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Torture and Trauma in WodOkello Lawoko's *The Dungeons of Nakasero*

Oluwagbemiro Isaiah Adesina^{1*} and Mobolanle Ebunoluwa Sotunsa¹

¹ Department of Languages and Literary Studies, Babcock University, Illisan Remo, Nigeria.

Corresponding author*

Abstract

African literature is characterised by the struggles and challenges of Africans, entailing pains of slavery, primitive colonisation and modern colonisation otherwise referred to as neo-colonisation or imperialism. The continent's postcolonial challenges include poor leadership, government instability, corruption, poor justice administrative system, underdevelopment, and poverty, among others. Prison memoir, which is a form of witness and resistance literature, particularly, the one written by Prisoners of Conscience (POC), is usually a documentation of these challenges including the trauma experienced as a result of torture experienced from bad leaders. Journalists, being part of society have not been excluded from the societal problems, principally, the torture and trauma experienced from undemocratic leaders. Some journalists have captured these experiences in their writings. However, while scholarship in African literature has paid attention to the various problems of Africa, it has not sufficiently explored torture and trauma in literary texts, mainly, the memoirs written by journalists. WodOkello Lawoko's *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, a journalist memoir of sufferings, torture and trauma in the hands of Uganda's worst dictatorial military head of state, General Idi Amin, captures the highlighted African struggles and challenges. Therefore, against this backdrop, this study explores the nexus between torture and trauma in *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, which presents the real-life ordeals of Ugandans during the reign of Idi Amin. The study relies on Carthy Caruth's trauma theory to undertake a textual analysis of the text. Apart from depicting Idi Amin as the worst dictatorial head of state in Uganda, it further places him as one of the worst leaders in Africa. The text depicts journalism as one of the riskiest professions in the world and notes that only the unison of Africans can rid the continent of dictators and poor leadership.

Keywords: Journalists; Prison Memoir; *The Dungeons of Nakasero*; Torture and Trauma; Uganda.

1. Introduction

Witness Literature is a literary genre explored by survivors of traumatic experiences to narrate their ordeals. Yudice (1991, p. 17) defines witness literature as “an authentic narrative, told by a witness, who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g. war, oppression, revolution, etc.)” Several literary scholars including Yudice (1991), White (2004), Anden (2021) and Gilmore (2001), coin different terms for the genre: fictional testimony, witness narrative, documentary literature, testimonial literature, faction and literature of witness.

Spurring repressed victims to document their horrific experiences for various reasons, including judicial proceedings, is the unimaginable torture they have been subjected to at various points in their lives. This torture, which can either be clean (leaving the body unmarked to cover up the track) or scarring (marking the body with conspicuous injury), leads to trauma. Some scholars have argued that one of the ways to overcome trauma is to narrate it. Literature’s capacity to mobilise trauma is predicated upon Judith Herman’s hypothesis that traumatic feelings must be transformed into words if they are to be shared and dealt with. This is what she calls narrative memory (Herman, 1992). In African literature, torture and trauma are major motifs explored by authors in an attempt to portray the economic, religious and socio-political realities of the postcolonial era. Trauma is represented as a gateway and a witness to survival amid traumatic experiences. Thus, in witness literature, survivors reminisce about their scars to testify and historicise.

In essence, African literature is known to exhibit the struggles and challenges of Africans. Prison memoir, which is a form of witness literature, is also not devoid of this and one of the major features is the experience of torture and trauma Africans are subjected to under military rule. This is captured in various forms of genres available on the continent. Interestingly, some journalists have equally suffered this fate and captured this experience in their memoirs. However, scholarship in African literature has not sufficiently explored torture and trauma in literary texts, particularly, the memoirs written by journalists. A few ones like Cloete and Mlambo (2014), Nwanyanwu and Anasiudu (2019), Nabutanyi (2019), Narismulu (2012) and Tembo (2017) that investigate either torture or trauma are not only scanty, they focused on fictional texts.

Therefore, it is against this backdrop that this study explores the nexus between torture and trauma in *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, a journalist’s memoir that presents the real-life ordeals of Ugandans during the reign of General Idi Amin Dada. With the aid of Carthy Caruth’s trauma theory, this study undertakes a textual analysis of WodOkello Lawoko’s *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, a memoir which bears witness to the repressions of the regime of General Idi Amin. This is to highlight Lawoko’s contribution to the discourse on the motifs of torture and trauma in African witness literature.

The graphic narrative of torture and trauma offers insight into the lived experiences of average Ugandans during this regime. The study further shows that the memoir goes beyond the narration of individual trauma, as it is a reflection of what can be described as collective trauma – the traumatising of a people or a whole nation. Furthermore, the memoir also articulates the unique and common trauma experiences

brought on by postcolonial exploitative regimes, which is reflective of the trauma experiences of many postcolonial African nations.

Conceptualizing Torture and Trauma

Torture experts consensually view torture as a horrendous act against humanity. For instance, Liebling-Kalifani *et al* (2007) define torture as “a cruel and inhuman act, produced by one or more perpetrators, who find themselves in a situation of the absolute power of life or death over another person, who finds him – or herself submitted, without any defence or any chance to impede the torture, free, or defend him – or herself” (p. 7). In the same manner, Gilmore (2001), whose definition focuses on physical torment describes torture as “the systematic infliction of physical torment on detained individuals by state officials for police purposes, for confession, information, or intimidation”. Redress (The Convention against Torture) (2018), citing Article 1.1 of the 1984 United Nations Convention Against Torture, gives a comprehensive definition of torture:

Any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person, information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions (p. 4).

Therefore, torture in this context is a governmental tool deliberately used to cause body or/and mental harm for any purpose, which includes information elicitation, intimidation and harassment, and to cow critical individuals.

Torture could be physical, psychological, or both. At the physical level, torture is in various forms including routine kicking, slapping, application of electric current to the body, severe beatings with any object including rifle butts and sticks, tying the victim’s hands and feet, keeping detainees tied together in mud pits, tying victims with the head facing down, inflicting serious harm to the private part, suspension from the ceiling while tied up; water torture including waterboarding, forcing the victim to lie face up, mouth open while the tap is turned on into the mouth, rape and gang rape of female victims (Redress, 2018).

Psychological or mental torture comes in many forms including death threats, putting the nozzle of the pistol into the victim’s mouth, showing him fresh graves, dead bodies or snakes, forcing detainees to witness the torture of others, food and sleep deprivation, which has specific effects on the body’s physiological processes and stress positions, including forced standing, causing immense physical pain, sexual humiliation or threats of pain, but rarely are such acts isolated from physical tortures: beatings, stress

positions, or sensory assault with strobe lights and deafening music. These tortures are to produce torment, pain, suffering, vexation, humiliation and fear with the ultimate aim to break the victims. Nevertheless, the torture of political prisoners is usually directed at extracting confessions and destroying the prisoner's personality. It could be posited that all forms of physical torture will impact the mental state of the victim, hence, psychological torture may not show any trace of physical torture.

Significantly, the act of torture in any guise is condemned by the United Nations. Thus, on June 26, 2007, the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment or Punishment came into force. Yet, despite the efforts of the UN to abolish the use of torture in any society, governments of different countries still practice it in different guises.

Closely linked to torture is trauma. One of the consequences of torture is trauma. Survivors of torture have always found themselves being hunted by their hideous past experiences, hence, the experience of trauma becomes inevitable. Trauma could be immediate or at the instinct of a previous absurd experience(s). Trauma is a life-threatening experience or one that transgresses bodily integrity. It is an awful event the victim had never thought, dreamt or wished to happen, but when it does, it has to be managed or navigated out. Norbury *et al* (2021) note that it is serious harm that affects human beings negatively and leaves its toll on their bodies and psyches. In the same direction, Mailloux (2013), citing the American Psychiatric Association, defines trauma as:

direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or serious injury, or other threat to one's physical integrity; or witnessing an event that involves death, injury, or a threat to the physical integrity of another person; or learning about unexpected or violent death, serious harm, or threat of death or injury experienced by a family member or other close associate (p. p. 1).

Some of these dreadful events that can have a long-lasting effect on victims include natural disasters, violence, sexual and physical assaults, witnessing the shooting or stabbing of a person, the sudden death of a close person, hospitalisation, war, terrorism, rape, arrest, incarceration and brutality. Mostafa (2009) sees trauma beyond experiencing scary events alone as she points out that it includes the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event(s) that are not fully grasped as they occur but return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena. Therefore, the selected text for this work, *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, is a life writing that explores a series of inhuman treatments, subjugation and violence against the characters.

Theorizing Trauma

Many researchers and scholars have shared their thoughts on trauma, either as a theory or as a concept. The pioneer researchers, who theorised and conceptualised trauma are in the field of Medicine, mostly Neurologists and Clinicians, and thus the tracing of the origin of trauma theory to Medicine. These pioneers include Jean-Martin Charcot, Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud, Judith Lewis Herman, Joseph Breuer, Hermann Oppenheim, Abram Kardiner, Morton Prince and Henry Krystal. Scholars afterwards explored the theory from other fields of study ranging from Psychology: Ronnie Janoff-Bulman and John Briere, to literature:

Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Kali Tal, J. Brooks Bouson, Suzette Henke, Laurie Vickroy and History: Dominick LaCapra.

Ringel (2012) points out that Charcot was the first to investigate the relationship between trauma and mental illness, thereby providing a platform for other trauma theorists to build on. Charcot, in the 19th century, focused on hysteria, an ailment mostly identified in women with symptoms like convulsions, amnesia, paralysis, and sensory. It is thought to originate from the uterus. According to Herman (1992), Charcot was the first to understand that the origin of hysteria is psychological, and hysterical attacks are dissociative problems as a result of having endured nasty experiences. While Charcot's student, Pierre Janet, dug deeper into dissociative phenomena and traumatic memories, he concluded that patients' symptoms could be alleviated through hypnosis and abreaction, or re-exposure to the traumatic memories.

Freud and Breuer (1893), in *Studies on Hysteria* (1893), came up with a seduction theory to explain hysteria. The theory posits that the source of patients' unusual behaviour is sexual trauma. Due to a wide rejection of the theory, particularly, by the feminists, he recanted it and came up with a new theory. Though the theory was recanted, it has established that those hysterical symptoms can be alleviated when the traumatic memories and intense feelings that accompanied them are recovered and put into words. It highlights resistance to speaking about the trauma suffered. Therefore, speaking and silencing traumatised victims is a central element in literary trauma fiction. Adebisi-Adelabu and Aguele (2017) note that the clinical studies on trauma mostly focus on victims of the Holocaust, wars, rapes, terror attacks, and the like. They opine that these kinds of experiences are serious and of extreme magnitude, but put a caveat that not all cases of bad experiences are of extreme magnitude.

Anderson (2012) avers that Cathy Caruth's *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) veered off a medical examination of trauma into viewing it mainly from a literary perspective with a psychological touch. Hirth (2018) corroborates this postulation by asserting that Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996) and other trauma texts produced by the likes of Judith Herman (1992), Shoshana Felman & Dori Laub (1992), Geoffrey Hartman (1995), Bessel Van der Kolk (1996), Richard McNally (2003), Dominick La Capra (2004), and Ann Kaplan (2005), among others, shape trauma studies and redirect it towards the humanistic view, thereby enhancing its possibility of interdisciplinary studies.

On his part, Hirth (2018) explains that *Unclaimed Experience* provides an extensive framework for reading narratives of traumatic experience through both psychoanalytic and literary theories since traumatic narrative fluctuates between the confrontation of death and survival. The texts explored by Caruth in her work keep bearing witness to some forgotten wounds in the absence of an immediate understanding of the traumatic experience. The story of the wound cries out to relate to the unknown realities. She strongly holds that the language of trauma is literary and trauma is a deferred experience that returns repeatedly to haunt the survivor. Therefore, trauma is a belated experience that is fully evident only in connection with another place and at another time. Engaging Freud's latency, she argues, according to Hirth (2018):

After a latency period during which traumatic symptoms are not apparent, subjects then engage in an involuntary cycle of repetition, a reliving of the traumatic experience. For Caruth, this involuntary repetition occurs because the traumatic experience was not assimilated by the subject at the inception - the trauma is so unexpected that the subject experiences a rupture in perception. This rupturing experience then belatedly repeats as nightmares or flashbacks. Essentially, Caruth asserts that a crisis is marked not by “a simple knowledge but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness (p. 346).

For Caruth (1996), history and trauma are never one’s own because it is precisely the way people are implicated in one another’s traumas. The experience becomes dispossessed, unclaimed, by the trauma subject and only belatedly perceived about another subject’s traumatic history. She opines that a traumatic narrative cannot be limited to an individual as individual and collective stories “are sever[ed] and [bound] together, in a history that can only be figured as a speaking wound” (p. 121). Therefore, history is not individualistic but collective. The main thrust of Caruth’s argument is that the impact of trauma compels a response to the subject who demands to be heard across the distances of culture, history, and disparate traumatic experiences. Also, Macleod (2015, p. v), avers that trauma theory provides “innovative critical frameworks for reading textual and filmic responses to mass violence”. Thus, Krockel (2011) asserts that trauma theory bears witness to the author as a survivor of history.

However, despite the relevance of trauma theory to literature and the explosion of literary texts of various genres, particularly, those with overwhelming violence, civil war, and genocide thematic preoccupations, it is seldom applied to African cultural production. Thus, since trauma is a universal phenomenon, it is relevant to the study of African literature despite its Eurocentric root (Kurtz, 2020). Kurtz (2020) argues that traumatic experiences similar to the Western world characterise African narratives. This line of thought can be related to the catastrophic experiences of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, civil wars, government brutality, military dictatorship, terrorism, and the like. Therefore, Caruth’s trauma theory is considered relevant for the analysis of torture and trauma in African Witness literature as represented in Lawoko’s *The Dungeons of Nakasero*.

Torture and Trauma in Literature

There are several studies on torture and trauma in Africa. While some focus on the Rwandan genocide as a source of trauma, some examine the effect of colonialism on the African people. For instance, Gilbert (2013) examines the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, when, acts of extreme violence were committed against women. The study explores how Rwandan women genocide survivors respond to and communicate such a traumatic experience. This is done by engaging with the published testimonies of Rwandan women survivors, seeking to understand how the genocide is remembered in both individual (psychological) and collective memory (cultural) and the challenges Rwandan women face in the ongoing process of surviving trauma as well as exploring how Rwandan women position themselves as witnesses.

Cloete and Mlambo (2014), using both trauma and resilient theories, examine the challenges, realities and hopes of the African continent and her citizens in the 21st century, through a novel, *The Uncertainty of*

Hope. They highlight ways by which African literature can genuinely mirror the continent through the application of literary theory to issues and concerns in fiction and balancing the traumatic realities of life and how Africans resiliently face these challenges. With the aid of Zimbabwe's text, the study discovers different forms of trauma Africans have to battle with and how they are managed and mitigated.

Nwanyanwu and Anasiudu (2019) examine the traumatic contextualisation of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* and show how the victims of the Biafra War managed to negotiate their existence. *Half of a Yellow Sun* reveals the agonies and traumatic experiences of the Igbo ethnic nation in Nigeria and it captures the reality of trauma both at the psychological and physical level in the lives of the Igbo ethnic nation during the Nigerian civil conflict. The study explores how traumatic encounters permeate the narrative texture of the text and establishes that it is this traumatic encounter with history that constitutes the Igbo nation's experience in Nigeria.

Nabutanyi (2019) examines melancholy and trauma in David Rubadiri's poetry to highlight the violence Africans suffered during colonialism and postcolonialism. He argues that Rubadiri's poetry foregrounds the traumatic experiences and melancholic longings of Africa to provide profound insights into Africa's post (colonial) reality. Maurer (2018) studies the literary representations of trauma and survival in the Holocaust, Apartheid, and the 1994 Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. Considering the universal response to violence, she seeks broader discussions around trauma and its representation.

Tembo (2017) explores the portrayal of civil war in East African fictional and autobiographical works. Specifically, he examines the various and distinct ways in which East African writers use literature and art to translate and transmit the physical, vicarious, and psychological trauma resulting from intra-state conflicts in South Sudan, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Rwanda, Somalia, and Uganda. The study emphasises that trauma studies provide useful methodological tools for the analysis of the representation of trauma in fictional and autobiographical works, bringing to the fore specific narrative techniques to represent both individual and cultural trauma.

Examining torture and trauma in Uganda, Pringle (2019) highlights various violent activities of the Ugandan government. Pringle (2019) claims that psychiatry has attempted to account for the violent behaviour of Ugandan leaders, including suffering from general paralysis of the insane (GPI), which explains Idi Amin's 'syndrome of grandiose paranoia and 'hypomania', a state of mind in which a rapid succession of widely varying ideas hit the mind and receive oral expression'. The Ugandan leaders, according to him, suffer, among others, madness, clinical insanity, delusion and paranoid schizophrenic. A longer-term perspective, moreover, also raises questions about the legacies of a colonial state that legitimised the use of violence and which, in preparing for decolonisation, rapidly promoted soldiers and police officers through the policy of Africanisation. On her part, Ebila (2020), discusses the representation of loss and trauma in autobiographies by two Ugandan women who were once child soldiers to highlight the challenges females face during war.

While these studies are relevant, there is still much to be done in exploring the significant link between torture and trauma in African Witness literature most especially, the literary production in Uganda, despite the traumatic experience the citizens of the country have been subjected to as a result of dictatorial governments since independence. The lacuna observed in literature justifies the thrust of this study on WodOkello Lawoko's prison memoir.

Uganda and Torture

In Africa, Uganda is a country that is notorious for torture. Otunnu (1992, p. 23) explains that "since Uganda gained independence from Britain, the country has experienced some of the worst human catastrophes in modern times - gross violations of human rights, amounting to genocide." Torture in the country is a political instrument that governments at different times, including the incumbent, President Yoweri Museveni, have employed in cowing the citizens because of the inordinate ambition to stay in power indefinitely. Centre for Policy Analysis (2017) alludes to this assertion when it states that torture has "remained a prominent tool in the repertoire of tactics that the state uses against suspects" throughout Uganda's history", arguing that "the use of torture by regimes is as old as Uganda itself" (p. 1).

Burke and Okiror (2021) list some of the methods used in torture in Uganda including systematic torture, detention in harsh conditions in secret prisons, and denial of access to family members and lawyers in detention. Redress (Torture in Uganda) (2018) adds some other peculiar patterns identified with Uganda. It notes that, in Uganda, torture methods used against men often target the genitalia. Women are exposed to various sexual torture including rape, gang rape, sexual comforting, forced incest, sex in exchange for gifts or security, forced marriage, abduction with rape, attempted rape, and forced to witness violent sexual acts. Kippenberg (2004, p. 23) adds that other types of torture, particularly, in Uganda's ungazetted illegal detention places referred to as "safe houses" include:

kandoya (tying hands and feet behind the victim); suspension from the ceiling while tied kandoya; water torture or "Liverpool" (forcing the victim to lie face up, mouth open, while the spigot is turned on into his mouth); severe beatings with hands, fists, pistols, metal rods, and wooden sticks with nails protruding; death threats, including putting the nozzle of a pistol into the victim's mouth, showing him fresh graves, dead bodies, or snakes; putting the victim in the back of a vehicle where his captors sit or put their boots on him; abusive language and threats; and kicking with boots all parts of the body...the gang rape of females; and mutilating the male genitalia of suspects, through kicking, beating with sticks, puncturing with hypodermic needles, and tying the penis with wire or weights.

In essence, the regime of Idi Amin in Uganda, which is the focus of Lawoko's memoir, was filled with all forms of torture, hence, the subjection of Ugandans to a life of trauma.

Synopsis of *The Dungeons of Nakasero*

In *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, WodOkello Lawoko describes the events leading to the 1971 coup in Uganda and his 196-day incarceration at the State Research Bureau's dungeon in Nakasero. The memoir is a real story of torture, horror, and trauma, which is not for the faint-hearted. Lawoko gives a horror-filled account of what transpired. When Idi Amin seized power, Lawoko was the head of programming at Radio Uganda. He received training in media management and technology in America for two years before being appointed as the Controller of Programmes at Radio Uganda. He was detained in February 1977 together with other Ugandans and accused of treason. The group of sixteen was tried after six months of incarceration by the military tribunal set up by Idi Amin's administration.

Though Lawoko is declared guilty of the offences he is being accused of, the tribunal sets him free. After receiving a tipoff that his life is in grave danger, he escapes to Kenya but is denied asylum. In the memoir, Lawoko gives horrifying details of the torture and cruel killings that are the order of the day in the dungeons. He breathes a sigh of relief and rejoices on getting to Nairobi. Yet, his happiness is not full because of the overpowering sense of belonging and connection with those who had witnessed and heard what so few others will live to tell.

Narrating Torture in WodOkello Lawoko's *The Dungeons of Nakasero*

The Ugandan WodOkello Lawoko's *The Dungeons of Nakasero* can be likened to Coetzee's *Waiting for The Barbarians*, which, according to Aytemiz (2017), J. M. Coetzee himself, describes as "the impact of the torture chamber on the life of a man of conscience" (p. 47). *The Dungeons of Nakasero* is a prison memoir that centres on the authoritarian regime of Idi Amin, which is characterised by torture, in this case, as an instrument used by a mediocre and poor leader to perpetually subdue his citizens. Torture, be it physical or psychological, is a running motif in the text, representing the inhumanity and incivility that fellow humans are subjected to. Lawoko, a gentle and civilised broadcasting veteran and high-ranking pioneer journalist in Uganda, establishes that leadership, at all levels, is the main problem in Africa. Africans have continued to demonstrate absurd wickedness and acute incompetence to lead and manage themselves. They have continued to wreak untold havoc of a huge magnitude not even known in the colonial era on their citizens.

The memoir highlights various instances of abuse and oppression Ugandans experienced under the military government of Amin. Torture is the most notorious aspect of Amin's government, suggesting that Amin's government was a period during which sadistic torment was inflicted on the citizens with impunity and without provocation. The narration of the episodes of torture in the memoir is so graphic that Lawoko describes the experience "as a true story and painful experience" (p. 3). Beyond that, the narrative is a story of the incarceration of people of conscience (POC), otherwise known as political prisoners, who put their lives on the line to resist authoritarianism. Most of them paid the ultimate price for their stands as they were gruesomely eliminated.

Amin, a self-proven cannibal surrounds himself with fellow cannibals and attempts to cannibalise Ugandans until his government was terminated through a coup staged by some soldiers in exile in collaboration with the Tanzanian government led by late President Julius Nyerere. Establishing the cannibalistic nature of Amin and his men, a guard pre-informed the incarcerated victims about how they would be brutally murdered. He says: “My name is Cannibal if you don’t know me. I will first make you eat your own penis before dying with it in your stomach” (p. 67).

The protagonist foregrounds the torture experienced by Ugandans through the characterisation of Amin. From the onset, the author-narrator introduces the chief torturer, “I vividly recall the day I first met Idi Amin” (p. 9), who as a member of Uganda Legislative Council (LEGCO), joins his colleagues in Lawoko’s house for a meeting on “Saturday afternoon in 1956” (p. 9). They later become close and he honours an invitation to Amin’s house for lunch. After leaving, Amin wrongly accuses his first wife (Mamma Maliam) of flirting with Lawoko and this results in the first domestic violence recorded in the text. This is a signifier of Amin as an insecure and complex being. Amin’s second wife, Kay Admin (Adroa), Lawoko’s junior staff, in a letter warns Lawoko, “Be careful with my husband” (p. 13), adding, “After you had departed, my husband accused Mamma Maliam of being in love with you. He then proceeded to beat her up very badly. So, Mamma Maliam wants you to know that Amin can hurt you. Don’t go near him anymore” (p. 13). Mamma Maliam also personally warns Lawoko and informs him about how ruthless her husband is naturally.

Following this is a thought that Lawoko’s friend, Dr Okot P’Bitek, shares with him about Amin, “This character is dangerous to the country. He doesn’t fear to slaughter a sacred cow!” (p. 15). All these thoughts first translated into reality prior to Amin becoming a military president through a coup. He recklessly abuses his power by subjecting a journalist, Mr Bryon Kawadwa to torture. On the order of Amin, Kawadwa is illegally arrested and detained at Mbuya Army Headquarters for allegedly committing the crime of walking near a besieged palace.

Amin, as a president, unleashes full terror on Ugandans in different forms, ranging from arrest to outright execution. For his terror assignments, Amin recruits heartless foreigners (Sudanese, Palestinian and Chinese) as his killer squad – the narrator describes these mercenaries as “strange and hostile faces” – to carry out horrendous activities against the citizens. He populates his army with foreigners because he holds that Ugandans will not have the guts to torture one another. Lawoko recounts: “On Thursday 28th January, part of this new force began an operation to arrest and execute both top and junior military officers in Gulu” (p. 28). These activities later spread across the country. Ironically, the first person arrested and severely tortured before execution is the officer who prevented Amin’s coup from being challenged. To motivate the mercenary soldiers to kill the so-called rebels, he promises that any soldier who kills the rebels will be promoted and decorated with the rank of the fallen victim (p. 29).

The torture in the narrative takes different forms and it is so grave that many of the government casualties bled to death. A minister of internal affairs in the collapsed government, Mr Basil Bataringa is berated and humiliated by Amin himself, paraded in a jeep, and jabbed with bayonets of several armed men, before being taken away and heartlessly executed (p. 31). Another victim, the Inspector General of Police, Mr

Erinayo Oryema, though, narrowly escaped death, is subjected to both physical and psychological torture. His residence was bombed and a person was killed.

One of the celebrated instances of torture in the narrative is the handling of Hamed Oduka. Oduka is accused of writing a letter to the immediate past government to be weary of Amin, whom he describes as a person without good intentions for the country. When Amin took over power, one of his lieutenants saw the letter and showed it to him. As a result, Oduka was marked for extermination. During the coup, Amin's men storm Oduka's house for elimination but he is not found. When they realise he has escaped, they harass and intimidate the family and equally scatter Oduka's house. Determined to hack him down, Amin orders his men to bring Oduka back from Mobisa in Kenya where he flees to. His men go to Kenya, drug Oduka, and bring him back to Uganda in outright violation of human rights. Lawoko recounts:

According to eye-witnesses at the president's office, when Hamed Oduka was brought before Amin, the president himself began to physically assault and torture his guest. Amin called his victim a stupid and weak Muslim. When Oduka was bleeding profusely, the very bitter Idi Amin then ordered that the victim be loaded into a waiting Landrover and driven to Lubiri army barracks. On arrival, Mr Oduka was immediately clubbed to death (p. 32).

Another instance of torture is the experience of Lt Col Abwola. Abwola was commanding the Mubenbe Battalion when Amin's men attacked and killed many soldiers, but Abwola escaped. He could not stay long in hiding because of the fear that his family members may be attacked. Through a third party, he reaches out to Amin, who assures him of his safety and asks him to resume duty. Taking Amin for his words, Abwola, in the company of Oryema reports to Amin, who asks his companion to leave Abwola with him so that he can be well entertained. Shortly after Oryema left, the guards of Amin descended on Abwola, beating and clubbing him with all kinds of crude weapons. He is never seen again (p. 35).

Efforts are made by the anti-Amin guerrilla based in Tanzania to rescue Uganda from Amin, but they are captured. Among them is Mr Alex Ojera, former minister of Information. Amin invites the press and some foreign guests to witness a meeting he has with the prisoner (p. 36). Although wounded and with clear signs of being physically tortured, Amin mocks and taunts the man before promising that Ojera will be charged with treason in a court of law. Before the same press, he orders his men to take good care of the former minister and to stop torturing him. At the meeting, Ojera is bundled up in ropes and stripped to the waist. He is brutally murdered that night.

The ordeal of Lawoko, the memoirist in the hands of Amin, his onetime friend started on Tuesday 15th February 1977, when he was arrested in his office over a false allegation of collaborating with some military men planning to overthrow the government of Amin (p. 57). In reality, his major 'crime' was committed shortly after Amin became the president. Amin sends a document signed by the ousted president, Dr Apolo Obote, to Lawoko to verify and confirm the signature of the ex-president (p. 28). In the document, Obote is alleged to have promised support to coup planners in Kenya, who was planning to overthrow Mzee Jomo

Kenyatta. Lawoko's verification of the signature would, therefore, confirm that Obote is trying to overthrow Kenyatta, the propaganda Amin wants to push through as the reason why he overthrew Obote.

Since Lawoko has never seen Obote's signature, he replies to the president that he is not in a position to verify the former president's signature (p. 28). Lawoko, who is arrested by about twenty soldiers, foregrounds his psychological torture and danger ahead of him as he is been led to the truck parked fifty metres away from his office where he is arrested:

I did not react with outward fear, although I felt that something must have gone seriously wrong... The seriousness of the situation was quickly dawning on me... I had realised by now that the slightest attempt at resistance or flight would have meant instant death!... Although arrests or abductions were common, this was the first time someone working with Radio Uganda had been taken from their office (p. 57-58).

The significance of the arrest and incarceration of Lawoko reveals the wickedness, heartlessness and impunity of Amin's government. It exposes all the dastard acts of Amin and members of his government ranging from chronic torture to death or what is described as "torture-murder". Torture murder simply means any murder that occurred due to the intentional infliction of pain and suffering on the victim. Bessler (2016, p. xiii), describes it as "killings aggravated by acts of torture." This inhuman act, according to Lawoko takes place in three slaughter centres around Kampala. One is the Police Public Safety Unit established under Kassim Obura and located at a Police Training College in Naguru. The second killing centre is at the Military Police Headquarters in Makindye and was headed by Lieutenant Colonel Marela. The third killing centre is the State Research Bureau headquarters in Nakasero, located at Nakasero. Lawoko is detained for 196 days at the third killing centre, a dungeon, and this makes it possible for Lawoko to give the true picture of daily activities in the centre. When Amin's henchmen go for prey, they lay siege, and violently arrest and lock up the victim inside a dungeon.

A psychological torture that is peculiar to all the incarcerated victims or men who jump a fence to escape arrest is the fear of what their family members are going through in their absence. On several occasions, victims are deceived into believing that Amin will pardon and release them to reunite with their families. As they are warming up for this, they are returned back to the dungeon. An example of this kind of trauma is experienced by Dr John Leji Lalobo, who is eventually slaughtered just like some of Amin's victims (p. 145).

Ironically, at the point of death, occasionally, some victims put up resistance and fight for survival. There is an occasion when the victims, who, despite being handcuffed and leg cuffed overpower the killer squad (p. 78). They kill some of them and the condemned victims' executions have to be postponed to another time. The next time the killers come, they are better prepared and cruelly murdered in the most bizarre way that cannot be imagined (p. 80).

Another torture-murder takes the form of first releasing gas into the cell to choke the inmates and weaken them to the point of not being able to resist the brutal killing to follow. This, they often do when the slaughterers feel that the cell is overcrowded and they need to decongest or empty in order to refill it.

Lawoko narrates that it is a usual practice that at any time of the day, new victims in hundreds are brought into the dungeons. The sign of new arrivals is the sound of shuffling footsteps of people being dragged and pushed downstairs before eventually being thrown into the dungeons. Among the victims, those who find themselves in cell one referred to as C1 become condemned victims who can be butchered as soon as possible. The signs are everywhere in the dungeons as a point of no return. There are blood-soaked shirts, torn blood-stained trousers, bits of human bone and excrement littering the cells, and the belongings and remains of people that have been killed. The walls are all blood-stained and, in some places, human brain tissue and dung are sprayed, confirming the types of treatment that the previous occupants had received. Sometimes, the dead are left in the cell for days. When they are finally evacuated, a large portion of their rotting skin will peel off and remain stuck on the floor. The odour is that of death itself.

Lawoko recounts that some of the prominent victims brought to the dungeons include the former Archbishop of Uganda recently promoted as the Archbishop of Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi and Boga Zaire, Janani Luwum, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Charles Oboth-Ofumbi and Mr Erinayo Oryema, the first Ugandan Inspector General of Police at independence. Lawoko narrates how the archbishop is dehumanised, tortured, and murdered.

While still mourning the archbishop, two other victims identified as Nazarena Amone, and Obonyo are thrown into C1 (p. 68). They are soldiers accused of being guerrillas. At the officers' mess, Maliyamungu, one of the killer squads, slit open Obonyo's belly with a bayonet and orders both Amone and Obonyo into a truck, which he personally drives to the bureau headquarters. At midnight, removing the unconscious Obonyo, Amone's handcuff is removed and his arms are tightly bound behind him with sisal rope and he is led to where he is murdered.

Furthermore, part of the psychological torture melted on the prisoners is feeding them with human parts or a whole dead snake with its head and tail intact. Whenever the prisoners discover this after swallowing a few of these meats, they throw up and the guards punish them for vomiting a "sumptuous meal" given to them.

Narrating Trauma in WodOkello Lawoko's *The Dungeons of Nakasero*

The Dungeons of Nakasero is a representation of the traumatic events that explore both the individual and collective disastrous experiences of Ugandans. It is established that the atrocities narrated or the wounds expressed in the text are hugely traumatic to the extent of being described as the "Ugandan holocaust". This is expressed in the dedication. Lawoko wrote: "This book is dedicated to the hundreds of thousands of Ugandans who either disappeared or were murdered by the military regime of Idi Amin Dada between the years 1971 to 1979. To all Ugandans who perished in brutal hands of subsequent dictatorship (p. 8)".

The experience of trauma in Lawoko's story is in two-fold: the actual graphic torture instances in the dungeons and within the cities, and the perpetual fear of the inevitable. Incredibly, following Ugandan's postcolonial experience, each successive government of the country has continued to build on the brutality,

pains, and wounds initiated by the previous administrations. Therefore, the trauma has continued to be fresh among Ugandans. Significantly, Radstone (2007) points out that trauma theory is primarily concerned with witnesses and testimonies that rely on memory, which is applicable to the practice of history. Besides, it revolves around grave occurrences and the confrontation with death and survival. The survivors narrate the belated experiences fragmentally and chronologically.

The representation of trauma can also be seen in the foreword. The one-page foreword of the narrative creates the image of grave occurrences weaved into a fragmented and chronologically arranged story. Intuiting the difficulty in the acceptance of unimaginable stories shared in the 150-page memoir, the author-narrator speaks to the readers that the stories are not concocted, as he declaratively affirms: "My book is a document of the facts as I witnessed them" (p. 7). Elucidating the hugeness of the tragic events that Uganda suffered and the very traumatic reign that Amin unleashed on Uganda, the author-narrator feels that conscious comprehensive, and integrated efforts must be made to heal Ugandans, or else, generations in and out will have to be embroiled in Ugandan postcolonial pains and trauma.

The tragic events are so overwhelming to the extent that the exit of Amin from the government cannot reverse the conditions and mindset of Ugandans. Though Amin left the government in 1979, "his legacy continued to dog Uganda long after that date" (p. 7). The author-narrator advocates that the survivors of Amin's brutality should speak up, however, the government feels differently. Hence, attempts are made to exterminate Lawoko, and the manuscripts for his book are stolen thrice. Lawoko opines further "It is not enough for us to say that today fewer people disappear without a trace, or that only a few are executed without due judicial process compared to the significantly higher numbers seen during Idi Amin's rule" (p. 8), instead, something must be done to heal Ugandans from the legacy of Idi Amin, or else, intolerance and genocide might continue to loom over that nation.

The author-narrator further explains the magnitude of the events in the memoir by comparing them to genocide, which could have been avoided if the local and international communities were able to discern and were pragmatic about Amin's personality. After hoodwinking Ugandans into accepting him as a messiah to the oppressed while carrying out a most heinous agenda, he expressed happiness in the extermination of millions of Jews during World War II and wished all Jews should have been wiped out from the surface of the earth (p. 7). This happens to be the horrific story of the Northern Ugandans, particularly, the Gulus, those he pencilled down for elimination before becoming the military president on the basis of ethnicity and education. He eliminates a large number of them and he may have possibly eliminated all if his government had lasted longer.

Lawoko is able to firmly establish the memoir as traumatic when due to the inability to find words to depict the pains Ugandans are subjected to, as Caruth (1996), notes that a distinguishing feature of trauma is the inability to find language adequate to describe the experience. Lawoko says:

I could only relate the stories to the relatively innocent fellow refugees as best as I could. I was unable to find language expressive enough to sufficiently describe the feelings that one experiences as he or she witnesses the bludgeoning of a human skull, or snapping of the neck.

Neither could I sufficiently describe the almost soundless penetration of a fellow senior civil servant's belly by the tip of a killer's dagger, the sudden oozing of blood as the murderer draws it out and tastes the blood of his victim, a matter of ritual. I was not capable of describing the anger, frustration, and despair written over the face of Mr Nyagahima as guards bound him tightly to a grille door while his killer, Hajji Kabugo stood on the ready with a sledgehammer. The silence reigning in that cold, dark and damp dungeon as Farouk's men selected individuals to be transferred to permanent happiness could not, I felt at that time, be sufficiently described in words. Put briefly, therefore, one was short on words to match the feelings eating him on the inside, making it necessary to seek another with a similar experience (p. 131).

The acknowledgment section of the memoir is also a representation of trauma. It shows how the author-narrator survived death on different occasions. Lawoko points out, "There are many people who have in one way, or another, helped me live long enough to finally give this narration, which I feel is important" (p. 4-5). Among these saviours is Mr Brunos of Norconsult, who in 1977 became very much involved in saving the life of a man he had never met before. Captain Agundururu of the State House Entebbe and Mr Engwao, legal adviser to the Military Tribunal, both took the highest risks to leak vital information, which allowed Lawoko to escape Amin's henchmen.

The author-narrator carefully introduces principal characters at the beginning of the narrative starting with himself, the protagonist, to Alli Sebi, who later becomes a vicious killer for Amin, Amin himself, and cabinet members of which a group goes with Amin in his dastard acts and the others are murdered by Amin and his men. Amin is portrayed as a complex being and a mediocre, greedy, over-ambitious, disloyal, brutal, clubber, womaniser, shameless, and domestically violent. The significance of this is to establish Amin as an individual who is capable of wreaking havoc of unimaginable magnitude.

Lawoko narrates various forms of traumatic experiences of the Ugandans. A good instance of a traumatic experience is the case of Mrs Irene Abe, a poultry farmer, who is falsely accused of providing food supplies to guerrillas training at a place called Owiny Kibul in southern Sudan (p. 51). She is arrested and held without trial until two notable clerics and other top government officers secure her release. As part of the conditions for her release, she is ordered to leave Kampala immediately. She relocated to Gulu, only for her terrified children to inform her that the notorious Onziga and his men from the State Research Bureau were looking for her again. She had to be smuggled out of the country to Kenya.

The author-narrator expresses grave concern at the ugly happenings unfolding daily in the country. His concern, according to him, is not different from the collective concern to which all Ugandans are daily subjected (p. 54). The reality of how bad the situation dawned on him with the arrest of Anyuru, John Olobo Leji, and Ongom as well as the disappearance and murder of several people, hence, he decides to

avoid the pang of terror continually traumatising Ugandans by relocating abroad with his family within the space of three months. The week he starts planning the relocation, his friends and associates are either arrested or disappeared. He describes this as a “reminiscence of the weeks that followed the coup itself back in 1971” (p. 57). While ruminating over this, Mr Ben approaches him agitatedly to inform him that Mr James Kahigiriza, the land commissioner, has just been arrested by plainclothes men wielding guns. He is shocked. Afterward, his worst fear happens as the security men come for him and arrests him to start his own traumatic journey (p. 58).

His arrest is a real trauma for his colleagues at Radio Uganda as he explains that the staff scattered in panic. He illustrates the collective trauma his arrest inflicted on the staff: “The three secretaries ran in opposite directions spreading the panic” (p. 58). This trauma cannot be helped but intensified with the remembrance of how a Controller of Television programmes, Mr Omuge disappeared after barely one year in the office. Also, Mr James Bwogi disappeared without a trace after six months in office. He notes, “Both my predecessors, however, were not arrested in public with all the drama that accompanied it. Because of the high rate of disappearance of programme controllers, my staff members were very worried when they saw me being taken. The same thoughts were crossing my own mind” (p. 58).

A traumatic experience that permeates the narrative is witnessing horrific acts on fellow humans, starting with assault to murder. The Ugandans are helpless and cannot help to prevent their relatives’ disappearance, who were either killed or subjected to violent sexual assaults if they were ladies. The arrested victims of Amin and the incarcerated, at their latency traumatic stage, did not only witness grave assaults and torture of close friends, family members, and acquaintances, they saw them being murdered in the crudest manners to the extent that torture, slaughtering and blood mean nothing to them.

One major representation of trauma in the memoir is the symbolic importance of place. The individual experience within a larger cultural context is the primary focus of place in trauma depictions (Balaev, 2008). Place, therefore, becomes central to representations of trauma in the narrative because the physical place of suffering and remembrance of loss becomes an identifiable source for the author to explicate the multiple meanings of the event. The memoir graphically explores the effects of trauma on the individual and community in terms of the victims’ relation to place.

By vividly and carefully describing the place of trauma, the author shows that the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories embedded in the landscape that define the people’s identity and thus influence the meaning of the traumatic experience. Thus, by situating the traumatic experience in relation to a particular place, the memoir, *The Dungeons of Nakasero*, extends the function of trauma and its multiple meanings for both the individual protagonist and the collective members of his society. Thus, the place of trauma draws attention to the cultural meanings of a traumatic event that is understood and communicated in terms of a collective identity.

2. Conclusion

This paper has highlighted and interrogated torture and its forms, the different ways of its manifestations, and the nexus between torture and trauma in the selected text. It further reveals the goals of torture which are breaking the victims, destroying victims' personalities, and elicitation of information, among others. The overall goal is for General Idi Amin to clear all the obstacles that will inhibit him from being a life president, and the goal is sustained for about four years.

WodOkello Lawoko's memoir serves as an important African Witness literature that conveys the torture and trauma, which form a distinctive feature of postcolonial Africa, especially in countries that experienced military or autocratic regimes. The graphic description of torture in the memoir represents a wound in the collective psyche of the Ugandans. As Caruth (1996) avers, literature enables us to bear witness to events that cannot be completely known and it opens our ears to experiences that might have otherwise remained unspoken and unheard.

Thus, the memoir is able to demonstrate the importance of writing about trauma. It is believed that writing about torture and trauma will enable survivors to break the silence which overwhelms the whole society and the traumatised individuals. In essence, writing, as a means of confronting trauma, creates a psychological and emotional liberation which is a vital process, leading to healing and rejuvenation as well as coming to terms with the self, memory, past, and society.

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