

Traumatic Events and Experiences of Female Victims in Sexual Violence and Abduction Narratives by Selected Contemporary Nigerian Writers: A Comparative Study

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Abstract

This study is a comparative evaluation of the traumatic events and experiences of female victims in sexual violence and abduction narratives by selected contemporary Nigerian Writers. It focuses on elucidating the creative techniques used by the authors to present incidents of sexual violence and abduction in selected Nigerian narratives. This study adopts Psychoanalytic theory and Social Learning Theory to examine the psychological effects of trauma of sexual violence and abduction of female victims as represented in Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuoha's *The Son of the House*; Peniel Okwuchukwu's *Whispered Screams*, Helon Habila's *Chibok Girls*, and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. The texts were purposively selected due to their thematic affinity to the study and the fact that they are contemporary texts. The findings reveal that the novels portray trauma as an ongoing struggle, demonstrating how victims face not only psychological torture but also societal stigmatisation, cultural alienation and institutional neglect. The study concludes that the psychological distress that follows sexual distress manifests in different ways including dissociation, post-traumatic stress and emotional withdrawal. It recommends that literature should play a critical role in documenting, interrogating and performing the role of educating people about the realities of these dangerous societal trends to ensure meaningful change.

Keywords: Gender studies, Trauma studies, Abduction narratives, Rape victims, Psychological theory, Social learning theory, Sexual violence.

Introduction

Females are subjected to inhuman gender subordination, which causes a majority of women to suffer life-altering traumas. Trauma can be viewed broadly to mean both physical and psychological damage to a human entity. Its treatment is broad because trauma means different things to different people, and people experience different types of traumas under diverse circumstances and situations. These circumstances include situations of sexual violence, particularly rape, and abduction or kidnapping, which have remained underexplored in literary criticism and scholarship. Therefore, this study adopts a qualitative textual approach to analyse four literary texts that were

purposively selected due to their relevance to the thematic affinity of trauma. The selected texts are Helon Habila's *Chibok Girls*, Peniel Okwuchukwu's *Whispered Scream*, Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia's *The Son of the House*, Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets*. The study adopts Psychoanalytic theory and Social Learning theory as frameworks to examine the psychological effects of trauma on female victims of sexual violence, particularly rape and abduction in the selected contemporary Nigerian fiction. The plots of sexual violence, including rape, and abduction narratives abound in global literary writings. Literary writers such as Onyemelukwe-Onuoha, Oluchukwu, Habila and Adimora-Ezeigbo have creatively captured the broad spectrum of their literary genres with a special focus on trauma, particularly among females domiciled in the environment where abuse is found.

However, there has been a gross under-representation in literary scholarship or available academic literature on the significant contributions of contemporary Nigerian literary writers, male or female, on the subject matter. Traumatic events and experiences of female victims of rape and abductions are diverse and their impact on victims can never be overemphasized. Scholars have focused on themes of violence and rape in the narratives of female writers in existing studies; however, the present study considers traumatic events of rape and abduction in fictions of both male and female Nigerian authors. Thus, while some studies have explored these issues as represented in the literary works by female African critics (Adam, 2021; Baw, 2021; Olaore & Agwu, 2021), this study contributes significantly to the existing literature on trauma studies, gender studies, comparative literature, and multidisciplinary scholarship as it critically evaluates the subject matter, especially as recounted in the novels of both male or female Nigerian authors in contemporary times. Therefore, this study undergoes a comparative analysis and explication of the various traumatic events and experiences of female victims through the lenses of the authors to enhance a more vivid comprehension of the narratives.

The Concept of Trauma and Traumatic Events

Trauma can be viewed broadly to mean both physical and psychological damage to the human entity. However, it is critical to distinguish between trauma and traumatic experiences for this study. Trauma, according to Corsini (2002), is the outcome of a painful occurrence, whereas the 'traumatic event or experience' is the injurious event itself. It includes the result of a painful occurrence, physical or emotional, inflicting instant injury to the body or shock to the psyche. Psychological trauma, on the other hand, involves emotional shocks that have a long-term impact on a person's personality, such as rejection, divorce, combat, civilian disasters, and racial or religious persecution. A traumatic or upsetting physical or psychological harm could be the root of an emotional or mental problem. Sutton (2002) outlines how sensory overload following a stressful event can cause long-term damage to brain systems,

while Struwig (2008) believes that when defining trauma, the incident and symptoms cannot be separated. Different components of the event, culture, resilience, social support, and trauma-related symptoms should all be evaluated simultaneously, according to her.

Depending on the context, the term 'trauma' can signify a variety of things. Although trauma technically refers to an experience or event, individuals often use the term to refer to either a traumatic experience or incident, following an injury or stress situation, or its longer-term effects and consequences on health (Briere & Scott, 2006). Trauma is defined by behavioural health professionals as "an event or series of events, or set of circumstances that are perceived as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening by an individual and has long-term negative effects on the individual's functioning in terms of mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (National Analytic Center-Statistical Support Services, 2012 p.7). From the foregoing, Nigerian women are not immune to the occurrence of traumatic events and they should get the benefit of representations in texts.

Treatment of Trauma in Literature

Tade and Udechukwu (2020) found that while offender and victim characterisation offer clues to devising preventive strategies and victim therapy, existing studies in Nigeria have yet to capture this empirically. Using two national dailies, about 331 rape cases were analyzed. The rapists were found to be of the age group 18-55 years. The victims' age was reported to be between 1 and 20 years. Rape victims were mostly females (90%) compared to males. Most of the rapists were labeled as familiar foes meaning: fathers, uncles, brothers, cousins, relatives, or neighbors. Third-party guardianship is also mentioned as predatory. Another study by Nabutanyi (2013) explores representations of troubled childhoods in post-1990 African narratives. The study delineates three attributes of the selected texts that explain why such fiction is considered significant from both social and aesthetic perspectives. The study focuses centrally on how the units of narration construct persuasive 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.

Tembo (2017) explores the portrayal of civil war in East African fictional and autobiographical works and examines the various and distinct ways in which East African writers use literature and art to translate and transmit the physical, vicarious and psychological trauma resulting from intra-state conflicts in Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The study finds that in many ways, literature and art may be positioned in a discursive space between instruction and enlisting the larger public in the project of redressing harm. The study proposes that literature and art are good forums for campaigns against human rights violations.

Jena & Samantray (2021) examine narrative strategies, like the use of trans-generational empathy, intermediate intervention of text and image, syntax disruption, ellipses, text/image layout, repetitions, symbols, photograph insertion and assimilation, inter-texts, framing of panels, inter-textuality, repetition, fragmentation, and flashback that are employed to deal with the challenges for the representation of traumatic experiences in narratives. The paper argues that the narrative features and techniques embedded in the narratives are utilised for the representation and understanding of diverse traumatic experiences. The narrative components like plot (event), character and theme are analysed to discuss the psychological trauma of different characters. The entire technique used helps to represent the psychological trauma of the characters in the narratives.

Treatment of Trauma in Nigerian Literature

Treatment of trauma differs as people experience different types of traumas under diverse circumstances and situations. Examples of different traumas include psychological and emotional trauma, physical trauma, religious trauma, and mental trauma. The various traumas suffered and experienced by Nigerian citizens are a result of the negative roles played by their indigenous leaders as represented 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, socioeconomic 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 post-colonial 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.

Kaine Agary's *Yellow-Yellow* (2006) presents a present-day Niger Delta region of Nigeria that contains a mass of land that brings oil wealth to the surface. 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 aborigines. The foregoing has led to violent protests by the local community against their oppressors. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half Of A Yellow Sun* (2006) is a narrative work that captures the reality of trauma both at the psychological and physical levels in the lives of the Igbo ethnic nation during the Nigerian civil conflict. It is this traumatic encounter with history that constitutes the Igbo nation's experience in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Sigmund Freud's Psychoanalytic Theory and Bandura's Social Learning Theory. These theories offer insight into human emotion and psyche

and how the social learning environment contributes to what affects humans living within the experience. Sigmund Freud, in his work, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1901), suggests a three-part, rather than a two-part, model of the psyche, dividing it into the ego, the super-ego, and the id, these three 'levels' of the personality roughly corresponding to, respectively, the consciousness, the conscience, and the unconscious. In essence, this model of the psyche helps to reveal the unconscious mind of the characters and understand the characters' psychological problems, particularly the challenges of trauma. Freud proposes that literature and other arts, like dreams and neurotic symptoms, consist of the imagined, or fantasised, fulfilment of wishes that are either denied by reality or prohibited by social standards of morality and propriety. Psychoanalytic theory is used for this study because it provides appropriate tools of analysis for human behaviours such as anger, desires, urges, jealousy, frustration, domination, et cetera which are usually the twists in most plots of African novels.

Meanwhile, the need for positive social change away from social vices like rape, abduction, and terrorism makes the Bandura theory of social change an important one. Since the focus of the research is on sexual violence with a focus on rape, which is a social problem, one of the study's theoretical underpinnings is Bandura's social learning theory (McQuail, 2005). Positive and negative rewards can have a significant impact on the learner, according to the social learning theory. Applauding/punishing a role model for engaging in socially desirable/undesirable behaviours can drive audience members to engage or disengage in similar behaviours. It can also give a vicarious experience for the observer, encouraging or discouraging him or her from engaging in the same behaviour. As a result of imitating a model, it is possible to learn new behaviours as well as reinforce or decrease existing ones. People follow or read about many of these models because they want to be seen, heard, or rated like them. On the other hand, Ellis (1999) believes that communication (writing) should be constructive to effect change.

This study, therefore, examines and discusses traumatic experiences resulting from events of rape and abduction in the selected texts. This study provides an in-depth comparative analysis of the chosen variables in the selected primary data, and consequently, becomes a significant contribution to existing literature in trauma studies, gender studies and the field of comparative literature.

Comparative Analysis of Traumatic Events and Experiences of Female Sexual Violence Victims in the Selected Narratives

In examining the portrayal of traumatic experiences across the selected texts – *The Son of the House* by Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuoha, *Whispered Screams* by Peniel Okwuchukwu, *Chibok Girls* by Helon Habila, and *Roses and Bullets* by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo – several similarities and differences emerge in how each author

approaches the subject matter. The four texts delve deeply into the psychological impact of trauma on their characters. Nwabulu's feelings of abandonment in *The Son of the House*, Julie's nightmares in *Whispered Screams*, the pervasive fear experienced by the *Chibok girls* in *Chibok Girls*, or Ginika's sense of dread in *Roses and Bullets*, the authors meticulously portray the internal struggles faced by their characters in the aftermath of traumatic events.

In *The Son of the House*, Nwabulu grapples with deep-seated feelings of abandonment stemming from her experiences as an orphan and a housemaid. The trauma of her past leaves her with a pervasive sense of worthlessness and self-doubt, which she carries with her into adulthood. Onyemelukwe-Onuoha meticulously portrays Nwabulu's internal struggles, illustrating how her traumatic experiences shape her identity and outlook on life. Nwabulu's journey is marked by a constant search for acceptance and belonging, as she navigates the complexities of her past while striving to forge a better future for herself.

In *Whispered Screams*, Julie is haunted by recurrent nightmares stemming from her traumatic experiences. Her abduction leaves her with deep emotional scars, manifesting in intense anxiety and hyper-vigilance. Okwuchukwu skillfully portrays Julie's internal struggles, depicting the visceral nature of her nightmares and the profound impact they have on her daily life. Julie's journey is marked by a constant battle to reclaim her sense of safety and control, as she grapples with the lingering effects of her trauma. In *Chibok Girls*, the abducted schoolgirls from Chibok experience a pervasive sense of fear in the aftermath of their kidnapping by Boko Haram. The trauma of their abduction leaves them with deep psychological wounds, manifesting in intense anxiety and distrust of others. Habila meticulously portrays the internal struggles faced by the girls, illustrating how their traumatic experiences shape their worldview and sense of self. The pervasive fear experienced by the Chibok girls permeates every aspect of their lives, as they grapple with the uncertainty of their fate and the lingering threat of violence.

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika experiences a profound sense of dread stemming from her traumatic experiences during the Nigerian Civil War. The trauma of rape and the constant threat of violence leave her with deep emotional scars, manifesting in intense fear and hypervigilance. Adimora-Ezeigbo vividly portrays Ginika's internal struggles, depicting the pervasive nature of her fear and the profound impact it has on her daily life. Ginika's journey is marked by a constant battle to reclaim her sense of security and autonomy, as she grapples with the lasting effects of her trauma. The exploration of psychological impact is a central similarity across all four texts.

Each author meticulously delves into the internal struggles faced by their characters in the aftermath of traumatic events, offering a rich and nuanced portrayal of the psychological toll of their experiences. Whether it is Nwabulu's feelings of abandonment, Julie's nightmares, the pervasive fear experienced by the Chibok girls,

or Ginika's sense of dread, the authors skillfully depict the complex interplay between trauma and the human psyche, shedding light on the enduring impact of traumatic events on individuals' lives.

Use of Flashback and Memory

Each author employs flashback and memory as narrative devices to highlight the enduring impact of trauma on their characters. When it comes to Julie's intrusive memories in *Whispered Screams*, the *Chibok girls'* recollections of their abduction in *Chibok Girls*, or Ginika's vivid flashbacks in *Roses and Bullets*, these techniques serve to underscore the cyclical nature of trauma and its ability to intrude upon the present. In *Whispered Screams*, Julie is haunted by intrusive memories of her traumatic experiences. These memories are vivid and visceral, thrusting her back into the horrors of her past with startling clarity.

Okwuchukwu uses flashbacks to depict the cyclical nature of trauma, illustrating how Julie's traumatic experiences continue to intrude upon her present reality. Whether triggered by sensory experiences or certain situations, these intrusive memories serve as a constant reminder of Julie's pain and suffering, highlighting the enduring impact of trauma on her psyche. In *Chibok Girls*, the abducted schoolgirls from Chibok recount their experiences through recollections and flashbacks. These memories are fragmented and disjointed, reflecting the chaotic and traumatic nature of their abduction. Habila uses flashbacks to provide insight into the girls' internal struggles and emotional trauma, illustrating how their memories continue to haunt them long after their release. Whether it is reliving moments of terror or grappling with feelings of guilt and shame, these flashbacks serve to underscore the lasting impact of trauma on the Chibok girls' lives.

In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika is plagued by vivid flashbacks of her traumatic experiences during the Nigerian Civil War. These flashbacks are triggered by sensory experiences and certain situations, bringing her past horrors to the forefront of her consciousness with startling clarity. Adimora-Ezeigbo uses flashbacks to highlight the enduring nature of trauma, illustrating how Ginika's memories continue to intrude upon her present reality. Whether it is reliving moments of violence or grappling with feelings of fear and helplessness, these flashbacks serve as a constant reminder of Ginika's pain and suffering, underscoring the cyclical nature of trauma and its ability to shape her worldview.

The use of flashbacks and memory is a powerful narrative device employed by each author to highlight the enduring impact of trauma on their characters. Whether it is Julie's intrusive memories in *Whispered Screams*, the Chibok girls' recollections in *Chibok Girls*, or Ginika's vivid flashbacks in *Roses and Bullets*, these techniques serve to underscore the cyclical nature of trauma and its ability to intrude upon the

present. By providing insight into the character's internal struggles and emotional turmoil, flashbacks and memories serve as poignant reminders of the lasting effects of trauma on individuals' lives, enriching the narrative and deepening our understanding of the human psyche.

Exploration of Coping Mechanisms

The texts also explore various coping mechanisms adopted by the characters to deal with their trauma. Whether it is Nwabulu's search for acceptance, Julie's reliance on denial, the Chibok girls' faith and family support, or Ginika's inner resilience, each character employs unique strategies to navigate their pain and find a semblance of normalcy amidst the chaos. In *The Son of the House*, Nwabulu's primary coping mechanism is her relentless search for acceptance and belonging. As an orphan and housemaid who has endured significant emotional trauma, Nwabulu seeks validation and love from those around her.

This quest for acceptance drives her actions and decisions, providing her with a sense of purpose and direction: "I yearned for a place where I belonged, where I was more than just a ghost passing through." Nwabulu's coping mechanism reflects her deep-seated need to overcome the feelings of abandonment and worthlessness that have plagued her since childhood. By striving to find acceptance, she attempts to rebuild her self-esteem and carve out a meaningful place for herself in society. In *Whispered Screams*, Julie relies on denial as a coping mechanism to deal with the trauma of her abduction. This psychological strategy helps her to temporarily distance herself from the pain and terror of her experiences.

However, this reliance on denial often proves to be a double-edged sword, as it can hinder her ability to process and heal from her trauma: "She built walls around her memories, hoping to keep the nightmares at bay, but the walls were fragile and crumbled easily." Julie's reliance on denial underscores the difficulty of confronting traumatic experiences head-on. While it provides her with a reprieve from her pain, it also prevents her from fully addressing and integrating her trauma, leading to persistent psychological struggles. In *Chibok Girls*, the abducted schoolgirls find solace in their faith and the support of their families. These coping mechanisms play a crucial role in helping them navigate the aftermath of their abduction.

The girls' faith provides them with a sense of hope and strength, while the support of their families offers a crucial emotional anchor: "I found strength in my prayers and the comforting presence of my family. They reminded me that I was more than my trauma" The reliance on faith and family support highlights the importance of social and spiritual resources in coping with trauma. These mechanisms help the Chibok girls to maintain a sense of identity and resilience, even in the face of overwhelming adversity. In *Roses and Bullets*, Ginika draws upon her inner resilience to cope with the psychological and emotional toll of the Nigerian Civil War. Despite

the severe trauma she experiences, Ginika's strength and determination enable her to endure and rebuild her life. Her resilience is reflected in her ability to find moments of hope and connection amidst the chaos: "I refused to let the darkness consume me. I held on to the small sparks of hope, knowing that they would guide me through." Ginika's inner resilience is a testament to the human capacity for survival and recovery. Her ability to draw strength from within, as well as from her interactions with fellow survivors, underscores the importance of resilience in overcoming trauma. The exploration of coping mechanisms in *The Son of the House*, *Whispered Screams*, *Chibok Girls*, and *Roses and Bullets* highlights the diverse strategies that characters employ to navigate their trauma. Whether it is Nwabulu's search for acceptance, Julie's reliance on denial, the Chibok girls' faith and family support, or Ginika's inner resilience, each coping mechanism reflects the unique circumstances and strengths of the characters. These mechanisms are crucial for their survival and recovery, offering insight into the varied ways individuals respond to and manage the enduring impact of traumatic experiences.

Differences in the Context of Trauma

While all four texts deal with themes of trauma, the specific contexts vary significantly. *The Son of the House* focuses on domestic abuse and exploitation, *Whispered Screams* explores abduction and violence, *Chibok Girls* depicts the kidnapping of school girls by Boko Haram, and *Roses and Bullets* delves into the psychological toll of war. These distinct contexts give each text a unique flavour and allow the authors to explore different facets of trauma. In *The Son of the House*, the context of trauma centres on domestic abuse and exploitation. Nwabulu's experiences as an orphan and housemaid highlight the systemic issues of domestic servitude and the psychological impact of being treated as less than human. Her trauma is rooted in the daily indignities and harsh treatment she endures, which manifest in her deep feelings of inferiority and abandonment: "I felt like a ghost in a house that never wanted me, a shadow passing through life unnoticed." Onyemelukwe-Onuoha uses this context to explore how systemic abuse within domestic settings can leave lasting emotional scars and shape an individual's sense of self-worth and identity. *Whispered Screams* explores trauma through the lens of abduction and violence.

The characters in this collection of stories face brutal kidnappings and physical assaults, which lead to severe psychological repercussions. The narrative delves into the immediate and long-term impacts of these violent encounters, emphasizing how such experiences can shatter an individual's sense of security and lead to persistent mental health issues: "She could no longer find the words to express the turmoil inside as if her soul had been silenced along with her screams." Okwuchukwu's focus on abduction and violence provides a stark look at the acute trauma and the ongoing struggle to reclaim a sense of normalcy after such harrowing

events. In *Chibok Girls*, the trauma is contextualised within the real-life kidnapping of schoolgirls by the terrorist group Boko Haram. This context introduces themes of political violence, religious extremism, and the societal impact of terrorism.

The psychological trauma of the kidnapped girls is compounded by the public nature of their abduction and the global attention it received. Habila's narrative highlights the multifaceted trauma experienced by the girls, including fear, loss of innocence, and the challenge of reintegrating into their communities: "I felt like an outsider in my own home, my memories a constant reminder of the horrors I had endured." Through this context, Habila explores the broader implications of terrorism on individual lives and communities, as well as the resilience required to overcome such profound trauma. *Roses and Bullets* situates its exploration of trauma within the Nigerian Civil War. The protagonist, Ginika, endures the horrors of war, including rape and the constant threat of violence. The context of war allows Adimora-Ezeigbo to examine the pervasive impact of conflict on mental health, the disruption of everyday life, and the struggle to maintain a sense of normalcy during chaos. Ginika's experiences reflect the widespread psychological toll of war on civilians, particularly women: "I refused to let the darkness consume me. I held on to the small sparks of hope, knowing that they would guide me through". By placing her characters during the war, Adimora-Ezeigbo provides a detailed portrayal of how large-scale conflict can create lasting emotional and psychological damage.

Characters' Perspectives

The texts vary in terms of whose perspective the trauma is explored from. In *The Son of the House* and *Roses and Bullets*, the focus is primarily on individual characters (Nwabulu and Ginika, respectively), allowing for a deep dive into their internal struggles. In contrast, *Whispered Screams* and *Chibok Girls* adopt a more expansive approach, exploring the experiences of multiple characters affected by trauma, which provides a broader perspective on the societal impact of sexual violence and abduction.

In *The Son of the House*, the narrative is centred primarily on the individual experiences of Nwabulu. This singular focus allows for an in-depth exploration of her internal struggles and the profound psychological impact of her traumatic experiences as an orphan and housemaid. By delving deeply into Nwabulu's journey, Onyemelukwe-Onuoha provides a rich, nuanced portrayal of how systemic domestic abuse and exploitation shape her sense of identity and self-worth: "I felt like a ghost in a house that never wanted me, a shadow passing through life unnoticed." This intimate focus enables readers to engage deeply with Nwabulu's emotions, thoughts, and coping mechanisms, creating a powerful, empathetic connection to her character.

Similarly, *Roses and Bullets* primarily explores trauma through the perspective of Ginika, a woman deeply affected by the Nigerian Civil War. By

concentrating on Ginika's individual experiences, Adimora-Ezeigbo can provide a detailed account of the psychological and emotional toll of war on a single character. This focus allows for a thorough examination of Ginika's internal struggles, fears, and resilience as she navigates the chaos and violence of war: "I refused to let the darkness consume me. I held on to the small sparks of hope, knowing that they would guide me through." Through Ginika's eyes, readers gain insight into the personal impact of large-scale conflict, highlighting her unique coping mechanisms and the profound effects of trauma on her mental health.

In contrast, *Whispered Screams* adopts a more expansive approach, exploring the experiences of multiple characters affected by trauma. This narrative strategy allows Okwuchukwu to present a broader perspective on the societal impact of abduction and violence. By including a range of voices and experiences, the author illustrates the diverse ways in which trauma manifests and is coped with across different individuals: "She could no longer find the words to express the turmoil inside as if her soul had been silenced along with her screams." This multi-character approach enables a more comprehensive examination of trauma, shedding light on the varied psychological responses and coping mechanisms employed by different individuals and highlighting the collective impact of violence on a community.

Chibok Girls also takes an expansive approach, focusing on the collective experiences of the schoolgirls abducted by Boko Haram. By presenting the stories of multiple girls, Habila provides a wide-ranging perspective on the trauma of abduction, its aftermath, and its impact on both individuals and their communities. This collective narrative approach emphasises the shared nature of their experiences and the common psychological and emotional challenges they face: "I felt like an outsider in my own home, my memories a constant reminder of the horrors I had endured." Habila's focus on multiple characters allows for a deeper understanding of the social and cultural ramifications of the abduction, highlighting how communal support, faith, and collective resilience play crucial roles in the recovery process.

Narrative Style

Each author employs a unique narrative style to convey the psychological and emotional impact of trauma. In the work of Onyemelukwe-Onuoha, she uses introspective prose in *The Son of the House* to delve into Nwabulu's inner world. Okwuchukwu utilises fragmented storytelling in *Whispered Screams* to capture the disjointed nature of trauma and how it causes instability in the lives of the characters. Habila employs a journalistic approach in *Chibok Girls*, incorporating elements of non-fiction to provide context and insight into the real-life abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls. Adimora-Ezeigbo adopts a more lyrical style in *Roses and Bullets*, using vivid imagery and metaphor to evoke the emotional landscape of war-torn Nigeria.

Cheluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuoha's *The Son of the House* employs an introspective prose style that delves deeply into the inner world of Nwabulu.

This narrative approach allows readers to intimately experience Nwabulu's thoughts, emotions, and psychological struggles. The introspective nature of the prose highlights Nwabulu's internal conflicts and her continuous battle with feelings of inferiority and abandonment: "I felt like a ghost in a house that never wanted me, a shadow passing through life unnoticed." Onyemelukwe-Onuoha's detailed, reflective writing style enables a profound exploration of Nwabulu's psyche, offering a sensitive portrayal of how trauma affects her sense of self and her interactions with the world around her. Peniel Okwuchukwu's *Whispered Screams* utilises a fragmented storytelling technique to capture the disjointed and chaotic nature of trauma. This narrative style mirrors the characters' shattered lives and minds, as they struggle to piece together their identities and experiences after abduction and violence.

The fragmented structure, with its abrupt shifts and disjointed sequences, effectively conveys the sense of confusion and disruption that trauma imposes: "She could no longer find the words to express the turmoil inside as if her soul had been silenced along with her screams." Okwuchukwu's use of fragmented storytelling underscores the pervasive and destabilising effects of trauma, highlighting how victims often experience their memories and emotions in a non-linear, fragmented manner. Helon Habila employs a journalistic narrative style in *Chibok Girls*, blending elements of non-fiction with literary storytelling.

This approach provides a factual and contextual framework for the real-life abduction of Nigerian schoolgirls by Boko Haram. Habila's journalistic style offers a grounded and authentic portrayal of the events, incorporating detailed interviews and personal narratives to convey the girls' experiences and the broader socio-political implications: "I felt like an outsider in my own home, my memories a constant reminder of the horrors I had endured." By using a journalistic approach, Habila not only brings attention to the factual aspects of the abduction but also deepens the emotional resonance of the girls' stories, highlighting their resilience and the community's response to such atrocities. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* is characterised by a lyrical narrative style, rich with vivid imagery and metaphor. This approach effectively evokes the emotional and psychological landscape of war-torn Nigeria, capturing the beauty and brutality of Ginika's experiences.

Adimora-Ezeigbo's lyrical prose immerses readers in the sensory and emotional depths of the narrative, allowing them to feel the intensity of Ginika's trauma and her moments of hope and resilience: "I refused to let the darkness consume me. I held on to the small sparks of hope, knowing that they would guide me through." The use of lyrical language enhances the emotional impact of the story, making the depiction of trauma both poignant and evocative, and highlighting the complex interplay of beauty and sorrow in Ginika's world.

Patterns and Unique Perspectives

Overall, the comparative analysis reveals several patterns and unique perspectives on how trauma is portrayed across the selected texts. Each of the authors approaches the subject matter differently; however, some common themes like resilience, coping, and the destructive impact of trauma run through the novels. By exploring trauma from various angles and contexts, the authors reveal a comprehensive understanding of its psychological and emotional burden on women in Nigerian fiction. It also sheds light on the human capacity for survival and resilience in the face of adversity that affects the human mind.

Conclusion

The exploration of sexual violence, especially rape, and abduction narratives in *The Son of the House* by Chieluchi Onyemelukwe-Onuobia, *Roses and Bullets* by Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, *Chibok Girls* by Helon Habila and *Whispering Scream* by Peniel Oluchukwu reveal critical insights into the representation of trauma in African literature. These texts show the profound psychological, social and political consequences of trauma. These narratives not only shed light on the experiences of victims but also interrogate the structural conditions that perpetuate gender-based violence. From the prism of trauma, these novels demonstrate how rape and abduction are not isolated incidences but part of a larger system of oppression that is reinforced by war, terrorism patriarchy and institutional failure. A common thread in these works is the representation of trauma as an ongoing, lived experience rather than a singular event. The psychological distress that follows sexual distress manifests in different ways, including dissociation, post-traumatic stress and emotional withdrawal. The victims in these narratives struggle with memories that refuse to fade, reinforcing the idea that trauma is not easily erased by time. This is particularly evident in *Chibok Girls* where the kidnapped girls' experiences extend beyond the moment of abduction into a prolonged existence of fear and captivity. Similarly, in *Roses and Bullets*, the horrors of wars intensify the vulnerability of women, making sexual violence a recurring pattern in times of conflict.

The role of patriarchal structures in sustaining gendered violence is another significant issue in these imaginative narratives. Women and girls are often subjected to societal norms that silence their pain and shift blame onto them rather than onto their perpetrators. In *The Son of The House*, for instance, the treatment of women within domestic and societal spaces reveals the deeply ingrained expectations that compel victims to endure suffering rather than seek justice. *Whispering Scream* further explores how victims are often left to navigate their trauma alone, with little support from the institution meant to protect them. These works highlight the complicity of cultural traditions in maintaining an environment where abduction and rape continue to occur with impunity.

These narratives depict the overwhelming sufferings of victims, and also glimpses of resistance. The ability of some characters to rebuild their lives, find solidarity with others or use their experiences to advocate for change suggests that survival is possible even in the face of extreme trauma. Nevertheless, the complexity of their struggle highlights the need for structural change rather than individual perseverance. The portrayal of survival in these texts serves as a reminder that healing requires societal transformation, including legal reforms, shifts in cultural attitudes and stronger institutional support for victims. Ultimately, these novels provide a critical examination of rape and abduction within the broader discourse of trauma in African literature. By exposing the realities of gender-based violence, they challenge the readers to confront uncomfortable truths about societies that enabled such atrocities. They call for a rethinking of justice, not just as legal accountability but as a societal commitment to breaking the cycle of violence and ensuring that victims are heard, protected and supported. Creative writers, through their compelling narratives, reaffirm the importance of literature in amplifying the voices of the marginalised and advocating for a more just and compassionate world.

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