

## War, Trauma and Liminality of Healing in Uzodinma Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*

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### Abstract

Sustaining wars through the agency of child's conscription over the centuries has been a regular but abhorrent phenomenon. However, what has been disturbing is the apparent violation of the child's right by forcefully engaging him or her to fill up the desired manpower needed in war situations. If the experiences of those who volunteered and participated in wars, especially adults, could be brazenly devastating then the fate of those who were conscripted as children would be nothing short of traumatizing. In *Beasts of No Nation* (2005), Uzodinma Iweala, drawing from the experiences of a conscripted child soldier, not only exposes the psychological, physical, and liminal disenchantment the child faced but also, the impossibility of healing that characterized his post-war life. The idea of traumatized child's psychology has dominated the critical attention given to the novel so far. However, in seeking to extend this notion, this paper examines the traumatic dispositions of the child soldier as a double wound, emphasizing his liminal condition, which the critics of the novel have paid little attention to. Therefore, contemplating on Kali Tal's notion of liminality through which this paper is analyzed, the article concludes that the impossibility to attain healing after a traumatic encounter pitches one against his world manifesting as double tragedy.

**Keywords:** War, trauma, liminality, Uzodinma Iweala

### Introduction

Though trained as a medical doctor, it is Uzodinma Iweala's interest in literature that has brought him to global limelight, particularly, with his first novel, *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) which fetched him several awards. In 2007, he was listed among the *Granta* magazine's 20 best young American novelists. Undoubtedly, his passion for creative writing has birthed *Our Kind of People* (2012) and *Speak No Evil* (2018). Given the success that trailed the novel, the *Beasts of No Nation* was adapted into a movie in 2015. With his knowledge in medicine and interest in fiction, Iweala's works have been imbued with some traumatic conditions that delineate the severity of human tragedy. However, *Beasts of no Nation* (2005), Iweala's first novel will be the preoccupation of this article. War has been identified, over the centuries, as one of the avenues through which human tragedies are multiplied in mass regardless of gender, class, and age. In literary discourses, the subject of war has been given diverse interpretations from its socio-political, religious, cultural, philosophical, legal and medical viewpoints in order to comprehend, among other things, the futility and perils of wars. To Vickroy (2002:1), writing on the commitment of fiction writers about the effects of war, asserts that:

Their works reflect a growing awareness of the effects of catastrophe and oppression on the individual psyche, a perspective that emerged with examinations of the psychological consequences of wars, the Holocaust, poverty, colonization, and domestic abuse.[...] trauma narratives- fictional narratives that help readers to access traumatic experience – have taken an important place among diverse artistic, scholarly, and testimonial representations in illuminating the personal and public aspects of trauma and in elucidating our relationship to memory and forgetting within the complex interweaving of social and psychological relationships.

Iweala, certainly, finds himself as one of the fiction writers whose work has contributed considerably to the recurrent subject of war particularly the theme of child soldiering. Notably, prior to the publication of *Beasts of No Nation* in 2005, most literary works available on the Nigeria/Biafra war dwell on the nationalist considerations and the heroic deeds of some individuals from both the Nigerian and Biafran sides. Some, however, identify the obnoxious plight of the female folk vis-à-vis their various contributions during the war. Unfortunately, the predicament of children especially those

conscripted during the war has not received much attention. Apparently, this informed the ovation that met the novel on its appearance on the literary scene because, its thematic preoccupation captures the helplessness as well as the traumatic incarceration ordinary children were subjected to during the war.

What the novel seems to underscore is that, if adults could be traumatized so terribly during and after wars, what becomes the fate of children who were conscripted into war? In his assessment of the novel, Tiefenbrun (2006:61-62) considers the novel from the themes of slavery and human trafficking. To her, "Iweala's novel is a realistic slice of life that portrays in vivid pictures the human rights principles and laws relating to child enslavement by abduction, forced enlistment, and trafficking. Tiefenbrun merely pinpoints the issues of "forced enlistment and trafficking" without addressing the traumatic tempers that destroyed the development of the protagonist. Once more, Asaah (2017:23) studies the linguistic aspect of the novel. He underscores his point while comparing the language use with that of *Sazoboy* by Saro-Wiwa. "Iweala deviates from Saro-Wiwa by predominantly eschewing outright Pidgin English, preferring to Anglicize all of Agu's narration into a poetic and easily comprehensible pseudo-English language. Despite this, his ultimate goal seems to be the same as Saro-Wiwa's: to satirize child soldiering by giving his readers an unvarnished firsthand experience of the shocking life of a child soldier. Asaah merely identifies the linguistic import of the novel without delving into the traumatic depth of the main character. However, the psychological disposition of the victims (children) is quite devastating given the fact that they are still in their formative years. They are yet to understand themselves and the world around them before being thrown into wars that thoroughly disconcert them afterwards. Surely, their condition becomes a double tragedy. The foregoing thoughts, therefore, form the basis of my analysis in Iweala's conception of trauma and its liminal effects on the protagonist's psychology.

### **War, Trauma, and Liminality of Healing**

Trauma narrative basically locates the inherent vulnerabilities of the human condition. It reveals the natural response to an unexpected confrontation in the convolutedness of human existence. And, as a result undermines the integrity of the mind in its contact with diverse human experiences. The study of trauma, which dates back to the early twentieth century when Sigmund Freud developed his own aspect of psychoanalysis, forms groundwork for our interrogation of the psychological displacement that envelops a traumatized victim. In his seminal work, where the meaning of the term "trauma" was changed from indicating "physical injury" to psychological injury, Freud (2010:12) observes in the case of the war neuroses, the fact that the same symptoms sometimes came about without the intervention of any gross mechanical violence, seemed at once enlightening and bewildering. Ostensibly, the victim is unable to control the reenactment of these traumatic actions. Thus, trauma is both an immediate experience of the wounding, and the belated effects of that wound in form of dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks, repeated actions which are the hallmark of trauma theory. He further emphasizes that the occurrence of wound mainly does not provoke a lasting impression initially on the individual but a subsequent wounding that informs an abiding pain which usually manifest through a voice – a voice that is out to tell the truth. (Freud, 2010: 31-32).

Freudian philosophical study of the cause of neurosis in hysterical women which led to the comparison between mental illness and trauma influenced other trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth, Kali Tal, Maria Root, Doninick LaCapra, Dori Laub and Shoshan Felman among others. In her own appropriation of the theory, Caruth (1996) notes that:

Trauma seems to be much more than pathology, or the simple illness of a wounded psyche: it is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us reality or a truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language. (p.4)

Trauma manifests belatedly and locates itself in the mind. The abiding reoccurrence of the mind as the unfortunate site of these wounds underline the complexity associated with the subject of trauma. Furthermore, if Freud and Caruth lay emphasis on the belatedness that characterizes traumatic manifestation, Kali Tal, on her own examination of war veterans, stresses the liminality of traumatic

condition. To her (Tal, 1996: 15) “Trauma is enacted in a liminal state, outside the bounds of ‘normal’ human experience, and the subject is radically ungrouped. Accurate representation of trauma can never be achieved without recreating the event since, by its very definition trauma lies beyond the bounds of ‘normal’ conception”. This condition underscores that traumatic experiences linger unsettled. The victims continue to see themselves re-experiencing the excruciating events which have interrupted their ‘normal’ lives and find it difficult to return to their pre- liminal state.

In her study, Tal compares war veterans post war life to a three-fold structure, which is “separation, transition, and incorporation” earlier advanced by Arnold Van Gennep (1908). Van Gennep employs the term “liminal (or threshold) to illustrate the transition phase of ritual character, that is to highlight the in-between status of the ritual subject during the transition period. To Tal, war veterans (survivors) could be described as seen as individuals going through a rite of passage which normally is divided into pre-liminal, liminal and post liminal stages. The individuals have undertaken the first phase by going from their normal lives into the traumatic experience, but are not able to complete the cycle of moving from the liminal traumatic experience back to their normal lives. It is, however, within this theoretical framework that this paper centers its idea of war, trauma and liminality in *Beasts of No Nation* which does not only reinforce the severity of child soldiering but also identifies the uncanny human tragedy rooted in war situations.

Delving into the posttraumatic incidents as well as the liminal condition in the novel, the experiences of Agu is aptly highlighted. Agu’s liminality begins when he is caught by Strika, a fellow child soldier and, is subsequently conscripted by the Commandant. Having left his “normal” environment when his father told him to run away so that he would not be killed, he runs and hides in a shack where he is caught. This separation from his father and by extension his society begins his traumatic journey into the war.

I am looking at him. He is looking at me. He is not surprising at all to be seeing me even if I am surprising for him, but his face is falling and becoming more dark. He is sniffing like dog and stepping to me. KPAWA! He is hitting me. (p.2).

Agu’s encounter with the rebel soldiers reveals the helplessness and terror that characterize victims especially children who are yet to understand the implication of war. This sordid incident is contrary to the life Agu is used to before the war. Having separated from his environment and met the rebel soldiers, he is eventually conscripted as a soldier. To Agu, the effortlessness of becoming a soldier ridicules his conception of army conscription. However, when he desires to know what supposes to be his role, he is told to wait until the opportunity comes. Commandant metaphorically tells him “...it is like falling in love” (p.12). Innocently, he believes him and further asks:

... What else can I be doing?

They are all saying, stop worrying. Stop worrying. Soon it will be your own turn and then you will know what it is feeling like to be killing somebody. Then they are laughing at me and spitting on the ground near my feet.(p.12)

Being a child, the above revelation does not mean much to him until he carries out his first murderous assignment. That becomes the climax of his learning as a soldier. “Commandant is stepping to me and grabbing my neck. You idiot, he is shouting. Come here... He is dragging me to the enemy soldier. Do you see this dog! He is shouting. You want to be a soldier eh? kill him. KILL HIM NOW!” (P.18) The act of killing someone does not conform to Agu’s conception of being a soldier. Quoting Peter Bourne, Tal (1996) reveals that “The early weeks of training are characterized by physical and verbal abuse, humiliation, and a constant discounting and discrediting of everything in which the recruit believes and everything which serves to characterize him as an individual.” (p.128) His troubled psyche before and after the horrid murder betrays his conscience. The gruesome event is graphically detailed:

Then I am hitting his shoulder and then his chest and looking at how commandant is smiling each time my knife is hitting the man... It is like the

world is moving so slowly and I am seeing each drop of blood and each drop of sweat flying here and there... (p.21)

This singular act throws Agu into a state of repulsion typified by vomiting and shock. He reveals: "I am vomiting everywhere. I cannot be stopping myself... I am feeling hammer knocking in my head and chest. My nose and mouth is itching. I am seeing all of the color everywhere and belly is feeling empty. I am growing hard between my leg. Is this like falling in love?" (pp.21-22) To Udumukwu (2006), "he experiences heightened physiological arousal after the heinous act."(p.315)

After this traumatic encounter, Agu never returns to his innocent and "normal" self again. He becomes a transformed person, a liminal character unable to let go his past. His conscience becomes terribly troubled. He hopelessly tries to placate his battered psyche by rationalizing that he is soldier and soldiers are meant to kill. He argues within himself:

I am not bad boy. I am not bad boy. I am a soldier and soldier is not bad if he is killing. I am telling this to myself because soldier is supposed to be killing, killing, killing. So if I am killing, then I am only doing what is right. (p.23)

Unfortunately for Agu, a battered psyche cannot be healed by logical reasoning per se. It is beyond logic. It is a wound of the mind that does not easily go away until appropriate therapy is applied. He further reveals the futility of his rationalization: "But it is never working because I am always feeling like a bad boy? Me, bad boy-somebody who is having life like I am having and fearing God the whole time". (p.24) Agu's feeling of guilt is in consonance with what Krystal (1995) calls "... problems of (survivor) guilt feelings... as 'intractable to psychotherapy'". Considering his plight as a child soldier who has been enmeshed in the gory theater of war, Agu cherishes the companionship he has come to enjoy with his fellow child soldier, Strika. But, in spite of Agu's interrogation on many occasions, Strika cannot be engaged in a verbal communication. Initially, he is bewildered but later on he discovers that his friend is suffering from withdrawal syndrome as a result of the trauma he has witnessed watching his parents being killed. Agu reveals his observation thus:

I am finding him sitting under the tree far away from the other men, holding stick and scratching picture into the dry ground. Over and over again he is drawing the same picture of man and woman with no head because their head is rolling away on the ground. Strika, I am calling to him, and he is looking up at me. No noise from him. he is not saying anything, I am telling myself. Since I am becoming a soldier, I am never hearing the sound of his voice, but now, I am knowing what is his problem (p.36)

Strika's withdrawal from his comrades shows how trauma can realign someone's psychological temperament. A young boy witnessing the murder of his parents in a most horrendous manner could be disconcerting and heart-breaking. And this will always haunt his memory. He stays "far away from other men" and also engages in a repetitive action by drawing the same picture of a headless man and woman "over and over again". According to Erikson (1995) survivors of trauma "suffered deep shock as a result of their exposure to death and devastation, and, as so often happens in catastrophes of their magnitude, they withdrew into themselves, feeling numbed, afraid, vulnerable, and very alone".(p.187) These are features of a traumatized mind. Similarly, Krystal (1995) describes this as "survivors living in 'withdrawn depression'" (p.77) Drawing repetitively on the ground has become his means of expressing his sorrow. Strika who is constantly raped like Agu by the Commandant, communicates his pain through drawing. In other words, drawing becomes his way or mode of purging his mind of pain. The constant rape of these child-soldiers has the potential not only to traumatize them but to debase their innocent minds. If Strika reflects his agony through drawing without talking, Agu makes us to understand that he would not be smiling again: "The picture was very funny but I am not smiling. I was feeling I can never be smiling again." (p.86) This feeling is coming out of a wounded psyche. Agu's plight is in consonance to Caruth's (1996) assertion that "... we can also read the address of the voice here, not as the story of the individual in relation to the events of his own past, but as the story of the way in which one's own trauma is tied up with the trauma of another..." (p.8) In fact, after the rape Agu reveals how he started bleeding: "I was deciding that it was time for me to leave because I felt that I was bleeding and I did not want to be bleeding in front of him or the other soldier otherwise they might

be laughing at me and calling me a woman” (p.86) This shows that Agu has completely seen himself as a soldier. He would not want his ego to be punctured not even in pain. While revealing the “masculinity” of the combat soldiers, Tal (1996) asserts that “They repressed emotions other than anger, avoided close relationships that involve nurturing, and cultivated a callous attitude toward the feelings and humanity of others. (p.140)

In his process of becoming a soldier and a transformed entity from civilian civilities, Agu’s mental level has to be upgraded to conform to the ruthlessness that characterized war. Given the magnitude of killing fellow human beings, the wanton destruction, and sheer recklessness of rape adventures, soldiers always get themselves immersed in narcotic substances. If only such substances would, indeed, take them out of the bounds of human sympathy in order to carry out violent acts. As part of the initiation rite per se, Agu’s baptism into the world of hard drugs is subtly revealed:

But everybody is getting gun juice. Everybody is always wanting gun juice because it is drug and making life easy easy. Gun juice is making you to be stronger and braver. It is making your head to hurt and it is tasting like bullet and sugarcane.... My throat is burning like the fire of gun, but it is also sweetening like sugar cane. I am wanting more gun juice (pp. 43-44)

The above passage underscores Agu’s introduction to another event that further shreds his innocent garment. After taking the “gun juice” he becomes “possessed” and blood thirsty:

Across the stream, I am feeling in my body something like electricity and I am starting to think: Yes it is good to fight. I am liking how the gun is shooting and the knife is chopping. I am liking to see people screaming for me when I am killing them and taking their blood. (p.45)

Confusion has taken better part of Agu’s life as a result of the drug he has taken. Agu’s aggressiveness and desire for blood after taking the substance negate his earlier stance of sanctity of life. He has started degenerating badly. He does not seem to identify with the ideals of humanity anymore. The brutality of the war has begun to take its negative toll on his psyche and he seems helpless before the entire melee.

From the foregoing, to infer that Agu has lost touch with humanity is to state the obvious. He has become so blood thirsty that when an opportunity to kill appears he did not waste time on it. Before they raped and killed a particular woman, we are told how the woman’s daughter look like: “The girl is so shrinking, she is almost like an unborn baby- I am knowing because I have been taking them from their mother’s belly to be seeing who is girl and who is boy.” (p.48) This shows that Agu has been involved in killing and ripping out babies from pregnant women. However, the gory narrative of the woman’s rape is captured thus: “Strika is pulling down his short and showing that he is a man to this woman while I am holding her one leg and another soldier is holding the other. She is screaming, DEVIL BLESS YOU! DEVIL BORN YOU!... She is still screaming screaming, AYIIIEEE...” (pp.48-49) What is apparent so far is the continual degeneration of Agu into a beastly nature. He finally kills the woman after Strika has decimated her daughter.

The killing of this woman as we would see later disconcerted him greatly. His memory becomes so battered afterwards that it even affects his waking moments. In one of their onslaughts as the Commandant is dishing out instruction with a map in an abandoned classroom, Agu experiences a daylight nightmare. Because of the classroom’s environment, Agu’s memory of his classroom turns into a nightmare:

She is stepping like she is having limp, but her body is looking like Mistress Gloria. She is writing, I will not kill, I will not kill. I will not kill, and everybody is writing in their book, I will not kill, I will not kill excepting me because I am not having book. Then the teacher is turning around and looking at me and I am fearing because she is having the face of that woman I am killing with blood everywhere on her face and in her eye... she is walking to me with one sharp machete that is shining...all of the face of the child are only the girl that Strika is killing. I am wanting to scream. (P.105)

Agu's post-traumatic life has become one characterized by liminality. His past encounter of a killing a woman has finally caught up with him. Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart (1995) posit that "Certain happenings would have indelible and distressing memories – memories to which the sufferer was continually returning, and by which he was tormented day and night. (p.158) He finds it difficult to concentrate while his Commandant is instructing them. The shouting of "AGU!" by the Commandant jolts him back to reality revealing his state of hallucination. According to Agu "I am hearing my name and then everything is map and I am standing inside the world looking at Commandant just looking at me. I am saying, yes Sah! Yes Sah! ... He is saying to me, What is wrong? What is wrong?" (p.105) This clearly shows that Agu's life has become one reconstructed by his traumatic encounters. In fact, his earlier thoughts capture his post traumatic life: "... I am thinking that everything is moving fast, I will be old man before the war is over. I am knowing I am no more child so if this war is ending I cannot be going back to doing child thing." (p.93) He knows quite well that his life will never remain the same.

As a child who has encountered so much trauma in the war; doing what ordinarily in prewar period he cannot imagine himself doing. Indulging in rape and being raped, killing mercilessly, and taking hard drugs have become sordid encounters too devastating for his young mind. At a point, he feels so depressed that crying seems an option of purgation but then soldiers are not meant to express it. He bemoans: "Sometime I am wanting to cry very loud, but nobody is crying in this place. If I am crying, they will be looking at me because soldiers is not supposed to be crying." (117) According to Tal, (1996) "Both anti-grief and anti-intimacy were expressed by calling men who cried, or showed other signs of mourning, 'girls, 'woman', 'ladies', or 'hogs'... " (p.141). Agu's disillusionment is quite understandable given the numerous traumas he had witnessed. His participation in the war as a soldier has opened his eyes to the lawlessness and brutalities that typify wars. His childhood perception about soldiers suffers greatly. He contemplates ignorantly: "... to be a soldier was to be the best thing in the world because gun is looking so powerful... but now I am knowing now that to be a soldier is only to be weak and not strong..."(p.31) His passage from innocence to experience in the war reflects his liminal condition. Before his separation from the prewar moment, Agu has been living his normal life of childhood without disruption but his entry into the world of soldiers marks the beginning of his liminal existence. Little wonder he reveals during a moment of depression: "And if there is no war and we are normal person and not soldier, we are jubilating and saying, how nice the morning feels."(p.90) He recognizes that living the life of a soldier is far from the one he has known as a civilian.

Agu's post traumatic condition also reflects in his inability to sleep. Insomnia as a symptom of a traumatized man characterizes the life of Agu during their escapades in the bush. On several occasions, he bemoans his fate:

We are lying down to sleep, but I am not sleeping. *I cannot be sleeping. I can never be sleeping.* I am just listening. No noise. Then I am hearing one boy talking talking. (Emphasis added; p.78)

His emphasis that he can never be sleeping is quite revealing and underscores its seriousness. Considering his horrific involvements in the war so far, the elusiveness of sleep is indeed understandable. Towards the end of the narrative, Agu's insomnia has become pronounced:

Nothing is the same anymore. I am not being able to be sleeping at all when it is time to sleep. Each time I am lying down my head, some voice inside me is shouting and starting to make too much trouble so I cannot even be closing my eye. And all of the time this happening I am fearing that I am not knowing myself anymore.(p.133)

The repetition of these reenactments has started telling on him, increasing the bitterness in his heart. Even the voice he continues to hear only underscores the condition of a traumatized mind. According to Caruth (1996) "these repetitions are particularly striking because they seem not be initiated by the individual's own acts but rather appear as the possession of some people by a sort of fate, a series of painful events to which they are subjected, and which seem to be entirely outside their wish or control" (p.1) He is troubled psychologically as a result of the trauma he has experienced. And, naturally it finds expression in his inability to sleep. Being engulfed in these psychological confrontations and unable to endure the trauma, Agu considers his resignation from the war:

And I am thinking of all the thing I am doing. If they are ordering me to KILL, I am killing, SHOOT. I am shooting, ENTER WOMAN, I am entering woman and not even saying anything even if I am not liking it. I am killing everybody, mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, soldier. It is all the same. It is not mattering who it is, just that they are dying. I am thinking thinking. I am thinking that I cannot be doing this anymore. (p.135)

Even though, his soberness may elicit a measure of our sympathy, it does not absolve him from the trauma of such atrocities whether compelled or not. In fact, his consideration of quitting the battle reechoes his earlier reluctance of continuing with the war after being raped by the Commandant: “My tear begin to running down my face and mixing with my spit in the pillow. I want to be telling him that I cannot be fighting anymore, that my mind is becoming rotten like the inside of fruit”. (p.89) These echoes of frustration from Agu represent his awful entry into the war and his subsequent resignation which is steeped in disappointment and disillusionment. He has lost his innocence and, can never reclaim it again. He can never return to his “normal” life hence his liminal condition. Tal’s (1996) assertion underscores Agu’s frustration: “The combat soldier, too, is faced with the reestablishment of the ‘traditional world of justice’. He must suspect that his actions must ultimately be judged according to the rules of the society to which he will return”. (p.129) It is instructive to note that the author incorporated rites of transition into manhood in the narrative. This serves as a technique to reinforce the theory of liminality adopted for this work. At the height of their drillings, killings and lootings in the bush, Agu’s enchantment towards singing and dancing becomes pronounced. It also shows Agu’s recollection of how the rites of initiation which are occasioned by dancing and singing into manhood are carried out in his community:

If person is dancing or singing in the camp just to be doing something to not be thinking about the war, then I am closing my eye and seeing how when I am in my village we are loving so much to dance. We are dancing too because it is how we are learning to become men. Young person is having to one whole year learning all the dance that is turning you to man, and if you are not learning, then nobody is thinking that you are man. (p.52)

Agu’s recollection of the rite of passage into manhood parallels his current posttraumatic condition. From Agu’s narration, whoever is not learning the dance has failed to become a “man”. Therefore, this process of initiation is in consonance with Agu’s plight during the war. He has been separated from his environment by joining the war. In other words, he has left the civilian (childhood) state and joined the army (manhood).

However, he is expected to attain post liminal stage after the initiation but he fails. This is because he was unable to resume his “normal” life afterwards. When Agu comes out of reverie of the dance initiation, he says: “I am opening my eye and seeing that I am still in the war, and I am thinking, if war is not coming, then I would be man by now” (p.56). Agu’s regret that he would have become a man by now if not the war does not really matter because the traumatic experiences he had during the war eventually initiated him into manhood. The only difference between the two initiations is that after passing through the rite of passage in his community, one is expected to return to his normal life. While in the initiation of the war, Agu never returns to his normal life after encountering trauma. Comparing Agu’s and Ehrhart’s initiations’ outcome, Tal (1996) identifies that “Where the traditional *Bildungsroman* tells a story of a callow youth who must come to manhood after enduring the initiation rituals of adolescence, Ehrhart’s main character is most fully realized as a moral being in his childhood, and his ‘trial’ of combat is clearly no initiation rite – he is destroyed by war, fragmented instead of made whole,... and unable to regain his moral bearings” (p.100) Ehrhart’s condition reechoes that of Agu because Agu “is a moral being in his childhood” who “is destroyed by war”. His memory becomes so traumatized that he was simply trapped by his past traumatic encounters. As its common to trauma victims, Agu becomes disturbed psychologically that he considers confession in order to purge his conscience. He says: “I am always thinking Confession and Forgiveness and Resurrection...” (p.139) His religious upbringing also contributes immensely to his battered psyche. That is why he is not seeking only confession and forgiveness but also thinking of resurrection. He knows if he is not forgiven

of his atrocities, he will end up in Hell. Agu's thought vividly recalls Tal's (1996) submission that: "At the same time, testifying to crimes can be a purgative experience - the confession that purifies the soul and prepares it for readmission into the house of God. By evaluating his acts in light of reestablished social and moral norms, the soldier can contextualize his experience: I was bad then, but I'm good again now" (p.130)

### Conclusion

Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2005) not only interrogates the rationale behind child soldiering but also uncovers the depth of traumatic incarceration embedded in wars. The novel's thematic preoccupation of liminality of healing is basically located in Kali Tal's theory of liminality which foregrounds the transformative nature of trauma victims. Agu's post-traumatic experience is characterized by liminality as the foregoing analyses have shown. It is evidently clear that his journey from a civilian child to the status of a soldier is one distinguished by terrible and devastating encounters. And, that these encounters are too traumatic that he lost his psychological bearing. After his rescue from the war, it is expected that he should resume his normal life and move on in the right direction. But his session with the therapist exposed his inability to forge ahead since he is still trapped by his past traumatic encounters of the war thereby making his healing an impossible one. Finally, Agu's liminality could be summarized in the affirmation of Tal (1996) that "The permanent transformative nature of the traumatic experience should be obvious: Ehrhart's [Agu's] journey from the normal world to the abnormal world of the war should lead him to perceive 'a normalcy so permeated by the bizarre encounter with atrocity that it can never be purified again' " (p, 78).

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