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Beyond the Battlefield: Tracing War, Psychological Trauma, and Liminality in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*

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Abstract

This article challenges the nationalistic war accounts of the Zimbabwe's liberation struggle that focused primarily on the political conquest where individuals' contribution and their psychological experiences were not given the recognition they deserved. Hence, a critical survey of Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) through the intersecting lenses of war, psychological trauma, and identity reconstruction investigates the novel's depiction of Zimbabwe's liberation fight and its aftermath. Going beyond the patriotic war accounts that centered on political victory, the novel interrogates the lives of ex-combatants, using the character of Benjamin, whose post-war survival is characterized by psychological breakdown and emotional disruption. This paper, however, contends that Chinodya criticizes the patriotic exaltation of war revealing the unseen wounds endured by individuals, particularly those whose identities have been broken by ideological revolution and battlefield brutalities. Relying on trauma theory of liminality, therefore, the study analyzes how *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) recounts the silent, ongoing combats that endure long after the hostility ends- those fought within the mind and soul of the traumatized victim. Finally, the article reveals that real liberation entails not only political sovereignty but also emotional healing of the ex-combatants and a reimagining of selfhood in post-conflict societies.

Keywords: Combatants, liberation war, liminality, trauma, identity

Introduction

The liberation war of Zimbabwe is among the many wars fought during the colonial occupation of Africa especially among the settler colonies like Kenya, South Africa and Algeria among others. Given the favorable environment as well as the fertile land of these countries, their colonial masters found it conducive to live there permanently. Whereas colonialists in Western Sahara like Nigeria, Ghana, Togo and others were motivated by commercial and administrative interests. The settlers in Zimbabwe introduced repressive laws which enabled them appropriate a greater percentage of the land to themselves, thereby leaving the natives with little or no land to farm on. However, this oppressive colonial rule was resisted by the natives, who waged guerilla warfare against them.

As the war raged, many atrocities and violent killings were recorded on both sides. The whites saw the guerilla fighters as rebels that must be crushed while the natives considered the whites as invaders that must be uprooted. Those natives who worked against their country's nationalistic aspirations were rounded up and murdered to serve as a deterrent to others. When the wars ended, many creative writers produced works that idolized the freedom fighters. However, the official narrative of the war focused on their parties' contribution to war successes. Only a few writers focused on the traumatic experiences of the people and victims of the warfare. Their works revealed the liminal spaces that characterized victims who never returned to their "normal" lives after the liberation war. To these victims, the war never ends but continues throughout their lives.

It is against this backdrop that Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) was written. Typical of trauma narrative, the novel is divided into four parts revealing the different narratorial voices that make up the story. The novel chronicles the revolution that ended the white minority rule in Zimbabwe formerly called

Rhodesia, through the traumatic memory of Benjamin Tichafa, a youthful guerilla fighter. Born into a religious and dogmatic family, Benjamin discovers that his family takes a neutral stand in the wake of socio-political transformation going on in their country. As a result, he is branded a sellout and enemy of the state at school which eventually led him joining the revolution as a guerilla. His joining the revolutionary group is to disabuse the mind of his critics of the notion that he is a sellout. This singular decision to join the guerrilla marks a defining moment in his life because it underscores his initiation into the military life. In relation to Van Gennep's (1960) conception of liminality, Benjamin has separated from his civilian world and has entered a transition to liminality. Tal (1996) reechoes the same assertion that the:

> … combat soldiers were physically removed from the communities with which they identify and relocated to a new and foreign environment where previous notions of self were rendered useless. Basic training is designed to traumatize the recruit, to systematically strip him of his civilian identity. (127)

However, he is expected to transcend to post-liminality after the war to resume his "normal" life. Unfortunately, as the investigation reveals later, Benjamin is unable to return to his normal life. His activities in the bush, however, reveal the atrocities, savagery, horrors, pains, disillusionments, hatreds, fears, sufferings and trauma that characterized the liberation war. His participation in the murders of a white farmer and a woman "sellout" depicts his steep descent into acts of murderous savagery during the armed struggle. Finally, after the war the ex-combatants' expectations as represented by Benjamin have not been realized given the fact that the three-year armed struggle failed to revolutionize their country. To him winning the war has not brought the needed change but it will take time to witness the fruits of the liberation struggle.

Liminality and Trauma Theory

Trauma as field of study dates back to the early twentieth century when Sigmund Freud established his strand of psychoanalysis. He was the one who altered the meaning of the term "trauma" from indicating "physical injury" to psychological injury"(2010,p.34). Relying on Sigmund Freud's theory as foundation to build their own diverse notions on trauma, theorists like Cathy Caruth, Van Der Kolk & Van Der Hart, Kali Tal, Maria Root, Doninick LaCapra, Dori Laub and Shoshan Felman among others, recognize that the elementary understanding of trauma is really believed as the devastating of the victim's vital conviction of himself/herself and the world. In her definition of trauma, Tal (1996, p15) reveals that "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"

While Balaev, (2014, p.1) contends that "trauma as a recurring sense of absence that sunders knowledge of the extreme experience, thus preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression" Akingbe (2023, p.4) in his own assessment, notes that "as such, literary trauma theory emphasizes the possibilities of using language to contextualize the experiences, responses and narratives of grief as experienced by an individual." This situation emphasizes that traumatic experiences remain unresolved. The wounded continue to see themselves re-experiencing the agonizing events which have disturbed their 'normal' lives and find it problematic to return to their pre- liminal state. Forter (2014, p.71) aptly summarizes that:

> … in these works some combination of the following: a profound psychic disorientation; the deformation or eclipse of memory; an exile from chronological sequence and into the compulsive repetition of past injuries; and a form of writing that

> must, if it is to keep faith with this experience, mime and transmit to readers a break in linear, conventionally narrative representation.

Tal's usage of the word "Liminality" is inspired by the work of Eric J. Leed on World War 1. Although, the submission of liminality as an academic theoretical framework started in the field of social anthropology with Arnold Van Gennep in the early twentieth century and sustained through by Victor Turner in the 1960s and 1970s. The French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold Van Gennep engaged the word 'liminal' in his book, *The Rites of Passage* (1908), in the background of tribal rituals by means of which he wanted to scrutinize life-crisis rituals and ceremonies of passage. He categorizes rites of passage into three phases: rites of separation, which separated an individual or a group of individuals from his or their familiarized place; liminal rites, which symbolically attach the character of the 'passenger' as one who is between states, places, transitions, or conditions; and finally rites of incorporation (post liminal rites), which welcome the individual back into the group.

Underscoring on this three-fold structure, which is "separation (séparation), transition (marge), and incorporation (agrégation)", Van Gennep engages the term "liminal (or threshold)" (Van Gennep, p.21). To demonstrate the character of the transition phase within the life crisis rituals, Van Gennep adapts the word 'limen' in other to highlight the in-between status of the ritual subject during the transition period. 'Limen' is a Latin word for boundary. It refers more figuratively to "a transitory, in-between state or space, which is differentiated by indeterminacy, ambiguity, hybridity, possible for subversion and change.

Tal while contextualizing on this three-fold structure in her study of traumatic victims, reveals that a war survivor is seen as an individual going through a rite of passage which normally is divided into pre-liminal, liminal and post liminal stages. The

individual has undertaken the first stage by going from his normal life into the traumatic experience, but cannot complete the cycle of moving from the liminal (traumatic experience) back to his normal life.

Psychological Trauma, and Liminality in Shimmer Chinodya's *Harvest of Thorns*

Benjamin's liminality becomes visible after the liberation war. It is expected that after the war, the survivors, especially the veterans will be rehabilitated and re-integrated into society to ensure their smooth passage into normal lives. People's patriotic engagement in the war is usually fuelled by the assumption that the government will recognize and reward their efforts after the war. Unfortunately, people like Benjamin find themselves absolutely abandoned after the war. His first disappointment comes shortly after the ceasefire and his subsequent return from the warfront as he goes for his demobilization payment:

> 'I 've come to fill in my demob pay forms.'
> 'Which assembly point are you from, comrade?'
> 'Freedom Cliff.'
> 'Your name?'
> 'Benjamin Tichafa.'
> 'What was your war name?'
> 'Pasi Nema Sellout.'…
> 'have you got your discharge papers with you?'
> 'I left on urgent family business.'
> 'Do you have discharge papers or not?'
> 'No.'
> 'Have you got a pass from freedom Cliff?
> 'No'
> 'You 'd better talk to Comrade Ngano.' …(p. 14)

The above conversation reveals Benjamin's inability to provide his discharge papers. Although his explanation seems genuine, he is denied his right as a former soldier. He is left without compensation to cater to his needs and his pregnant wife's. His

encounter with the officer at the mobilization office reveals the raw deal he receives for fighting for his country's betterment.

It becomes a sheer dramatization of impiety when the officer at the Demobilization office threatens and accuses him: "I can see your file is in order but without discharge papers there's not much I can do.' 'But officer…' 'Now, now let's get this straight. Do you realize you could be charged for leaving Freedom Cliff without official permission?' Benjamin stared blankly at him." (p. 15). This simply captures his utter disappointment, and it certainly affects his behaviour towards people and his environment.

Both his behaviour and language in the post war Zimbabwean society reflects a portrait a man who is still at war with himself and his environment. When shopping for his pregnant wife at a mall, his reaction towards the white cashier shows that he is still at "war":

> The white girl sitting at the till raised her eyebrows when she saw them line up their three trolleys in front of her. 'Are you sure you can pay for all this? She asked, looking first at Nkazana, then Peter and settling on Benjamin's boots. 'Why are you asking us that?' Benjamin demanded, snapping into English. 'Do you think we can take things if we can pay for them?'… He got behind the till and started banging at the register, pushing the goods down through to the packer.' If you don't like Zimbabwe go to South Africa,' Benjamin yelled. The manager took a deep breath and quietly held out his hand. Benjamin slapped the money on to the counter and stomped out after the packer ferrying their goods to the pavement. 'See what I mean? Benjamin fumed outside the shop… 'They didn't learn a thing from the war,' Nkazana said. (p.8)

Benjamin's anger is not only kindled by the racial insults prevalent in their white-ruled society, but the White cashier's "eyes settling on his boots". In fact, his wearing of the boots reflects the

continuity of war in his life. His mother's gaze at his "brown boots" (p.3) parallels that of the white cashier. In another scene, "The waiter looked at his boots and reached under the counter" (p.16). The boots, in other words, serve as an ugly reminder of the war that has unsettled him. Benjamin's post war lifestyle is accurately underscored thus:

> To his mother he was fiercely laconic. For Nkazana he alternated periodical silences with a playful banter that sometimes even had his mother laughing, but always he was generous in his own brusque way. Peter he handled with a mixture of camaraderie and ruthlessness. (p.16)

The above behavioural pattern reflects the combatant way of life obtainable in the bush during the liberation war. Actions and not too much talk prevail in the war camp. Most of the time silences pervade the battle front. These attitudes are what clearly characterize the war atmosphere. And, Benjamin extends such to his post war life. That "he handled Peter with a mixture of camaraderie and ruthlessness" portrays him as one who has continued his military existence in the civilian world.

Benjamin's post-war life is still influenced and shaped by his past traumatic experiences, and as such he is unable to move on with his normal life. It is instructive to note that even when he was at the Demobilization office after the war, he still intends to join the army. It shows that he cannot return to his civilian life. The experience of liberation war has grossly overwhelmed him such that he cannot live his "normal life". He reveals:

> 'I want to join the new national army.' 'Even if your papers were in order that would take time. The recruiting office has a long waiting list. They are taking people with special skills first. Mechanics and so on. (p.15)

In as much as Benjamin desires to continue with the army as the only vocation that will accommodate his combatant lifestyle, those in charge have thwarted his efforts to join the army. To underscore the "gravity" of the matter, he insists:

> 'I really wanted to join the national army,'
> 'Why?'
> 'Because…its what I can do.'
> 'Have got a family to look after?'
> 'Yes'
> 'You can register at the recruiting office if you want but I wouldn't promise anything. (p.15)

Consequently, his burning desire to join the army which is unfulfilled shaped his behaviour towards other people. In his affirmation, quoting Des Pres, Tal (1996) defines the condition of a survivor as thus "…there is no sense that this is a function of limited duration. This is not a stage through which the survivor passes, but a permanent state" (p.45). This statement underscores the fact that survivor like Benjamin cannot transcend this stage of his life rather it has become his way of life.

Benjamin is terribly disenchanted with life. A little disagreement with his mother that ought to have been handled maturely simply degenerated into chaos laced with abusive words. His constant quarrels with his mother reinforce the fact that he is always at the edge of disorientation. At another scene, their verbal exchanges snowballed into another squabble:

> 'Oh, Benjamin. Whatever you did out there has…'
> 'What do you think I did? Shoot birds with a catapult?'
> She gaped at him.
> 'All right, all right. I just walked around with my gun.
> Nobody fired at me and I didn't fire at any body. I didn't see corpses and didn't touch any. *I'm clean. There are no vengeful spirits after me . you don't have to take me to a n'anga or a priest*. Is that what you want to hear? Does that satisfy you? Does that make you happy? (Emphasis added p.8-9)

The above conversation comes after Benjamin refuses to talk about the war until his mother's insistence broke his silence. Ever since Benjamin returned from the war, he has kept silence regarding his experiences in the bush. Quoting Schreiber Weitz, Caruth (1995) reveals that "people have said that only survivors themselves

understand what happened … silence is the only proper response but then most of us… feel that not to speak is impossible. To speak is impossible, and not to speak is impossible". (p.154). To worsen the situation a girl he impregnated in the bush comes to their family house. This gives Benjamin's mother a reason to question Benjamin further. She demands:

> 'I want to talk about Nkanaza … I want to be sure what you want to do about her.'
> 'What's there to be sure about?'
> 'Do her people know she's here'
> 'What difference would that make?' (p.8)

Benjamin's outburst and unwillingness to talk about anything related to the war shows the trauma such memories will bring. Therefore, it is better left unsaid. According to Laub (1995) "None finds peace in silence even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of distorted memory…" (p.64). Benjamin finally retorts "Why don't we just not talk about it, mother (p.9). Even his conversation with Dickson his brother-in- law reflects his desire to be silent:

> 'I hate talking about the war'
> 'Why is it so difficult to talk about it?'
> 'How do you know it is'
> 'A cousin of mine was in the bush for five years. He's a captain in the army now.
> When he came back he wouldn't say a word about his experiences. He wouldn't be drawn out all. (p.243)

This conversation reechoes what Krystal (1995) said "It may also be said that these individuals, who experienced catastrophic psychic trauma in adult life, show signs of continuation of the trauma patterns, hyper vigilance, anxiety dreams, sometimes a driven need to talk about the events of the traumatic period. At other times a need to avoid doing so" (p.81).

Apart from the fact that war veterans find it difficult to relieve their war experiences, those who are abandoned after the war seem

to be more devastated and as a result more withdrawn. Kai (1995) underscores that "To describe people as traumatized is to say that they have withdrawn into a kind of protective envelope, a place of mute, aching loneliness, in which the traumatic experience is treated as solitary burden that needs to be expunged by acts of denial and resistance"(p.186). For instance, in spite of Benjamin's trauma in the bush, he continues to suffer after the war. He becomes despondent not because of the years he had wasted in the bush but because of the opportunity he was not given after the war to rehabilitate his shattered life:

> 'There is nothing to talk about, really. If the bush could speak then it could tell the story. When you are trying to piece together the broken fragments of your life it hurts to think back. The worst thing is to come back and find nothing has changed…I worked for a day as a hand in a construction site last month but when the white foreman heard I was an ex-combatant I was told the company had employed too many casual labourers by mistake. Is it fair? You come back and find you are years behind your classmates who didn't leave school… it's not the gap that I regret – that was part of the sacrifice. It's not being given the chance to catch up that makes me bitter. (p.243)

Apparently, the above expression summarizes the double tragedy people like Benjamin faced during and after the war. Their personal sacrifices during the liberation war are relegated to obscurity. Worse still, they are unable to be re-integrated into the society. Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart (1995) while writing about the Holocaust survivors reveal that " They often can tell the story of their traumatization with a mixture of past and present, but their current life is characterized by doubt and humiliation, by feelings of guilt and shame: past meaning schemes determine the interpretation of the present" (p.178). Regrettably, those who may not have participated in the struggle are given heroic ovations after

the war. Those who fought in the war are praised as heroes only as the war lasted. Benjamin representing the ex-combatants bemoans their fate:

> Five years from now the war will be totally forgotten. The truth of it is that those of us who went out to fight will carry the scars for the rest of our lives. We were heroes during the heat of the war, but now we have been left to lick our wounds. You think we consider ourselves heroes? When you wake up every morning and hitch your gun and go out in search of death it's idiotic to talk about heroes. Out there it was kill or be killed' (p.243)

It is revealing that Benjamin describes their war experiences as "scars" they would carry throughout their lives. These scars will always serve as an obstruction to their advancement in life. That means the scars are beyond physical wound which would heal with time. The scars are ugly reminder that the injury is deep in the mind. In other words, the wound transcends bodily affliction and locates itself in the psychic domain thereby remaining with them (the victims) for the rest of their lives. He refers to the pains they are experiencing as "wounds". The above statement aptly describes the novel as one filled with trauma.

It is quite appalling and unjust that veterans like Benjamin and others were abandoned in spite of their sacrifices; while those who prioritized their acquisition of western education above the struggle for independence have become the chief beneficiaries of independence:

> As the line slowly moved forward the ex-combatants smoked, played draughts or chatted quietly. Across the road, on the other side of the street, chauffeured cars stopped to drop suited gentlemen at the entrance of a hotel. (p.13)

The above excerpt underscores the ironical positions of the ex-combatants and others after the traumatic liberation war. In fact,

his mother's outburst is quite revealing "Look at your friends who finished school and started working. You 'll never catch up with them!" (p.22). According to Leed quoted by Tal (1996):

> The normal difficulties experienced by the World War 1 veterans on their return to peacetime society were intensified by the front soldiers' perception that those on the home front had benefited momentarily from their suffering, that capitalists had made profits on the war, and that civilians had suffered little or no privations. (p.193)

Furthermore, quoting Linderman, Tal (1996) appropriately summarizes Benjamin's thoughts that "the solider like (Benjamin) who remembered correctly would have been forced to acknowledge his role as a victim of a government and social order that exploited him" (119)

It is important to note that before the war Benjamin was at "war" with himself, family and society. His humiliating experiences at school had serious effect on his personality. Sadly enough, no one seems to identify with him. He is seen as a rebellious child. Consequently, these internal wars pushed him into the bush to join the real war. Before fleeing into the bush, Benjamin's memory had become terribly troubled and wounded. According to the narrator, "There developed in his consciousness an ongoing interrogation between an older, authoritarian voice and his defensive, obstinate self" (p.94). This interrogation captures a mind that is traumatized:

> Do you enjoy causing trouble? *I don't know*.
> What if you get expelled from school? *I won't be expelled.*
> Why? I'm just as naughty as any one at this mission school…
> You hate your parents, don't you? *No.*
> Have you forgotten the sergeant's warning when you burnt down the beerhall? *No*.…
> You don't want to spend half your life in prison, do you? *No*.
> You don't think you're a hero, do you? *No*. (p.94)

This internal argument going on in his mind clearly reveals that Benjamin had become a problem not only to himself and family but also to society. His family and the church consider him a child of the devil. He has been warned by the police and his reputation in school tainted. All these bad reports have a negative impact on his life. His remembrances of those gory events are the reasons why he is waging war against the world. They haunt him so badly that he had no place to hide rather than flee into the bush and join the liberation fighters in order to assuage his psychological burden. In fact, during his interrogations by the guerilla fighters to ascertain the genuineness of his motive, he becomes exhausted from being abandoned in an underground without food. In that underground, his mind recalls the pains and sufferings he experienced in town before his capture by the guerilla fighters:

> He thought of the last three days and could not believe what had happened to him- the train and bus rides, the soldiers at the roadblock, the race through the grass and now this underground tunnel. And he thought of the week before those three days, at the mission school, arguing over the newspapers, writing posters- a week seething with anger and fear and hysteria. (p.110-111)

These thoughts traumatize him so much that he questions the rationale behind his decision to join the guerillas: "What fit of courage could have made him dream of ever ending up here? Why was he now suddenly afraid? When would they bring him food? " (p.111). This situation, apparently, is far from what Benjamin envisaged before his voyage into the bush! Later, as he is brought out for further interrogation, he merely "slumped into the chair in front of the commander" (p.111). Benjamin's condition reechoes Tal's (1996) revelation that "narratives and novels by combat veterans emphasize the profound shock of the soldier's realization that their expectations about war were simply not compatible with reality" (p.140). Benjamin's reaction further reveals Caruth's (1995, p.153) assertion "That trauma is the confrontation with an

event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge…" If these traumatic sufferings are the inevitable prices Benjamin had to pay in order to become a guerilla fighter, he simply has to endure them than face the constituted authorities in the city.

According to Tal (1996):

> … The three goals of Basic Training are to destroy the soldier's civilian identity, to force him to acknowledge and accept discipline from the military, and to convince him of the validity and justice of the military system. Armed with this revised perspective on life, the recruit is sent off to battle, believing that he has earned the right to join the masculine ranks of the warrior. Once in combat, however, disillusion sets in, beginning the process of alienation…" (p.128)

From the foregoing, it is evident that Benjamin's zeal to join the guerrilla does not endure for long given the alienation that immediately followed his recruitment. As the war intensifies so do casualties increase on both sides of the warring groups. The author carefully situates those common scenes that distinguish the struggle by bringing out the murder of Baars Mellecker representing white farmers whose exploitative tendencies are among the causes of the native's agitation.

Baars Mellecker's death reveals the guerilla type of war engaged by the natives who feel shortchanged in the possession of their rights especially the land. Through the recollection of Msindo, the foreman of Baars Mellecker, the exploitative relationship between the white farmers and native workers is fore grounded:

> 'There were seven of them altogether,' Msindo is to recount many many times, 'seven of them, and three of them came to my house and woke me and took me out to the bush and said how many people are working on his farm and how many hours do you work and how much

> does he pay you and I told them and they said what is a big man like you doing here getting twenty-seven dollars a month working twelve hours a day… (p.146)

It is important to emphasize at this point that the above revelation by Msindo is obviously and chiefly what sparked off the war. The natives were exploited in the scheme of things in their native country. Apart from the lands that were taken away from the natives, they are made to work on the same land for a paltry sum of money. Consequently, this exploitative relationship coupled with other racial discrimination leads to the natives' restlessness and agitation that culminated into the liberation struggle. Benjamin alias Pasi Nema Sellout becomes deeply involved in the struggle. He witnessed and participated in the killings. He is among the people who killed Baars Mellecker. According to Stephen (2016):

> Here, even though the narrator stops short of describing how the killing takes place, as the narrative breaks of- typical of trauma narratives- we will later discover through Pasi's troubled recollections that it was Mbanunu Muchepera 'who had cut farmer Mellecker's throat […] and […] had wiped off his bayonet on the curtains and dipped his finger in the pool [of Mellecker's blood] on the floor to scribble slogans on the wall. (p.176)

From the above account, it is apparent that Benjamin's mind became troubled upon his recollection of Baar Mellecker's murder. Such re-enactments reveal the over powering intensity of trauma and how it affects the victim.

Another gruesome scene is that of Mai Tawanda's death which represents the plight of saboteurs. And it is the most frightening and painful death ever described in the novel. In relation to Mai Tawanda's death, Benjamin's psyche is affected each time the manner of her death replays in his mind. Mai Tawanda's situation reveals how sellouts were tortured and killed before the natives in order to discourage them from becoming one. Her brutal killing

speaks of deep seated anger against any native considered an enemy to the guerrilla fighters' patriotic engagement. Her death is quite terrifying:

> Mabunu Muchapera stepped forward. He took two steps forward and whipped up his stick. It smashed across the woman's shoulders. 'There were cries in the crowd. There were sobbing in the crowd. There were tongues clicking in the crowd… he flung the stick sideways and caught the woman on the back of the head. It made a sound like soft liquid burst of the shell of *mulambo* fruit knocked against the trunk of a tree… Pasi Nema Sellout clutched his stick and took two steps forward. The woman's calves shone in the firelight… the woman did not move. She did not make a sound. Pasi raised his hand and struck her on the waist. (pp.186-87)

Mai Tawanda's death underscores the animalistic tendencies in man. Clubbing a full-grown woman to death for act of sabotage reveals the hideous and callous nature of members of the liberation group. Benjamin's participation clearly demonstrates how man can gradually degenerate into an agent of terror within a short period of time. Later, typical of trauma encounters, Benjamin begins to suffer the post traumatic experience of that incident:

> Mai Tawanda's death had not at first worried him. She was a traitor and she had to die. The horror of it he could suppress; he never allowed himself prolonged thoughts about it, though the incident had sought out a corner of his mind and pitched a little tent there. (p.211)

Not minding the fact that the woman was a traitor- a reason that could have placated Benjamin's conscience- her image simply refuses to be obliterated from his mind. Typical of trauma, the impact of the murders of both Baars Melleck and Mai Tawanda's death does not impress fully first in Benjamin's mind until the repeated re-enactments in his psyche. These repetitions, however,

are quite haunting and terrifying to Benjamin. Caruth (1996) quoting Freud calls this experience "traumatic neurosis" which "emerges as the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind" (p.2)

Given Benjamin's bloody involvements in the struggle so far, his psyche becomes easily traumatized at the sight or smell of anything that reminds him of his past traumatic encounters. According to Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart (1995, p.174), this is called "autonomic stimulation… which … causes people with PSTD to immediately access sights, sounds and smells related to earlier traumatic events". Of a particular night, his reminisces are portrayed thus:

> Later that night as he sat at his guard post, under *muonde* tree, Pasi Nema Sellout thought of the night they had woken up Msindo at the farm compound. He remembered the hot smell of sleep that had wafted out of the door when the foreman had stepped out, bare-chested, his fearful wife screaming behind him. He remembered too, the couple he had woken up to cook him food after they shelled the district office… the odour of Ropa, Ropa in the kerosene lamplight of her hut… On nights like these, these smells and odours visited him, fleshed up into vividly haunting bodies, pressing upon him in a throng, picking his body into a desire bigger and more terrifying even than the thought of death. (p.206)

The above picture captures the imposition of trauma in the mind. Caruth (1996, p.4) identifies it as an incident that "… imposes itself again repeatedly" Trauma imposes itself and keeps haunting the victim without the victim's consent.

The enormity of pain, suffering, terror, shocks and harsh realities that characterize the war particularly the war fronts can only be imagined. These ugly experiences are meted out to the comrades in the bush. In one of those battles, some comrades fall into a trap

that killed Torai Zvombo and their guide. Their immediate reactions betray their traumatic emotions:

> Mabunu Muchapera crawled on his elbows and knees and roared. Gidi Ishumba stood upright, hands supporting belly, tears streaming down his face. Pasi Nema Sellout leaned forward over a rock and moaned. Baas Die squatted, vomiting. Shungu Dzangu knocked his head against a tree, moaning… (p.219)

The above reactions reflect the physical manifestations of minds gripped by trauma. The above incident, however, refers to what Erikson (1995, p.190) called "… communal moods, that come to dominate a group's spirit". The essence of their comradeship is felt deeply at this loss. Trapped in the forest without a guide heightens their trauma as "they walked for three days in confused circles". Finally, they can trace their way back to the village where they met women with calabashes of wine. Tal's (1996) assertion becomes a revelation too obvious to ignore "The emotional scars a survivor bears are the deaths of others- a survivor, by definition, never dies himself" (p. 98).

Given their traumatized encounters, they quickly grab the calabashes of wine and drank to stupor. Ordinarily in that tensed situation in the bush, no one would have taken a sip of wine let alone being drunk. But, their traumatized selves coupled with hunger, exposes their vulnerability. The following day:

> They stared dully at each other, reeling from their hangovers and the bronze mid –day sun striking their brows; miserable, ashamed, baffled at the recklessness which might have cost them their lives. No one said anything. They heaved their packs and fled from the place (p.220)

Conclusion

The foregoing analyses reveal that *Harvest of Thorns* (1989) is a bold challenge by the writer to deconstruct official hagiographical

accounts of the war. It rejects the impressive narratives marked by self-adulation. The novel highlights their patriotic fervor as the only force that activated the struggle. The liberation war is narrated in terms of national heroism at the expense of guerilla warriors who are suffering post-traumatic afflictions at the end of the war. And that is what Chinodya capitalized upon to reveal the pains and agonies meted out to the common combatants as represented by Benjamin. Quoting Leed, Tal (1996) identifies that:

> Those who had internalized the war, its peculiar relationship between victims and victimizers, the liminality that it imposed upon combatants, were destined to play a significant part… for many could not resolve the ambiguities that defined their identities in war and resume their place in civilian society without acknowledging their status as victims. (pp.193-94)

Conclusively, these ordinary combatants experienced both physical and psychological wound during and after the liberation struggle and as such should not be dismissed into national obscurity. These traumatic experiences, however, cannot not be erased completely from the memories of the victims despite the free education and other free social amenities promised by the new government of Zimbabwe. In fact, the assertion of Ehrhart quoted by Tal (1996) aptly describes the posttraumatic condition of Benjamin and his likes "He is less concerned with how one survives in the camp (bush)… than with how one survives afterward, having left part of oneself behind. The problem does not end with liberation – it only begins." (p. 103).

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