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The Difficulty of Reintegration: Examining The Child Soldier's Post-War Life in Selected African Novels

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Abstract. Many research works on the child soldier phenomenon seem to focus largely on the war-time experiences of the child soldier. Consequently, great attention is given to the life of the child soldier during the war. This paper, through qualitative content analysis and the trauma theory (Cathy Caruth's concept of belatedness and Dominick LaCapra's concept of acting-out) pays particular attention to the child soldier's life after the war and his preparedness towards reintegration. The difficulty that accompanies this exercise makes obvious the loss of the child soldier. Even though he is far away from the war, he becomes a troubled child who struggles futilely to erase his war-time memories. The paper finds that the child soldier's loss is often manifested in the form of extreme violence, post-traumatic stress disorder, identity crisis and the lack of trust. Also, the paper subtly questions rehabilitation as an absolute curative measure for the child who was once a vicious perpetrator of violence and chaos. The paper finds that although rehabilitation provides a serene environment for the former child soldier and attempts to normalize his difficult and painful memories in his present world, it does not completely heal him of his psychological pain and wound.

Keywords: Reintegration, Trauma, war, child soldiers

Introduction

One of the many obligations of writers is to address and expose social ills and societal decadences (Osundare, 2007, Edebor, 2013, Olumide, 2013). It is for this reason that in Africa, literature is often considered a social institution and writers considered "righters" (Osundare, 2007). African writers as part of their social responsibility are to highlight through the medium of language, the innumerable challenges that plague the African continent with the ultimate goal of bringing about change. This has been the preoccupation of many African writers like Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Ayi Kwei Armah, Ama Ata Aidoo, Alain Mabanckou, Ben Okri and many others. The works of such writers and literature in general can therefore be regarded as a tool that exposes and tackles the burden of prevalent and diverse wrongdoings in our societies (Megbowon & Uwah, 2020). In addition to bad governance and poor leadership are the civil wars that have devastated many African countries since the 1990s. These include countries like Nigeria (Biafran War), Sierra Leone (Sierra Leone Civil War), Rwanda (Rwandan Genocide), etc. Under the bigger umbrella of African civil war narratives are child soldier

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narratives – texts that seek to highlight the plights and predicaments of children who are conscripted as soldiers during times of war. The authors of these texts are indubitably fulfilling their social responsibilities as writers by going beyond the ordinary to capture the living realities of child soldiers in Africa. This is why Yeboah et. al. (2022:206) emphasize that "writers always write to reflect the socio-politico-cultural conditions of the societies and eras in which they find themselves. Reiterating this same point, Rachmayanti and Andini (2014: 84) posit that "literature is the reflection about life, thought, feeling, behaviour and attitude of human being". By highlighting the issue of child soldiering and its psychological implications on the child in their texts, Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah set out to sensitize readers and caution against the blatant abuse of the rights of children during times of war.

Aside Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier,* which are the primary source of data for this paper, the child soldier figure has been depicted by many other writers with some even sharing their personal experiences. The publication of Ahmadou Kourouma's last novel, *Allah is Not Obliged* (2000) is mostly regarded by literary critics as what set the pace for the discussion on child soldiering two decades ago. Kourouma's masterpiece tells the story of ten-year-old Birihima, who leaves his native village in Ivory Coast after the death of his mother in search of his auntie, Mahan. While crossing the border into Liberia, he is captured by rebels and forced into military services as a child soldier. He experiences untold trauma as he fights in a chaotic civil war with many other child soldiers. He witnesses death, torture and dismemberment. These are indeed experiences that are very traumatic for a young boy.

With the conversation on child soldiering already opened by Kourouma, Uzodinma Iweala and Emmanuel Dangala join the conversation with the publication of *Beasts of No Nation* and Johnny *Mad Dog* respectively in 2005. Unlike Kourama and many other writers, Dangala, who in 1997 together with his family fled their home in Brazaville in the wake of a brutal civil war, approaches the issue of child soldiering from two different narrative perspectives. He employs two teenagers, Laokoles and Johnny Mad Dog, to tell the story. While Laokoles wants to complete high school and become an engineer, Johnny Mad Dog joins an armed rebel. Dongala masterfully uses dual narrators, both of whom are teenagers to portray the effects of war on children and how children who are recruited as child soldiers leave behind their innocence to commit atrocities.

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

Aside Akallo's *Girl Soldier*, the year 2007 also saw the publication of another child-soldier narrative titled *Song for Night* by the Nigerian-born novelist, Chris Abani. Born in 1966 at the beginning of the Biafran-Nigerian civil war, Abani did not personally experience the war but through fiction, he is able to create a vivid picture of the concept of child soldiering. His novel revolves around a 15-year-old boy soldier called My Luck. He is trained as a sapper, a soldier who specializes in laying and clearing mines. Abani presents to readers, the struggle of a child soldier on a journey to understand his place and identity in the world. The trauma that My Luck suffers comes to him in dreams as he is often haunted by the people that he has killed and women that he had raped.

A significant thread that runs through these child-soldier narratives is how the authors dwell on the concept of childhood to highlight the effects of war on children. They do this by employing an African child as the narrator of events – a method which became prominent after the publication of Camara Laye's *African Child*. This is why Maxwell Okolie in his section of Eldred D. Jones' *Childhood in African Literature* argues that "In fact, the African child did not become a subject of literature until the early fifties in the wake of negritude controversies." (p.29). He acknowledges Camara Laye as the writer to have set a precedent in discussing the theme of childhood and making it possible for subsequent novelists and writers like Uzodinma Iweala and Ishmael Beah to integrate it in their works.

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

Theoretical Framework

The present study is underpinned by the trauma theory. The researchers deem this theory to be apt because the protagonists in both novels do not only witness violence brought about by war but they also have to deal with the belated and persistent return of their wartime memories even when they have been rescued and sent to rehabilitation centres. Considering the belated nature of the protagonists' trauma, the paper relies on the traditional model of the trauma theory propounded by Cathy Caruth which sources its roots from the therapeutic practices of Sigmund Freud. Cathy Caruth has been recognized as the pioneer of trauma theory with her critical introduction to a collection of essays titled *Trauma: Exploration in Memory* (1995) and the publication of her work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory (1995*), she regards trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which take the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event" (p. 4).

Just like Freud, Caruth stresses on the belatedness of trauma. She believes that the traumatic event is so overwhelming that the mind cannot integrate it at the time of its occurrence, which then leads to the belated return of the trauma in forms such as flashbacks and nightmares. This is what some trauma critics like Bessel van der Kolk term "dissociation" – an inherent latency within the experience itself, since the traumatized individual does not repress or forget the traumatic event afterwards, but because he or she does not consciously experience the event itself as it happens. The individual is thus dissociated from the event at the time of its occurrence since the experience is so overwhelming that it cannot be registered by the mind. It however comes back to the victim later on, in the form of dreams and hallucinations. In his work, "Writing History, Writing Trauma", which focuses on the interpretation of historical traumas such as the Holocaust, Dominick LaCapra, a historian and a contemporary of Cathy Caruth, calls this "acting out". LaCapra explains acting-out as:

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

From LaCapra's perspective, acting-out can be understood as the compulsive repetition of past traumatic experiences in the present in such a manner that the victim seems helplessly glued to his/her past. It is almost as if there is a total collapse between the past and the present. LaCapra reiterates that there is a tendency for the past traumatic experiences to affect the victim's future because the victim of trauma during acting-out, relives a "past that will not pass away" (p.124). For him, this does not only cause confusion between the present and the past but affects the victim's future as well. This is evident in the texts used for this study as Agu's dreams of becoming an engineer or a doctor seems shattered. Also, although Ishmeal Beah is taken to New York, he is occasionally confronted by the awful memories of his past life as a soldier.

Materials and Method

The study employs a close textual reading of two child soldier narratives – Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. This mode of analysis is what some scholars call "qualitative content analysis" – a systematic investigation of texts to understand meanings that are present in them (Leavy, 2017). For Mayring (2023), qualitative content analysis enables a systematic analysis of textual material especially important for educational research. Hawkins (2018) as quoted by Yeboah et. al. (2023:9) is of the view that the instrumental role of textual analysis is to help with the "understanding of language, symbols…in texts to gain information regarding how people make sense of and communicate life and life experiences".

The research approach employed in this study is purely qualitative since it grants the researchers the opportunity to critically observe the data and offer detailed explanation and description to it (Babbie, 2016; 2020). The paper relies on Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra and Sandra L. Bloom's ideas concerning trauma to help identify and examine the difficulties that accompany the reintegration of former child soldiers in the two texts. The researchers deliberately select a novel and a memoir for this paper because we believe that the memoir, which is a true reflection of the Sierra Leone Civil War, will go a long way to authenticate the fictitious events in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*.

Results and Discussion

Set in a fictionalized African country that is being ravaged by war, Uzodinma Iweala's Beasts of No Nation (2005) recounts the harrowing experiences of Agu, a young boy who is forced into child soldiering. Being a symbol of many other child soldiers who have fought different wars in Africa, Agu showcases how young and innocent children are turned into ruthless killers as a result of war by powerful warlords. Although Agu escapes from the rebel group after the killing of the Commandant, he must deal with the difficulties that accompany reintegrating himself back into the society. Agu suffers from severe post-traumatic stress disorder and identity crisis. Through the protagonist, Agu, Iweala shows that the trauma that child soldiers suffer do not easily go away and know no geographical boundaries.

Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier (2007) recounts the author's personal experiences as a child soldier in the Sierra Leone Civil war which lasted for eleven years (1991 – 2002). Before he is recruited as a child soldier, Ishmael witnesses heads being cut off with machetes, smashed with cement bricks and rivers filled with human blood. These scenes are so traumatizing that even though he often closes his eyes to avoid thinking about them, it proves a futile act. He is later recruited by the government army to fight the rebels. Together with other child soldiers, he is given drugs and fed on American movies so that he can kill without any hesitation. Ishmael suddenly moves from an innocent child to a blood-thirsty killer. He is selected by his superior for a rehabilitation programme. At the rehabilitation centre, Ishmael and the other chid soldiers find it extremely difficult to leave

behind their former lives as soldiers. It is at the centre that their war-time memories begin to torment them.

Results

With the aid of the trauma theory, the paper finds that some of the challenges that make reintegration of former child soldiers as seen in the case of Agu in Beasts of No Nation and Ishmael in A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier include post-traumatic stress disorder (compulsive return of their trauma in the form of hallucinations and dreams), the display of physical violence, loss of identity and the lack of trust. This finding resonates with the assertion that "the use and abuse of children by armed groups can result in low self-esteem, feelings of guilt, violent behaviour, shame as well as lack of trust and confidence" (Twum-Danso, 2003: 32).

The paper also finds that although Agu and Ishmael find reintegration extremely difficult, they welcome it differently – while Agu welcomes reintegration keenly, Ishmael seems unenthused about it as he feels betrayed by his Lieutenant for selecting him for rehabilitation. It becomes obvious that the levels of attachment that these children build during their days as soldiers determine how they welcome the idea of rehabilitation and their preparedness towards it.

Again, the paper finds that rehabilitation with all of its techniques, does not completely eradicate the former child soldier's traumatic memories. Although Agu and Ishmael are no longer at the battle grounds, they fight a different form of war which is equally destructive – the belated and persistent return of their trauma. These memories that plague the young minds of Agu and Ishmel are devastating to the extent that they sometimes consider death as the only solution. Although Ishmael travels to New York to escape the war, he is still haunted by his war-time memories. This shows that childhood trauma knows no geographical boundaries. Also, Agu who used to be a staunch Christian as he loved to read the Bible begins to question his faith.

Considering these findings, the paper strongly recommends that children must not be conscripted into armed forces or rebel groups during times of war because no amount of rehabilitation can completely rid them of their trauma. Also, just as Yeboah et al. (2022) argues that child soldiers turn from victims to victimizers just to survive the brutalities of war, it is important to acknowledge that the violence they experience as victims and perpetuate as victimizers have the tendency of completely changing the trajectory of their lives.

Discussion

Traumatized and Lost: Reintegration in Beasts of No Nation

Even though the concept of reintegration is given much attention in Beah's A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, it is discussed briefly in Iweala's Beasts of No Nation since the novel concentrates more on the child soldier's war-time experiences than his days after the war. Agu gains his freedom after one of the soldiers, Rambo, kills the Commandant. Agu is then taken to a rehabilitation centre which he describes as "heaven". He tells readers:

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

> I am fearing that the food is finishing and I will not be eating any for the next day. (p. 138).

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

> And sometimes I am telling her, I am hearing bullet and scream in my ear and I am wanting to be dying so I am never hearing it again. I am wanting to lie down on the warm ground with my eye closed and the smell of mud in my nose, just like Strika. I am wanting to feel how the ground is wet all around my body so that if I am sweating, I am feeling like it is the ground sweating through me. And I am wanting to stay in this same place forever, never moving for anything, just waiting waiting until dust is piling on me and grasses is covering me and insect is making their home in the space between my teeths. I am telling her that I am thinking one Iroko tree will be growing from my body, so wide that its trunk is separating night and day, and so tall that its top leaf is tickling the moon until the man living there is smiling. I am saying to her sometimes, I am not saying many thing because I am knowing too many terrible thing to be saying to you. I am seeing more terrible thing than ten thousand men and I am doing more terrible thing than twenty thousand men. So, if I am saying these thing, then it will be making me to sadding too much. (p. 141).

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

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

This explains why Agu experiences flashbacks and hallucinations of his war-time experiences even though he is now in a serene environment. Although some scholars have argued that Agu reclaims his sanity, this paper argues otherwise. Thus, although Agu is no longer a child soldier, he is still haunted by his war-time memories. He cannot erase them from

his mind; however, he constantly and compulsively relives these awful memories. This shows the extent to which he has been shattered emotionally and psychologically by the horrors he witnessed as both a victim and victimizer during the war. His war-time experiences have been consolidated into his long-term memory and constantly triggers post-traumatic stress disorder (P.T.S.D). This usually manifests in the form of hallucinations and nightmares. He therefore reveals to readers: "I am hearing bullet and scream in my ear and I am wanting to be dying…" (p. 141). This statement shows how these traumatic experiences have impaired Agu's quality of life. A similar situation is highlighted in one of the most celebrated and important modernist novels, Virginia Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway. Through the character Septimus Warren Smith, a World War I veteran who is haunted by his war-time memories, Woolf depicts the lonely, petrifying and depressing experiences of trauma victims even after the traumatic event itself has ended. Having suffered depression and having written a novel (Mrs. Dalloway) to illustrate the effects of trauma, Virginia Woolf herself could not be healed completely of her trauma. Though Woolf seemed to understand perfectly the effects of trauma on the human mind and how it renders people lost, she committed suicide – the apex of a traumatized mind.

The memories that intrude on Agu's mind even at the rehabilitation centre does not only overwhelm him but also, the psychologist who is supposed to listen to him without any emotional attachments and help him salvage the little that is left of his humanity. Agu reveals this when he says:

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

This shows the intensity of Agu's trauma. The idea that his story troubles Amy, the psychologist, to the point of almost shedding tears only makes his trauma and loss more obvious to readers. It is therefore justifiable to argue that this exercise cannot help relieve Agu completely of his trauma, grief and pain. It is not surprising that Agu explains that "every time I am sitting with her I am thinking I am like old man and she is like small girl because I am fighting in war and she is not knowing what war is" (p. 140). It can be deduced that the "talking cure" of trauma as developed by Sigmund Freud in the 1880s and later upheld by some scholars like Judith Herman, does not completely relieve victims of their trauma. It only does so partially. The "talking cure" as proven in the case of Agu in Beasts of No Nation, seems to be an insufficient curative technique because it only provides a space for Agu to explore and process his traumatic experiences. Although it helps Agu to normalize his difficult and painful memories in his present world, it does not erase these memories from his mind. This communicates the sense of loss that engulfs child soldiers even after the war has ended. From this backdrop, it is important to state emphatically that children as seen in the case of Agu must not be conscripted as soldiers because no amount of rehabilitation can heal them completely. The impossibility of erasing trauma from their minds and the horrors they have experienced as victims and carried out as victimizers is a stern caution to anyone who imagines conscripting children into wars. The researchers therefore strongly agree with Caruth (1995:9) that "the impact of the traumatic event lies precisely in its belatedness, in its refusal to be simply located, in its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time."

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

> I am always thinking Confession and Forgiveness and Resurrection. I am not knowing what all this word is meaning. They are not making

> any sense to me anytime his is saying them…I do not know if I am believing him, but I am liking to hear it" (p. 140).

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

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

Undoubtedly, at the rehabilitation centre, Agu is given a new life that is devoid of the drudgeries of his former life as a child soldier. In the extract above, through the use of personification and imagery, Agu establishes the contrast between his former life as a child soldier and his current life at the rehabilitation centre. He was weak, but he is now strong and he now walks without his bone cracking. He used to wear dirty, wet, and blood-stained clothes, but now he wears clean and dry clothes. The contrast gleaned at this point although highlights the serenity of Agu's new environment, it most importantly depicts the harsh and perilous nature of his old life a child soldier.

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

A Different Form of War: Reintegration in A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier

In Ishmael Beah's A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier, the factors that make reintegration problematic for Ishmael and make glaring his loss go beyond psychological ill health (specifically P.T.S.D). In the case of Ishmael, he becomes extremely violent and finds it difficult to build trust. He confirms the psychological trauma they (child soldiers) experience after the war when he says, "But we were still traumatized, and now that we had time to think, the fastened mantle of our war memories slowly began to open." (p. 145). Ishmael's revelation

explains perfectly the idea of trauma being belated. It confirms the opinion held by many trauma scholars like Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra that trauma is much realized in its belatedness. During the war, the traumatic memories of the child soldiers are restrained by a "fastened mantle", but away from the war, the fastened mantle loosens and they are violently attacked by these memories in the form of hallucinations, nightmares and flashbacks. Away from the war and introduced to a peaceful environment, the bitter memories of these children begin rushing back. Ishmael reveals:

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

In the above extract, Ishmael makes known the vicious nature of their trauma even at the rehabilitation center since they have to punch their heads in order to drive away these memories. Although this may seem exaggerated, it creates a vivid image of the psychological battle that these young children must fight even after the war. This is substantiated by the use of words like "sweating", "screaming" and "punching". The plosives within these words are indicative of the violent and persistent return of their war memories. These memories are so strong that they do not attack these former child soldiers only in dreams but even when they are awake. In fact, what Ishmael and the other child soldiers experience in the extract above is a disorder (Hypnopompic hallucination) that can be adequately explained medically. According to Berry (2012), hypnopompic hallucination is a type of sleep-related hallucination experienced by an individual after full awakening from sleep. This makes it difficult for the individual to differentiate between what is real and what is not real. Herman (1997) quoted by Anthonissen (2009:6) also explains what accounts for Ishmael's nightmares when she says that, "Most trauma victims also suffer from traumatic nightmares. Like flashbacks, these nightmares can repeat themselves, they can be experienced as if the traumatic event is happening again, and they often consist of exact fragments of the traumatic past". In a conversation with the nurse, Esther, Ishmael recounts one of such memories that haunt him. He narrates:

> I shot them on their feet and watched them suffer for an entire day before finally shooting them in the head so that they would stop crying. Before I shot each man, I looked at him and saw how his eyes gave up hope and steadied before I pulled the trigger. I found their sober eyes irritating. (p. 159)

Denied the hard drugs that numbed his conscience and emotions during the war, Ishmael is now haunted constantly by nightmares and flashbacks of his past life as a child soldier. Anthonissen (2009: 7) explains that, "these visual traumatic memories, in nightmares as well as in flashbacks, can give the trauma victim the impression that he or she is reliving the traumatic event in the present.". LaCapra (2001: 119), a historian and a contemporary of Cathy Caruth, calls this "acting-out" – a situation in which one is haunted or possessed by the past and performatively caught up in the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes" The researchers also agree with Bloom (1999) when she posits that "a traumatic experience impacts the entire person – the way we think, the way we learn, the way we remember things, the way we feel about ourselves, the way we feel about other people, and the way we make sense of the world are all profoundly altered by traumatic experience" (p. 2). This explains why even though Ishmael and the other former child soldiers are no longer combatant, they still exhibit violent behaviours at the rehabilitation centre. A typical scenario is the violent encounter between Ishmael's group and the new arrivals who have also been rescued from some rebel forces and brought to the rehabilitation centre. Ishmael narrates this violent encounter:

> Alhaji broke the silence. "Where are you boys from?" he asked. The boys widened their eyes and stared at Alhaji as if he had just asked them the wrong question. One of the boys, who looked a little older and had no hair on his head, stood up, clenching his fist. "And who the fuck are you? Do we look like we are here to answer questions for bastar pekin lek you?" He leaned across the table and looked down on Alhaji. Alhaji got up and pushed him. The boy fell, and when he got up, he pulled a bayonet and jumped on the table toward Alhaji. All of us stood up, ready to fight…I took out my grenade and put my fingers inside the pin. (pp. 161-162).

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

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

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

> 'They are rebels', Mambu shouted, and before he could reach for his bayonet, the boy punched him in the face. He fell, and when he got up, his nose was bleeding. The rebel boys drew out the few bayonets they had and rushed toward us. It was war all over again… As the boys rushed toward us, I threw the grenade among them, but the explosion was delayed. We leaped out from underneath the stoop where we had taken cover and charged into the open yard, where we began to fight. Some of us had bayonets, others didn't. A boy without a bayonet grabbed my neck from behind. He was squeezing for the kill and I couldn't use my bayonet effectively, so I elbowed him with all my might until he let go of my neck. He was holding his stomach when I turned around. I stabbed him in his foot. The bayonet stuck, so I pulled it out with force. He fell and I began kicking him in the face. As I went to deliver the final blow with my bayonet, someone came from behind me and sliced my hand with his knife. It was a rebel boy, and he was about to kick me down when he fell on his face. Alhaji had stabbed him in the back. He pulled the knife out, and we continued kicking the boy until he stopped moving. I wasn't sure whether he was unconscious or dead. I didn't care. (p. 163-164)

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

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

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

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

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

> During that same week, the drugs were wearing off. I craved cocaine and marijuana so badly that I would roll a plain sheet of paper and smoke it. Sometimes I searched in the pockets of my army shorts, which I still wore, for crumbs of marijuana or cocaine. We broke into the mini-hospital and stole some pain relievers—white tablets and off white—and red and yellow capsules. We emptied the capsules, ground the tablets, and mixed them together. But the mixture didn't give us the effect we wanted. We got more upset day by day and, as a result, resorted to more violence. In the morning, we beat up people

> from the neighborhood who were on their way to fetch water at a nearby pump. If we couldn't catch them, we threw stones at them. Sometimes they dropped their buckets as they ran away from us. We would laugh as we destroyed their buckets… We would fight for hours in between meals, for no reason at all. During these fights, we destroyed most of the furniture and threw the mattresses out in the yard. We would stop to wipe the blood off our lips, arms, and legs only when the bell rang for mealtime. (p. 167-168)

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

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

Conclusion

Using textual analysis and anchored on the trauma theory, the paper sought to investigate the difficulty that accompanies the reintegration of former child soldiers as seen in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier*. This required a critical examination of the child soldier's life after the war has ended and he has been taken off the battle field and introduced to a new environment. The paper finds that while at the rehabilitation centre, the former child soldier's display of extreme violence, post-traumatic stress disorder, identity crisis and the lack of trust make obvious the difficulty that accompanies reintegration. Also, the paper finds that rehabilitation with all of its techniques, does not completely eradicate the former child soldier's traumatic memories. Though Agu and Ishmael are no longer on the battle grounds, they fight a different form of war – the belated and persistent return of their trauma. This help establish the fact that during times of war, the rights of children must be protected at all cost.

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