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Dictatorship, Trauma, And Post-Traumatic Experiences in Alex Agyei-Agyiri's *Unexpected Joy At Dawn* and Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song*

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Abstract

The paper examines the portrayal of trauma and its post-traumatic experiences within the context of dictatorship in Alex Agyei-Agyiri's *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* (2003) and Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song* (2016). Drawing upon trauma theory as proposed by Caruth, the paper explores the psychological and emotional repercussions endured by the characters in the selected texts, portraying the implications of living under oppressive regimes. Through a close analysis of the texts, the paper examines the fragmentation of identity, emotional numbness, loss of trust, selfless sacrifice, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma. Moreover, the paper explores the characters' post-traumatic experiences, including nightmares, anxiety, and the complexities of healing and resilience in the aftermath of dictatorship. The paper, through in-depth analysis, contributes to the existing literary discourse on African military dictatorship, trauma and its effects, offering valuable insights into the impact of dictatorship and the characters' capacity to navigate trauma and find unexpected joy amidst adversity.

Keywords: Trauma, Fragmentation, Resilience, Dictatorship, Post-trauma

Introduction

Dictatorship has been a recurring theme in post-independence African literature, leaving lasting impacts on society and individuals. The concept of dictatorship involves

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the exercise of authoritarian power, often by military rulers, leading to the suppression of civil liberties, human rights violations, and the erosion of democratic institutions. Under such repressive regimes, trauma becomes an inescapable companion for the populace, as the consequences of dictatorship extend far beyond its reign, haunting individuals long after the dictator has fallen. The paper aims to explore the intersection of dictatorship, trauma, and post-traumatic experiences as depicted in Alex Agyei-Agyiri's *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song*. To understand the impact of dictatorship on individuals, it is crucial to consider the background of military rule in Africa. Military interventions in governance in Africa have plagued several African countries, often justified by a desire to restore order, national security, or economic stability. However, the suppression of civil liberties, censorship, arbitrary arrests, torture, and extrajudicial killings characterise the dark underbelly of military rule. In the wake of such oppressive regimes, trauma permeates society, leaving scars that endure for generations. The narratives in *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and *Taduno's Song* provide poignant portrayals of this trauma, exploring the depth of its psychological and emotional repercussions.

The concept of dictatorship encompasses a concentration of power in the hands of a single individual or a small group, often achieved through force or manipulation. It strips citizens of their agency, rendering them voiceless and vulnerable to abuse. Dictatorship thrives on fear, as individuals face the constant threat of persecution for expressing dissent or challenging the ruling regime. The protagonists of the selected texts find themselves entangled in the web of dictatorship, grappling with the psychological strain it imposes on their lives. Under the shadow of dictatorship, trauma becomes an ever-present reality. The experiences endured during periods of oppressive rule leave individuals scarred, both mentally and emotionally. The trauma manifests in various ways, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, depression, and a profound loss of trust in authority. The aftermath of dictatorship brings forth a plethora of challenges as survivors navigate a changed world, struggling to rebuild their lives and find solace amidst the ruins. The narratives in the texts offer nuanced explorations of these post-traumatic experiences, illuminating the complexities of healing and resilience in the face of unimaginable adversity.

Unexpected Joy at Dawn presents a gripping tale set in Ghana during the era of military rule. The novel delves into the profound impact of dictatorship on individuals, as well as the intricate web of relationships forged under such oppressive circumstances. Through the examination of the protagonist's journey, this paper

portrays the lasting effects of trauma and the struggle for redemption, illuminating the human capacity to find unexpected joy amidst the darkest of times. On the other hand, *Taduno's Song* transports one's imagination into a fictional nation gripped by dictatorship. The eponymous protagonist, Taduno, a renowned musician, becomes a symbol of resistance against the oppressive regime through his music. Through the examination of this novel, this paper explores the entwined themes of dictatorship, love, and loss, while delving into the harrowing aftermath of trauma and the pursuit of personal and collective healing. Therefore, by examining the themes of dictatorship, trauma, and post-traumatic experiences in *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and *Taduno's Song,* this paper delves into the profound implications of repressive rule on individuals and societies. The texts, however, serve as poignant reminders of the importance of empathy, resilience, and the enduring human spirit in the face of unimaginable hardships. As this paper embarks on this exploration, it bears witness to the indomitable power of literature to illuminate the human condition and inspire hope even in the darkest of times.

The concept of trauma is a phenomenon that is as old as humanity itself. However, attention has recently been placed on Trauma Studies. Trauma studies explore the representation and effect of mental and psychological trauma in literature. It examines how traumatic experiences are portrayed and how they shape narrative structures. The field of Trauma Studies in literary criticism gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. She sees Trauma as post-structural phenomenon and an almost unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent mind of man. Caruth further argues that trauma is not easy to represent and comprehend as it disrupts traditional modes of storytelling and challenges our conventional understanding of time and memory. Therefore, Trauma is a wound upon the mind. The word trauma is used to describe experiences or situations that are emotionally painful and distressing and which overwhelm people's ability to cope, leaving them powerless. In other words, trauma means a very severe shock or very upsetting experience which causes psychological damage. The traumatic event overwhelms the ordinary human adaptation of life.

Freud describes Trauma as any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield of a man. Later on, Freud added that the essence of the traumatic situation is the experience of helplessness on the part of the ego which is suddenly overwhelmed. Traumatic events are often experienced as fragmented and un-integrated, leading to a repetition of the traumatic experience

in forms of flashbacks, nightmares or voluntary and involuntary recollections. Trauma, therefore, exerts a very powerful influence on an individual's mental and emotional wellbeing. Sandor Ferenczi, a notable scholar who is passionate about the concept of Trauma is of the opinion that Trauma is a fully psychological concept and is largely based on perceptual experience and its meaning to one person might be different from another. He further opines that what is traumatic is the unforeseen, unfathomable, incalculable and unexpected external threat the sense of which one cannot grasp is unbearable. This means that up to the moment that trauma builds up the person is unprepared and undefended.

There are different approaches to the exploration and analysis of the concept of trauma in literature, one of such is the Trauma Novel. Trauma novel refers to a work of fiction that conveys deep loss or intense fear on an individual or collective group of people. One distinct feature of the Trauma Novel is the transformation of the self, ignited by an external often terrifying experience which incapacitates and seizes the power of an individual(s). The Trauma Novel conveys a diversity of extreme emotional state through a myriad of narrative innovations such as intense imagery, silence, almost palpable fear, pain and traumatic detailing. Therefore, it is safe to argue that *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and *Taduno's Song* fall within the category of Trauma Novels.

The portrayal of military dictatorship in Nigerian literature has been examined by various scholars. Adeoti (2003) explores the military in Nigeria's post-colonial literature, highlighting how literary writers capture characters' experiences during military rule from various ideological perspectives. He asserts that the military is not just a dominant force in the country's post-colonial government but also a recurring subject in its narrative fiction, poetry, and drama. He opines that Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ola Rotimi, Christopher Okigbo, Femi Osofisan, and Niyi Osundare have confronted the tropes of power abuse, economic mismanagement, and poverty during the military regime. Kehinde (2008) also argues that the new and old breed politicians, the military, and traditional rulers have failed in their roles in the governance of the country, emphasising that the constant trope in writings has been defined by corruption, elephantine socio-political paralysis, and political subterfuge. However, several scholars have critiqued power abuse, corruption, and tyranny associated with military dictatorship in various Nigerian literary texts, there has not been enough in-depth analysis done on the trauma and post-trauma effects of military dictatorship in Alex Agyei-Agyiri's *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song*.

Onwuka (2008) discusses the military image in Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Ndibe's *Arrow of Rain*. He explores the events that lead to the military intervention in politics and discusses the prominent themes in the texts. He critiques the military handling of the political power, their relationship with various facets of society, and their motives in government in the texts. He further identifies the power relationship between the military regime and the characters, portraying the brutality of the military against the characters. However, Onwuka simply identified the factors leading to military intervention and how they executed their roles, including their disposition towards the characters. In addition, his analysis of Iyayi's *Heroes* and Okpewho's *Last Duty* constitutes the themes connected with the armed forces' exercise of power in the theatre of war. He discusses the treatment of civilian characters by military officers, examining the overall conduct of the military and their characterisation in the text.

Asika (2011) explores military incursions in Chinua Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah* and Helon Habila's *Waiting for an Angel*, examining the depiction of the ugly situation of the country in the hands of the oppressive and hostile military dictators. He discusses how the texts portray the military regime as a total failure and their oppressive approach towards governing the people, projecting the general impact of dictatorship on the characters. He further examines the various themes of terror, anguish, and victimisation, meted out to characters by military regime in the texts. Asika's analysis emphasises and captures the age of military rule in Nigerian prose fiction as filled with blood, fear, terror, hunger, and diseases, leading the characters to wait for death willingly – an angel of death to take them away from the shocking realities of their lives. The analysis also explores the impact of military dictatorship on the characters within the texts, portraying the destruction of the joy, hopes, and desires of the characters. Therefore, the paper conducts an in-depth analysis of the effect of military dictatorship, examining its trauma and post-traumatic impacts on the characters in *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and *Taduno's Song*.

Textual Analysis

Unexpected Joy at Dawn portrays how oppressive regimes and traumatic events which the characters experience lead to a fractured sense of self and an adoption of multiple roles and masks as a survival mechanism. Nii, the protagonist, is compelled to assume different roles to navigate the oppressive regime and assert his identity. The alien policy of the dictator forces him to lose his sense of identity in a country of his birth. "Though of Nigerian parentage, Nii had been born in Ghana and his

upbringing had entirely made him Ghanaian. All records about him bore his Ghanaian name…" (Agyei-Agyiri 19). Blackness of his skin is "no defence against deportation" (Agyei-Agyiri 19) from Ghana. This situation traumatises him as he grapples with the role of a loving husband to his sick wife and an alien seeking his root. Nii's Yoruba tribal marks make him vulnerable to xenophobic attack. "He became afraid" prophesying that "one day Ghana would sack all aliens as it had done fifteen years before, ..." (Agyei-Agyiri 19). Being conscious of his tribal marks, a sign that he is alien in a society that his whole being has been immersed, is traumatic. Nii runs "his fingers over his cheeks" feeling "the tribal marks: three vertical stripes" (Agyei-Agyiri 19). He has "tried to clear them with Neco and Asepso soaps" but the economy under the oppressive regime makes the soaps scarce and he realises "that his face had become darker than before but the tribal marks were still there" (Agyei-Agyiri 110).

Nii's traumatic state is evident when he voices out from his dream that "Blackness is not enough! Blackness...Enough! Three stripes only...!" (Agyei-Agyiri 37). His internal conflict demonstrates how trauma forces him to compartmentalise different aspect of his identity, leading to fragmented sense of self. Nii's traumatic experience worries Massa, his sick wife, who anxiously interrogates him: "Is it the alien issue? Has anyone threatened you?" (Agyei-Agyiri 37). Massa's anxiety heightens when Nii recoils from engaging in such conversation because of her health. She admits: "I've been watching you closely; of late you've been showing serious signs of worry. You'd never have talked about three stripes and colour in your sleep unless...You're thinking about them, aren't you, Nii?" (Agyei-Agyiri 37).

Massa, however, grapples with trauma in response to her deteriorating health but she adopts a mask of strength to encourage Nii and shield their family from the devastating effects of the oppressive regime. She asserts that "in Ghana there are hundreds of tribes" with varied tribal marks but Nii fears the bad news in the papers which is "stirring xenophobic feelings in the people, even in my office" (Agyei-Agyiri 37). Massa's ability to suppress her own emotions and project a facade of strength underscores the fragmentation of her identity and the sacrifices made for survival. Therefore, the trauma experienced by the characters in the text forces them to suppress and mask their true emotions as a means of self-preservation. This is exemplified in the character of Nii who becomes adept at burying his emotions, concealing the depths of his pain beneath a stoic facade. Massa's deteriorating health instils emotional trauma in Nii and "he was beginning to die himself – die of exhaustion and tension – his weak body scarcely able to sustain him" (Agyei-Agyiri

2) but he assures Massa that "there's nothing the matter, ... nothing at all to worry about. I guess I'm a little tired; that's all" (Agyei-Agyiri 37). This masking of emotions contributes to the fragmentation of identity as Nii and Massa present a false front to each other while internally grappling with the profound effects of trauma.

Emotional numbness is prevalent in the text as the characters navigate the traumatic experiences associated with living under dictatorship. The text explores the psychological defence mechanisms. Some of the characters adopt to cope with the overwhelming emotions brought about by trauma. This exploration of emotional numbness is anchored within the context of dictatorship and post-traumatic experiences. The political atmosphere which fosters this emotional numbness is itself strangulating and predatory. It is a period of anarchy and military brutality, an era when a soldier armed to the teeth chases a ten year old girl in the streets of Accra because she is "caught selling above the control price" terrifying the little girl to a point where she is too afraid to cry and her concerned mother, traumatised by the same terror, collapses in the street gasping. (Agyei-Agyiri 100) Nii is baffled by the emotional numbness of the street mob turned accomplice and accessory, which applauds and energises the soldier in his brutal assault. The street mob's experience of emotional numbness is as a result of the trauma they endure. This reflects their inability to feel emotions in response to the atrocities they witness.

> There was the applause of approval from the crowd that opened a sore in Nii's ears. He turned from one face to another, expecting something different from the devious support that the soldiers and their behaviour received – a people's anger, an uprising or some sign of distaste or robust show of discontent against the shooting – but nothing happened. He was alone and voiceless (Agyei-Agyiri 101).

This depicts the psychological defence mechanism of emotional numbing, which serves as a protective barrier against the overwhelming pain and horror of traumatic events. The characters suppress their grief and emotions as a means of self-preservation in the face of ongoing trauma. This is evident when Nii mourns the demise of Massa, his wife, but is unable to fully express his grief and he abandons her corpse at the hospital mortuary. The excruciating economic hardship brought about by dictatorial regime, forces him to imagine "the cost of transporting the corpse; the cost of burial; the coffin; the shroud; drinks" (Agyei-Agyiri 113). The lance corporal, whom Massa's deteriorating condition affects before her death, suspends his grief and expresses less emotion. He is soldier on guard for curfew and will not let Nii take her to the hospital. He says: "Sorry, Madam! We're keeping

this country free from robbers and nation wreckers, and we need the cooperation of everybody" (Agyei-Agyiri 109). The suppression of grief is a manifestation of emotional numbness, as individual characters learn to stifle their emotions to navigate the harsh realities of dictatorship and its traumatic aftermath.

Living under dictatorship exposes the characters to violence and brutality, leading to desensitisation and a diminished emotional response. This is illustrated when Nii witnesses an act of violence and brutality in the market by six armed soldiers which causes a stampede but he fails to exhibit the expected shock or horror. "The moustached soldier raised his gun and pointed it at the crowd. People ran and fell here and there. Mama Akosua collapsed on the ground and fainted right where she fell, as the crowd surged away from the soldier's aim" (Agyei-Agyiri, 102).

Nii watches with detached eyes "as the armed soldiers dragged the fallen woman away, he seemed not to take any notice" (Agyei-Agyiri 102). The violence no longer evokes the visceral response it once did. This portrayal reflects the desensitisation that occurs as individual characters become accustomed to witnessing and experiencing trauma, resulting in a blunting of emotional reactions. The traumatic experiences of the characters contribute to loss of empathy, making them detached from the suffering of others. The loss of empathy is a consequence of emotional numbness and desensitisation, as individual characters focus on self-preservation and become disconnected from the emotions and experiences of those around them.

Trauma creates a disconnection from the present moment, leading to a sense of detachment and disconnection. Mama Orojo experiences occasional disconnection from her present environment as a result of her traumatic experience. This emanates from her longing to connect with her long lost brother. "She was alone in her recollection" (Agyei-Agyiri 171) and "she recollected her own loneliness and desire to get a family" (Agyei-Agyiri 182). While in Ghana in search of her brother, Nii, she struggles with her mental exploration:

> Her mind was in torment... in her mind's eye she saw the operating theatres of hell and hell-gate, as they stood nearby, yawning to swallow her. Nothing remained in its place anymore. Nothing looked real to her. She was drowning in her own despondency (Agyei-Agyiri 175).

Mama Orojo feels as though she is floating through life, a mere observer of her own existence. This depicts the profound impact of trauma on her ability to fully engage with her present environment. Marshak, a Ghanaian, is another character that experiences mental disconnection due to oppressive regime that treats her as an

alien. "All the high hopes she had carried to Nigeria, the goodwill, the love – these lay floundering" (Agyei-Agyiri 178). Marshak, being unable to reconcile with her present reality and her failed attempt to have Nii as her lover to "secure for her and his friends the freedom to live in Nigeria" lies in her room but "her body was cold. (Agyei-Agyiri 178) She had "stopped breathing and her eyes were fixed" (Agyei-Agyiri 200). It is indicative from the "chamber pot... filled with blood" which Nii notices in her room that "Marshak might have committed suicide.... the kind of worries in her mind, it could not have been otherwise" (Agyei-Agyiri 199-200). The text poignantly depicts the emotional toll of dictatorship and explores the long-lasting effects of trauma on the characters' emotional well-being.

Throughout the text, the characters wrestle with the fragmentation of their identities and seek coherence amidst the chaos of trauma. Nii and his long disconnected sister, Mama Orojo, in particular, long for a sense of family wholeness and struggle to reconnect. For Mama Orojo, "her esteem at Ijase would be rising: that she had a family was not in doubt anymore" (Agyei-Agyiri 271). This longing for coherence portrays the profound impact of trauma on the characters' sense of self and the ongoing quest to integrate the disparate aspects of their identities.

However, the weight of the past and the intergenerational burden of trauma are portrayed through the experiences of Nii and Mama Orojo. The text illustrates how traumatic experiences of one generation impacts subsequent generations. It projects into the ways in which trauma reverberates through families, leaving a lasting imprint on the lives of descendants. The text portrays how trauma can be inherited and manifest as anxiety in subsequent generations. Nii's inhumane experience in the hands of Nigerian immigration officers and outright denial of his citizenship as a Nigerian because he "can't speak Yoruba, Igbo, Hausa, or any authentic local language" (Agyei-Agyiri 135) reflects the inhumane experience of his parents "who were living in Ghana and were deported many years ago to Nigeria.... the simple reason that they were aliens from Nigeria..." (Agyei-Agyiri 131). Nii explains that "they left me in Ghana; so I've come to look for them – and stay" (Agyei-Agyiri 131). Nii's steadfastness to claim his citizenship is a deconstruction effect in which he deployed, although unsuccessfully, to fracture the dictatorial establishment:

> I'm not asking to be given citizenship. I am claiming it as a right. Look at my tribal marks. I've told you of my parentage, told you my sad story, how I have been deprived of parental care due to a barbaric un-African, unconscionable law over there... I look at my own people thinking they'll do

> the right thing by me and allow me to live peacefully by right in my country... (Agyei-Agyiri 134).

This portrays how the intergenerational transmission of trauma impacts Nii's self-perception and creates a sense of fragmentation in his identity. It highlights the repetition of trauma patterns across generations. Nii and Mama Orojo often find themselves reliving the traumas endured by their parents, experiencing similar hardships. Despite the intergenerational transmission of trauma, the text explores the characters' attempt to break the cycle and prevent its continued impact. Nii, motivated by the harrowing experiences, he and his colleagues go through in the build-up to the deportation, is determined to create a different future. With blood drawn from incisions on his finger, Nii inscribes a message on a piece of paper which he drops in the midst of the thirsty, suffocating and dying deportees whose only identity is their collective quandary. The message is terse and unequivocal:

> Here we plant the African Unity flag... we're holding it between us for the martyrs... it's also in memory of the struggle for African Unity... also in memory of those who have fallen victim to hatred and bad laws and those undergoing all forms of degradation and persecution (Agyei-Agyiri 247).

This portrays the characters' resilience and their efforts to disrupt the transmission of trauma to subsequent generations. The exploration of intergenerational transmission of trauma in the text is evident in the long-lasting effects of trauma on individual characters. The text critically depicts how trauma is inherited, influencing the emotional well-being, identity, and patterns of behaviour of subsequent generations. However, it emphasises the characters' resilience and determination to break free from the cycle of trauma, offering hope for healing and the possibility of creating a different future. This is evident in the text's transformative potential of human connection in the process of healing and overcoming the scars left by dictatorship and trauma, portraying the healing power of relationships and connections forged between characters. Mama Orojo's relationship with Joe serves as a catalyst for her personal growth and healing. Joe's marriage proposal breathes life into her and stitches the frayed edges of her lonely life. This depicts how genuine connections provide solace, support, and contribute to the healing process.

The characters, however, find healing through the sharing of their stories and experiences, which allow for validation and the recognition of shared pain. Nii's interaction with Aaron and K. K. enables him to confront his own trauma and find solace in the validation of his experiences. In sharing their stories, Nii, Aaron and K.

K. discover that they are not alone but feel a sense of collective validation of their pains and struggles. This emphasises the healing potential of connecting with others who undergoes similar traumas, fostering a sense of belonging and understanding. Through portraying the characters' sharing of their experiences, the text explores the importance of communal support and solidarity in the healing process. The characters at the deportation form a supportive community, offering strength and solace to one another culminating in Nii's espousing a humane society to the crowd, a real process of healing. He buttresses the power of communal support, imploring his audience to:

> ... look around, watch the people about you. Same people, same reaction to pain. Race is important but being human elevates one above all base acts of hatred. We should not allow hatred to destroy this uniqueness of our humanity. Hatred feeds on itself. We are not only citizens of a country but we are all citizens of this world, which unites us all (Agyei-Agyiri 248).

The depiction highlights the transformative power of collective healing, where individual characters find strength and resilience in their shared experiences and mutual support, refusing to succumb to the effects of trauma and instead strive to overcome their circumstances which portray their inner ability to endure and persevere in the face of trauma. Therefore, the text explores how human connection, empathy, and validation contribute to the healing journey, offering individual characters the strength and resilience to overcome the wounds of trauma and find unexpected joy in the process of healing.

Taduno's Song is a fictional retelling of the dictatorship of the 1990s during the military regime in Nigeria. The protagonist of the text bears a stark and untold semblance to Fela Anikulapo Kuti, the revolutionary musician who is persecuted by the then military government for his radical music. The text portrays the tyrannical and oppressive military government that stifles its citizens. It vividly depicts the harrowing consequences of living under military dictatorship. Set in a fictional Nigeria, the narrative exposes the oppressive nature of the military regime under the leadership of the 'president' and its devastating impact on individual characters and their society at large. The military government in the text is bent on making the characters live in constant fear and depression

Through the lens of Taduno, the protagonist, the text explores the suppression of freedom and the iron fist of oppression that characterises a dictatorial government. This regime depicted in the text is one that is characterised by a ruthless enforcement

of control, fostering fear, violence and censorship to silence any opposition. The military government's ability to control and manipulate the narrative is exemplified by its ban on Taduno's music and the complete eradication of his identity. Under the military rule, identity is often undermined or erased as a strategy to consolidate power in the text. Taduno's identity as a musician and as the voice of hope for the masses is systematically erased. The regime strips him of his voice and renders him nameless and faceless. Taduno laments:

> The government took my identity away from me and destroyed it. They mutilated me and turned everyone against me – my family, my friends, my neighbours and the entire country. They ground me into the dust and now even they can no longer recognize me because they destroyed every bit of me (Atogun 33).

Under the oppressive regime, trauma becomes an inherent part of daily life for the characters. The military government uses brute force, violent surveillance and arbitrary arrest to create an atmosphere of fear, anxiety, and hopelessness. The text portrays trauma as a pervasive force that shatters one's sense of self, safety and identity. This is evident in Aroli's fear when Taduno brings TK to his house. One senses the fear and anguish in Aroli:

> There was fear in Aroli's voice. If the government gets to know that he is here it will bring everybody a lot of trouble. I can imagine what they will do to us. They will send in soldiers to kick all our arses. They will lock many of us up. They will destroy our properties and rape our women. They will do a lot of nasty things to us (Atogun 76).

The core of military dictatorship is the engendering of traumatic experience of suppression, denial of fundamental freedoms and civil liberties of the characters. In the text, the president places a ban on music and any form of creativity. Taduno's music is deemed a threat to the legitimacy of the dictator's regime because he has the courage to speak against the government's abuse of power and dictatorship through his music. "Yes I became an activist, a thorn in the flesh of government. The president's soldiers beat me up on many occasions, sometimes leaving me for dead. They burned my car and closed my bank accounts" (Atogun 32).

The ban on Taduno's music erases his identity from other characters' memory. The threat on his life by the soldiers leads him into exile which at his return discovers that he has lost his voice, identity, and creativity. It comes as a shock to the characters when "in a nationwide broadcast, the president explained that music has caused a

lot of problems for his government in recent time" (Atogun 90). This leads the regime to impose "a dusk-to-dawn curfew" (Atogun 90). The text portrays the character of the president as a ruthless dictator who would stop at nothing to subdue and stifle the citizens. The president sees his subjects as animals. In his broadcast, he states that: "Anyone found on the street during curfew hours would be shot like a dog, no, a goat, he corrected. He explained that goats are known to be very stubborn animals. So anyone who flouted the curfew would be shot like a goat" (Atogun 90).

This suppression projects how an oppressive regime aims to control and manipulate the narrative by silencing dissenting voices, stifling creativity, and imposing strict censorship. Silence and suppression is one evident traumatic experience in the text. The characters, including Taduno, carry the weight of their traumatic experiences in silence, unable to express their pain openly due to fear which perpetuates the cycle of trauma.

Military dictatorship in the text, therefore, relies on fear and intimidation to exert control over the characters. The president employs blackmail, atmosphere of terror and violence to intimidate the subjects and make them cower in fear and helpless surrender. This constant state of fear leaves the characters feeling powerless and trapped. The text portrays the suffocating grip of fear, emphasising the traumatic and paralysing effect it has on the characters. It depicts this through the character of TK who is rendered homeless, powerless and penniless because of his affiliation with the wanted musician, Taduno. This traumatic event turns TK into an alcoholic and a wanderer. The president destroys the life and reputation of TK and all he worked for. TK laments:

> I was taken before the president after you went into exile. He wanted me to produce you, but I told him I could not. He vowed that he would make sure I never made music again. After that, the process of my ruin was rapid. He put machinery in place that ensured my total destruction (Atogun 73).

The act of dictatorship in the text leaves a psychological and emotional traumatic impact on the character of Lela, Taduno's girlfriend. She is arrested and placed in detention because of Taduno. Lela suffers untold agony because she believes in the cause of Taduno and is ready to sacrifice her freedom and her life to further the cause of resistance against the dictatorial government. The text explores the trauma that comes with living under military dictatorship, examining the emotional, psychological and physical toll it takes on the characters' lives.

The post-traumatic response in the text is resistance and the search for emancipation as the characters all remember Taduno thereby putting an end to their collective amnesia. The text captures the excitement of the characters as they remember their hero, and "his street flooded with fans and well-wishers and a huge party that would rock the entire city for two days began" (Atogun 137). Despite the suffocating oppression, the text presents a glimmer of hope through acts of resistance. Taduno emerges as a powerful symbol of defiance, refusing to be silenced and challenges the dictatorial government. Taduno's determination to find his voice serves as a catalyst for his own healing and inspires hope in the country. Therefore, the ultimate aim of the text is to defeat tyranny thereby depicting the characters as courageous and rekindling their hope by raising a saviour, a radical revolutionary activist to lead the act of resistance and put an end to dictatorship.

The text portrays the post-traumatic experience as a transformative process through which the characters reclaim their agency, their voice and identity. It projects the strength and courage required to confront tyranny and fight for what one believes in. Taduno becomes a beacon of hope and a symbol of resistance for other characters and inspires them to confront their own trauma and work towards healing. His music brings the characters together, and gives them the courage to rise against dictatorship. "Now that we remember you, the whole country is looking up to you. If you go ahead to support the regime with your music, our hopes will be crushed. The regime will have won. Tyranny will have won" (Atogun 141-142).

Despite Taduno strikes a deal with the president to use his song to praise the dictatorial government in order to secure the release of his girlfriend; the letter he receives from her makes him change his resolve and instead use his song to lampoon the tyrannical government, restoring the hope of other characters. While Taduno and Lela pay the ultimate price for the love for their country, they awaken the hope of other characters and boost their courage to rise against tyranny. Therefore, the text explores the intricate aspects of military dictatorship and the traumatic impact it has on the characters. It portrays the physical, psychological and emotional effect of trauma on the characters, examining the post-traumatic experiences of resilience and resistance against tyrannical oppression that seeks to stifle creativity and freedom.

Conclusion

The paper has explored the depiction and exploration of trauma and post-traumatic experiences in Alex Agyei-Agyiri's *Unexpected Joy at Dawn* and Odafe Atogun's *Taduno's Song* within the context of dictatorship. Drawing upon Caruth's theoretical

framework of trauma, the analysis has revealed the profound psychological and emotional repercussions endured by the characters in the texts. The portrayal of fragmentation of identity, emotional numbness, loss of trust, selfless sacrifice, and intergenerational transmission of trauma reveals the long-lasting effects of living under oppressive regimes. The characters' post-traumatic experiences, including nightmares, anxiety, and the complex process of healing and resilience, further underscore the profound implications of trauma on the characters in the aftermath of dictatorship. Therefore, the analysis of the selected texts offers valuable insights into the psychological and emotional challenges faced by individual characters that have experienced trauma and portrays the resilience and indomitable spirit of the characters that emerge even in the darkest of times.

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