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## UNDERSTANDING THE CHILD SOLDIER IN UZODINMA IWEALA'S NOVEL, *BEASTS OF NO NATION*

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### Abstract

The academic space has witnessed in recent times, a plethora of research works on child soldiering. However, the majority of these works are often viewed from a non-literary perspective. Using textual analysis which is purely qualitative in nature, this paper, from a literary perspective, focused on examining the representation of the child soldier figure in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* by paying particular attention to the characterization of the child soldier as an individual who transitions from a victim of war to a victimizer. With the help of the trauma theory, the paper discussed and provided an understanding of the physiological factors and reactions that necessitate this transition. Based on Bloom's concepts of trauma and the general theory of trauma, the paper finds that the child soldier transitions from a victim of war to a victimizer is a result of the fear that overwhelms him. Again, the child soldier undergoes this transition in order to survive the war – an archetypal mammalian survival response. This study is significant as it has contributed to the existing literature on child soldier narratives in Africa and provided an understanding of the child soldier's reactions and responses to the devastating trauma that accompanies war.

**Keywords:** *child soldier; trauma; victim, victimizer; war.*

### 1. Introduction

With the support of the trauma theory, this paper sets out to examine the representation of the child soldier figure in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* as one who transitions from a victim to a victimizer. Based on Bloom's concepts of trauma and through a close reading of the text, this paper explains the factors that incite the child soldier's transition from an innocent and naive child to an unsympathetic and brutal killer. Even though the National Children's Advocacy Centre (2017: 5) and some trauma scholars including Bloom (2018: 19) have associated the victim-victimizer concept of trauma mostly to sexual abuse and criminal violence, we believe the trauma brought about by war and child soldiering as seen in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* is equally capable of turning victims into victimizers.

### 2. Literature Review

The child-soldier narrative which falls under the bigger umbrella of war narratives has within the last two decades become a prominent genre in African literature with novels and

memoirs including Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah Is Not Obligated* (2002), Iweala's *Beast of No Nation* (2005), Grace Akallo's *Girl Soldier* (2007), Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way Gone: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* (2007), Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007), Emmanuel Jal's *Warchild* (2009) and Tchicaya Missamou's *In the Shadow of Freedom* (2010). These novels and memoirs accurately depict the predicaments of innocent children recruited by military forces and rebel groups and turned into blood-thirsty killers. While recounting the periods of war in Africa, these novels also incite readers to condemn the outrageous disregard for children's rights.

The Paris Principles and Guidelines on Children Associated with Armed Forces and Groups (2007) defines a child soldier as "any person, eighteen years of age or younger, who is or has been recruited or used by an armed group in any capacity (United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund – UNICEF, 2007). Reiterating the views of UNICEF, Machel (UNICEF, 2000) also defines a child soldier as "any child, boy or girl aged less than eighteen, who is recruited compulsorily, by force or otherwise with the intension of using him/her for combat by armed forces, paramilitary forces, civil defense units or other armed groups. Child soldiers are used for sexual services or as combatants, forced spouses, messengers, porters or cooks". It is clear from these definitions above that the use of the term "child soldier" is restrictive since it does not cover entirely the role the child soldier is made to perform. This is why the International Committee of the Red Cross points out that "children can be used for the purposes other than direct participation in hostilities; they can be used as spies, messengers, domestic servants, sexual slaves, etc." It is important to acknowledge that whatever the role a child soldier is made to play, the mere act of recruiting him/her is a blatant abuse of the child's right: they are deprived basic amenities like food and shelter, they are sexually abused, deprived the education they deserve as children and their right to grow naturally in a conducive environment.

The principal theory upon which this paper is anchored is the trauma theory. Since Iweala's novel recounts the traumatic and overwhelming experiences of the protagonist as a child soldier during a civil war, it is apt to adopt the trauma theory to steer the discussion. Analyzing gender and trauma in Maya Angelou's *I know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, Adhikary (2020) identifies some experiences that could be described as traumatic. These include events like physical torture, witnessing violence, rape, physical and emotional abuse, the sudden death of a loved one and many others. Abubakar (2017) shares similar sentiments as he ascribes the growth and development of trauma to the ruins and destructions that have occurred in human history. Since the protagonist around whom this discussion revolves, witnesses violence brought about by war, it makes the application of the trauma theory not only appropriate but necessary.

Kurtz (2018) points out that "the core concepts in our present model of trauma were laid out over a century ago in the therapeutic practices of late nineteenth-century European neurologists like Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Josef Breuer, and Sigmund Freud". Freud's early theories in *Studies of Hysteria* (1895) which was co-authored by Joseph Breuer and his theories in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) is the foundation upon which contemporary trauma studies is built. From a Freudian perspective, trauma is theorized as not a physical wound but a psychological wound. Freud understood trauma to be any emotional wound leading to psychological injury or an event that causes great distress. This is directly antithetical to the ancient Greek's usage of the word to just mean a physical injury. Freud, therefore, defined the traumatic wounding of the mind as a widespread rupture or breach in the ego's protective shield, which he explains in *Beyond the Pleasure*

*Principle* as a barrier or a shield that defends the psyche against external stimuli. This has not changed much in recent times as contemporary trauma scholars like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Sandra L. Bloom, and Dominick LaCapra also theorize trauma as events and occurrences that lead to psychological wounding or emotional stress. Sandra L. Bloom, whose concepts of trauma are majorly used in this paper is a Board-Certified psychiatrist and an Associate Professor of Health Management and Policy at the Dornsife School of Public Health, Drexel University. Through Bloom's theories on trauma, this paper will unearth the physiological motivations behind the child soldier's transition from a victim to a victimizer in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*.

It is important to stress that Bloom (1999; 2018) does not specifically centre her discussions on trauma around the child soldier figure. However, she discusses the victim-victimizer concept of trauma based on sexual abuse. With this research, we argue that the trauma that the child suffers during times of war is equally capable of turning him, an innocent and naive child, into a heartless victimizer.

### 3. Research Method

Since this investigation involves a critical analysis of literary texts, the qualitative content analysis which is also known as textual analysis seems most suitable. Through a critical reading of the text, this mode of analysis will help identify the common patterns in the representation of the child soldier and also help explain with the help of the trauma theory (mostly Sandra L. Bloom's concepts on trauma), the transition of the child soldier from a victim to a victimizer. Even though the paper does not primarily set out to undertake a stylistic analysis of the text, particular attention is given to the author's writing style and the protagonists' diction in order to make tangible its objective: exploring the child soldier's transition from a victim to a victimizer. An understanding of the factors that necessitate this transition requires an interrogation of certain parameters of language like the choice of words (diction), sentence structures, punctuations, and the density and types of figurative languages. This will help foreground the literariness of a paper whose concern, child soldiering, is often considered sociological.

### 4. Result and Discussion

Set in a fictionalized African country that is being ravaged by war, Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* recounts the harrowing experiences of Agu, a young boy who is forced into child soldiering. Being a symbol of many other child soldiers who have fought different wars in Africa, Agu showcases how young and innocent children are turned into ruthless killers as a result of war by powerful warlords. After Agu loses his mother and father to the war, he is left to navigate a world full of chaos as both victim and victimizer.

#### 4.1 The Child Soldier as Victim

In Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation*, readers are instantly introduced to Agu, a young, innocent and naive boy, who is hiding from a group of rebels as they invade his village, killing many including his father. The killing of his father, the destruction of his village and the physical abuse that innocent and vulnerable Agu is subjected to when he is found by one of the rebels (Strika) at his hiding place clearly presents him as a victim of war. He cries:

He is sniffing like a dog and stepping to me KPAWA! He is hitting me. Again and again he is hitting me and each blow from his hand is feeling on my skin like the flat side of machete. I am trying to scream, but he is nocking

the air from my chest and then slapping my mouth. I am tasting blood. I am feeling like vomiting. The whole place around us is shaking...he is grabbing my leg, pulling it so hard that it is like it will be coming apart like meat, and my body is just sliding slowly from the stall out into the light and onto the mud (Iweala, 2005: 3).

Even though a child, Agu does not spare the harsh treatments that accompany war, Agu's choice of words and language clearly depict him as a helpless victim of war. Through the use of simile, he compares his oppressor's blow on his skin to the flat side of a machete. He further compares the pulling of his leg to meat being torn apart. These comparisons reveal the level of pain inflicted on Agu and enhances a visual representation of the entire scenario. This is further intensified through the hyperbolic statement, "the whole place around us is shaking". The use of imagery and exaggeration in the extract above, even though help paint a vivid picture of the pain that Agu suffers as a victim, they also help reveal the realities of the consequences of war on children. The helplessness that overwhelms Agu, who at this point is a victim of war, is further revealed in the extract below:

The smell of rainwater and sweat is coming into my nose and I am feeling my shirt is so wet it is almost like another skin. I want to be moving, but my whole bone is paining me and my muscle is paining me like fire ant is just biting me all over my body. If I can be slapping myself to be making it go away I am doing it, but I cannot even move one finger. I am not doing anything (Iweala, 2005: 1-2).

In order to make obvious the helplessness that engulfs Agu and ultimately delineates the senselessness of war and child soldiering, Iweala makes great use of imagery, exaggeration and simile. Agu compares the physical pain he experiences at this point to the bites of fire ants. The adjective "fire" that modifies this particular species of insects depicts the magnitude of their bites: a burning sensation that even though goes away in some few minutes, leaves a white-fluid-filled blister on the human body that can last for days. The level of exaggeration seen in this extract does not only add to the beauty of the language but also communicates the confusion and powerlessness that weighs down young Agu as a result of war. The fear that Agu experiences as a victim is devastating and lethal for a young boy of his age that it inhibits his ability to move. The fact that he cannot do anything to salvage the situation reiterates his trauma and helplessness. This is why Bloom (1999: 11) states that "a victim is both helpless and powerless...helplessness is a noxious human experience". These experiences mark the beginning of Agu's transformation from a civilian to a "soldier" as he is immediately recruited by the rebels. He is emotionally blackmailed by the Commandant to think that he will have a better life with the rebels and also get to avenge his father's death. The Commandant tells Agu, "If you are staying with me, I will be taking care of you and we will be fighting the enemy that is taking your father...everything will be just fine." Aside the Commandant preying on Agu's immaturity and innocence, he also instills so much fear in him that Agu sees no other alternative than to join the rebels if he wants to stay alive. We glean this when he says, "I am seeing all the soldier with gun and knife and then I am thinking about my father just dancing like that because of bullet. What am I supposed to be doing? So I am joining." (p. 11). Even though the word "dancing" is satirically used, it is meant to paint an image of how bullets tear apart Agu's father. This

heightens Agu's fear and compels him to join the rebel group for survival. The rhetorical question, "what am I supposed to be doing?" shows Agu's helplessness as a child who is exposed to a such chaotic environment. If his father, a fully grown man is made to dance because of a bullet, Agu, as a small boy, is sure unable to do anything. It is clear from the foregoing that Agu is driven to join the rebel group by the need for survival. This is why Williams (2013: 143) opines that "life with the army provides some excitement away from the drudgery of life on the street: food is certain and one does not have to hustle all the time for a living. The uniform and the gun bring status and power and the opportunity to take revenge against previous transgressors." Agu understands that the entire village has been consumed by war and there is no place he can run to seek refuge. In order to live, Agu realizes that his best chance is with the rebel group. This is why he admits that "I am fearing because I am seeing that the only way not to be fighting is to die. I am not wanting to die." Presented with this conundrum, his only way out is to put on the mask of a victimizer even if he does not want to. Bloom (1999) calls this *trauma-bonding*. She explains that:

People who are terrorized, whether as adult victims of torture, or domestic violence or child victims of family abuse, experience their abuser as being in total control of life and death. The perpetrator is the source of the pain and terror, but he is also the source of relief from the pain. He is the source of threat but he is also the source of hope (p. 10).

Indeed, even though the rebel group led by the Commandant terrorizes and maltreats Agu, he joins them and forms a bond with them in order for him to survive. Agu perceives that by joining the rebel group that oppresses him, he will eventually be relieved of his fear and pain. It can also be understood that Agu is not only driven by fear to join the rebel group but also his inability to think and analyze situations critically when under emotional stress. This is a behavior that is typical of trauma victims. Bloom (1999) explains further that:

Our capacity to think clearly is also severely impaired when we are under stress. When we perceive that we are in danger, we are physiologically geared to take action, not ponder or deliberate. In many situations of acute danger, it is better that we respond immediately without taking the time for complicated mental processing, that we respond almost reflexively to save our lives or to protect those we love. When stressed, we cannot think clearly, we cannot consider the long-range consequences of our behaviour, we cannot weigh all possible options before making a decision, we cannot take the time to obtain all the necessary information that goes into making good decisions. Our decisions tend to be based on impulse and are based on the experienced need to self-protect...in such situations, people demonstrate poor judgement and poor impulse control (p. 5).

It is clear from the discussion so far that Agu does not join the rebel group on his own volition, but he is manipulated and forced by the Commandant. This is why he laments, "I am looking at this pin and that pin and thinking, if I am to run away where can I be running to? Where can I be running to? War is everywhere" (p. 129). His quest for survival in a life-threatening environment and his inability to think critically under stress compel him to join the rebel group and he loses his innocence in the process. The use of the rhetorical questions further emphasizes Agu's confusion and his inability to decipher the consequences of his

decisions. Agu just like Birahima in Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah is Not Obligated* and Ishmael Beah's *A Long Way: Memoirs of a Boy Soldier* becomes a child soldier not by choice but for survival. Child soldiers as seen in the case of Agu are also programmed into believing that the only way to ensure justice for their parents, siblings and friends is to fight and kill. Clearly, Agu's vulnerability and innocence just like many other child soldiers make them susceptible to military and rebel recruitments during times of war.

#### 4.2 The Child Soldier as Victimizer

Agu's days as a brutal murderer and a beast begin after his recruitment and he is ordered by the Commandant to kill a soldier. This is where we begin to witness Agu's transformation from an innocent victim of war to a victimizer. The Commandant tells Agu, "Do you see this dog! He is shouting. You want to be a soldier eh? Well—kill him. KILL HIM NOW!" (Iweala, 2005: 26). This act of killing is likened to the act of "falling in love" since according to the Commandant, it is devoid of reasoning. The Commandant also likens it to the act of "killing a goat". This scene can be understood as some kind of initiation rite. Here, the Commandant becomes a teacher, a perverted instructor who moulds young and innocent children into vicious killers. War has thwarted Agu's dreams of becoming an engineer or a doctor. Instead of being taught in a civilized and accepted manner (formal education) how to achieve these dreams, he is mentored by the Commandant to become a ruthless killer. Even though Osiki (2021) sees war as a post-colonial illness that plagues the African continent, it can also be seen as a cankerous and corrupted pedagogue that shapes innocent children into killers. Being just a child who once had a family, who was loved and had never taken the life of another man, Agu laments:

I am starting to crying and I am starting to shaking. And in my head I am shouting NO! NO! NO! but my mouth is not moving and I am not saying anything. And I am thinking, if I am killing killing, then I am going to hell so I am smelling fire and smoke and it is harding to breath, so I am just standing there crying crying, shaking shaking, looking looking (Iweala, 2005: 18).

In order to limn the fear that arrests Agu, the writer makes use of repetition to depict his trauma. The repetition of the word "NO!" accompanied by an exclamation mark only tells the overwhelming and traumatic nature of the scene. Again, one cannot lose sight of the capitalization of the word "NO!". This strongly communicates Agu's resentment to the act of killing another human being and brings to light the instances of coercion that dictate the lives of child soldiers. It helps identify Agu at this point in the novel as a victim who is forced to commit an inhumane act against his will. This ultimately helps foreground Agu's innocence. This means that the author's writing style – his use of capitalization and some punctuation marks (graphology) help communicate Agu's plight as a victim of war. This is what Bilal and Cheema (2012) as quoted by Yankyerah (2021) explain as *a graphological discussion of style*. They posit that:

A graphological discussion of style among other features entails the foregrounding of quotation marks, ellipses, periods, hyphens, contracted forms, special structures, the full stop, the colon, the bold prints, capitalization, small print, spacing, italics...

The repetition of the words "crying", "shaking", and "looking" is also very significant to understanding Agu as a victim of war. Even though one can easily attribute the use of

repetition to the influence of African oral storytelling as a result of performance, it also helps reveal the repetitious nature of Agu's trauma. The wrong use of grammar is a unique feature of Iweala's novel. In almost all of his narrations, Agu violates linguistic and grammatical rules and breaches conventional code of the English Language, to give prominence to his state of mind as the story unfolds. By saying "it is hardening to breath", Agu unconventionally turns an adjective "hard" to a verb "hardening". This is what in the area of Literary Stylistics Yankson (1987) calls *Violation of Category Rule*. Yankyerah (2021: 174) explains that "a violation of category rule is said to have occurred when a deliberate misplacement of a lexical item is employed by a writer or a literary artist. For instance, if a writer intentionally employs a noun to perform the work of a verb in a sentence, it means that there is a violation of a grammatical rule." This violation as seen in Agu's narration is consistent with the disorientation that accompanies his first kill as a child soldier. The use of parallel structures also helps highlight the plight of Agu. This is a writing style that may involve the repetition of a single word, a phrase or an entire sentence. Parallelism can be understood as a literary feature in which portions of sentences have the same or similar grammatical structure. This technique is employed extensively in Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* to help make perceptible the plights, trauma and loss of Agu. He says:

I am starting to crying / I am starting to shaking

**Subject + verb + to infinitive**

It is clear from the example above that even though the two statements do not have the same words repeated throughout; there is a repetition in terms of the grammatical structure. This helps readers appreciate how Agu is left traumatized and lost at various levels – physically, psychologically and emotionally. It is not surprising that Nkansah (2009: 87) posits that the general notion of parallelism is a woven scheme on the manipulation of the many forms of repetition where the recurrence happens in the line of the text. Consequently, through the use of parallelism, the author reveals how child soldiers are continually manipulated, brainwashed and coerced to take up the identities of heartless "soldiers" and "rebels".

Obviously, Agu is petrified to kill another man, but being a "soldier" now means taking orders without questioning. So, with the help of the Commandant and Strika, Agu eventually kills the soldier he ironically perceives and has been brainwashed to believe to be his enemy (the ones who killed his father). Agu narrates:

He is taking my hand and bringing it down so hard on top of the enemy's head and I am feeling like electricity is running through my whole body. The man is screaming, AYEEEEIII, louder than the sound of bullet whistling and then he is bringing his hand to his head, but it is not helping because his head is cracking and the blood is spilling out like milk from coconut. I am hearing laughing all around me even as I am watching him trying to hold his head together. He is annoying me and I am bringing the machete up and down and up and down hearing KPWUDA KPWUDA every time and seeing just pink while I am hearing the laughing KEHI, KEHI, KEHI all around me. 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. Strika is joining me and we are just beating him and cutting him while everybody is laughing. 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. I am hearing the

bird flapping their wing as they are leaving all the tree. It is sounding like thunder. I am hearing the mosquito buzzing in my ear so loud and I am feeling how the blood is just wetting on my leg and my face. The enemy's body is having deep red cut everywhere and his forehead is looking just crushed so his whole face is not even looking like face because his head is broken everywhere and there is just blood, blood, blood (Iweala, 2005: 21).

The above narration from Agu is replete with powerful images. The words, "AYEEEEIII", "KPWUDU", "KEHI" immediately appeal to the reader's sense of hearing (auditory imagery). The author thus, presents to readers a child protagonist who is yet to acquire the appropriate language to express the horrors that he sees and experiences. This is why Agu constantly describes traumatic scenes and experiences by resorting to the use of onomatopoeic language (making reference to a thing or action via a vocal imitation of the sound that comes with that particular thing or action). The author, therefore, makes use of ideophones. These are words that evoke an idea in sound, often a vivid impression of certain sensation or sensory perception. This sound-communication element in the text is what helps readers hear with their minds' ear so they can better appreciate the senselessness and violence that surrounds war and how it induces physical pain on victims. Agu compares the blood flowing from the soldier's head to milk spilling from a coconut. This hyperbolic statement, carried on the wings of simile, foregrounds the image of pain in the reader's mind's eye and foreshadows the atrocities that Agu will commit later in the novel as a child soldier. The author, even though allows the narrative to develop obtrusively, it is clear at this point that he also relies on the imaginative capacities of the reader to take in bit by bit the trauma and senselessness of the whole episode. This ensures an intense emotional engagement between the reader and the narrative. Although, Agu is initially hesitant, one cannot help but notice the enthusiasm and zeal that later engulfs him as he begins slaughtering the soldier. This particular scenario is perfectly explained by Bloom (1999: 11). She quotes Real (1997) who asserts that:

When we understand the effects of trauma, it is easier to grasp how someone could be victimized and turn away from the victim role and towards the victimizer role instead. A victim is both helpless and powerless, and as we have seen, helplessness is a noxious human experience. Human beings will do anything to avoid feeling powerless. If you have been victimized, one of the possible outcomes is to assume the power of the one who has hurt you by becoming someone who terrorizes and abuses others. Such behavior can reduce anxiety while providing a certain excitement and the combination of these two effects can become habit-forming.

At this point, it is obvious that Agu is in denial – a traumatic stage where a trauma victim ignores or represses his trauma by engaging in acts that under normal circumstances, he or she would not have. The trauma victim ignores his or her trauma and his or her emotions become numb. By consoling himself with seemingly-assuring thoughts like "I am not bad boy. I am not bad boy. I am soldier and soldier is not bad if he is killing... So if I am killing, then I am only doing what is right" (p. 31) and hooked unto hard drugs, Agu becomes a ruthless killer. He tells himself:



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 running from me and people screaming for me when I am killing them and taking their blood. I am liking to kill... I am feeling like man with big muscle and small head and I am thinking that nothing can be stopping me and nothing can be slowing me down—not even the hill we are climbing. I am like leopard hunting in the bush (Iweala, 2005: 53).

Even though Agu was once a victim, he becomes addicted to violence after he is initiated and brainwashed by the Commandant. The “art” of killing is presented to him as a necessity and a duty. He must imbibe these ideals in order to survive the chaos that accompanies the war. By ironically comparing himself to a man with big muscles and a leopard, Agu’s transformation from a victim to a victimizer becomes very obvious. He becomes a hardened and a remorseless torturer. He now seems to take pride in the monster that he has become: a sadist who takes pleasure in the screams and cries of his victims. This is seen in the constant use of the clause, “I am liking....” Under the duress of hard drugs, Agu together with Strika and some other soldiers molest and rape a woman and her daughter during a raid in one of the villages. Agu narrates:

Under the bed there is woman and her daughter just hiding. She is looking at us and worrying worrying so much it is looking like somebody is cutting her face with knife. She is smelling like goat and we are wanting to kill her so we are dragging her... Strika is pulling down his short and showing that he is 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! ... AYIIIIII! woman is just looking at me and screaming. And I am shouting, SHUTUP! SHUTUP! SHUTUP! This woman is enemy. She is killing my family and burning my house and stealing my food and making my family to scatter. And this girl is enemy. She is killing my father and making me to run from my home. I am pulling the girl, but she is not letting go of her mother’s arm. She is holding holding her so the two of them are like one animal. I am with Strika and we are pulling the girl, pulling until her leg is cracking, but she is not letting go. She is screaming and I am seeing her breath is coming out from her mouth, just coming out and coming out. Then Strika is taking his knife high above his head and chopping and everybody is coming apart. The girl is having no more hand. She is not screaming or shouting or making any noise. She is just having no more hand. Commandant is saying that she is enemy, she is stealing our food, and killing my family because she is enemy. I am jumping on her chest KPWUD KPWUD and I am jumping on her head, KPWUD, until it is only blood that is coming out of her mouth. You are not my mother, I am saying to the girl’s mother and then I am raising my knife high above my head. I am liking the sound of knife chopping KPWUDA KPWUDA on her head and how the blood is just splashing on my hand and my face and my feet. I am chopping and chopping and chopping until I am looking up and it is dark (Iweala, 2005: 56-57).

We glean Agu's total transformation much more in the extract above where readers witness the highest form of disregard for human life. Agu compares the smell of the woman to the smell of a goat. This animalistic comparison shows how these children have been brainwashed to consider their supposed enemies as non-humans who do not deserve to be treated with dignity. At this point in the novel, Agu's sudden transformation from an innocent boy who once lived a peaceful life together with his family with aspirations of becoming a doctor or an engineer to a blood-thirsty and ruthless killer becomes patent. In order to numb their emotions as they rape and commit the atrocities, Agu and Strika shout constantly. They repeatedly shout 'SHUT UP!' in order to drown the cries and voices of their victims so as to distance themselves from any form of pity. They seem to put on a mask of machismo just so they can carry out these horrible acts. The repetition of the cacophonous sounds "KPWUD" and "KPWUDA" as Agu jumps on his victim's chest and head showcases how violent and remorseless these child soldiers become. It also makes obvious the pain that the vulnerable in the society must suffer as a result of war. Agu mutilates (chopping and chopping and chopping) his victims until he later looks up and realizes it is dark. Discussing how perpetrators of criminal violence have had serious childhood traumatic experiences, Bloom (2018: 19) quotes Strueber, Lueck and Roth (2007) that:

Their early experiences have done such damage to them that they have become detached from other humans, and they have become incapable of empathy, often on a permanent basis...they are unable to love and care for life other than their own, and even their capacity to love and respect themselves is severely impaired or missing on all levels other than that of pure survival.

This explains why Agu and Strika even though young children can unleash such terror and violence on other human beings. The fact that Agu seems to love the violence he perpetuates at this point shows how lost he has become. Although his natural growth development is not interrupted, his sanity as a human being has been completely shattered and compromised. He becomes a lost child.

## 5. Conclusion

The study clearly shows through the literary analysis of Iweala's *Beast of No Nation*, that the protagonist, Agu, is robbed of his innocence and childhood. The author characterizes Agu as a child who transitions from being a victim of war to a victimizer in order for him (Agu) to survive the war. Being a representative of many other child soldiers, it is worth stressing that Agu never wishes to commit these atrocities, but he is compelled to do so by circumstances beyond his control. Having lost his family who is meant to protect him, he is left with no other alternative than to join these military forces in order to survive the brutalities of war. Even when he abhors what he does, he must do them if he wants to survive. The logic then goes: just "as flies are to wanton boys," so are child soldiers to warlords during times of war, they senselessly conscript them for their selfish gains and satisfaction.

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