020), giving an example from Georges Perec's *W ou le souvenir d'enfance* (1975),

who revised the notion of the “absent presence” by putting an ellipsis in the middle of a blank page, an ellipsis which is a punctuation mark consisting of three dots to indicate that something was omitted, he did that to demonstrate something that is missing but is also present.

In this "elliptical" way, the unbearable pain and trauma of the parents' disappearance is shown as an absence, as something that can't be said directly but is always allusively and obliquely present, which shows the absence of a missing person, like parents (Silverman, 2020, p. 127). In the books we are analyzing, we perceive that both characters cannot speak loudly about who they lost because no full testimony was possible for them, because of their lack of communicative means, but many phases in their life still show the marks of what is gone and left behind, as it is showed in these two quotations, where My Luck still feels guilt for his mother’s loss, and Mariatu unconsciously projecting with her child how her own mother treated her in her childhood.

> No, I decide, I am hallucinating. I must be. I scratch the cemetery on my arm and tell myself that if I put one foot into the darkness, it would disappear. I tell myself that this is only the shape of my guilt: guilt for all the lives I’ve lost or taken, guilt for letting my platoon down, guilt for losing my mother, for leaving her to die for me while I hid in the ceiling like a little coward. (Abani, 2007, 98)

> Besides, it sounds like Abdul had lots of love from Marie, Abibatu, Fatmata, and Mabinty. Just like you when you came to live with Marie and Alie. Did you ever think for a moment it was because your mother didn’t love you?” (Kamara, 2008, p. 112)

Words and writing have enabled both the author and the character, Mariatu and My Luck, to narrate, confront and verbalize their witnessed unspeakable experiences, so they can mirror what they have survived during their childhood years. Whilst Kamara's memoir (I will use the author’s surname, Kamara, to talk about her as an author rather than as a book character) is the testimony of the survivor herself, My Luck is a fictitious figure who "symbolizes" that suffering. Words are a powerful tool for conveying anguish, but they can also symbolize the impossibility, if not the outright failure, of doing so. This is especially true in high-stakes situations like courtroom testimonies or media interviews, where witnesses feel the heat of the

spotlight where they may feel the full force of the public's gaze especially if they are not proficient in the used language of their audience.

Our book characters went through similar speechlessness situations, given the fact that My Luck is mute and unable to transfer his words verbally, where he struggled to convey his message to his people other than the gestures he has employed, which were not always comprehended by them, as we can see here: "'Mother, where am I?' I try to signal, using the generic term for respect. But either she can't see me anymore, doesn't understand, or doesn't want to." (Abani, 2007, p. 56). Mariatu also has trouble explaining herself in English, a foreign language for her during her first interviews in Sierra Leon. Mariatu was unable to communicate with media since she lacked the linguistic proficiency and cultural context to effectively express her message in English. and as My Luck indicated "there is something atavistic about war that rejects all but the primal language of the genes to comprehend it" (Abani, 2007, p.17). In other words, the stories of the victims can only be told in one's primal language, as it is innate in them, and if they were ever translated, it only means that the voices of the victims' sufferings are transmitted into a more universally privileged culture or language, that is English.

The failure of words mentioned above may be found in both books in certain excerpts. Starting with *The bite of the mango* (2008) While carrying her son Abdul, Mariatu failed to convey through words that Salieu, a family friend, was the one who had raped and impregnated her and not the rebels. In her first interview, after being asked about her son she described her experience as follows: "For a moment I was speechless. For the first time in my life […] 'His name is Abdul,' I replied. 'He's five months old.'" (Kamara, 2008, 94). Her comments about her son were succinct, she only mentioned his age and his name, which are not giving any kind of detail about how she had him in the first place, in the same interview she had to priorities what they needed in the refugee camp like it shows in this passage: "'Vegetables, clean water,

soap, new clothes, dishes.' I don't know where my answer came from, but I found myself reciting a long list of everything we didn't have at the camp" (p. 78) These brief information are giving the journalists the opportunity to report something other than the truth, paving the way for them to create a more 'exciting' version of her story, she indicated later that she was stunned when she was in Canada reading that "The journalists all said the rebels had raped me and that I had conceived Abdul during the attack on Manarma" (Kamara, 2008, 94).

Mariatu didn't actually intend to mislead in her role as a witness; she just lacked the adequate linguistic tools to convey the entire scope of her experience. This, however, does not alter the fact that it serves as a barrier to the genuine truth hiding behind that silence. Especially with modern technologies where millions of people would be able to know, or judge according to the small portion of information they have at their reach. without forgetting that she could have been accused of lying or distorting the facts purposely to get profit from her tragedy, neither of which are implausible, since not to mention that, impostors and fraudsters may easily play the card of victims to elicit people's sympathies.

In another interview, she felt unable to speak by saying "My mind had run through all the possible answers I could give to the questions I thought would be coming. And not one of those answers felt right to me" (Kamara, 2008, p. 145). This state of speechlessness that is found in Kamara's autobiography is a kind of symbolic mutism that communicates unfathomable experiences of extreme suffering. Similarly, during the Holocaust testimonials, Yehiel Dinur, a Jewish survivor and writer, "he told friends that the spirits who visited him at night had starved at Auschwitz" then "When he testified, he […] did not respond properly to questions" (Dean, 2020, p. 113). The disintegration of Mariatu and Yehiel on both an emotional and physical level revealed a gap between the language that survivors were able to use to describe their experiences and their readiness to testify about those experiences.

Yet, based on other findings, silence is considered as important and as expressive as words. Meretoja (2018), a Professor of Comparative Literature, believes that "the interplay between storytelling and silence is woven into their fabric so intimately that one does not exist without the other" (p. 305). In other words, the silence of the witness may be just as evocative as the words of the witness, as we can see from the fact that both narratives, *Song for night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008) recognize the importance of silence in conveying their stories, as identified by My Luck and echoed by Mariatu "There is a lot to be said for silence, especially when it comes to you young." (Abani, 2007, p. 17), and "There are times when silence is louder than any voice." (Kamara, 2007, p. 55).

Today's news and media outlets also provide visual content like photographs and videos, not simply audios or written texts; nevertheless, even while verbal comments can be just as biased and controlled for the advantage of the information diffuser, nonverbal cues like facial expressions, tears, emotions, surroundings, and gore can both have a more potent message and a twisted plot behind it. Thus, the audience are left with a piece of information on which they must rely solely on their own judgment to form an opinion. Academics such as Sybille Krämer and Sigrid Weigel believe that "the incarnation of knowledge without proof [...] only arises out of a constellation between witness and addressee that rests on social recognition and epistemic trust" (2017, xv). In other words, social recognition and trust are the foundation upon which the testimony of the trauma sufferers is based.

To assess the prevalent modern paradigm to "bear witness", first, we need to understand its origins. According to *the Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma* (2020) the practice of recording testimony first became prevalent during the First World War, where mass media has made the witness a ubiquitous figure. However, the issue of credibility has always been entangled in historical and cultural processes, and it could not be disentangled from the

witness's moral status which is “closely linked to the narrative’s ethical dimension” (Meretoja, 2018, p. 107); thus, Even though victims of genocides meticulously recorded their suffering, the public attributed the “civilized” testimonies about the suffering of the victims more credence than it did to the victims themselves; hence, it was an imperialist perspective of Western countries condemning barbarism in other places.

During the late 1800s and early 1900s, condemnations of mass violence was made by witnesses who were spectators rather than the victims themselves because distant reserve was seen as a sign of credibility. In other words, people only believed people who were not directly exposed to the violence, since they were skeptical about the reliability of their stories. It was not until the Second World War (1939 – 1945) “that victims’ voices became credible evidence of injuries suffered, as credible as the “civilized” spectator’s dismay.” (Dean, 2020, p. 112). Thus, an alteration from suspicion to sympathy has taken place. This shift, has first seen light after the Vietnam War, when the symptoms of shell shock, or PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) were mere evidence to prove psychic trauma among war veterans, thus, they were no longer asked to convince their observers of their mental disorders. Trauma witnesses after the Second World War were not required to verbalize their suffering in order to convey their ordeal to the public. (Onega, 2020, pp. 91-92).

For further illustrations from the history of witnessing and trauma, the western civilization accorded the victim role only to the Jews but not to any other genocide victims at the time, such as Armenians, the Herero of Namibia and the Kikuyu of Kenya (Onega, 2020, p. 113). Nor did they record any testimonies from any anti-colonial movements during that time period. After their countries gained their independence, numerous African leaders were looking to the West for assistance. Their eagerness was caused by the anticipated participation of the United States in the Marshall plan to restore the continent of Europe. The following passage

from *Song for night* (2007) shows how the Western response to African violence fell short of expectations and helped fuel the conflict even further, additional to that, this excerpt also shows the limited time spent training child soldiers prior to their deployment into battlefields.

> Naturally, and in spite of the three weeks of boot-camp training and the formations we have been taught to assume, we scatter for cover, stumbling onto the mines, blowing up ourselves and our friends. It is a particularly cruel way to take out an enemy, but since land mines are banned in civilized warfare, the West practically gives them away at cost and in this way they are cheaper than bullets and other arms. (p. 33)

In a further discussion about the subject of the African history in relation to war victims and colonizers, in *The bite of the mango* (2008) a social worker named Yabom was tasked with preparing and educating Mariatu on the Sierra Leonean history with Britain before she was sent to London for medical care by an Englishman named David. This was done in anticipation of any racist comments Mariatu might hear while in London. She began by praising the origins of the country's name.

> Back in the 1500s, a Portuguese explorer was sailing the West African coast," Yabom began. "When he reached what we call Freetown today, it was storming. The thunder echoed against the mountains, and the sailor thought the noise sounded like roaring lions. He named the area Sierra Lyoa, or Mountain Lion. (Kamara, 2008, p. 102)

This excerpt shows that the culture of a civilization is what distinguishes them from other human communities within the spectrum of mankind. The values of a society might be considered part of its culture, which is typically defined as the total sum of the idiosyncrasies held in common by its members. However, there are underlying characteristics shared by several African societies which is noticed in both our books. It is perceived that the folktales and ancestral traditional tales that were recounted to both our characters by their grandparents had an important role in their upbringing and provided them with hope even through the most difficult of times. The shared past, cultural values, and major practices were frequently emphasized in folktales, My Luck says: "I realize that nothing I know of the world came from my Catholic mother or my Muslim father. All I know comes from the stories Grandfather told

me.” (Abani, 2007, p. 73). My Luck's use of the African oral tradition as a vehicle for displaying his defiance is significant. The goal of My Luck's emotional and spiritual quest is salvation. He feels shame and guilt for having committed acts of violence against others.

Abani addresses questions related to humanity's need for salvation by incorporating religious and mythological motifs to seek redemption. In addition to Mariatu’s remembrance of what her grandmother told her on multiple occasions including dreams, when she dreamed of palm oil “Whenever you dream of palm oil … blood will spill by the end of the day.” (Kamara, 2008, p. 21) and other similar situations. One other example of the African superstitions discussed in the book is the following:

> I stopped dead in my tracks. My grandmother had once told me that every person has a spirit watching over him or her. Some people, if they’re really good, have two or three spirits. These spirits are often relatives who have died, like a grandfather, like Santigie, and sometimes they come to you in the guise of an animal, a bird or a reptile. Here I was looking at the second black cobra of the night. Something was going on, that much I was sure of. (Kamara, 2008, p. 38)

It is clear from the passage above that individuals have a propensity to fantasize about the hereafter, particularly concerning the destiny of their loved ones when they die. Believers in the afterlife find it easier to move on with their lives during times of strife, and they are more likely to keep the hope that they will see their loved ones again, even if it is only in the form of a spirit.

b) Narrative

The concept of "self" has been a source of philosophical inquiry for humans from their earliest days. In spite of the difficulty of this pursuit, mankind has always been on the lookout for his own true identity. *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020) provides a forum in which certain theories can be used to the discussion of individual reactions to collectively experienced traumatic experiences that reflect these types of identities. Despite the

inextricable bond between identity and trauma narratives, the connection between the two is complex. Professor emeritus of Literary Studies at Leiden University, Van Alphen (2018), claims that narratives function as "the medium of identity," which he describes as the story of the self that people tell and that develops over time in order to make sense of their lives, which he dubbed “narrative identity” (p. 68).

Van Alphen claims that shifting cultural norms pose a threat to the concept of narrative identity since the viewpoint of a story shifts depending on its setting; however, Lothe (2020) a Norwegian literary scholar and Professor of English literature at the University of Oslo, argues that challenges that may change the narrator’s perspective, do not diminish the significance of the concept in terms of its applicability to trauma or to narrative. When considering the effects of historical development on narrative identity. What's more, Arendt (1998), a political philosopher, author, and Holocaust survivor, argues that a person's identity and story are significantly impacted by the trauma they overcame. She makes an argument opposing to Ricoeur's fundamental assumptions and findings. To quote her: "Who somebody is or was we can only know by knowing the story of which he himself is the hero — his biography, in other words” (p.186). This can be relevant to our two literary books, given the background of both authors and what they have survived.

Abani was born in Afikpo, Nigeria, on December 27, 1966, to an English mother, Daphne, and a Nigerian Igbo father, Michael. Abani had a privileged infancy with nannies and servants; however, this did not last, alongside with his mother and four siblings, they escaped Nigeria in 1968 to flee the Biafran War (1967-1970). In their way to the airport, his 9-year-old eldest brother Mark was at risk of being captured as a child soldier, but his mother's reaction was as he described "my mother sort of stepping between him and this army commander saying,

you know, we either all go or none of us go, so kill me or let me take my children." (Martin, 2007, 3:35).

These real life scenes were projected into his book *Song for night* (2007): “But the women in the crowd formed a circle around me, a wall between the men and me. “Step aside,” the men said. “So we are down to killing children now?” the women asked, not moving.” (Abani, 2007, p. 66). Afterwards, they lived in England for three years before returning to their home country. Abani would later recreate this pivotal moment in his family's history in *Daphne's Lot* (2003), an epic poem retracing his mother's life and the nature of his relationship with his violent radical father who often beat his mom. He said about his father: “it is possible we would look nothing alike. It is possible we would look exactly alike” (Arrowsmith, 2016), meaning that he resembles physical appearance but not his actions. In a TED talk show, Abani was making a joke about his father saying “growing up in Nigeria with my father, he used to say to me, never eat or drink in a Yoruba person’s house because they will poison you, it makes sense now when I think about it, because if you knew him you would want to poison him too” (Abani, 2007). This is reflected in the following:

> He beat me so bad; and my mother watched, afraid or unable to help, I wasn’t sure why, but I hated her for it. Why would she let this goat possess her? One day she showed me the crawl space in the ceiling, and I would hide up there for hours crocheting, wrapped around the wooden beams, building one huge web that became a hammock, became a shelter. (Abani, 2007, p. 43)

In an interview on NPR News *All Things Considered* (2007), hosted by Michel Martin Abani was asked the following: “It's my understanding that you had been a political prisoner in Nigeria, and I wondered whether you had experienced any of the things that you've written about in this book?” (Martin, 2007, 3:35), Abani’s answer was negative:

> No, not so much in this book… you know, I grew up in a very strange context. I grew up biracial in a post-Civil War country. I grew up playing in burned-out tanks with skeletons hanging from trees that we made - you know, with guns lying around, and cases where my cousin and I were playing catch with a live grenade that we didn't know was alive and he ended up losing his fingers when it exploded… (Martin, 2007, 3:38)

He then added about the story setting “I sort of thought it was a sad commentary on the region of the world where I come from that you could throw a war literally anywhere in West Africa, and it can stick.” (Martin, 2007, 2:25). This was about his novella, *Song for Night* (2007), in which he clarified, "It's meant to be not nation-specific, it is region-specific, it's West Africa.” (Martin, 2007, 2:23). However, his reference to his country cannot be denied since the main character “speaks” the Igbo language, a language specific to south eastern Nigeria and he made allusion several times to what is claimed to be the Biafra river which evokes memories of the Nigeria-Biafra Civil War.

> You would also know then that my inner-speech is not in English, because there is something atavistic about war that rejects all but the primal language of the genes to comprehend it, so you are in fact hearing my thoughts in Igbo. But we shan’t waste time on trying to figure all that out because as I said before, time here is precious and not to be wasted on peculiarities, only on what is essential. (Abani, 2007, p. 17)

These personal life experiences inspired Abani to write *Song for Night* (2007), In addition to that, while researching about child land mine diffusers in civil conflicts, he discovered that "some of them would accidentally set off a mine, and in the explosion, they would scream and startle the other kids who would shatter through minefield." (Martin, 2007, 2:02) which prompted him to write about a character whose vocal chords are cut, he also added that “the novella works on two levels. One is sort of that immediate physical journey, and then there's another spiritual and emotional journey of memory. So that's recuperating his humanity through this journey.” (Martin, 2007, 1:30).

The bite of the mango (2008) by Kamara is a narrative told from the author's own personal experience. The author was motivated to create this book after reading *A long way gone* (2007), an autobiographical novel written by Ishmael Beah, a former child soldier who served in the Sierra Leonean Civil War. Both the chronological and geographical settings of this book took place during the conflict. Today, Kamara is a present-day UNICEF special Representative, author, and survivor of the Sierra Leonean Civil War. Her book *The Bite of the*

Mango (2009) takes its name from the first food Mariatu ate after she was attacked. Kamara describes her experiences as a child growing up in Sierra Leone during the Civil War. Written with the help of the Canadian author Susan McClelland, an award-winning magazine journalist and author.

In an interview with Krause-Leipoldt (2009), Kamara said that she has been encouraged by her family and friends, as well as the inspirational message her life story conveys and "how it affects people and helps them reflect on their life." (2009). Kamara established her own foundation that is called The Mariatu Foundation to help build homes for women and children in her hometown. In the same interview, she also explained:

> I am the right person to help because I experienced the same problem they did. I experience the same pain. I can offer assistance to help them move forward in their lives. People are still suffering even though the war is officially over. People are asking for help. When I go back to Sierra Leone I see people – women and children – begging on the streets. That is something I did. That breaks my heart. I had a second chance in life in coming to Canada. But they don´t have that opportunity. The only thing I can do to help them is studying how to become a counselor, to establish my foundation, and to ask people to support my work to build homes for these people in Sierra Leone to help get them off the street. My biggest issue is to build them a home and give them training, so they can support themselves and help themselves rather than relying on other people. There are so many people that need counselling (Kamara, 2009).

These comments on stories and identities suggest that recollections, even painful recollections, are integral to each author and their writings. Reading the author's autobiography or biography can help see the ways in which their personal experiences inspired their writing. Character development is crucial to any good narrative. Knowing and understanding characters and their actions thoroughly whether in fiction or nonfiction. The concepts of narrative and individuality need reference to the past, either explicitly or implicitly. "If I cannot conceive of narrative divorced from memory, neither can I think of my own identity without remembering something of myself before the point or stage of my life where I am now." (Lothe, 2020, p. 153). Meaning that, in the same way that a person cannot conceive of a story without recalling it, he cannot conceive of himself without pondering on his past.

Anyone who has undergone a traumatic experience and is interested in addressing it, is entitled to do so according to their own discretion and without restriction. However, not all individuals who have been through traumatic situations have the desire or the ability to talk about it. Depending on the nature of the traumatic experience, and the victim's ability to remember the event, which may either improve or become impeded with time. If a person does not receive treatment, traumatic memories may cause a torrent of upsetting images, sounds, and feelings in his system as we can witness in the course of our two main protagonists, Mariatu and My Luck. The therapeutic approach in the field of psychiatry that is referred to as "trauma narrative" allows patients to revisit traumatic memories of their past experiences while also assisting them in making sense of those memories.

In a branch of film studies that is increasingly preoccupied with moral questions, the nine-hour *Shoah* (1985) documentary by the French filmmaker Claude Lanzmann has risen to prominence. The tone of the film is strongly determined by Lanzmann's use of the film's aesthetics to ask probing questions about how moral values influence what individuals do. There is a direct connection between the song Srebnik sings in the present day of the film and the one he sung for the Nazis in the past. The fact that he had not moved from his posture in spite of the scenery around him added more to the complete image. According to Jacques Rancière, this opening is "provocative" (Rancière, 1996, p. 158).

> Srebnik does not, or cannot, talk much, but his singing is remarkably suggestive. In addition to its intrinsic value as a narrative fragment and an act of memory, it becomes an important leitmotif. In the filmic present, Srebnik is singing as a free man; when he sang the same song for the Nazi guards, he knew that his death was imminent. As a viewer I can see Srebnik in a small boat framed by a beautiful and peaceful landscape, but I cannot see the extermination camp that he miraculously survived.

The question that can be asked here is: is it ethically justifiable for Lanzmann to compel Srebnik to repeat what the Nazis forced him to do? His singing must be uncomfortable for him since it recalls and likely worsens a horrific memory. However, his singing might be a means

for him to cope with that event. As a consequence of all the tension, we can better comprehend the role the theater group had in helping Mariatu recover following Abdul's death, via performances that included dramatic songs and dances that conveyed the depth of their grief. That is why it is so crucial to depict tales and memories via art, as seen by the following passage from Song for Night (2007), in which My Luck tries to recall his Grandfather's Song in order to soothe his pain:

> He taught me a song. We sang it over and over, together, for the rest of the night until I couldn't tell where his voice ended and mine began, and where mine ended and the river began and where the river ended and my blood began. But I have forgotten that song. I wish I hadn't because I think it would bring me much comfort to sing it. Oh well, I think, eating the last of the fish, wondering whose soul I can taste smoking down to my stomach, and if anyone has eaten mine yet. (Abani, 2007, p. 50)

Lothe (2020) believes that experience surpasses narrative, yet when it is recalled, it often takes on a narrative structure. It is advisable to use narrative identity carefully since it can be challenging to put a traumatic occurrence into a story, no matter how fragmented and disorganized it may be. For both the storyteller and the listener, reader, or spectator, narrative may provide light on certain facets of human identity (p. 156). Brockmeier (2015) also indicates that narrative is both a language and a tool for "existential meaning-making" (p. 51). Understanding the meaning of a narrative is a communicative process. A writer or filmmaker conveys a message to a reader or viewer (which may or may not be explicit), and the recipient interprets and acts upon that message.

Another way a narrative may be presented or portrayed is through the use of several narrators and characters, each of whom may present the story from a unique perspective. Both closeness and remove from a story's action can produce a broad variety of moral quandaries and outcomes. There is a moral dimension to a survivor's decision to tell their story, which is an effort to find meaning in the aftermath of a devastating event. Thus, this talk on tales and trauma is connected to and intended to expand upon narrative ethics. (p. 154). Both book

characters struggle with their moral values and morality. There is the significant remorse that Mariatu felt following Abdul's death. "She's such a good person, and I'm rotten. I killed Abdul." (Kamara, 2008, p. 111) in addition to the image of My Luck as a perpetrator of violence; yet, the narratives have been successful in presenting the child side of both of them, putting away all of their deeds of violence during the conflict and showcasing their humane side instead. These two aspects of the books will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter II: Victimhood and perpetrator trauma in *Song for Night* (2007) and *The bite of the mango* (2008):

The beginnings of war trauma studies, or "shell shock," may be traced back to the First World War (1914-1918), when psychiatrists, Freud included, recognized an increase in psychiatric illnesses among soldiers. They presumed at first that these symptoms were due to cowardice, constant bombardment or the loss of their comrades, in other words, as a result of being victims of violence rather than committers of violence by considering their trauma as "only a response to threats to one's own life" "exposure to actual or threatened death", "directly experiencing the traumatic event(s)", or "witnessing in person, the event(s) as it occurred to others" (Black and Grant, 2014, p. 158). However, scholars slowly and gradually shed light on both perspectives by the emergence of the Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, during the Vietnam War.

In his early psychoanalytic theorization of trauma, Freud, a cornerstone in the psychological studies of trauma, included the idea of perpetrator traumas. Over the course of his fragmented work on trauma, which includes *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) with Josef Breuer, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), and *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud developed the defining characteristics of the psychoanalytic account of traumatic neurosis, including the functions of initial repression of the traumatic event, an essential latency period in which the event remains unassimilated in the psyche. It's important to remember that Freud's examples of traumatization included both victims and violent perpetrators as explained in the following quotation:

> he derives his discussion of repetition-compulsion in Beyond the Pleasure Principle from Torquato Tasso's tale of Tancred in La Gerusalemme liberata (1581), in which Tancred "unwittingly kills his beloved Clorinda in a duel while she is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight"; later, in his grief, Tancred "slashes with his sword at a tall tree; but blood streams from the cut and the voice of Clorinda, whose soul is imprisoned in the tree, is heard complaining that he has wounded his beloved once again" (Freud

> 1920: 16). The distraught Tancred is thus compelled to repeat an essential aspect of his original trauma; however, this trauma is rooted in his experience not as a victim of violence but as a perpetrator of it. (p. 102)

In his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), Freud noted after the end of WWI that "The terrible war which has just ended gave rise to a great number of illnesses of this kind" (p. 12) and by these illnesses, he meant traumatic neurosis such as, hallucination, hysteria and repulsive neuroses, which is the desire of people to repeat unpleasant experiences, Freud argued that after going through shock either from "fright" or "physical wounds" the patient is fixated on his original life-threatening situation. These reminiscences might manifest through dreams or flashbacks (Freud, 2001, pp. 12-13), something Abani explicitly referred to in this passage "I see Ijeoma standing off to the left. She smiles sadly and says: "You aren't dreaming, My Luck, my love. These are memories. Before we can move from here, we have to relive and release our darkness." (Abani, 2007, p. 69).

Freud's trauma theory relies heavily on the concept of repetition compulsion, which describes a psychological phenomenon in which a person feels compelled to repeatedly reenact a particular event or the conditions surrounding that event. This may involve playing out the experience again or putting oneself in circumstances that increase the likelihood that the event may occur again. This "re-living" can also occur in the form of nightmares, in which the person recalls and re-experiences the events of the traumatic event, and may even hallucinate aspects of it.

> The study of dreams may be considered the most trustworthy method of investigating deep mental processes. Now dreams occurring in traumatic neuroses have the characteristic of repeatedly bringing the patient back into the situation of his accident, a situation from which he wakes up in another fright. This astonishes people far too little. They think the fact that the traumatic experience is constantly forcing itself upon the patient even in his sleep is a proof of the strength of that experience: the patient is, as one might say, fixated to his trauma (p. 13).

Since perpetration is inherently immoral, it seems at odds to see the trauma experienced by certain offenders as a cause for concern. which has depended chiefly on studies on trauma

suffered by combat veterans, both involve the perpetrator in a hidden fashion from the very beginning of modern trauma theory. The perpetrator is also embedded in the psychiatric explanations that reinforce post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which depend heavily on the trauma experienced by troops in the line of duty. The aetiology of trauma is quite different for the perpetrator of violence and the victim of violence, but the symptomatology, encompassing both psychological and somatic components including anxiety, panic, sadness, irritability, and physical complaints, is relatively comparable in both circumstances.

Mariatu, a victim: “I had no energy left as a boy took my other arm and held it down on the boulder. It took three attempts to cut off my left hand. Even at that, some of the flesh remained and hung precariously loose” (Kamara, 2007, p. 31). My Luck, a perpetrator: “We had seen fathers shoot their children on our orders, sons rape their mothers, children forced to hack their parents to death—the worst atrocities—all of which we witnessed impassively” (Abani, 2007, p. 69).

Above are two excerpts from each book that support the aforementioned explanations of the role of each character, which leads us to the concepts of Victimhood and Perpetrator trauma as we can see victims and perpetrators are two juxtaposing but interrelated concepts. The culprits who have a diverse background in terms of “age, gender, profession, nationality, race and ethnicity, religious identity, history of violence, etc.” deceit the victim who gains the sympathy of the people, contrarily to the perpetrator who draws their antipathy; however, “While the aetiology of trauma is very different in the case of the perpetrator of violence than it is in the case of the victim, the symptomatology in both contexts is quite similar” (McGlothin, 2020, pp. 101-107)

The following are some of traumatic disorders that we could spot in the two book characters of the two literary works:

a) Anxiety: Anxiety is a state of mind characterized by concern or dread that can range in intensity from moderate to extreme. Meeting new people, particularly foreign press, or experiencing new forms of situations for the first time are a few of Mariatu's biggest sources of anxiety. “ECOMOG soldiers were helping people disembark from the truck. My body tightened when it was my turn, and my lips started to quiver” (Kamara, 2008, p. 46). Equally, smoking is My Luck's refuge when being anxious and it is a symptom of his nervousness “I light another cigarette from my never-ending pack and inhale deeply” (Abani, 2007, p. 88)

b) Panic: Rapid heartbeat, shallow breathing, and profuse perspiration are just some of the physical manifestations of panic attacks, which are characterized by intense, abrupt emotions of dread and worry: “I decided in a panic. But I didn’t want to be one of those girls. My body began to shake. A knot formed in my throat. Choking back tears » (Kamara, 2008, p. 29) “I am in shock for a moment, then I drop my head back and howl at the moon. The hard convulsions of my throat, not the sound, wakes me.” (Abani, 2007, 94)

c) Depression: Depression is a mental condition characterized by an overarching sense of melancholy and a general lack of interest in most activities. After the loss of her son, Mariatu went through a severe depressive episode before she actually joined the theater troupe that helped her recover “Since finding out I was pregnant, I’d endured serious bouts of depression.” (Kamara, 2008, p. 74). As for My Luck, he lost all sense of joy, even discovering his platoon could not bring him any delight, he was preoccupied with nothing but death. “I have lost all sense of time and don’t remember night coming upon us. It seems like just a moment ago I was standing in broad daylight in a field of dead men.” (Abani, 2007, p. 76).

d) nightmares: Exposure to trauma in a war zone has been linked most strongly to nightmares. both Mariatu and My Luck had an amount of nightmares to which they woke up in fright in a cold sweat, terrified: “Adamsay was always doing nice things for me, like holding me in her

arms when I had a bad dream at night." (Kamara, 2008, p. 100) "I always wake up sweating, the dreams leaving a tangy bitter aftertaste for hours." (Abani, 2007, p. 46)

e) Flashbacks: Whenever anything brings up a painful memory from the past, it's called a flashback. It is possible to experience the same range of feelings, behaviors, and bodily sensations associated with the original event while reliving it in the present: "The letter chilled me to the bone, reigniting all my terrible memories." (Kamara, 2008, p. 65) "my mind staggers back in time, but fragments are all I stumble over." (Abani, 2007, p. 57)

Another Freudian concept that is found in the narratives is "screen memory" where the story's protagonists recall prior events that may appear inconsequential, but are actually suppressed and condensed memories that have a far greater meaning. In psychoanalytic theory, a repressed memory is a memory of a childhood event, usually a small one, that unconsciously serves to hide or block out a more important or even traumatic events that happened around the same time. Also known as cover memory or substitute memory. "Through the processes, already familiar to you, of condensation and more specifically of displacement, what is important is replaced in memory by something else which appears unimportant." (Freud, 1978 [1917], p. 237). Mariatu's anxious frame of consciousness caused her to unconsciously dream about palm oil, a substance that her grandma associated with blood spilling in her childhood. "Whenever you dream of palm oil … blood will spill by the end of the day." (Kamara, 2008, p. 21).

In another excerpt, My Luck encounters a World War I veteran at a pub; The veteran gives My Luck chicken before yelling and firing his gun at him. "I hear the other soldiers laughing about how the older man always sees ghosts and demons coming for him. I wonder why he thinks I am a ghost. How do ghosts appear?" (Abani, 2007, p. 67). This line not only describes the PTSD of the veteran old man, but also that of My Luck, who now wonders whether

or not he was dead. Later in the story, after having dreams about his deceased beloved, My Luck raises the same question about being dead once more and unsure of whether he is in the world of the living or the dead. “I have no idea what she means. Does she mean I am going to die? Or that I am dead? I am pretty sure I’m not dead though, because that would make me a ghost, and I am pretty sure I would know if I was.” (Abani, 2007, p. 70).

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, PTSD, is a relevant theme in postwar modernist literature. Mariatu and My Luck regularly experience hallucinations, flash-backs and dreams in which they see the dead,

> He dies, mouth open. There is nothing heroic about it. This confuses me; can a ghost die? My jaw drops as another soldier looks up at me, eyes misty, transparent, mouth open in a smoke trail of speech. I shut my eyes tightly and shake my head. When I open them, the phantom soldier has gone. I scan the horizon; nothing. Then like mist, he coalesces again. (Abani, 2007, p. 73)

> I’d hear Abdul crying and I’d wake with a start. Relief swept through me, until I realized I’d been dreaming. A frequent dream was feeling Abdul lying on my stomach. I’d awake hugging him, only to find he was not there. (Kamara, 2008, p. 82)

As a result of war trauma, Lifton (1970) believes that “bearing witness forged a bond both between the survivors and the dead” (p. 204). This also may remind us of the Eros and the Thanatos drives, that swing between the will of living and the will of dying. With the publication of his book "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" in 1920, Freud came to the conclusion that all instincts belong to one of two major classes: life drives and death drives, subsequently referred to as Eros and Thanatos by other psychologists. Freud's theory of drives gave attention to the idea that there is an intrinsic principle of chaos, a propensity for the disintegration of life, known as the Death drive, or Thanatos, with his famous quote in The Pleasure Principle “the aim of all life is death.”. On the other hand, Freud characterized the Life drive, also known as Eros, as a balanced tendency toward preserving life. The life drive, often known as sexual impulses or libido, is concerned with fundamental reproduction, pleasure, and survival.

Communities all over the African continent have been subjected to a significant amount of mental anguish as a direct result of living in a region that is perpetually plagued by conflict, violence, and oppression. The victims of the African Civil War go through the painful events that have been described previously; yet, what exactly is a war victim? As highlighted by Onega (2020), the definition of the word victim has altered from the primary definition of the 1989 edition of *The Oxford English Dictionary* as the Christian ecclesiastical context of the Christ as an offering for mankind, or as the sacrificial pagan ritual to becoming "A person harmed, injured, or killed as a result of a crime, accident, or other event or action.". The 2018 edition of *Oxford Living English Dictionaries* is followed by three sub definitions:

> 1.1 A person who is tricked or duped. […]
> 1.2 A person who has come to feel helpless and passive in the face of misfortune or ill-treatment. […]
> 1.3 A living creature killed as a religious sacrifice.

Van Djik in his article *Free the victim: a critique of the western conception of victimhood* (2009) however, has underlined the advantages and disadvantages of associating the definition of the word "victims" in Western languages, as well as Hebrew and Arabic, with the origins of the term as "the sacrificial ones". He indicates that the positive side of this association is that it impedes the possibility of revenge and infinite violence; yet, its drawback is that alliance is that these "sacrificial objects" are assumed to implement a social role of "passivity and forgiveness […] thus denying them the capacity for agency and resilience" (p. 93). This stigmatization according to Van Djik is an inherent threat of society, given the fact that the moment the victims refuse to perform the victim role, that sympathy turns into antipathy.

As an illustration the above explained point, when Mariatu announced that she was no longer willing to stay in the United Kingdom and was interested in moving to Canada instead, her assistant, Mariama, reacted as follows: "'Don't be so ungrateful,' Mariama scolded." (Kamara, 2008, p. 117). After she refused to get her prosthetic hands done because she felt

uncomfortable using them, she still received the same reprimanded response. Again, the same feeling of the fear of disappointing her expected victim role has followed her to Canada once she realized that her story has been distorted, "I was scared that if people knew the truth about my rape or my dislike of prosthetic hands, they would abandon me. I didn't want to let them down, either. Everyone seemed so proud of me." (p. 147).

Another perspective to tackle with the term "victim" is that "There is a kind of stigma that victims feel uncomfortable with; the use of the terminology "victim" is synonymous with weakness, synonymous with degradation this is why Mariatu felt more comfortable being creative, alive and productive in order to be treated as a survivor instead, which is one of the first reason why she has decided to write her autobiography. "The heart of my country is the heart of the people who helped me see myself not as a victim but as someone who could still do great things in this world." (Kamara, 2008, p. 160)

The paradigm of the modern world assigns Mariatu the role of the weak victim by placing her on display for the public to nourish his infatuation. In his 2004 book *Distant Suffering*, Boltanski discusses the peril of making these mediated acts of aggression into compulsion-inducing spectacles. when the observer is helpless to alter the circumstances in which the suffering is taking place. He suggests that viewers openly discuss what they have seen and how it has affected them "when the viewer cannot act directly to affect the circumstances in which the suffering is taking place" in order to avoid the danger of collusive silence denounced by Primo Levi (Onega, 2020, p. 96).

> Everything is organized around the deprived, frustrated, handicapped subject, and the victim strategy is that of his acknowledgement as such. […] So we move into a situation of the celebration of one's deficit, one's misfortune, one's personal insignificance – with the intellectual and media discourse, by its simultaneously sadistic and sentimental takeover of these matters, sanctioning people's right to their own suffering, their consecration as victims and the loss of their natural defenses. The victims themselves do not complain, since they get the benefit of confessing their misery. (p. 137)

In his book *The ideal crime* (2002) Baudrillard describes how modern technologies have ushered in a society with a "new victim order." He asserts that every part of modern civilization is edging toward a compulsively sought distinctive Other or a continual extrapolation of one from the other. According to him, in desperate need to identify ourselves as subjects "we liquidated the Other" (p. 137). He believes that "All forms of sexist, racist, ethnic or cultural discrimination arise out of the same profound disaffection and out of a collective mourning, a mourning for a dead otherness, set against a background of general indifference." For instance, "The humanitarian seeks the other just as desperately in the form of a victim to aid." (p. 132). Thus, the contemporary world has adapted an obsessional need for a victim society to "prove its own existence a *contrario*" (p. 132).

As we notice *The Bite of the Mango* (2008) is full of media interventions and press, since trauma paradigm has captured a large interest in the area of social studies (Sanyal, 2015, 184) in contrast to perpetrator trauma, which, due to the delicate nature of the topic, has only received a limited amount of coverage. Which brings us to the following question: given that Mariatu was a child when she became a victim of "rebel boys," is My Luck, the rebel boy, any different from her? Do they merit the same level of investigation and compassion? Especially that we noticed the similarity of their traumatic episodes. These enquiries remind us of Butler's notion of a worthy life where she sought to respond to the following inquiries: "who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, what makes for a grievable life?" (p. 20) This division between grievable and ungrievable victims, along with the victim society's construction of an artificial Other-as-different, may be considered to represent a phobic process of dehumanization and derealisation of the Other which fosters a system of violence.

> If violence is done against those who are unreal, then, from the perspective of violence, it fails to injure or negate those lives since those lives are already negated. But they have a strange way of remaining animated and so must be negated again (and again). They cannot be mourned because they are always already lost or, rather, never "were", and they must be killed, since they seem to live on, stubbornly, in this state of deadness.

> Violence renews itself in the face of the apparent inexhaustibility of its object. This derealisation of the "Other" means that it is neither alive nor dead, but interminably spectral. (p. 33)

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) has typically been associated with victims of traumatic situations or those who assisted them since its inclusion in formal psychiatric diagnosis in 1980. Scholars such as Dominick LaCapra (2014) recognized around the turn of the century that criminals might feel surprised and disturbed after committing violence against others. In 2005, psychologist Rachel MacNair coined the term "Perpetrator-Induced Traumatic Stress" to describe a subtype of PTSD devoted to perpetrator trauma (PITS). Her key point was that victimizers might not only have intrusive symptoms like flashbacks, nightmares, and unpleasant thoughts, but that these symptoms can be worse than those experienced by innocent victims due to the component of agency in perpetration (97). This shift to perpetrator trauma is contentious due to the ethical issues of studying those who harm others. This new emphasis on perpetrator trauma is contentious because it raises ethical concerns about how to research those who harm others. The prospect of gaining a deeper grasp of history and mankind is most likely the primary reason why many modern authors have begun to focus on the offender rather than the victim in their depiction of tragedies.

The seeming simplicity of the phrase "perpetrator trauma" in comparison to the staggering range of experiences included under the umbrella notion of perpetration is, according to McGlothin (2020), one of the most troublesome challenges engaged in the discussion of perpetrator trauma. The delicate nature of the subject matter has led to sharp disagreements among reviewers. Contrarily to Vice (2016) who considers trauma as "a diagnostic rather than a moral concept" (p. 16), Mohamed (2015) believes that "Trauma is not merely a psychological empathy" but rather "a moral category that identifies its subject as a person who merits empathy and deserves to be heard." (p. 1173). The idea that violent criminals suffer trauma as a result of their violent acts has been met with skepticism by academics, yet it

lingers like "an unwelcome ghost" (Morag, 2013, p. 4) in the form of an "uncannily but obscurely shadowed theories" (McGlothin, 2020, p.100).

> I prayed hard, so hard my head began to throb. When I opened my eyes, there was a group of rebel boys staring right at me. If it hadn't been for their red eyes, their guns, and the knives in their hands, it would have been like opening my eyes after counting to a hundred during a game of hide-and seek, and finding the village kids smiling in front of me. (Kamara, 2008, p. 27)

The moral conflict, shame, and guilt produced by taking a life in combat are not emphasized in the definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Due to the ambiguous portrayal of the perpetrator in trauma discourse, we lack a clear understanding of what perpetrator trauma is, how it varies from victim trauma, and how it manifests as a different dynamic in cultural artifacts. According to Morag, the lack of study on perpetrator trauma is partly the result of "under-theorization" (Morag, 2013, p. 3). The term "perpetrator-induced traumatic stress" (PITS) was coined by MacNair to describe "those components of PTSD symptomatology, at clinical or subclinical levels, that arise from events that would be traumatic if the person in question were a victim, but for which the person in question was a cause" (MacNair, 2002, p. 7).

Trauma theory is gradually shedding light on it as a psychological phenomenon as well as a cultural and creative emblem after only lately recognizing perpetrator trauma as a hidden figure. A taxonomic and philosophical framework is provided by MacNair's comparative and synthesis study on the psychological repercussions of killing across settings and populations from 2002, which offers a way to think about the potentially terrible effects violence may have on the perpetrator Taking into account the devastating effects of using violence, such as guilt and fear of punishment:

> I smile and something in my face softens her, and for a minute her eyes are pure tenderness and the look unsettles me, brings back memories of the first woman I raped, a woman her age, and I stumble back confused, wondering if she is real or if she is a

> ghost, an apparition drawn by the river goddess mami-wata from my guilt; to punish me. (Abani, 2007, p. 57)

> My heart leapt. What if Mohamed was right? What if I could leave this place full of so much sadness, end my days of feeling worthless because I had to beg richer Sierra Leoneans for handouts? Abdul still entered my dreams at night. When I passed other babies at the camp, slung on their mothers' backs, I'd look away and quicken my pace. Moving to a foreign place might be a remedy for the guilt that still plagued me. (Kamara, 2008, p. 92)

In the same context, for moral and political scholars, the presence of children in armed organizations poses difficult concerns. These issues revolve on our fixed views of what it is to be a child, the dynamics between child victims and child violence perpetrators, and the interplay of independence, dependency, and vulnerability. Children, are those who are defined under the first article of the Convention on the Rights of the Child as "every human being below the age of eighteen years" (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989). Children who ordinarily require unequivocal guardianship are specified in article 6 of the same convention:

1. States Parties recognize that every child has the inherent right to life.

2. States Parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child.

Nonetheless, children make good soldiers, which is an unfortunate reality behind their usage in combat, accordingly, annihilate their right to life and protection. "There are estimated to be more than a quarter of a million child combatants in wars around the globe" (Dallaire, 2010, p. 125). Between 2005 and 2020, around 93,000 minors were verified as being recruited and utilized to join armed conflicts, while the true number of recruitments is thought to be substantially higher. (UNICEF, 2021). Over 40% of the child soldiers are female, "I had never heard of girl rebels before, but there they were. They wore the same combat pants and red bandanas as the boys and men, and a few of the girls carried guns and had bullets wrapped around their bodies in a similar fashion." (Mariatu, 2008, p. 25).

There are multiple reasons for the recruitment of children in wars. Firstly, child soldiers are regarded as less expensive to recruit and train, “Having trained our eyes, they began to train our legs, feet, and toes. We learned to balance on one leg for hours at a time, forty-pound packs on our backs in so many odd and different positions that we looked like flamingos on drugs” (Abani, 2007, Pp. 24-66) Secondly, because most adult forces are hesitant to fire on children; thus, they easily penetrate enemy territory combined with their enthusiasm to join and take risks “we all wanted to join then: to fight” (Abani, 2007, p. 16). They have been also used as distractions, since no one would suspect a child, but they would rather help them.

> The woman holding the cup explained that she had heard of girls like me being used as decoys. My mind drifted back to the girls I’d seen in Manarma with the rebels. Apparently the girls would feign injury and get unsuspecting villagers to help them. While everyone was busy with that, the rebels would sneak into the village unnoticed and attack. (Mariatu, 2008, p. 40)

When discussing solutions to the problem of child soldiers, there is a common belief that one must choose between treating them as children or as soldiers. This seeming conflict renders us unable of arriving at objective moral judgments. There are just two possible outcomes: they are either war victims or war criminals. From a standpoint of impartiality, this tension raises some serious problems. Most juvenile soldiers join violent extremist organizations that have a history of committing atrocities against civilian populations.

> We came, we surrounded them and cut some of them, killed them, put tires over them and burned them... I killed some, put tires on them, beat them, including the civilians who were with them. We took some of their properties and after that we went to Magburaka. We were shooting, advancing. We were shouting, we were happy, we were clapping (Samura, 2002)

The vast majority of people appear to be preoccupied with how young child soldiers are and how fragile they are as a result of this, and as a result, they do not consider child soldiers legally accountable. In the recent years however, several authors shed a spotlight on the issue of child soldiers both as victims and perpetrators, for instance we mention: A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier. by Ishmael Beah. Let’s Go Swimming on Doomsday by Natalie C.

Anderson. Beasts of No Nation (2005) by Uzodinma Iweala and Allah Is Not Obliged by Ahmadou Kourouma. These works challenge the assumptions that child soldiers are predators or members of a lost generation by revealing the realities of the child soldiers' lives. By focusing on the shared characteristics of those living in chronic poverty and those at risk, the contributors want to dispel misunderstandings about violence's origins in the past or in other cultures. Each essay delves deeper into a specific aspect of child soldiering, including the law and ethics surrounding the practice.

In an effort to "redeem" these youngsters from the perceived harm caused by the traumatic experiences they encountered while serving in war, humanitarian interventions for former child soldiers have predominantly concentrated over a long period of time. Youth from vulnerable populations (such as those who are orphaned, immigrants, members of religious or ethnic minorities, or otherwise on the margins of society) are common targets for youth recruitment drives. The most prevalent method is to kidnap potential recruits. A kidnapped child may be subjected to physical or sexual abuse, torturous interrogation techniques, or coerced into committing acts of violence against his own family members. Historically, the concept of "autonomy" has been pitted against "protection" as an approach to children's rights. Not a legal issue, but rather a philosophical disagreement about infancy lies at the heart of this argument.

Current trauma theory has focused almost entirely on the victim as the single individual who feels the catastrophic effects of violence, and as a result, both the phenomenon of perpetrator trauma and its representation in literature have been largely disregarded. Children's rights law, on the other hand, treats child soldiers as victims rather than perpetrators, or what is known in René Gerard’s theory as Scapegoats. René Girard's theory, "The Mimetic Desire" is based upon the idea that culture becomes overshadowed as it gets less distinct, he asserts that “If human beings suddenly ceased imitating, all forms of culture would vanish.” (Girard et al,

1978, p. 7). This Mimetic Desire develops in the direction of a contagious rivalry, resulting in two facsimiles who become progressively obsessed with one another.

> In Stendhal's The Red and the Black, the character Monsieur de Renal decides to hire the tutor Julien Sorel on the basis that his rival, Monsieur Valenod, is thought to be planning to do the same. As it tums out, Valenod wasn't planning this, but now that Sorel has been employed by Monsieur de Renal, Valenod also attempts to hire him—although both men are, in actual fact, indifferent to the educational possibilities of tutoring and seem to care very little for the tutor himself. (Fleming, 2014, p. 3)

Girard refers to this increase of conflict that gradually destroys cultures as a "sacrificial crisis", asserting that, at the moment that the mimetic crisis threatens to overwhelm society as more individuals commit acts of retaliation against one another, a violent resolution will arise at the most acute climax of the struggle since it is an inevitable cultural response to chaos. Eventually, a coping mechanism would display itself as “a scapegoat” by focusing all the blame on a defenseless, marginal Other as a common enemy, in order to restore a temporary peaceful resolution. He explains that in order to have a steady stance on some act of collective violence the scapegoat mechanism “must remain nonconscious. The persecutors do not realize that they chose their victim for inadequate reasons, or perhaps for no reason at all, more or less at random” (Girard, 1987, p. 78).

On the other hand, Girard believes that the purpose of some religious rituals is to perpetuate the peace attained via scapegoating by legitimizing sacrifice through using the virtuous accredited violence against the condemned vilified person. To illustrate, in the cannibal tribe of Tupinamba, after capturing their prisoners they feed them for some days but then when their execution is near, they stop doing so and “The prisoner was permitted during this period to lay about him with his fists, to steal fowl and geese and other things, and to do his utmost to avenge his coming death.” (Girard, 1923, p. 275). We can apply this on child soldiers and refugees or beggars who were labelled as corrupt, unethical, monstrous or “killing machines” thus they sacrificed them as scapegoats.

IV. General Conclusion:

Case studies of the trauma induced by West African civil conflicts can be found in literary works like *Song for night* (2007) by Abani and *The bite of the mango* (2008) by Kamara and McClelland (2008). This master's dissertation aimed to combine both novels to show the similarities between them in the light of comparative literature using Trauma literary theory depending on *The Routledge companion to literature and trauma* (2020). The discussion made me conclude that both books fall under the same concepts despite the different aetiology of the main characters' trauma. The two main characters witnessed the same traumatic experiences like amputation, rape, and the loss of loved ones, alongside with living in difficult civil war areas. These similar traumatic events led Mariatu and My Luck to have similar mental and physical traumas. heir reactions were fluctuating between both silent speechlessness and silent expressiveness, in order to portray their emotions and psychological struggles.

According to our findings about the topics of childhood and traumatic experiences, Mariatu and My Luck did not have peaceful childhoods, nor treated as such by the adults who made them responsible for their own life and held them accountable for their actions. The western media has contributed to perpetuating a set of stereotypes that have been used in a dehumanizing manner towards people from these nations. By using child soldiers and child refugees, they portrayed the state of affairs in these countries as a result of their involvement in the conflict. The two books talk about identity in connection to both parties, as trauma perpetrators and victims. Yet, the results of my research showed that both of them suffer from the same sets of symptoms, depending on their narratives, and their ways of narrating them, which made it possible for us to compare between both books.

The temporal synchronicity in the composition and subsequent publication of both novels, despite originating in different African countries, underscores the striking parallels

among West African nations—a thematic thread woven throughout this comparative exploration. The juxtaposition of Mariatu's challenging upbringing and Abani's more privileged one reveals a surprising commonality in their life experiences. This attests to the indiscriminate impact of war conflicts, transcending socioeconomic boundaries and affecting both the privileged and the less fortunate.

In essence, *Song for night* (2007) by Abani and *The bite of the mango* (2008) by Kamara and McClelland illuminate the shared struggles faced by African nations in the aftermath of the colonial era. These narratives poignantly depict the challenges stemming from a tumultuous history, shedding light on the resilience of individuals amid adversity. It becomes evident that the tumultuous post-colonial landscape and its attendant hardships were exacerbated by a corrupt ruling system perpetuated through neocolonialism. The collective narratives presented in these works serve as powerful testimonials to the enduring impact of historical legacies on the contemporary African experience, transcending borders and socioeconomic divides.

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