

## Shades of Trauma in Selected Nigerian Novels

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### Abstract

The evolving critical attention on contemporary Nigerian literature in general and the novel in particular focus more on the themes of military and political misrule, corruption, gender issues and other social ills. Little attention has been paid to the traumas which these ills have caused the Nigerian citizens. Therefore, this study focuses on shades of trauma in selected Nigerian novels. The selected novels which form our primary data are, Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* (2005) and Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006). The study adopts psychological theories as its theoretical framework. This is in a bid to situate the analysis of the consequences of actions and roles of the Nigerian leaders on its citizens. Findings reveal that the oppressive nature and the leadership failure of the Nigerian government are mainly responsible for the disillusionment and traumas experienced by a lot of individuals as represented in the literary texts. This has given rise to mental and psychological disability and even death among the characters in the selected texts. It then concludes that the selected texts are clear testaments of the shades of trauma experienced by the citizens as a result of the state of crisis in Nigerian society.

**Keywords:** Trauma, Leadership Failure, psychological, contemporary, Nigeria

### Introduction

The term "Trauma" according to *Merriam-Webster*, refers to a disordered psychological or behavioural condition resulting from severe mental or emotional stress or even physical injury. It is a very difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems, usually for a long time. According to American Psychiatric Association (1994) "trauma may result when a person experiences, witnesses or is confronted with an event or events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of self and others" (p.13). Herman (1992) states that, "events are described as traumatic, not because of the frequency of occurrence, but because of their effects on human life" (p.33). Certain symptoms are considered "Post-traumatic" because they occur after the traumatic events. They are flashbacks, intrusive thoughts about the traumatic event, psychic numbing, isolation, and more (APA, 1994). Often the above problems are experienced by the primary victims of the traumas.

Trust is defined as a universal expectancy that others can be relied upon (Rotter, 1967). From this point of view, the global expectations people have regarding the motives and reliability of others are central to trust (Jones, Couch & Scott, 1997). Betrayal is closely related to mistrust. Betrayal violates previously held notions about trust. Trust has been described as a decision that "permeates the interface between people and their social environments" (Jones, Couch & Scott, 1997). In nearly every social environment encountered, individuals, grapple

with the cost of benefits of displaying some level of vulnerability and having faith in the benevolence of another which opens door to betrayal. This is therefore evidence of the relationship and situation between the Nigerian citizens and their indigenous leaders. Nigerian citizens have become victims of shades of trauma inflicted upon them as a result of bad leadership and misrule as represented in the selected texts for this study. After the end of colonial rule, colonial masters handed power to the indigenous leaders and the people thought that the end of their enslavement had come. They believed and trusted their indigenous leaders who unfortunately betrayed their trust with their atrocious and inglorious activities. This has also resulted in shades of trauma in the lives of the citizens.

The novels selected for this study have widely been viewed from such existential and social realities of postcolonial Nigeria. As Aijaz (1992) notes, third-world texts are national allegories. It then means that the oppressive and atrocious activities of the government that result in sufferings, pains and various traumas in the lives of the masses are represented by African writers in their texts. For instance, Okoronkwo (2012) explicates the wanton destruction of the natural resources, exploitation and frustration caused by oil exploration in the Niger Delta region, as depicted in Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*. Onukaogu and Onyerionwu (2012) in the same vein, reveal the dual expression of lamentation and revolution that characterise the literary text in which the people of the Niger Delta have lamented endlessly about their ordeal. The victims are presented as people that can mobilise themselves to undertake violent protests and other revolutionary steps against the inhuman treatment. In Sefi Atta's *Everything, Good will Come*, Smit (2009) believes that the deepest rift in the Nigerian Society which keeps the nation from attaining unity is caused by historically constructed gender differences and prejudice. In the same novel, Smit unveils the theme of marital dislocation as portrayed in Sunny Taiwo's family life as well as Enitan's. Both women, according to the critic, see themselves being oppressed and at the receiving end of their marital union. In the novel, the women stand symbolically as the Nigerian citizens oppressed by the government. Uwasomba's (2014) study of Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, dwells on military brutality, and political misrule as he argues that since independence, African countries have been plagued by postcolonial dictatorship and misrule. From the above, it is obvious that not much criticism has viewed contemporary African novels and the selected texts in particular from the perspectives of shades of trauma, by applying psychological theories. This gap in scholarship is what this study fills.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study adopts psychological theories as the theoretical framework. Indeed Editorial Team (2022) affirms the definition of psychological theories as, "systems of ideas that can explain certain aspects of human thoughts behaviours and emotions" (Online, Para. 3). The Team asserts further that, the psychological researcher create these theories to make predictions for future human behaviours or events that may take place if certain behaviours exist. For instance, they can assist with understanding what events trigger specific behaviours or habits.

Under psychological theories, behaviourism and biology will be espoused in engaging the various traumas that are manifested by the literary characters in the selected texts for this study. According to the dictionary of psychology (2015) "psychology is the scientific study of mind and behaviour. Psychology includes the study of conscious and unconscious phenomena, including feelings and thoughts". Psychologists seek to understand how the brain functions. They seek to understand the behaviour of individuals and groups. Some psychologists attempt to understand the role of mental functions in individuals and social behaviour. While psychological knowledge is often applied to the assessment and treatment of mental health problems.

The central idea behind the behavioural psychological theory of John Watson is that human behaviour comes because of the stimuli both intrinsic and from our environment. According to Kowalski and Western (2005) "it is through the behavioural theory that we learn such aspects as how we acquire new behaviours whether through the effects that the environment has on us and triggers our behavioural changes or choose to remain the same" (p.6). As the theory unfolds, surroundings determine human behaviours largely. People respond differently according to the stimuli exposed to them. Kowalski (2005) says that, "a person might acquire a certain behaviour because of something that is happening in the family. For instance, a child might develop a negative behaviour because of the conditions exposed to him or her in the family set up, such as the divorce of parents..." (p.34).

The biological theory according to Wickens (2005) "examines the relationship that exists between internal body systems and external factors, and how they affect human behaviours... with a closed consideration put to mental and emotional states" (p.23). Kozulin (1990) asserts that "biological psychology aims at studying the effects of the nervous system

to the internal and external stimulus" (p.87). For Reiss (2000) "there are several disorders explained through biological psychology. These conditions include some common mental disorders such as schizophrenia, depression and anxiety disorders" (p.54). Reiss (2000) further states that "the above complexities can be because of the exposure to certain conditions in the society... that can lead to conditions such as depression" (p.54).

Behaviourism and biological theories render their relevance in exploring the themes and techniques in literary texts. The roles performed by the indigenous leaders and how these roles have adversely affected the psyche of the individuals in the selected texts would be unveiled in engaging the above theories for this study.

According to Kubayanda (1990) "... to write about tyranny is not only a national duty but an obligation to the self..." (p. 9). The foregoing quote by Kubayanda goes to show that writing about tyranny unveils the cruelty of the leaders and possible steps that could be taken to forestall its negative consequences on the citizens. Politics play a crucial role in African and Nigerian critical theory and literary discourse because it is the main core of people's lives. Immediately after the indigenous African leaders have been handed power, particularly in Nigeria, they projected statesmanship before the people, in their promises to provide the necessary social welfare as well as delivery clear accountability in dispensing their duties. This act is a welcoming one to the masses, who then demonstrate trust for their leaders. But shortly after, the citizens experience extreme betrayal, torture, and other forms of ill-treatment from their indigenous leaders. These result in disillusionment for which many have become traumatised in various ways. This dangerous bearing in African society and Nigeria in particular, therefore necessitates the adoption of psychological theories in this study to explore the extent of the negative roles played by the Nigerian leaders and how these roles have affected the individuals psychologically, mentally, emotionally and physically, as represented by the characters in the selected texts. This essay attempts to show the interrelationship between literary narratives, political tyranny and other forms of oppression in contemporary Africa and Nigeria. Shades of trauma arising from the political failure and socio-economic conditions of the continent, especially Nigeria, have informed this study.

### **Shades of Trauma**

Shades of trauma mean different forms of traumas as experienced by different individuals under various circumstances and situations. Examples of Different traumas include psychological and emotional trauma, physical trauma, religious trauma, and mental trauma.

Psychological and emotional traumas are the unique individual experience of an event or lasting conditions in which the individual's ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is overwhelmed, or the individual experiences a threat to life, bodily integrity, or sanity (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). The above then means that a harsh situation creates psychological trauma when it overwhelms the individual's ability to cope and leaves that person facing severe mental disorders, sometimes with physical damage to the brain and with a distorted view of reality. This means the individual may feel emotionally, cognitively, and physically overwhelmed. The consequences resulting from abuse of power, betrayal of trust, entrapment, helplessness, pain, confusion, and loss. Physical trauma on the other hand is a serious injury to the body. It is a difficult or unpleasant experience that causes someone to have mental or emotional problems, usually for a long time. Religious trauma is based on a person's response to a belief system that belittles and degrades them before a deity. It occurs as a result of events that threaten and damage an individual's core spiritual values and goals. This can be a result of either abuse by religious figures or being raised with a toxic and overbearing interpretation of that religion or spiritual belief. This results in religious trauma syndrome, a term coined in 2011 by psychologist Marlene Winell in an article for British Association for Behavioural Cognitive Psychotherapies. Religious Trauma Syndrome (RTS) is recognised in psychology and psychotherapy as a set of symptoms, ranging in severity, experienced by those who have participated in or left behind authoritarian, dogmatic, and controlling religious groups and belief systems. The various traumas suffered and experienced by the Nigerian citizens as a result of the negative roles played by its indigenous leaders, are represented in the selected texts below:

### **Reflections of Trauma in the Selected Texts**

Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* (2002), unveils a horrible bearing in the form of military dictatorship, political instability, insecurity, imprisonment, socio-economic failure, poverty and suffering of the masses, as well as human rights abuses in Nigerian society. Sefi Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* (2005), tells of the postcolonial government in Nigeria and the political situation. It captures military dictatorship, political unrest, suppression of human rights, repression of dissidents, tensions, and the war that took place between Nigeria and the Biafrans. The novel also depicts themes of family dislocation, feminism, rape and more. In Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006), the writer presents a present-day Niger Delta region of Nigeria that contains a mass of land that generates oil. Despite carting away the huge natural resources of these people which destroys their land, little has been done by the government and

the oil exploration companies to help salvage the environment and ameliorate the sufferings of the indigenes. The foregoing has led to violent protests by the indigenes against the perpetrators.

Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* unveils the realities of prison life which result in psychological trauma as his character, Lomba, is arrested and thrown into the prison by the military junta. The warders in the prison are more than usually brutal; the inmates are on tenterhooks, not knowing where the next physical blow would come. The prisoners are lined up in rows in the cell, waiting for hours to be addressed by the prison superintendent. When he comes, his face is as hard as a rock, his eyes are red like fire. He paces up and down as he addresses the inmates. While the prisoners listen, their heads are bowed and their hearts quake. Lomba reveals the traumatic effect of this encounter when he recounts:

When he left, an inmate, just back from a week in solitary, broke down and began to weep. His hands shook, as if with a life of their own. What's going to happen next? He wails, going from person to person, looking into each face, not waiting for an answer. 'We'll be punished. If I go back there I'll die. I can't. I can't.' Now he was standing before me, a skinny mass of eczema inflammations, ringworm, and snot. I thought, what did he do to end up in this dungeon? Then without thinking, I reached out and patted his shoulder. I even smiled. With confidence I did not feel I said kindly, 'No one will take you back.' He collapsed into my arms, soaking my shirt with snot and tears and saliva. Everything will be all right I repeated over and over ... (10-11).

The above scenario is one of the many psychological traumas experienced by prisoners in Nigerian prisons. It portrays the use of solitary confinement as a tool of oppression and repression and the psychological import and impact on the victim. It also shows a brief respite and comfort experienced by the victim at that moment when Lomba held him in his arms and offers him words of encouragement and hope. Lomba is later taken to the next prison yard and kept in solitary for three days. He describes the cell thus:

The floor was about six feet by ten, and the ceiling was about seven feet from the floor. There were two pieces of furniture. The iron bunk with its tattered, lice-ridden mat, and the slop bucket in the corner (17).

The condition of the prison is a horrible one which is deliberately kept this way by the dictatorial regime to make the people suffer to no end. Most citizens thrown into these Godforsaken prisons are mostly the innocent and those who dare to speak against the bad and dictatorial style of the military. This is witnessed in Habila's *Waiting for an*

Angel where Lomba the protagonist is incarcerated for daring to write against and exposed the ill activities of the government (9). Some of these citizens are killed before their loved ones even make efforts to bring them out of the dungeon, just like the jailed business tycoon and politician, Chief Moshood Abiola (161). This situation also reverberates in Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come* when Enitan says of her psychological state of trauma:

... I couldn't sleep. All that my father had told me about prisons came to haunt me: the darkness, dampness, smell of stale urine, cockroaches, rats. There were no beds, no ventilation, and too many inmates. Some were arrested for being out on designated sanitation days. Others belonged to mental institutions, cemeteries... (218).

The protagonist unveils more of the horrible and pathetic environment of the prison and the health conditions of the prisoners as she tells the reader what her father reveals:

... Look where I have landed myself, ... We sleep in each other's urine in this place. The food is like the bottom of a pit latrine. I have not touched it. Your hands, ... it itches like mad, but they won't get a doctor... (218).

The foregoing depicts the fact that prison life in Nigeria is an unpleasant experience for anyone. It also shows that it is not a respecter of anyone. Hence we are told that the prisoners "looked like twisted tree branches". After Enitan was thrown in her pregnant state into the prison, Niyi tells her: "Your life means nothing to them" (280). Some of the prisoners are sick while others are at the point of death. This is evident when the Mother of prison says: "...She's nearly dead. The whole womb is rotten now. We are choking on her smell" (281). The above situation is emphasised when Enitan says about her father's prison experience:

I couldn't sleep. All that my father had told me about prisons came to haunt me: the darkness, dampness, smell of stale urine, cockroaches, rats. There were no beds, no ventilation, and too many inmates. Some were arrested for being out on designated sanitation days. Others belonged in mental institutions, cemeteries." "... Look where I have landed myself, ... We sleep in each other's urine in this place. The food is like the bottom of a pit latrine ..." (218).

The situation above depicts the severe physical, mental, and psychological trauma, not just Enitan suffers, but the father as well. The prison is devoid of all comforts as the protagonist is made to encounter the torment of various creatures like rats and cockroaches, amidst darkness and cold in the prison. Sleeping on a bare floor and all other forms of torture are also experienced, which proved to be evidence of all Enitan confirmed the father confessed to her

about his experiences. The plights of the masses are worrisome. The same citizens who are disillusioned, frustrated, hungry and neglected by the Nigerian government are the ones subjected to the above psychological, mental, and physical traumas. The indigenous leaders are callous and cold-hearted to their subjects. The criminals are not the only ones suffering the grim situation in society, the innocents are condemned to the same anguish as unveiled in the texts.

The physical trauma suffered by the dissident voices in Nigeria under military dictatorship as represented by Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* is further amplified in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel* when Lomba, from the confines of the prison, secretly writes to keep himself sane, and when he is discovered, he is beaten and put in solitary confinement. The historical characters, Dele Giwa and Kudirat Abiola are some dissident voices assassinated by the military. When the university students demonstrate, the soldiers come to the campus to rape the female students and ransack rooms and in the process, destroy Lomba's poems and journals. He feels threatened by this violent act carried out by the military, which makes him vacate the school premises and quit his studies. Consequently, the University is closed down. A Chemistry student is shot in the head and killed. Bola's parents and sisters are killed in a car crash and this incident leads to his mental unstableness causing him to speak against the military rule as revealed below.

... The military has failed us. I say down with Khakistocracy! Down with militocracy! Down with Kleptocracy!" ... According to Wole Soyinka, "The man dies in him who stands silent in the face of tyranny... (56).

From the scenario above, Bola vituperates against the military without an iota of fear. This shows how psychologically and mentally traumatised he had become with the loss of members of his family. He is further violated physically by the state security men, after which he is taken to their office. Later realising too late that Bola is just an innocent boy experiencing mental deterioration, he is then taken to a psychiatric hospital by his assailants. In fear and regret for Bola's situation, Bode's wife says thus:

... They had beaten him all night, shouting questions at his bewildered whimpering face. Finally, they realised that something was wrong with him. Disgusted, they dumped him at the psychiatric hospital... (62).

The preceding quote is a clear case of military brutality. At little or no provocation, the military inflicts physical injury and subjects the masses to all forms of inhumane treatment.



These have led to the individuals being traumatised. These beastly acts are carried out against the masses at all times and places. One of such acts is further perpetrated in Atta's *Everything Good Will Come* as depicted below:

... Soldiers drove past sounding a siren. The soldiers jeered and lashed at cars with horsewhips. A driver pulled over too late. Half the soldiers jumped down from the truck and dragged him out of his car. They started slapping him. The driver's hands went up to plead for mercy. They flogged him with horsewhips and left him there whimpering by the door of his car... (69).

The picture above shows the extent to which the masses have been cowed, and the fears suffused in them by the military. The blaring of their sirens and flaunting of their whips are used in instilling fears in the masses as they drive through the roads. As they approach, they spare no one who mistakenly obstructs the way. The citizens are at their mercy as they would stop at nothing to unleash terror on them. A road user becomes unlucky to encounter them and he receives a terrible beating from the military men for which no one dares to rescue him. The scene of the military torture is so agonising that Enitan's mum cries out saying: "They are going to kill him" Enitan who also watches helplessly could not help but draws the conclusion that the world we live in is extremely a terrible place.

Assault and repressive acts perpetuated by the military against dissidents and even the innocents are equally represented by Habila's characters in *Waiting for an Angel*, as the inhabitants of Morgan Street, worn out from their depressed and hardship situation, carry out a peaceful demonstration, led by Joshua, to the Local Government Secretariat. The reaction from those in authority is brutality and assault of the protesters. They are sprayed with tear gas by the police and Hagar, the prostitute, a friend to Joshua, dies from the violent act (134-135).

The state of poverty depicted in Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, resonates in Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, as Enitan reveals to the reader concerning a woman who has a ware containing a few sugar cane. Yet, her ware had kept her there for hours. The protagonist is pained by the reality of poverty, hunger, and trauma suffered by the masses in the country as she expresses her worries thus:

... The woman had been there from the morning, and would probably be there all day. Her ware couldn't be worth more than twenty Naira. The cheap pen in my hand was worth more. "People are hungry," ... "People are starving out there!" ... "Hunger in my country always looked like a child with a swollen belly and I strongly believed that no one, except those who were hungry, should speak of it. The rest of us, unless we were prepared to give up half our food, were only entitled to shut up ... (299).

Millions of Nigerians are living below the poverty level, yet the government has become persistently negligent about it. This unfortunate situation has continued to make the citizens of the country groan in pain.

The Niger Delta predicament is the most disturbing of all the crises, as the activities of the oil exploration lead to oil spillage, causing the destruction of plants and animals as well as aquatic life in the environment. The environment has been terribly impoverished and it has caused untold poverty and trauma for the people of the area. The people's source of livelihood has been deliberately tampered with, and yet the federal government and oil exploration companies are negligent about this catastrophe. In Agary's *Yellow-Yellow*, Zilayefa tells us that:

... One of the crude oil pipes that ran through my village broke and spilt over several hectares of land, my mother's farm included ... The community took the matter up with the oil company that owned the pipes, but they said they suspected sabotage by the youths and were not going to pay compensation for all the destruction that the burst pipes had caused. And so it was that, in a single day, my mother lost her main source of sustenance. The day my mother's farmland was overrun by crude oil was the day her dream for me started to wither ... (3-10).

The above reveals that Zilayefa's mother's loss of farmland caused by the government and the oil exploration company has consequently resulted in traumatising the protagonist's mother. This is evident when the protagonist tells the reader this: "And so it was that, in a single day, my mother had lost her main source of sustenance" (4). She says further: "but when she was upset, she got very quiet" (3). For anyone who is struggling to make both ends meet, the loss of a main source of survival is enough to traumatise one. We see how when she got back home from the farm, she knocked on the door and told Zilayefa calmly to bring her bathing soap and sponge. When she was asked what happened, she ignored the question and asks further for her towel and walked towards the river with an oil spill all over her.

The majority of the parents in the Niger Delta area have been rendered incapacitated in dispensing their duties to their wards. They are unable to fend for their families, as a result of the destruction done to their main source of sustenance by the oil exploration companies. This has caused so much poverty which has led to their girls getting involved in prostitution with the foreigners for survival as revealed by the protagonist:

I had to come up with something to do to stay alive. I started to consider options that had never crossed my mind before, and from what I knew ... I could find my way to a place like Bonny, the base of expatriates working

for the oil companies, and sell my body to a whitey. Some girls from my town did that to send money home to their families (35).

Zilayefa's mother denies herself all social activities to be able to raise money for Zilayefa's education since she wants her daughter to be better than herself. But the activities of the multinational companies and the capitalists amount to the total annihilation of the host community of the Niger Delta. Hence Zilayefa's mother, as well as the parents in this environment could not provide for their wards. This has led to frustration, hunger, lack, suffering, prostitution, and more.

In Atta's *Everything Good Will Come*, Enitan's friend, Sheri, is violated sexually by a group of boys. Enitan intervenes to save her from further harm. Enitan says:

The boy in the cap saw me first. He let go of Sheri's arms and she pushed the portly boy. He fell backwards out of the Van. Sheri screamed ... She ran towards me, clutching her top to her chest ... The portly boy fumbled with his trousers." ... I dressed her, and saw the red bruises and scratches on her skin, ... There was blood on her pubic hairs, thick spit running down her legs. We began to walk home ... (62-63).

In the above scenario, Atta vividly portrays the scene of a rape in which the victim is traumatised, dehumanised and stripped of self-esteem and dignity. Enitan who is a friend to Sheri witnesses the beastly act carried out on her friend and finds it difficult to stand the shame she says "I wondered if the ground was firm enough to support us, or if our journey would last and never end" (63). It is not only Sheri that is traumatised, Enitan is as traumatised as her friend as she reveals:

... I had to teach myself how to breathe again. Breathing out wasn't the problem, breathing in was. If I didn't prompt myself,

I simply forgot ... I realised I hadn't felt hungry in days. I didn't even feel thirsty (64).

The trauma is quite unmanageable that Enitan began to have nightmares. Her body rejects food and she becomes extremely depressed. Sheri, the direct victim of the rape, goes into a state of crisis as she would eat excessively on impulse and suddenly starts throwing up all she had forced into her stomach. It did not take long for Sheri to realise that she got pregnant from the rape, and she makes every effort to terminate herself. Enitan's mother tells her: "Your friend is pregnant and she nearly killed herself..." (67).

Sexual violence and prostitution have a profound impact on the physical and mental health of victims, causing serious damage. The social well-being of the victims or individuals will also be affected, and they may be stigmatised and ostracised. This inglorious act cannot be forestalled as the leaders who are supposed to ensure a safe and secured society, are themselves the perpetrators.

The pains, anxiety, suffering, and hopelessness caused by bad leadership in Nigerian society have also led to the proliferation of many fake pastors and prophets. To survive and make money from innocent church members, who themselves are traumatised, as they seek spiritual solutions to their problems, the fake pastors and prophets subject them to all manner of fears and anxiety through lies and deception in their prophecies. For instance, Sefi Atta's *Everything Good will Come*, depicts the trauma experienced by the protagonist as the mother's prophet prophesied that she would soon die just like the late brother. This is seen below:

I was too young, he said my time would soon come ... The rest of the day I walked around with the dignity of the aged and troubled, held my stomach in until I developed cramps. Death would hurt, I knew and I did not want to see my brother like that, as a ghost. My father only had to ask how I was feeling when I collapsed before him. "I am going to die," I said (11).

The above scenario shows the level of deception and the trauma some prophets make their members suffer. It is a clear instance of the clever use of religion for exploitation and subjugation, where the individual's rationalism is replaced with the pretence to solve their perceived problems, or worse still, death or fear of hell, rather than the love of God. It portrays involuntary, as well as coerced submissions to evil and hypocritical leadership. It does not matter the level of pain, torture and deception the victims are made to encounter, they keep going back to the prophets to receive more torture as if under some form of hypnosis. They make the members believe that being happy is sinful. To be holy, you have to be sad and wear that appearance and then, become strict daily. At this level, holiness is sure maintained. Everyone therefore carries or wears a perpetually sad and strict countenance to convince other members as well as the prophet of their observance of a holy and pious life. However, in the practical sense of it, this piety does not extend beyond facial and outward expression. Deep down, some of these persons are merely suffering from extreme trauma, putting up an act of deception to mislead the public. This is revealed by Enitan in the text when she says:

Holy people had to be unhappy or strict, or a mixture of both. My mother and her church friends, their Priest with his expression as if he was sniffing something bad. There wasn't a choir mistress I'd seen with a friendly face,

and even in our old Anglican church, people had generally looked miserable as they prayed. I'd come to terms with these people as I'd come to terms with my natural sinfulness (19).

The above scenario is seen, as represented by the religious characters in the text. Some Christians exhibit such an attitude to show the world the level of their piety. This is how far they have gone to deceive the public.

### **Conclusion**

Adopting the psychological theories, this paper has shown the various traumatic experiences reflected in the selected novels. The characters in the novels manifest the shades of trauma which ranges from psychological, emotional, physical, and mental, to religion. These traumatic experiences are induced by the present crop of political leadership in the country. This study has also shown that military terror and repression, political instability, misrule, betrayal, poverty and more have continued to be the problems that have overwhelmed the African nations especially Nigeria, and thus partly responsible for the traumatic experiences as seen in the characters in the selected novels. This research, therefore, maintains that Nigerian leaders should exercise their authority with civility and protect the citizens they are ruling to ensure a better society economically, socially, and politically.

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