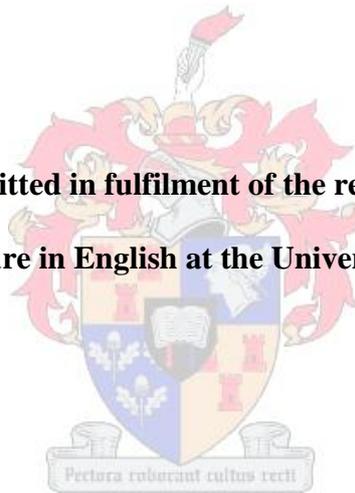


**Representations of Troubled Childhoods in Selected Post-1990 African Fiction in
English**

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**A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Literature in English at the University of Stellenbosch**



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Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own work and has never been submitted for any award of a degree at any university.

.....

Edgar Fred Nabutanyi

.....

Date

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Dedication

For Princess Lunyoro **aka** Nkosazana

Abstract

The study explores representations of troubled childhoods in post-1990 African narratives. Defining troubled childhoods as the experiences of children exposed to different forms of violations including physical, psychological, sexual and emotional abuse, the study reflects on depictions of such experiences in a selection of contemporary African fictional texts in English. The study's central thesis is that, while particular authors' deployment of affective writing techniques offers implicit analysis of troubled childhoods, the knowledge about this reality that such literary texts produce and place in the public sphere resonates with readers because of the narrative textures that both make knowledge concerning such childhoods accessible and create a sense of the urgent plight of such children. They render troubled childhoods grieveable. The study delineates three attributes of the selected texts that explain why such fictions can be considered significant from both social and aesthetic perspectives: namely, their foregrounding of intertwined vectors of violation and/or vulnerability; their skilful use of multi-layered narrative voices and their creation of specific posttraumatic damage and survival tropes.

The four main thesis chapters are organised thematically rather than conceptually or theoretically, because representations of troubled childhoods are contextually and experientially entangled. Using Maria Pia Lara's notion of "illocutionary force" and specific aspects of trauma and affect theory, the study focuses centrally on how the units of narration construct persuasive and convincing depictions of troubled childhoods while using fiction to convene platforms for reflection on the phenomena of child victims of war violence, abusive parenting, sexual predation and sexual violation.

Opsomming

Die studie ondersoek voorstellings van gekwelde kinder-ervaringswêreld in post-1990 narratiewe deur skrywers van Afrika. Gekwelde kinder-ervaringswêreld word gedefinieer as die ondervindinge van kinders wat blootgestel is aan verskillende vorms van skending, insluitend fisiese, psigologiese, seksuele en emosionele skending. Met hierdie definisie in gedagte reflekteer die studie op geselekteerde uitbeeldings van sulke ervarings in hedendaagse Afrika-fiksie in Engels. Die studie se sentrale tesis is dat, terwyl sekere outeurs se ontplooiing van affektiewe skryfegnieke implisiete analise van gekwelde kinder-ervaringswêreld bied, resoneer die kennis oor hierdie realiteit wat sulke literêre tekste oplewer en in die publieke sfeer plaas met die leespubliek omdat die struktuur van die narratiewe die verskynsel van kwellende kinder-ervarings onthul en bewustheid van die dringende aard van die verskynsel bemoontlik. Sulke kinderleuens word op hierdie manier ‘treurbaar’ [“grievable”] gemaak. Die studie delinieer drie eienskappe van die gekose tekste wat verduidelik waarom hierdie tekste vanuit beide sosiale en estetiese perspektiewe as beduidend beskou kan word, naamlik die verstrengelde vektors van verkragting en kwesbaarheid wat hulle op die voorgrond bring, hul bekwame gebruik van veellagige narratiewe stemme en hul skepping van spesifieke posttraumatiese skade- en oorlewingstroepe. Die vier middelste tesis-hoofstukke is tematies in plaas van konsepsueel of teoreties georganiseer, omdat voorstellings van gekwelde kinder-ervaringswêreld kontekstueel- en ervaringsverstrik is. Met die gebruik van Maria Pia Lara se begrip van “illocutionary force” en spesifieke aspekte van trauma- en inwerkingsteorie fokus die studie hoofsaaklik op hoe die narratiewe eenhede oorhalende en oortuigende afbeeldings van gekwelde kinder-ervaringswêreld konstrueer terwyl hulle fiksie gebruik om platforms vir refleksie op die fenomeen van kinderslagoffers van oorlogsgeweld, misbruikende ouerskap en seksuele predasie en verkragting byeen te bring.

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Table of Contents

Declaration	ii
Dedication	iii
Abstract	iv
Opsomming	v
Acknowledgments	vi
Table of Contents	vii
 Chapter One: Introduction: Representations of Childhoods in African Fiction	
Introduction	1
Troubled Childhoods in Post-1990 African Fiction	11
Depictions of Childhood in Post-1990 African Fiction in English	18
The Illocutionary Force of Troubled Childhood Narratives	33
African Trauma Fiction: Narrating Troubled Childhoods	37
Affective Representations of Troubled Childhoods	40
Chapter Layout	44
 Chapter Two: Testimonies and Masks in Fictional Representations of War-affected Children	
Introduction	49
Child Soldiers' Vulnerability in Uzodinma Iweala's <i>Beasts of No Nation</i>	52
Chronicling War Atrocities in Kourouma's <i>Allah is Not Obligated</i>	63
The Melancholy of Wartime Confinement in Marechera's <i>Scrapiron Blues</i>	78
Conclusion	89

Chapter Three: Masculinised Public Violence and ‘Domestic’ Sexual Violation of Children: Depictions by Akpan, Behr and Vera

Introduction	91
Attempted Rape in Akpan’s “My Parents’ Bedroom”	94
Taboo Revelations in Behr’s <i>The Smell of Apples</i>	103
Re-defining Family Relations in <i>Under the Tongue</i>	115
Conclusion.....	130

Chapter Four: Fictional Reflections on the African Middle Class and Domestic Abuse

Introduction	133
Ritualised Abuse in <i>Purple Hibiscus</i>	135
Abuse and Revenge in Isegawa’s <i>Abyssinian Chronicles</i>	147
Emotional Trauma in “What Language is That?”	161
Conclusion.....	171

Chapter Five: Representations of Child Prostitution: Depictions by Akpan, Duiker and Darko

Introduction	173
Child Sex Work: The Predatory Family in “An Ex-mas Feast”	177
Investigating Child Prostitution as Depicted in Darko’s <i>Faceless</i>	189
HisStory: Pederastic Prostitution in <i>Thirteen Cents</i>	203
Conclusion.....	215

Chapter six: Conclusion: Mourning Troubled Childhoods in the Public Sphere
..... 217

Bibliography..... 226

Chapter One

Introduction: Representations of Childhoods in African Fiction

The Child is the dark shadow of the soldier
On guard with rifles Saracens and batons
The child is present at all assemblies and law-givings
The child peers through the windows of houses and into the hearts of mothers
This child who just wanted to play in the sun at Nyanga is everywhere
(Ingrid Jonker)

Introduction

In her incisive article “Forming Identities: Conception of Pain and Children’s Expression of it in Southern Africa,” Pamela Reynolds argues that “children in Southern Africa often live on the edge of dreadful things — community violence, state oppression, warfare, family disintegration and extreme poverty” (83). Although Reynolds is speaking about a specific region of Africa, her observation is applicable to the lives of countless children across the African continent. The issues that she foregrounds — community violence, state oppression, warfare, family disintegration and extreme poverty — are conditions that define the lived realities of many children in the post-1990 African context. If children (as Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck argue, in *Makers and Breakers: Children and Youth in Postcolonial Africa*) constitute the majority of Africa’s population (1), then their lived experience of catastrophic conditions constitutes a crisis worth writing about — as confirmed by Amma Darko’s point in an interview with Mary Ellen Higgins that if “a country is going through a crisis, and people are writing around the time, they will be drawn to writing stories that would deal with those crises” (115). Writing at this point of crisis regarding childhood in the continent, it is unsurprising that many contemporary African writers reflect on the plight of the continent’s children in their fiction.

In using child narrators/protagonists to reflect on troubled childhoods, these writers draw on what Madelaine Hron identifies as the rich literary tradition of “adopting the child focaliser” (28) in the exploration of African issues that has been effectively deployed in a number of canonical African literary texts. Camara Laye’s *The African Child* (1955); Ferdinand Oyono’s *Houseboy* (1966); Mongo Beti’s *The Poor Christ of Bomba* (1971) and Ben Okri’s *The Famished Road* (1991) are some canonical African literary texts that deploy a child focaliser.¹ Despite the thematic, stylistic and contextual differences between these texts, they resonate in their utilisation of a child narrator as an enunciator and symbol of particular African problems such as alienation in Laye, colonial violence in Oyono or postcolonial disillusionment in Okri. While canonical African fiction and critical analyses of such texts allegorise childhood in order to expose colonial and postcolonial oppression and exploitation, it can be plausibly argued that by deploying a child narrator/protagonist and subtly nuanced narrative textures, such texts can offer alternative interpretations of challenges afflicting particular African societies. For example, a close analysis of Nwoye’s thoughts and reflections on the Igbo practice of abandoning twins and Ikemefuna’s death in Chinua Achebe’s classic *Things Fall Apart* (1958) provides a compelling critique of aspects of Igbo traditional society’s treatment of children.

That fictional texts deploying child focalisation can offer alternative renderings of the awful treatment of children in some African societies is gestured to by Eldred D. Jones in his introduction to the 1998 special issue of *African Literature Today* entitled “Childhood in African Literature.” He argues that African authors use child narrators/protagonists to disclose the “grim reality of cruelty, harshness, parental

¹ Although the list of canonical African texts that deploy child focalisers above is not exhaustive, it is important to note that this technique is a preferred mode of focalisation among Francophone writers. This is, partly, because of the traumatising impact of French colonial policies in Africa.

(particularly paternal) egocentricism and extraordinary bruising of the vulnerable child psyche” (7). By foregrounding how child focalisation can lead to the disclosure of children’s violation and abuse, Jones is cognisant of the discursive potential of child narrators/protagonists such as Ben Okri’s Azaro or Nurrudin Farah’s Askar in the African literary canon. These child narrators/protagonists have “superior knowledge” (Jones 6) that they use to archive compellingly how patriarchal eroticised oppression, urban poverty and violence perilously intersect on the bodies and lives of children in contemporary Africa. While child narrators/protagonists such as Ikemefuna and Nwoye in *Things Fall Apart* or Toundi in *Houseboy* or Waiyaki and Njoroge in *The River Between* and *Weep Not Child* respectively are constructed and read as allegories of particular African issues, the writers I study in this dissertation attentively index their child narrators’/protagonists’ experiences in the face of ‘major socio-political shifts’ in post-1990 Africa. While valuable work done on these major socio-political shifts registered in other disciplines has been — mainly in terms of work on conflict; urban poverty; patriarchy; and human rights — from a predominantly adult victims’/perpetrators’ perspective, children as victims, perpetrators and/or witnesses of these phenomena have perhaps received greatest attention in fiction.

Given that authorial focus in my selected texts is on child narrators/protagonists who variously find themselves in the tragic triangle of victims of, witnesses to, and/or perpetrators of violation during war, incestuous rape, in cases of oppressing parenting and underage prostitution, my reading centrally focuses on the particularity of these children’s experiences as articulated through their eyes. This is because authorial use of child narrators/protagonists offers an intimate understanding of children’s experiences in contexts of socio-political crisis. Here, we recall Maria Pia Lara’s argument in *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in Public Sphere*, that when “stories unfold in the public

sphere they return to and reconfigure life itself. In this way, complex webs of narratives emplot action, experience and speech, and stimulate further levels of those same categories in the subsequent readings and self-understanding of the subjects” (93). Taking Lara’s point that fiction not only reconfigures life out of daily experiences, but also provides profound insights into the experiences portrayed as my point of departure, I posit that the selected authors’ portrayal of traumatised children place convincing archives of troubled childhoods in the African literary public sphere. If the public sphere — as defined by Jürgen Habermas — is an institutional location where validity of argument (practical reason) and not status determines what public affairs’ decisions are to be taken (Calhoun 2), then it can be plausibly argued that fiction provides and widens the discursive space in which troubled childhoods can be examined and mitigating solutions enacted because of fiction’s ability to empathetically draw attention to the plight of the depicted African child in these harrowing contexts.

I examine depictions of troubled childhoods in a selection of twelve post-1990 African fictional narratives in English. Each of the texts either employs a first person child narrator or foregrounds the traumatic experiences of a child protagonist. Firstly, I explore the depiction of war-affected children in Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (2005); Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Allah is not Obligated* (2007)² and Dambudzo Marechera’s short story “The Camp” in his collection *Scrapiron Blues* (1994). Secondly, I examine the portrayal of sexual violation of children in the domestic space during contexts of public, masculinised violence in Uwem Akpan’s “My Parents’

² Although *Allah is not Obligated* was first published in 2000 as *Allah n’est pas obligé*, Frank Wynne’s 2007 translation serves my purposes in my discussion in this dissertation. My reading of the text with particular focus on the child-soldier’s experiences and how fiction enables the articulation of the said experiences is not compromised by translation; even though there might be some interesting nuances that are gained or lost during translation. The same can be said of *The Smell of Apples* which came out in English and Afrikaans in the same year. This may make for an interesting bilingual study of the translated texts and their originals in subsequent research.

Bedroom” in his collection *Say You’re One of Them* (2008)³, Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* (1995) and Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue* (1997). Thirdly, I examine the portrayal of cruel parenting in some African middle class homes in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Moses Isegawa’s *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2001) and Uwem Akpan’s “What Language is That?”(2008). Lastly, I read the representations of child sex workers in Uwem Akpan’s “An Ex-mas Feast” (2008), Amma Darko’s *Faceless* (2003) and K. Sello Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* (2000).

The phenomenon of troubled childhoods has received extensive attention in African writing in the last three decades.⁴ Far from being a comprehensive study of this body of writing, this study samples a range of texts from different regions of the continent; which explore various manifestations of troubled childhoods in different social spaces. Thus, I have selected four West African writers — Ivorian Ahmadou Kourouma, Ghanaian Amma Darko, Nigerians Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and Uzodinma Iweala — who use fiction to explore the experiences of the region’s children during wartime, in abusive domestic spaces and as commoditised sex objects in poor urban spaces. Secondly, I have selected an East African and a West African writer — Ugandan Moses Isegawa and Nigerian Uwem Akpan — who write about abusive parenting; child sex work and attempted rape as respectively manifested in the Eastern African region. Lastly, the study features four Southern African writers — Zimbabweans Dambudzo Marechera and Yvonne Vera and South Africans Mark Behr,

³ I read three of Uwem Akpan’s short stories appearing in his collection *Say You’re One of Them* (2008). The three short stories are “What Language is That?,” “An Ex-mas Feast;” and “My Parents’ Bedroom.” Henceforth, when referring to any of the short stories, I use title of the particular short story and the collection’s year of publication.

⁴ See Alcinda Honwana’s study of child soldiers and Alcinda Honwana’s and Filip De Boeck’s exploration of the impact of postcolonial violence and deprivation on children and youth in Africa.

and K. Sello Duiker — who depict the impact of nationalist wars, sexual predation and incest on children in contexts of public, masculinised violence.

The selected texts sensitise us to and place various forms of violation to which children are exposed in the “post-1990” dispensation. I have chosen the timeframe of “post-1990” to delimit the chosen texts’ dates of publication and settings (contexts). Whereas all the narratives explored in this dissertation are published after 1990, post-1990 as a delineation of their setting and context gestures to a specific epoch in contemporary African history. The study is cognisant of the complexities associated with the “post-1990” timeframe and writers’ increasing attention to the plight of children in their fiction. The intersection between the violent postcolonial state and traumatising of African subjectivities is a complicated reality that this study takes note of. Nevertheless, I argue that the inherited structural fault-lines and cultures of violence that are carried over from the colonial and post-independence contexts erupt catastrophically in the 1990s as reflected in crippling and debilitating violence inflicted on various post-1990 African subjects.⁵

Achille Mbembe’s concept of the obscenity of the postcolonial state comes to mind here. Mbembe suggests that “in their desire for a certain majesty, the masses join in the madness and clothe themselves in cheap imitations of power to reproduce its epistemology” and that such power “in its own violent quest for grandeur, makes vulgarity and wrongdoing its main mode of existence” (133). The situation that Mbembe describes explains the prevalence of violence and trauma in the postcolonial African state, especially when this reality is accentuated by the socio-economic collapse of the 1990s. The declining living conditions and increasing number of conflicts

⁵ As Frantz Fanon predicated, the postcolonial state is characterised by a number of “tragic mishaps” (119).

consequent upon, among other factors, Africa's loss of strategic significance at the end of the cold war, harsh IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies and the failures in governance of the postcolonial state have resulted in a number of socio-political and economic problems, namely extreme poverty, civil wars and genocide, as well as disintegrating families.⁶ However, as the study acknowledges, while there are explicit links between moments of social strife and the brutalisation of children, some authors spotlight the plight of children in seemingly less *publicly* violent conditions as depicted in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* and Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles*. Similarly, some of the troubled childhoods unfold in pre-1990 contexts, but ultimately get articulated in fiction published post-1990, as is the case with Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples*; Dambudzo Marechera's "The Camp" and Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*.

It is unsurprising that both fictional and non-fictional texts have engaged with the afore-mentioned realities and their impact on African societies. In spite of the abundance of socio-anthropological texts that explore the various crises the continent has grappled with in the last two decades, these centrally focus on adult subjects. However, there are literary texts that give a fresh perspective to this phenomenon by foregrounding children's perspectives regarding their experiences of violation or abuse during this epoch. A number of African writers have explored the impact of the African crises on children in their fiction, since children are the most vulnerable members of any society in crisis and the quality of their lives constitutes a significant social index.

⁶ Scholars such Kenneth Harrow, Mahmood Mamdani, Honwana and De Boeck, and Machel have variously explored how war, poverty and other socio-economic African problems that arise from Africa's engagement with the rest of the world in implementation of IMF and World Bank structural adjustment policies affect children.

The study recognises the different, often culturally specific definitions of childhood. Although I define a child as any person under the age of eighteen, I am cognisant of Heather Montgomery's argument that the idea of "a universal child is an impossible fiction and that children's lives are influenced as strongly by culture as they are by biology" (1).⁷ I find what Adrian Knapp calls the Romantic cult of a universal childhood that defines childhood as "an empty space, a kind of a clean slate [that] has come to resemble the basis of dreams onto which we impose, plant and project our ideas of a desired future" (2) problematic. I favour an all-encompassing perception that underscores the plurality and heterogeneity of childhood as characterised by "varied and multifaceted experiences" (Honwana 1). It can be plausibly argued that in most African societies; childhood is a state of being rather than a state of becoming. This is because the label "childhood" has multiple meanings depending on the speaker and the subject. For example, for a parent or a clan or a tribe, a person is perpetually a child, irrespective of his/her age.

In some African contexts, where "many children are expected to work and assume social responsibility at an early age" (Honwana 4), childhood remains a multifaceted notion. In spite of the multiple meanings attached to childhood in postcolonial African discourses, it is still a stratum of society that is particularly vulnerable and whose quality of life constitutes a significant social index. As Alcinda Honwana observes (concerning postcolonial Africa):

Children have rarely been listened to, and when their voices are not silenced, their talk is never unconstrained [...] children's voices reach a broader platform only in rare, and sometimes tragic, cases, but even then these subaltern voices are often immediately recuperated, transformed, and inserted into different narratives and agendas set by other interest groups. (2)

⁷ See the 1990 African Union's *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* and the 1989 United Nation's *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. These international legal documents define a child as a person under the age of eighteen years.

Given the triple-layered marginality of childhood in African discourse that Honwana underlines above, it can be plausibly argued that it is in fiction that children are allowed an illocutionary space to discuss problems affecting them. The illocutionary space accorded to childhood by fiction for its self-enunciation is validated by the selected texts' sensitive treatment of troubled childhoods as will be explored in this dissertation.

I use the expression "troubled childhoods" to refer to fictional representations of a category of children who tragically exist as victims of, or witnesses to, or perpetrators of various violations and atrocities which have marred the post-1990 African context. As Jack A. Kearney observes in his study of portrayals of child soldiers in contemporary African fiction, the use of child narrators/protagonists in fictional representations of troubled childhoods enables us to move beyond sociological-type data and begin "to grasp [with] intimate awareness" (92) the trauma of war violence; and, one might add, abusive parenting; forcible prostitution and incestuous rape on children. Literary analyses provide an understanding of this phenomenon that other disciplinary records cannot capture largely owing to the evocative power of fictional imaginaries to paint candid portraits of experiences. While a burgeoning corpus of fictional depictions of troubled childhoods takes cognisance of the crises facing children in Africa today, there is little scholarly interest that keenly focuses on child narrators'/protagonists' experience in and of themselves in these harrowing contexts (I return to this paradox presently).

The standard meaning of the term "representation" indicates presentation of an image of, or a portrayal of someone/something in a work of art. My use of the notion takes note of Edward Said's and Linda Alcoff's anxieties about the ethical implications of representation, given the multiplicity of meanings of the term and its rootedness in disempowering socio-political subaltern sites. Both scholars argue that representation is

embedded within the language, the socio-cultural and the class position of the “representing entity” (Said 272). Cognisant of Said’s and Alcoff’s caution that the cultural and political environment of the artist influences his/her portrayal of specific social realities, and the fact that the twelve texts are neither written nor published by children, my focus is on how the respective authors’ narrative techniques and perspectives can provide sufficiently convincing renditions of troubled childhoods. I delimit my use of the concept to artistic attempts by particular writers to portray traumatised children and individual or institutional practices that enact, enable and facilitate the various traumatic experiences under discussion.

A core thesis in my study is that by foregrounding child narrators/protagonists in traumatising contexts, the selected texts use affective writing to offer implicit analyses of troubled childhoods in various post-1990 African contexts. While I use the notion of affect to refer to textual strategies by means of which writers stir or surface readers’ emotions (particularly compassion) in order to arouse such readers’ empathetic identification with the depicted child narrators/protagonists, I use implicit analysis to denote features of descriptive writing that use child narrators’/protagonists’ unsophisticated register and non-theoretical (even non-conceptual) perspective to explain why, how and by whose agency children’s violation comes about or what characterises it.

The selected authors create opportunities — through the arousal of affect and provision of analysis implicitly rather than overtly — for readers to access children’s suffering and to recognise the sites, agents, conditions and institutions that form the intricate infrastructure of child violation. The depictions of troubled childhoods focus readers’ attention on what children undergo, see, struggle with and interpret in particular contexts of violence that lead to psychic and physical harm and cause extreme distress.

In spite of the varied settings and socio-political contexts of the selected texts, three templates of troubled childhoods emerge namely: child victims of, witnesses to, or victims-turned-perpetrators of atrocity and violation in specific post-1990 African contexts, who are traumatised (respectively or cumulatively) by war violence; harsh parenting; sexual predation and sexual assault. I seek to contribute to the still relatively meagre, though valuable research on representations of traumatic childhoods by privileging in my examination the respective authors' portrayal and engagement with the various types of child traumatisation rather than analysing their treatment of child narrators/protagonists as incidental to other concerns and conditions.

Troubled Childhoods in Post-1990 African Fiction

My goal is to investigate how selected post-1990 African fictional texts in English use the candour and perceptiveness of child characters to depict the suffering and violence in which children are immersed without sensationalising the focalisation or inviting a voyeuristic gaze on the spectacle of children's violation. Across the study, I suggest that these texts' employment of devices and language that connects the readers "through empathy and shared experience" (Hemmings 550) to their portrayed child narrators/protagonists, enables a balanced depiction of the child against the background of the horrors of social breakdown (in war and other forms of violence and suffering in and out of the home). I read the texts as offering a critique of contemporary African societies by prioritising rather than subordinating the child protagonist's perspective to his or her individual violation and trauma. My delineation of the function of engaging narrative techniques in the portrayal of troubled childhoods in African fiction resonates with Ruth Robbins's comment about representations of women in fiction. Robbins argues that literary depictions of women can effectively contribute to how their worth and importance are perceived in society. Although representation is not the same as

reality, she argues, it is seen as part of the solution, because:

The analysis of literary representation of women and their differences from real women's lives might well be a fruitful place to begin a politicised analysis of that reality, through the means of representation. Furthermore, representation might not be the same thing as reality, but it is a part of reality. The images we see or read about are part of the context in which we live. If we can read these images differently, against the grain, as it were, we can go some way towards altering our perceptions of reality, we can see a need for changes: and when we have seen the need, perhaps we can bring it about. (51)

Robbins's argument above concurs with Maria Pia Lara's support of the transformational and emancipatory role of narratives. Lara argues that women authored narratives are capable of reconfiguring and disclosing the impact of patriarchal violence and oppression on women's lives (Lara 8). Although the two scholars are primarily interested in how literary representation of women is a powerful critique of the oppression and discrimination suffered by women in the public sphere on the one hand, and on the other hand, how narratives can be used to redress the ills of patriarchy, I find them useful in my reading of representations of troubled childhoods. While the images of traumatised children that fill the pages of the twelve texts analysed here do not depict 'real' children in post-1990 Africa, the value of fictional representations of this phenomenon possibly lies in how such depictions can afford us an understanding of the suffering and trauma endured by children as under-examined victims of various traumatic experiences.

Robbins's and Lara's interest in the beneficial role of narratives in placing debates about "real" problems affecting "real women" in the public sphere echoes my argument that the selected texts can create awareness about and contribute towards an understanding of problems faced by children in post-1990 African contexts. I aver that the various affective passages in the texts can encourage our empathetic identification with the experiences of the represented children. The emotive power of these narratives

can provide us with insights into the causes and nature of the various forms of traumatisation in non-explicit ways. Such implicit analysis, I argue, can promote more nuanced responses to the phenomenon of child violation and traumatisation. Despite Madeleine Hron's claim that child narrators occupy a "critical position in African and Nigerian literature" — a fact which is attested to by the numerous child narrators/protagonists in canonical African and Nigerian fiction — the use of a child narrator/protagonist is nevertheless fraught with particular difficulties.

In his 2000 study of representations of children in the works of Dragoslav Mihailovic, Radmila J. Gorup argues that "adult imagination cannot access a child's consciousness and the experiences of childhood are thus lost to the adult" (71). While the child is aware of his or her experience and reality yet lacks the language to convey it to others, Gorup reasons, the adult writer has the language but is cut off from a child's consciousness (71). He concludes that the "child-character who inevitably serves as an expression and extension of their author's views is also the one who interprets adult meaning" (72). Gorup raises three important questions about the effectiveness of using a child focaliser in a literary text. Firstly, the mismatch between a child's and an adult's imagination means that reality is perceived and disclosed differently by the two subjects. Secondly, although children are aware of their reality and experiences, their language is not sufficiently developed to express it. Thirdly, the child narrator in a literary text acts as a vessel that carries an adult writer's perspectives. Gorup's three points above mirror Adrian Knapp's argument elsewhere that the view of the world offered to us by a child-focalised narrative is that of an adult camouflaged in the innocence and vulnerability of childhood. If, as Gorup and Knapp persuasively argue, the reality conveyed by a child focaliser is an adult writer's, then whose perception of troubled childhoods do my selected texts disclose? This question is further complicated

by the fact that the texts grapple with traumatic realities that often rupture the subjects' language — leaving them “feeling helpless” and inarticulate (Fredericks 79).

Who speaks and whose views do the child narrators/protagonists disclose in the public sphere? The complexity of the above question is signalled by Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* and its triadic levels of focalisation. In his address entitled “Living on the Fault lines” — given at the Fault lines Conference at the University of Cape Town in 1994 — Behr reveals that he used a child narrator in *The Smell of Apples* because, such a narrator would “succeed in accusing the abusers while at the same time holding up the mirrors” (2). It is clear that eleven-year-old Marnus is a mask that Behr uses to expose his views on Afrikaner militaristic patriarchy's oppression of men, women and children during Apartheid. Even if we were to concede to the fact that Marnus is Behr's mouthpiece, there is still the problem of how to treat Marnus as a focaliser in the text. Whose story does Marnus narrate in the text? Is it the dreadful experiences of an eleven-year-old child living in Cape Town in the 1970s or the reflections of an adult South African Defence Forces soldier fighting in Southern Angola in the 1980s or the views of a former Apartheid spy who is now a liberal and conflicted writer in the 1990s? The above questions clearly indicate that Marnus — like many of the child narrators/protagonists in the selected texts is an example of Richard Walsh's “unreliable narrator” (505).⁸

While acknowledging the above misgivings, the narrative voice or perspective in *The Smell of Apples* and the other selected texts must be read not so much for its veracity — as it remains a voice mediated by an adult author's mind — but for the candour and credibility with which the adult author occupies the fictional child's

⁸ In his insightful article, “Who is the Narrator,” Richard Walsh defines unreliable narration as arising from the inconsistencies in the narrative that are not attributable to the author (505). This means that an unreliable narrator is a kind of focaliser whose focalisation is inconsistent or illogical. This is the kind of narrator who tells a story or details that s/he could never possibly be in position to narrate.

sensibility and distils insights into how children experience and make sense of various traumatic encounters. Thus, for instance, Behr's novel offers credible insights into the oppression of children in the Afrikaner domestic sphere because of Behr's use of a child narrator's candid descriptions and 'childish' devices such as peepholes and euphemistic register. Here, we recall Linda Alcoff's argument that "how what is said gets heard depends on who says it, and who says it will affect the style and language in which it is stated, which in turn affects its perceived significance" (13). Similarly, Robie Macauley and George Lanning argue that the final answer to the question "through whose eyes should we see [and one may add, hear the story] is of course, dependant on the nature of the story and the angle or angles from which the author wishes to watch [or listen to] it" (118). The causal relation between meaning, subject matter, style and language that Alcoff foregrounds and the lenses of focalisation that Macauley and Lanning emphasise, explain the effectiveness of the child narrator in *The Smell of Apples* specifically and the selected texts generally.

The child narrator is crucial in the disclosure of the violation of children in the post-1990 African context because of the amplified subtlety and nuanced narrative textures of the selected texts. Although John C. Hawley (18) reminds us that seeing troubled childhoods through the eyes of child narrators may have its limitations, the point-blank, unfiltered, vulnerable, innocent, wide-eyed gaze of the child narrator ensures that readers vicariously experience the trauma as if it were intimate and personal. That the selected texts lend us new lenses with which to see the suffering of children around us arises from the potential that childhood offers which adult focalisation falls short of. Here, we recall Madeleine Hron's argument that literary texts focalised by a child narrator carry "themes too large for adult fiction" (29). The appeal of the child narrators in the selected texts lies in the fact that they question, resist, and

contest their violation. This makes a child focalised text what Hron has called a “resistant space, of complex, on-going negotiation and articulation of difference that is perhaps not as readily accessible in the stable, socially structured world of adults” or adult narrated text (30).

Hron’s point brings to mind Pius Adesanmi’s and Chris Dunton’s opinion that “the innocent probing[s] of young characters become acts of resistance, capable of unmasking the socio-cultural strictures of the postcolonial space” (x). The first person child narrators/protagonists or omniscient narrators probe and unmask different forms of violation suffered by children in postcolonial Africa. The narrative in which a child comments on his or her experiences in the face of atrocity places in the public sphere credible archives of this phenomenon. That these annals of troubled childhoods are narrated from the perspectives of suffering and witnessing children themselves, recalls Mineke Schipper’s point about the first person narrator in African literature. She argues that:

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

The narrative positions and functions of the first person narrator that Schipper outlines above echo the narrating positions and functions of the child narrators/protagonists in the twelve texts analysed in this dissertation. The child narrators in Adichie’s, Akpan’s, Duiker’s, Kourouma’s, Isegawa’s, Iweala’s and Vera’s texts narrate their own awful experiences. For their part, both Amma Darko and Dambudzo Marechera use the omniscient narrator to convey the horrific tales of their protagonists. While Darko’s text additionally features Kabria and the women of MUTE who use Maami Broni’s,

Poison's, Maa Tsuru's and Fofu's 'recollections' and 'confessions' to piece together Baby T's experience as a child prostitute in Accra's slum of Sodom and Gomorrah.

In my reading of these texts, I rely primarily on textual analysis, i.e. the close critical reading and interpretation of the affective and implicitly analytical dimensions of the texts and a critical reading of and engagement with critical works about the selected creative (and comparable) texts. The study centrally focuses on the experiential and spatial realities of the characters and the aspects of language deployed by the writers to depict their experiences. Although some attention is paid to adult characters (in as far as their actions impact on child narrators/protagonists), my primary focus is on the depiction of children attempting to make sense of their complex traumatic situations in the post-1990 African context.

In the interpretation of the narrative devices deployed by the selected authors, my analysis is informed by what Maria Pia Lara calls the "new vocabulary" (171) of emancipatory narratives. My study identifies and investigates how actions and thoughts of the child narrators/protagonists rendered by means of authors' choice of diction; style; language units (e.g. images, descriptions, figures of speech); voice; tone and point of view are constructed to create texts with persuasive and convincing power that can push the reading public to care about and to concern themselves with troubled childhoods as depicted in post-1990 African fiction in English. I explore how the writers deploy the above listed linguistic and rhetorical devices to foreground their child protagonists' experiences of varied traumas and how these narratives function as implicit analyses of the nature and causes of the suffering in which these child characters are immersed. I also pay attention to the portrayed uniqueness of each child's character's illocutionary force in the authors' use of discursive techniques for disclosing

their suffering in their specific contexts.⁹ I use the term “illocutionary force” according to Maria Pia Lara’s formulation, which underscores the empowering impact of narratives that allows marginalised groups to successfully engage with injustice in order to transform oppressive practices. Lara derives the expression from the work of Jürgen Habermas and J. L. Austin, but she adapts it for her own purposes. I argue that authorial use of representational strategies that vividly depict troubled childhoods can enable readers to gain intimate understanding of children’s experiences in contexts of socio-political crisis.

Depictions of Childhood in Post-1990 African Fiction in English

While representations of children in traumatic conditions have attracted substantial scholarship in the rest of the world, in the sphere of African writing this scholarship has been sporadic and fragmented. Writing in the *Journal of African Children’s and Youth Literature* in 2004, Robert Muponde and Pippa Stein observe that childhood is not “considered a field worthy of intensive study” (xxv). This paucity exists in part because — to paraphrase Zimbabwean novelist, Dambudzo Marechera — children are mostly taken for granted in Africa (371). My sample survey of a selection of criticism about post-1990 African fiction that feature traumatic experiences of children reveals that child characters in these texts are approached from a perspective that Joan Sullivan elsewhere describes as regarding “the individual as a social unit” and not “individuals as individuals” (182). Such an approach exhibits what Arthur Gakwandi calls the extent to which “the total life of an individual is affected by the conditions in which [she/he] lives” (126-127). This means that the child character becomes a “frame of other issues”

⁹ How I apply and deploy Lara’s theory is more fully outlined in a later section (“The Illocutionary Force of Troubled Childhood Narratives”) of this introductory chapter.

(Gorup 72-73). I build on these critics' work by offering a reading of post-1990 portrayals of troubled childhoods that is keenly focused on children's experience in and of themselves, and as articulated by child narrators/protagonists in the selected texts.

The texts explored in this study have attracted substantial critical attention and impressive work has been done on them by various scholars. However, I find the treatment of the child narrator's/protagonist's disclosure of his or her traumatic experiences peripheral in some of these readings. The case in point is Akin Adesokan's reading of what he terms "new African writing" in his 2012 article "New African Writing and the Question of Audience." Positing that an author is a public intellectual theorising "perennial [African] political and humanitarian emergencies" (3), he infers five characteristics of new African writing: "they are mostly written by women; they are focalised from the perspectives of culturally innocent or marginal protagonists; they thematise the emotional consequences of familial or public upheavals; they are not so long [...] and they end happily, or at any rate not too grimly" (4). It is important to note that some of the attributes of 'New African Writing' listed above are uncannily reflected in my selected texts. While I agree with Adesokan's elucidation of the characteristic features of new African writing, I find his allegorised reading of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is not Obligated* — as do some other critics I presently survey — an example of reading that disregards the illocutionary potential of not only the use of child focalisers in the respective texts, but also the disclosure of domestic abuse and war violence by victims and witnesses themselves.

Here, I find it instructive to recall Florence Stratton's argument concerning canonical African male writers' use of the mother Africa trope in their texts in a manner that analogises women's experiences and David T. Mitchell's and Sharon L. Synder's

equally persuasive postulation about how fictional narrative's use of disability affords it representational advantages without corresponding emancipation of disabled subjects. Reading two generations of African writers or two thrusts/trends in African writing from the 1950s to the 1980s, Stratton identifies a dual configuration of the mother Africa trope in male African writing, i.e. the use of women as symbols of mother Africa and the representation of women's exploitation and oppression as an analogy of the suffering of the nation. For instance, she concludes that the sexploitation of Wanja and her pregnancy at the end of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Petals of Blood* are metaphors of the exploitation and the rejuvenation of the Kenyan nation (*Politics of Gender* 48-52). She further points out that, even in *Devil on the Cross*, where Ngũgĩ is at his revolutionary best, Warĩinga's experiences as a woman are sacrificed to the expediency of Ngũgĩ's master narrative, and its demand that "all other oppressed groups [struggles] be sacrificed to those of workers' struggle" (163). Similarly, defining narrative prosthesis as "the pervasiveness of disability as a device of characterisation in narrative art" (9), Mitchell and Synder, argue that "while disability's troubling presence provides literary works with the potency of an unsettling cultural commentary, disabled people have been historically refused a parallel power within their social institutions" (8).

The allegorisation of femininity and disability by mainstream narrative canon is problematic, because as the three scholars insightfully reflect, the use of marginal subjects such as women, prostitutes and disabled characters as metaphors for 'larger socio-political and economic themes' disregards these subjects' social conditions or reality. Instead, the prostitutes, women and disabled characters are used as metaphors of other socio-political and economic problems. The metaphorisation of women and disabled people's experiences that the above-mentioned scholars effectively critique is similarly evident in some readings of childhood in the selected texts as surveyed below.

In my survey, I have established two patterns of allegorisation of childhood in critical readings of post-1990 African fiction. One pattern, akin to Akin Adesokan's reading of *Purple Hibiscus* and *Allah is Not Obligated*, perceives the child as a metaphor for "the African continent as a place where nasty things happen" (Adesokan 11). The second (and most prevalent) pattern is one where critics peripherally acknowledge the suffering child, but appear to prioritise 'more important socio-political and economic themes.' In what follows, I explore and comment on the above two patterns within my four organisational themes of wartime violence, sexual violation, domestic abuse; and sexual predation.

It is important to note that reading and writing about war-affected children has more recently been tainted with what Alexandra Schultheis calls the "politics of humanitarian consumption of these texts" (31). What Schultheis describes as a humanitarian consumption script resonates with Peter J. Pham's argument that child soldiers are perceived as an aberration that attracts "voyeuristic attention when not abandoned as an irredeemable lost generation" (Pham 47). The above trope manifests prominently in the reading of Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) by scholars such as John C. Hawley, Suzan Trefenbaum and Robert Eaglestone. Although these scholars offer compelling reflections on Iweala's portrayal of the unreasonable and irrational nature of suffering during wartime, they variously read the child as a metaphor of the failed postcolonial state. Dinaw Mengestu has offered an insightful comment on recent war-affected children narratives: "what attracts immediate and superficial attention to Africa's child soldiers [is the fact that] the brutal existence of a child soldier dovetails neatly into depictions of Africa as a place born of hell and misery and as a continent that, like a child, can be saved" (qtd in Schultheis 33). Mengestu's warning with regards to the reception of child soldier narratives such as *Beasts of No*

Nation underscores a particular script or lenses of perceiving Africa and its traumatised children. Unfortunately, this script allegorises child soldiers, while infantilising the African condition. It is probable to argue that a child soldier like Agu is seen as a metaphor of the young and fragile postcolonial states or democracies in Africa that, in spite of being brutalised by civil wars — like the child victim of war violence — can be rehabilitated in order to reach their full potential.

The figure of the African child soldier as an embodiment of the horrors of violence in African war narratives is similarly reflected in John Walsh's, Richard K Priebe's, Amadou Koné's and Vivan Streemer's reading of Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* (2007). Observing that the text exemplifies the tropes of reading violence in African literature after 9/11, Priebe argues that "from ethnically and geographically different parts of Africa, these works — including *Allah is not Obligated* — have one central element in common: they are filled with accounts of horrific violence" (48). Although *Allah is not Obligated* explores the violence of civil wars, its narrative stance remarkably differentiates it from other war narratives such as Assia Djébar's *Algerian White* and Nega Mezlekia's *Notes from the Hyena's Belly*. By reading the child narrator as a metaphor of dismal suffering during wartime in Africa, Priebe ignores the peculiarity of Birahima as a first-hand interpreter or chronicler of wartime violence seen through the candid lenses of a child's eyes.

While Dambudzo Marechera's posthumously published text *Scrapiron Blues* (1994) has not attracted as much scholarly attention as his much more popular *The House of Hunger* (1978), critics such as Robert Muponde and Robert Muponde and Ranka Primorac read children in Marechera's fiction as symbols of the Zimbabwean nation. In his 2004 reading of the deployment of children and childhood in Marechera's oeuvre, including *Scrapiron Blues*, Muponde maintains that childhood acts as a

metaphor of “creativity to articulate a longing for a new form of self-writing” (14). He goes on to argue that “childhood in this instance is viewed as a space of experience as well as a place of memory in which the struggle for self-authorship and self-capitalisation is pitted against the grasping, circumscribing and pre-possessing narrative of the father, by extension the nation” (19). Here, Muponde frames childhood as a space in which the writer and the father figure (symbolising the nation) read and write their autobiographies.

Admittedly, these critics offer persuasive interpretations of the representations of childhoods in the selected texts. My study, however, attempts to build on their work, by arguing for the need to read childhood in these texts differently. In this regard, I find Jack A. Kearney and Annie Gagiano’s readings of some of the selected texts particularly instructive. Kearney and Gagiano demonstrate the possibility of alternative readings of Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (2005); Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Allah is Not Obligated* (2007) and Dambudzo Marechera’s “The Camp” (1994) through a sustained focus on children’s experiences as articulated by child narrators/protagonists themselves. The two critics pay close attention to the textual evidence provided by the authors in their portrayals of troubled childhoods to provide alternative readings that foreground the child narrator’s/protagonist’s self-articulation of his or her traumatic experience in the texts they analyse.

If, for example, we focus on some of the statements made by Agu and Birahima, in *Beasts of No Nation* and *Allah is Not Obligated* respectively, it can be plausibly argued that the child narrators/protagonists are more than metaphors of postcolonial African violence. In Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*, Agu who had enjoyed his mother’s embellished and repeated narration of the Biblical story of “David killing Goliath” (*Beasts* 32) and war movies remarks that he had always fancied that “to be a soldier was

the best thing in the world” (*Beasts* 38). Unfortunately, when he becomes one (a child soldier), he rescinds his earlier fascination with soldiering by saying “I am knowing now that to be soldier is only to be weak and not strong” (*Beasts* 38) and as he later suggests, is to become a devil or beast. Iweala’s allusion to a Biblical story of David and Goliath does not only allow Agu to debunk the romanticised view of war, but also permit him to use Agu’s individuation to spotlight the awful impact of war on such children. The bitter irony of Agu’s horrific knowledge: to “be a soldier is to be weak” shows that he (Agu) has come to a painful understanding of what it means to be a child soldier. Similarly, when Birahima — the child protagonist in *Allah is not Obligated* — retorts that “being a child soldier is for kids who got fuck all left on earth or Allah’s heaven” (*Allah* 114), in spite of his trademark arrogance and cockiness, Birahima provides us a first-hand personalised and compelling interpretation of the dreadful lives of child soldiers. Although the above passages disclose the horror of wartime violence, their power lies in the respective child narrators’ perception and interpretation of their awful reality as child soldiers.

In their treatment of incestuous rape, the other texts examined here — Uwem Akpan’s “My Parents’ Bedroom” (2008); Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* (1995) and Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue* (1997) — are often read as metaphors of an insecure domestic sphere during moments of crisis. Reflecting on the impact of genocidal violence on the family and children in the Rwandan society, John Kearney avers that Akpan succeeds in “affirming the possibility of divine benevolence at work [...] though, that benevolence would be dependent on the acceptance by different ethnic groups of their common humanity” (96). Although Akpan’s text extensively draws on Catholic iconography and symbolism to explain the dreadful trauma, it is important to note that

the text centrally focuses on the child who narrowly escapes sexual violation and who is a witness to the murder of her mother by her own father.

Even if Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* explores the violence of rape in an Afrikaner domestic sphere, for scholars such as Rita Barnard, Michiel Heyns, and Cheryl Stobie, child homosexual rape is subordinated to their wider focus on tropes of sexuality and confession in the disclosure of the crimes that Apartheid committed against those it claimed to protect. This socio-political reading of *The Smell of Apples* is reflected in Heyns's observation that we might infer from Johan Erasmus's "playful impatience for his son to reach potent manhood [...] as the general's professional interest in the development of future soldiers" (93). This political reading of the text is also reflected in Rita Barnard's argument that Behr's revelation of a homosexual act at "the very heart of Apartheid's darkness flirts with a sensationalism similar to that deployed by the government itself" and that in the "process, he diverts attention from the crucial political and economic to the psychological and sexual dimensions of Apartheid's power" (210). Acknowledging that the socio-political dimensions of Afrikaner ideology offer useful insights into understanding women's and children's bodies and sexuality as sites at which Afrikaner militaristic and patriarchal ideology is negotiated and contested, I argue that the text can be conceivably read as a fruitful unmasking of the brutal effect of hypocritical and pathologised masculinity on children in moments of national crisis (particularly) as this impinges on vulnerable boys.

Conceding that there is a strong link between particular patriarchal practices, social crisis and children's horrendous sexual violation such as incestuous rape that Yvonne Vera explores in *Under the Tongue*, it can be reasonably argued that her text privileges the victim rather than using the child victim's experiences to allegorise these crimes. Whereas critics like Meg Samuelson, Jessica Murray and Robert Muponde

rightly argue that the child protagonist's lack of language (destroyed during the rape) is a manifestation of incest-inspired muteness, I find their subsequent conclusion that such muteness underscores feminine victimisation by patriarchy, nationalism and colonialism peripherising the individual and personalised experiences of the traumatised child. The possibility of reading both the socio-political and the personal theme(s) in Vera's text is exemplified by Jessica Murray's 2008 and 2009 articles. Whereas in her 2008 article she avers that Vera's text "clearly deals with the way in which practices such as incest and rape and ideologies, such as patriarchy, nationalism, have victimised the characters of the novel" (2), in her 2009 article — "A Post-colonial and Feminist Reading of Selected Testimonies to Trauma in Post-liberation South Africa and Zimbabwe" — she argues that Zhizha exhibits symptoms of a traumatised child. The two articles demonstrate the validity of alternative readings of the text. While one such alternative is the kind of reading that explores the 'important socio-political themes,' another is a type that privileges the personal injury and pain of the protagonist.

The alternative reading of the depiction of child victims of wartime violence and incestuous rape that I suggest for the above-mentioned texts can also be applied to texts concerning abusive parenting. This is because cruel parenting is often read as a metaphor of postcolonial African state oppression and dictatorship. Among the third generation of Nigerian writers, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie has attracted a great deal of critical attention, especially with regard to her novel *Purple Hibiscus* (2004). Most of this criticism interprets the text as either a bildungsroman or a symbol of Nigerian post-independence problems such as dictatorship, religious fanaticism, gender inequity, censorship and brain drain. While Jane Bryce and Madeleine Hron argue that Adichie's text is a postcolonial bildungsroman because of the fact that Kambili matures during the course of the narrative, Debra Beilke, Heather Hewett and Ogaga Okayude establish a

connection between the violence in the Achike household and the atmosphere of fear in the Nigerian society under military dictatorship. Other critics like Nnedi Okorafor-Mbachu, Brenda Cooper and Roger J. Kurtz focus on the inter-textual connections between Adichie's text and the corpus of canonical Nigerian writing to argue that Adichie "is directly engaged with the Nigerian literary canon and is furthermore making a case for her inclusion in it" (Hewett 78). The above-mentioned critics' reading that foregrounds tyranny and inter-textuality as central concerns in Adichie's fiction is valid and persuasive. Nevertheless, I argue that it is possible to read Kambili's narrative as a child's personal record of domestic abuse and its impact. For example, while I agree with Akin Adesokan's argument that expressions such as "communion," "missal," "figurines," "palm fronds," and "holy water" give "us an intimation of the ritual[s]" associated with Catholicism, I read Eugene's application of ritual as a tool of abuse and not as "solemn festivity associated with the Catholic church" (8) as Adesokan does.

Andrew H. Armstrong argues that Moses Isegawa's novels *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2000) and *Snakepit* (2004) "recast and re-enact a period of recent Ugandan history marked by violence and chaos, emanating from the dictatorship of Idi Amin" (127). Similarly, Jacqui Jones avers that *Abyssinian Chronicles* engages "with the political climate of Uganda under the dictatorship of Idi Amin in the 1970s and concerns itself thematically with violence, political upheaval, anarchy, chaos and uncertainty" (85). She goes on to argue that the abuse of Isegawa's protagonist by his parents "parallels the larger tyranny of Uganda under Amin," and she concludes that "Isegawa ingeniously interweaves the personal narrative of his protagonist Mugezi with the larger-scale story of a country in turmoil" (85). Although both Jones and Armstrong present convincing arguments in their interpretations that underscore the socio-political theme(s) in Isegawa's text, I argue that the text is open to readings that consider the

account of Mugezi's experiences of domestic abuse as an insightful depiction of the mistreatment of a child. Here, we recall Florence Stratton's comment about Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) that "it is to women, then, that Achebe assigns the task of appeasing an embittered history" (166). Similarly, it can be argued that for Jones and Armstrong, it is to the children that Isegawa assigns the task of disclosing Uganda's bitter history.

The allegorizing of Kambili and Mugezi in the interpretations referred to above dovetails into John Kearney's, Paul Lakeland's and Adrian Knapp's reading of Uwem Akpan's "What Language is That?" For example, John Kearney argues that Akpan's purpose in the short story is to celebrate how the friendship between two children "transcend[s] the hatred fuelled by religious prejudices of their societies and parents" (98). For his part, Adrian Knapp avers that the subversive agency of the two girls "undermines their parents' authority" (7). Similarly, Paul Lakeland argues that the text is an "instructive exposé of the failings of adults around these children" (672). Although I do not disagree with these readings of the text as a discussion of inadvertent parental culpability in child abuse, I posit that the text appeals to readers because it demonstrates children's awareness of their violation; highlights their resilience in such situations and underscores their agency that ensures their survival.

A survey of Kambili's, Mugezi's and Akpan's unnamed protagonist's thoughts about their condition and experiences convinces us why an alternative reading of troubled childhoods is viable. The cases in point are two comments by Kambili that underline the fact that the abuse and anguish is personal. On one occasion Kambili pretends that the thuds coming from her parents' bedroom are her father's attempts to open a stuck door, and not the evidence of wife beating (*Purple* 32). On another occasion, she explains that she counts throughout her mother's beatings because doing

so reduces its horrific intensity (*Purple* 33). These and similar passages in the text make us empathise with Kambili because the violence and abuse she is a victim of and a witness to are uniquely personal. The intimate and personal connection that her register arouses focuses our attention on domestic violence and abuse as some children's lived reality and not as symbols of Nigerian military dictatorship. Similarly, when Akpan's unnamed narrator says that her parents "couldn't be serious" ("Language" 147) before subverting their authority by developing a 'wordless language' with which she can communicate with her best friend, we are exposed to her personal anguish and disdain, not a metaphorical repairing of ruptured socio-religious ties. The above quotations portray these children's lives as a "series of bad dreams" (*Abyssinian* 102) and not as metaphors for the inequities of their respective societies.

While available criticism on Uwem Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast" (2008); Amma Darko's *Faceless* (2003) and K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000) similarly read children's awful experiences as sex workers as metaphors of the harsh African urban conditions in which the texts are set, I find Adrian Knapp's and John Kearney's readings of "An Ex-mas Feast" different because of their focus on the child victims of sexual predation. For example, about the portrayal of child prostitution in "An Ex-Mas Feast," Adrian Knapp argues that Akpan's protagonist — Jigana — on realising that the family's future is based on "strong filial bonds and patriarchal ideals that justify the callous exploitation of Maisha's body [...] forfeits his privileges as eldest son and opts for the uncertain future of a daily struggle for survival on the streets of Nairobi" (6). About the use of the money from Maisha's prostitution to educate Jigana, John Kearney argues that it "indicates the presence of chauvinist discrimination between son and daughter" (92). These critics' focus on the intersection between child prostitution and

pathologised masculinity into the violation of children spotlights the violated children's agency in understanding, resisting and disclosing their exploitation.

Darko's focus on how some parents take paths of least resistance by making "easy money" off the bodies and sexuality of their children and how the children experience this is not the central focus of the analysis in the critical works of Ellen Mary Higgins, Allen Louise Zak and Mawuli Adjei in their reading of *Faceless*. For example, Mary Ellen Higgins argues that Amma Darko's fiction — including *Faceless* — engages in debates that examine "urbanisation, modernisation, economic instability and migration at the micro-level" (58). In the same vein, Vincent Odamtten argues that as an example of fiction for education, Darko's text presents an "unflinchingly stark circumstance of human suffering and folly" (7) arising from patriarchal oppression and exploitation of women. These readings of Darko's text are compelling, as they engage with how patriarchy and economic meltdown in the depicted African city enact child prostitution. However, they do so in a manner that spotlights how these aspects of the Ghanaian society create conditions conducive to the underage sex trade. In some ways, Darko's exploration of underage sex work unravels the predatory infamy of the African urbanscape through her foregrounding of a child protagonist, whose voice and vision are central to the text.

Sam Raditlhalo, David Medalie, Helene Strauss and Meg Samuelson read Azure's traversing of the economically divided Cape Town's cityscape as archiving how post-apartheid exploitation disempowers some city residents. Helene Strauss observes that Azure's body, "inscribed with contradictions and shame becomes the terrain upon which the community plays out its racist expectations" (31). The racial slant of Azure's violation and exploitation is revealed by Gerald's obsession with him mainly arising from the fact that he is jealous of Azure's blue eyes. Besides Gerald

whose interaction with Azure carries racial undertones, most Cape Town residents with whom Azure interacts read his body as a source of money and sexual pleasure. The impulse of reading post-apartheid fiction through the tropes of oppression and segregation strongly manifests itself in Meg Samuelson's reading of Duiker's urban subject in *Thirteen Cents*. She argues that "Azure's act of walking the streets becomes the very modality through which physical and social boundaries are transgressed" (255). It is true that pederastic prostitution is coloured by distinctive socio-political and economic histories that shape and inform urban poverty and its intersection with patriarchy's eroticisation and sexualisation of young bodies. Thus, when Azure says he hates adults because they "cut him up into pieces and spread [him] everywhere" (*Thirteen* 129), his statement indicates his individuation in a city and its inhabitants that prey on him financially and sexually because of this city's particular exploitative histories and realities. This means that the physical and social boundaries that allegorise racial and political differences can also be read as manifestations of tropes of financial and sexual exploitation.

The nature of abuse and violation that the selected texts grapple with makes them available to a variety of readings. The plausibility of reading fictional depictions of children's traumatic experiences as symptoms of contemporary African problems as demonstrated by the above-mentioned and similarly-oriented critics lays ground for the possibility of reading such texts as probing children's self-reflection on their own violation. The veracity of the arguments and insights about the texts by the critics I have surveyed above notwithstanding, I argue that alternative readings that centre the child's experience can expand the illocutionary impact of these texts in the African literary public sphere.

In her dissertation “Agents of Change: Childhood and Child Characters in Patricia Grace’s Novels,” Ulla Ratheiser argues that “the Romantics seized upon the child as a symbol of all they believed in: nature, goodness, joy of living, human progress, instinct, and original innocence not original sin” (qtd in Knapp 2). She concludes that the Romantics’ perception of children as inherently innocent and vulnerable has coloured how we think about, and one may add, read their depiction in literary texts. I argue that one can choose to romanticise depicted childhood as existing in what Ata Quayson has described as — “a terrain of life and death struggles” (86) — a metaphor of postcolonial African troubles. However, it is also possible to productively explore troubled childhoods as a form of children’s self-representation in the post-1990 African traumatic reality (Quayson 86). Through the technique of verisimilitude, I argue that the selected authors centre their child narrators/protagonists in their fiction to create realistic and moving impressions of children’s experiences of postcolonial African societies in crisis rather than merely using their portrayal as a means to an end for purposes of depicting particular conditions. Surrounded by or immersed in traumatising conditions, the respective child narrators/protagonists speak about “private” rather than “public” themes, hence they reclaim the hitherto “totally ignored or [...] peripherally hinted at” childhood experiences (Inyama 36).

In her reading of Dambudzo Marechera’s *Scrapiron Blues*, Annie Gagiano argues that the profundity of Marechera’s war oeuvre lies in his empathetic depiction of children during wartime. Similarly, in his analysis of African child soldier narratives, Jack A. Kearney argues that fictional accounts of child soldiers — especially those employing the first person narrator — provide compelling and intimate realisation of what it is like “to be exposed to [the] suffering and violence [during war]” (92). Like Gagiano’s and Kearney’s readings, my own discussions focus on how the child

narrator/protagonist is portrayed as one who speaks for him/herself and against those who have violated and victimised him/her. Here, I focus critical attention explicitly on the child characters in order to showcase how chosen authors use affect and subtle verbal effects, particularly vivid and moving individuation, in the portrayal and interrogation of the plight of children in post-1990 African fiction in English.

The Illocutionary Force of Troubled Childhood Narratives

Given my focus on how the selected authors' new vocabulary achieves affect and offers implicit analysis of the sites, agents and circumstances that enable troubled childhoods, I adopt Maria Pia Lara's notion of "illocutionary force" as my overarching theoretical framework in analysing how these fictional representations of troubled childhoods claim "social inclusion" for children in the African literary public sphere (Lara 3). In *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in Public Sphere*, Lara argues that women's writings address those in power with powerfully imaginative speech framed as self-disclosure in order to claim recognition, visibility and social inclusion for those excluded or disregarded or unjustly treated (2-3). Although Lara is concerned with women's experiences, I find her argument equally relevant to fictional depictions of troubled childhoods in post-1990 African fiction.

I apply Lara's theorisation that women's writings bring problematic issues into the public sphere to produce powerful narratives that "provide an account of the lack of justice created by a situation of marginalisation, oppression or exclusion" (16) to narratives about troubled childhoods in post-1990 African fiction in English. I hypothesise that these authors create (in Lara's terms) an "exploratory moral quest" to allow imaginative identification with children portrayed in the texts and in doing so they can engage the reader to empathise with the characters' experiences as "semblance of truth" (Lara 16). I explore how the writers' use of affect and implicit analysis in the

fictional representations of troubled childhoods in the novels creates a “new vocabulary [with which such] social groups [can] provide for new descriptions that not only [illuminate] once repressed truths but [create] possibilities for relations that were never envisioned before” (Lara 171). The powerfully vivid and persuasive narratives that the texts bring into the public sphere, disclosing the trauma associated with the violation of children during war; cruel parenting; sexual predation and sexual assault, arise from “the effort to communicate” these traumatic experiences, which relates necessarily to who is speaking in the texts (Lara 68).

In delineating clearly “who is speaking,” I argue that the texts through the authors’ narrative, poetic and rhetorical skills (in Lara’s terminology: their “illocutionary force”) focus attention on the child narrator/protagonist in a manner that can arouse our empathy for their depicted lives. The authors’ use of particular tonal variations, literary tropes, points of view, and narrative techniques can draw attention to the individually depicted children. As such, the uniqueness of each text in providing a compelling image of African children’s troubled experiences can signal the respective authors’ grappling with possible ways to create adequate portrayals of experiences that may seem to defy articulation.

If the public sphere is a “source of storytelling” that allows society to envisage “the past, the present, and a possible utopian future” (Lara 6-7), then the fictional accounts of troubled childhoods parallel the trauma suffered by some children in the post-1990 African context and the need to minimise or end practices causing this. These texts’ portrayal of troubled childhoods become — in Lara’s postulation — the “social movements, through which interactions in the public sphere, create and generate solidarity [...] which demand recognition and, at the same time, aim to redefine the collective understanding of justice and the good life by proposing new visions of

institutional transformation” (1). Fiction’s reflection and refraction of the traumatic reality of troubled childhoods, disclosure and recognition of the suffering some children are faced with, I argue can possibly create an awareness of the injustice and trauma that is prevalent in contemporary African societies. It is plausible to argue that the depictions of traumatised children in the selected texts can convene a platform that engages with and discusses how society treats its children. Although it is impossible to quantify how such a platform can sufficiently engage readers’ ethical/political recognition and responsibility towards traumatised children, the placement of the issues affecting children in the public sphere can be a starting point to a collective redefinition of how society treats its children?

Using Lara’s concept of illocutionary force as my interpretative framework, I argue that the answer to the above question is in the affirmative. This is because the “new vocabulary” that the writers employ to describe the uniqueness of post-1990 troubled childhoods can not only disclose the violence and suffering to which children are subjected, but can also enable us to see the world from the traumatised child’s perspective — the starting point of possible societal activism against the brutalisation of children (Lara 171). For example, in the analysis of child victims of rape and oppressive parenting, it is noted that Mark Behr’s eleven-year-old Marnus and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s fifteen-year-old Kambili use particular narrative devices and linguistic tropes to sidestep the muting terror of their abusive fathers in order to disclose their violation.

The illocutionary impact of Behr’s text is underscored by Marnus’s innocent question whether the white men who burnt Little-Neville (their domestic servant Doreen’s son) will be taken to Robben Island. It is true that his reflection that “even if Little-Neville did steal charcoal, I still don’t think it’s right for someone to fry him in front of a locomotive engine. Whether Little-Neville’s a Coloured or not, it doesn’t

matter, you shouldn't do things like that to someone, especially not a child" (*Smell* 138) is coloured with Apartheid's racial undertones. I read it differently. It is an unequivocal protest against the dreadful treatment to which many children are subjected. The illocutionary power of the above quotation makes it a profound condemnation of child abuse. Its affective impact is as a result of the fact that it is made by a child who explicitly rejects the violation of children irrespective of their race or class. It is plausible to argue that if that statement were to be made by an adult, it would not carry the same impact to arouse our compassion for the suffering and violated child as it does when uttered by an anguished and conflicted child.

Similarly, in *Purple Hibiscus*, Kambili's explanation that she and Jaja always asked each other questions whose answers they already knew because asking other questions had the possibility of getting replies they did not want to know explains the portentously ominous silence and sadness in the Achike household. A poignant example is when Jaja says that they will take care of the baby and Kambili reads his meaning as protecting the baby from their father from her brother's eyes (*Purple* 23). That the unborn child must be protected from its father showcases the kind of terror and abuse that pervade the Achike household. But more significant is the fact that the violated and abused children cannot utter the name of the abusive parent because of the power he has over them. By using their secret language of exchanging information through eye contact to disclose Eugene as an abusive father and husband, Kambili and Jaja accentuate the horror of living under an abusive parent. The child narrator's new vocabulary that she skilfully deploys to identify and disclose the prevalent physical abuse in her home inscribes empathetic significance to her narrative. I argue that the quintessentially 'childish' language deployed by the child narrators/protagonists can push the reading public to care about and to concern themselves with the depiction of

children's violation — which reflects and refracts what is done to actual children in the 'real' world — presented in the literary public sphere.

African Trauma Fiction: Narrating Troubled Childhoods

Cognisant of the fact that the subject matter of the selected texts stretches the limits of linguistic depiction because usual, even acceptable forms of representation are unavailable to the victims of or witnesses to these atrocities (Van Alphen 27), I use some aspects of trauma theory to supplement Lara's notion of illocutionary force in exploring the depiction of troubled childhoods in the selected texts. Although I refer to works by Judith Lewis Herman, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, James Berger, Elaine Scarry and Kate Douglas, I mainly draw on Cathy Caruth's, Dominick LaCapra's, Anne Whitehead's, and Geoffrey Hartman's theories of trauma. If the content of the selected texts is traumatic and their form mimics symptoms of trauma, then any engagement with the subject matter of these texts is an act of bearing witness to, or facing the horror of, the portrayed trauma (Douglas 149). I deploy specific (trauma) theoretical postulations and particular theorists in sections of the thesis where I deem their contributions to be vital.

Geoffrey Hartman avers that on the poetic or figurative level, trauma fiction "may correspond to two types of cognition" (536) — the event (content) and the symptoms of the event (form). Hartman's postulation resonates with Anne Whitehead's question whether "trauma itself is content or form" (162). An answer to a version of Whitehead's question as regard fictional representations of troubled childhoods is that the selected texts are about trauma and their style mimics the symptoms of harrowing distress. In "Shoah and Intellectual Witness," Geoffrey Hartman argues that texts about distress always put us in an uncomfortable place of spectators where we "are exposed, at one and the same time, to the trauma and anxiety of not empathising enough" (42).

Hartman suggests that in engaging with traumatic fiction, readers' anguished empathy arises from both the dreadful content they witness and the realisation that they can neither fully understand nor relate to (make sense of) the distress depicted. The complexity of traumatic witnessing that Hartman foregrounds reminds us of Dominick LaCapra's warning against the potential of empathetic transference. He argues that witnesses' "self-victimisation" (40) arises when they attempt to understand and empathise adequately with the traumatised subject.

The selected texts' portrayal of troubled childhood indicates forms of violation that leave us helpless and hapless in relation to the depicted suffering subjects. It can also be argued that particular authors' nuanced and subtle narrative styles ensure that readers avoid vicarious traumatising through contact with the traumatic content that is placed in a public sphere. While Anne Whitehead argues that "trauma emerges as that which, at the very moment of its reception, registers as a non-experience, causing conventional epistemologies to falter" (5), it can be plausibly argued that the selected texts' innovative registers render the depicted trauma interpretable and legible. The texts' focus on unmasking the dreadful lives lived by countless children in post-1990 Africa by grammars chosen by the traumatised subjects themselves, sidesteps the overwhelming effect of trauma that makes it not only difficult to articulate, but also impossible to express by means of conventional discursive methods.

If adult victims of trauma often fail to articulate their appalling experiences because of trauma's paradoxical nature — craving and needing expression yet simultaneously finding their own feelings and memories 'inexpressible' — we can only imagine how difficult it is for children, whose linguistic resources are either undeveloped at the time or are destroyed by the catastrophic event. The perception of troubled childhoods as "narratives burdened by the incoherence of trauma" (Whitehead

7) is explored with the aim of establishing how a balance between witnessing and voyeurism is achieved. I argue that the writers “[bear] witness” to and allow readers to “[face the] horror” (Douglas 149) of the awful subject matter portrayed in the texts. My focus is on how the writers/readers engage with the problems of “witnessing,” given the propensity of trauma narratives towards “voyeurism and exploitation of the pain of others” (Felman and Laub 4). Using specific aspects of trauma literary theory, I pinpoint the textual strategies employed by the writers to articulate the traumatic experiences of their protagonists without being sensational or voyeuristic in their narration.

The subtle and nuanced depiction of traumatic content is exemplified in Uwem Akpan’s “My Parents’ Bedroom” and Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation*. Adrian Knapp argues that “when the violence breaks out and the men take over control [...] Monique’s belief in her family’s former unity [is shattered]” (8). The extent of Monique’s disillusionment is captured by Akpan’s style and diction. For example, the attribution of the understated description — “Papa lands the machete on Maman’s head” (“Parents” 285) — to his eight-year-old protagonist’s portrayal of her father’s horrifying murder of her mother constitutes a poignant example of the subtly nuanced register that is crucial to the disclosure of the text’s traumatic content. The child narrator’s bold, understated description gestures not only to the ability of fiction to find the kind of register that can disclose horrific experiences, but also to how such articulations are manifestly symptomatic of trauma. The child narrator’s understatement, as James Berger argues in another context, mirrors a “wound that has become a voice” (Berger 577-579). This voice is deeply affective because it articulates a reality that is “in excess of [the child narrator’s] frame of reference” (Felman 59).

If “witnessing works to ameliorate the trauma particular to othered subjectivity” (Oliver 7), then Iweala’s protagonist’s — ten-year-old Agu’s — point-blank style

allows him to report the horror that he observes and readers to engage with his dreadful experience as a child soldier. Although it is clear that Agu neither understands the traumatic implication of what transpires around him nor what he reports, the horrific ‘appeal’ of his narrative arises from his vocabulary that realistically enunciates this reality. It is plausible to argue that because his voice mimics the “forms and symptoms” of trauma in their disjointedness, “repetition and indirection” (Whitehead 3), he is able to unravel the horrific aspects of life as a child soldier. A case in point is the scene when he justifies the killing of a captive, because by “just going to toilet like sheep or goat or dog” (*Beasts* 26), the captive has become an animal that can be slaughtered without any moral qualms. The protagonist’s logic candidly signposts his individual, childish ‘translation’ of the ferocious dehumanisation and cheapening of lives during war, and his subject position in the morally and emotionally disturbing and paradoxical role of a victim-turned-perpetrator.

Affective Representations of Troubled Childhoods

While I refer to concepts in affect theory used by scholars such Brian Massumi, Mark Sadoski, Christine Ferguson, Judith Butler and Lee Spinks, my exploration of how the various authors ensure that the “soiled and humiliated” (Guha 163) child narrators/protagonists arouse affective responses to their plight is chiefly informed by the works of Lauren Berlant, Sara Ahmed and Martha Nussbaum. I argue that the texts creatively and powerfully ensure that we are linked “separately or simultaneously [to] see, hear, smell, taste and touch the world of the [traumatised child] characters” (Ferguson 1). Arguing that affect transforms the child character’s experiences of trauma into “zones of [discernability] between” the writer and the reader, I show how literary style, characterisation and foregrounding “reproduce[s] affect through human and interpersonal forces” in the literary texts (Spinks 31). Specific emphasis is placed on

how readers are taken beyond “abstract information” to something in the portrayal of children that “they are more likely to find memorable” (Sadoski 270-71), thus creating what Brian Massumi calls “the vertical path between head and heart” established by the creation of empathy with the suffering of others (25).

Martha Nussbaum makes a compelling argument in support of the role narrative literature can play in “public reasoning” (xv). If one were to argue that “public reasoning” involves engaging with the problems facing society with the aim of finding solutions or methods of alleviating them, then the twelve texts under discussion in this dissertation convene a platform at which the traumatic experiences of children can be debated. Can such a debate convened by fiction set an agenda in the public sphere to theorise troubled childhoods? Can such an engagement with troubled childhood demystify the phenomenon? These and related questions constitute my focus in exploring ways of “measuring and comparing the elusive thing, *the quality of life*” (Nussbaum xv, my emphasis) for many children living in post-1990 African societies. What yardsticks do the selected authors provide us with to assess children’s quality of life in post-1990 Africa? According to Nussbaum, the answer to the above question lies in how narrative literature generally and (and one may argue) the selected texts specifically, allow us to imagine the dreadful lives of the child protagonists (xiv).

Because narratives give “nourishment to curiosity, wonder, and perpetual [questioning]” and because they help us to “see other people in non-instrumental ways” (*Upheavals of Thought* 237), an understanding of the causes of troubled childhoods that eventually leads to the dismantling of these factors is enacted. Nussbaum’s argument echoes Lauren Berlant’s questions:

Does a scene involve one person’s suffering, or a population? When we want to rescue x, are we thinking of rescuing everyone like x or is it a singular case that we see? When a multitude is symbolised by an

individual case, how can we keep from being overwhelmed by the necessary scale that an ethical response would? (6)

If Nussbaum's postulation underlines empathetic identification with troubled childhoods, Berlant's questions demonstrate our ethical and political responsibility towards traumatised subjects as both groups and individuals. A case in point is the portrayal of child prostitutes in K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and Amma Darko's *Faceless*. The image of the two protagonists as Guha's "soiled and humiliated" child subjects in fiction, Berlant would argue, represent an infinite population of vulnerable child sex workers operating in predatory African cities.

For example, in *Thirteen Cents*, Duiker's thirteen-year-old protagonist Azure's subsistence on underage prostitution is a fictional eye-opener to the thousands of 'real' child prostitutes in African cities. Helene Strauss argues that *Thirteen Cents* is a discourse on "racialization that [governs] choices available to the poor and the unhoused" (31). Strauss's point does not invalidate the alternative argument that the text is an important archive of financial and sexual exploitation of individual orphans and street children in the fictional Cape Town. My hypothesis is supported by Azure's declaration that he knows "how to please a man" and that he has "done this a thousand times," but concluding that he does not want to think about some of the things he has had to do to "these bastards" (*Thirteen* 84). The protagonist's reflections concerning his exploitation by the men he calls bastards show how his violation is made possible by his homelessness on the impersonal streets of Cape Town. If we apply Berlant's triple-queried litmus test to Azure's anguished reflection in the above quotation, we can read Azure's violation as representative of similarly abused children. If Duiker's fictional rendition of child prostitution affectively "places [us] in spatial relations" alongside his sexually exploited protagonist (Ahmed 85-86), suffice to argue that his text can be read

as a realistic portrayal of the traumatic experiences arising from participation in the underage sex trade.

Similarly, Berlant's three questions can be used to assess the affective dimensions of Amma Darko's teen prostitute who is sold into sexual slavery by her own mother and is eventually murdered in *Faceless*. While adults like Maa Tsuru, Kpakpo, Onko, Maami Broni and Maa Abidjan extract sexual gratification or financial gain from the body and sexuality of this young girl, her twelve-year-old street child sister Fofu has the moral courage and agency to search for the truth about her sister's prostitution and death. It can be argued that she thus succeeds in bringing to justice — at least in fiction — those who violate and abuse her sister. As Mawuli Adjei argues, the sex-entrepreneurs (male or female) “pervade the world of *Faceless* in a manner that leaves the reader, male or female, totally disgusted and angry” (53). The tale of Baby T's prostitution and death underlines the demeaning and dangerous lifestyles to which some parents or parental figures consign their daughters in order to make “easy money.” It is plausible to argue that Darko arouses our empathy for child sex workers and anger against sex-entrepreneurs by showing us how child prostitution flourishes with the complicity of different stakeholders (including parents). Both Duiker's and Darko's protagonists invoke our empathy because, existing as they do on the margins of society, they are severely endangered physically and psychologically.

Post-1990 African fictional representations of troubled childhoods empower the child by giving him or her a voice, visibility and opportunity for self-disclosure — ensuring that the child is seen, heard, read and allowed to claim social inclusion or recognition (Lara 45). I demonstrate that the traumatic content and its articulation in selected post-1990 fictional texts affectively expose traumatised childhoods by (in my analysis) identifying ways in which sympathy for the child victim is evoked and

understanding of their circumstances and contexts increased. Using the outlined theoretical frameworks, I show how affect and implicit analysis function in the texts to produce knowledge about the post-1990 traumatic African sphere of troubled childhoods as depicted in fiction, on the one hand. On the other hand, I argue that the narrative strategies deployed by the writers ensure that the representations are neither sensational nor do they arouse the voyeuristic impulses of the readers as they engage with the depicted children's painful experiences. I also explore the extent to which the authors use their texts to provide insights into posttraumatic survival of traumatised child protagonists.

Chapter Layout

I subdivide this thesis into six chapters. Whereas I introduce representations of troubled childhoods in post-1990 African fiction in English as a field of literary investigation in chapter one, in chapter six I revisit and underscore the key issues related to troubled childhoods in contemporary African fiction in English unearthed during the study. The rest of the thesis is divided into four chapters that are organised around an experiential and spatial quadrant of troubled childhoods. These are children's suffering as combatants, victims and/or witnesses during war, incestuous sexual violation in the domestic space, cruel child-rearing in middle class homes and commercial sexual predation on children's bodies in the urban space.

In chapter two, I examine Uzodinwa Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* (2007) and Dambudzo Marechera's "The Camp" (1994) as narratives that archive the traumatic experiences of war-affected children. Delineating "war-affected" children as an adjective for both children who are actively engaged in combat as child soldiers and hapless bystanders during fictionalised African civil wars, I explore how the depicted experiences of children as victims of or

witnesses to or victims-turned-perpetrators of awful wartime atrocities are narrated. On the one hand, the chapter sketches out the experiences of these children at the sites of war (the frontline and internally displaced people's camps), and on the other hand, it records their experiences thereof in these places characterised by regimes of oppressive violence.

In chapter three, my focus is on how patriarchy-inspired conflicts (the Zimbabwean war of independence known as the Second Chimurenga, Apartheid and the Rwandan genocide) erode the security of the home to the extent that children become easy prey to incestuous rape by the deviant masculinities that are supposed to protect and nurture them. I read Uwem Akpan's "My Parents' Bedroom" (2008), Mark Behr's *The Smell of Apples* (1995) and Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1997) as narratives that unmask the under-examined phenomenon of child rape in contexts of public conflict. I argue that, against the backdrop of compromised family security, incestuous child rape is a horrific outcome of the spill-over of public, masculinised violence into the domestic space.

In chapter four, my focus turns to the traumatic impact of despotic child-rearing in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2004), Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* (2001) and Uwem Akpan's "What Language is That?" (2008). Locating this chapter in the spatial zone of the African middle class home, my focus is on how the unmasking of experientially physical and psychological violation under the guise of inculcating propriety and respectability in the child turns the home into a site of abuse, in spite of its promise of security and nurturing. The chapter delineates how the selected authors pay tribute to the child victims of domestic violence in some African middle class homes in upholding the agency and intelligence of the portrayed child protagonists.

In chapter five, I read Uwem Akpan's story "An Ex-mas Feast" (2008), Amma Darko's *Faceless* (2003) and K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* (2000) as texts that discuss child prostitution in the underbelly of the African city. Although two of the texts deal with heterosexual prostitution and one with homosexual sex work, all three texts' spatial location in the poverty-stricken sections of the African city showcases how paedophilic sex work is a literal and social death for many children forced to engage in transactional sex to survive. I argue that urban poverty and the attachment of erotic fantasies to young bodies allow greedy and callous parents or parental figures to make easy money and pathological African urban masculinities or foreign 'sex tourists' to derive sexual pleasure by instrumentalising vulnerable children's bodies.

The four chapters outlined above are structured as they are for organisational purposes, given that the experiential and physical sites of troubled childhoods in the selected texts are often entangled. The complexly entwined experiential and spatial reality of the phenomenon of troubled childhoods that I foreground is informed by the question: what type of knowledge about troubled childhoods do literary texts generally and the selected texts particularly place in the African literary public sphere? The above question acts as a thread that connects the various nodes of the study. In the four core chapters of the dissertation, my focus is on how the above-mentioned question weaves in and out of fictional representations of troubled childhoods. The study shows that the aforementioned question anchors three crucial motifs in the representations of troubled childhoods namely, placement of grievable troubled childhoods in the African literary public sphere, disclosure of the precarious intersection of post-1990 African crises and violent impunity on children's bodies and construction of empathetic posttraumatic damage and survival tropes.

The aforesaid motifs find illocutionary expression in the complexity of authorial voices and textually intermeshed vectors of violation and vulnerability. The complexity of the speaking voice — as first person or omniscient narrator — across the selected texts remind us of Richard Walsh’s point that Kourouma’s method through the explosive first person narrative “strips down the French language in a defiant gesture that signals how he searches for ways to express the violence taking place in West Africa” (196). Walsh’s point underscores the dual complexity of the adaptation of traumatic content (ideas, thoughts and perceptions of a child soldier) into narrative form. While it might be difficult to translate from Malinke into French on the one hand, and from French into English, on the other hand, I argue that literal language translations are not as complicated as rendering traumatic memory into narrative memory (see Mengel and Bal). Cognisant of this complexity, I nevertheless find Walsh’s argument about Kourouma valid and applicable to the other selected authors’ painful quest for an appropriate grammar to depict troubled childhoods in their texts. This is achieved by their use of child narrators as translators, who define and elucidate their traumatic experiences, but more importantly, who transform their experiences that “resist language or representation [into] narrativised fiction” (Whitehead 3).

If trauma — including the kind that is narrated in the selected texts by children who are yet to master language fully or whose linguistic abilities are destroyed by the monstrosity of what they experience — is inherently unrepresentable (van Alphen 27), then the profundity of Kourouma’s writing in *Allah is not Obligated* (and this can be extended to the other writers too) notably lies in how they “[reinvent] language [in their novels]” (Stemers 38). As a cocksure Birahima uses his four inherited dictionaries to define, clarify, translate, and elucidate the phenomenon of child soldiers, so do Agu and Tonderai; Monique, Marnus and Zhizha; Kambili, Mugezi, and Akpan’s unnamed

protagonist in “What Language is That,” and Jigana, Fofu (including the women of MUTE and Slyv Po) and Azure variously demystify, translate and define the impact of war violence, sexual violation, abusive parenting and coerced child sex work to a heterogeneous reading public through their unique narrative voices and perspectives.

The enactment of troubled childhoods in the literary public sphere in a manner that can render their violation grievable and push readers to consider their posttraumatic damage and survival is enhanced by the textually intertwined vectors of vulnerability and traumatising. Across the various chapters here, it is evident that there is an intersection between post-1990 African crises and the different forms of child violation and abuse. Although the horrific realities of post-1990 Africa are a carry-over of colonial and postcolonial violence, the confluence between pathologised masculinity, and occasional complicity of certain women in reading children’s bodies as sites to extract sexual pleasure or financial gain or to enact sadistic impulses, have been exacerbated in contemporary African contexts of public, masculinised violence. It would, nevertheless, be naïve, I argue, to assume a simple correlation between poverty, social unrest and child abuse. This is because there is also child violation in middle class homes that are not (or less) vulnerable to poverty and socio-political violence. Lastly, briefly, I interrogate the kinds of lives violated and traumatised children lead after their experiences, with a view to exploring the possibilities of healing and rehabilitation signalled by the fictional texts examined in the study.

Chapter Two

Testimonies and Masks in Fictional Representations of War-affected Children

“The greatest pain is the pain we are unable to express” (Junior 7)

Introduction

On 26th January 2009, the International Criminal Court charged Mr Thomas Lubanga Dyilo of the Patriotic Forces for the Liberation of Congo (FPLC) with three counts of war crimes namely, conscripting, enlisting and (or) using child soldiers under the age of 15 in an armed conflict between July 2002 and December 2003 during the Ituri conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The charge is a culmination of over two decades of human rights activism and advocacy to hold accountable those responsible for what Romeo Dallaire describes as “the damage that is being done to the fabric of humanity by allowing our children to be abused in conflict zones around the globe” (16). The two-decade-old human rights activism by international civil society against the use of children and the violation of children’s rights in armed conflicts has made war-affected children the most visible of troubled African children.¹⁰

Although the above-mentioned activism is often coloured by a commoditised reading of child soldiers using a simplistic and often voyeuristic humanitarian consumptive script, fiction’s evocative register opens up an interesting and effective platform to theorise this phenomenon. Peter J. Pham observes that the voice of the child soldier is often absent in the “political and security analyses of the epiphenomenon or case studies of the use and implication of using children in specific conflicts” (47). In

¹⁰ Scholars like Alexandra Schultheis, Graça Machel, Romeo Dallaire, Alcinda Honwana, P.W Singer and Michael Wessels describe the shocking phenomenon of child soldiers in the contemporary African context which has galvanised public discourse, as reflected in an inordinate number of humanitarian, legal, and multimedia representations of child soldiers.

spite of the possibility that texts about war-affected children are read and/or written using a problematic humanitarian consumptive script, fictional representations of the phenomenon accords them a voice to share with the public their experiences either as active combatants or hapless victims (or victim-perpetrators) and witnesses of African civil wars. The value of fiction in post-1990 war-affected children's discourse lies in how it recovers and places the missing voice of war-affected children in the public sphere.

It is a fact that war-affected children have become a popular subject and recurrent thematic concern in recent fiction from Africa as reflected in the large corpus of texts dealing with child soldiers and war-affected children. This body of writing has attracted significant scholarly attention, which extends the work of placing the child soldier phenomenon on the agenda of literary discourse and reflection. For instance, in his important essay evocatively titled "Rites and Wrongs of Passage: Child Soldiers in African Writing," Stephen Gray surveys two sets of binaries — factual/fictional and active combatants/innocent bystanders — in representations of war-affected children such as China Keitesti's *Child Soldier: Fighting for My Life* (2002); Emmanuel Jal's *War Child* (2009); Dinaw Mengestu's *Children of the Revolution* (2008); Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone* (2008); Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*. Gray frames his discussion around the recurrent motif of an appalling rite of passage in which children occupy the triad position of victim-witness-perpetrator as they move from childhood into adulthood.

Taking my cue from Gray's compelling victim-witness-perpetrator triad, I read Uzodinwa Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated*, and Dambudzo Marechera's short story "The Camp" as using narrative to offer empathetic archives of the experiences of war-affected children. Gray's triangular

portrait of war-affected children is invaluable in my reading of how the three child narrators/protagonists in the selected texts provide compelling images of their vulnerability and how their stories additionally function as empathetic archives of traumatic war experiences.¹¹ In my reading here, I bear in mind Adrian Knapp's observation that "literary texts featuring a child[']s perspective offer a view of the world informed by the critical insights of an adult even if disguised in the clothes of a child's innocence and vulnerability" (3).

In some ways, fictional depictions of troubled childhoods articulated through the eyes and voices of child narrators/protagonists bring to mind Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's much-cited question: can the subaltern speak? If, as Spivak convincingly argues, "the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, [and] the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow" (28), I suggest that the war-affected children in *Allah is Not Obligated*; *Beasts of No Nation*, and "The Camp" — who would exist in an even deeper shadow — reflect convincingly on their experiences in contexts of war as explored in the three sections of this chapter. In the first section, I explore how Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* uses the child narrator's ungrammatical English, mixed-up imagery, onomatopoeia and setting to provide a compelling portrait of the vulnerability of the child soldier. In the second section, I examine how Kourouma's child protagonist adopts certain masks to insulate himself from the horrors of civil war, while chronicling war atrocities outside his scope of reference in *Allah is Not Obligated*. Lastly, I investigate how Marechera's short story "The Camp" undermines romanticised notions of African nationalist liberation wars by offering unique insights into the traumatic damage civil wars inflict on the lives of children.

¹¹ I use the term empathetic archive to refer to the selected texts as preserving records of evocative and cognitive reflections on and representations of war-affected children.

Child Soldiers' Vulnerability in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*

In an interview with the Centre for Global Development, Iweala maintains that the inspiration to write about child soldiers came from a *Newsweek* Magazine article about child soldiers in Sierra Leone and not from the Biafran civil war (as many scholars have suggested).¹² Set in an unnamed West African country, *Beasts of No Nation* is an insightful depiction of the impact of war on the lives of children. The story is told by Agu who, traces his life as a child soldier from the moment he is abducted into a rebel army to the point of his recovery at a rehabilitation centre. The linear plot, interspersed with flashbacks and stream of consciousness sections, in its 'broken pattern' design offers a compelling account of Agu's vulnerability as a child soldier.¹³

Given that horror is part and parcel of war narratives, the challenge is how to represent such trauma without exploiting or cheapening the pain of the victim. Dominick LaCapra argues that although it is desirable to tell "the story of genocide as though [one has] passed through it" (27), such narration is problematic because it may be insensitive to the pain of the victims, who according to both Cathy Caruth and Elaine Scarry, are unable to tell their own stories, given that trauma destroys their language. The "self-praising, self-justifying, self-pitying, self-deluding" register and a "smart, quasi-intellectual vocabulary laden with curses" (Kearney 78) employed by child soldiers like Johnny Mad Dog in Emmanuel Dongala's *Johnny Mad Dog* indicate some

¹² Robert Eaglestone, Suzan Trefenbrun, Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton, John Hawley, Krishnan Madhu and Madelaine Hron place Iweala among the third generation of Nigerian writers who themselves are children of the postcolony haunted by the story of Biafra. Although Iweala does not attribute the inspiration of *Beasts of No Nation* to the Biafran civil war, there are numerous textual markers in the text that do place it squarely in the context of Nigerian civil war discourse.

¹³ See Madelaine Hron's argument that because of "Iweala's deft use of language and his penetrating child's perspective, the adult reader not only witnesses the graphic, gory violence of war, but also viscerally experiences Agu's victimisation, trauma, or remorse" (40). It is an argument that Jack A. Kearney, John Hawley and Krishnan Madhu also make when they point to the elegance of Iweala's language and its ability to capture the horror and vulnerability of a child in a context of war.

child soldiers' awareness of and attempt to cover up their contribution to the terror and horror of war around them. Johnny Mad Dog's register contrasts sharply with Agu's seemingly inarticulate language (ungrammatical English expressions). While Johnny Mad Dog's brash register is an attempt to disguise his guilt arising from his complicity in perpetuating war atrocities, Agu's inarticulate lexicon betrays his anxiety and awareness of both his vulnerability as a victim, witness and perpetrator as well as his inability to comprehend the horror around him. This allows Iweala to complicate his portrayal of the impact of war a child.

In this section, I want to argue that Agu is engulfed by the horrors of war, which Iweala's linguistic devices present as testimony with a point-blank candour. This exposes the gory details of his conscription into a rebel army, transformation into a vicious killer and rapist, and his sexual violation by the Commandant. Iweala's use of Agu as the protagonist-narrator allows him to show the terror of children in the brutalising contexts of war. *Beasts of No Nation* opens with Agu's evocative statement: "it is starting like this" (*Beasts* 1). The opening passage is followed by the Commandant asking if Agu wants to be a soldier: "He is asking me in soft voice. Do you know what that is meaning? [...] If you are staying with me, I will be taking care of you and we will be fighting the enemy that is taking your father [...]. What am I supposed to be doing? So I am joining. Just like that. I am soldier" (*Beasts* 13). The novel's candid opening spotlights the horror of the Commandant's devious manipulation and Agu's vulnerability. Alone in a secluded place, separated from his parents during a civil war, how can a ten-year-old child defy a rebel army and its Commandant? The continuous present tense and ungrammatical English Agu uses at the beginning of the novel gesture towards the overwhelming strangeness and horror of his experiences of war.

The power of the opening passage as an example of *effective* affective writing that provides implicit analysis of the problematic phenomenon of child-soldiers in African civil wars as victims, witnesses or perpetrators (or all three) lies in the image of a child deprived of parental protection and guidance, confronted with a bizarre invitation to be a soldier at the tender age of ten. The Commandant's question — “do you know what that is meaning?” — can be read as one of the several rhetorical questions the novel poses. Although apparently addressed to Agu, these questions are indirectly posed to us as readers, in ways that can force us to think critically about the abhorrent depravities of war and its predation on children. Firstly, it is plausible to argue that this question can force the reader to imagine what options such a child has in such horrific conditions. Secondly, it can focus our attention on his fear of the horror of war. Thirdly, it can underscore his resignation to his fate. Agu's candid description of his recruitment echoes Romeo Dallaire's description of the eyes of the actual child soldiers he came across during his United Nations Peace Keeping deployment. He describes the eyes of these child soldiers as “scream[ing] of pain and anguish and fear and hatred” (2) and wonders about the effect of war on these children's psyche. Although Dallaire privileges the discursive capacities of child soldiers' eyes in communicating their traumatic experiences, Iweala highlights the resonance of Agu's voice in its evocation of the horrors he has witnessed.

Granting that the anguish and confusion conveyed in Agu's rhetorical question complicates our reaction to child soldiers as victims-turned-perpetrators, the subtlety of the question can allow us to imagine the terrible strain under which child soldiers live. In such a space, children are forced to ask questions to signal their inability to understand what is taking place. It is their key mechanism of drawing attention to an experience that is beyond their emotional or intellectual grasp. However, the manner in

which Agu frames the question allows Iweala to bypass the restrictions of traumatic dissociation. Agu's sense of disorientation and numbness attract our attention to his pain and suffering. The question stimulates what Lara, in a different context, describes as "the appearance of new subaltern public[s]" whose pain and suffering we cannot ignore (Lara 73).

The diction and simple structure of Agu's sentences underscore Iweala's task of writing to give a particular, human face to the broad, hazy notion of the child soldier. The statements in the opening passage are unmistakably made by a child. The diction and structure of the opening statements, carrying a prophetically ominous tone, further signal the genesis of the child's suffering. The 'ungrammatical' use of the present continuous tense in the five words, "it is beginning like this," forebodes a catastrophic dystopia whose disfiguring impact on the child's humanity is mirrored by the mangled syntax of his narrative. In her article "Translating Trauma: Witnessing Bom Bali," Kate Douglas argues that readers are "commonly drawn to the life narrative of vulnerable subjects" (149). The catastrophic character of the experience evoked in the opening passage draws us to Agu as a vulnerable subject. Simple sentences and ungrammatical constructions in the opening passage convey Agu's fear and confusion in a strange and suddenly altered environment. The immediacy of the present continuous tense in words such as "starting," "staying," "taking," and "fighting" as well as the constant repetitions, foreground Agu's on-going, interminable trauma while staging its immediacy and forcing readers to symbolically step into the horrors of his experiences. The sense of protracted time compellingly and effectively conveys both the incomprehensible, unending horror and terror of his trauma as a child combatant trapped in war.

Agu's voice with its characteristically child-like register that is represented by ungrammatical English constructions not only signals his vulnerability, but also his

ability to address us with what Lara calls “illocutionary force.” The consistent use of nonstandard English neatly integrates the errors into the content of the text in a way that gives the text appeal and plausibility as the tale of a child narrator. This kind of persuasive, affective, powerful language can be analysed from several perspectives. Firstly, nonstandard English locates Agu’s traumatic experiences in the Nigerian and African civil war context. This is because Agu’s register with its sprinkling of West African pidgin English locates the text in a recognisably West African linguistic landscape. The use of West African pidgin establishes a connection between the novel and the numerous civil wars that have plagued this region.¹⁴ Secondly, it authenticates his childhood, since it shows a child who has yet to master the use of a foreign language. Thirdly, it gestures to class dynamics in postcolonial conflicts in Africa. It is more often the children of the poor who are abducted and conscripted as child soldiers. Fourthly and most importantly, as Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead eloquently argue, it demonstrates the fact that trauma is anti-language. Martina Kopf in another context argues that trauma has a “devastating and disintegrative effect on language and communication” (244). Kopf’s argument here coheres with my reading of Agu’s nonstandard English in *Beasts of No Nation*. Agu’s register underscores his traumatic experiences as a child soldier, since such ‘broken,’ nonstandard English symbolically stages the disintegrating impact of war on this child’s psyche and his limited mental/emotional resources with which to make sense of his experiences. If, apart from embodying good grasp of a language, correct grammatical formulation is thoughtful and suggests filtering on the part of the speaker, Agu’s ungrammatical English gives his story its point-blank, unprocessed impact, passing on the task of processing the

¹⁴ Examples include the Nigerian (Biafra) civil war 1967-1970, the Liberian civil wars of 1989-1996 and 1999-2003 and the Sierra Leonean civil war against the rebel movement (RUF that was supported by Liberian President Charles Taylor) 1991-2002.

experiences to the reader even as these experiences remain beyond the pale of the ten-year old's emotional resources of comprehension.

If one is going to care about and concern oneself with the fate of child soldiers, direct address by a child soldier can provide an account or representation of first-hand experience of what it means to be a child conscripted into war and living a life of unmitigated fear, anxiety, uncertainty, violation and horror. The problematic of depicting a child soldier who is simultaneously a perpetrator, victim and witness is signalled elsewhere by Chris Abani's protagonist My Luck in the novel *Song for Night* (2005). My Luck explains that "what you hear is not my voice" (*Song* 19), because his vocal cords have been brutally removed by adult soldiers so that he can perform the delicate and important task of defusing landmines without scaring or alerting nearby soldiers. The destruction of My Luck's voice signals the impossibility and ethical complexity of allowing a child to narrate the horrors of war. As My Luck explains, "there is something atavistic about war that rejects all but the primal language of the genes to comprehend it" (*Song*, 3).

Iweala's novel captures this complexity by tracing Agu's transformation into a monstrous child soldier. In one nightmarish account of an attack on a village, Agu informs us: "I am feeling like man with big muscle and small head and I am thinking that nothing can be stopping me and nothing can be slowing me down — not even the hill we are climbing. I am like leopard hunting in bush" (*Beasts* 56). If, as Cathy Caruth argues, traumatic language is always literary, the referents "big muscle," "small head" and "like leopard" are metaphors and similes that capture the monstrosity of the child soldier phenomenon. Before this particular attack, Agu tells us that "everybody is getting gun juice [...] Gun juice is making you to be stronger and braver" (*Beasts* 54-55). Although the above passage shows that child soldiers' use of drugs partially

explains their transformation into monsters, Iweala nonetheless sheds an unwavering light on the horror of child fighters who commit brutal atrocities ‘in the line of duty.’ Elsewhere in his story, Agu describes how fellow child-soldier Strika holds his knife high above his head and starts “chopping and everybody is coming apart [while Agu] jumps on [the female victim’s] head, KPWUD, until it is only blood that is coming out of her mouth” (*Beasts* 62-3).

The similes and onomatopoeic expressions in this passage depict a child trying to make sense of what war has turned him into. The expressions “big muscle,” “I am feeling like animal going back to his home” and “small head” gesture to the beast in the novel’s title. These similes underscore the novel’s commentary on the grotesque savagery of war in its creation of the child soldier phenomenon. It is unsurprising that at the end of this section Agu says that he likes “the sound of the knife chopping KPWUDA KPWUDA on her head and how the blood is just splashing on my hands and my face and my feet. I am chopping and chopping and chopping until I am looking up and it is dark” (*Beasts* 63). The simile “like leopard hunting” and the onomatopoeic “KPWUD” — which seems better suited to children’s comic-book descriptions than a child’s grotesque mutilation of a human head — show us Agu attempting to find a vocabulary capable of expressing his traumatic experiences. The repetition of “chopping” and the visual image “it is dark” coheres with the ‘beasts’ of the novel’s title to show how Agu has been transformed into a vicious killer. The repetitions, the present continuous tense and the imagery show him as a victim even while he is perpetrating such gruesome atrocities. He is depicted as struggling to describe what is clearly outside the scope of his linguistic repertoire.

Agu’s similes and onomatopoeic expressions gesture to a struggle to get a language to capture the immediacy and horror of his war experiences; a struggle further

accentuated by his sadistic laughter. Whereas the victims are “screaming and shouting all the time” (*Beasts* 117), Agu and the other child soldiers shout to drown out their screams with uproarious laughter. Agu describes one such scene: “AYIIIEEE! Woman is just looking at me and screaming. And I am shouting, SHUTUP! SHUTUP! SHUTUP” (*Beasts* 62). The competing cacophony of the mournful or terrified sounds of the victims and the celebratory (and although unconsciously disguised, also mournful and terrified) noises of the perpetrators is striking. This is emphasised by the harsh jarring quality of the competing sounds such as “AYIIIEEE,” “SHUTUP” or Strika’s demonic laughter “kehi.” These sounds point to the simultaneous mourning and masking of the pain of war. Earlier in the novel, Agu remarks that even Strika, who says very little, laughs “kehi kehi kehi kehi like it is the best joke in the world” (*Beasts* 18). The boisterous cacophony of the laughter and onomatopoeic language used in the above horrific passages serve to indicate both the inability of ordinary language to describe such horrific events and the narrator’s attempt to drown out and obliterate these horrific experiences. It further shows the vulnerability of both the victims and perpetrators, because it underscores the brutalisation of perpetrators and the pain of the victims.

Describing the victims’ screams demonstrates the anguish and courage of the narrator and his attempt to verbalise what defies language. Agu is either unwilling to talk about what he observes, or the enormity of his experiences unconsciously force these things out of him by crafting a language that can capture their horror. Likewise, the sadistic laughter of the child soldiers can be read as a form of hysteric defence mechanism. In contexts where compassion is frowned upon as a weakness that contradicts preferred militaristic masculinities, hysterical laughter ironically registers an exaggerated form of valour and courage while disguising and cushioning one’s vulnerability and anguish. On the one hand, the child soldiers’ maniac laughter covers

their anguish. On the other hand, it draws our attention to their failure to process the horrific atrocities that they witness and commit. Their laughter is an ellipsis, a gap that forces readers to symbolically step into the narrative and actively grapple with the brutalities of the child soldier phenomenon. The use of maniacal laughter and screams by Iweala to shield his protagonists from the horrors of war has resonance with Ben Okri's "Laughter beneath the Bridge" in his collection *Incidents at the Shrine*. In Okri's short story, it is only when the children don the "Egungun" mask ("Laughter" 20) that they are emboldened to come near or even attempt to cross a bridge whose stench and floating bodies symbolise the evil of war and its impact on the town.

Apart from perpetrating horrendous acts of violence, Agu and his fellow child soldiers are also subjected to sexual violation. In a nightmarish episode, Agu struggles to talk about his sexual violation by the Commandant. The Commandant repeatedly violates Agu, justifying his action as "what commanding officer is supposed to be doing to his troops. Good soldier is following order anyway and it is order for you to let me touch you like this" (*Beasts* 103). Agu tells us: "I do not want his finger creeping all over my body [...] his tongue to be touching me and feeling like slug should be feeling if it is on your body" (*Beasts* 103). This candid description of the scene brings us face to face with the terror of sexual violation of child soldiers. Here, Iweala invests simple verbs such as "touching," "feeling" and "creeping" with an ominous intensity that makes us feel Agu's pain, shuddering repulsion and helpless apprehension at the abhorrent intimacy.

Agu's position as a victim-witness is further underscored by the evocation of the concept of protection as a justification of paedophilic sexual predation in contexts of war (*Beasts* 102). This is because Agu is painfully aware of the price (and in a twisted sense, 'prize') of his violation. Whereas the horror of Agu's gratitude for "the small

favours” accentuates his utter helplessness, the continuous present tenses further amplify the horror of his sexual violation. The piling effect achieved by repetition, imagery (tactile and olfactory images) and present continuous verbs have the ability to transport us into Agu’s experience, making us share his revulsion and terror. We are revolted and outraged by the the Commandant’s exploitation of a child. Our outrage and revulsion resonates with LaCapra’s argument that empathy “involves affectivity as a crucial understanding” (40). At the same time, because of the author’s narrative strategy, we come to these narratives “with respect for the other and the realisation that the experience of the other is not our own” (LaCapra 40). We may be repulsed by what the Commandant does to Agu, but we can never feel the full extent of the revulsion that Agu feels when he is violated.

The perverse logic of ‘sex-for-protection’ in the novel is sensitively depicted as one of the atrocities of war that the child-soldier negotiates. Although what the Commandant does to him is wrong and awful, Agu is aware that the Commandant is more powerful and allows him access to material comforts like food and clothes. The dilemma of a child soldier who is sexually exploited is depicted using euphemism, symbolism and imagery. He confides to us that “my bottom is burning like it has fire in it” (*Beasts* 104). Elsewhere in the novel, fellow child-soldier, Strika, struggles to speak about his sexual violation by the Commandant. He draws a “picture in the mud of a man bending down with his hands on the ground and gun and bullet shooting up his bottom” (*Beasts* 104-5). The iconography of Strika’s euphemistic drawing not only embodies the vulnerable child beneath the afore-mentioned manic laughter, but also indicts the predatory proclivities of militaristic masculinities. Agu’s description in a sense transcribes Strika’s drawing when the Commandant tells Agu “to kneel and then he is entering inside of me the way the man goat is sometimes mistaking other man goat for

woman goat [...] if you are watching it, then you [know] it is not natural thing” (*Beasts* 104).

Agu’s child-like linguistic inventory sensitively underscores the problematic of narrating children’s traumatic sexual experiences in contexts of war. Such writing allows Iweala to show sensitivity to Agu’s trauma while depicting the pain and humiliation of his sexual violation. The allusion to goats captures the child’s lack of comprehension and a language to describe the horror of these homoerotic paedophilic experiences, while further summoning the beasts of the novel’s title. Agu and Strika are the innocent and vulnerable sacrificial beasts who suffer at the altar of perverse militaristic sexual predation. It is also important that the reference to the beast in the title is taken to be a goat, a beast that in various cultures is often construed as a sacrificial animal in rituals. In this sense, we are made to see Agu as a scapegoat sacrificed at the altar of the failures of the postcolonial state and institutions in Africa, and the moral degeneration of adults and leaders.

What happens to child soldiers when the war ends? Given that the “panacea for healing is dialogue — talking is the medicine of troubles” (Kaarsholm 13), is it probable to argue that at the end of the conflict the child soldier needs only to talk about his experiences to recover? What experiences can he or she talk about, if, like Agu, he neither makes sense of, nor comes to terms with, these experiences? For such a sensitive and psychically ruptured child to recover, Iweala suggests in his plot and characterisation that the child must not only leave the scene of trauma, but must also be rehabilitated in the care of an empathetic listener.¹⁵ Because Agu has seen “more

¹⁵ Some African war fiction articulates the difficulty of post war rehabilitation of child soldiers. See for instance Delia Jarrett-Macauley’s *Macauley’s Moses, Citizen and I* (2005) and Ishmael Beah’s autobiography *A Long Way Gone* (2007) which explore this complexity in the Sierra Leonian context.

terrible thing than ten thousand men [and done] more terrible thing than twenty thousand men” (*Beasts* 176), he needs an empathetic listener (Amy) to help him work through his experiences within the protective environment of a rehabilitation centre. His dream for the future — “[I] am seeing myself becoming a Doctor or Engineer” (*Beasts* 175) — is only possible because of Amy, who says little and sits with him in the posture of someone who is “looking at me [like she] is going to be helping me” (*Beasts* 175). Iweala’s fictional depiction of post-conflict survival involves (re)reading the scene of the conflict and finding an empathetic listener.

Chronicling War Atrocities in Kourouma’s *Allah is Not Obligated*

I now turn to another child narrator cum child soldier who hides behind elaborate and well-constructed masks in his chronicling of wartime atrocities. Kourouma’s *Allah is Not Obligated* employs an ‘insulated’ child narrator who hides behind well-constructed masks of bravado to chronicle war atrocities that he is unwilling and/or incapable of confronting. Explicitly set in the West African countries of Liberia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s civil wars, Kourouma’s *Allah is Not Obligated* uses the first person perspective and adventurous quest of a thirteen-year-old child soldier, Birahima, to construct an extensive dossier on war atrocities, victims and warlords. Having traversed the width and breadth of Liberia and Sierra Leone fighting for different warlords, Birahima at the end of his adventures as a child soldier inherits four dictionaries from “Varrassouba Diabate [who is] from the griot caste” (*Allah* 211-212). Here, I read both the dictionaries and their previous owner’s griot stature as implicitly authorising Birahima’s chronicling of war. At the prompting of his cousin Mamadou, who asks him “to tell everything [he has] seen and done” (*Allah* 215), Birahima decides to acquaint his cousin (and conversely the reader) with his “full, final and completely complete [...] bullshit story” (*Allah* 1).

Given that the horrific nature of what Birahima has seen and done as a victim, witness and perpetrator cannot be coherently processed or understood by a child, the allusion to the griot — traditional story-teller, oral historian and chronicler — provides him with both a complex mask to narrate his experience, and authorial legitimacy to chronicle child soldiers' experiences. I draw on the work of Abiola Irele, Manthia Diawara and Matthew Wilson to appreciate the narrative significance of Birahima's use of a griot figure in his discussion of the child soldier phenomenon. Following the above-mentioned scholars' conceptualisation of the griot, I read Birahima as chronicler of the history of war, counsellor of society about the impact of war, a repository of knowledge about the causes and traumatic experiences of war and a critic of African postcolonial leadership's subjection of innocent victims to traumatic experiences because of their selfish interests and desires. It is additionally conceivable to argue that as Kourouma chooses Birahima as his mask in order to write with sensitivity and candour about the experiences of a child soldier which the child himself cannot comprehend, Birahima's narration of atrocities committed during wartime becomes possible because he adopts a suitable persona to respond to "an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur" (Caruth 91).

What I describe as masks (discussed in detail presently) are useful in depicting the experiences of war in two ways. Firstly, the writers use children's candour and perceptiveness in narrating with clarity the horrors of war. Secondly, the child narrator himself or herself uses a mask that is appropriate to his or her task of narrating atrocities of war. For example, the "tongueless" narrator My Luck in Chris Abani's *Song for Night* tells us that "if you are hearing any of this at all it's because you have gained access to my head" (*Song* 19). Many readers of *Song for Night* have observed that the mask of My Luck's muteness allows Abani to examine the complexities of the victim-

witness-perpetrator position of child soldiers in war narratives.¹⁶ Whereas Abani opts for interior monologues of a mute narrator, I suggest that Kourouma opts for the mask of arrogant self-reliance and brashness for a child who has not yet come to grips with the atrocities he has witnessed during the course of the war. Birahima's various masks not only allow him to chronicle wartime atrocities, but also protect him from the potentially paralysing impact of directly confronting and dealing with these atrocities.

The masks behind which Birahima writes about the horrors of war are constructed in part by the tone of black humour that pervades his story; a humour perhaps best captured by the novel's title. The Qur'anic phrase "Allah is not obliged to be fair about all the things he does here on earth" (*Allah* 1) is not only periodically repeated in the novel, but it acts as an overarching philosophy of the novel. It opens and closes the novel, gesturing at either the need to laugh at, or attribute the painful realities of war to the mysteries of God. Richard Priebe argues that Birahima uses this Qur'anic extract "as a mantra-like response to all his horrific experiences" (56). Beyond Birahima's constant use of the phrase in response to events or episodes that are unimaginably horrific, it is the phrase's ability to conjure his vulnerability and helplessness on one hand and its stoic irony at the expense of the uncaring world on the other hand that signal its use as a mask.

Achille Mbembe, in another context, argues that "the subject is the master and the controlling author of his or her own meaning" (13). Mbembe's argument suggests one possible response to Spivak's question: "with what voice-consciousness can the subaltern speak" (27)? The voice-consciousness in *Allah is Not Obligated* is that of the child soldier who has intimately participated in war. The masks that Birahima uses to

¹⁶ The complexities of child soldiers' experiences demand a special licence of representation to ensure sensitivity to the pain of child soldiers and avoidance of commodification or sensationalisation of their suffering. This crucial argument is appropriately explored in this chapter.

chronicle civil war atrocities include the linguistic mask signalled by the use of dictionaries; the insolence mask that approximates to a militaristic code of masculine valour; and the performance mask enacted through funeral orations for dead child soldiers. Beneath his brash and seemingly confident persona, Birahima's masks signal his vulnerability and innocence. It is plausible to argue that these masks have the potential to evoke readers' inherent "urge to protect the defenceless" (Knapp 3). Jack A. Kearney has convincingly argued that Kourouma hastily and unconvincingly allows Birahima to narrate colonial and postcolonial histories of the Liberian and Sierra Leonean states. In my view Birahima's various masks, coupled with his symbolic griot heritage, mediate his kaleidoscopic insight into the horrors of war and the structural weaknesses that facilitate civil wars in Africa. This grants his dossier on the two countries' civil wars a degree of symbolic credibility.

Unlike the typical child soldier who finds it difficult to speak about his experiences, Birahima's supposed eloquence is possible and credible because he hides behind the different masks he creates for himself. The complexities of writing about child soldiers who occupy the problematic victim-witness-perpetrator triad is underscored by the extremes in their representations. For example, while Chris Abani's *My Luck* is literally and symbolically mute yet mentally lucid, Birahima is deceptively eloquent. However, Birahima's eloquence is a cover for his traumatic muteness. In a sense, it is possible to read the two children as each other's inversions across an interior/exterior boundary. This is because whereas *My Luck* is physically muted but precociously vocal and eloquent in his mind, Birahima's outspoken persona can be read as a staged mask beneath which lies a traumatised child. Both texts demonstrate how fiction can potentially bypass the muting power of victim-perpetrator traumas to

articulate the horrific experiences of war. Read this way, Birahima is fictionally shown to be well equipped for his task of chronicling the two wars.

Robie Macauley and George Lanning in another context argue that “there is a belief common to large numbers of authors that children are inordinately perceptive creatures” (102). Granting that Birahima is a perceptive narrator, he is able to convincingly communicate his observations about war not primarily because he is a child, but because of his masks. Birahima as a child subaltern in the text “poses counter-hegemonic possibilities not as inviolable otherness from the outside, but from within the functioning of power, forcing contradictions and dislocations in the dominant discourse and providing sources of immanent critique” (Prakash 288). Prakash’s “contradictions and dislocations” arise from the fact that, contrary to conventional expectations that the child cannot speak eloquently about war and violence (let alone examine the conditions that perpetuate it), Birahima competently does this in *Allah is Not Obligated* by means of the different personae he adopts. This agency approximates Lara’s argument in *Moral Textures* that narrative fiction empowers the subaltern classes “by performative effectiveness of their claim to recognition and, in doing so they reverse the self-defeating image” (77).

Amadou Koné argues that the essential problem of African writers is “writing in a multicultural context that produces, in different ways, discourse in obedience to all sorts of constraints and giving rise to all types of freedoms” (112). Although Koné is primarily concerned with the complexities of writing in foreign languages, his argument resonates with the linguistic tools available to or suitable for a child narrator to chronicle war atrocities. Because both Maria Pia Lara and Linda Alcoff convincingly argue that the effort to communicate relates to who is speaking, the linguistic mask allows the ‘unlikely’ Birahima convincingly to chronicle war atrocities. Elaine Scarry

argues in another context that “extreme pain destroys language itself” (54). Birahima’s use of the dictionaries in *Allah is Not Obligated* acknowledges the destruction of his language by trauma. Given the properties of a dictionary as a reservoir of language and words, I argue that Birahima’s linguistic inheritance of dictionaries becomes an instrumental mask which allows him to overcome the representational challenges of articulation that traumatic experiences of war create. This is because the dictionaries enable him to find the words for chronicling these horrors. Birahima uses the dictionaries “to look up swear words, to verify them, and especially to explain them [because his] blablabla is to be read by all sorts of people” (*Allah* 11). Birahima here underscores the need to translate and archive wartime atrocities, some of which he may otherwise remain unable to fully comprehend or find words for as a child.

Birahima’s task of looking up words, verifying and explaining them so that his record of war is understood by all, resonates with Nerea Arruti’s argument in another context that in traumatic narratives the only possible language is that which brings “into play the existence of language itself” (4). At the core of Kourouma’s chronicle of war is an acknowledgement that the subject matter is beyond the comprehension of a child narrator. Because the horrors he depicts are outside the scope of his register, the dictionaries become handy in defining, explaining and interpreting war atrocities; indeed, in literally finding the words for these atrocities. That Birahima insists on channelling readers’ attention to the record presented and not the “little black kid because [he] speaks bad French” (*Allah* 9) in itself betrays Birahima’s double struggle with language — both the literal French language, and the symbolic language of the horrors of war. Under these circumstances, the use of foreign language dictionaries buttresses his struggle to narrate his traumatic experiences.

Birahima's use of dictionaries to translate and define his traumatic experiences and the impact of war on children coheres with Kourouma's technique of inserting into the text a series of funeral orations. Birahima notes that a "funeral oration is a speech in honour of a famous celebrity who's dead. Child-soldiers are the most famous celebrities of the late twentieth century" (*Allah* 83). In popular discourse, child-soldiers elicit dread and apprehension or revulsion and contempt rather than being celebrated. The funeral orations are ironical and poignant and by means of the irony, complemented with Birahima's performative mask, Kourouma bypasses the notoriety of child soldiers to claim their agency. The superlative "most famous" recovers the child soldiers' humanity and asks us to listen to their stories — coming from one of them. The funeral orations as performances evoke readers' empathy for a child caught up in contexts of war.

Although Birahima's funeral orations as masks rehabilitate child soldiers and bring their traumatic experiences to public attention, helping us to see them in a new light, they are also significant literary tropes that enable the author to chronicle multiple narratives of child soldiers. The funeral orations give Birahima licence to talk about the traumatic experiences of the other child soldiers. At the same time, they give Kourouma plausibility to depict the lives and specific experiences of different child soldiers. This is significant in narrating wartime atrocities, because Kourouma scores the representational advantages of using an introspective first person narrator who can also take on the retrospective qualities of the omniscient narrator when need arises. This narrative attribute gives him the freedom to traverse different contexts and locations in the precarious conditions of war. Given that talking for or about another person is to "practise a kind of discursive coercion and even violence" (Alcoff 6), funeral orations make it possible for Birahima to talk about and for the dead child soldiers without any ethical qualms. Since he decides whose funeral oration to perform and what to say about

any particular child soldier, he succeeds in relating the different traumatic experiences of child soldiers without any challenges as to the veracity of his narration. Furthermore, the funeral orations validate his radically realigned role of the griot. Whereas the griot was traditionally affiliated with the centre of power, Birahima re-orientates the griot figure to a stratum of society (child soldiers) who ironically are only powerful when they don the masks of militaristic masculinity symbolised by the gun.

The bulk of the funeral orations in *Allah is Not Obligated* are about dead child soldiers, explaining (according to Birahima) “how in this great big fucked-up world they came to be [child soldiers]” (*Allah* 83). His diction, “big fucked-up world,” recovers the child soldiers’ humanity, because it implicitly exonerates them from unqualified culpability for what they have done and become. Such a phrase speaks to readers about how other factors and persons are to blame for the trauma to which child soldiers are subjected. Some of the outstanding funeral orations include those performed for Kik and Sekou. Concerning Kik, for example, we are told how one day, he returned home from school to find “his father’s throat cut, his brother’s throat cut, his mother and his sister raped and their heads bashed in. All his relatives, close and distant, dead” (*Allah* 90). We are also told that when Sekou fails to get school fees and finds himself in a rebel compound, he goes up to the commandant and declares “[m]y name is Sekou Ouedraogo, I want to be a child-soldier” (*Allah* 113).

Although the funeral orations destabilise the efficacy of the griot as a voice of public authority, given its deployment in a dystopic context, it does bring to our attention with forceful impact the plight of child soldiers. It further evokes Richard K. Priebe’s categorisation of African writing on violence after 9/11 as either being banal, demonic or sublime. The subversion of an art form and discursive tradition that is associated with the sublime (paying tribute to greatness and momentous or epic periods

in a society and its history) to the monstrous (child soldiering) allows Kourouma to highlight horrors of war in a familiar representational form to the West African society. I argue that in taking advantage of a discursive mode rooted in a familiar cultural landscape, he highlights the problem of violence and child soldiers while retaining the fundamental function of the griot to teach, archive and criticise social ills in society by force of his paradoxical deployment of the griot's focus on child soldiers.

Given that the lives of child soldiers as victims, witnesses and perpetrators of atrocities defy comprehension, Birahima's funeral orations recover the humanity of child soldiers who, in contexts of war, would otherwise be reduced to statistical footnotes or rejected in horror. In his insightful book on child soldiers — aptly titled *They Fight Like Soldiers, They Die Like Children* — Dallaire acknowledges his use of “the power of [his] imagination to help the reader connect to the reality of child soldiers” (16). As he correctly observes, the material ‘reporting’ child soldiering is so painful that readers instinctively block or avoid accessing it. To this effect, two of his chapters: “Kidom” and “The Moment: Killing a Child Soldier” are written in a fictional mode, in which he examines how children become child soldiers and how they die. There is resonance between the lives of child soldiers that Birahima describes in his funeral orations, and Dallaire's findings from interviews with ‘real’ child soldiers. Birahima's rhetorical question: “and when you've got no one left on earth, no father, no mother, no brother, no sister, and you're really young, just a little kid, living in some fucked-up barbaric country where everyone is cutting everyone's throat, what do you do,” (*Allah* 90) demands that we confront the conditions that produce the anomalous phenomenon of child soldiers.

Birahima's performance of child soldiers' experiences in the funeral orations is enhanced by Kourouma's graphic and cinematic vocabulary. Lara elsewhere argues that

emancipatory narratives are infused with a new vocabulary that allows victims not only to reveal their pain and suffering, but to address us with illocutionary force so that we can probably care about and concern ourselves with the experiences and ideas portrayed. The repetition of the phrase “throat cut” in the description of the murder of Kik’s family captures the horror of war and the inability of such children to lead normal lives. This is gestured to by Birahima’s lament: “I cried for their mothers. I cried for all the life they never lived” (*Allah* 110). The illocutionary power of funeral orations allows Birahima to recover the voices of child soldiers from the grave and grieve their lives and death. The funeral orations also allow him to intensify and manipulate our responses to the experiences of child soldiers. They ensure that the child fighters are portrayed sympathetically by showing us how and why children become soldiers and the impact this has on their lives.

Birahima’s insouciance that enables him to speak eloquently about his experiences during the civil wars is sketched out using his militaristic/masculine mask. The aliases of child soldiers such as Sekou the Terrible and Sosso the Parricide are similar kinds of masks that gesture to the terrible conditions of war. To survive in these conditions one needs to create an appropriate persona. Like Birahima’s insouciance, the most appropriate mask behind which contemporary child soldiers hide to survive and archive the different kinds of atrocities inflicted on or by them during wartime is militaristic masculinity. Martha Nussbaum argues that honest revelation “promote[s] identification and emotional reaction from readers” (6). It is possible to argue that any emotional connection and/or identification readers might develop towards Birahima arise from his self-deprecating portrayal of his horrific wartime experiences. His militaristic mask makes convincing revelations that can evoke readers’ empathy towards this cocky child narrator. For example, Birahima’s declaration that he does not “give

two fuck about village customs [because he has] been to Liberia and killed lots of guys with an AK-47 (we call it a ‘kalash’) and got fucked-up on kanif and lots of hard drugs” (*Allah* 3) signal his militaristic mask. His arrogant swagger and militaristic mask serve a dual purpose. Firstly, they enable him disclose the awful lives of child soldiers. Secondly, they insulate him against the horror that has scarred his personality. Furthermore, his attachment to his gun, which he lovingly calls a ‘kalash,’ signals the ambivalent transformation of child soldiers. It suggests that the gun is what defines him and ensures his survival in the horrific conditions of war. The gun is both a symbol of survival and shows that his transformation into a vicious killer is possible because he adopts the militaristic and masculine code of valour, insensitivity to fear and lack of compassion for victims. It is also a shelter and mask of adult manly valour to hide his vulnerability as a mere boy.

However, to fully appreciate the significance of Birahima’s cocky persona, one needs to read the irony and sarcasm inherent in this linguistic mask. He deconstructs the militaristic masks which children are forced to assume when he observes that child soldiers are driven to battle full of drugs and when they die, they are blamed for taking drugs. Birahima exclaims: “it [is] unbelievable” that adults can callously and cynically send children into war and turn around with what Birahima calls “bullshit like that” (*Allah* 110). The guns and drugs underscore the vulnerability and exploitation of child soldiers who are forced to fight for powerful warlords who have divided up the country (“all the money, all the land, all the people”) and who are ready to do “everything they can to get their hands on more stuff” (*Allah* 43). Birahima’s cockiness, eloquently articulated through his heavy swearing which punctuates the narrative, is a mask that allows him to posture as a macho adult in order to reveal the atrocious sordidness of war and the culpability of adults. He is able to achieve this kind of disclosure in his state of

intoxication and material attachment to an instrument of power and coercion. The guns and drugs give children a temporary sense of invincibility and power, enabling them not only to commit atrocities, but to talk about them.

It is also important to note that the duplicity and cunning of warlords in creating a cheap and expendable fighting force or what Dallaire and others have called “a new weapon system” (Dallaire 105). Although child soldiers are never paid, they are easily manipulated by the promises of manhood and invincibility made to them by the warlords. Here, we are reminded of Agu’s intoxication by the power of violence he wields when he tells us: “I am starting to think: yes it is good to fight. I am liking how the gun is shooting and the knife is chopping. I am liking to see people running from me and people screaming for me when I am killing them and taking their blood. I am liking to kill” (*Beasts* 56). Whereas the drugs and the guns drive child soldiers into battle without fear, it is the promise and temptation of the power of life-and-death as well as unrestricted access to scarce resources that is intoxicatingly effective. Birahima explains the ‘privileged’ position of child soldiers in the hierarchy of rebel armies. They are the ones that spearhead ambushes and because “grown-up soldiers are not given any food or anywhere to sleep and they don’t get any salary at all [...] being a child soldier had its advantages” (*Allah* 76). One of the advantages, for example, is that Colonel Papa le Bon “kept all the hash for the child soldiers because it was good for them and made them as strong as real soldiers” (*Allah* 79). The comparative “as strong as real soldiers” in the above passage both underscores the manipulation of child soldiers by warlords, and functions as an inadvertent acknowledgement of the paradox of the child soldier phenomenon. They may carry guns and kill like ‘real soldiers’ but they remain children, hence the need for drugs to boost their ‘strength’ to enable them to act like ‘real soldiers.’ Given their loss of home and family, the preferential treatment that elevates

while hinting at their disposability, underscores their vulnerability. The appeal to the generic ‘manly’ idea of going to war and being a valiant soldier is irresistible to child soldiers. Birahima’s chronicling underscores the paradoxically intricate conundrum of child soldiering. It shows that child soldiers live with the reality that they are simultaneously important, expendable and at the mercy of a warlord. To survive in a space of uncertainty calls for adept negotiation, and acquisition, of the appropriate persona: hiding one’s vulnerability and helplessness behind exaggerated displays of courage and ‘manhood’.

The sense of invincibility and power invoked by the militaristic mask allows Kourouma to create a spectacularly courageous and reckless first person narrator who walks with ease across the precarious terrain of war and meets all the local warlords. Birahima’s adventures provide us with first hand impressions of other aspects of the civil wars. Using his mask as a fearless child soldier, Birahima walks with ease into the camps of Colonel Papa le Bon, Prince Johnson and El-Hadji Koroma to prepare elaborate dossiers on their activities. He tells us that ambushes were mounted by Colonel Papa le Bon, and having stopped innocent travellers, his soldiers “unpack everything, weigh everything, measure everything on account of the taxes and duties [...] then you pay and pay and pay” (*Allah* 47). Prince Johnson, the “third big important rebel war lord” with exclusive rights over large parts of Liberia, moves from one end of Liberia to another fighting to control resources and revenue at an inordinate cost in the lives of child soldiers (*Allah* 126). El Hadji Koroma uses refugees to extract money from NGOs. Birahima notes that every time an NGO showed up with food and medicines, “the poor well-trained refugees would stand at the gate and deliver the same speech [...] everything you give to them, they give to us” (*Allah* 209).

Birahima's sense of invincibility and arrogant swagger opens for him a discursive space in which he can effectively access and document the warlords' activities during the civil wars. His commentaries on the warlords are imbued with sarcasm and irony in ways that focus attention on the contemptible nature of warlords. It is ironical that Colonel Papa le Bon's name translates 'good father' in French; Prince Johnson is 'a prince' and El Hadji Koroma is 'a hajji.' The titles of the three infamous warlords are imbued with qualities of nobility, religious piety and compassion. However, their actions during the war show that they are in no way compassionate, noble or religious. The nomenclatural irony focuses attention on the horror and evil to which child soldiers are subjected and the deception and hypocrisy in which it is enveloped.

The irony of the names of warlords allows Birahima to build a dossier on their culpability for the horror that their wars bring to society. For example, Birahima's reference to Colonel Papa le Bon's rebel army as a racket or El Hadji Koroma's scheme of using refugees to get food and medicine from the NGOs leaves no doubt in our minds that the warlords are despicable and cynical racketeers. Their true character is made vividly apparent because of the ironic juxtaposition of their names and actions. It is made clear that warlords manipulate conditions and innocent victims to fuel wars. Birahima's dossier on warlords steeped in Kourouma's irony and sarcasm underscores the duplicity and cunning of warlords fuelling civil wars in Africa. This provides us circumspectly with unique insights into what fuels civil wars in Africa. Colonel Papa le Bon's extortion, Baclay's control of the diamond trade and Johnson's quest to control the revenue of rich areas of Liberia clearly show that civil wars are started and sustained by the greed of warlords. When Birahima describes Johnson with tongue-in-cheek: saying that he "was a nice warlord because he had principles" (*Allah* 126), he is

blatantly ironical. The irony extends to all warlords, because they fight to enrich themselves and at huge cost to others, such as child soldiers. This description begs the question: if warlords fight to enrich themselves: what do child soldiers fight for? This question focuses our attention on the vulnerability and exploitation of children in contexts of war as aptly put by Dallaire (2010) in the title of his book: *They Fight like Soldiers, They Die like Children*.

Dallaire argues that “it is better to stop the recruitment and use of children within belligerent forces before it happens than to deal with the complexities of reintegrating children into their homes and communities” after the conflict (152). Kourouma’s posttraumatic vision has resonance with Dallaire’s observation about the complexity of child soldiers’ recovery and reintegration into society. Kourouma’s way of dealing with this complexity resonates with Pamela Reynolds’ assertion that there is a “great need on the part of the survivors to tell their stories over and over again” (89). The validity of the ‘talking cure’ lies in the fact that fictional child soldiers find a way of talking about their traumatic experiences. Characters like My Luck in Abani’s *Song for Night* who literally has no voice with which to narrate his experiences of war find a way of talking to us through interior monologue that takes us into his mind, while Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* takes on the mask of a writer to complete someone else’s manuscript in order to talk about his experiences of war.

Birahima’s eagerness to tell his story has to be read as a fictional intervention functioning by means of the appropriation of an effective outlet for repressed and psychically traumatic experiences. This means that he struggles to reveal these atrocities from “A to Z” (*Allah* 215) to create a record in the public sphere as testimony and warning of what war can do to children. If opposition to the use of children in war is to become a priority in international discourse, records like what Birahima painfully

assembles are important. The dictionaries are thus important, because they facilitate a language which he can use to talk competently about his traumatic past. They also act as linguistic tools by means of which the child can impress on us the horrors of war in an adult vocabulary, and express its obscenity in ‘adult’ swear words.

The Melancholy of Wartime Confinement in Marechera’s *Scrapiron Blues*

In this last section, I examine how a short story functions to expose the ugly side of the often romanticised nationalist liberation wars. Whereas the war-affected children as child soldiers in *Allah is Not Obligated* and *Beasts of No Nation* are simultaneously victims, witnesses and perpetrators, the war-affected children in “The Camp” are victims of and witnesses to wartime atrocities. “The Camp” by Dambudzo Marechera explores the depiction of children as victims and witnesses to the debilitating violence in a concentration camp. This makes it an exploration of the enormous impact of trauma on children during armed conflicts. “The Camp” is a story about two children — Tonderai and Rudo — and their suffering and pain while incarcerated in a concentration camp during the Zimbabwean war of independence.

Using the omniscient narrator, flashback technique, interior monologue, setting and symbolism, Marechera portrays the ugly side of a liberation war from the perspective of children.¹⁷ Annie Gagiano argues that Marechera’s writing in “The Camp” is visionary because “[it] shows the true face of war to be, not the conflict between roughly equal and armed adult men, but the unequal encounter between ruthless brutalisers and the harmless, tender lives they attack and destroy” (52). Gagiano’s argument reminds one of Ben Okri’s short story “Laughter beneath the

¹⁷ Other Zimbabwean writers such as Yvonne Vera in *The Stone Virgins* (2002), Shimmer Chinodya in *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) and *Child of War* (1986) (under the name B Chriasha), and Edmund Chipamaunga in *A Fighter for Freedom* (1983) also underscore the influence of Zimbabwe’s violent history on the lives of children during the life-and-death struggle for independence.

Bridge” in which an innocent child (Monica) is “dragged [...] towards the bridge and on the back of the jeep” (“Laughter” 21-22) by the soldiers and never seen again. Okri’s and Marechera’s writings are comparable because of their sensitive depiction of the pain and suffering of innocent children at the hands of powerful tormentors. The true face of war that is portrayed in their texts is the child characters’ contact with the horrors of war at such a tender age.

“The Camp” is set in an internally displaced people’s camp and explores how passive victims of war deal with their traumatic experiences. In one of Marechera’s short stories, “Black Damascus Road,” Paul commits suicide on the night of his wedding because he “has seen too much too soon” (“Black” 123). If an adult man like Paul is driven to commit suicide because of his horrific experiences of war, we can only imagine how children like Rudo and Tonderai are affected by war and life in the concentration camp. Tonderai and Rudo, whose names are translated as ‘remembering’ and ‘love’ in Shona, are children who see “too much too soon” for them to lead normal lives as other children of their age. It is the “brilliantly, harrowingly visceral accounts of bodies in pain and of mental anguish, offset by limpid moments of beauty and peace” (Gagiano 51) that captures the horrifically numbing reality of depicting the nature and impact of war on children in the concentration camp.

It is an awareness of the fear to exploit or to write condescendingly about war-affected children, which makes Marechera’s “The Camp” a subtle, nuanced and sensitive representation of the impact of the horrors of war on children (Gagiano 44). The near muteness of Tonderai and Rudo’s exaggerated silence in “The Camp” evoke Scarry’s and Caruth’s ideas on the difficulty of articulating or depicting trauma and pain. Marechera uses the metaphor of the concentration camp to navigate the difficult task of narrating extreme trauma in “The Camp.” Rudo informs us that:

It was hard and harsh, life in the camp. No one had been allowed to bring maize or anything from the village. There was no water nearby; you had to walk a very long way to get to the river. That water was brackish but was the only water near the camp [...] Rudo Makoni used to walk with her mother to the river. (“Camp” 158)

The use of “certain techniques’ in order to achieve a visionary [appreciation] of suffering [that can] convince the reader that the anguish is unique and meaningful and, at the same time, a universal expression of life” (Gagiano 44) is captured in the texture of Marechera’s language in the above passage. The inverted sentence construction that opens the passage draws our attention to and emphasises the hard life of the concentration camp. The fact that the camp inhabitants do not have maize seeds and water is very far way illustrates the hard and harsh conditions owing to the absence of the bare essentials for survival. The harsh life of the concentration camp is given a human face by the five-year-old Rudo Makoni.

Marechera crafts a narrative that can possibly provide readers with new insights into how children’s witnessing of war related violence affects their lives. His narrative texture has the potential of calling upon readers to critically consider the unquantifiable impact of war and violence on these young lives. Although Marechera’s narrative takes advantage of the benefits of the omniscient narrator and flashback, it is his utilisation of the powerful image of the “concentration camp” (of which the Holocaust is the most notorious example) that gives effectiveness to his symbolism and language, making “The Camp” a remarkable narrative of war and its impact on children.

Given that the dehumanising conditions in the camp resonate with T. W. Adorno’s argument that there can never be poetry after Auschwitz, what helps Marechera to weave a tale that captures unique insights into the impact of war on children while evoking our empathy? The respectful and sensitive, humane voice of the

adult omniscient narrator signals the inherent paradox of traumatic narratives. In the passage where the helicopter gunship strafes the boys, the omniscient narrator observes:

The boy's hands worked ceaselessly, plaiting fresh bark onto fresh strip of bark. [...] did he know with a lingering smile: it was for Rudo. As the boys fanned out, carrying sticks, stalking the stray cattle and cajoling them back into the ranks for the return to the camp, a Hawker Hunter spun out of the bright rays of the sun, dipping its wings in a metallic flash towards the group of boys and cattle in a strafing run. Tonderai was hurled to the ground and, even before he thudded on the hardpacked clay, his ears were filled with shrill screams, maddened bellows and, as he hit, his vision encompassed a panoramic scene of horror [...] the boy tottered to his feet. His eyes were coming into focus, but it was as if he was seeing the whole world through a thin screen of fresh blood. ("Camp" 161)

The beautiful language which contrasts sharply with the horrific content of the passage underscores Marechera's brilliance and sensitivity in handling the horrors of war and the resilience of life even in the most catastrophic conditions. The omniscient narrator balances the horror of war with the beauty of young love, childhood purity and human resilience to underscore the traumatic intensity of the lives of children in contexts of war. A compelling and intimate depiction of subjects who resist being stripped of their humanity by the horror of war and the inhuman conditions of the concentration camp is signalled by the herd boys' engagement in a normal and nurturing activity of herding cattle and Tonderai's blooming love for Rudo.

However, even such beautiful activities are desecrated by the viciousness of war when potential reunion of the families are harshly interrupted by death jarringly and casually spouting out of the helicopter gunship. The sinister and terrifying beauty and power of death are captured in the images and verbs that describe the helicopter's run of death. The diabolic beauty and agency in the verbs "spun out," "dipping," "flash" or the adjectives in "bright rays" and "metallic flash" paint the majestic monstrosity of a death machine. This symbolises the reality of the ever-present precarity of the children's lives

especially when such a deadly monster is deployed with a kind of callousness and casualness ironically similar to children's play.

The constant presence of death and violence does not break the spirit of children but instead reinforces their resilience as captured in the portrayal of the blooming love between Rudo and Tonderai. This is underscored by Tonderai's engrossment in making a love token for Rudo. The hands that work ceaselessly "plaiting fresh bark onto fresh strip of bark" gesture to the necessity of persisting in the task of surviving the horrific conditions of war. Whereas Tonderai's actions are geared towards the production of love, the helicopter's actions bring death and horror. Furthermore, the ease with which the helicopter gunship transforms a peaceful evening into horror gestures to the vulnerability of life in the camp.

The vulnerability of life in the concentration camp is underscored by the short story's physical setting and Marechera's subtle deployment of a powerful metaphor of the death camp. Hannah Arendt in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* avers that "there are no parallels to the life in the concentration camps" and that the horror of the concentration camp "can never be fully embraced by the imagination for the very reason that it stands outside life and death" (444). Contrary to Arendt's assertion, Marechera finds a language and a structure to depict the horror of the concentration camp in his setting. For example, the omniscient narrator observes that "[t]he others were taken away day after day by the white soldiers for questioning and sometimes they returned bleeding and unable to walk. Several of the men never returned and were reported killed" ("Camp" 159). The passive voice sentences underscore the fear and vulnerability of the family. The men are "taken away," they return "bleeding and unable to walk" and several "never returned and are reported killed."

The horror inherent in the setting of the concentration camp is underscored by the Commandant's power that "appears to function through dividing people into those who must live and those who must die" (Mbembe 16-17). The use of the passive voice construction that names the atrocity but not the perpetrator underscores the atmosphere of fear for the tormentor and suggests the incomprehensibility of the trauma. It also provides Marechera with the kind of language that can depict the horror of the camp. The binaries of heroes and traitors, whites and blacks that are usually ascribed to liberation struggles are replaced by this horrific register. We are forced to imagine what it feels like to exist in conditions where the commandant has the power of life and death — and abjection — over everyone, and does not hesitate to use it.

Lara argues that a "web of feminist storytelling that imaginatively develops new ways of understanding of women and the role of gender has played [an important role in] thinking about equality, democracy and recognition" (75). Although Lara is primarily concerned with the reconfiguration of gender perspectives in the public sphere, her argument can be applied to Marechera's project of reconfiguring childhood in contexts of war. Marechera's sombre tone and mood established by means of the folkloric type of setting evoked in the story's opening infuse the narrative with a melancholy that has the ability to evoke our empathy. "The Camp" opens with the passage: "in a narrow winding valley in north-west Zimbabwe, there lived two families [...] once there had been a big village [...] it was hard and harsh, life in the camp" ("Camp" 158). Although the story is set in the Zimbabwe of the 1970s and 1980s, Marechera gives it a remoteness that is ominous and eerie.

The darkly fear-inducing setting relates to Maureen Tilley's argument that torturers attempt to control an individual by restructuring his or her sense of reality through isolation. She avers that "isolation attacks the victim's compensatory

techniques [and by] depriving the victim of familiar places and supportive people, the torturer weakens the victim's will to resist" (468). Tilley's argument resonates with the dislocation of the villagers from the fertile valley in the mountains. The trope of being "taken away" has resonance with Okri's "Laughter beneath the Bridge." In this short story, the child narrator observes that "they took us aside, into the bush, one by one, to be questioned" ("Laughter" 5). In both texts, being taken away is a subtle and euphemistic expression for being selected for violation.

Can the sense of apprehension and disorientation inherent in the description of life in the camp evoke our empathy for the inhabitants and provide insight into how torture works? While the inhabitants of the camp are vulnerable because they have been dislocated from their natural environment, the new environment coheres with the new reality of oppression to alert us to their double trauma. Marechera depicts individuals who are lost, both literally and symbolically. The symbolic loss of a sense of belonging and rootedness is captured in the setting of the text. The setting gestures to the instinctual aversion to the strange and the unhomely that arises in contexts of war. The fable-like setting is an attempt by Marechera to insulate his characters against the traumatic reality of war.

If the dislocation of the villagers from their life-giving, fertile village terrifies them, how could it not be devastating to children? The answer to the above question is provided by Rudo's observation that she "was learning something important about the world in which she lived" ("Camp" 158). The lesson she learns forces her to grow up and confront things which she should not have had to face at her age. It is not so much the sexual harassment of her mother that she witnesses, but the realisation of her own vulnerability and helplessness that disturbs her child's world because there was "nothing she could do about" her mother's suffering ("Camp" 158). E Strover and E O

Nightingale argue that “the purpose of torture is to break the will of the victim and ultimately to destroy his or her humanity” (5). The trauma in the concentration camp is deliberately orchestrated to break the will and destroy the humanity of the residents.

By use of an interior monologue, Rudo is able to observe and reveal the torture in the camp and her own vulnerability, while protecting herself from the pain of disclosure. She observes that “they fetched water in the early morning. [...] These guards always searched Rudo’s mother very carefully [...] going or returning from the river. Rudo did not like it because the men would put their hands inside her mother’s dress” (“Camp” 158). It is with haunting illocutionary force that Rudo’s interior monologue alerts us to the double-layered suffering of women in the concentration camp. They not only have to travel long distances to get water for their families, but they are also prone to sexual harassment by the soldiers. The discerning voice of the child subtly notes that it is African guards who molest her mother and that she is helpless to protect her. Rudo’s interior monologues draw a picture of a child traumatised by the terrible conditions of life in the camp and her family’s vulnerability at the hands of the camp guards. We are shown a child struggling to narrate what she has neither the language nor the will to disclose. We also see the fear of a lost child in an appalling environment, hesitantly trying to make sense of the horror within which she lives. Thus, the interior monologue attests to her lost language, which means she can only speak in a language that exists within her mind.

It is Marechera’s portrayal of Tonderai (the protagonist of the story) as someone who has lived through what Gagliano describes as “contaminating and desecrating” experiences of war (46) which is especially affecting. LaCapra argues that “art departs from ordinary reality to produce surrealistic situations” (186). Tonderai’s reality is extraordinary because it has literally and symbolically rendered him extraordinarily

silent. Tonderai's silence gestures either to the horrific nature of his experiences which render him speechless or the intensity of trauma which he does not have a register to describe. One notices this, because after collapsing into an epileptic fit during questioning ("Camp" 162), he only talks twice in the course of the text — once when he advises Rudo to lie down when there is shooting, and a second time when he shouts: "Mama! Mama!" when his mother is hit with a rifle butt ("Camp" 194). He does not join in the triumphant shout: "WE DID IT" ("Camp" 193) after the herd boys succeed in hunting and capturing a rabbit and killing a snake. This shows that the trauma has ruptured both his language and self. Without a language, it would be difficult for Tonderai to narrate his trauma. Marechera finds a way around Tonderai's loss of language through the use of an omniscient narrator who allows us to get into Tonderai's mind to 'overhear' and 'oversee' what he thinks, feels and perceives.

The omniscient narrator observes that "two of his lower teeth were missing, the result of a kick from the sergeant when the commandant had questioned him about his father's 'friends'" ("Camp" 160). Furthermore, the omniscient narrator reports that "they stuck the bayonet to his mother's throat telling him that if she died it would be his fault" ("Camp" 160). The epileptic fit that his torture elicits signals the intensity of his pain that can only be expressed primordially as 'grunts' and 'cries.' Here, we are reminded of two occasions in Okri's "Laughter beneath the Bridge." The first incident occurs when the protagonist is too scared to talk and instead resorts to maniacal laughter at a road block. The second instance is when Monica is challenged to speak her own language, an act which will reveal her to be an 'enemy' and therefore a 'legitimate victim.' In this incident, Monica urinates, shivers, wails and jabbars in her language ("Laughter" 21). Okri's short sentences signal a flight into the preverbal 'language' which is comparable to Tonderai's epileptic fits. Tonderai's epileptic fit demonstrates

that horror destroys language, and thus Tonderai is compelled to revert to the primordial groans which are unmistakably expressions of horror and pain. In other words, it is the struggle and commitment to speak in “a voice that is paradoxically released through the wound” (Caruth 2) that allows us to imagine something of the trauma with which Tonderai lives and that Marechera attempts to articulate.

It is important to note that Marechera juxtaposes physical and psychological torture in this section of his narrative. The juxtaposition allows for a comprehensive portrayal of all forms of Tonderai’s trauma. This resonates with Scarry’s concept of “the totality of pain” which (she argues) is “world-destroying” (qtd in Harpham 206). The use of the passive voice focuses our attention on the intensity of both physical and emotional pain to which the child is subjected. While the child’s two missing teeth and epileptic fits symbolise his world that has been destroyed by intense pain, torturing an eight-year-old boy reminds one of Scarry’s truism that there has “never been an intelligent argument on behalf of torture” (qtd in Harpham 206). This not only evokes our empathy, but makes us see the monstrosity of the camp system. When Tonderai muses that he “was learning little by little from the horrifying stories whispered around” (“Camp” 160), it can be argued that it is in fact readers who are learning about the pain inflicted on innocent children during wartime.

In an article entitled “Necropolitics,” (2003) Achille Mbembe argues that the state has the power to decide who lives and who dies. Mbembe’s argument is demonstrated in the concentration camp because Tonderai is clearly marked as one who must die. In the eyes of the Commandant, he is less than a human being who must be crushed without any consequences. Although he has been marked as one to die, Marechera infuses him with agency to survive in spite of the horrific conditions of the concentration camp. This reflection creates an awareness of the dehumanising

conditions of the concentration camp and interrogates the Commandant's right to inflict pain on Tonderai. The boy's description, stating that "he looked up in the sergeant's face" and that all he could see was the "darkening twilight of the universe [which] was streaming into the sky from a point at the back of the sergeant's head," effectively uses symbolism to focus readers' attention on the evil that the child has to live through ("Camp" 161). If the eyes are a passage into the conscience of a person, the darkness in the sergeant's eyes (and he is a representative of the system) symbolises the evil the system is capable of inflicting on the child. It is this powerful acknowledgement that Tonderai is a vulnerable victim of amoral and evil men like the commandant that makes "The Camp" a credible narrative of damaged lives in contexts of war. Its profundity is signalled by Marechera's subtle and nuanced reconstruction of the state in a manner that accords with Foucault's concept of the murderous function of the state: "the condition for the acceptability of putting to death" (228). The actions of the commandant signal a sense of apprehension for the lives directly under his control: the lives we are forced to fear for and concern ourselves with in this powerful story.

What posttraumatic vision does Marechera envision for his protagonists? Rudo's and Tonderai's posttraumatic conundrum is achieved by their self-imposed muteness and awareness that the present horror is momentary and that soon the nightmare will come to pass as reflected in the omniscient narrator's report on their conversation. The symbolic use of Rudo's name, which means 'love' in Shona, and the bodily vocabulary of the "strange sweetness that splash[es] into Tonderai's heart as Rudo [takes] his hand in hers" ("Camp" 163), suggests the power of love to cleanse and regenerate the individual and the community after their traumatic experiences. Furthermore, Tonderai's love for his mother and Rudo enables him to become a "'fit' and healthy [individual who needs] to achieve a detachment from war's terrible power" (Gagiano

46) in order to survive the trauma of war. However, the fact that his name in Shona means ‘remember’ signals both the inescapability of his traumatic experiences and the importance of building ‘archives’ of children’s wartime experiences, an exercise in which the three writers discussed here partake by means of narrative fiction.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is instructive to evoke Alexandra Schultheis’s observation that in the last five years there has been “a growing market for the stories of child soldiers in literature and film” (31). While such stories (she writes) “focus much needed attention on the conditions of the estimated 300,000 child soldiers world wide” (31), she is apprehensive that they not only voyeuristically commoditise the suffering of the war-affected child, but also simplify a complex reality. Do the three texts explored in this chapter commodify the suffering of war-affected children? Do these texts reduce a complex phenomenon to simple stereotypes? While the endings of *Beasts of No Nation* and *Allah is not Obligated* using a rehabilitation centre or moving out of the war zone motif respectively lend credence to the argument that they adhere to the humanitarian script that is discussed elsewhere in the study, there is no doubt that the respective writers succeed (differently) in placing the plight of war-affected children in the public sphere.

The act of writing and narrating these experiences is equivalent to artistic grieving for the lives of war-affected children. Furthermore, given the inordinate horrors of war that Agu, Birahima and Tonderai narrate, the authors’ use of different personae or positions takes into account the need for sensitivity in depiction and avoidance of voyeuristic exploitation of the suffering of child soldiers and war-affected children. If Agu, Birahima and Tonderai are seen to struggle with their memories of war, it is

plausible to argue that their language and masks act as defence mechanisms against the psychic damage caused by their experiences.

The question, then, is what future awaits these children whose lives have been so traumatically ruptured by war? The voices of children narrating their traumatic experiences in wartime raise questions about how these children can be rehabilitated and reintegrated into society. This complicates the notion that a war-affected child can easily or perhaps even possibly reintegrate into society and continue with his or her life from where it was disrupted. What these texts underscore is that the war-affected children's lives are irrevocably harmed by their experiences. The endings of the narratives evoke empathy and a sense of ethical responsibility because they acknowledge that the child protagonists can neither make sense of what they have seen and experienced, nor 'unsee' or 'unexperience' what they have gone through, because they have lost their innocence and childhood. Such a realisation, the study argues, can show the readers that their response(s) to the protagonists need be more than mere compassion. It is plausible to argue that it can prompt them to consider what must be done to end such misery.

Chapter Three

Masculinised Public Violence and ‘Domestic’ Sexual Violation of Children:

Depictions by Akpan, Behr and Vera

“The transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory allows the story to be verbalised and communicated, to be integrated into one’s and other’s knowledge”
(Caruth 151)

Introduction

In this chapter, I turn from the battle field and the concentration camp as sites of trauma to the domestic space as a location of children’s violation. The connection between the texts explored in the preceding chapter — Uzodinma Iweala’s *Beasts of No Nation* (2005); Ahmadou Kourouma’s *Allah is not Obligated* (2007) and Dambudzo Marechera’s “The Camp” (1994) — and Uwem Akpan’s “My Parents’ Bedroom” (2008); Mark Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* (1995) and Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue* (1997) is that the violation of the children is inflicted by powerful men. Besides violating fathers, another hinge that connects the two chapters is public, masculinised violence during contexts of militarised violence and its impact on children. By public, masculinised violence, the study refers to the Rwandan Genocide, the Zimbabwean war of independence and the equally militaristic Apartheid context. The three African writers whose fiction is analysed in this chapter explore the rupture of children’s domestic security within contexts of socio-political upheaval. Despite pronounced differences in the settings and narrative styles of the stories, by situating the sexual violation of their protagonists in the symbolic bastion of domestic security and privacy (the bedroom) and depicting fathers or father figures as violators of the child protagonists, the three authors show how, within contexts of public violence — the Zimbabwean Chimurenga,

Apartheid and the Rwandan genocide — the safety of the home space and the bedroom is compromised and the cost of violence is traumatically borne by children.

All three authors locate their “tragically ill-equipped” protagonists (Sambell 253) in homes whose former security has been compromised or subverted by conflict. It is well known that rape is often used as a weapon in conflicts. Louise du Toit observes that “systematic rape has often in conflicts been used to mark territories and to break the morale of the enemy group, the Christian-Serbian rapes of Muslim Croatian women during the 90s being a clear case in point” (47), whereas Meredith Turshen argues that “rape is the most common act of violence against women in wartime” and that it “is also an act of political violence” (803). Similarly, Patricia A. Weitsman (commenting on the use of rape and sexual violence during the 1994 Rwandan genocide) argues that owing to government propaganda targeting Tutsi women’s supposed promiscuity and their alleged feeling of superiority towards Hutu men as an unattractive low class, “systematic rape that took place during the widespread killing in Rwanda was undertaken with the express purpose of degrading, humiliating, punishing, and torturing Tutsi women” (574).

While the above-mentioned scholars focus on rape of adult women as a weapon in conflict zones, the three authors examined in this chapter use their fiction to introduce child rape as an under-investigated phenomenon occurring during times of conflict off the battle field, in the victims’ homes. Whether it is the depiction of genocidal violence in “My Parents’ Bedroom” or the fear of annihilation by neighbouring African states and internal uprising of the black population in *The Smell of Apples* or the unavoidable violence of a liberation war in *Under the Tongue*, the three texts resonate in their foregrounding of child rape as a consequence of misuse of power and authority by some men in contexts of public, masculinised violence. The different forms of violation

depicted in the three texts — sexual violence facilitated by trusted male adults, pederastic rape and incestuous rape — spotlight how, in violent environments, men are implicated in the abuse of their own children or child charges. In the first section, I explore Akpan's depiction of adult male enmities enacted on a girl's body and the victim's response to this type of patriarchal violence. In the second section, I examine how Behr uses peepholes to expose pederastic rape as an outcome of militaristic and masculinist latitude arising from the depicted society's travesty of its celebrated principles of militaristic honour, religious propriety and the protection of family. In the third section, I investigate how Vera depicts firstly the loss of speech because of the horror of incestuous rape and secondly the role of speech in building new familial ties after the loss of those severed by patriarchal incest.

The recurrent motif of child rape in the three texts spotlights an under-investigated phenomenon in the African literary public sphere. Akpan explores a space where “God permit[s] evil to flourish” (Corrigan 1) because pathologised Hutu masculinity publicly mobilises ethnicity and physical appearance as grounds for the extermination of the Tutsis (“Parents” 272) and fathers or father figures become implicated in the sexual assault on a child that they should be protecting. Similarly, in a context where the ‘real’ or ‘imagined’ enemy is “bearing down on [the Afrikaner society] from all directions” (*Smell* 200), the fear of total annihilation gives the father-General absolute power and impunity that is abused (through pederastic rape). This is especially true when we consider the fact that father-General's favourite expression “*duidelik verstaanbaar* [clearly understandable]” portrays him as an autocrat whose word is final in the home (*Smell* 19). In Vera's text, Muroyiwa's explanation that his brother — Tachiveyi — who had gone to war, usually tore off and ate lizard tails

(*Tongue* 91) reveals the psychotically violent impact of war on Zimbabwean masculinity.

While Tachiveyi expresses his suppressed frustration and violence by going to war and mutilating lizards, the ‘stay-home’ and ‘butterfly-hunting’ Muroyiwa expresses his violently psychotic impulses in the incestuous rape of his daughter. If lizards perform autotomy — in their defensive act of self-mutilation by shedding off their tails when under threat of capture — one can plausibly read Tachiveyi’s dismemberment of these creatures’ tails as mirroring his own self-sacrifice. Here we recall Muroyiwa’s observation that his brother had gone to war to fight for his freedom. By going to war, Tachiveyi’s violent obsession with and/or mutilation of lizards provides him not only with the heroism of fighting to protect his family and nation, but also affords him an acceptable cathartic outlet for the inherently violent disposition arising from colonial violence and oppression. While Tachiveyi’s violent fascination with lizards channels his aggression in an appropriate form — to the extent that he fights adults who can defend themselves, Muroyiwa who stays home and searches for beauty and fragility (see his obsession with butterflies) does not have an acceptable cathartic outlet like that of his brother. This possibly explains why his suppressed violence catastrophically expresses itself in form of incestuous rape of his daughter

Attempted Rape in Akpan’s “My Parents’ Bedroom”

In this section, I explore how Uwem Akpan uses fiction to explore the targeting of a young girl for rape and the victim’s response to such violation. Set in rural Rwanda during the 1994 genocide, Akpan’s text employs a child focaliser (Monique) to analyse rape attempted in the security of the home and privacy of the bedroom. The text opens with Monique’s mother dressing up — ostensibly to go out for the evening, but in fact she is going to hide in the ceiling in order to escape the killers. She asks Monique to

protect herself and her younger brother while she is away. When a mob led by Monique's paternal uncle attacks her home, in search of her mother, Monique is sexually attacked as a surrogate for her mother. Still struggling to make sense of what is happening around her, the violated, traumatised girl is later forced to escape with her brother after her father is forced to kill her mother, who is figured as an enemy, due to her Tutsi ethnicity. Nine-year-old Monique has to try and make sense of her world, which is turned into a nightmare by the genocidal violence around her. The power of this text as a depiction of rape lies in how Akpan transports us into the private space — the bedroom — to witness violation of an innocent nine-year-old child in contexts of violent upheaval.

Although the image of Monique's coerced father murdering his resigned wife may evoke Richard K. Priebe's argument that in contemporary imaginaries Africa is "situated as a place of violence" (46) and Sherene Razack's description of the Rwandan Genocide as "one of the last century's enduring images of evil" (205) — according to Chinua Achebe, bringing into question the "very humanity of black people" (15) — I argue that the attempted sexual assault on Monique highlights the cost borne by children in ethnicised conflicts. Valuable work has been done on the text by Adrian Knapp, Paul Lakeland and John Kearney who point to the gruesome murder of Maman ("Parents" 284-285) to argue that the text is about the unimaginable horror of ethnicised violence. While the three scholars' foregrounding of how traumatic Monique's witnessing of the murder of her mother by her father is valid, I argue that Monique's violation by a Hutu neighbour is similarly horrific. Writing on the Rwandan genocide, Kenneth Harrow notes that "one key question continually posed by the events of the genocide — posed by all [concerned parties] and never really answered [is] why did you kill your neighbours, even your own family members; why did you participate in a genocide?"

(38). Akpan attempts to reframe a version of Harrow's baffling question. His text asks why Monique's male relatives not only fail to protect her, but actually deliver her to be raped?

In "Acts of Power, Control and Resistance: Narrative Accounts of Convicted Rapists," Peter Kellet notes that convicted rapists justified their actions as a form of "debt collection, a payment, a reasonable revenge, or a re-balancing of injustice" (148). I find Kellet's delineation of terribly perverted masculinity of rapists useful in my reading of Akpan's portrayal of Monique's attempted sexual violation. In the eyes of her Hutu neighbour who attempts to rape her, Monique's violation is perceived as an acceptable price/prize for his ethno-national service of putting Tutsi women in "[their] right place" (Kellet 144). Although Monique is a mere child and of mixed ethnicity (Hutu father, Tutsi mother), she is seen as an acceptable surrogate for her absent mother. Her attackers clearly relish the opportunity presented by the genocidal violence to feed their fantasies of cruelty and ugly lust on this vulnerable child.

The 1996 Human Rights Watch Report: "Shattered Lives: Sexual Violence during the Rwandan Genocide and its Aftermath" observes that the government propaganda leading up to the violent events of 1994 convinced Hutu men that Tutsi women were arrogant and disrespectful towards them because they thought of themselves as royalty and aristocrats. The report concludes that, for Hutu men, the genocide provided an opportunity to either avenge their maligned or affronted manhood by 'teaching' the 'arrogantly aloof' Tutsi women a 'lesson' or fulfilling their fantasies about the sexuality of the mysterious Tutsi women. This, explains the report, is why rape and sexual violence were common crimes committed against Tutsi women during the genocide. Monique is targeted by her Hutu neighbours because of her stereotypically Tutsi appearance. Here, we recall her mother's worry about her beauty,

when Monique informs us that her mother wishes that she could have been “beautiful in other ways” and that her relatives also worry that “it’s risky that [she] look[s] so much like Maman” (“Parents” 276). In the prevailing violent context of the genocide, it is plausible to argue that Monique is targeted for sexual violation because her body indexes her as an ethnically different person coded as an enemy who can be violated.

In her reading of the use of rape as a weapon during the South African struggle for freedom, Louise du Toit argues that “women’s sexuality was simply used as a way of motivating or rewarding soldierly acts” (16). Similarly, Patricia Weitsman relates an anecdote about Pauline Nyiramasuhuko — a Rwandan Government Minister — who “used rape to reward the soldiers for the killings, urging them on time after time” to rape the women before killing them (573). I find both Du Toit’s and Weitsman’s spotlighting of how in contexts of violent upheaval South African and Rwandan patriarchy diabolically deploys rape to extract their “soldierly rewards” exemplified in fictional justification of Monique’s attempted violation in “My Parents’ Bedroom.” In the eyes of her would-be violators, Monique is perceived as a fair reward or motivation for their soldierly acts. This is underlined by the rapists’ reference to Monique as a “little thing” (“Parents” 273). The phrase “little thing” ethnically objectifies her even as it nullifies her mother’s logic that Monique’s proclamation of her patrilineal identity would save her (“Parents” 266). In spite of her mixed ethnicity and a justifiable claim on Hutu citizenship, Monique is dehumanised because she has been reified by the obsessively ethnicised masculinity of her attackers.

Another factor making Monique’s violation possible is that on this fateful day she is left alone in the house. At the start of the text we are impressed by her parents’ care and concern when Monique reports that she has been kept indoors the whole weekend, presumably to protect her. However, by keeping her indoors and refusing to

allow Monique to ask questions about what is going on outside — “swallow all your questions” (“Parents” 265) — as well as leaving her alone in the house on the evening of the attempted rape, her parents inadvertently create the conditions for the attempted rape. The parents commit the common African middle class folly of assuming that the best way to protect children in contexts of violence is to hide the truth from them. When Tonton Nzeyimana declares that nobody would escape their wrath this time (“Parents” 272), it is clear that Maman is the mob’s target. However, when the mob fails to find Maman, Monique who looks like her, becomes her legitimate replacement in the eyes of the mob. Unfortunately, Nzeyimana’s statement that Monique is one of them (“Parents” 273) does not summon ethnic protection neither does Maman’s advice that Monique should say she is “*one of them*” (“Parents” 266 my emphasis) to protect herself and her younger brother, Jean. Whereas Maman’s statement underscores the protective attributes of ethnicity, shockingly, Nzeyimana’s statement validates child rape as long as the victim is Tutsi. The fact that her paternal uncle (André) fails to heed her cry for help as the two men attempt to violate her — “I call to Tonton André” (“Parents” 271) — spotlight how during contexts of social stress patriarchy abandons and betrays children it is supposed to protect. Distraught because of his participation in his pregnant Tutsi wife’s murder and enraged by the absence of Maman, André epitomises Kenneth Harrow unanswerd (or inanswerable) question: why did Hutu men murder their wives and allow the (attempted) rape of their daughters? Akpan shows how thirst for revenge and lust for ethnic cleansing blinds some Hutu men to their duty to protect innocent women and children in their custody.

The second issue that Akpan pursues in “My Parents’ Bedroom” is Monique’s response to the attempted rape. Louise du Toit argues that “the aftermath of rape is often characterised for the victim by the total collapse of such an integrated and meaningful,

coherent ‘worlded self’ or ‘subjective world’ and that “suicide attempt rates are high among survivors” (80). Similarly, Annette Wolbert Burgess argues that rape triggers “psychic disequilibrium” among survivors (qtd in Hesford 215). If rape of adult women triggers such psychic disturbance, we can only imagine how devastating sexual violation is to nine-year-old Monique. However, Monique is (significantly) not reduced to a passive and helpless victim. The vividness of Monique’s description of her attackers is striking. She informs us that one of her attackers is “bald and wearing stained yellow trousers [...] has a few strands of hair on his chest and his belly is huge and firm. The other is young, secondary-school age [...] and is wearing jean overalls, a T-shirt and dirty tennis shoes” (“Parents” 271).

The fact that she observes and describes them before they attack her allows Akpan three representational advantages in his task of using fiction to uncover the under-investigated phenomenon of child rape during conflicts. Firstly, like it is reflected by her attempts to hide the crucifix, her detailed description shows her heightened and anticipatory apprehension. She is on a watchout for ‘trouble and trouble makers’ because as she rightly assumes, something wrong is likely to happen when the mob invades her home. Secondly, her unexpectedly detailed description of her violators reflects her horror and vulnerability. She is frozen by her terror so that she involuntarily looks at and clearly notes otherwise banal details about their appearance. Thirdly, her precise description uncannily mirrors the courage and agency required in the formulation of an identity kit of the rapists. Having tried to fight them off as strongly as she could and having failed to enlist the timely intervention of her male relatives on her behalf — neither Tonton Nzeyimana nor Tonton André immediately heed her call for help — Monique’s description is more than a mechanical and reflexive action of a

traumatised child who is resigned to her fate. It is rather a courageous, evidence-gathering action that produces a profile sketch (mug shot) of her attackers.

Lara argues that women's narratives deploy "new metaphors that provide new ways [of] self-understanding and self-interpretation" (70). The repulsive description of her violators constitutes some of the "new metaphors" that move us to imagine Monique's anguish in a manner that does not offer us a "comfortable position of distant observation" (Harrow 40). Monique's "new metaphors" also remind us of Anne Whitehead's argument that "the rise of trauma fiction has provided novelists with new ways of conceptualising trauma and has shifted attention away from the question of what is remembered of the past to how and why it is remembered" (*Trauma Fiction* 3). From a stylistic point of view, the child narrator's tone, voice and language record her attempted rape as an awful "human act rather than a specific case of ethno-political massacre within a colonial/postcolonial context" in the depicted society (Ganguly 50). The depiction of her dauntless struggle during the attempted rape dissuades us from describing her as a passive and helpless victim. In fact, her courageous, persistent struggle delays the assault significantly before Tonton Nzeyimana's intervening shout that halts the attack. This brings to mind Geoffrey Hartman's observation that the power of art lies in the fact that it often acts as "testimony and representation" (545).¹⁸ Monique's spirited fight against her would-be rapist testifies to how women's agency challenges the powerful violator and abuser in contexts of violence:

He pulls me out by my ankles. Pressing me down on the floor, the naked man grabs my two wrists with his left hand. He pushes up my nightie with the right and tears my underpants. I shout at the top of my

¹⁸ This resonates with Debjani Ganguly's argument that narratives about genocide "supplement and enhance [...] these experiences in ways that the real experiences simply cannot" (52). This is probably because fiction allows the imagining of and interface with events and realities that are too traumatic to verbalise in real life.

voice. I call to Tonton André, who is pacing in the corridor. He doesn't come. I keep screaming. I'm twisting and holding my knees together. Then I snap at the naked man with my teeth. He hits my face, this way that way, until my saliva is salted with blood. I spit in his face. Twice. He bangs my head on the floor, pinning down my neck, punching my left thigh. ("Parents" 271)

Although the home (bedroom) as the epitome of the family's protection of its children has been compromised, Monique's fight against her attacker underlines children's resilience even in the most traumatic conditions. Her actions of "twisting;" "holding knees together;" "snapping at" and "spitting" are quintessential anti-rape actions. Although she is hit and her head banged on the floor, she fights back courageously and determinedly by biting her attacker and expressing her disgust by spitting at him.

Monique's agency and courage are also reflected in her willingness to give Maman and Papa her account of what was done to her. Monique informs us that when she attempts to show her parents the evidence of her near rape — her torn nightie, soiled pants, swollen mouth and thigh — Maman dismissively tells her that she will "get a new pair of underpants" and that her "face will be beautiful again" ("Parents" 277). Whereas Maman appears to respond dismissively to the evidence of Monique's violation, Papa reacts angrily. When Monique tells him that André "'brought a man to tear [her] underpants'" ("Parents" 274), he shouts: "'leave me alone'" ("Parents" 274). Akpan's juxtaposition of Monique's eloquence with her parents' reluctance to listen to her story spotlights two representational issues about child rape. Firstly, if (as Irene Kacandes argues) "trauma must be narrativised for healing to take place" (67), the fluency of Monique's recollections (Whitehead 7) underline her agency and willingness to speak about her trauma in order to heal. Secondly, Akpan arouses our empathy for parents who are anguished possibly because they blame themselves for the violation of their daughter. Having failed to protect their daughter in her hour of need, their unwillingness to listen to their daughter's narration of the awful experience of sexual

violation is a psychic blocking out of this horrific experience. Their abruptness is also not so much out of lack of care, but out of their helplessness as they grapple with what is ahead: that Maman must be sacrificed in order to save Papa and the children, and indeed, the possibility that Maman was the rape target for the attackers. Here, Akpan uses the parents' anguish to show what it feels like to be a parent who cannot protect your child when the child most needs your protection.

Monique's willingness to speak about her attempted rape to her parents who are 'unwilling' to listen to her story fictionally parallels the story of Esther Mujawayo, a genocide survivor who was frustrated by the fact that people did not listen up to the end of her story without interrupting her at "a certain point saying something like 'no stop it I can't bear this'" (Kopf 50). Mujawayo's relief at finding a listener willing to listen up to the end of her story, Kopf (2010) argues, reflects the paradox of trauma. Although some trauma victims are willing to talk about their experiences in order to heal, because of the horrific character of their experiences, they often lack willing listeners to their awful stories. This explains why literary texts "play a crucial role in helping our understanding of extreme violence and traumatic experience" (Armstrong 259). Armstrong's argument is applicable to Akpan's text because of the way he deploys the symbolism associated with the family's crucifix to illustrate the children's posttraumatic survival in a context where socio-familial bonds have been severed to the extent that such children not only distrust their relatives, but also any form of adult authority ("Parents" 287-289).

Monique informs us that although she is a girl, her father has said she will inherit the crucifix because she is the firstborn of the family and she will "carry it till [she gives it to her] child" ("Parents" 267). It is because of this promise that Monique does everything in her power to save and protect it ("Parents" 270). Although it is

plausible to argue that, like the crucifix, Monique is “broken” by the attempted rape and by witnessing of the gruesome murder of her mother at the hands of her father, it is the double symbolic significance of the crucifix — inheritance and luminosity — that frames Monique’s survival and recovery in this text. Here, we recall Monique’s agency inscribed in her statement “We want to live; we don’t want to die. I must be strong” (“Parents” 289) and her insight as depicted in the phrase “if Papa could not spare Maman’s life, would my mother’s relatives spare mine” (“Parents” 289). Though indeed broken and traumatised by her experience, Akpan shows how Monique’s recovery and survival are irrevocably linked to the purifying and illuminating attributes of the incandescent crucifix. Its luminosity that cannot be eclipsed even when they lie down on it (“Parents” 289) and its other attributes that she deems important to protect and preserve, script Akpan’s alternative site to the toxicity of genocidal violence. With adults having subverted the moral and spiritual wellbeing of society in their frenzied ethnic cleansing, the crucifix as the only item these children are able to salvage out of the chaos arising from ethnic cleansing, suggests that it is in the spiritual realm that comfort and safety from the toxicity of genocidal violence can be attained.

Taboo Revelations in Behr’s *The Smell of Apples*

In this section, I examine how Mark Behr’s subtle narrative technique enables his protagonist to unmask both the homosexual rape of his best friend and the insidious means used to coerce and seduce him into maintaining his father’s hypocritical mask of respectability. Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* employs a double narrative structure to unmask the terrible outcome of depraved fatherly and militaristic authority in a privileged upper class Afrikaner family. While the main narrative is about the young protagonist’s (Marnus) upbringing in an upper class Afrikaner family in the Cape Town of the 1970s, a sub narrative presented as war diary extracts tells the story of the

older Marnus fighting in Southern Angola in the 1980s. The novel centrally focuses on the momentous events occurring during what the protagonist — in one of his war diary extracts — refers to as the “summer [that] ultimately determined it [...] just that one week in December [...] the arrival of the visitor cannot be divorced from what preceded his coming” (*Smell* 31).

While Marnus’s many parroted sayings borrowed from his parents and teachers betray his racist upbringing (*Smell* 66-67), his willingness to obey authority unquestioningly, trustingly imbued in his nicknames, show us that he is nurtured to fit into the militaristic and patriarchal establishment of his people (*Smell* 1, 35). However, when the real face of this institution is unveiled in unnerving snapshots of crimes committed allegedly in pursuit and protection of racial purity — the burning of Little Neville; his mother’s indiscretion with the visiting Chilean General and his father’s rape of his best friend — Marnus’s world is turned upside down. It is clear that what transpires in the Erasmus home during this “one week in December” shakes young Marnus’s confidence in the righteousness of his people’s cause and the propriety of his family. Coming face to face with the military and patriarchal establishment’s use of fear of annihilation by neighbouring African states and internal black unrest to violate and oppress its own people, Marnus is conflicted between unmasking this hypocrisy or maintaining the respectability of his society (in the text this is symbolised by his family).

In an interview with van der Vlies, Behr argues that he wanted *The Smell of Apples* to “show how one is born into, loved into and violated into discrimination and how none of us were, or are, free from it” (4). I argue that it is also true that the text usefully foregrounds both the illocutionary barriers and insidious tools deployed by the system to mask its crimes. Ground-breaking investigations by critics such as Sarah

Nuttall and Carli Coetzee, Rita Barnard and Michiel Heyns have focused on how Behr uses sexuality as a trope for uncovering Apartheid's crimes. Admittedly, the above critics' arguments that *The Smell of Apples* is a confessional text that Behr uses to exonerate himself and White South Africans from the ills committed by the Apartheid regime, or one that attempts to expose what Rita Barnard has labelled "Apartheid's moldy corpse" (207) are valid given the textual evidence they present. Nevertheless, I argue that its additional significance in the post-apartheid literary canon lies in how it interrogates the use of fear during real or imaginary moments of national crisis to gag the victims of various forms of hegemonic violation.

It is important to note that *The Smell of Apples* exposes numerous forms of violation of children, women and men in a Janus-faced Afrikaner patriarchal-nationalistic sphere. However, it is the homoerotic paedophilic rape of a young boy that epitomises the breaching of the sanctuary of the home and children's safety in this institution.¹⁹ In one of his war diary extracts, Marnus informs us that although the reconnaissance team had estimated the presence of more than ten thousand Cuban infantry soldiers in Southern Angola, they (the commanders) were "instructed not to divulge the enemy's logistical and numerical superiority to [their] troops" (*Smell* 82). He goes on to relate another anecdote of how, when they were two hundred kilometres inside Southern Angola on New Year's day 1984, his father had told the world on radio that "there wasn't a single South African soldier inside Angola" (*Smell* 83). The two passages above illustrate the unquestionable power and latitude of the military establishment. By showing the South African military establishment callously allowing

¹⁹ See Rita Barnard, Michiel Heyns, Sarah Nuttall and Carli Coetzee and Njabulo Ndebele. These critics use the textual evidence that Marnus was being prepared for the life of a privileged Apartheid supporter and Mark Behr's own confession at a conference at University of Cape Town that he worked as an informant for the security services while he was a student at Stellenbosch University to categorise the text as an example of White South African confessional fiction.

the sacrifice of its own soldiers in order to reinforce the stereotype of Afrikaner military prowess and moral-political rectitude, arrogantly treating the rest of the world in lying in official declarations (as suggested in the two passages above), Behr stresses the difficulty of disclosing embarrassing truths about one of Apartheid's celebrated Generals. I argue that it is in fiction (as Behr's *The Smell of Apples* demonstrates) or in ingenious techniques such as Marnus's peepholes and Behr's subtle language, that hegemonic patriarchy is challenged and its predatory secrets uncovered.

In *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*, Maria Pia Lara insightfully argues that "transformations entail a fusion of horizons, a new and novel way of understanding oneself" (157). Lara's foregrounding of transformational attributes of narratives usefully resonates with the novelty of Behr's discursive model in his depiction of pederastic rape in *The Smell of Apples*. Insights into the oppressive and hypocritical Afrikaner masculinity are emphasised by the concluding statement of Marnus's Grade 3 essay: "*you can learn all this by walking through the museum and by just keeping your eyes open. Open eyes are the gateways to an open mind*" (*Smell* 160, original italics). The images of "open eyes" and "gateways" point to Marnus's ability to bear witness to and disclose the rape of his best friend in an institution which is characterised by secrecy. Uncannily, the "open eyes" and "gateways" allude to the peepholes that the protagonist uses to expose an "Afrikaner father's pederasty [rape] — and, by extension, [...] a generational violence perpetrated against Apartheid's ostensible beneficiaries" (Barnard 208). Since both the victim of and witness to pederastic rape in *The Smell of Apples* are muted and gagged in the text's secretively hypocritical world, peepholes are crucial to Behr's task of disclosing this kind of traumatic violation.

Concerning the use of peepholes, Rita Barnard (2000) argues that Behr places the “reader in something of an uncomfortable position — with eyes glued, voyeuristically, to the convenient holes that Behr has made for us to peep through, in Marnus's bedroom floor” (210). Barnard’s disapproving reading of the representational significance of the peepholes overlooks the importance of this device in exposing a taboo subject in a secretive society. On the one hand, the peepholes authenticate the resources at the disposal of a conflicted and scared child to discover a horrifying incident, and on the other hand, it allows the novel’s focus on the articulation of personalised trauma by those who are constrained by an abusive and secretive Apartheid ethos. I argue, furthermore, that it is not so much the text’s ability to use the peepholes to expose the violation and rupture of young lives that underscores the aptness of Behr’s discursive technique. It is rather how this technique allows him to disclose a traumatic subject matter in an environment that gags and mutes the victims and witnesses that makes his text an exceptional archive of troubled Afrikaner childhood sexuality.

Although both Rita Barnard and Michiel Heyns argue that Mark Behr uses the innocence of childhood as a means of exculpating his involvement in Apartheid’s crimes (qtd in Roux 243), I argue that this narrative stance allows him to sidestep the representational difficulty associated with his delicate subject matter in a highly secretive and hypocritical society. In the penultimate section of the novel, Behr uses the peepholes to allow Marnus to witness and inadvertently (uncomprehendingly) disclose the rape of his best friend. My hypothesis is supported by the fragmented, diversionary and contradictory 15-page passage that is dedicated to the depiction of Frikkie’s rape and its consequences. Marnus’s witnessing of Frikkie’s rape starts when Marnus discovers that his friend is not in bed, goes to the peepholes to investigate and witnesses

a man he believes to be the Chilean General putting his hand on Frikkie's shoulder, after which the man

bends forward and from up here it looks like his face is right up against Frikkie's [...] his other hand is on Frikkie's John Thomas. Now his face is against Frikkie's and it looks like he's pressing him against the wall and kissing him. *I want to choke*. He takes Frikkie's one hand and puts it between his legs. His mister is standing up out of his pyjama pants. *I shut my eyes tightly* [...] he's moving Frikkie's hand up and down his mister. With his free hand, he pulls down Frikkie's shorts and underpants. (*Smell* 175, my emphasis)

In the above passage, the uncomprehending, childlike phrases "his face is against Frikkie's;" "takes Frikkie's one hand and puts it between his legs" and "he's moving Frikkie's hand up and down his mister" indicate Marnus's bewilderment at what is happening to his friend. The innuendo and euphemism allow him to delay his exposure of coerced masturbation by a boy as the crime that is being perpetrated in the bedroom below. Although it can be plausibly argued that Marnus's euphemistic register and the peepholes allow Behr to depict a sensitive subject without being voyeuristic, I read both the peepholes and the elliptical description of the scene as highlighting Marnus's struggle to make sense of what is happening and who is perpetrating it in the guest bedroom below. Marnus's apparent denial and unwillingness to identify the perpetrator and the violation underscore his bewilderment at seeing his father in this light. Marnus is unable at first to grasp the fact that his father is a masturbator because it is too bewildering a thought, even unthinkable to contemplate. Furthermore, the delayed exposure of his father as a masturbator and rapist accentuates the linguistic barriers that curtail the disclosure of embarrassing information. Whereas the euphemistic expressions indicate sensitivity and politeness, they also reflect Marnus's lack of an appropriate register to acknowledge and describe what he witnesses. This highlights both the monstrosity of forced (imposed) masturbation and pederastic rape, as well as

the hypocrisy that deletes the diction for such acts from the linguistic repertoire of children.

Besides ensuring that a balance is struck between the sensational impact of his depiction and fiction's ability to witness and disclose sexual violation by the father-General, Behr's technique allows him to sidestep the illocutionary restrictions against the disclosure of a taboo violation in a society whose hypocrisy and secrecy create impunity for the violators. This is because the peepholes give the impression that the crime that Marnus discloses is accidentally stumbled upon. Judith Lewis Herman argues that "people who have survived atrocities often tell their stories in a highly emotional, contradictory, and fragmented manner" (22). Similarly, Marnus's seemingly accidental revelation of the violation is highly contradictory and fragmented because it parallels his shock and disbelief at what he witnesses. This is confirmed by Marnus's reference to the poor light in the guest bedroom, the limited vision of the peepholes and the pyjama shirt that he initially uses as excuses to postpone the identification of his father as the violator. It is probable that Marnus (at least initially) honestly thinks the violator is what his sister — Ilse — earlier in the evening describes as the "dark stranger" (*Smell* 151), and not his father.

Marnus's instinctual revulsion and reading of an adult man using a child in masturbation as immoral spotlights his father's and society's hypocrisy. Since his father's ultra-righteous Christian teaching has drilled into him the belief that the Afrikaners' moral propriety symbolise a covenant between them and God, Marnus's anger and perplexity underscore his dismay and disillusionment. For a child who agonises over the "sin" of letting Frikkie copy his sums, we can imagine how devastating it is to witness his father's engagement in what he has been taught to consider the utmost indication of moral debauchery. This explains why Marnus seems

unsure and reluctant to believe that his father is a child rapist. It is profoundly ironic, to the reader, but shocking to Marnus, that the father who has taught him that masturbation is immoral and to whom he turns to protect his friend is the very masturbator and child rapist whom he observes.

Behr's temporary repression of the exposure of Johan Erasmus as a rapist arouses our empathy for a child who is faced with the dilemma of whether to disclose the rape and get justice for his best friend, or to keep it a secret and maintain his father's hypocritical mask of respectability. The text's controlling metaphors of "open eyes" and "gateways" cohere with the cliff hanger digressions and seemingly accidental revelation such as the slipping pyjama-shirt to identify without any doubt that the rapist in the guest bedroom is the protagonist's own father:

He pulls Frikkie's legs apart and it looks as if he's rubbing something into Frikkie's bum. Then he goes on to his knees between Frikkie's legs and I can see his mister [...] but it seems like he pushes his mister into Frikkie's bum and then lies down on top of him. He starts moving around. It's is just like the Coloured with the girl in the dunes. He uses his one hand to hold himself on the bed. With the other he keeps the pillow down over Frikkie's head. With all the moving around, the pyjama-shirt is pushing up [...] even before the pyjama-shirt has moved halfway up, I can see: the scar is gone from the General's back. (*Smell* 177)

The significance of this scene in Behr's task of disclosing pederastic rape lies in how we are made to witness not only the horror of a powerful man subduing and raping a child, but also how the rapist symbolically mutes the child by keeping the "pillow down over [the victim's] head." Given that in idiomatic Afrikaans the euphemistic expression "mister" ("*meneer*") means both penis and master, I argue that the above scene also underscores the violating, gagging and domineering omnipotence of militarised patriarchy. In an environment where the victims and witnesses are actively gagged, innovative techniques like the peepholes and euphemistic register are useful or even necessary to expose the horror of the acts of powerful adult men.

Marnus's register in the above passage coheres with Behr's vivid, slow motion pace in this particular episode to highlight the protagonist's anxiety and fear of exposing a horrific violation and the powerful individual who perpetrates it in the domestic sphere. The cliff hanger diversions such as "I must go and call Dad [...] maybe I should just wake Mum" (*Smell* 175) signal Marnus's fear and unwillingness to confront the horror unravelling in the family guest bedroom below him. In fact, his last minute revelation that the rapist is his father ("before the pyjama-shirt has moved halfway up [...] the scar is gone from the General's back" — *Smell* 177) appears accidental, affirming that Marnus is either too scared or too embarrassed or too horrified to label his father a child rapist. The peepholes and Marnus's innocent gaze highlight three points about Behr's writing. Firstly, the apparent reluctance to name the perpetrator as his own father authenticates Behr's depictions of Marnus as a frightened and conflicted child faced with the dilemma of exposing or keeping the secret of a father he adores. Secondly, it underlines the difficulty of surmounting the secrecy surrounding a subject that is taboo in the home. Thirdly, as pointed out elsewhere, it allows Behr some degree of elegance not to sensationalise his depiction of homosexual rape in a quintessential upper-class Afrikaner home.

Behr's symbolism variously depicts the vulnerability of children under this powerful militaristic institution. It is not coincidental that upon Marnus's discovery of his father's rape of his best friend, he looks at Oupa Erasmus's trophy and out on False Bay. Whereas the trophy symbolises children as victims and trophies for adults to do with as they wish, False Bay echoes the falsity and hypocrisy of his society. The symbolic significance of Oupa Erasmus's trophy and the geographical name False Bay are complemented by Marnus's actions of rolling back the carpet, and curling himself into a foetal position by pulling the sheets up his chin. Marnus's somnambulistic and

dazed actions instinctively draw our attention to the enormity of the abuse he has witnessed and the difficulty of absorbing, let alone divulging such information. His movements portray a child whose world has been turned upside down by a father he adores. The foetal posture he takes as he digests the implications of what he has witnessed illustrates his vulnerability.

Maria Pia Lara argues that particular writers adopt distinctive points of view to ensure that their narratives matter in the public sphere. She concludes that “the uniqueness of a writer’s position makes her/his account of human action meaningful” (9). I argue that the “uniqueness” of Behr’s text lies in how he uses the olfactory image alluded to in the text’s title — *The Smell of Apples* — to supplement the discursive properties of the peepholes in his task of unmasking the rot in his society symbolised by Johan Erasmus’s rape of Frikkie. The olfactory image is used contrastively: i.e. originally to show the protagonist’s initial confidence in and latter his disillusionment with his society. The first time the phrase is used is when Marnus asks whether his father can smell the apples in the back seat of the car on their return journey from his Uncle Samuel’s apple farm near Grabouw (*Smell* 124).

Although the initial mention of the phrase “smell of apples” conjures up images of freshness and health, Johan Erasmus’s questionable claim that an empty South Africa was given to the Afrikaner by God and that even the apples were brought by the white man affirms the stale ideological affirmation of a pathologised masculinity and racist militarism.²⁰ Ironically, the freshness that the image of freshly plucked apples suggests turns into putrefaction at the second mention of the phrase. When Frikkie complains that the apples stink and Marnus corrects him by saying that the stench is on his hands

²⁰ See Njabulo Ndebele’s argument in “Memory, Metaphor, and the Triumph of Narrative” that novels like Behr’s *The Smell of Apples* highlight the Afrikaners’ “illusion of [...] historical heroism” and the “burden of being special” (24).

and not the apples the morning after the rape, Behr is able to underscore Afrikaner militaristic patriarchy's contamination and corruption of its children (*Smell* 179). It is probable that the stubborn, foul odour that cannot be washed away with "Sunlight liquid" or "Dettol" (*Smell* 179) comes from the semen that Erasmus ejaculates on Frikkie's hands during the masturbation and rape. The contrasting imagery of putrefaction and freshness heightens the impression of the contamination and corruption of childhood perverted by fatherly authority that accords child violators the latitude to exploit innocent children.

The second issue that *The Smell of Apples* addresses are the insidious means that Afrikaner militaristic patriarchy deploys to gag witnesses to its crimes. Even though I have argued that Rita Barnard's and Michiel Heyns's readings of *The Smell of Apples* privilege the socio-political and the sexual at the expense of the suffering of children in an Afrikaner domestic sphere, I find their reading of the coercive nature of Afrikaner patriarchy insightful. For example, Barnard aptly observes that "Marnus not only dies as a soldier, but imagines his death as a consoling embrace of his Dad" (222). Similarly, Heyns spotlights "the power of the father to cow the son into submission and recruit him into the service of patriarchy" (94). Both critics' arguments call attention to how Marnus's consent to keeping his father's secret emphasises the inescapability of his contaminated and corrupted childhood. I argue that Marnus's complicity is achieved by the insidious methods deployed to ensure his collaboration. For example, the ease with which Frikkie is written out of the text, Marnus's feeling his "Dad's face against [his] chest" (*Smell* 198) and forced acceptance of the "soiled" epaulettes are clearly involuntary actions that underline how he is seduced *and* coerced into accepting to live his father's lie. This reminds us of Michiel Heyns's argument that Erasmus's pressing of Frikkie against the wall and then kissing him "dramatizes precisely the perversion of

tenderness into an act of violence” (93). Behr portrays Marnus as a victim of a powerful, manipulative and militaristic paternalism that insidiously uses the son’s “admiration of the strength and his protection of the weakness of the father” (Heyns 100) to co-opt him into keeping its ugly secrets.

The seductive and coercive co-optation is depicted by means of Behr’s subtle language use and symbolism. The father-son reflection in the bathroom mirror and the inter-textual link between Leonore’s letter and Herman Melville’s novel *Moby-Dick* are skilfully interwoven to portray how the system coerces or traps sons into keeping their fathers’ secrets. The seductive conflation of affection into violence reveals the impossibility or impracticability of resisting this brand of militarised patriarchy. Marnus’s argument that “it is good that Frikkie didn’t tell me” and that between them “the secret is safe” (*Smell* 199) coheres with the reward he is given of going on a fishing trip with his father, because now there is “froth in the water [...] when he has a pee [in the morning]” (*Smell* 200), to spotlight two critical issues about the workings of Afrikaner masculinity and militarism. Firstly, violent as well as affectionate means are deployed to ensure that the embarrassing information (for example, the rape of an innocent child) remains a secret. Secondly, the protagonists (Marnus and Frikkie) are brow beaten into resignation to the fact that they can neither rebel against nor challenge the all-powerful Afrikaner military establishment to get justice for the crimes committed against them.

The ruptured and contaminated Afrikaner childhood discussed above is complicated by Behr’s inter-textual juxtaposition of Leonore’s letter with Ilse’s completion of Marnus’s “favourite story in all the world” (*Smell* 36) the day following Frikkie’s rape. The “pestilence [that has] taken hold of the gardenias” (*Smell* 133) that Leonore Erasmus writes about and the cover image of *Moby Dick* — “a picture of

Captain Ahab throwing his harpoon, and just in front of him, in the bloody water, is Moby Dick” (*Smell* 180) — cast Frikkie, Little Neville and Marnus as the silent victims driven to destruction by Johan Erasmus’s brand of militaristic patriarchy. Marnus’s submission to the obsessive, horrible Ahab figure (Johan Erasmus) makes him abandon the Quequeg figures of his redemption — Frikkie and Little Neville: the children who are violated in the space where they are supposed to be kept safe and by men who are mandated to protect them.

Re-defining Family Relations in *Under the Tongue*

In this section, I read *Under the Tongue* as a text that chronicles how a child victim of incestuous rape uses speech to redefine her familial relationships. Yvonne Vera’s *Under the Tongue* and Dambudzo Marechera’s “The Camp” resonate because of their exploration of the impact of public, masculinised violence on children during the Zimbabwean war of independence. While Marechera, as pointed out in the previous chapter, focuses on the trauma suffered by both a female and a male child under the merciless adult military power in the concentration camp, Vera explores the invasion of this perverted power into the home in form of incestuous rape of a girl child by her own father. Narrated from two perspectives, the text explores how the raped daughter deals not only with her rape, but also her separation from a mother who is imprisoned for killing the rapist father and traditional attitudes that prohibit her from disclosing her ordeal. While one perspective features Zhizha’s first person fragmented and disjointed passages that hesitantly recounts her ordeal during and after her rape, the second deploys an omniscient narrator that reveals the troubled history of her family and fills in the gaps in her tentative and elided narrative. This is why *Under the Tongue* has been variously read by critics such as Robert Muponde, Meg Samuelson, Jessica Murray and Martina Kopf as a trauma narrative. While Muponde reads incestuous rape as signalling

the death of Shona institutions of motherhood and fatherhood, Samuelson argues that the text is an allegory for national and colonial violation of women. Similarly, Murray and Kopf variously aver that the protagonist's recovery of her voice towards the end of the text signals her healing from her rape-trauma.

It is important to note that rape is a recurrent trope in Vera's narratives about the Zimbabwean war of independence. For example, while in *Without a Name* and *The Stone Virgins* Vera explores the rape of adult women by Chimurenga combatants, in *Under the Tongue* she examines incestuous rape by a 'stay-at-home,' 'butterfly-searching' father. I suggest that Vera's change of focus in *Under the Tongue* signals her intention to highlight the under-investigated phenomenon of incestuous rape in the domestic sphere. Anna Chitando and Angeline M. Madongonda argue that during the Zimbabwean war of independence, masculinity was often associated with boundless conquest (176). Similarly, Kizito Z. Muchemwa avers that accustomed to "disciplining other bodies, the male body finds itself in crisis when confronted by the possibilities opened up by the demise of its virility and physical wellness and the collapse of the life-supporting fiction of its indomitableness" (xviii). He goes on to read the prevalence of rape trauma in post-1980 Zimbabwean fiction as "reflect[ing] attempts to interrogate the sites that produce this trauma. War masculinity, celebrated as a cultural and ideological imperative, is a major source of the contemporary crisis of manhood" (xix). These critics link the destabilisation of Zimbabwean masculinity to the horribly perverted crimes it commits against children and women.

The intersection between sexual violence and patriarchal misuse of power during the second Chimurenga are useful to my reading of child rape in *Under the Tongue*. There is no doubt that Zimbabwean manhood and fatherhood are in crisis when a father rapes his daughter because he aberrantly perceives the daughter's innocence and

vulnerability in times of conflict as epitomising elusive beauty and fulfilment. I argue that the impact of incestuous rape are ruptured familial ties. In her reading of the Greek myth of Persephone and Demeter, Louise du Toit (2009) argues that believing that she had contributed to her own rape and abduction, Persephone “comes to understand that she can never be whole again” (87). Building on Persephone’s sense of alienation described above, Du Toit avers that rape victims often feel that their “existence is cut off from any hope of human contact and humane responses to [their] terror” (89). Du Toit’s argument that rape survivors feel alienated or that they are cut off from meaningful past relations resonates with Zhizha’s experience after her rape as underscored by her silence. Jessica Murray makes a valid argument about the discursive significance of Zhizha’s silence (8). I agree with her theorisation that silence is an interim space which allows Zhizha to “heal and find herself again” (7). I supplement Murray’s reading by focusing not only on how it portrays Zhizha as a traumatised child, but also as one whose relational connections with her family have been severed.

In their reflections about Zimbabwean manhood and fatherhood, Mickias Musiyiwa and Memory Chirere note that it morphed into a social tragedy during and after the liberation war (156-157). The social tragedy of Zimbabwean fatherhood is reflected in the prevalence of incest, which according to Anna Chitando and Angeline M. Madongonda “destroys the trust and bond that should be shared by father and daughter” (176). There is no doubt that the father-daughter trust and bond between Zhizha and her father particularly and male relatives generally are shattered by her rape. Zhizha’s severed familial ties are underlined by the frightening darkness inside her head (*Tongue* 14). The enormous darkness and emptiness brought about by the actions of her father create a void in which Zhizha’s familial ties are severed. It is important to note that in this void, Zhizha believes that her tongue “no longer lives, no longer weeps [and

is] buried beneath a rock. My tongue is a river [...my] tongue is heavy with sleep. I know a stone is buried in my mouth, carried under my tongue. My voice has forgotten me" (*Tongue* 1).

Louise du Toit argues that rape survivors experience "the telling and writing, the very construction of [their] experience of trauma in words as healing" (77). If *voice* allows traumatised subjects to speak about their trauma, interact and connect with others, and redefine socio-familial ties, then the image of the tongue ("my tongue is heavy") in Vera's text not only allows Zhizha to search for the places of her growing (read the circumstances that lead to her rape), but also to spotlight both her damaged psyche and her severed interpersonal liaisons. The images of death such as "buried beneath the rock" and "a stone buried;" weight like "heavy tongue" and depth such as "somewhere behind [her] eyes" and "hidden deep in her head" (*Tongue* 13) portray Zhizha as a victim who is significantly destabilised by her violation. By searching for the "places of her growing," Zhizha not only exposes a father who has become a "vampire [that feeds] off the blood of [his] offspring" (Chitando and Madongonda 176), but also acquires a lexicon that can script her disassociation with an abusive and violent Shona patriarchy. Zhizha successfully disengages from an abusive masculinity when she recovers the voice she lost in the death-like limbo of incestuous rape's aftermath.

Susan J. Brison observes that a rape victim feels "utterly helpless in the face of a force that is perceived to be life-threatening" and that responses to such trauma include "terror, loss of control and intense fear of annihilation" (Brison 40). Similarly, Louise du Toit argues that it is "much more damaging psychologically to be raped by a friend, acquaintance, family member or spouse than by a complete stranger" (48). In the above quotations, both Brison and Du Toit underscore the devastating impact of rape on the victim. Brison's and Du Toit's observations explain why Zhizha is a hostage of deviant

paternal power. Her rapist father ensures that her tongue that is “no longer alive” can neither interrogate the conditions that lead to her violation nor can it help her relate to her empathetic relatives in order to heal. She is not only burdened with her experience of rape, but also with her lack of skills to build a new network of socio-familial links. Her fright and powerlessness are signalled by her instruction to Grandmother that she does not “want to see father, ever” (*Tongue* 4). By refusing to ever see her father, Zhizha underlines both her fear of and rejection of her father and the abusive fatherhood he symbolises.

Vera does not explicitly indicate why Muroyiwa rapes his daughter. I infer from the passage “grandfather walks briskly to the small kitchen holding his newspaper like a shield [...] it says massacre in bolding black print on the front, and shows a man with wide shoulders holding a gun” (*Tongue* 42) a subtle juxtaposition of domestic violation (incest) with national patriarchal violence and victimisation (the Zimbabwean liberation war). The subtle conflation of incest with the liberation war allows Vera to show how during conflicts, some men are implicated in the violence committed against women and children. Furthermore, the Shona meanings of the names of Zhizha’s male relatives that portray them as dealers and carriers of death signpost how deviant fatherhood unwittingly leads to incestuous violation.²¹ The portrayal of Zhizha’s male relatives as carriers of and dealers in death resonates with Grace Musila’s argument that when male superiority and identity are threatened in settings of public, masculinised violence, “extreme violent forms of sexual control are enacted, in attempts to lay claim to elusive dominant identity of power” (148). While Tachiveyi reclaims his identity as a dominant and powerful male by going to war or through the mutilation of lizards (*Tongue* 91-3),

²¹ See Robert Muponde’s (2007) explication of the Shona meanings of Zhizha’s male relatives. While Muroyiwa means bewitched, VaGomba means grave and Tachiveyi lust i.e. all the three are in one way or another associated with death (41).

the ‘stay-at-home,’ ‘butterfly-hunting’ Muroyiwa rapes his daughter in search for unattainable patriarchal notions of beauty, spiritual fulfilment and heroism during wartime.

While Muroyiwa’s search for beauty and fulfilment in time of conflict places his daughter in a “rapist’s hell” (Du Toit 99), his traumatised daughter is empowered to break free of her rapist-father’s perverted power by acquiring an appropriate grammar and agency to disclose her violation (Du Toit and Kopf) as it is reflected in the penultimate section of the text (*Tongue* 103-110). By speaking about the night of her rape, Zhizha is able to escape the trauma of her rape. Her agency is signalled by a mouth that moves in “different directions with the letters” (*Tongue* 81). The moving and speaking mouth is a meaning-giving and relation-redefining illocutionary organ that allows her to escape the power her rapist father has over her. It is with the mouth that moves in different directions that Zhizha speaks about how her father’s powerfully authoritative lust finds expression as pleasure-seeking violence on her body. Zhizha describes how the “cold hand presses hard on [her] knees, moves impatiently over [her] body, searching and digging. Fingers mumbling, muttering, cursing the darkness in a voice [...] a sudden shove, brutal repeated. [Her] knee breaks” (*Tongue* 109).

Whereas the image of rupture such as the “sudden shove” that brutally breaks her knees spotlights the unexpected horror that rips apart her body, psyche and relationships, the illocutionary personification of fingers (they “mumble;” “mutter” and “curse”) articulates the chilling, grotesque outcomes of pathologised masculinity. Vera’s imagery and language cohere with the way ordinary verbs like “searching” and “digging” become terrifying, to accentuate the horror of sexual probing and incestuous rape. In fact, the image of the cold hand and its macabre connotations eloquently discloses the harrowing process that precedes the breach of this child’s ties with her

male relatives. Verbs like “shove,” “dig,” and the adjective “brutal” present a surrealist picture of the violence of incestuous rape. Susan J. Brison observes that constructing and telling a narrative of trauma enables the survivor not only “to integrate the traumatic episode into a life with a before and after, but also to gain control over the occurrence of intrusive memories” (46). That Zhizha is able and ready to relive this nightmare attests to the fact that language is an important tool that allows her to reverse the power that her rapist father had had over her since that fateful night. However, the fragmented and disjointed nature of Zhizha’s disclosure — in what Irene Kacandes has labelled “symptom-waiting-to-be-narrated” passages (56) — makes clear that the trauma of incestuous rape is irreparable, even when Zhizha has ‘come to terms’ with what happened.²²

It is important to note that Zhizha also redefines her ties with grandfather. Here, one recalls grandfather’s previous decree that they “must not talk of mother” (*Tongue* 73) because it “is death when such things are told” (*Tongue* 108). The negative auxiliary verb “must not” connotes obligatory prohibition. It underscores how grandfather’s explicit command stops Zhizha from talking about her rape. Similarly, the statement “it is death” to speak about “such things” defers to patriarchy’s censorship of embarrassing taboo topics such as incestuous rape. Grandfather’s attitude towards the rape of his granddaughter spotlights embarrassed masculinity that has severed its liaison with its daughters because it does not “know how to begin” (*Tongue* 15) to relate to them. Grandfather fails to consider the death-like silence he is insensitively and dictatorially imposing on Zhizha and Runyararo. Instead of applauding his daughter’s righteously indignant response to the defiling act of his son-in-law and constructing a healing

²² See Jessica Murray (2009); Tal K (1996); Isabel Moore (2005); Jenny Edkins (2001) and Sigrun Meining (2004) who separately argue that trauma is completely unspeakable and inaccessible, noting that the challenge for writers is finding a way to speak of or listen to what remains unspeakable or inaccessible.

environment for his granddaughter, he merely wants to “save face” by concealing the horror of incest. Vera uses the grandfather’s insensitive, deplorable actions to show how patriarchy puts a premium on hypocritical respectability and reputation above the welfare of children. By juxtaposing his actions with those of Grandmother and Runyararo, Vera stresses how the loving and caring atmosphere created by matriarchy builds new family ties.

By redefining her traumatising ties with Zimbabwean patriarchy, Zhizha conversely builds new ties with Runyararo and Grandmother. Anna Chitando and Angeline M. Madangonda note that novels like *Under the Tongue* display societies whose moral decay has reached alarming levels. According to them, the novel demonstrates how incest has become a “rampant phenomenon owing to the disintegration of value systems that combated such practices” (176). If in the Shona society incest was dealt with severely because it “had spiritual implications whose repercussions were greatly feared” (Chitando and Madangonda 176), the question is whether these punitive measures are still available. Here, one recalls Maria Pia Lara’s argument that “no solidarity is possible if the discourse does not form a bridge to the other’s understanding of what are considered to be worthy features and need of human beings” (157). The *new solidarity* between Zhizha, Runyararo and Grandmother takes cognisance of the need to censor, reject and punish abusive and perverted power of men in Shona society that is exemplified by Zhizha’s incestuous rape. Robert Muponde’s argument that Runyararo’s “sorrowful ululation” (*Tongue* 31) is an acknowledgement of her failure to protect her daughter (41) provides one way of reading Runyararo’s action. An alternative way of interpreting her angry utterance is to argue that it spotlights a fictional counter to the excesses of degenerate masculinity. Her revenge

inscribed in the killing of the rapist husband-father arises out of outrage. She is outraged by what she conceives as her husband's betrayal of his role as the family's protector.

After the death of her rapist father and the imprisonment of her mother, Zhizha is left in the care of Grandmother. This creates an educational and comforting grandmother-granddaughter bond that is explicitly built out of the rejection of paternal vampirism. Du Toit observes that the crucial resource that facilitated the degree of recovery for the rape victims she discusses in her book was "their close relationships, especially with lovers, intimate friends, parents" (78). Likewise, Mieke Bal argues that whoever listens to the victim's story performs "an act that is potentially healing" (x). In many ways, the new healing, comforting and mentoring Grandmother-Zhizha association underlined by the consistent use of an upper case "G" in her name reveals the feminine solidarity that is crucial to Zhizha's recovery. While Runyararo's contradictory adjectival phrase: "the husband who is not a man" (*Tongue* 31) implicitly highlights and challenges the dystopia of male power in situations of public, masculinised violence, Grandmother's rhetorical questions such as "small as it is, it is your voice too, does my voice not belong to you as I do? Can a woman not speak the word that oppresses her heart, grows heavy on her tongue, heavy, pulling her to the ground" (*Tongue* 44) not only interrogates Zimbabwean patriarchy's duty and obligation towards women and children, but also rejects its oppression.

Given that Zhizha is mute most of the time she is with her, Grandmother variously educates, soothes and comforts her. For example, Grandmother informs Zhizha that her father is dead (*Tongue* 4) and that he was killed by her mother (*Tongue* 42). For a child who had been subjected to such a terrifying traumatic event (incestuous rape), we expect her separation from her mother to be devastating. Fortunately, this is not the case because, in Grandmother's care, Zhizha is comforted and soothed (*Tongue*

5). Grandmother does this by sharing her own pain and suffering with Zhizha, such as telling her about the death of her deformed son “Tonderayi one who remembers” (*Tongue* 72). In another important passage, Zhizha informs us that she pulls at the rope “which holds the basket to the wall and the basket falls into [her] waiting arms [...] I give the basket to Grandmother” (*Tongue* 16). The rope and the basket which is full of words to be “shelled and tossed” like peas are images that Vera uses to stress the sustaining connection between Grandmother and Zhizha. The language that banishes the “silence in the room” in which Zhizha and Grandmother are situated symbolically connects them:

I wait for Grandmother to find me, to find all my dreaming with her lament, with her tears. Her song tells me about birth. Her song rises from ancient rivers where the sun no longer rises or sets. A woman will find herself in such a place where memory lingers like the sun [...] the river will become a tongue. Under the tongue are hidden voices. Under the tongue is a healing silence. I see the river. I see Grandmother. My hands touch the river which grows from inside my mouth, inside Grandmother, grows a murmur and a promise. (*Tongue* 41)

Whitehead argues that at the level of language, imagery or plot, the device of repetition “mimics the effects of trauma, for it suggests the insistent return of the event and the disruption of narrative chronology or progression” (86). The repetition of “tongue” in the above passage and the phrase “Tonderayi” in the entire text underlines the importance of the comforting and caring understanding between Grandmother and Zhizha that is built on shared feminine memory. Although Zhizha’s songs come from a place where the sun no longer rises or sets (read, the world of predatory fatherhood), the fact that she dreams and sings in Grandmother’s voice and presence shows why Grandmother is important to her. The space of alienation symbolised by unnatural darkness is overcome when she is in the company of Grandmother. Here, “[finding]” gestures to Zhizha’s creation of an empathetic companionship with Grandmother. The nouns “river” and “tongue” symbolise the connective, restorative and cleansing Zhizha-

Grandmother bond forged in love and care after the awful sexual violation of a little girl by her own father.

Furthermore, the repetition of the title phrase coheres with the recuperative and connective significance of the image of “river” to show how the placement of Zhizha in Grandmother’s safe, loving and caring environment builds new bonds. The river that Zhizha sees or the one hidden in her mouth or the one that Grandmother touches is important because it connects and cleanses her. Using Grandmother’s statement that “when our voices reach the sky with their crying, rain will fall and cover the earth [...] sky will become a river” (*Tongue* 2) and Zhizha’s explication of her name (“there is a time of the year when everyone seems to remember me and whispers... Zhizha...Zhizha...very softly [...] I am harvest. I am rain. I am river and rock. I am sky and earth. I am Zhizha” — *Tongue* 97), Vera underscores how relational ties are envisioned in the connectively triadic images of harvest, rain and river. Whereas rain and river foreground the cleansing attributes of family relationships, Zhizha’s emphatic statements “I am sky and earth” and “I am Zhizha” highlight the agency that breaks the destructive outcomes of incestuous rape. Here, one recalls Dori Laub’s argument that “the eventual production of the healing narrative includes a hearer [...] the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time” (57). Grandmother plays the role of Laub’s “hearer” or “blank screen” onto which Zhizha’s rape trauma is scripted because she is an empathetic ‘Other’ who protects, cares for and listens to Zhizha’s horrific experience as reflected by the soothing ‘lullabys’ she performs (sings) for Zhizha.

It is important to note that Grandmother’s lullaby(s) (*Tongue* 4-6) starkly contrasts with Muroyiwa’s lullaby-like sounds he utters before and during his rape of Zhizha (*Tongue* 107). Lucy Valerie Graham notes a recurrent trope in incest narratives.

She argues that the rapist father often soothes or sings to his daughter or a daughter-figure before raping her as depicted in Toni Morrison's *The Bluest Eye* and J.M Coetzee's *Disgrace*. Graham argues that Cholly's nibbling at his daughter's foot before he rapes her in *The Bluest Eye* is echoed in Lurie's kissing of Melanie's feet in *Disgrace*. The above examples are comparable to Muroyiwa's singing a sort of lullaby for Zhizha before raping her in *Under the Tongue*. In doing so, he turns a loving and caring Shona linguistic device into a cynical tool of verbal control that facilitates sexual abuse. Whereas Muroyiwa's lullaby is paralyzing, Grandmother's song, with its image of a torrentially cleansing river, physically and vocally connects her to Zhizha.

Grandmother's soothing and healing lullabys are vividly linked to her depiction as a "maker" and a "mender" of things (here, one is justified to add Zhizha's mother Runyararo). Meg Samuelson reads mat-making and dress-mending as a form of 'writing' that allows women muted by patriarchy to speak about their oppression (23). I am interested in how weaving and mending connect Zhizha to Runyararo and Grandmother.²³ Zhizha informs us that on the table sits a rusty sewing machine which her grandmother uses to "[mend] an old dress" (*Tongue* 24-25) and the omniscient narrator notifies us that Grandmother had passed on mat-making skills to Runyararo because she came from "some place where she had learnt to sew mats" (*Tongue* 68). The attributes of "making" and "mending" that are shared between Grandmother and Runyararo frame the women as healers. Their physical activity of 'putting right' something that has been torn apart (e.g. an old dress) symbolically echoes their role in building new family bonds after the previous ones are destroyed by the violence of

²³ See Lucy Valerie Graham's reading of Philomela's tapestry in Ovid's *Metamorphosis* as a device that makes it "possible for [Philomela's] sister to discover the rapist's identity. In the workings of art, Philomela can thus convey what which is 'unspeakable' in the realm of life" (439).

perverted male sexual desires. This is because their creation of mats and mending of a dress parallel their restoration of severed family relations.

When Runyararo returns from prison after the declaration of a cease-fire, a new mother-daughter relationship is built. It is important to note that Runyararo's return from prison on the 'eve' of Zimbabwe's independence is not a structural coincidence. In her reading of Dambudzo Marechera's *The House of Hunger*, Grace Musila argues that Peter's violent disposition is his way of compensating for his inability to hit back at the colonial system. She notes that "unable to hit back at the colonial system, [Peter] feels the need to reclaim his sense of power and sense of a coherent, dignified, autonomous self, through violent expression" (147). While violence and despondency were common actions during the war, it can be plausibly argued they are replaced with optimism with the end of conflict. It is in the context of optimism, I argue, that familial ties are forged. The infectious optimism that is reflected in women's pouring of milk on the roads and breaking of mirrors following the end of the war (*Tongue* 100-102) parallels Zhizha's building of new healing ties with her mother and Grandmother and the rejecting of the abusive power of patriarchy. The empowering feminine ties that reject pathologised masculinity in times of conflict are further alluded to by Runyararo's observation that she "heard [Zhizha's] cry in a voice just like [hers], just like Grandmother. I had not expected to meet myself in your voice, meeting my own mother, meeting you my daughter, all in one moment" (*Tongue* 87). The similarity between the three women's voices acts as a connective metaphor that unites three generations of women in the fight against patriarchally-imposed trauma.

Although Zhizha does not immediately remember Runyararo — "I do not remember her face or her voice. I have forgotten my mother" (*Tongue* 86) — the mother-daughter bond they build on her return is very strong. In fact, even if Zhizha

starts speaking while in the care of Grandmother (*Tongue* 50-53), it is in the new and empowering company of Runyararo that her linguistic abilities fully recover. After killing her rapist husband, it can be plausibly argued that Runyararo's nurturing connection with Zhizha spotlights empowering and healing role of femininity during conflict times. By incising from society a "lizard with a rotting stomach [Muroyiwa]" (*Tongue* 31), Runyararo builds a nurturing environment in which she bonds with her daughter.

While watching her mother in the mirror or trying on her dresses (*Tongue* 72) or listening to her voice (*Tongue* 80-81), Zhizha is able to recall the painful memories of her forgotten world. Zhizha's statement that she remembers her stolen dawn and that she cries "in the voice of my mother and my grandmother. I remember my hidden world" (*Tongue* 79) shows how positively empowering environment created by her reunion with her mother enables her recall and deal with her painful memories. Whereas her previous memory is associated with rupture and death (*Tongue* 2-4, 21), in the present context, her recollections are soothing, caring and nurturing because of her ties with her mother and Grandmother. The repetition of the phrase "I remember" followed by the images of pain and suffering "forgotten world," "pain in my growing," "hidden world" and "stolen dawn" gesture to how the presence of Runyararo emboldens her to face and disclose her pain. Here, Zhizha's memory of her traumatic experience — through her own arduous effort and with the selfless aid and care of her mother and grandmother — can be faced, articulated and shared so that her shattered psyche can be re-empowered and begin to heal through what Mieke Bal calls "traumatic recall, the painful resurfacing of events of a traumatic nature" (viii). Zhizha can face and deal with her traumatic past in the empathetic company of her mother.

The curative effect of the new mother-daughter association is underlined by how Zhizha in the company of her mother is able to fully and pleasantly recover her language and agency that now torrentially “[fall] from the sky” (*Tongue* 80):

My voice falls from the sky. Mother saying in a measured voice, repeat after me aeiou [...] I sit very still, reading aloud, *repeating* after my mother through the mirror filled with our *calm resemblances* and our hope, with *sonorous song*, with the *quiet rhythm* of our sleep, with the sound of my growing [...] we belong and belong [...] My mother. I repeat silently. I repeat into the deep mirror far where my mother’s eyes meet mine. I breathe a warm cloud over the shiny glass. (*Tongue* 80, my emphasis)

Whereas the fragmented character of Zhizha’s earlier narrative confirms the validity of Jessica Murray’s argument that sexual violence “is not comprehensively experienced by the victims at the time when it occurs” (1), the above passage shows us a character who regains her eloquence in the empathetic company of her mother. That Runyararo’s new liaison with Zhizha is soothing and empowering is accentuated by the almost playful yet also ritualistic and solemn interaction between daughter and mother.

Firstly, its reciprocity highlights the significance of an empathetic other in the traumatised child’s process of rebuilding her shattered familial ties. Secondly, as Mieke Bal argues, the pleasantly playful banter and interchange between Runyararo and Zhizha exemplify how the hold of traumatic memory on the victim is severed by way of legitimate first person narration of the awful experience. Zhizha informs us that she says “aeiou. I remember all my letters. I tell mother and she repeats after me and I laugh then I repeat after mother who repeats after me and I after [...] I have turned into mother, and she laughs because she has become me [...] letters flow from me to mother” (*Tongue* 92). The verbs “remember,” “tell” and “repeat” are significant to Vera’s depiction of Zhizha’s building of a new bond with her mother in a cheerful atmosphere. The almost playful and caressing mother-daughter relationship depicted in the above passage works

as a counter to the harm wrought by the father's pathologised masculinity. Where patriarchy inflicts traumatic rupture, matriarchy mends in a caring environment.

Meg Samuelson argues that Vera deploys a language and voice appropriate to narrating atrocities committed against women, and one may add, children. Samuelson's argument above is echoed by Vera herself, when in an interview with Jane Bryce, she notes that she writes about traumatic subjects with a "certain elegance, so you feel you can still endure it and see beauty in it" (222). The elegance arising out of Vera's lucid imagery and poetic language is emphasised by how the images of tongue and river are used as relation-building metaphors. When "Grandmother pulls a word from her mouth and places it under [Zhizha's] tongue" and Zhizha feels Grandmother's fingers reaching beneath her tongue and "Grandmother's word grows and her mouth trembles with the word she has taken from it" (*Tongue* 53) or when words flow from daughter into mother and vice versa (*Tongue* 81-2), one recalls Dori Laub's argument that "the absence of an empathic listener, and more radically, the absence of an addressable 'Other,' and an 'Other' who can hear the anguish of one's memories and thus reaffirm and recognise their realness annihilates the story" (69). Grandmother and Runyararo, as examples of Laub's empathic 'Others,' help Zhizha to build new relationships out of previously shattered ties because of their loving and empathic companionship, and more importantly, because they are there to hear her.

Conclusion

In their "Introductory Comments" to the section "Political Violence" in an issue of *Research in African Literatures*, Kenneth W. Harrow and Richard K. Priebe note that "against the on-going real violence in Africa [...] the exploration of the aesthetics of imagined violence might seem to pale in importance" (33). They go on to stress that a "better understanding of the one [artistic depiction of violence] is connected with a

better understanding of the other [the real violence]” (33). The essence of their argument in this piece and the entire section in the journal foregrounds the significance of artistic depiction of violence to its comprehension in contemporary African discourses. The two critics’ privileging of aesthetic representation of violence resonates with this chapter’s exploration of how child rape is one of the often overlooked and still under-theorised outcomes in the domestic space when men “make war” because it is “men that must make war” (*Smell* 120). The three texts’ exploration of why children are targeted, how they struggle to expose their violation in contexts that allow latitude to their violators and how they use speech to build new familial ties severed during their violation enriches our archives of the horrific outcomes of public, masculinised violence’s intrusion into the domestic space. The three authors whose writings have been explored in this chapter — Akpan, Behr and Vera — skilfully use fiction to portray how violence and conflict expose children to awful experiences in stressful socio-political contexts and how adults (more often the men on whom the greatest demands are made in such times) may in dreadful ways project their fears and violent hatreds onto children they should be caring for. Such perverted scapegoating sacrifices the very children whose welfare and future represent what they should be fighting to protect and foster.

The central motif of child rape that cuts across the three narratives puts emphasis on the awful consequences of perhaps uncontrollable but actually uncontrolled masculinities in contexts of public, masculinised violence for children within the domestic sphere. Monique’s ability to rise above the horrors of her sexual violation and of her father murdering her mother to comply with a genocidal ethos to survive and protect her brother; Marnus’s subversion of Apartheid’s hypocritical impunity to bear witness and disclose pederastic rape by a military leader and paterfamilias in an

Afrikaner home and Zhizha's achievement of new family relationships despite her incestuous rape by her father during the Zimbabwean war of independence are "kind[s] of knowledge [in] art, or [the] kind of knowledge [fostered]" (Hartman 537) by fiction. Fiction convenes a platform for the three writers to archive the catastrophic consequences of contemporary conflicts for children. In spite of the selected texts' shared child rape motif, their grammars and scope that disclose awful projection of pathologised masculinity in acts of sexual violence perpetrated upon children during times of public crisis differ considerably. While Akpan's protagonist is willing to speak about her violation, the 'death' of her parents and the rupture of the social chords of her family/society mean that she has no empathetic 'Other' to listen to her tale. Similarly, Behr's protagonist fails to expose the rape of his best friend by his father because of the coercive seduction of Afrikaner militaristic patriarchy. Unlike Akpan's and Behr's protagonists who are variously gagged because of severed socio-familial relations, Vera's protagonist uses speech to build new ties with her family members.

Monique, Marnus and Zhizha deploy different grammars in disclosing their violation during contexts of public, masculinised violence. However, their agency and linguistic innovation parallel the representations of child victims of oppressive parenting explored in the next chapter. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Moses Isegawa and Uwem Akpan use fiction to unmask parents' physical and emotional abuse, ironically, in some African middle class homes during peace time. If this chapter links parental culpability in the violation of their children to stressful socio-political contexts, the next debunks the concealment of cruelty towards children by some African middle class parents in their pursuit of propriety and respectability in seemingly peaceful contexts.

Chapter Four

Fictional Reflections on the African Middle Class and Domestic Abuse

“All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (*Anna Karenina* 1).

Introduction

The Ugandan newspaper *Daily Monitor* of November 7th 2011 headlined a story of a mother who had reportedly tortured her eight-year-old daughter Rachael Nakiganda for stealing an earring worth five hundred Ugandan shillings (20 US cents). Rachael Nakiganda’s experience epitomises countless lives of children in post-1990 Africa who lead traumatic lives.²⁴ Nakiganda’s mistreatment is an example of the relatively better acknowledged poverty-related ill-treatment of children. Notably, the African middle class family rarely features in discussions about parental cruelty towards children, partly due to popular perceptions of the middle class family as a site of safety and respectability as well as outsiders’ (especially European and American) homogenisation of Africans as living lives characterised by poverty within traditional (tribal) structures. Yet, the peaceful exterior and the inaccessible aura of the African middle class family sometimes belie forms of abuse that may be manifested in legitimate parental authority over children. It is for this reason that some African writers’ engagement with the question of child abuse in middle class families provides an important platform for reflection on the phenomenon. Fictional narratives about domestic abuse in some African middle class homes and families allow a form of articulation of children’s suffering narrated through convincingly portrayed child protagonists’ eyes.

²⁴ See the 2009 ANPPCAN and 2000 UNICEF reports about child abuse. The reports outline the continued abuse of children irrespective of the enactment and ratification of laws to protect children from abuse.

In this chapter, I read Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Moses Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* and Uwem Akpan's short story "What Language is That?" as texts using fiction to interrogate the façade of African middle class propriety which disguises parental cruelty towards children. The three authors draw attention to how obsession with reputation for respectability in some African middle class families results in abuse.²⁵ My focus is also on how Adichie, Akpan and Isegawa use narrative to pay tribute to the child victims of domestic violence in some African middle class homes. These texts' respective narrative textures draw our attention to their protagonists' insight and creativity in articulating the horrific mistreatment of children in some African middle class homes. Through their affirming portrayals of their respective child protagonists, the three writers illustrate how abuse is a form of disrespect towards children who have a better understanding of what is at stake in their homes than their parents give them credit for. These texts reveal what transpires in the private confines of certain African middle class homes by spotlighting how some such families' enactment of respectability, religious piety and liberalism coexists with various forms of child abuse.

This chapter is framed in three sections which correspond to the three texts under discussion. In the first section, I read Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* as unmasking Eugene's ritualised abuse of his family in instances where he feels they have deviated from his (distorted) version of religious piety and its attendant rituals. In the second section, I explore how Isegawa uses his protagonist's brash personality and spectacularly outrageous actions to expose the ways in which some African middle class families' fetishistic attachment to objects combined with adults' unquestionable

²⁵ In some African middle class homes/families, parents believe that the best way to discipline a child is to spank him or her. In some instances, the adage: "spare the rod and spoil the child" is heeded all too literally.

disciplinary power masks the suffering of children in certain homes. Lastly, I examine Akpan's use of his protagonist's indignant and meditative voice to reveal how some African middle class families' enactment of self-serving liberalism inadvertently traumatises children.

Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus*, Isegawa's *Abyssinian Chronicles* and Akpan's "What Language is That?" resonate thematically and stylistically with one another. The three writers use their child protagonists' experiences to unmask the façades of the respective middle class homes they depict, which disguise the abuse and traumatisation of children. In depicting the abusive treatment of children in seemingly dignified middle class families, the texts expose these families' ironic subversion of the supposedly benevolent qualities of the home, family, liberalism and religion as idealised spheres and concepts. Whereas concepts like home, religion and liberalism carry connotations of safety, moral conduct and tolerance respectively, the depiction of how these values are enacted and applied in the respective middle class homes shows how the interest in dramatized decorum and the idea of a 'well-behaved' child turn the home into a space of abuse.²⁶ Through their depictions of their respective child protagonists, the three writers recognise these children's silencing and grant them credible articulations of their understanding of the injustice they suffer at the hands of their parents.²⁷

Ritualised Abuse in *Purple Hibiscus*

In *Purple Hibiscus*, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie allows her silenced, precocious fifteen-year-old protagonist a form of articulation to disclose the violent 'disciplining' in her middle class home without invalidating her depiction as a traumatised child. By

²⁶ I use the concept 'well-behaved child' to refer to the belief among some African middle class families that a good child is one who is seen and not heard, one who does as s/he is told.

²⁷ See Heather Montgomery's argument that "although children's input and opinions are available, it is adults whose views and opinions about children that are taken" (9).

granting Kambili a double persona — as a simultaneously cowed and silenced and an articulate child — Adichie creates for her a convincing grammar to speak about domestic abuse. Narrated through Kambili’s first-person perspective, the novel depicts Eugene’s violent ‘disciplining’ of his family when they transgress his distorted interpretation of ideal religious conduct.²⁸

Adichie’s novel would seem to suggest that Eugene’s violently heavy handed parenting style can partly be read as a re-enactment of his own upbringing. If, as Jeremiah Schumm and Ana Maria Vranceanu argue elsewhere, “loss initiated in childhood can snowball into resource loss spirals later in life, leaving individuals ill-equipped to handle [new] challenges” (42), then it is striking to note the similarities between Eugene’s abuse as a child, and his current enactment of similar patterns of abuse on his children. As a student at the Catholic school, St. Gregory’s, Eugene was ‘cured’ of masturbation by a priest who poured boiling water on his hands. Years later, the adult Eugene, now a father to two children, administers the same boiling-water punishment to his daughter’s feet and legs as punishment for staying under the same roof as a ‘heathen’ — her own grandfather (Eugene’s ‘unchristian’ father) — against Eugene’s wishes:

[Papa] lowered the kettle into the tub, tilted it toward my feet. He poured the hot water on my feet, slowly, as if he were conducting an experiment and wanted to see what would happen. He was crying now, tears streaming down his face. I saw the moist stream before I saw the water. I watched the water leave the kettle, flowing almost in slow motion in an arc to my feet. The pain of contact was so pure, so scalding, I felt nothing for a second. And then I screamed. (*Purple* 194)

Eugene’s mimicry of this form of punishment in disciplining his own family by targeting the offending parts of the body indicates how his childhood abuse resurfaces and is re-enacted in his adulthood. The sombre manner in which he dispenses this

²⁸ See St. Augustine’s argument for authoritarian parental practice, that “children should be punished for their sins” (qtd in Lampinen and Sexton-Radek 4).

punishment is particularly striking, both in this example and similar instances across the novel, as discussed below. To a large extent, Eugene's manner brings to mind a ritual act; in some ways mirroring the religious rituals that govern his household, and whose transgression often precedes the punishment of his wife and children. It is in view of this that I read Eugene's abuse of his children (and wife) as a form of ritualised violence. What I describe as Eugene's ritualised violence is evident in his targeting Kambili's legs, because they are the part of the body that allows her 'walk' into sin (*Purple* 194), in a twisted enactment of Biblical dictum: to punish the offending body part.²⁹

Eugene's double obsession with religious ritual and equally ritualised 'punishment' of his family for what he sees as transgressions from his distorted notion of religious piety is further illustrated when he breaks Jaja's hand for failing to be the top student in his Holy Communion class:

When he was ten, [Jaja] had missed two questions on his catechism test and was not named the best in his First Holy Communion class. Papa took him upstairs and locked the door. Jaja, in tears, came out supporting his left hand with his right, and Papa drove him to St. Agnes hospital. Papa was crying, too, as he carried Jaja in his arms like a baby all the way to the car. Later, Jaja told me that Papa had avoided his right hand because it is the hand he writes with. (*Purple* 145)

Eugene's insistence on his son maintaining the top position in the Holy Communion class underscores his obsession with public demonstration of Catholic piety. It is his need to publicly demonstrate his family's righteousness that regularly leads to the abuse of his children. Notably, in a twisted observation of the afore-mentioned Biblical dictum of punishing the offending part of the body, Eugene targets the hand. While it is clear

²⁹ See Matthew's 5:27-30 proclamation that if one's right eye causes him or her to sin, he or she must "gouge it out and throw it away" because it is "better for [someone] to lose one part of [his or her] body than for [one's] whole body to be thrown into hell.

that in punishing Jaja, Eugene targets the ‘sinning’ part of Jaja’s body that he believes is complicit in his ‘failure’ to be the top catechism student, it is noteworthy that he is careful to protect the right hand so that his son can still write. In spite of the fact that he is aware of the terrible trauma he inflicts on his son, his deluded belief in the righteousness of his action makes him administer the punishment. He blindly believes in his divine responsibility to uphold God’s law rigidly in his home by ensuring that any transgression from his notion of absolute piety is punished. Paradoxically, his weeping as he tenderly cradles Jaja in his arms and rushes him to hospital suggests a twisted, unquestioning conviction about the appropriateness of his actions and the painful, even loving ‘duty’ of administering violent punishment, much like the unquestioning conviction that often attends ritual acts.

Eugene’s ritualised abuse of his family also mirrors Christ’s uncompromising stance against sinners as portrayed in his violent confrontation with traders in the Temple. Here, we are reminded of Kambili’s perceptive observation that Father Benedict “usually referred to the Pope, Papa and Jesus — in that order” (*Purple* 4). If the previous passages showed how Eugene’s ritualised abuse of his family is a re-enactment of his St. Gregory punishment and the mimicry of the Biblical dictum of punishing the offending parts of the body, then it is plausible to argue that his deification by the church and society as suggested by Kambili’s observation deludes him into believing that his actions uphold God’s law. Thus, *Purple Hibiscus* “force[s] the [reader into] the role of [a] witness” (Socolovsky 189) to Eugene’s enforcement of what he believes to be divine law. This is poignantly depicted when he beats Kambili for breaking the Eucharist fast because of the pains of her first menstrual period, and Beatrice and Jaja for helping her ‘sin.’ It is ironic that the essence of the Christian ritual of fasting as a form of cleansing and the home as a nurturing and safe environment are

tainted by a father who feels his authority (and God's) has been undermined by his family's breaking the Eucharist fast. Adichie uses the symbolism associated with menstruation, which in many cultures is an occasion for celebration that marks a transition from girlhood to womanhood (flowering), to demonstrate that Eugene is not interested in the spiritual welfare of his family, but rather in the performance of publicly visible religious uprightness. We can also read Kambili's menstruation and her transition into adulthood as a threat to Eugene's authority. Eugene is unconsciously aware that Kambili will eventually break free of his control.

Here, his reason for abusing Kambili mirrors his beating of Beatrice that leads to her miscarriage. In both cases, the women are abused because they are seen to 'transgress' and 'challenge' Eugene's control over them and his flawed ideal of maintaining publicly visible religious piety. What is important in both cases is that what Eugene reads as transgression is no such thing. Whereas Kambili's 'transgression' is because of her menstrual period, Beatrice's is caused by early pregnancy nausea. It is possible to read Eugene's furious punishment of his daughter and wife as induced by his threatened patriarchal pride by manifestations of femininity which lie outside his rigid Catholic practice's frame of reference — the kind that does not make allowances for normal bodily function. It can also be plausibly argued that his punitive actions underline his primitively misogynist hatred for femininity.

Ironically, the enactment of violence to enforce publicly visible religious piety devalues one of the core aspects of Catholicism: the centrality of a happy family. The unhappiness of this family because of Eugene's seriously unbalanced personality is poignantly depicted in yet another instance of Eugene's 'disciplining' of his family, this time with his belt:

It was a heavy belt made of layers of brown leather with a sedate leather-covered buckle. It landed on Jaja first, across his shoulder. Then

Mama raised her hands as it landed on her upper arm, which was covered by the puffy sequined sleeve of her church blouse. I put the bowl down just as the belt landed on my back. Sometimes I watched the Fulani nomads, white jellabas flapping against their legs in the wind, making clucking sounds as they herded their cows across the roads in Enugu with a switch, each smack of the switch swift and precise. Papa was like a Fulani nomad — although he did not have their spare, tall body — as he swung his belt at Mama, Jaja and me, muttering that the devil would not win. We did not move more than two steps away from the leather belt that swished through the air. (*Purple* 102)

Although the diction in the passage paints a vivid picture of the victims' agony, Adichie uses it to unmask the façade of this dignified middle class home. Our empathy for Kambili, Jaja and Beatrice on the one hand and contempt for Eugene on the other hand can be enhanced by the repetition of the verb "landed" in the passage. Whereas the adjective "sedate" that describes Eugene's heavy belt and Beatrice's evidently expensive "puffy sequined sleeved church blouse" are displays of respectability and piety (decently covering the bodies) and the prosperity Eugene believes was earned by his pious practices, the repetition of the phrase "landed" shows the powerful blows that Eugene inflicts on his family with disproportionate rapidity and regularity. The violent connotation of the verb "landed" has the power to imaginatively transports us into the sitting room as eyewitnesses to the intense pain that Jaja, Beatrice and Kambili are subjected to — especially when it is clear that their 'transgression' does not warrant such punishment.

Furthermore, it could be argued that the parallel yet contrasting image of a Fulani nomad can arouse readers' empathy for the victims of domestic violence. Whereas both Eugene and the cattle herd are expected to play protective roles, Eugene subverts positive care-taking parental role into abuse. Unsurprisingly, the only similarity between Eugene and the herdsman is the whip/belt which symbolises and reinforces Eugene's power over his family, while underscoring the dehumanising power of domestic abuse in the implied comparison of his victims to a herd. This demonstrates

how the African middle class concept of a good child/good wife silences and dehumanises victims of abuse. It is ironical that Eugene's rigid observation of Catholic ritual desecrates the expected safety of the home as a comforting and nurturing environment.

Eugene's ritualised abuse of his children is however not restricted to acts of punishment.³⁰ This is seen in an equally disturbing subversion of an apparently loving family ritual of regularly inviting his children to have a sip of his hot tea, oblivious of the children's cowed inability to protest that it scalds their tongues:

[Papa] poured his tea, and then [...] told Jaja and me to take sips. Jaja took a sip, placed the cup back on the saucer. Papa picked it up and gave it to me. I held it with both hands, took a sip of the Lipton tea with sugar and milk and placed it back on the saucer. 'Thank you Papa,' I said, feeling the love burn my tongue. (*Purple* 31)

This passage underscores the characteristics of a ritual — unquestioning obedience and repetitive performance — as executed by Eugene in ordering Jaja to take a sip and then picking the cup and giving it to Kambili for a sip of the scalding tea. Here, Eugene's act of raising the cup and handing it to the children mirrors Christ's loving and sacrificial action with his disciples during the Last Supper. Eugene's required 'scalding sips of tea' periodically (or perversely) evoke the ritual of Holy Communion as usually administered by the priest (father) through the symbolic sip of holy wine in commemoration of Christ's fathomless sacrificial love — his shedding of his blood for Christians' salvation.

If we take our reading of the scalding sips of tea as reminiscent of the Catholic ritual of Holy Communion, which symbolises Christ's — and by extension, God the

³⁰ It is ironic that in his enactment of religious piety, Eugene is oblivious to Christ's declaration in Matthew 16:8 that "whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea."

father's — sacrificial love and suffering for His children's salvation, then Eugene's baffling blend of New Testament scriptures and violent anger as well as his deification by society signal a perverse distortion of religious ritual. Here, we are reminded of Kambili's observation that at church her father "led the way out of the hall smiling at the many hands that reached out to grasp his white tunic as if touching him would heal them of an illness" (*Purple* 90-1). His delusion of divine power, supported by society's adulation, gives him *carte blanche* to enforce his perversely distorted interpretation of religious rituals. Eugene's *public* dramatization of religious piety further manipulates his abused children and wife into silence, creating an impermeable and unchallengeable false front of the impeccable Catholic *paterfamilias* and patron to the needy.³¹

If in both contexts of punishment and affection, Eugene resorts to ritualised violence, we are forced to wonder: who can protect Jaja and Kambili from their father's distorted application of religious piety? His wife, Beatrice, is disqualified because she is an abused housewife whose constant polishing of her figurines symbolises her own vulnerability in an abusive marriage.³² Brenda Cooper argues that Beatrice's ritual of polishing the figurines after every beating is her way of coping with her abuse. Rather than reading the ritualised cleaning of the figurines as a coping mechanism, I focus on the point that it indicates her failure and inability to protect her family. She takes better care of these miniature humanoid figures than of her own children. This is glaringly revealed in one instance when she sends Kambili to Eugene's bedroom well aware of what was going to happen; given that she has been a victim of 'bedroom-based' violence on several occasions herself. Furthermore, her inadequacy as a parent is evident when she lets her son go to prison for the crime she commits, of poisoning her

³¹ See Cathy Caruth's, Anne Whitehead's and Geoffrey Hartman's emphasis on the difficulty of narrating traumatic events.

³² See Brenda Cooper's, Daria Tunca's, Jane Bryce's, John C. Hawley's, Heather Hewett's and Madelaine Hron's arguments on this topic.

husband. Her fetishistic figurines which are broken during one of Eugene's ritualised violent outbursts, symbolise how her children are 'broken' by their father without her intervention. Here, we are reminded of Aunty Ifeoma's advice to Beatrice while visiting Kambili in hospital: "[t]his cannot go on, *nwunye m* [...] when a house is on fire, you run out before the roof collapses on your head" (*Purple* 213). The proverb and the image of a burning house show that by staying in an abusive marriage, Beatrice is complicit in her children's abuse. Furthermore, it is valid to argue that Kambili's lack of agency and 'muteness' are caused by Beatrice's apathy and compliance that normalise silent endurance of abuse to her daughter by always yielding to Eugene's dominance.

Can a child broken and silenced by abuse reclaim her agency and resist? The answer to this question is in the affirmative in this novel because Kambili, like Jaja did earlier, eventually stands up to her abusive father.³³ Whereas Jaja's refusal to attend Holy Communion (*Purple* 6) that results in Eugene's flinging his heavy missal across the room and breaking the figurines (*Purple* 3) is a verbalised rejection of his father's abusive authority, Kambili's standing up to Eugene's abuse is more subtle and nuanced. Her carelessness with the half-finished painting of her grandfather after Eugene had poured boiling hot water on her feet, like her mother's decision to stop the self-comforting process of cleaning the figurines or her brother's refusal to attend Holy Communion, articulates her rejection of paternal abuse. The violence in the following passage epitomises the clash that follows a daughter's rejection of the tyrannical legitimacy of her father's authority:

³³ It is plausible to read Jaja's revolt as an inverted archetypal succession trope where the old leader is ousted by a younger male. Comparable to the earth's change of seasons, this motif is built on the idea that ousting the old leader is necessary for the rebirth and rejuvenation of the sick society. In some sense Jaja's rebellion against Eugene promises the healing of this family, especially when the symbol of evil is pruned from it.

He started to kick me. The metal buckles on his slippers stung like bites from giant mosquitoes. He talked nonstop, out of control, in a mix of Igbo and English, like soft meat and thorny bones [...] the kicking increased in tempo, and I thought of Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music [...] I curled around myself tighter, around the pieces of the painting; they were soft, feathery. (*Purple* 210-11)

The intensity of the beating in this episode reminds us of Elaine Scarry's description of torture as the totality of pain (qtd in Harpham 206). To survive this kind of excessive pain, Kambili constructs an inviolable space in her mind that neither Eugene nor the pain can penetrate. Her description of Eugene talking "nonstop" in a mixture of "Igbo and English" and the increasing tempo of his blows signal his loss of control over her and her success in constructing a mentally inviolable space. If we read Eugene's crying when he abuses his family as a perversion of pained paternal love — much like God's painful loving sacrifice of Christ so that 'the devil would not win' — then this scene signals Kambili's rejection of this perverse 'love.' Kambili's use of her imagination to tame the pain takes away Eugene's diabolic agency and control over her. In addition to severing Eugene's control over her, Kambili's inviolable mental space helps her to shut out the physical pain inflicted on her body by finding comforting thoughts. The images she uses to describe the beating and her embrace of the warm and loving spirituality of her grandfather symbolised by the torn pieces of his painting and her cousin Amaka's culturally conscious indigenous music help her endure the beating and denote her symbolic embrace of an alternative cultural and ethical sphere to that which her father seeks to inculcate.

Unlike her earlier failure to name Eugene as the one who breaks her mother's figurines because she lacks an appropriate register to do so, here her silence and imagery eloquently communicate her rejection of her father's abuse. Her images imaginatively domesticate the pain by making it bearable and comprehensible. The comparison of the beating to "giant mosquito bites" tames the pain she is subjected to.

In her mind, if the beating becomes bites from giant mosquitoes which she can easily slap off and not blows from a strong man delivered in anger, she is able to withstand it. Similarly, if her father's mixture of "Igbo and English" becomes the "soft meat" in the "thorny bones," she is able to decipher the grammar of abuse, which helps her demystify and reject the awe he previously inspired. Her attachment to the feathery softness of the torn pieces of the painting signals her devotion to and respect for the loving and comforting spirituality of her grandfather. By coupling her grandfather's affirming spirituality with her cousin's culturally grounded music, she is able mentally to escape the world of her father's violent corruption of Catholic spirituality.

Kambili's rejection of Eugene's viciousness due to his misguided appropriation of Catholicism is contrasted with her healing relationship with Father Amadi. In a simple question of whether Kambili has ever worn lipstick, Father Amadi manages to bring a smile on the face of the girl whose laughter sounds strange to her because she rarely laughs. "I laughed. It sounded strange, as if I were listening to the recorded laughter of a stranger being played back. I was not sure I had ever heard myself laugh" (*Purple* 179). Her laughing voice is unknown to her because laughter and happiness are banished from her home. The above example coupled with Father Amadi's use of Igbo songs during Mass (*Purple* 136) show up Eugene's heathenising everything Igbo as a distorted interpretation of Catholic spirituality. The contrast between Eugene's religious violence and Father Amadi's life-giving Catholicism arise out of Eugene's association with Father Benedict and the St. Gregory's priest's brand of Catholicism that not only demands blind obedience, but also endorses violence as a way of disciplining and raising children.

Although it is tempting to argue that Eugene's death and the blooming of the purple hibiscuses offer the possibility of a trauma-free future for the rest of the family,

Adichie stresses the ambivalent aspects of survival of those permanently maimed by the experience of domestic abuse. Nevertheless, she privileges ‘talking about’ the abuse in her construction of Kambili’s posttraumatic existence. Kambili’s previous muteness is picked up by her cousin Amaka, who observes that Kambili lowers her voice whenever she speaks and “talk[s] in whispers” (*Purple* 117). However, in the course of the narrative, Kambili not only survives physical abuse by her father, but also regains her voice and agency in order to tell ‘HerStory.’ The fact that she is mesmerised by her cousin’s ease with language (*Purple* 99) gestures to her need to retrieve her tongue — symbolically muted by repeated abuse — in order to voice the abuse she and her brother Jaja suffered at the hands of their father.

It is plausible to argue that in the very act of writing *Purple Hibiscus* and granting her child protagonist the role of first person child narrator, Adichie grants Kambili a voice — albeit as a simultaneously cowed/muted, yet articulately precocious narrator — to convincingly expose abuse in her middle class family. Notably, Kambili’s measured description of the gory details of domestic abuse in the text signals Adichie’s authorial sensitivity to the risk of inadvertently vulgarising, sensationalising or cheapening the victims’ pain in the process of drawing attention to it. At the same time, Kambili’s visual and acoustic attention to detail is a credible grammar for the disclosure of domestic abuse through the eyes of a child that allows her talk therapeutically about her abuse as a means to her recovery. This is analogous to her intention to transplant freedom into a space previously devoid of it, as suggested by her plans to “plant purple hibiscus” in Enugu after Jaja is released from prison (*Purple* 306-7).

However, the juxtaposition of the ‘ghost’ of an abusive father with the planting of purple hibiscuses — whose colour resembles that of her mother’s bruised eye — signals the lingering effects of abuse. As Ewald Mengel argues in another context,

societies will always “[struggle] with the memory of their traumatic past” (vii), which is also true for individual victims of abuse. The similarity between the bruises and the purple flowers as symbols of freedom shows the struggle both to achieve healing from abuse and to cope with the indelible memories of cruel and horrible experiences.

Abuse and Revenge in Isegawa’s *Abyssinian Chronicles*

Moses Isegawa depicts another child victim of domestic physical abuse in an African middle class family in his novel *Abyssinian Chronicles*. Isegawa’s novel is divided into seven chronicles which deploy (black) humour and sensationalism to depict power, its abuse and institutional dictatorship in the context of the 1970s-1980s political and social upheavals in Uganda. The sections are ‘1971 Village Days’; ‘The City’; ‘Amin, The Godfather’; ‘Seminary Days’; ‘Nineteen Seventy-Nine’; ‘Triangular Revelations’ and ‘Ghettoblaster.’ Using his child narrator’s experiences of abuse in the home and in a Catholic seminary, Isegawa explores the abuse of children at the hands of uncaring fathers, holier-than-thou mothers and duplicitous priests.

The near rhyming of Mugezi’s name to the Ugandan slang term “*lugezigezi*” — loosely and sarcastically translated as a ‘wiseacre’ or ‘wise guy’ or ‘naughtiness’ — signals Isegawa’s need for a particular kind of persona for his narrator to deconstruct the connection between domestic abuse and some African middle class families’ fetishisation of objects. His protagonist’s persona also enables him to illustrate how often the violence inflicted on children in some African middle class families arises from parents’ misreading of childish curiosity — suggested by the semantic association of Mugezi’s name with *lugezigezi* — as naughtiness or disrespect. Isegawa depicts the outrageous actions and creates the brash voice of his protagonist to unmask how some African middle class families’ conspicuous consumption and authoritarian parenting coincide in the enactment of domestic abuse.

Abyssinian Chronicles is comparable to Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* because both authors use child narrators in their exploration of domestic abuse. While the main abusive parent is male in *Purple Hibiscus* and female in *Abyssinian Chronicles*, the abuse in both texts is informed by what the two (principal) parents perceive as their Christian and parental duty of not sparing the rod and spoiling the child. However, the two texts are not comparable in terms of the tone and texture of the narrating voice. Adichie's sensitive and perceptive narrator is starkly contrasted with the outrageous and brash persona of Isegawa's protagonist. In terms of exaggerated, precocious masculinity and arrogance, Mugezi is comparable to Ahmadou Kourouma's Birahima in *Allah is Not Obligated*.

Isegawa's effortless segueing from the first person to the omniscient narrator and his sensational register allows him to unmask an African middle class family's obsession with decorum and authoritarian parenting. Mugezi's somewhat melodramatic narration of abuse juxtaposed with the spectacular revenge he takes upon his abusers highlights how Isegawa furnishes a language for his protagonist to unmask his parents' (Padlock and Serenity's) obsession with material things, which leads to domestic abuse of their son. Serenity (Mugezi's ironically named father) states that "Uganda was a land of false bottoms where under every abyss there was another one waiting to ensnare people, [the] historians made a mistake: Abyssinia is not the ancient land of Ethiopia, but modern Uganda" (*Abyssinian* 469). Isegawa reconfigures the notion of an abyss to symbolise the pitfalls of this family's exhibition of respectability and authoritarian parenting that disguises domestic abuse.

Isegawa parallels domestic abuse of children in this particular family with the parents' obsession with material possessions. There is a direct connection between Mugezi's beatings and starvation and his parents' and guardians' authoritarian parenting

and obsession with fetishized objects.³⁴ While Jacqui Jones argues that *Abyssinian Chronicles* uses the “political milieu to set the scene for Mugezi’s narrative of coming of age: his rural childhood; his oppressive Catholic upbringing under his totalitarian mother (Padlock) and his father (Serenity); his scholarly life in the seminary; his move to the Netherlands” (85), I argue that his parents’ obsession with a respectable life accounts for the prevalence of domestic abuse in the chronicles.

The connection between domestic abuse and middle class obsession with a good life is depicted when Padlock beats Mugezi on the day she leaves the village for the city. As an intelligent child, Mugezi mistakenly assumes he is travelling with the family to the city. His attempt to climb into the lorry’s cab, to Padlock’s chagrin, actually demonstrates his intelligence and initiative. Mugezi describes the beating thus: “she cringed and, with blinding speed, drove her palm full into my face [...] she raised her foot, the yellowish sole flashing, as if she were going to plant it full in my face” (*Abyssinian* 69). The verb “cringed” and images “drove her palm into my face” and “fire of her hatred” depict the intensity of Padlock’s blows, delivered because Mugezi has dared to challenge her authority and transgress her concept of a well-behaved (i.e. docile) child. The hyperbolic description of her actions as having “blinding speed” or her slaps as ‘driven’ into Mugezi’s face illustrate Sara Ahmed’s argument that “the face of a suffering child places [the public] in a position of charitable compassion” (192). Despite the comic-book diction, our empathy for this mud-spattered child arises because Padlock’s rejection of her son’s clinging to his family is so misplaced and extreme. She erroneously thinks that he is merely misbehaving in not obeying his parents unquestioningly — but also because he threatens to soil and devalue her symbol of prosperity and respectability, in the form of her Sunday best attire.

³⁴ While not actually his parents, the priests in the seminary have parental authority over him.

Padlock is blind to the fact that Mugezi's actions demonstrate quickness of mind and initiative — qualities which are implied in his name. His name is important to our understanding of how authoritarian parenting validates domestic abuse and demonstrates parental blindness to their children's positive attributes. Mugezi's name is derived from the Luganda prefix pronoun “*mu*” which is translated as “one who has” and the Luganda root “*gezi*” which is translated as “intelligent, wise or clever.” Padlock, Serenity and the priests fail to read Mugezi's actions as displays of intelligence — a quality they should nurture in him. Instead, they interpret his actions as expressions of naughtiness — the “*lugezigezi*” which should be ‘beaten out’ of him. Padlock's authoritarian parenting is comparable to the parents in Akpan's short story (discussed shortly), because both sets of parents fail to explain their actions and decisions to their children and also interpret their children's intelligence and initiative as signs of naughtiness.

Although the description of this intense beating is infused with black humour — as evident in Mugezi's observation that Padlock was endowed with an explosive temper that “[smouldered] inside of her for His Holy purposes which she, in her simplicity, was yet to understand” (*Abyssinian* 63) — the inflicted pain that Mugezi is half disguising with his humour and sardonic irony remains legible. Since child abuse is a “range of behaviour [...] in total intended to exercise coercive control” (Buzawa and Buzawa 16), the attribution of her “smouldering anger” to divine mystery (*Abyssinian* 62) reveal the ugly reality of child abuse built on parental authority that is believed to be infused with divine sanction, and an obsession with exhibiting respectability. In a household that Mugezi equates to a prison because of its “too many regulations and too many pretensions exacerbated by a dictatorial administration” (*Abyssinian* 91), Padlock sets out to reform her wayward son: by vowing to “hammer sense into [his] head”

(*Abyssinian* 137). Here, the three texts are comparable because of how domestic abuse turns the home into a prison.

The climax of his parents' failure to form him into their version of a 'well-mannered' child happens when Mugezi defaces the headboard of a second-hand bed that Serenity purchases from Indians who have been expelled by President Idi Amin. In this episode the three nodes of African middle class pretension — performed piety, disciplinarian parenting and fetishisation of luxury objects — are exposed. Mugezi is drawn to the burnished, shining, and smooth surface of the headboard in spite of Serenity's growled threat "if you touch it" (*Abyssinian* 133).³⁵ When he gets an opportunity, Mugezi prods the varnished headboard to find out what lies beneath the shiny surface.

I brought my nose close to the glittering object at the head of the new bed. I was disappointed because it smelled like shoe polish, its oily tang lingering on my palate [...] I stretched out my hand and touched the gleaming surface, its dry smoothness, the imagined smoothness of Lusanani's backside [...] my fingers going deeper and deeper into imaginary orifices, my imagination's eye peeking under the sheet at slick dilated lips [...] beneath the veneer was mere wood! Dull brown, long-grained wood! (*Abyssinian* 135-6)

The location of the headboard in the privacy of the bedroom symbolises the secrets of this African middle class. Mugezi uses olfactory, visual and tactile sensory expressions to deconstruct the secrets and mysteries of this family's middle class pretensions. He also uses the expressions "glitter," "smoothness," "slick" and "magnificence" to indicate that the façade of this middle class family is mere surface gloss. The penetrative and sexualised imagery such as "swimming in the dark pool," "beneath," "my fingers going deeper and deeper," and "wedged my thumbnail" articulate Mugezi's

³⁵ Serenity's growled threat to a curious child acts like an invitation for this child to try to find out what the out-of-bounds object consists of.

quest to discover what lies beneath the veneer of the mysterious object. Here, the sexualised quest for knowledge may be comparable to the proximity of this scene to Mugezi's loss of his virginity. It may also point to the ordinary physical urges that persist in people like his parents underneath the coating of prim respectability. Furthermore, Isegawa alludes to the "forbidden fruit trope" to spotlight how middle class parenting often, by the very act of forbidding certain things [touching of prized objects, or sexual exploration] to children, tend to provoke or incite exploration of the forbidden — now made exciting by the very ban in the eyes of feistier children. What is disappointing to Mugezi and conversely an indictment on the African middle class is that beneath the glitter lies dull ordinary wood — symbolising the banality of African middle class pretentiousness.

The consequences of Mugezi's quest to unearth the secrets of this family are terrible because what follows is one of the most awful beatings that he receives in the course of the narrative. Padlock snaps, and "something like a tree trunk split in two by lightning [flies] sideways and hit[s him] with such force that, the lights [go] out. Hours later [he wakes] up with a bad headache and a swollen eye" (*Abyssinian* 106). Mugezi in his matter-of-fact tone states:

Serenity struck with bare-clawed fury of a leopard at the end of a long antelope-stalking session [...] Serenity was all over me with his suede shoes. For a moment, I was too overwhelmed to do anything about those scalding blows with cooked rubber. Up and down, left and right it went, guttural groans of you-saw-it-coming issuing from his twitching mouth. With the first pain barrier cleared, I thought I was going to die. (*Abyssinian* 141)

The beating described in the above passages is an imaginative way of showing the ugly side of this family's reaction to what it reads as a child's disobedient conduct. If the curious defacing of the headboard symbolised the unmasking of Ugandan middle class hollowness, the beating in the above passage exposes angry parents' savagely extreme

response to a ‘disobedient’ child, who they think deliberately damages an expensive, fetishised household item. Here, Serenity’s near-maniacal state is comparable to Eugene’s complete loss of self-control when he beats Kambili for keeping the half-finished painting of her grandfather in *Purple Hibiscus*. The fathers’ loss of control in the two texts arises from their interpretation of their children’s actions as signs of deliberate disrespect and disobedience. It is worth noting that to some extent, the parents’ paranoia demonstrates their recognition that the children’s actions symbolise rejection of their (parents’) authoritarian control over them.

The children’s detection and rejection of their parents’ hollowness is pointed out by Mugezi’s disclaimer that in the village “Grandma or Grandpa would have told [him] straight away that the glittering thing was just a bloody headboard for a bloody bed, wooden, veneered, period” (*Abyssinian* 137). Mugezi’s vote of confidence in his grandparents’ pedagogical practices is based on his recognition that the grandparents’ child rearing ethos indulges the child’s curiosity and treats him like an equal, thus legitimising the child’s curiosity and inquisitiveness. His parents’ failure to explain to him what the strange thing is and Serenity’s growled threat, far from dissuading him, actually stokes his curiosity to demystify the object. This beating highlights how the authoritarian parenting practice of this family misinterprets Mugezi’s extrovert nature as merely disrespectful, rude or undisciplined.

Heather Montgomery argues that communities “recognise a distinction between discipline and abuse and will intervene to protect the child who they feel is being maltreated” (176). David Gough argues similarly (in another context) that child abuse is “a social problem rather than an evil found in only certain families” (209). The two scholars’ arguments remind us of the rhetorical question of Mugezi’s lover and neighbour in Kampala, Lusanani: “she is not your real mother, is she” (*Abyssinian* 97)?

Lusanani's rhetorical question not only criticises Padlock's parenting style in its astonishment, but also evokes our empathy for Mugezi, because her question suggests that Padlock's 'disciplining' is unacceptable and illegitimate by this society's standards of parenting.

Isegawa's unmasking of how obsessive middle class conspicuous consumption and materialistic values translate into disciplinary authoritarianism continues into his depiction of Mugezi's starvation in the seminary. When Serenity and Padlock fail to 'put him right' and fear that he may corrupt his siblings, he is sent to a seminary where he encounters a new form of abuse. His parents' choice of the seminary as a setting that would reform him is not accidental. Here, *Abyssinian Chronicles* is comparable to *Purple Hibiscus*; not only because the children are abused by ultraconservative Catholics parents, but because in both texts the seminary is perceived as a discipline-oriented institution.³⁶ Eugene's and Padlock's connections to the seminary suggest how the parents' experiences at a discipline-oriented institution have a residual impact on their lives as reflected in how they punish their children. The parallel between Eugene, Padlock, Fathers Mindi and Lageau is highlighted by Mugezi's sarcastic assertion that he thought of "[Father Mindi] as a brother to that constipated gorgon Padlock [...] both believed that the harsher, the meaner and the more mysterious you played it, the better your children" (*Abyssinian* 213).³⁷

Physical violence in the seminary is carried out by the older seminarians, who target their bullying upon the younger and newer ones with the complicity of the priests,

³⁶ See Eugene's claim that he was 'cured' of masturbation because of the punishment administered to him by the 'good father' at St. Gregory's.

³⁷ Father Lageau is not African, but he exhibits similar sensibilities to some of the African middle class characters as depicted in *Abyssinian Chronicles*. At the political level, Isegawa seems to show parallels between postcolonial governmental abuse and colonial practices, if those in power politically can be seen as placed 'in loco parentis' vis-à-vis those they govern.

who do nothing to stop it (*Abyssinian* 198-201). The student-on-student violence confirms Amma Darko's and Lorraine Waterhouse's argument that those who suffer abuse when young are often inclined to be abusive when they grow up. The priests in the seminary abuse seminarians emotionally, which is aimed at breaking the seminarians' spirit and agency. Mugezi describes the seminary's disciplinary mandate as follows:

The hydra at the heart of the autocracy commonly known as the seminary system bore three venom-laden heads: brainwashing, schizophrenia and good old-fashioned dictatorship. This infernal Trinity of venoms worked jointly [...] would result in a malleable subject ready for use by and for the clerics in charge of the system [...] a seminarian mandate was to please, obey and be docile and trustworthy. (*Abyssinian* 197)

In this passage, Mugezi uses strong and sophisticated expressions such as “autocracy,” “brainwashing,” “venom-laden,” and “dictatorship” to condemn the child-rearing ethos of the seminary. His deliberately macabre diction highlights the terrible life to which this discipline-oriented institution subjects children. When Mugezi uses the terms “hydra,” “venom-laden,” “schizophrenia” and “infernal” to describe how the seminary treats children, he succeeds in showing the monstrous or diabolic dimension of treatment of children in this institution.

In order to produce “malleable,” “docile” and “trustworthy” children, some African middle class families subject their children to inordinate violence. If the disciplinary intention of the seminary is to produce such cowed children, we can understand why his parents send Mugezi to the seminary and also why Mugezi treats the seminary with the utmost suspicion. Mugezi, as suggested by the colloquial translation of his name, — *‘lugezigezi’* or ‘know it all’ — is the archetypal precocious, supposedly ‘undisciplined child’ who, according to the thinking of his parents and the priests, is in need of being shaped into an ‘obedient child.’ Mugezi’s devilish metaphors

such as “venom-laden heads,” “infernal Trinity of venoms” help him to demonise the seminary as a place where horrible abuse takes place in the process of moulding ‘acceptably’ obedient children. Furthermore, these images help him reassert his character as an extrovert and curious child who, unfortunately, is a target of the seminary’s disciplinary impulses.

When Mugezi wonders “why [Father Mindi] could not see the ludicrousness of his position [...] Couldn’t he see that he was the Pharisee who preached total rest on Sabbath, yet rescued his donkey when it fell in the ditch on that day” (*Abyssinian* 212), it is plausible to read Father Mindi’s myopia in Padlock, Serenity and Eugene. The three are ‘highly educated’ parents who expect blind and uncritical obedience from their highly intelligent, creative and innovative children. Sadly, instead of nourishing and nurturing their children’s creativity and intelligence, these parents read these positive qualities as signs of naughtiness that must be ‘beaten out’ of their children. Here, the Biblical allusion does not only allude to the hypocrisy of the Catholic Church as portrayed in the text, but ironically also alludes to the blindness of some African middle class parents who equate a well-behaved child to one who is docile and lacking in initiative or intelligence.

In a claustrophobic setting where docility is demanded and people are programmed to obey and be obeyed (as portrayed in *Abyssinian Chronicles*), it is impossible to enjoy the pleasures of social interaction and the joys of living. Furthermore, in a home with a father like Serenity and a mother like Padlock, it is easy to understand why its members glorify and get attached to objects instead of cultivating social relationships. This explains why Padlock and Serenity and the priests in *Abyssinian Chronicles* fetishize material objects. Mugezi observes that Father Mindi’s reward for having responded to the priestly call was his car (*Abyssinian* 214). The same

argument can be made about Father Lageau. His reward for coming to Africa is his boat. The car and the boat are rewards for ‘suffering’ and “now making others suffer so that they in turn would make others suffer” (*Abyssinian* 214). Whereas the above passage demonstrates institutionalised violence, it also shows the characters’ enslavement to material things. In their attachment to their possessions, the priests are comparable to other parents in the selected texts explored in this chapter. Fathers Mindi’s and Lageau’s near starvation of the seminarians is a re-enactment of the principle that those who suffer make others suffer and their belief that the cowed children cannot effectively challenge them. The resources meant for feeding the seminarians are probably diverted to maintain Father Mindi’s and Father Lageau’s fetish objects. Father Lageau’s naming of his boat *Agatha* as if it is a substitute partner underscores how fetishizing a utilitarian object, much like the shiny headboard, exposes the banality and hollowness of African middle class obsessions with performed decorum and obsessive displays of possessions as class markers or claims.

Fiction allows silenced children a forum for the articulation of the abuse they suffer. Isegawa creates an illocutionary space (Lara 5) for Mugezi to speak about his abuse without invalidating his child’s perspective, in two ways. Firstly, he uses the trickster motif to allow Mugezi a degree of loudness and brashness in speaking about his abuse. Secondly, he uses the symbolism of names and nicknames to ridicule this particular family’s child-rearing practices and also foreground his creative truancy in the revenge he takes upon those who abuse him. Among the Baganda, a monkey “represent[s] cleverness, curiosity and [...] intelligence” (*Abyssinian* 268), Mugezi declares at one point in the text. Isegawa uses the trickster motif symbolised by the monkey to give his protagonist a loud voice with matching intelligence and capriciousness to unmask this family’s preoccupation with respectability as shallow.

Ironically, his brashness and loudness in a sense contradict his actual metaphorical muteness. The illocutionary space of the text is configured in terms of Mugezi's loud braggadocio voice and actions he is shown to perform as acts of revenge upon Padlock, Father Mindi and Father Lageau. Mugezi's hyperbolic register and outrageous actions can be seen as coping mechanisms to help him live with the abuse and his middle class sanctioned muting.

This is eloquently seen in the unflattering nicknames he gives to all those who mistreat him. His mother is Padlock: she exchanges and locks up her love and care from her children for a middle class display of decency and religious dignity. His father is Serenity, a hypocrite who creates an appearance of civility and calm that camouflages his demonic rages. Father Mindi's name means "tobacco pipe," which is a common insult in Buganda owing to the tribe members' alleged tendency to have big noses. The other priest's nickname is Red Indian — direct abuse probably indicating 'wildness' or lack of civility that is comparable with the monkey metaphor that this particular priest uses to insult the black seminarians (African children in his care). Mugezi gleefully uses both names and nicknames to mock his abusers and cut them down to size. For example, he informs us that his father was called Mpanama or hydro cell and that his mother's name Nakazi could be changed to dry vagina, dry faeces, dryness, or female sugar cane.

Giving nicknames to his abusive parents and priests is Mugezi's way of contesting their power. Mugezi regains his agency by subverting the authority of the parental figure; demystifying their power; and reducing the awe that they seek to inspire. This allows him to make them ordinary and pitiable mortals whose cruel acts are foibles arising from their flaws, fears, and ignorance. The use of nicknames to contest the social order in abusive homes in contexts where the parents' word is law is a

critique of and protest against the unsavoury child-rearing practices of this type of African middle class family. I hasten to add that Mugezi's derogatory nicknames in *Abyssinian Chronicles*; Kambili's "asusu anya" in *Purple Hibiscus*; and the "secret language without words" in "What Language is That?" are sophisticated linguistic structures devised by precocious children to expose the harm taking place in their homes.

Mugezi's unmasking of forms of African middle class hollowness and demonstration of methods of coping with the cruelty he suffers are also articulated in his acts of vengeance taken upon Padlock and Fathers Mindi and Lageau. Whereas the defacing of the headboard symbolises the unmasking of middle class hollowness, the stealing of Padlock's bobbin is an attack on Padlock's power and invincibility. In referring to the room housing the sewing machine as the "Holy of Holiness" or the "Command Post," Mugezi utilises Biblical and military imagery to describe his desecration of and challenge to Padlock's power in order to make her "realise that brute force had its glaring limits" (*Abyssinian* 163). I argue that the care, calculation and creative imagination invested in taking a small but vital component of the sewing machine, well aware it would be hard to get its spare part, signal his cunning. In the cunning and ingenious actions of his protagonist, Isegawa demonstrates how rebelliously feisty children are easily misunderstood as disobedient. He also underscores the underutilisation of the intellectual potential of so many of Africa's children, because their environment stifles their creativity, curiosity and imagination.

In the case of Fathers Mindi and Lageau, Mugezi defaces their fetish objects. He smears Father Mindi's car with faeces and defaces Father Lageau's boat with five letters scratched onto its immaculate paintwork. About Father Mindi's car, Mugezi tells us that "he had eaten a few pawpaws, bought from a truant and combined with our weevilled

beans, the stench they gave my excrement was overpowering” and that he uses a towel to smear the inside and outside of Father Mindi’s car (*Abyssinian* 215). The irony is that the result of the bad food that Father Mindi gives to the seminarians is what Mugezi uses to despoil his fetish object. Mugezi writes “OH GOD” (*Abyssinian* 272), on Father Lageau’s beloved *Agatha*. The comic-book prominence of the letters mimics the stupid monkeys that Lageau has accused of defacing his boat. The condescending tone in the expression “Oh God” not only portrays Lageau as a hypocritical, ignorant and insensitive brute, but also reveals Mugezi as an intelligent child whose wit and creativity are here reflected in his truancy. Mugezi’s condescending tone exposes Father Lageau as myopic and unimaginative, which enables Mugezi to cut him down to size. Here, we are reminded of Kofi Anyidoho’s comment about Amma Darko’s Fofo in *Faceless*, that often words by children assume unassailable moral authority over actions of adults (*Faceless* 16). We feel empathy for this creative, imaginative and intelligent child whose exuberance is constantly misread as naughtiness and disobedience.

In conclusion, it is plausible to argue that Isegawa uses Mugezi’s ingenuity to articulate how victims of parental cruelty can cope with and outwit the abusive system and their tormentors. His ingenuity is seen in how he forges “his own expulsion letter, signed and stamped [...] with the seminary stamp” (*Abyssinian* 281) and recommends himself to the best school he knows. Another incident that demonstrates his craftiness and ingenuity is his blackmailing of Lwendo and Sister Bison when he catches them making love. The forged expulsion letter and blackmail of Lwendo and Sister Bison are personal victories. He enters into a better school after leaving the seminary, ends his slavery to Lwendo and receives tasty and nourishing meals from Sister Bison. Another example of a benign but highly ingenious transgressive ploy is when he sabotages the electricity supply of the seminary. In his dialogue with Lwendo, Mugezi ironically

observes that before the power saboteur “did something, all the fish ended up rotting in the freezer. Now, thanks to him, we get to see some of it on our plates” (*Abyssinian* 270).

Mugezi’s creative truancy symbolised by his hero status in the seminary makes us contemplate the legacy of domestic abuse to those children who lack Mugezi’s flair. Although the revenge that Mugezi takes upon his parents and the priests as well as the ingenuity with which he outwits the abusive system unveil an imaginative child, it also spotlights the inordinate suffering of children who lack Mugezi’s flair. Nevertheless, the connection between Mugezi’s name and the Luganda/Ugandan slang term *lugezigezi* signal Isegawa’s focus on the unexploited potential of Ugandan middle class children living in contexts of parental cruelty and confinement. Mugezi’s talent, demonstrated in his role as a midwife’s assistant in the village, is wasted in the city. Here, we are reminded of Auntie Ifeoma’s satisfied look in *Purple Hibiscus* (121) as she observes the vibrancy of her family members whom she has nurtured to discuss matters maturely and Kambili’s wondering gaze when she comes face to face with a family and home that nurtures its children.

Emotional Trauma in “What Language is That?”

In this last section, I discuss how Uwem Akpan uses the indignant voice and the “secret new language without words” (“Language” 152) of his protagonist to explore how a hollow kind of African middle class liberalism can disguise the traumatising of children in domestic spaces. Akpan’s short story is set in the Ethiopian town of Bahminya and is about a close friendship between two girls at a time when there is an outbreak of religious riots between Christians and Muslims. In one critic’s description, the text highlights the anguish of the two friends as they attempt to find a way of breaking free of their caring but misguided parents’ ban in order to re-establish their

friendship (Knapp 1). Akpan's project in "What Language is That?" shows how some African middle class families' display of liberalism masks authoritarian parenting attitudes, which often traumatises children who are raised to believe in values that their parents conveniently discard in times of crisis.

Akpan's short story further spotlights how children are the unacknowledged casualties in contexts of socio-political upheaval. Compared to the empty streets and burning flats in the neighbourhood, it might be argued that the disruption to the little girls' interaction across the religious divide is trivial. However, the children's anguish because of the ban imposed on them following the religious riots helps us appreciate how painful the separation is from their perspective. The question that arises is: how often, in contexts of socio-political upheaval, do we assume that we know what is best for children? The parents' failure both to imagine less disruptive ways of protecting their children and to explain why they have taken certain actions illustrates the harmful impact of authoritarian parenting on children. In a society whose child-rearing ethos equates an obedient child to a silent one, parents assume they know what is best for the children and often do not attempt to consider how children might be affected by their decisions. This is why it is important for Akpan to give a voice to these children to articulate how they feel about their treatment in a context of social stress.

In an interview with Cressida Leyshon, Uwem Akpan states that he wants the voices and faces of the African children he writes about to be seen and heard, especially in terms of "how [they] are faring in these endless conflicts in Africa" (8). Arguing that the world is not 'looking at' the suffering of children in Africa, he proposes that fiction can allow the world "to sit for a while with people [it] would rather not meet" (8). Akpan's literary activism is comparable to Adichie's and Isegawa's, whose texts place domestic abuse of children in the public sphere for debate. Whereas *Purple Hibiscus*

and *Abyssinian Chronicles* unmask how African middle class enactments of religious uprightness and respectability can lead to acts of physical violence inflicted on the bodies of children, Akpan's short story uncovers how African middle class families' pretensions to modernity and liberalism are jettisoned with unfathomed traumatic consequences for children.

Lara argues that if women conceive their lives as "struggles for self-clarification, contemporary narratives gain the illocutionary force not only to increase women's self-esteem, but to alter the conception of who women are" (77). Lara's argument for women can be applied to how Akpan's text reclaims its protagonist's voice (in an African middle class context that mutes the child) to focus our attention on the child's articulation of resistance to her parents' authoritarianism. Akpan's unnamed protagonist also confirms how cosmetic liberalism is easily eroded when external violence (as in religious conflicts) intrudes into and transforms hitherto idyllic and cordial relations between families of differing religious orientation. Here, one is reminded of Kenneth Dodge's and Doraine Lambelet Coleman's warning that the "perpetration of child abuse within a family [is] affected by factors at the community level" (2).

Akpan's unmasking of African middle class liberal pretensions leading to traumatising of children is developed through his fusion of the omniscient and the (rare) second person narrator, as well as in his protagonist's indignant tone and secret new language without words. The second person pronoun "you" is specifically important in the narrative, because it mimics the voice of a child who is not being listened to. Because her parents do not listen to her, her secret new language without words and the second person pronoun portray a frustrated child addressing herself or the reader about her traumatising experience. Her parents' hollow liberalism which is abandoned under social stress severely disrupts her emotional wellbeing when she is

suddenly forbidden to play with her best friend. Previously, her friend's Muslim parents had declared that the Imam should not tell them "how to raise their children in a free Ethiopia" ("Language" 143) and they had told their daughter that she can eat pork if she wants to ("Language" 144). The protagonist's Christian parents had admired them because they thought them "open-minded" ("Language" 146). The message both sets of parents conveyed to their daughters was that religious differences do not matter in choosing one's friends.

The narrator's statement that her friends' brothers "avoided the next street, which had a mosque, because the Imam would curse them if the kites entangled the minaret [and] made it known to their parents that flying kites was foreign" ("Language" 143), ominously foreshadows the rupture of the social bond by pre-existing religious affiliations. Her portentous remark, "[t]hen one day" ("Language" 146), foretells the rupture of her parents' performance of their frivolous Premier League peace time liberalism ("Language" 145). In spite of their commendable intentions as parents concerned for the safety of their child, their unexplained oscillation between liberal and parochial positions is confusing and traumatising to their daughter. The protagonist's indignation at her parents' abandonment of their previously commendable liberal position is a critique of brittle liberalism among some African middle class families.

Her parents' dismissively euphemistic response when they declare that their daughter cannot play with her best friend because of "[f]aith differences [...] just faith differences" ("Language" 149) betrays the shallowness of their religious tolerance. That both sets of parents had actively encouraged their daughters' friendship ("Language" 143-6), means they have a responsibility to respect and nurture the strong bond of friendship between the two girls. The protagonist informs us that "[your] best friend said she liked your little eyes and lean face and walk and the way you spoke

English [...] you said you liked her dimples and long legs and handwriting” (“Language” 143). About the above passage, Adrian Knapp observes that “just as speaking and writing resemble two forms of communication, long legs are commonly associated with beautiful walks as are smiling eyes with dimples” (7). He goes on to argue that the passage indicates that having “grown up together” the two girls are inseparable (Knapp 7). I agree with Knapp’s interpretation that their friendship creates the uncanny impression that they are almost the same person, which means that it is impossible and in fact terrible to attempt to separate them.

If for the girls there is no “them” and “us,” because their parents’ previously convenient liberal stance has taught them that religious differences do not matter, it is traumatic for the children suddenly to be separated because of religious riots. The parents’ decision is even more traumatic because they expect their daughters to endure their separation — an equivalent of amputation — without a convincing explanation, because, according to some African middle class child-rearing practices, a child is supposed to do as told. The trauma is captured in the anguish of the protagonist imagining the worst: her best friend getting a new friend who shares her religion. This anguish extends literally and symbolically into a nightmare:

You dreamed bad dreams of Selam, even in your afternoon nap. In one dream she turned her face away from you and would not answer your greetings [...] She told you that it wasn’t Selam’s fault that her parents wanted her to avoid you because you weren’t *one of them*. (“Language” 150, my emphasis)

Akpan’s story (especially the strategically placed phrase “one of them” that echoes the collection’s title) focuses our attention on how the individual application of parental authority produces severe emotional distress.³⁸ The protagonist’s observation that “all

³⁸ Compare Pia Handrup Christensen’s argument that within the family, adults are positioned as “responsible providers and carers of the child and the child ‘as not yet part’ of [or active agents in] the family receiving care, protection and training” (41).

morning, [her] parents didn't leave [her] side" ("Language" 146) and that for the next two days, "when Mommy left the house, Daddy stayed with you. When Daddy left the house, Mommy stayed with you" ("Language" 149), reveals her anxiety — a state caused by parents who have turned the home into a prison because of their fears and prejudices, thinking that they are keeping the child safe and making her feel secure. Although it is understandable that during contexts of social upheaval parents are helpless because they cannot control the reality outside their home, it is disingenuous and inappropriate on their part merely to ban the girls from playing with each other without any explanation. If the parents were to explain to their daughters that it is the dangerous climate of religious enmity that has necessitate the ban, then their former principles of religious tolerance would have been maintained. Here, the text highlights a typical middle class unimaginative tendency of responding to a challenge by denying the reality or displacing their frustrations and insecurities onto their children.

Akpan's critique of some African middle class families' flirtation with liberalism and reversion to parochialism and authoritarian parenting is signalled by his portrayal of their euphemistic and dismissive invocation of "faith differences" and the condescending rhetoric they use in their explanation: "honey, we don't want you to play with that girl anymore" ("Language" 146). The parents, who had earlier encouraged and taken pride in this friendship, now shockingly label their daughter's best friend "that girl." The contrast of the terms of endearment "honey" and rejection in "that girl" shows the brittleness of this family's supposedly moral respect for members of other faiths. Here, middle class hypocrisy coheres with its authoritarian tendencies to produce the myopic response: "at six you're a bit too young to understand these things" ("Language" 147). The phrase "too young to understand," the endearment "honey" and

the rejection inscribed in the expression “that girl” are typical evasive middle class expressions that underscore the notion of a child as someone who does not question parental authority. This exposes not only their hypocrisy, but also the impermanence of this family’s liberal credentials. By invoking the binaries underscored by their blustering phrase: “not us as in *us*” (“Language” 149, original emphasis), the parents abdicate their responsibility to explain why the two friends ‘must’ (as they believe) be separated. If the best friend becomes “that girl,” her parents are in their own eyes exonerated from explaining why their daughter cannot play with her.

Although the “tension between us and them” (“Language” 148) may justify the parents’ insistence that the girls be separated, Akpan implicitly condemns their insensitive unawareness of the emotional trauma this will cause. Sara Ahmed argues that the “the pain of others is continually evoked in public discourses as that which demands a collective as well as individual response” (20). Akpan evokes empathy for the children by showing how painful their parents’ abandonment of their earlier liberal perspective and failure to explain to their daughters the reason for their present separation are. If the parents had encouraged their daughters’ friendship and taken pride in it (“Language” 143-6), their reversion to a parochial stance is more than disconcerting and indeed traumatic for the children. Adrian Knapp rightly argues that the religious riots expose the cracks and fissures in the liberal credentials of these particular Ethiopian middle class families (4).

If liberalism is equivalent to watching Premiership football; enjoying the Disney channel on TV; having Sunday lunches on the terraces of Hoteela Federalawi or going to church (“Language” 144-5), it is easy to understand why it disintegrates so easily into parental imprisonment of their daughters. The protagonist observes that on the morning after the riots, she wakes up “in Mommy and Daddy’s bed. The flat was full of a

burning smell. The streets were almost empty. Daddy said there was no school that day” (“Language” 146). The olfactory and visual images of the “burning smell” and almost “empty streets” simultaneously signal the unpleasantness and awfulness of the changes, the dangerous conditions and the disruption of normal routines, thus giving legitimacy to the parents’ interventions. Waking up in her parents’ bed, besides indicating a changed routine, also suggests parental intervention in the girl’s life. However, here the parental bed, which symbolises primordial parental security, is turned into a kind of prison which the parents inadvertently use to traumatise their daughter. The protagonist and her best friend can only escape these ‘prisons’ when they “discover a new language” (“Language” 152).

Akpan’s achievement in writing this short story lies not only in his spotlighting how the family’s enactment of liberal respectability regresses to abuse during moments of social crisis, but also in his ability to give the child trapped in such a context a voice with which to speak about her abuse and trauma while maintaining her six-year-old child’s perspective. The protagonist’s indignantly mature tone and the omniscient or second person narrator address us with such illocutionary force (Lara 77) that we easily perceive why her parents’ former half-hearted and exhibitionist liberalism contribute to her present anguish. Although Elaine Scarry argues that “the attempt to invent linguistic structures that will reach and accommodate [painful experience] normally so inaccessible to language [...] is a project laden with practical and ethical consequences” (6), the protagonist and her best friend evade their parents’ restrictions to create their own language whose linguistic structures simultaneously depict how their world is disrupted by the religious conflicts and reveal their parents’ insensitivity.

The expansion of the children’s linguistic repertoire through the creation of a “new wordless” vocabulary breaks societal and parental restrictions:

Slowly Selam lifted her hand and waved to you as if the hand belonged to another person. You waved back slowly too. She opened her mouth slowly and mimed to you, and you mimed back, 'I can't hear you' [...] you embraced the wind with both hands and gave an imaginary friend a peck. She immediately hugged herself, blowing you a kiss [...] you smiled back because you had discovered a new language. ("Language"151-152)

The predominance of the second person pronoun "you" in this passage and the rest of the story is a subtle and nuanced depiction of a child trying to address parents who do not listen to her simply because she is a child. Since she cannot speak 'with' her parents, it is logical that she enlists our understanding and empathy, since her parents are deaf to her pleas. She is also narrating a story to herself — an indication of her loneliness, since her parents cannot replace the companionship she previously shared with her friend. This passage also depicts children who reject traumatic restrictions placed on them by their parents and respond creatively to their plight. It expresses their innovation in creating a language that bypasses unimaginative parental restrictions. By doing so, these children provide us with an alternative vision of a world in which parental authority is interrogated and bridges built between warring religious communities through friendship.

Besides the secret new language without words, the protagonist also speaks through her actions. The fact that she challenges her parents to explain their actions indicates her rejection of the middle class ideal of an obedient child who does as she is told. This is depicted by the protagonist's breaking of the remote control on being told that she would not be allowed to play with her best friend. Although this action can be read as a tantrum thrown by a spoilt child, I read her action and the broken remote control symbolically. The broken remote control symbolises parental control, which the girl now rejects and in a sense 'breaks' by breaking free from its authoritarian restrictions. Ironically, whereas the adults are eager and ready to forgo their previous

non-discriminatory and liberal relationships, the children find a way to uphold their friendship — which symbolises their integrity.

There is a connection between her father's obsession with the remote control and middle class attachments to fetish objects. The remote control and by extension, the TV is a visible symbol of the middle class idea of a good life. Eugene's palatial homes with all types of modern gadgetry; Serenity's shiny headboard and Toshiba TV are comparable to what the remote control symbolises in this particular family. The three sets of parents erroneously assume that access to material possessions is equal to a decent life. In the process of acquiring and maintaining these objects, they traumatise and abuse their children by depriving them of love and sensitive care. This is underlined by Kambili's observation that: "our living room had too much empty spaces, too much wasted marble floor [...] our furniture was lifeless: the glass tables did not shed twisted skin in the harmattan, the leather sofa's greeting was a clammy coldness" (*Purple* 192). Kambili's imagery on her return from Auntie Ifeoma's warm, loving and free home (in spite of its limited material resources) highlights how misplaced reverence for material possessions undermines the nurturing qualities that a loving home should have.

In circumventing parental restrictions through the creation of their own language and an illocutionary space, the children in Akpan's story implicitly urge us to recognise adult complicity in enacting and upholding conditions and institutions that perpetuate emotional trauma. Daniel Lafleur argues that, in the end, "their friendship clearly endures in spirit but is separated by the protagonist's move away from the rioting area" (671). Contrary to Lafleur's unease with the Akpanian motif of ending the narratives in the collection *Say You're One of Them* at the point "of separation from the object of support and love" (672), which he assumes underscores broken filial and cultural bonds, I argue that in this story the creation of a new secret language constructs agency and an

impregnable space within which the protagonists can escape the consequences of destructively caring and well-intentioned actions of their parents. Thus, I read the protagonist's movement to Addis after learning to speak with her best friend in their secret language as a confirmation of their enduring and unending friendship, rescued by the girls themselves from the banality of their parents' actions.

Conclusion

Maria Pia Lara argues that “narratives become the vehicle for the construction of collective and individual identity” (35). Following Lara, it can be argued that the selected authors use narrative to shed light on the plight of domestically abused children in some African middle class homes. Although Adichie's, Akpan's and Isegawa's depictions of domestic abuse arise from different perspectives, their texts make audible in the African public sphere certain private narratives about unhealthy domestic spaces. This is achieved by means of their texts' unmasking of certain African middle class family pretensions. Whereas the overtly religious, educated and financially successful image of the middle class family in Africa can be construed to mean a fulfilling and protected life available to a minority of Africans, the texts' protagonists divulge an often unseen side to some such families' domestic lives as characterised by vulnerability to abuse and trauma. The three texts depict various types of mistreatment often disguised as actions taken in the best interest of the child; which accords with many African middle class families' obsession with displays of piety, material prosperity and liberal values, as well as their tendency towards authoritarian parenting. However, the three writers spotlight how such families' implementation of authoritarian parenting, religious righteousness and liberal values stand in stark contrast to what these concepts ideally represent.

Our eyes are opened to physical abuse and emotional trauma in ways that arouse our empathy for the child victims of and witnesses to harm and hurt, while the texts provide unique insights into how and why the good intentions of parents often end tragically in abuse. Firstly, Adichie deploys the quiet voice and demure actions of her protagonist to demonstrate how Eugene's ritualised violence masquerading as 'disciplining' leads to the terrible abuse of his family. Secondly, Isegawa's brash narrator shows how parents' obsession with disciplinarian control and materialism can result in domestic abuse. Lastly, Akpan works with the rare second person narrator and the indignant voice of his protagonist to show how the jettisoning of liberal values in the face of a socio-religious crisis by some middle class families traumatises children.

Kambili's 'silences,' Mugezi's brash register and Akpan's protagonist's "secret language" are sophisticated linguistic manoeuvres that allow them to expose maltreatment in the domestic sphere of particular African middle class families in which the child-rearing ethos silences the child. In homes where children are not invited to 'talk,' 'criticise,' 'object' or 'contradict' the adult, the protagonists' innovative register nevertheless allows them to condemn autocratic parenting. Kambili's fascination with her cousins who "simply speak and speak and speak" and her aunt who looks on "like a football coach who had done a good job" (*Purple* 120) represent what a child-friendly African middle class home and family should be like. These images of openness and receptivity to and trust in children's capacities help us to understand the three writers' vision of good parenting.

Chapter Five

Representations of Child Prostitution by Akpan Duiker and Darko

“I have no choice but to speak out. I shall create a space in the world with my story, a space of honesty, compassion and rebellion” (Muhjaub 5).

Introduction

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison presents two psychotically maladjusted, abusive men in the character of Cholly and Elihue Micah Whitcomb (Soaphead Church). Cholly, who is described as “dangerously free [...] free to live his fantasies, and even free to die, the how and the when of which held no interest for him” (*Bluest* 126), rapes his eleven-year-old daughter because he is simultaneously attracted and revolted by her fragility, innocence, purity and vulnerability. The omniscient narrator’s observation that “the hatred would not let him pick her up; the tenderness forced him to cover her” (129) underlines a travesty of parental love that arises when debauched obsession with a child’s body and sexuality induces a mixture of hatred and tenderness. Cholly’s paradoxical relationship with his daughter that leads to the rape is given theoretical explanation by the highly educated, but equally psychotic Elihue Micah Whitcomb, who attempts to rationalise his paedophilic impulses (cravings to touch young girls’ breasts) in a letter to God. He argues that his sexual encounters with young girls are “anything but lewd; his patronage of little girls smack[s] of innocence and [is] associated in his mind with cleanliness” (132).

There is no doubt that Morrison’s Cholly and Whitcomb are seriously disturbed men whose distressing pasts manifest in their traumatising relationships with young girls. Their perceptions of little girls as clean, good and pure (*Bluest* 144) indicates how their perverse reading of eroticised purity, innocence and vulnerability of young girls’

bodies intersects dangerously with societal and institutional oppression and exploitation that creates these “dangerously free” men. Investing children’s bodies with eroticised notions of purity, innocence, fragility, delicacy and vulnerability places the child’s body dangerously at an intersection between patriarchal, socio-political crises and social breakdown. This fact is what links this chapter to the previous ones about war-affected children and incestuous rape. In these three chapters, the socio-political and economic crises of post-1990 African contexts impact directly and disastrously on the child’s eroticised and sexualised body.

In her article on the intersectionality of multiple structures of oppression on women’s bodies/lives, Nira Yuval-Davis argues that “in concrete experiences of oppression, being oppressed, for example, as a ‘Black person’ is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions (for example, gender, social class, disability status, sexuality, age, nationality, immigration status, geography)” (195). Yuval-Davis’s argument is an explication of the notion of “triple oppression” — a theorisation that argues, for example, that a black woman is triply oppressed: as a Black person, as a woman and as a working person. I find Yuval-Davis’s foregrounding of the intersecting tangents of violation and exploitation applicable to the reading of child prostitution in the fictional works of Uwem Akpan, Amma Darko and K. Sello Duiker. The sexual predation on their protagonists arises in contexts where patriarchal eroticisation of children’s bodies intersects with socio-economic breakdown (urban poverty and the disintegration of the family unit). How does one write and (or) read productively the sexual predation on children that is prevalent in some African cities? I find a useful methodology suggested by Maria Pia Lara in her text, *Moral Textures: Feminist Narratives in the Public Sphere*.

Lara underscores Hannah Arendt's conviction that narratives as "sources of reflexive judgment [are] capable of envisioning utopian futures" (11). She further contends that the ability of fictional narratives to envisage an ideal future arises out of the fact that narratives bring something new into the world through the interweaving of stories: "every [story] is rewoven into new stories that bring to life a variety of different meanings and experiences and thereby provide new possibilities for action" (16). Lara's concept of narrative-aided reflective judgement is based on her belief in the power of narratives to empower marginalised subjects — and, one may add, society at large — to engage with different forms of oppression and exploitation.

Both Arendt and Lara recognise how vivid and complex narrative representations of oppressed and exploited subjects provide a more powerful and affective vehicle for an insightful communication of their traumatic experiences. Whereas Arendt refers to how narratives empower society to reflect upon and consequently envision "freer" realities after totalitarianism and Lara to how women's fictional narratives have allowed them to articulate their experiences of oppression and marginalisation under patriarchy, both scholars' arguments can be extended to fictional representations of troubled childhoods from the point of view of the victims or witnesses themselves, such as children.

Arendt's and Lara's arguments resonate with this chapter's focus on how fiction exposes the complex intersection between patriarchal and commercial eroticisation of children's bodies and socio-economic conditions that create "predatory urban parents" and "sex-entrepreneurs" that thrive on under-age prostitution in some African cities.³⁹ Uwem Akpan, Amma Darko and K. Sello Duiker use fiction to craft an appropriate

³⁹ In this chapter, I use the terms parents and (or) parental figures to refer to those people whose predatory actions pervert their expected conduct as nurturers and protectors to some vulnerable children into sex-entrepreneurship.

discourse for disclosing how the networks of adults involved in the sexual predation on vulnerable children as manifested by perverted patriarchal sexual desires create and sustain the industry of commercial paedophilia.⁴⁰ In this chapter, I read Uwem Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast," Amma Darko's *Faceless* and K. Sello Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* as texts depicting how patriarchal eroticisation and sexualisation of children's bodies intersect with socio-economic crises to enact teen prostitution in some African cities. I argue that the texts are archives that chronicle child victims' experiences of the trade as well as the kind of characters involved in constructing and facilitating this practice.⁴¹

In the first section, I explore how Akpan presents juvenile prostitution as a face of the layered forms of predation on the vulnerability of children in contexts of extreme urban poverty. In the second section, I examine how Darko's documentary-fiction approach takes the reader on a journey of discovery and documentation of the dynamics and intricacies of child sex work in some African cities. In the last section, I examine how Duiker's deployment of Azure's brash personality (foregrounded by the first person narrative style and the immediacy of the present tense) not only problematizes the popular reading of child prostitution as inherently heterosexual by foregrounding commercialised homosexual paedophilic sex, but also shows how adults prey (financially and sexually) on boys without homes and families, on the one hand, and how these boys pragmatically tap into and engage in homoerotic sex trade for survival, on the other hand.

⁴⁰ See Viktoria Perschler-Desai's article "Childhood on the Market: Teenage Prostitution in Southern Africa" in which she narrates a chilling tale of an eleven-year-old girl who confessed to having slept with men for "prices vary[ing] from \$2.50 with a condom to \$3.50 without a condom" (Perschler-Desai 4).

⁴¹ See Article 2 (a) of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. It defines child prostitution as the use of children in sexual activities for remuneration or other considerations.

Darko's *Faceless* and Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast" in the collection *Say You're One of Them* deal with heterosexual child sex work of children who have a semblance of families and homes (even if these are dysfunctional). However, they resonate with Duiker's *Thirteen Cents* and its representation of the homoerotic sex work of a child without a family and home. This is because the three authors fashion an appropriate register for depicting the horror of paedophilic sex trade. The three texts' grappling with how urban poverty and attachment of particular erotic fantasies to young bodies allow greedy and callous parents or parental figures to drive children into teen prostitution recalls Lara's argument that the "creative process of the initial construction of the literary narrative [...] is followed by a return to the experiential dimension of the readers, where narratives gain influence and transform previous ways of seeing things" (19). Here, Lara is speaking about how narratives are used by women to establish a feminist agenda in the public sphere. Nevertheless, I find her argument applicable to literary depictions of the complex phenomenon of under-age sex work. The selected authors use fiction to articulate the complicated reality of teen prostitution in the African literary public sphere creatively, informatively and affectively.

Child Sex Work: The Predatory Family in "An Ex-mas Feast"

"An Ex-mas Feast" is set in the Kenyan capital Nairobi, and concerns a starving *machokosh* (street) family and its economic dependence on its eldest (twelve-year-old) daughter. John Kearney argues that Uwem Akpan's text reveals "the state of a disempowered family whose efforts to better themselves backfire" (101). The level of disempowerment of this family is reflected in how it exploits its children for survival. The different forms of exploitation to which the children are subjected are subtly highlighted by the protagonist's anguished bewilderment at the way his parents use his pre-teen sister's prostitution as a source of income. The depiction of this boy's anguish

at his sister's exploitation questions the shameless ease with which some parents yield to the temptation of making easy money by tapping into Kenya's sex economy. Using Jigana's perceptive and empathetic gaze (signalled by his refusal of the role of a parasite that benefits from the sexual exploitation of his twelve-year-old sister as a teen sex worker on the streets of Nairobi), Akpan exposes the extent to which child prostitution is attributable to how a financially desperate family yields callously to the terrible pressures of urban poverty to turn a child into a marketable commodity.

In her insightful book *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Judith Herman argues that "psychological trauma means bearing witness to horrible events" (7). She goes on to argue that it is morally impossible to remain neutral and that bystanders are forced to take sides. Similarly, Adrian Knapp argues that "experiencing the world through the eyes of suffering children, we cannot but feel guilty about the world we have created" (13). The two scholars' arguments are given force by Akpan's depiction of how urban poverty ferociously preys on basic human dignity of some parents so that they readily and pragmatically send their daughters into child sex work to fund their survival. Ironically, when Jigana compares his elder sister's behaviour towards her parents to those of "a cat that was going feral" ("Feast" 5), the description aptly suits his parents who — like domestic animals gone wild — without discernible qualms subsist on their daughter's sexual exploitation. She is in her fierceness and resentment reflecting how ruthless and uncherishing they have been in their treatment of her.

The metaphor of a "cat gone feral" is less a description of Maisha's unruly conduct towards her parents or her engagement in juvenile sex work, than it is a vivid portrayal of how the humiliation of brutal cross-generational urban poverty breaks this family's ability to nurture and care for its children. If cats as domesticated animals are

expected to behave with propriety and tamedness, the family's "feral" attitude towards its children is accentuated by Akpan's portrayal of its feasting on the food that Maisha returns with after exchanging sex for money.

[Naema] almost knocked Baba down as she burst out with the bags of food we had forgotten. [...] Baba bit into a chicken wing. Mama took a leg. The rest of us dug into the sour rice, mashed potatoes, salad, hamburgers, pizza, spaghetti, and sausages. We drank the dead Coke and melted ice cream all mixed up. With her teeth, Naema opened bottles of Tusker and Castle beer. At first, we feasted in silence, on our knees, looking up frequently, like squirrels, to monitor one another's intake. ("Feast" 28)

The point that this family's decency has been eroded by their poverty and deprivation is underscored by how the various family members gorge on the food while monitoring the intake of others "like squirrels." It is further heightened by the fact that they allow the toddler twins to partake of alcoholic drinks (beers). The depiction of the parents' lack of concern or proper care for the youngest and presumably the most vulnerable of their children as depicted above stresses the corrosion of their parental instincts. The predatory nature of this family is further poignantly emphasized by Akpan's deployment of connotatively violent verbs. The verbs such as "tore" or "dig into" signpost both the tearing apart of the family, symbolised by the fact that Maisha and Jigana leave the family at the end of the story, and also the way parents prey on the degradation of one of its daughters, with the second being groomed to follow in her steps.

Nira Yuval-Davis argues that "different social divisions are constructed by, and intermeshed with, each other in specific historical conditions" (202). The three issues that Yuval-Davis foreground here — socially constructed, intermeshed vectors of exploitation/oppression and historical locatedness — accord with the predatory exploitation of children depicted in this family. The family's dependence on Maisha's prostitution and grooming of Naema to follow in her footsteps arise out of the

intersection of urban poverty and patriarchal eroticisation of girls' bodies. It is both the condition of abject poverty in which the family exists and the demand from debauched men who seek sexual gratification of young girls' bodies that turn Maisha and Naema into child prostitutes.

The predatory nature of this family is further accentuated by Jigana's perceptive observation that "Mama who was good at spotting dog pregnancies, had baited [Simba — the family dog] with tenderness and food until she became ours; Mama hoped to sell the puppies to raise money for my textbooks" ("Feast" 7). There is a strong parallel between the dog and the young family members because, like Simba, the children are exploited by the parents. The reason for which Simba is brought into the family mirrors the family's dependence on Maisha for Jigana's fees and a Christmas feast. A mother who sends a premature, new-born baby into the Nairobi rain under the care of its ten-year-old sister as bait to beg or one who expects her twelve-year-old daughter to take up sex work to contribute to the household income makes herself available as an important link in the city's marketing of children's bodies and sexuality. Here, we are reminded of Naa Yomo's description of a good father in *Faceless*: she says that "a good man would never say to his child: there is no food, go out onto the street and find some money for food" (*Faceless* 116). Unlike Naa Yomo's example of good parents, Baba and Mama see their under-age children as 'main sources of income.'

The vivid and detailed description of the family's abode underscores their urban indigence in a way that might partially explain their "feral" transformation. The narrative nudges us to recognise the deplorable corruption of a family that willingly sends its daughter into child sex work. The story opens as follows:

Nairobi sat in a low flood, the light December rain droning on our tarpaulin roof. I was sitting on the floor of our shack, which stood on a slab of cement at the end of an alley, leaning against the back of an old brick shop [...] the floor was nested with cushions that I had scavenged

from a dump on Biashara Street. [...] [Mother] dug through our family carton; scooping out clothes, shoes, and my new school uniform [...] she unearthed a tin of New Suntan shoe glue. The glue was our Ex-mas gift from the children of a *machokosh* (street family) that lived nearby [...] sniffing it would kill my hunger in case Maisha did not return with an Ex-mas feast for us. (“Feast” 6-7)

In the above passage, the family’s abject poverty is highlighted by the fact that shoe glue is given to the children to dull their hunger pangs; while the parents cannot afford even as inexpensive an item as shoe glue to give as a Christmas present to the neighbours; that all the family’s property is kept in a carton and that its home in an alley is without proper sanitation and protection from the elements as well as having its eldest daughter’s trunk as the only solid object in the shack. More important is the fact that this family’s major sources of income are begging which involves using the youngest child — Baby — as bait (“Feast” 8), Baba’s occasional pick pocketing and (mainly) the earnings from the prostitution of its twelve-year-old eldest daughter.

Does the poverty depicted in the above passage justify this family’s preying on its children? Unfortunately, in the eyes of Baba and Mama, the answer is in the affirmative because their actions indicate their preference for the path of least resistance (by exploiting their children) rather than making further efforts themselves to ensure survival. For example, Jigana informs us that “though people were more generous to beggars at Ex-mas, our real bait was Baby. We took turns pushing him in the faces of passersby” (“Feast” 8). The exploitation of this innocent child to make money for the family is stressed by the fact that he is used as a “real bait” by “pushing him in the faces” of passersby. The parents’ complicity in this scheme is confirmed by Mama’s question: “Jigana, did you do well last night with Baby?” (“Feast” 7). By sending Baby into Nairobi streets to make money, Mama comes off as a callous and unfeeling parent who exploits her children.

The parents' willingness to subsist on their children's suffering is underscored by Akpan's layered irony in punning the story's title: "An Ex-mas Feast." Corruption of Christmas symbolism is reflected in how the parents label the food and Jigana's school fees obtained from Maisha's prostitution a "Christmas feast." Their readiness to survive by means of their daughter's degradation reduces Christmas — with its religious connotations of celebration and treasuring of children — ironically, to an anti-Christmas parody and blasphemy that 'feasts' on the successful selling of a child into sexual slavery or turning her prematurely into what the family's ten-year-old daughter — Naema — euphemistically calls a "breadwinner." The concept of a child as a "breadwinner" is introduced by Naema, who declares: "I'm *big gal* now guy. *Breadwinner*. If you want school, I pay for you" ("Feast" 28, my emphasis). In spite of her mere ten years, Naema's use of the phrase "big girl" signposts the role that this child is ready to take on: engaging in under-age prostitution to contribute to the family income. Baba's and Mama's failure to reprimand Naema on her self-declared future role allows Akpan to foreground how callously and shamelessly the rightful "breadwinners" take the easy way out; deflecting their responsibilities to their children because a monetary value has been placed on their children's bodies and sexuality.

The family's predation on their children is further illustrated by Mama's remarks: "we must save all Ex-mas rate to educate you, first son" ("Feast" 9), and "there is hope. Maisha will bring Ex-mas feast for us" ("Feast" 17). Mama's statements above implicitly indicate how lacking in compassion, care and compunction she is to consign her daughter (Maisha) into the awful life of sexual slavery to obtain money for the entire family. If Christmas alludes to sacrifice, love and redemption by Christ — the self-sacrificing Son of the Father — Mama's utterances: "Ex-mas rate" and "Ex-mas feast" in reference to the money and foodstuffs from Maisha's teen prostitution indicate

how a loving, caring and redemptive ritual turns into ruthless preying on children's sexuality.⁴² Akpan's punning on "Ex-mas Feast" stresses how Christmas degenerates into a capitalistic consumptive ceremony. In a predatory family and (or) society, Christmas inappropriately becomes an occasion of debauched consumption — including sexual 'consumption' of children at "Ex-mas rates" to ensure that some families procure "Ex-mas feasts."

Maisha's fate during this Christmas season — she is "hired at an Ex-mas rate" by "the *ma-men* tourists [...] real white people, *Musungu*" ("Feast" 8, original italics) — does not portray Christmas as the celebration of the birth of the Christ-child and the promise of salvation as it should. By foregrounding the negative prefix "ex" in the title, Akpan stresses the terrible life of a child sex worker. In "An Ex-mas Feast," Christmas also alludes to this family's last supper together as indicated by the dispersal of the characters at the end of the story — Maisha to life in a brothel, Jigana to the hard life of a gangster and Naema to the life of the next "breadwinner" of her family. "An Ex-mas Feast," *Faceless* and *Thirteen Cents* resonate stylistically because the climax of each plot highlights the protagonists' rejection of their degrading lifestyles in their dysfunctional families/homes — Azure's phantasmagorical movement up to the mountain, Fofu's to the rehabilitation centre (as I discuss shortly) and Jigana onto Nairobi's streets to fend for himself.

Teen prostitution in "An Ex-mas Feast" also portrays the consequences of depraved patriarchal predation on the sexuality of children from poor families in most African cities. In one flashback, Jigana recalls the older siblings' role play one

⁴² See John 3:16 "For God loved the world so much that he gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." The essence of this verse is the unconditional love of a parent for his children irrespective of circumstances.

particular night when they mimicked Maisha's life on the streets. He observes that "giggling, we began walking, our strides softened by laughter. Everything became funny. We couldn't stop laughing at ourselves, at the people around us" ("Feast"13). Here, we see a children's game rendering ridiculous an actual, awful reality. James Allison's argument (in another context) that children are supposed to play and learn (101) is applied in perverted form to reveal how terribly 'street-wise' these two children are despite their youth so much so that play becomes a rare exception in an otherwise harsh life filled with 'grown-up' experiences and problems.

This is further emphasised by the nature of their environment, which Jigana describes as the most dangerous part of the city. Although he refers to these dangerous streets as their "playground" ("Feast"13), "the anxious faces of these visitors in the old taxis, bracing for what would be the most dangerous twenty minutes of their twelve-hour journeys" ("Feast" 13) signpost the danger with and in which his sister lives. If adults in the safety of cars are nonetheless frightened, the fear of these travellers focuses our imagination on what it takes for these children to survive in this inner city jungle. Our empathy is evoked by the girl who is forced to share space with the scum of the earth such as murderers, thieves, sex perverts and predators as well as rapists to support her family.

Maisha's effortless change of personae — she easily and expertly discards the persona of a carefree playing child to assume that of a sex worker ("Feast" 14) — underlines the paradox of a child who is a prostitute. Her observation "someday, I must [have] to find a real job" ("Feast"14) is infused with the pain that arises from her awareness of how debasing her role as a teen prostitute is. It is not so much the selling of her body for sex that humiliates her, but the shame and anger she feels at being degradingly inspected (and passed over) by men like the old, bald man in the back seat

of the car, like a beast in a cattle market or any other object for sale. Using an eavesdropped conversation between Maisha and Naema, Jigana informs us of the other consequence of patriarchal predation on girls' sexuality that his sister endures:

Maisha shared her thoughts with Naema, our ten-year-old sister, more than she did with the rest of us combined, mostly talking about the dos and don'ts [...] no matter how much money he offered her [...] she told Naema that it is better to starve to death than to go out with any man without a condom. ("Feast" 5)

Here, Maisha indicates the dangers that child prostitutes face. They suffer physical abuse and live with the constant threat of contracting HIV/AIDS or being impregnated. Maisha's own admission of the dangers she lives with while plying her trade reverberates with Heather Montgomery's argument that an understanding of kinship obligations and filial duty is crucial in any analysis of children's justification of working as prostitutes. She argues that it "was because of the duties that kin felt towards one another that the children were able to rationalise and condone what they did" (197). Montgomery's argument can be applied to Maisha's self-sacrifice in spite of her awareness of the danger she faces in such an exploitative context in order to support her family financially and educate her brother.

The horror of Maisha's life as a child sex worker is inscribed on her body when she returns home on this particular Christmas evening. Jigana tells us that "she slouched in the back while the driver got out [...] her hair] stood up in places and lay flat in others, revealing patches of her scalp, which was bruised from the chemicals [...] and tonight her fatigue seemed to have seeped under the burns swelling her eyes" ("Feast" 24). Akpan indicates how this twelve-year-old girl has been deformed and disfigured because of the need to attract clients to obtain the money to support her family. The adjective "slouched" that describes her posture in the car and the verb "seeped" provide a vivid picture of a child whose life has been sucked or drained out of her by the sex

trade. Here, *Thirteen Cents*, *Faceless* and “An Ex-mas Feast” are comparable. As Azure in Duiker’s *Thirteen Cents* observes: “there are too many monsters” out in the streets where these children ply their trade (*Thirteen* 16). They include the married middle and upper class white men who “fuck” Azure until blood is expelled with his shit in *Thirteen Cents*; the tourists who might racially and humiliatingly let their monkey “fuck” Maisha in “An Ex-mas Feast;” or the likes of the Onkos who come searching for Baby T’s pubic hair in *Faceless* for ‘good luck medicine’ (as I illustrate in the subsequent section of this chapter).⁴³

John Kearney argues that Maisha’s parents should be partially exonerated for their joint readiness to use Maisha’s services as a prostitute because they are “both opposed to her becoming a fulltime brothel inmate” (92). I see this differently. Their objection to Maisha’s movement to the brothel is because they know they will lose the money from her prostitution if she does. Even if their desire to educate Jigana is commendable, it is unfortunately premised on unthinking sexism and parental favouritism. In fact, Jigana running off to the streets is a rejection of a ‘better future’ that causes incalculable harm and degradation to Maisha and Naema. Moreover, the parents more than likely believe that their son will ‘look after’ them, once educated and gainfully employed in later years, continuing the predation pattern in a more ‘respectable’ but no less selfish way. While we are appalled by parental favouritism that subjects daughters to terrible work in order to earn school fees for the eldest son, we are impressed by Maisha’s self-sacrifice to educate her brother:

“I don’t know. *Ni maisha yangu*, guy, it’s my life. I’m thinking, full time will allow me to pay your fees and also save for myself. I will send

⁴³ Here, I am using the verb “fuck” with its Cape Town double connotation as used in *Thirteen Cents*. In that text, it references both physical and sexual violence. The double meaning applies to all three texts because these child prostitutes face both physical violence and sexual violation.

money through the church for you. I'll quit the brothel when I save a bit. I don't want to stand on the road forever. Me myself must go to school one day." ("Feast" 14)

Here, we are shown a brave and selfless girl who takes on the dangerous trade of teen prostitution to ensure her brother is rescued from a life of abject poverty. In spite of her mere twelve years, the passage depicts Maisha as an intelligent and thoughtful person. In a hopeful scenario unlikely to be fulfilled, she intends to tap into Nairobi's sex economy, send money back home, then quit the brothel and go back to school herself after educating her brother. Here, Maisha is shown to exhibit a level of selflessness and commitment that is so lacking in her parents. Her selflessness highlights the parents' brutal betrayal of the children in this family.

The double meaning of the phrase *Ni maisha yangu* — featuring Maisha's name and (in its normal meaning, "it is my life") indicating her resignation to her life — coheres with Akpan's corruption of the Swahili names of his protagonists to script a symbolic counter to the various forms of predation on children's vulnerability. Akpan uses names that allude to life (Maisha), youth (Jigana) and grace/peace (Naema) as a motif that depicts the deviation from God's grace embodied in Christ the "Saviour-child" alluded to in the title of the text ("An Ex-mas Feast"). Jigana's anguished observation that "my family was breaking up because of me" ("Feast" 20) is comparable to Maisha's self-sacrifice gestured to earlier in this chapter. The children's possession of character attributes normally expected of parents such as good parents' self-sacrificial commitment to doing everything in their power to protect and nurture their children, implicitly censures parents who market their children's bodies and sexuality like those portrayed here.

Mama remarks of Maisha's likely foreigner clients: "*Puu*, those ones are useless. I know them. They don't even pay the Ex-mas rate — and then they even let their *ma-*

monkey fuck her” (“Feast” 8). When read alongside Baba’s (“Feast” 26) and Mama’s (“Feast” 27) confessions that at one point they had jobs that they gave up, Akpan shows that Mama and Baba cannot be exonerated from preying on their children because they made a choice — they prefer the ‘easy’ money from under-age prostitution to the welfare of their children. Rather than even partially exonerating the parents for their complicity in the suffering and degradation of their daughter, Jigana’s agonising about what his sister is made to do and Maisha’s selfless sacrifice for the sake of her siblings exposes the parents’ culpability. Granted, we might recognise the mitigating circumstances that are indicated by the generally dehumanising environment in which the family exists. However, unlike the self-sacrificing “God the Father” that the parodic title of the text suggests, Baba and Mama are depicted as irresponsible and ruthless parents who take the route of least resistance.

Sarah Nuttall’s argument about the illocutionary properties of objects (in her reading of Yvonne Vera’s *Butterfly Burning*), that “[objects] stand for, and [become] the means of creating their own private world” (186) can be brought to bear on my reading of aspects of Akpan’s text. The school clothing and equipment that Jigana destroys before he runs off into the streets as well as the different foodstuffs that the family feasts on symbolise the exploitation of Maisha and underscore how cheaply her life and dignity are sold by her own parents. Maisha’s trunk — which has a range of symbolic meanings — is the best illustration of Nuttall’s argument that things can stand for and (or) create meanings. The empty space where it used to be, described as a “newly dug grave” (“Feast” 29), is particularly symbolic. The simile “like a newly dug grave” construes under-age prostitution as a metaphorical death sentence imposed on children like Maisha through the callous and selfish actions of their parents who, instead of nurturing and protecting children, cause the destruction of their wellbeing and invert —

indeed, pervert — normal parent-child roles and relations. Here, the profundity of Akpan's text is reflected in its nuanced clarity about the deep-rootedness of juvenile sex work while refraining from offering easy solutions.

Investigating Child Prostitution as Depicted in Darko's *Faceless*

The detective plot of *Faceless* is centred on a sister's enlistment of civil society organisations to investigate what and who drove her sister into the child sex work that eventually leads to her murder in Accra. Framing her text in the mould of what I call "fiction for education," Amma Darko uses narrative to document the multifaceted nature of child sex work in some African cities. Her detective plot and thriller style coverage places in the literary public sphere a socio-analytic dossier concerning institutional practices and agents that facilitate under-age prostitution. In spite of the fact that Darko's *Faceless* and Akpan's "An Ex-mas Feast" are set in different geographical contexts, they converge thematically and stylistically that *Faceless* can be read as a kind of 'sequel' to "An Ex-mas Feast." Thematically, Maisha's and Baby T's prostitution resonate because the two girls are driven into this dangerous and debasing activity to support their families, on the one hand, and on the other hand, their attempted rescue from their terrible fates (by Jigana and Fofu respectively) underline their siblings' empathy — so lacking in their parents. Stylistically, the texts' use of death as a controlling metaphor — "An Ex-mas Feast" closes with the metaphorical death of Maisha underscored by the description of the place formerly occupied by her trunk as a grave when she relocates to a brothel, whereas *Faceless* opens with the real murder of Baby T in a brothel — spotlights how under-age sex work is a kind of social death sentence imposed on these girls in Africa's urban sex economy, but may indeed also often cost the lives of the under-age prostitutes or terribly harm them.

Using the adjective “faceless” alluded to in the text’s title (*Faceless*) as a metaphor for the defacement of the murdered girl whose identity must be recovered, on the one hand, and as a symbol of the inscrutable faces of girls who are forced to engage in child sex trade so that their parents or guardians can make “easy money,” on the other hand, Darko takes advantage of socio-analytical (detective) attributes of MUTE and Harvest FM to construct elaborately detailed dossiers on how some predatory parents collude with some sex trade agents to enact teen sex work in some African cities. Darko constructs a plot in which she assigns a major investigative role to a fictional organisation she titles MUTE — a non-governmental organisation that specialises in collecting and documenting the kind of information which is usually overlooked or which is not available in regular libraries (*Faceless* 133-134). This invented organisation is symbolically comparable to Darko’s use of a documentary fictional register to create awareness about a subject that is shrouded in secrecy, shame and silence. Just as MUTE collects and documents information about marginalized subjects, *Faceless* enables Darko to create public awareness about a criminally “invisible” phenomenon and recover the “faces” and “voices” of its “faceless” and “voiceless” victims. We recall the omniscient narrator’s observation that, because Baby T was “born during Kwei’s unceremonious absence, [she] was never honoured with a Kwei family name at birth” (*Faceless* 155). Without an identity that a family name confers on a person, Baby T is comparable to the socially peripheral subjects that MUTE documents and comments upon. This makes MUTE’s and Fofu’s quest for her killers a double pursuit for recovering her identity and humanity as well as ensuring that her oppressors and exploiters account for their role in her victimisation and demise.

Why do some residents of Accra live by making money off the bodies and sexuality of their children? Is corrosive urban poverty that characterises these parents’

existence a sufficient justification for the continuing sexual exploitation of children? Darko's detective plot creates awareness about how the actions of some family members in urban homes make them culpable in enabling under-age sex work. The thrilling search for Baby T's killers and the quest to expose those members of society who participate in juvenile sex work is initiated by the dead girl's 'street child' sister Fofu who is described by the omniscient narrator as "both a child and an adult [... who] could act like both, talk like both, think like both and feel like both" (*Faceless* 15). Fofu's persona as an "adult/child" — stressed by her chastising of Maa Tsuru: "Don't bring in God's name, mother. You knew what you were doing" (*Faceless* 15) — allows Darko two representational advantages. Firstly, Fofu's unrelenting moral outrage and courage indicate that she is a child whose moral compass has not yet been compromised. Secondly, her adult demeanour ensures that the truth about her mother's complicity in Baby T's prostitution is extracted from the culprit herself. Fofu's quest, initiated by the cryptic statement: "Government [...] I said government. I want government [...] the girl who was found dead last week at where I tried to rob you, was my sister" (*Faceless* 73), sets in motion Darko's implicit demand for accountability from different societal stakeholders in the prostitution of girls like Baby T.

In this way focus falls on Maa Tsuru's agency in the prostitution of Baby T as underscored by her confession: "'Baby T ceased to be my daughter the day I sold her to the streets. I sold her to the streets? I sold my own daughter to the streets? Oh God'" (*Faceless* 50). In the above passage, Maa Tsuru's use of short statements and questions illustrates how unfathomable — even to her own comprehension and moral understanding — she finds what she has done. She may have made money from the prostitution of Baby T, but it seems that the full impact of what she had done only hits her when Fofu utters her morally charged accusation. The confrontation between

daughter and mother, and especially Maa Tsuru's promise to open up completely to [Fofu and MUTE] in a way she had never done before, so that she could enable them understand why she could do what she did (*Faceless* 188), allows Darko to recover the defaced 'face' of the 'faceless' girl and give a 'voice' to the 'voiceless' victim of child sex work in a manner that creates a befitting memorial and a form of public mourning for her. The "moral texture" (Lara 1998) of Darko's writing allows the narrative to work affectively, to enter the "public sphere" and possibly to become effective in influencing the reduction of such forms of exploitation.

Furthermore, Darko skilfully uses the confrontation between daughter and mother to advance the plot of her novel. Fofu's perplexed and baffled series of questions after Maa Tsuru tells her that the body behind the hairdressing salon was that of her sister (Baby T) — "my sister was staying with Maami Broni. Then she dies. So Maami Broni comes to inform you about it. You, who are her mother. And because of that, Poison gets upset? For which reason he tries to rape me?" (*Faceless* 48) — are stylistically significant for two reasons. Firstly, the short questions and astonished statements evoke empathy because they depict a child trying to come to terms with an horrific revelation that her mother is complicit in her sister's prostitution and murder. Secondly, by using Fofu's questions and statements, Darko invites us to imagine the role of parental agency in the "selling" of girls into sexual slavery. This is because Fofu's questions underscore her incredulity at a mother "selling" her own daughter into prostitution. Furthermore, the passage also reveals the other players involved in child prostitution such as Maami Broni (the brothel keeper) and Poison (the pimp).

In the course of the MUTE-Harvest FM joint investigation sparked by a street girl who wanted "something from the government" (*Faceless* 105), the omniscient

narrator's vivid description of Maa Tsuru's reception of Onko's money offer exposes the parental actions and (or) inactions that allow and facilitate under-age sex work:

Maa Tsuru stared long at the thick wad of notes in her hand. There was a look of worry and hopelessness in her eyes and another not so easily discernible. Then she rested her gaze upon Onko's face. Onko found it difficult to return her gaze. He turned his head away. Maa Tsuru sighed heavily. Never once in her entire life till then had she held so much money in her hand. [...] Maa Tsuru rose abruptly. Onko's face fell. Then the corners of his lips stretched into a smile as Maa Tsuru untied her cover cloth around her waist; placed the wad of notes in one corner of it and proceeded to slowly tie it up. (*Faceless* 168)

As soon as Maa Tsuru accepts Onko's guilt money — as she, Onko and the reader all understand — she consents to treating her daughter's body as a source of income and forgives Onko's rape of Baby T as 'paid' or 'compensated' for. By accepting the prostitution of her daughter and allowing Onko's request to "just drop the matter" (*Faceless* 168) after taking his money, Maa Tsuru becomes the first person who makes money from her daughter's body. The gravity and monstrosity of both Maa Tsuru's and Onko's actions are highlighted by their body language. Whereas Onko's earlier failure to return Maa Tsuru's gaze signals that he feels some shame after raping a girl who calls him "uncle," Maa Tsuru's failure to meet his gaze after accepting his money indicates her shame that comes with the realisation that she has made money from her daughter's pain. Darko also uses Maa Tsuru's action of untying and retying her cover cloth to metaphorically show her shame and guilt for participating in the 'sale' of her daughter into teen prostitution. Her metaphorical nakedness designates the author's exposure of the mother's failure to protect and provide for her child, on the one hand, and her apparent profiteering from her daughter's appalling exploitation, on the other hand.

Maa Tsuru's further culpability in Baby T's prostitution is revealed when she is depicted accepting envelopes of money from Maami Broni, the woman who runs one of Poison's brothels. Although the meeting happens because Maa Tsuru wants information

about her daughter, her acceptance of the envelopes of money from Maami Broni, explicitly coming from Baby T's sex work — on this occasion and later regularly — underlines her complicity in her daughter's prostitution:

[Maami Broni] decided there and then to handle the deliveries of the envelopes herself. Thus it began, that for years, Maami Broni came to symbolise the arrival of an envelope containing money, whenever she showed up in the house. It always brought a smile to Kpakpo's face and a wince to Maa Tsuru's [...] who nevertheless never turned it down. (*Faceless* 172)

Here, Maa Tsuru is shown as actively and pragmatically tapping into Accra's sex economy, allegedly for her family's survival. The question that Darko underlines in the above passage is whether living off the earnings of her daughter's sex work is her only means of survival. The simple expression "never turned it down" and her bodily action of "winc[ing]" are actions that signpost not only her complicity and guilt in the exploitation of her daughter, but also that make it clear that she might have survived by different means. This particular movement of the "wince" is significant because of its doubly allusive connotation. As an involuntary reflex, it alludes to Maa Tsuru's bodily signification of her shame, pain and (or) moral shock that arises from her recognition that she is complicit in consigning her daughter to a painful ordeal. It is also a belated surfacing of an otherwise repressed guilt that is triggered by the arrival of the envelopes. In spite of the challenges that women may face in a patriarchal Ghanaian society, Darko's text suggests that women like Maa Tsuru are implicated in teen prostitution. By accepting the envelopes of money from Maami Broni, Maa Tsuru chooses money over the welfare of her daughter.

Kpakpo is a family member whose participation in Baby T's prostitution is disclosed by using the omniscient narrator's observations and both Maami Broni's and Maa Tsuru's 'confessions.' We are informed of how Kpakpo convinces Maa Tsuru to send Baby T away and Poison, Mama Abidjan and Maami Broni to take her on as an

apprentice prostitute. Maami Broni reveals that Kpakpo had told them that she (Baby T) was “already giving herself to men freely! [...] She even almost enticed her stepfather on one occasion” (*Faceless* 219). The depiction of Baby T as a sexually permissive girl explains why Mama Abidjan and Poison take on a twelve-year-old girl, who by Maami Broni’s testimony (she subsequently discovered) was not ready for sex work because of her reaction to her first “back pass.” Maami Broni’s testimony allows Darko to underscore the use of patriarchal stereotypes such as the opportunistic claim or perception that the ‘loose’ girl’s body may legitimately be used to satisfy male sexual desires to show how readily and opportunistically such false and self-exculpating claims about a child will be accepted and exploited by shrewd and callous sex-entrepreneurs to make money in the child prostitution industry.⁴⁴

Maa Tsuru indicates that Kpakpo had assured her that, although Mama Abidjan was formerly a prostitute, she was now reformed and engaged “into recruiting young girls for work in chop bars and households” (*Faceless* 169). The portrayal of the brothel owner to Maa Tsuru as a ‘saint’ is one of the reasons why Maa Tsuru allows Baby T to be sent away. She (either mistakenly or in a sort of wilful naivety) thinks that she is saving her daughter from Onko’s ruthless and violent lechery when she is actually sending her into a possibly worse form of suffering. Although Maa Tsuru’s sending away of Baby T is portrayed as an attempt to protect her, one cannot fail but recognise the mercenary intent in her action. It is clear that Maa Tsuru expects Mama Abidjan to place her daughter (despite Baby T’s youth) in some form of employment so that her daughter can send her money. Although the money from Baby T’s employment in “chop bars” or “households” might not have been as morally reprehensible as that from

⁴⁴ I use the term sex-entrepreneurship as collective noun that refers to how commercial paedophilia is used as a source of income for those who set it up in Africa’s cities (and elsewhere).

her prostitution, it is clear that Maa Tsuru expects to profit from her daughter's labour. Here, Darko exposes an intricate child labour economy in modern African cities. Baby T, the Kayayoos — child labourers from Northern Ghana — (*Faceless* 90-91) and Fofu's elder brothers (*Faceless* 156-160) are the face of the complicity between brutally exploitative urban poverty and ruthlessly predatory parenthood. Whereas we expect children to be in schools or in the protective custody of nurturing and well-resourced homes, in the text they are depicted as toiling in different kinds of child labour with the worst form being teen prostitution.

As a result of Fofu's uncomprehending but persisting demand to be shown how her mother could "peddle" her sister into sexual slavery, Darko deploys a socio-analytic device — the radio interview between Slyv Po and his studio guest Mrs Kamame — to objectively verify why some parents take the easier option of tapping into the city's sex economy rather than exploring other means of survival that does not entail preying on children. In this interview, Darko implicitly asks whether urban poverty is a satisfactory explanation for the readiness with which some parents exploit their children. Mrs Kamame is the social worker/expert and in her assessment of Maa Tsuru's case, she discredits poverty as the sole factor that explains why Maa Tsuru and other women like her send their daughters onto the streets "with ample ease":

Fofu's mother, whose village happens to be inner-city Accra, is more likely to lose her sense of onus rather speedily when pushed by joblessness and poverty and the non-existent male support. Her physical and emotional detachment from her children is made less difficult in the harsh conditions of the inner city life. She let go Fofu and her sister out onto the streets with virtually no guilt at all because her psyche had accepted the situation with ample ease. (*Faceless* 140-141)

The issues that Mrs Kamame foregrounds such as "harsh conditions," "joblessness," "poverty," "non-existent male support" and "virtually no guilt" echo Maa Tsuru's lived reality. Although Mrs Kamame's discussion of the causes of teen sex work underlines

three poverty-related aspects: “harsh conditions,” “joblessness,” and “poverty,” she implicitly privileges agency — “non-existent male support” or deserting fathers and “virtually no guilt” of mothers — to show that individual characters’ actions are crucial in the consignment of girls to sexual slavery. Maa Tsuru is comparable to the parents in Akpan’s “An Ex-Mas Feast” who, also apparently “with ample ease,” send their tiny Baby with Naema into the Nairobi rain to beg and expect Maisha to procure for them a Christmas feast from her earnings as a child sex worker.

The credence of the fictional expert social worker’s testimony during the radio interview is supplemented by Darko’s use of her second protagonist (Kabria) as a character who symbolically counters the predatory actions of parents like Maa Tsuru and Kpakpo. Kabria’s description of Fofu and Baby T as girls “who grew up never ever really experiencing what it meant to simply be a child” (*Faceless* 94) juxtaposes a caring alternative parenthood with Maa Tsuru’s predatory type. Although as a middle class mother Kabria has access to resources and ‘sensibilities’ that women like Maa Tsuru do not have, the way she treats her own children and the transformation in Fofu’s demeanour during her stay with Dina show a more affirming form of parenting than Fofu ever receives from her own mother. The omniscient narrator observes that Fofu, who acts one moment as an adult woman and the next like a child (*Faceless* 127), changes remarkably during “the few days under Dina’s secure roof and in MUTE’s absolute care [...] she became relaxed. Her face was rested” (*Faceless* 127). Fofu’s remarkable transformation while in the care of MUTE implicitly showcases how children need care and nurturing attention from adults in order to lead normal and fulfilling lives and to ‘blossom’ as they are meant to. Fofu is “relaxed” and “rested” because, for a change, she does not need to hustle to survive nor is she in danger of being preyed on by her family or social beasts like Poison.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's argument that "the location of the woman of colour at the intersection of race and gender makes her actual experiences of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform qualitatively different from those of white women" (qtd in Yuval-Davis 198) can be brought in here as a parallel. Her argument accentuates the difference of the know-how of two mothers because their encounters of patriarchal intersection with socio-economic conditions are dissimilar. In postcolonial Ghana, while Maa Tsuru's poverty, superstition and deference to patriarchy makes her susceptible to conniving male eroticisation of girls' bodies to exploit her daughters, Kabria's education and middle class liberalism go some way to explaining her ability to challenge patriarchy in various ways. While Maa Tsuru preys on her daughter's sexuality for survival, Kabria attempts to offer a "good life" for her daughter by managing and educating the daughter concerning risky sexual conduct (*Faceless* 106). Kabria's commitment to the difficult task of raising her children (note her struggle to find an appropriate register to give sex education to her teenage daughter) makes her an admirable counter to the predatory parents in the text, though one notes her relative material and social advantages.

Anne Whitehead in *Trauma Fiction* argues that "trauma [fiction] creates a narrative which is full of gaps to be filled in by the reader using his or her knowledge" (9). The anecdotes, reminiscences and comments by the omniscient narrator help Darko to use narrative to create awareness about the reclusive agents that facilitate the child sex industry. By mimicking a hostile interview between a social worker, a journalist and a pimp, on the one hand, and using the courage of Fofu and the women of MUTE, on the other, Darko gives us insight into a secretive, nefarious industry and its operators and co-operators. During this interview, Poison (who tells them that he had beaten Baby T and left her crying) rhetorically asks: "why would I kill a girl who was making lots of

money for me [...] I am a businessman. You may not like what I do but that is what I do. It is my business. Why would I so foolishly and carelessly jeopardise it by killing one of my girls” (*Faceless* 203)? Poison’s rhetorical question underscores the fact that in this society, children have become sexual commodities. However, Poison’s undisguised arrogance and callousness arouse our anger against him and similar “business men” and evoke empathy for children who are commoditised for the lucrative sexual gratification of some men.

Furthermore, the interview emphasises how Poison provides an infrastructure of terror that runs transactional sex in the form of brothels based on the prostituted girls’ fear that ensures that they ‘service’ his male clients. Poison’s regime of fear is so effective that even his partner — Maami Broni — is frightened by his viciousness (*Faceless* 226). This is portrayed in the beating to which he subjects Baby T and the omniscient narrator’s reflection on how he got his reputation as the most ruthless pimp in Sodom and Gomorrah. We are informed that Poison had “locked the door, stripped [the girl who had attempted to defy him] naked, lashed her mercilessly with a men’s leather belt; then raped her. The other girls never dared provoke him” (*Faceless* 199). The ruthlessness of Poison’s regime is also stressed by the actions he takes to ensure that no link is established between the “dead girl” and Baby T. He uses the threat of rape (*Faceless* 29) and later physical abuse — viciously slapping Fofu — to stop her from collaborating with MUTE in pursuing the matter (*Faceless* 133-134). He also sends a parcel of human waste (*Faceless* 196) to intimidate, mock and dissuade the women of MUTE from their investigation of Baby T’s death. In spite of the apparent impregnability of Poison’s child sex trade infrastructure that is sustained by fear, the courage and commitment of Fofu and the women of MUTE successfully force him and

the sex industry he represents to account for their role in the exploitation and degradation of children.

Given that child prostitution thrives in contexts of secrecy and fear, it is its exposure as depicted in *Faceless* that demystifies and thus can be read as the first step towards its dismantling. Lara argues (in another context) that “values embodied in the practices of a society and its individuals are made public and legitimised in the narratives surrounding them” (43). Although Lara’s argument concerns the publicising of positively emancipatory values, her argument is useful in appreciating Darko’s exposition of the perverted ethics of a sophisticated child sex industry and its supportive infrastructure. Poison uses former sex workers like Maami Broni and Mama Abidjan to run his brothels. The role of these women in Accra’s sex industry trading in children’s bodies and sexuality is noted by the omniscient narrator’s rhetorical question: “why [would] a middle-aged woman [...] allow her conscience to sink so low as to agree to put a girl [...] into a trade of prostitution without qualms, and make it her task to train a young girl to become good at trading her body for sex” (*Faceless* 219)? The omniscient narrator’s rhetorical question stresses the moral reprehensibility of these women’s actions because of what seems like their voluntary choice to facilitate under-age sex work. Because women like Maami Broni might initially have been forcibly recruited when children into the sex trade, it can be plausibly argued that the above rhetorical question can offer us particular insight(s) into the cross-generational sex economy and its subverted ‘social security system’ that tempts older women to ‘retire’ from the actual sex work into managing the trade in younger women’s bodies.

However, the depiction of Maami Broni’s guilt-ridden anguish — “not once since it happened have I known peace or sleep” (*Faceless* 230) — and the sacrifices she performs to appease Baby T’s spirit, not only recover her humanity to an extent, but

also allows Darko to question whether it is worthwhile for these women ‘mentors’ to engage in such a traumatic and horrific trade. Furthermore, the surfacing of Maami Broni’s humanity as seen in the fact that she goes out of her way to tell Maa Tsuru about Baby T’s death and the fact that she introduces Baby T to the “devil’s weed” (*Faceless* 221) which makes the selling of her body for sex at least bearable, shows that the normalisation (in these women’s eyes) of what they do is a mask behind which tormented women hide. The humane yet balanced depiction of Maami Broni allows Darko to place a dossier of accountability by a victim-turned-perpetrator group in Accra’s teen prostitution in the public sphere.

Stylistically, Darko uses Maami Broni to document the ghastly reality of child prostitution without her depiction being either sensational or voyeuristic. It is Maami Broni who provides us with the gory details of Baby T’s murder and defacement. “Baby T was lying with a split head on the concrete floor. A bizarre image came to Maami Broni’s mind. It was the image of a splintered stone oozing blood. A stone struck against steel” (*Faceless* 227). The horrific image that haunts Maami Broni as she vividly describes it (here) portrays the consequences of the Jujuman’s advice that Onko should seek out Baby T to shave her pubic hairs in order to make a potion to reverse his bad luck which has shadowed him since he raped Baby T. It is in the pursuit of Baby T’s pubic hair that Onko’s actions cause Baby T’s death (*Faceless* 226-7). Although it is plausible to argue that her death might have been accidental, by raping her and thus causing her relocation to the brothel and degradingly asking to shave her private parts for a concoction, Onko is to blame for her death.

To Baby T, the demand for her pubic hair from the man who first raped her and then caused her recruitment into the sex trade while still a child, comes across as horrific and a sort of ultimate further degradation. Not only has Onko destroyed this

girl's — significantly named “Baby T” — youth and innocence, but she is now expected to provide, again from the most private part of her body, the ‘medicine’ he needs to escape the guilt and blame he incurred by raping this very child. Maami Broni, who is a witness to a horrible crime (even if Baby T’s death is partly accidental or at least unintended) informs us that although by this time Baby T had got used to sleeping with men for a fee, she adamantly refuses — risking a horrible beating from Poison in the process — to sleep with Onko. Maami Broni’s testimony brings to mind patriarchal fetishisation of under-age female sexuality and its monstrous consequences reminiscent of the irrational myth in Sub Saharan Africa in the 1980s and 1990s that assigned ‘healing powers’ for many ailments (including HIV/AIDS) to an ailing man having sex with (i.e. raping) a virgin female child. Baby T’s horror at being expected to provide, her pubic hair — as if it were a trophy, and to make healing ‘medicine’ for the evil he himself perpetrated upon her body and her innocence — leads directly to the ‘accident’ that causes her death. Onko is as culpable in this as he is for raping a child who trusted him. Besides Onko, the misnamed doctor (Jujuman) who required the pubic hair of the raped child also plays a role in her death.

Darko’s literary task of bringing closure to Fofu’s quest suggests how society can contribute to the eradication of conditions that create child prostitutes. By connecting “Baby T’s tragic end [to] Fofu’s ultimate triumph” (Anyidoho 18), Darko shows the possibility of — if not eradicating, at least confronting and battling against the sexual commodification of children. This is linked to Fofu’s dream of living in a house with a roofed toilet (*Faceless* 27). After her traumatic experiences in Agbobloshie, Fofu deserves the better life that the rehabilitation centre at which she is to learn a trade promises. However, the inconclusiveness of her HIV/AIDS results resonates with Whitehead’s warning (in another context) that trauma “acts as a haunting

or possessive influence which not only insistently and intrusively returns but is, moreover, experienced for the first time only in its belated repetition” (5). Fofu’s inconclusive HIV/AIDS results make clear that her experiences as a street child cannot be permanently erased, because what she has witnessed and gone through will always haunt her life.

HisStory: Pederastic Prostitution in *Thirteen Cents*

In this section, I turn to a discussion of K. Sello Duiker’s protagonist Azure, whose point-blank candour acts as both his survival mechanism and a useful technique in providing a detailed and nuanced account of the predatory poor and affluent Cape Town adults whose exploitation of homeless children drive these orphans to tap into the city’s homosexual child sex trade for survival. The text’s realistic and detailed first section and its phantasmagorical final part explore the trials and tribulations of thirteen-year-old Azure as he negotiates his survival in a Cape Town whose adult inhabitants take advantage of his precarious condition as a child without a home or family to financially and sexually exploit and abuse him. Sam Raditlhalo argues pertinently that “sexuality [is] a currency to those that do not have nuclear families” (72). In many respects, Raditlhalo’s argument is true as far as *Thirteen Cents* is concerned, because Duiker’s protagonist survives by tapping into this city’s sex economy. Azure’s determination to survive and his ability to take us to the core of the city’s sex economy as he observes it, is framed around the numerical metaphor inherent in the figure thirteen.

Whereas this figure (indicating his age) signals Azure’s vulnerability as a newly adolescent child who needs the care of a family, the “thirteen” in reference to the money in his pocket (*Thirteen* 132) reminds one of the Biblical Judas’s “30 pieces of silver.” This gestures to both the meagre sum with which this boy’s youth and innocence are exploited and lost, and how cheaply society betrays the precious lives of children. It

allows Duiker to foreground the low price placed on the lives and dignity of an entirely dehumanised population that exists on the periphery of a capitalist society. The tiny amount reminds us that this boy is homeless and fending for himself on the streets of Cape Town because his parents are dead. He describes the death of his parents thus: “I lost my parents three years ago [...] I came back to our shack only to find them in a pool of blood. [...] my friend Bafana can’t believe that I saw my dead parents and didn’t freak out. [...] No one was going to take care of me. He’s still a *lytie*” (*Thirteen* 2, original emphasis). Although at thirteen he is legally and technically a child, the death of Azure’s parents and his relatives’ lack of concern for his welfare make him (at least in his own view) an adult (*Thirteen* 90). In this extract, he justifies his status as an adult by comparing himself to Bafana. If his nine-year-old friend Bafana is still a *lytie* (youngster), then the thirteen-year-old Azure who is capable of looking after himself is an adult. Azure’s confident claim of adulthood in the above passage poignantly highlights the danger that comes with the absence or distortion of the protective and nurturing function (in a child’s life) of a ‘normal’ family.

If, as Yuval-Davis eloquently argue, “the intersectional approach to analysing the disempowerment of women attempts to capture the consequence of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination” (197), then it is plausible to argue that Azure’s orphan status outlined above and his exploitative interactions with Aunt Joyce, Allen and Gerald intersect with pederastic desires of upper and middle class white men to reduce him into a sexual chattel. Duiker’s style — evinced in Azure’s point-blank coarse register; first person agency (“I”); tour-guide perceptiveness and cocky personality — allows him to place in the public sphere dreadful tales of an orphan child who is forced to exchange sex for money with adult (often married) white men in order to survive. Azure says that he is not a boy because he has “seen a woman being raped

by policemen at night near the station. I've seen a white man let a boy Bafana's age into his car. I've seen a couple drive over a street child and they still kept going" (*Thirteen* 142). These are things we cannot expect a child to have experienced without losing his child-like sensibilities. In another episode, Azure's claim to adulthood — stressed by his coarse, obscene and adult vocabulary — is shown to be based on a personal experience:

I have seen enough rubbish to fill the sea. I have been fucked by enough bastards and they've come in me with enough come to fill the swimming pool in Sea Point. [...] I don't want to think about bastards who pick me up at night when their wives are not watching and fuck me for peanuts till I bleed. I don't want to think about bastards who do it in the dark with children because their dick is so small. I don't want to think about assholes who don't wash their ballas but want you to suck them till them come. (*Thirteen* 142-143)

It is worth noting Azure's angrily melancholic tone in the above passage. Especially important is the evocative repetition of the phrase "I don't want." This phrase highlights his anguish and fierce rejection of the ghastly things that he is forced to do or endure in order to make the money on which he survives.

The first aspect of homoerotic sex-entrepreneurship that Azure convincingly discusses using an almost dossier-like register concerns the exploitative roles respectively played by a Cape Town working class woman, pimp and gangster. Although Joyce, Allen and Gerald do not force Azure into teen prostitution, they are implicitly culpable because their demand for and expectation of money from him is what drives him to sell his body. Aunt Joyce exploits Azure's longing for a mother figure to swindle him of the money he gets for making himself available for anal sex with men. Joyce baits Azure with a sense of parental security and leftover food — he calls her "the auntie who gets the food for me. Her name is Joyce but she likes me to call her Auntie" (*Thirteen* 6) — in order to earn his trust that will allow her to cheat

him. Azure's glowing description of Joyce poignantly shows his affection towards and total trust in her as a mother figure.

"Auntie Joyce" performs the maternally nurturing function of giving him regular meals. Her 'motherly' duties are also indicated by the respectful nomenclature "Auntie," whose loving and slightly formal tone gestures to her seemingly maternal disciplinary and nurturing function in Azure's life. However, Azure soon discovers that Auntie Joyce's exterior goodness masks her real, exploitative intention. Her 'concern' for Azure is motivated by the fact that he regularly gives her money from his prostitution to "take to the bank" on his behalf. Her true colours emerge when Azure asks for some of this money and she brutally and dishonestly refuses him (*Thirteen* 76-77), claiming that he is not entitled to any money since she has been providing him with food and that Azure's actions have jeopardised her relation with the bank. The fact that she takes his money and even his crutches indicates how cruel urban adults prey on lonely and orphaned children.

Whereas Auntie Joyce uses duplicitous means to fleece money from Azure's sexual exploitation, Allen as the self-declared Sea Point Pimp gets Azure's money by offering him 'protection.' Although Allen is a heterosexual pimp, he is involved in Azure's sex work because Azure is driven into paedophilic prostitution by Allen's extortion. The boy informs us that knowing Allen has helped him a lot, because Allen procures basic necessities like shoes and clothes for him. However, the real infrastructural importance of Allen in Cape Town's juvenile sex industry is security. For example, Azure tells us that when he walks out of Allen's flat after paying the 'protection money' he does not think of his money as wasted, but as a sort of insurance: "I can walk a little safer knowing that Allen has my money. Money is his language. It's the only thing that he remembers, everything is unimportant [...] I've learned something

from Allen and that is money is everything” (*Thirteen* 15-16). In the above passage, Azure provides us with a perceptive and pragmatic reading of the role of money and the lengths to which individuals living on the edge of poverty will go to make money from children’s bodies and sexuality.

Azure is clearly unaware, in his gratitude for Allen’s (bought) protection, of the expression “protection racket,” referring to a Mafia-like, criminal bullying of weaker parties and (or) blackmailing them into paying ‘fees’ in order to escape criminal violence. The exploitative “protection ring” is eloquently depicted in Azure’s graphic description of his violent relationship with Gerald (the gangster) who attempts to ‘own’ him: “now I own you. Understand? [...] Everybody has a job here. So go and do whatever it is that you do but just be back at five” (*Thirteen* 57). Although in the above statement Gerald does not explicitly ask Azure to sell his body, the fact that he expects Azure to return at five with money is an implied command that Azure prostitute himself — especially because sex work is the only viable means Azure has of earning money. Gerald’s harsh bluntness (he sees Azure as a cash cow) stresses the cruel ethos of this city in relation to children and their sexuality. Gerald’s declaration (here) follows Azure’s induction into his gang, an induction which is physically and sexually terribly violent, as suggested by the following passages. Enforcing the rite of passage arises from Gerald’s need to reassert his power and supremacy after Azure inadvertently calls him a “Kaffir.” But the quest for power and supremacy is irrevocably entangled with financial power.

To demonstrate his power and superiority on the one hand, and on the other hand, to ensure that Azure becomes a malleable member of his gang, Gerald instructs his lackeys physically and sexually to break Azure’s will and spirit of resistance and self-sufficiency. This ugly initiation rite reminds us of the description of Gerald as a T-

Rex and the warning that he (Gerald) can take Azure out “and no one will do anything about it” by Vincent — Azure’s former school mate with whom he treks from Gauteng to Cape Town (*Thirteen* 59). The fact that Gerald is a law unto himself underscores the perilous conditions that allow adults sexually and financially to exploit children. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, for children like Azure to get justice or real protection. In such a context, the child naturally deems it pragmatic to tap into the sex trade for survival and to keep a low profile in order to minimise harm. The above reality is highlighted by the fact that Azure takes himself to Gerald to be ‘punished’ because Gerald’s criminal and violent influence is inescapable and also because, in voluntarily submitting to Gerald’s authority, the severity of the punishment is reduced. Searly is tasked to inflict the physical pain:

He punches me again with a strong left hook. I stagger and land on my face. He kicks me in the head and stamps on it, grinding me into the tar road. I start screaming and grab his leg. He fucks up my face with his fists. My nose starts bleeding and snot runs [...] eventually I let go of his leg and roll up into a ball to protect my head. He kicks my back and rips off my jacket [...] I limp towards the car. One of my eyes is completely shut. Underneath the other eye is a bad cut. I just let the blood flow. (*Thirteen* 38-39)

The assignment of sexually abusing Azure is given to Richard, who takes Azure into a bedroom and shoves his penis into Azure’s mouth who does as he is told: “He stands there and starts rocking his pelvis. My jaws get tired. I take his dick out of my mouth and wank him [...] Richard takes out his *piel* from my mouth [...] while I suck the other’s *piel*. Soon they all join in and take turns with my mouth” (*Thirteen* 53-54). In both passages, the horror of the life of a child prostitute is underlined by the slow motion description and by Azure’s resignation to his physical and sexual violation. It is also intimately and realistically evoked in Azure’s present tense and blunt register in his description of his degradation and subjugation by these men.

The immediacy of Azure's diction recalls Lauren Berlant's argument that "compassion is a term denoting privilege: the sufferer is *over there*" (4, original emphasis). Although Duiker's vivid description of Azure's violation and abuse as well as his helplessness — indicated by his posture of "[rolling] up into a ball to protect [his] head" — has the power to affectively draw us into his protagonist's suffering, we nevertheless remain privileged, distant observers of Azure's pain. Yet, despite the gang rape and physical beating which are supposed to make Azure pliable as a money making object (as alluded to by Gerald — *Thirteen* 57), the boy's repeated phrase "I'm getting stronger" (*Thirteen* 46) stresses his recovery of agency that empowers him to reject his exploitation by Gerald. This growing strength is also suggested by his movement to the mountain immediately after the terrible gang initiation rite.

The second aspect on which Azure gives detailed information concerns the men who seek sexual pleasure from his body and are ready to pay for it. Azure's wandering from the "moffie" part of the beach to upscale Cape Town apartments allows Duiker to bring the inner workings of the homosexual child sex industry into what Geoffrey Hartman calls "an interpretative conversation" (541). Duiker's elucidation of the child homoerotic sex trade is underscored by the adjectives "bastard" and "monsters" that Azure uses to describe the men to whom he rents out his body. He seems to use "bastard" in the usual condemnatory manner to speak of the men with whom his sexual encounters are traumatically painful and conversely, in a merely condescending tone for those who have bizarre sexual appetites. His sketching of the men who sexually traumatise him reminds us of Helene Strauss's argument that Azure is "[adept] at reading the 'racial,' class, gender, and sexual codes" that his interpersonal interactions in Cape Town demand (32). Such adeptness is demonstrated by his effortlessly perceptive recognition of a man with sadistic sexual fantasies. Azure informs us that, in

dire need of money, he goes to the “moffie part of the beach” (*Thirteen* 8) to get a trick or “work with [moffies]” (*Thirteen* 116). He is picked by a person he describes as one of those

Sick bastards [who] would only be too happy to give it to me up the bum for a small price [...] The married ones are always the horniest and by far the roughest. He takes me in his family mini-bus to a dark beach near the V&A Waterfront. We are the only ones parked there. He takes me to the back seat and oils me with cooking oil before he takes me like a beast. I bite the seat in front of me while he grunts and moans. He goes at it at least for an hour before he comes into a condom. As soon as he is done he zips up his pants and takes out his wallet [...] I sit in a shallow pool and let the cool water cover me up to my waist. I sit for a while until my bum feels numb. (*Thirteen* 29-30)

In this extract, Azure takes us to the shadowy heartland of Cape Town’s sex economy to introduce us to the often violent men who patronise his sexual services. The specially selected space — the “moffie part of the beach” — underlines both the economic significance and the widespread practice of commercialised pederasty. Furthermore, it casts Azure as a perceptive and observant child who discerns that the man who buys his services on this particular night is married because he wears a wedding ring. The expression “the married ones are always the horniest and roughest” illustrates the uncaringly violent conduct of some of the men who ‘rent’ his body for sexual gratification and perhaps indicates that the child becomes the physical scapegoat upon whom they offload their anger, guilt and shame. The expressions like “takes out his wallet” and “as soon as he is done” indicate that this is a business transaction — but of a surreptitious, shameful kind. For fifty Rand, Azure has to endure an hour-long, excruciatingly painful penetrative sexual experience, because on this night it is the only available way he can make some money. The pain he endures is pointed out by expressions like “takes me like a beast” and “I bite the seat in front of me” as well as the fact that his only means of alleviating his pain is to sit in cool water.

The superlative adjectives “roughest” and “horniest” as well as acoustic images such as “grunts and groans” highlight the violent and sadistic character of some of the men that buy his services. His reference to them as “monsters” and “sick bastards” can possibly arouse our empathy for Azure because of the dangerous environment and callous people he interacts with in the course of trading his body. The irony of a child being sexually violated in a family car symbolises society’s betrayal of children like Azure. Here, we are reminded of Poison’s rationalisation in *Faceless* that he could not have killed Baby T because she was making a lot of money for him. Although it is money that motivates Poison in *Faceless* and sexual gratification that prompts this man in *Thirteen Cents* to take part in child prostitution, both novels show the ugliness and sordidness of the exploitation of children’s bodies by older men.

It is ironic that the type of men whom Azure contemptuously refers to as “bastards” are his only source of social and financial survival. Although not all his clients are sadistic as in the case described above, the same label of “bastard” is attached to those clients who have eccentric sexual preferences. Azure takes us again to the same area to meet an example of an eccentric client. He describes an incident in which he goes to the “moffie” part of the beach and leaves with a white man to his flat where they engage in sex for pay (to Azure):

We use a lot of baby oil. I close my eyes while he moans a lot [...] He stands over me while I lie down and we both masturbate. After a while his eyes roll into their whites and I feel warm drops across my chest. He hands me a towel to dry myself. With wallet in his hand we go to the kitchen. ‘You did good’ he says and hands me a twenty rand note. Peanuts. I’ve earned fifty bucks from a single trick [...] just before going out the door to the flats another white man looks at me with come-to-bed eyes. A lot younger than the other guy. I decide to follow him. [...] I just want to be sucked off. Don’t worry I won’t come in your mouth”.
(*Thirteen* 9-10)

It is paradoxical that homosexual under-age prostitution with its associated shroud of secrecy and illegality is (as depicted by Duiker) a widespread practice with clearly

designated places from which it is transacted. The fact that the “moffie part of the beach” acts as a sort of child homosexual prostitution market (red light district) also shows that it is a lucrative trade to which the police and social workers turn a blind eye.

Although this particular customer is not identified as a married man, he is odd, given that he has a framed picture of “a young boy taking a piss” (*Thirteen* 9) above his bed, but also because he asks Azure to let him “come on” his chest. The other peculiar client is a younger man in the same block of flats who pays Azure “forty bucks” (*Thirteen* 9) for Azure to “suck [him] off.” On this particular night, Azure seems to give the impression that he makes an ‘easy but degrading’ sixty Rand from two weird white male customers by letting one “come on” his chest and for “sucking off” the other. Azure’s cockily pragmatic sense of agency is underscored by his actions of taking on two clients and the self-reflexive register in the passage. Here, his sense of agency resonates with Sam Raditlhalo’s argument that Azure “is knowledgeable about what is expected of him, and all of the transactions are without fuss” (74). In a sense, then, Azure’s first person reflections on how he uses his sexuality to survive gives him a chance of retrospection, while his matter-of-fact narration allows readers to grasp the horror of his story.

Another category of Azure’s male clients are those that are depicted as caring and humane, which suggests that probably pederasty allows Azure what I call socially interactive survival.⁴⁵ My hypothesis is supported by a passage of over 20 pages describing Azure’s sexual liaison with Mr Lebowitz. His relationship with Mr Lebowitz

⁴⁵ Here, Azure cannot technically be labelled a child prostitute because he gets more than money from the sexual liaison with Mr Lebowitz. In this instance Azure’s role is comparable to that played by the Devadasi in India. Montgomery notes that although these girls are called prostitutes by outsiders and those campaigning to end child prostitution in India, they themselves reject this label (189). Like the Devadasi described by Montgomery, Azure is depicted appropriating pederasty as a survival mechanism on the harsh streets of Cape Town.

reveals an almost tender side of homosexual child sex work — creating a sense of belonging, with older men acting as mentors, even father figures for these children. This is poignantly depicted by its proximity to Azure's harsh rite of passage and rejection of life as a gangster in Gerald's gang. Both the gangster initiation rite and Azure's study of his reflection in Lebowitz's bathroom mirror show that he has come to understand and accept who he is and what society expects of him. He observes that the bathroom "has white tiles on the floor that show off your reflection. And there is a large mirror on one wall. You can see your whole body when you get naked" (*Thirteen* 85).

The image in the mirror makes discernible the alternative uses of pederasty for Azure. Mr Lebowitz is not comparable to Duiker's Zim in *The Hidden Star* or Ngugi wa Thiongo's Waigoko in *Devil on the Cross* — the rich men who use their money and power to exploit children. Unlike the large hairy Zim in *The Hidden Star* who preys on and enslaves children in the underworld, Mr Lebowitz in this scene is portrayed as both a mentor and a source of livelihood to Azure — in spite of or because of the hundred Rand that he pays him the following morning. Azure's image and especially his qualification that he had never seen himself like this before can be read as a form of self-acknowledgement. In an intimate space like a bathroom, Azure's naked body offers two possible symbolic meanings. On the one hand, it symbolises his acknowledgement that he is a boy on whose sexuality adults (both poor and rich) prey. On the other hand, it represents his cynically pragmatic decision to use this as a survival mechanism.

By feeding and teaching him about money/banking as well as listening to music with Azure (*Thirteen* 81-94), Mr Lebowitz does not behave as a mere exploiter. It is worth noting Azure's use of an honorific "Mister" in referring to and addressing Lebowitz. By using a title indicative of respect and conferring authority, Azure differentiates him from the other men who buy his services. In doing so, Mr Lebowitz is

portrayed as a mentor beyond being (in fact) a customer.⁴⁶ Although Azure describes Lebowitz's manners as sickening and says that they can make one "feel a little strange, like you're a dog with flea" (*Thirteen* 82), Azure is relaxed and comfortable in Mr Lebowitz's company. He is drawn to the comforting symbolism associated with a "white" house and an extremely "polite" host's soothingly sad music. It is regrettable that, notwithstanding the socially interactive connection between Azure and Mr Lebowitz in this episode, Azure is still that "flea-infected dog" whose sexuality is all that has allowed him to cross the divide between post-apartheid luxury from its ugly twin — urban poverty. To Mr Lebowitz, in spite of their connection, Azure is and remains a sexual object, as highlighted by the numerous bizarre rounds of sex that he asks Azure to perform with and for him. Unlike in *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* where, after a brutal sexual assault by his flatmate, Tshepo embraces his sexuality to make money for survival and in order to connect socially with a brotherhood of similarly oriented men, in *Thirteen Cents* the dangerous socio-economic conditions of African urban centres turn children's sexuality into a risky survival mechanism.

In conclusion, Azure as a sex worker who is "conventionally viewed with social revulsion as a tainted underclass" (Stobie 330) can only find a form of liveable existence after pragmatically accepting that his body and sexuality can enable him to survive. Ironically, for Azure, survival in the city is among adults who exploit his body and sexuality for their own financial and sexual pleasure. In a South Africa described by Jean Meiring (and other commentators) as far from the new democratic Eden (6), orphans are easy targets for financial exploitation by typical Township characters (working class women, pimps and gangsters) and for sexual predation by some

⁴⁶ Here, I am mindful of the double meaning of the Afrikaans equivalent— *meneer*— which is a simultaneous description of a boss and penis. In a sense, it is plausible to argue that Azure is punning on the honorific title in reference to Mr Lebowitz.

eccentric middle and upper class white men. Unlike in *The Hidden Star* (2006) and *The Quiet Violence of Dreams* (2001), Duiker stresses the melancholic impossibility of his protagonist's escape from a world full of evil in constructing his closure in *Thirteen Cents* by using a phantasmagorical ending, as in the apocalyptic imagery of the final section of the novel. Azure's sojourn in the mountain (*Thirteen* 103-130) and Gerald's (presumed) death do not mean the eradication of the exploitation of children. As Sealy points out, Gerald was evil and although "he died as Gerald [...] he'll come back as something else" (*Thirteen* 136). The mysterious death of Gerald and the prophesied destruction of Cape Town by the tallest wave "spreading its destruction" and a sky which "rains with fire" (*Thirteen* 160-3) indicate that it is probably only in fantasy that the evil forces exploiting children like Azure get (spectacularly) punished and eradicated Armageddon-style.

Conclusion

Akpan, Darko and Duiker narrate horrific experiences of children trapped in the massive and exploitative sex trade industry and families whose protective and nurturance infrastructure are eroded by mass urban poverty and lack of commitment to [their] children's welfare. It can be plausibly argued that their depictions open our eyes to the hazardous existence of very young, vulnerable occupants of African cities from the perspectives of the child victims and witnesses themselves. Whereas the city has been a recurrent thematic motif in African fiction, its horrific contemporary reality has seldom been envisioned from the perspective of the child as these texts do. The three texts rewrite the common motif of the city as a diseased social body by focusing on children's experiences as sexual objects. The focus on sex-entrepreneurship and fantasies of sexual pleasure derived from paedophilic sex trade is possible because, to paraphrase Martina Kopf in "Trauma, Narrative and the Art of Witnessing," the three

writers have discovered the ‘language’ that corresponds to and can articulate this traumatic reality (43). This sensitive register allows the texts to evoke ethical and empathetic witnessing, or what Ulrich Baer calls “bearing witness to the witness” (qtd in Kopf 43).

Jigana’s decision to return the school fees rather than consign his sister to a life in a brothel; Fofu’s request that Kabria take her to the government in order to seek vengeance for her prostituted and murdered sister; and Azure’s precarious negotiation of commercial pederasty can be read as intelligible grammars that help spell out something of the unfathomably steep prices that some children have to pay to exist in some of Africa’s urban centres. These are cities which lack comprehensive social welfare policies as safety nets for the urban poor, children from disintegrated families and (or) orphans. It is plausible to argue that the three texts become readers’ eye-openers to the appalling reality of child prostitution. Such affective portrayals, the study argues, have the ability to arouse our empathy for the child forced to transact her/his body for survival. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o has declared that, since children are the future of any society, “to maim the future of any society, you simply maim the children” (73). Akpan, Darko and Duiker use their protagonists’ “eyes” to communicate the “maimed future” of children who are preyed upon in some African cities. In spite of the different perspectives from which the selected writers “look at [or into] the eyes” (to use Ngugi’s words) of African children who exist by selling their bodies for sex, their works constitute an archive of literary activism that exposes the often ignored story of the sexually abused child in the African city in powerfully affective writing.

Chapter six

Conclusion: Mourning Troubled Childhoods in the Public Sphere

Most mothers there had long ceased
to care but this one; she held
a ghost smile between her teeth
and in her eyes the ghost of a mother's
pride as she combed the rust-coloured
hair left on his skull and then—
singing in her eyes— began carefully
to part it... In another life
this would have been a little daily
act of no consequence before his
breakfast and school; now she
did it like putting flowers
on a tiny grave. (Achebe: Refugee Mother and Child)

The overwhelming number of humanitarian disasters such as famine, war, poverty and social breakdown that characterise the lived experiences of many children in so many African societies in the post-1990 dispensation have led not only to 'donor fatigue,' but also what we might term 'compassion fatigue' as regards troubled childhoods. We recall Susan D. Moeller's and Andrew Hoskins's and Ben O'Loughlin's argument that the pervasiveness of suffering, pain, death in war, conflicts and catastrophes in media coverage has made audiences and journalists unresponsive to these horrific experiences. Consequently, they argue, journalism deploys "more sensational titbits in stories to [attract and] retain the attention of audiences" (Moeller 2). While a homogenisation of these vulnerable victims into a few stark television images is fast losing its impact in the media, fictional representations through the deployment of affective narrative textures has created unforgettable images of this stratum of African subjectivity. Why does fiction not only spotlight troubled childhoods in the public sphere, but does it in a manner that mourns their lives by paying tribute to their self-disclosure? How does the

use of aesthetically evocative depictions of children's abuse and violation surmount the children's victim status by infusing their individuation with agency?

These questions remind us of Bernard Boxill's argument concerning Fredrick Douglass's preference for *moral suasion* above *political action* in the slavery abolitionist debates in nineteenth century United State of America. Boxill states that Douglas believed that "moral suasion [was] a better way to abolish slavery because it [aimed] to persuade slave-owners to recognise the humanity of slaves" (216). Douglass's argument that moral persuasion can often make abusers to reconsider their violation of others' rights parallels the work done by fiction's evocative and affective placement of troubled childhoods in the public sphere. By allowing traumatised child characters to brilliantly and movingly articulate their violation, fiction can raise awareness about the plight of these unfortunate children in ways that mourn and pay tribute to their lives. It can also compel society to acknowledge its complicity in such suffering as the first step in enacting conditions or practices that can minimise or reduce such harm.

Concerning Jürgen Habermas's idea of the public sphere, Craig Calhoun argues that a "public sphere adequate to a democratic polity depends upon both the quality of discourse and quantity of participation" (2). If the selected literary texts approximate Habermas's public sphere where a robust exploration of troubled childhoods is convened, the attributes of a vigorous public sphere that Calhoun proposes inhere in the vividness of evocation, individuation and courage of the depicted children that allow authors to place a sizeable range of agents, institutions and manifestations of such violations in the public sphere. While the proliferation of narratives about troubled childhoods constitutes Calhoun's quantity of public participation, the kind of writing that is imbued with feeling and permeated with moral evaluation echoes what he calls

the forcefulness of the quality of civic discourse. By placing troubled childhoods in the public sphere through fictional portrayals, an undeniable platform for the acknowledgement and mourning of violated and abused children is enacted. This makes the texts discussed in this thesis aesthetic archives that use compelling moral force to ensure that the traumatised lives of violated children matter and are grieved.

Indeed, by placing troubled childhoods in the African literary public sphere these texts go beyond acknowledgement to enact a symbolic mourning of the depicted subjects. My study has foregrounded the significance of the use of child narrators/protagonists in affording us unique access to, analysis of and mourning of children immersed into traumatic experiences depicted in African fiction. The depicted child victims' undeserving suffering is placed in the public sphere so that we may lament their horrific experiences. Furthermore, it may be argued that beyond lamentation, representations of these lives arouse anger at such injustice and can possibly motivate the seeking of restitution or efforts to diminish if not to eradicate the evil, cruel and predatory practices common in many post-1990 African contexts. The impetus of grieving these children's varied violations in the fiction examined here is perhaps best embodied in Birahima's funeral orations for children caught up and traumatised by wartime violence in *Allah is not Obligated*. Of the many funeral orations that Kourouma's Birahima performs, the one for an eight-year-old girl who is raped, murdered and dismembered — Sita — exemplifies the possibility of literature convening a multi-layered public to mourn victimised children:

One day a young girl was found raped and decapitated between three labourers' camps. Eventually they found out the poor girl was called Sita and she was eight years old. Sita had been horribly killed in a way you would not want to see. Even someone whose whole life is blood like Sister Hadja Gabrielle Aminata cried her heart out when she saw it. (*Allah* 181-182)

In this and several funeral orations that Birahima performs across the text, two levels of mourning for the harrowing lives of children in contexts of war emerge. The first level of mourning features Kourouma as the chief mourner, because by choosing to write about the experiences of children like Sita, he not only personally grieves for the depicted children, but also demonstrates to his readers why they should be saddened by such violated lives. The second level sanctions funeral orations as important platforms for mourning troubled childhoods not only because of their emotive register, but because of the fact that Birahima honours and individuates particular victims by telling their stories.

Singling out Kourouma's text does not in any way indicate preference of his style of writing. Nor does it suggest that his narrative stance is the most effective in comparison to that deployed by the other writers explored in this dissertation. In fact, the study argues that Kourouma's two levels of mourning for war-affected children (highlighted above) are variously replicated across the different texts studied in this dissertation. On the one hand, the study is cognisant of the danger that the narrative textures deployed in the texts may fail in the task of placing troubled childhoods in the public sphere. On the other hand, it is also aware of the possible unintended consequences of their publication, such as attracting some readers' voyeuristic tendencies that authorial techniques of representation might elicit. Nevertheless, I argue that in their primary task of placing the plight of violated children in the public sphere in a manner that makes such lives grieveable, each text succeeds in its own right. This is because each type of violation requires particular narrative techniques and suggests alternative, appropriate modes of representation to their authors.

The knowledge produced by the selected texts on the interlinked vectors, sites and manifestations of child violation in the post-1990 African context ensures that we

engage with, and grieve the traumas of such lives. While being made to ‘see,’ ‘hear’ and ‘feel’ along with violated and harmed child narrators does not make for pleasant or easy reading, the authors nevertheless prevent merely superficial responses of horror, disgust or dismissal of such experiences by their evocative yet sensitive renditions of the traumatising experiences as coming to us in the affected children’s ‘own’ voices. For example, listening to Kambili’s compelling description of her fear of her father in *Purple Hibiscus*; or Maisha’s resignation to prostitution in order to provide for her family and educate her brother in “An Ex-mas Feast;” or Agu’s honest self-appraisal that his war experiences have turned him into a kind of “beast” in *Beasts of No Nation*; or confronted by Zhizha’s poetic evocations of her trauma in *Under the Tongue*, we see how fiction allows for their protection from dangerous or at least risky self-exposure in situations that require them to disguise their real feelings. At the same time, the techniques of affective narration allow the author to help us ‘hear’ and/or ‘overhear’ such narrators’ inner voices. This kind of revelatory writing from the child narrators’/protagonists’ perspective allows readers to ‘see’ the vulnerable child ‘inside’ or ‘behind’ the self-protective disguises of impassivity, silence or brashness used by some of child characters.

In her insightful text entitled *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Cathy Caruth acknowledges the complexity of dealing with trauma narratives. She writes that:

The difficulty of listening and responding to traumatic stories in a way that does not lose their impact, that does not reduce them to clichés or turn them all into versions of the same story is a problem that remains central to the task of therapists, literary critics, neurobiologists, and filmmakers alike. (vii)

The difficulty that Caruth pinpoints here extends to writing about traumatic experiences, as texts discussed in this thesis demonstrate. The selected texts narrate dreadful

accounts of child violation and harming without reducing such experiences to mere clichés or flattened versions of an archetypal troubled childhood.

The nuanced placement of troubled lives in the public sphere that Caruth calls for in the above quotation is made possible because of the nature and quality of the child narrators'/protagonists' voices deployed in the selected texts. Elaine Scarry, Yvonne Vera and Romeo Dallaire variously argue that because traumatic content like the kind depicted in the selected texts is involuntarily blocked out by readers, imaginative and beautiful rendition of such awful experiences facilitate readers' engagement with such materials.⁴⁷ The use of powerful and imaginative language to disclose the horror of troubled childhoods, I argue, can allow readers to appreciate and reflect on the lives of such children (both in fiction and real life). If "human rights work is, at its heart, a matter of storytelling" (Dawes 394), then the selected authors' use of the child narrators'/protagonists' voices is what defines the exceptional qualities of the narrative texture of their work. Admittedly, in different ways and with different levels of intensity across the selected texts, the child narrators/protagonists act as authorial masks. Yet, cognisant of the fact that child narrators/protagonists would not ordinarily possess linguistic tools capable of articulating the appalling forms of violation they were victims or perpetrators of or witnesses to, the authors grant their child focalisers various convincing façades to insulate themselves from psychic harm. Arrogant cockiness; anguished incomprehension; ingenious silence or point-blank discourse are particular camouflages that work to disguise, insulate or protect the child

⁴⁷ While in *On Beauty and Being Just*, Scarry argues that "the transcendent experience of beauty prepares us for justice by temporarily making us forget [the horror of our reality]" (qtd in Dawes 398), Yvonne Vera avers that she writes "with a certain elegance" about trauma so that we are not repulsed by "crudity" of depiction from witnessing the horror (222-223). The two scholars' arguments above are echoed by Romeo Dallaire's observation that often the public insulates its self from horrific subject matter and that evocative depiction is one of the ways of breaching their psychic defences (*The Fight Like Soldiers* 16).

narrators/protagonists (to some extent) against the psychic harm arising from the kind of atrocities they report, enact or are exposed to.

Are these children capable of surmounting their victimisation or are they completely broken by their experiences of trauma? Beyond Baby T's tragic death, the depicted children arguably wrestle with variously life-denying circumstances. Yet, while their suffering forms an unmistakable stain on their childhoods, it is their intelligence, resilience and agency that enables them to surmount or survive the paralysing impact of their traumatic experiences by eloquently talking about them. Fiction's subjective and personal testimonies strike a strong chord, provoke moral outrage, spur increased concern and can promote action to stop actual manifestations of what is depicted because of the affirming portrayals of the protagonists. In spite of the two tropes of narrative closure across the selected texts — relocation from contexts of violation and stoic resignation to traumatising environments — the utmost tribute that fiction pays to violated children arises from the fact that narrative allows them to vividly articulate their violation and abuse. Even if the narratives constantly reminds us that for some traumatised children, total rehabilitation is a long journey which may be haunted by the psychological wounding for the rest of their lives, fiction honours these children by allowing them illocutionary agency which, through disclosure of their violation and abuse, insists that they are much more than victims. It is this legacy that fiction allows to depicted troubled childhoods that recalls Charles Dickens's evocative address to his readers in his novel — *Hard Times* — “Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not [...] We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fire turn gray and cold” (252). These authors' depictions of troubled childhoods similarly demand of us to consider

whether “such abuse and violation” as are depicted in these texts “will be” or will “continue to happen.”

While I am aware that the power of literary depictions to inform policy or bring about action that can translate into the eradication or reduction of the various forms of children’s traumatisation is limited and unquantifiable, the study nevertheless underlines how fiction — by moving us to care and concern ourselves with the depicted victims of violation — might place various forms of violation of children in the public sphere in order for us not to think of these experiences as faceless statistical footnotes to postcolonial African problems, but as phenomena that require urgent attention from all stakeholders. The depiction not only reclaims such children’s lives and identities, but also their humanity — making their stories matter and raising the status of lives like theirs to grievability in the public sphere. They work for and earn recognition of realities many would prefer not to be reminded of.

Perhaps the legacy of fictional representations of troubled childhoods in politically, socially and economically stressed African societies lies in how focus on the plight of such subjects can create awareness about the subject and can contribute to the building of partnerships to address these problems among different stakeholders. Here, we are reminded of Romeo Dallaire’s eloquent and compassionate comments about the phenomenon of child soldiers. Dallaire’s concession that while we cannot undo what has happened to child soldiers, we “can commit ourselves now to aiming for a future in which children are never employed as soldiers in war” (109) is symbolically echoed by these authors, albeit through fictional portraits. In different ways, the authors discussed in this dissertation — by placing grievable child victims of abuse and violation in the public sphere — make similar appeals to us to ensure that children are nurtured and protected. The horrors that the texts evoke are not so much made legible as are

presented in a way that is morally effective through the use of aesthetic narrative styles. These qualities are affectively compelling in a manner that makes brutalised and violated children matter in the public sphere.

I would suggest a number of areas for future expansion of research. One of these would be increasing the intensive analysis of specific aspects of troubled childhoods. Given that the survey focus of my present project highlights representations of troubled childhoods as a viable area of literary exploration, further focused and thorough investigations of this theme is warranted. Later studies might focus primarily on fictional representation of child sacrifice, trafficking, domestic abuse, sexual predation and sexual assault in (respectively) upper, middle and lower class African homes, both in time of peace and conflict. Furthermore, regionally focused studies of fictional representations of troubled childhoods might be worth conducting to establish patterns and peculiarities in the depictions of these violations in different regions of Africa. Such studies would create continental, regional, national (if not international) archives in the literary public sphere concerning child violations, building up a knowledge base on these phenomena and devising strategies of healing our continent's most vulnerable citizens. I further suggest that empirical studies into readers' responses to affective representations of troubled childhoods be undertaken in order to quantify the actual ethical and affective effects of fictional representations.

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