

Women in Internally Displaced Persons' camps, a halfway house or a purgatory: Discourse analysis of *Embers* and *Preamble to Apocalypse*

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Abstract

This is a study of two plays that are based on the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok Girls' Secondary School by the Boko Haram insurgents. The plays, Preamble to Apocalypse by Fidelis Okoro (2016) and Embers by Soji Cole (2018), are here treated as a narrative continuum, which tracks the girls' abduction from their school to the Sambisa Forest, to the IDP Camps, and culminate in their degeneration into suicide bombers. The concepts of halfway house and purgatory are used to equate both the intended and the actual experiences of the girls, and sexual objectification theory is employed to underscore the causes of the traumatic experiences of the girls and argues that their radicalization is due more to their disillusionment with the government than with Boko Haram. There are three categories of characters in the plays - the abductors (villains), the rescuers (heroes), and the females (victims). However, as the narrative progresses, the line between terrorism and heroism blurs. The boundary between villainy and victimhood collapses. Apart from a close reading of the selected texts, the paper also draws supporting data from media reports that validate the literary accounts.

Keywords: *Terrorism, Boko Haram, Sexual Objectification, Internally Displaced Persons Camp, Victimhood.*

Introduction.

The greatest casualties of terrorism are women because they suffer multiple traumas. Any effort towards rescuing them is a lie because both the terrorists and the rescuers have the same agenda for the female body. This scenario is graphically exposed in the two plays selected for this study namely Fidelis Okoro's *Preamble to Apocalypse* (2016); and Soji Cole's *Embers* (2018), the winner of the 2018 Nigerian Prize for literature (Drama) of the Nigerian Liquefied Natural Gas (NLNG). The two plays are here studied as a narrative continuum about the fate of the 276 Chibok Schoolgirls who were abducted by the Boko Haram insurgents in 2014. The plays portray the various attitudinal inequities in society, often taken for granted but which coalesce and culminate in the violent reactions being experienced today. *Preamble to Apocalypse* starts the narrative by focusing on the terrorist hideout where the girls were held hostage, while *Embers*, completes the narrative by focusing on the experience of the girls in the Internally Displaced Persons' (IDP) Camps where they are nursed to recover from the trauma of captivity. What is common to these two plays is not the terrorists *per se*; the

terrorists are not even seen in *Embers*, and in *Preamble* they are seen only in the NECROPHONY scene. What is common is the terrible condition of women not only in captivity with the terrorists but also in the Internally Displaced Persons Camps where they are housed temporarily for rehabilitation. This is the focus of this study. The two plays afford a comparative study of the condition of women in society from home where they are nurtured; to school where they train for empowerment; to the jungle as victims of the terrorist agenda; and to the IDP camps where they are taken to recuperate from the trauma of captivity. The search for answers regarding the condition of women in these various social environments is meant to evaluate and appraise the differences and similarities in women's experiences in these spheres of existence. The concepts of halfway house and purgatory are used in this essay to describe the two supposed contrasting environments which shape the experiences of the girls. As indicated in the titles, the two plays portend a cataclysmic end of the nation due to normalized violent behaviours towards minority groups, unless a sincere and holistic approach is taken to tackle the problem from its roots. Terrorism is thus an effect not the cause of the

problem. It is not just what insurgents are doing to the society, but also what the society is doing to women. In the two plays women are presented as endemic victims of sexual objectification in which there is no escape. Thus, in addition to suffering the general devastation wreaked on society by men, women suffer a peculiar devastation in the hands of both terrorists and rescuers who are united in their tendency to sexually exploit women. The plays reveal that the similarities run even deeper.

Theoretical Framework

Objectification Barbara Fredrickson and Tomi-Ann Roberts proposed this Theory in 1997, as a framework for understanding the condition of women in society. They state:

Like gender oppression more generally, sexual objectification occurs with both 'endless variety and monotonous similarity'... The common thread running through all forms of sexual objectification is the experience of being treated as a body (or a collection of body parts) valued predominantly for its use to (or consumption by) others. (174)

The authors go on to reveal that though feminists have identified that objectifying

treatment is harmful to women, the question about how specifically it is harmful to women has not been fully addressed. Hence the objective of their work is "to present a framework for understanding the cascade of intra-individual psychological consequences that we suggest spring from objectifying treatment" (174). They also surmise that the psychological effect of objectifying treatment coaxes women to internalise a peculiar view of themselves thereby "internalising an observer's perspective of physical Self" (177). This tendency in women to adapt to socially constructed image of themselves is what Rachel Calogero (2013) refers to as 'trait self-objectification' which in turn validates gender-specific system justification,' and consequently interferes with women's resolve to engage in 'gender-based social activism,' even though sexual violence affects victims not only physically, but psychologically (Nwoke 2013; Uroko and Innocent 2020). Though the two plays selected for this study portray the condition of women in a conflict environment engendered by the Boko Haram insurgency, they also reveal that sexual objectification of women is endemic in the society as it occurs in all spheres of life – public and private – in time of conflict and in time of peace.

Thus, the plays serve as a window into the experiences of women as objects of sexual desire not only in the Internally Displaced Persons Camp, and in the terrorist hideout, but also elsewhere in the society. The radicalization of the girls into suicide bombers at the end of *Embers* is subtle warning, to insensitive society, that little embers can grow into huge conflagration and blow up the society into smithereens.

History of Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria

Nigeria is not new to the dangers of religious extremism. Studies show that from 1980 to 1985 a group named Maitatsine (He Who Damns) led by Muhammadu Marwa, a Cameroonian Islamic cleric who lived in Northern Nigerian city of Kano unleashed unprecedented terror in the country. He claimed and was believed by his disciples to be a prophet and a reformer. His teaching condemned Western culture, education and technology, and anybody who engaged in these things was adjudged an infidel and deserved to die. Thus, their first attack took place in Kano from 18 to 29 of December 1980, targeted against Christians, and reportedly claimed 4000 lives (including Marwa), as well as 100 policemen and 35 military officers (Isichei, 1987; Adesoji,

2011; Agbiboa, 2013;). Boko Haram thus, is believed to be an offshoot of Maitatsine because they share the same belief that Western education is a sin and people who refuse to convert to extremist Islamist doctrine should be put to death. Some writers argue that the insurgence is motivated by economic inequality (Isichei, 1987; Adenrele, 2012).

Boko Haram may have been organised as far back as 2003, by one Mohamed Yusuf, but it was in 2009 that they became violent after a show down with the police during which Yusuf was killed (Campbell 2014). From then on violent attacks from the group have continued unabated. In the year 2020 alone, there were at least fifty attacks despite the Covid-19 lockdown in the country.

Kidnapping of School Children

According to a report in *Premium Times* (22 June, 2021), there have been at least eleven (11) cases of kidnapping of pupils and students from their school, by the Boko Haram terrorists since 2014, and more than seven hundred (700) school children were kidnapped between December 2020 and June 2021. That is how lucrative school kidnapping has become for the group all thanks to "the absence of governance" (Orji 2019).

It all began on 14th April 2014 when Boko Haram kidnapped 276 young girls from Chibok Girls Secondary School and took them to their hideout in the Sambisa Forest where they were kept as sex slaves and as bargaining power for the release of their members who were captured by the Nigerian Army. The incident raised international outcry through a Non-Governmental Organisation called "Bring Back our Girls" led by Professor Oby Ezekwesili with the full backing of some international celebrities such as Michelle Obama, the then First Lady of the United States of America, as well as the celebrated Pakistani survivor of gender violence, human rights activist and the youngest Nobel Peace Prize Laureate, Malala Yousafzai. More than one hundred of the girls remain unaccounted for till date. The apparent lack of threat from all levels of government spurred them on to kidnap more and more school children. However, the group would later abduct one hundred and ten schoolgirls from Government Girls' Science and Technical College, Dapchi in February 2018 (*Sahara Reporters* 2018; Aljazeera 2018; Searcey and Akinwotu 2018), and over three hundred (300) schoolboys from Government Science School, Kankara in Katsina State in December 2020 (Jones

2020; Yusuf 2021; Ojelu 2021). Terrorists are abducting students from schools in hundreds at a time, in Northern Nigeria. However, it is the abduction of 276 schoolgirl from a secondary school in Chibok that inspired the two plays selected for this study.

The Escape, Rescue and Counterterrorism

Before the indisputably delayed rescue expeditions, some of the girls were courageous enough to escape from their captors at different stages of the abduction. It is reported that about forty of them escaped by jumping off the trucks that came to pick them from their school (Naomi 2017); about fifty-seven escaped before they could reach the jungle of Sambisa (Leithead and Hegarty 2017). Some escaped while in captivity. Incredibly, these escapees suffered stigmatization, for though they escaped they were branded Boko Haram wives. It was reported that over one hundred of the girls refused to leave their jihadist captors for fear of stigmatization as suggested by the Chairman of the Chibok Development Association (Withnall 2016). The rest of the girls would be released piecemeal over a five-year period, some pregnant and some nursing babies while about thirteen lost their lives.

Displacement

The rescued girls are kept in an Internally Displaced Persons' Camp for the purpose of rehabilitation, to regain their dignity and a sense of normal life before reuniting them with their families. The camp, fraught with myriad of problems – severe malnutrition, harsh climatic conditions, recurrent epidemics, poor infrastructure, and limited access to basic services – turned out to be another hell for the girls, and the last blow to their hope of finding peace and success in life. The level of disappointment and despair of the girls toward the systemic failure of society to protect and recognize their human dignity is graphically depicted in the plays.

The deplorable condition in the IDP Camps for which they were marked for a shutdown on 29th May 2017, is captured in this statement by the Borno State Governor, Kashim Shettima: "In most of the camps, there are challenges of early marriage, child prostitution, drug abuse, gangsterism, malnutrition and diseases" (Marama, 2016). Women are mostly the victims in all these conditions. Is it any wonder that it was women who carried out a demonstration in Maiduguri to protest the shortage of food caused by

officials diverting the supplies to themselves? The women protesters also demanded for the removal of the Central Feeding Committee, and the committee was removed by the State Government on 25th August 2016.

The scepticism created in these plays has edifying significance for ending insurgencies. The plays get to the roots of the seemingly intractable problems of Boko Haram terrorism and the epic failure of all levels of government in the country. The insurgents continue to increase in population, and amassing more sophisticated weapons than the country's troops, from Improvised Explosive Devices (IED) to more sophisticated weaponry, all thanks to the porosity of Nigerian border (Idris and Tutumlu 2021). A lot has been reported in the media about the devastation caused by these violent extremists. However, what has not been fully addressed is the reason Boko Haram has proved insurmountable. Only literature can present a total picture of society through a combination of literary techniques that follow a cause-and-effect sequence of human actions. Answers to the causes of a problem are often sought through the actions and inactions of man that act as enabler to the violent outcomes.

Preamble to Apocalypse (2016)

The play opens in a scene of devastation caused by the infamous Boko Haram insurgents led by a character named Caliph. It is structured into four main parts namely SYMPHONY, NECROPHONY, NARCOPHONY, and CACOPHONY, representing four stages in the journey to apocalypse towards which the country is headed. In SYMPHONY, three soldiers – Bola, Suleiman, and Ike are in a scene of devastation caused by the terrorists. In this scene they act as narrators in a prologue as they set the emotional tone of the play. They lament the massacre of innocent and unsuspecting citizens both in their homes, and everywhere else. They lament, in particular, the abduction of the Chibok schoolgirls, "Harvesting 276 young virgins from a nearby school" (9). Suleiman recalls that,

"Any time men decide to
slaughter one another for
one of their many trivial interests
Unbridled taste for power or vain
pursuit of wealth
They will drag the hapless woman
into the bargain
As a sex slave or as a victim of
rape (9).

He invokes history to corroborate his claim from the Dark Ages to the 21st Century. These three soldiers symbolize the nation as they represent the three major tribes in the country as their names indicate – Ike (Igbo), Suleiman (Hausa), and Bola (Yoruba). They represent the united voice of the nation. Brig. Usman, who is their teacher in the Military academy, describes them as "the closest set of friends I have ever known in spite of their varying background ethnically and religiously" (93).

Scene two, NECROPHONY, the longest scene in the play, reveals the culprits – Boko Haram terrorists – that caused the carnage seen in the previous scene. As this scene opens, armed men are seen dragging in weeping girls, some as young as 10 years old. It is later revealed that these are the Chibok schoolgirls. Four big sacks are also brought on stage and will later be revealed to contain four supposed graduates of Computer Science abducted to design hacking programmes that are capable of defrauding the Central Bank, and also cause havoc in the military. These supposed computer engineers are also tasked to set up a "cybercaliphate" for the Caliph who has now elevated himself to the post of a prophet. Also brought on stage is a pile of Daily Newspapers awash with news

reports on Boko Haram. Unfortunately, these media reports help to bolster the morale of the insurgents as they find that Caliph's images appear more often than that of the country's President, and also described them as "the dreaded Boko Haram" (17). Caliph loves the word "dreaded." Cartons are brought on stage the content of which will later be revealed to be money from bank robberies. Four members of the Special Mujahedeen enter the scene carrying weapons including AK47, Rocket Propelled Grenade Launchers, and an anti-aircraft gun. A throne is also brought in and the picture is complete with the entrance of the Boko Haram leader, Caliph, "a bearded man wearing a military camouflage uniform with AK47 slung across his shoulder" (12). When he opens his mouth the mission and the vision of the group becomes clear. Their dream is simply to annihilate the nation and rebuild it into an Islamic State. To accomplish this task a special breed of Mujahideens (jihadists) are trained with the promise of 72 virgins in heaven when they die fighting for Allah, and one virgin for every mission accomplished, successfully. The scene ends in a mutiny that leaves Caliph dead, killed by his disgruntled Special Mujahedeen, who flee

just before the soldiers arrive and rescue the girls.

NARCOPHONY presents a narcoleptic stage of power drunkenness and gross lack of any sense of responsibility displayed by the President and members of the two political parties in the country. The scene opens with the president entering the stage with his retinue. He recoils on seeing the lifeless body of Caliph, until the GOC assures him that the man is really dead by kicking the lifeless body, and even lies that he was the person who killed Caliph. The President instantly rewards him with the post of a General for that "Excellent!" (67) job. As the President rejoices for crushing terrorism, a Soldier informs him that he was the one who found the kidnapped schoolgirls. He too is instantly elevated to the rank of General "according to the Order of the Armed Forces." (68). He has just elevated a Private to a General, breaking all official protocols with impunity. He sends his Minister for Information, Alhaji Kure, to invite to the Presidential Villa, international journalists including CNN, BBC, American Ambassador and all other Ambassadors, parents of the rescued girls, all TV stations, because "These accomplishments need to hit the right international ears" (69). The same level of

giddiness and arbitrariness, and childish exuberance of Caliph is replicated in the President. He leads a prayer session and declares April 14th "World Chibok Day." He arranges a photo shoot in which he orders everybody present "squeeze your faces and look very sad" (72). He announces that it is his birthday and there is a burst of congratulatory salutes and songs. This mood flows smoothly into a campaign speech for his re-election. The noise comes to an end when a loud explosion is heard outside causing everybody to take cover. However, it turns out that a car ran over a discarded water sachet, causing a loud popping sound.

In CACOPHONY the tone becomes discordant without suggestion of a return to the symphonic beginning. The song has ended in fiasco as the nation rolls uncontrollably toward an apocalyptic denouement. Bola describes the catastrophic stage as "seasons of bombs and suicide bombers" (95). The government has been presented as worse than the avowed terrorists because, "Boko Haram has teeth, Political Haram has given it fangs and venom. Both have rolled into one big conundrum" (118). The trio of Bola, Suleiman, and Ike sum up the hopelessness and dream of the day when woman – "That flower for the decoration

of men," "That wheel without will or desire of its own," "That object to be owned but not to own anything" (123) – takes over leadership in every aspect of life, replacing supreme leader Ayatollah, Pope, and President of the United States of America. This dream to shift power to women is instantly tested when, according to the stage direction, "*Mellifluous sound rolls in from the speakers. Darkness on stage as a female Cardinal appears on the screen. Upper veranda of the Sistine chapel. She raises her hand and blesses the audience*" (125). She is joined by other female Cardinals and female Pope. They are welcomed with a tumultuous cheer from the audience. In her speech the Pope is happy that the days of marginalization of women are over. Now that women have risen to the various leadership positions which were hitherto denied them, a lot must change. "Henceforth, priests shall marry, and nuns too, Celibacy is banned and the oath of poverty too...Only female bishops can be archbishops" (126). As the images fade, a group of female Caliphs, Imams, Sheiks, led by a female Ayatollah, burst into the screen. Some of the changes they want to make include the freedom for women to do whatever they want, drive, expose their faces, marry 72 husbands, and all

other things which Muslim women were hitherto denied.

These women usurpers are shown on the screen dismantling all the patriarchal structures in religion and politics. They change 'man' to 'woman' wherever it occurs in a word. For instance, in the new world ruled by women, the word chairman turns to chairwoman; manager to womanager; mandatory to womandatory; manufacture to womanufacture; etc. However, crisis erupts when it comes to selecting the right woman to occupy the throne of God. Religious and political sentiment stalls the process. As they debate heatedly and insult each other, they notice the trio on stage who are completely unaware of the on-screen commotion. A free for all fight ensues as they scramble for the men. The fierce fight ejects the women from the screen on to the stage. As the women make to grab the men, the men run off the stage with the women in hot pursuit. This seems to hint at the possibility that under matriarchal social order men will become sexually objectified. Sexual objectification, therefore, is gendered power behaviour of dominance in any human relationship. Thus, when power shifts between the sexes, sexual objectification shifts against the less

dominant gender who will now self-objectify in order to be validated by the ruling gender. That makes it a gender norm. Shifting from misogyny to misandry will not ensure a gender balance and mutual respect needed for more equitable gender relationship.

***Embers* (2018) by Soji Cole**

The thematic trust of *Embers* is man's inhumanity to man perpetrated not only by the Boko Haram insurgents, but also at every turn in the society with women as the greatest victims. This is revealed through the life story of each of a group of four women which reveals a recurrent, social system of sexual abuse of women. By focusing attention on the experiences of women, the play demonstrates an all-pervading system of violence in the society, and how the victims could turn aggressors, thereby creating a vicious cycle of violence.

The play is structured into three parts titled TESTIMONY, DISCOVERY, and SMITHEREENS; each has intervening scenes. Set in an Internally Displaced Persons' Camp, the play portrays life in the camp and the relationship between the women and the camp officials. On one hand are the women – the three girls who were abducted from their school by Boko Haram terrorists and later rescued

and brought to the camp. With them is an older lady, Talatu whose experiences are similar to that of the girls even though she never went to school. It is not clear how Talatu wound up in the camp, but the girls gather every evening in her tent to exchange stories to keep their spirit up. Talatu, fondly called 'Gogo' (grandmother) acts as a mother to the girls encouraging them to pursue their dreams and not make the same mistake her generation made by believing that it is a man's world. The first line in the play is Talatu's advice to the girls, "Get it right my young girls; the world treats women the same. So, if you are lucky to be independent, don't lose it" (3). On the other hand, are the soldiers who keep watch over the camp and from behind their sandbags they banter, drink, smoke, play cards, take turns to patrol the camp at night, while Bayero fondles the girls in the dark. The soldiers also complain of their own bitter experiences in the hands of their superiors who arrogate the money meant for their allowances and allocations to their personal use. Solider 4 who is a graduate of a Polytechnic reveals it was unemployment that made him join the army. They blame the politicians for people's woes as the democracy which they promised does not bring any change for the majority but for

the privileged few individuals in the corridor of power.

Women learning to be human again

The women share stories about how they lost their humanity after series of traumatic and dehumanizing experiences in the hands of the Boko Haram terrorists who burnt down their school, left their communities in ruins, forcefully took them captives, and how they have come to the IDP Camp with the hope "to learn how to become human again" (5). Before she begins the story of her life Talatu tells the girls:

Many times my soul is weathered in torrid heat when I try to recall those memories of my past. That past was full. It was full of stories too long to contain in a book for a lifetime. But I will tell you as much as I can. Tomorrow, I will look with pride to see your generation rise to put women in dignified positions (5-6).

Her story captures the fact that women are no strangers to abuse. They are familiar with it because they are actually born into it. Though they appear to accept it, their stories show that they don't. In fact, they wish things were different and they live with the hope that someday things will change. Talatu had a

dead-beat father who went from place to place marrying women, making babies with them, abandoning them to start all over with another woman someplace else, only to do the same. This paints a picture of a culture that gives limitless freedom to the male gender and none to the female. Talatu was just a baby when her father left her indigent mother with three children. This indicates a culture where a woman has nothing and is helpless without a man to provide for her and her children. Ironically, having a husband does not guarantee anything since a man has the liberty to walk away from his family without any arrangement for their support. With her two sons gone to the cities to become almajirai (street children who roam the cities begging for alms and scavenging for discarded left-over food), Talatu's mother had to struggle to provide food for both of them. She would wake up early each morning to run the rounds of farming for "scruffy vegetables", sweeping the Local Government Council compound, washing "dirt off other people's children for a pittance," (6), then came back in the evening "to pare rinds off rotten sweet potatoes she collected from the village market. We lived like scavengers" (7) she tells her young listeners.

Talatu's story does not only pick a hole on the Africa's claim of gender sensitivity, it also questions the African kinship system built on caring for the extended family relations. Memunah and Atai must have heard about that aspect of African culture and so they pose the question to Talatu,

Memunah: Didn't any member of your extended family come around to...?

Atai: I wanted to ask the same question.

African culture dictates that in situations such as the one Talatu finds herself, extended family members have a duty to step in and fill the void. The culture, however, does not dictate what happens when an orphan is abused by the extended family. Thus, indeed, Talatu's uncle stepped in to "rescue" the eleven-year-old orphan supposedly to give her a sense of belonging. However, what she met in her uncle's home was a greater sense of loss, abuse, and alienation. She became a slave not just by being over worked, but also by being sexually abused by both the uncle and his son. Her young audience listen to Talatu's story with rapt attention not because it is interesting but because it is familiar. Her story resonates with them. One of her uncle's wives

encouraged her to run away and gave her the address of a friend of hers living in the city of Kano. Life in the big city was uncertain, but it held hope for an individual, unlike life in the village that was a certain dead-end. In the city she went from scavenging for food to prostitution to survive.

The moments when these women gather to talk about their experiences in life is the greatest thing that sustains them in the camp. It is also a great opportunity for a peep into the minds of these women. However, the session is rudely interrupted by a soldier, Corporal Bayero, who believes that he is a "gallant officer" who has risked his life to rescue the girls. He has no respect for the women and none for himself. When Talatu asks him to stop bullying the girls, he replies disparagingly;

BAYERO: Which girls! I say which girls! You call these ones girls? These ones that have fuck infidels in the forest! (9).

There is something ironical about the word "infidels" coming from a soldier. The word is associated more with religion and not the military. When Memunah asks him to leave them alone, he replies:

BAYERO (Shamefacedly): Haa..., you this girl. Now your mouth is

wobbling again like shrapnel of stray bullets ko! (8).

The imagery in this statement is consistent with the profile of the speaker who is a soldier. The confusion in Bayero's expressions replicates the complexities and contradictions in the treatment of women in the plays. For example, before he leaves the women, Bayero, the "gallant soldier" who "rescued" the girls, tells Talatu,

BAYERO (*sneeringly*): Gogo, I am still coming for one of your girls soon! (*He walks away in his accustomed insolent swagger*)

The girls know what he means. They expect it every night even as they dread it but there is nothing, they can do to stop the abuse. This is the irony of life which the women have grown used to when they are daily abused by people who should protect them. As soon as Bayero turns his back the girls evaluate him,

IDAYAT: Good riddance.

MEMUNAH: The dirty looking thing!

TALATU: Hold your peace, girls. Let him be. His thought is less as much as the gun he carries.

MEMUNAH: Such insolent thing.
The army will do well without his
kind. (16)

In the world of these plays where things are not what they should be, the gun which Talatu refers to may be the one slung down Bayero's shoulder or the one between his thighs. They are both lethal weapons because they leave fatal wound – physical and psychological – on the female victims.

Talatu's story in the second part, DISCOVERY, is about her life in the city where she started by begging and scavenging to survive until a woman took pity on her. The woman told her that the life of an almajiri was not safe for her. She changed her name from Khadija¹ to Talatu and introduced her into prostitution. She fell in love and got married, and soon became pregnant. Her life was fulfilled, or so she thought. However, she annoyed her husband by giving birth to a girl. The disappointed husband disappeared abandoning her and the baby. The child dies two weeks later thus erasing that chapter of her life.

¹ Khadija is an Arabic word for trustworthy; respected. It was the name of the first wife of Prophet Muhammad. It, thus, connotes something spiritual. Talatu on the other hand, is an Hausa name which means a girl born on Tuesday, and thus relates to the materialistic side of life.

Idayat's tale of woe began when she was in primary school and her Arithmetic teacher, Mallam Bideen, took her virginity. He had asked her to stay behind after school for extra coaching. "And you didn't report this to the school...?" Atai asks her. Memunah's instant reaction to that question points to women's culture of silence as rape victims (Folayan et al 2014; Oludayo 2020). She asks Atai "Will you report that if it were you?" (44).

There is a reason women keep their rape a secret. The chance of getting married is lost for a rape victim. She is considered a damaged good. Idayat's mother understands how important it is to keep quiet over such matter, hence she tells her abused daughter never to tell anyone about it but rather to avoid the teacher and never stay back for his coaching. Idayat later falls in love with a boy, name Qudus but is unable to respond to his advances because of her memory of Mr Bideen. Qudus wept when she told him about the rape and promised to keep her secret to protect her dignity. Shortly after that Mr Bideen was found dead supposedly by drowning, and Qudus disappeared. It was revealed that he joined the Boko Haram insurgents, rose in the ranks to become a commander. Idayat's story is interrupted by the arrival of a beggar, that infamous beggar who,

like all the characters in this play, will prove at the end, not to be a beggar at all.

ATAI's story is one of bravery. She decided to escape from what she considered to be a hellish life in the Sambisa jungle, even though she had no idea which direction led home. In the forest she was assigned to a jihadist husband as his wife number four. At the time she planned her escape; two more wives had been added to her husband's harem. He had changed her name to Utuba. An opportunity came when she was sent to wash her husband's blood-stained clothes. Despite the presence of many women in the stream washing clothes, and the Boko Haram boys keeping surveillance, she slipped into the woods and ran with speed that surprised her because, "I'll rather die than risk being captured. I lost all reasons to fear. That was the day I knew that anyone can kill if driven to the edge of reasoning. I was ready to battle and kill for my freedom" (53). Almost two days later she came upon a road where a woman took her home and nursed her for some days before her husband took her to her village, Gali, or rather, what remained of her village. She stayed for five days with the soldiers who occupied the sacked village. She recalls her experience in the occupied village;

The horrors I saw in five days were more frightful than the fiercest things I saw in Sambisa forest. The soldiers slaughtered any man that passed by the village. They didn't even wait to ask questions. Some men who escaped the destruction of the Boko boys were returning to Gali to see what can be salvaged. They were all killed by the soldiers. Even when I told them I knew a man they captured, they threatened to kill me too" (54).

Atai was assigned to the commander as a sex slave. After three days he passed her to another soldier as more and more girls arrived. Five days later, the commander told her she would be taken to the IDP camp. A new soldier took her on a motorcycle to the camp, and even apologised to her for what his mates had done to her. He advised her to report them to the Red Cross. She did not.

The girls insist that life in the Sambisa Forest was better than life in the IDP camp. MEMUNAH recalls how the insurgents went out to find food for them; unlike in the camp where the soldiers steal their food. They took care of them in the forest to the extent that with time some of the girls came to enjoy it.

She is not able to narrate her own story before they are interrupted by the arrival of some camp officials and soldiers, and she is arrested on the suspicion that she is a saboteur for the Boko Haram. The beggar she had earlier given food turns out to be an agent of Boko Haram bringing explosives into the camp. She is thus arrested and later reported dead. Contrary to the Newspaper report that she died of cholera, Idayat learns how she died from a cleaner:

Memunah was locked up in a room and raped by the Camp Commandant. After he's done he asked that she be thrown into the guard room. There, one by one the soldiers raped her too. Then they passed her to the cleaners. They wanted her to confess everything and the only way to do that was to rape her. The Camp commandant gave the order that she shouldn't be given respite until she confessed. They raped her to death. (82)

Violence

Though the IDP Camp is the setting of the action of *Embers*, it serves as a window for viewing life outside the camp as well. The camp thus becomes a microcosm of the larger society, different only in size

but nonetheless embodies all the characteristics of a purgatory for women. Creating a miniature representative of society makes it easier to see the problem in distilled form without distractions. It focuses attention on the relevant issues on the stark realities that are causing the problems in the country. The play's technique forces society to view itself in the mirror and see the role everyone, regardless of gender, social status, religion, ethnicity, age, has played in instigating, propagating and sustaining acts of violence. Everyone it seems, is engaged in one form of violence or the other against people considered a minority in gender, politics, economics, etc. These forms of violence are often ignored. However, from the plays we learn that violence is violence no matter who is the perpetrator or victim and that all forms of violence will eventually lead to serious consequences. If terrorism is a river, violent behaviours form its tributaries.

Rape as a Weapon of War

The foregoing calls to question the declaration of rape as weapon of war by the Human Rights Watch (1995), an ideology that has enjoyed some scholarly support. Large scale rape occurs during conflict ((Meron 1993; Turshen 2001; Pratt 2004; Engle 2005; Wood 2010;

Maedl 2011; Meger 2011; Bernard and Durham 2014; Burnet 2015; Kitharidis 2015; Shubert 2015; Amnesty International 2016; Buchowska 2016; Wieringen 2020), but it happens equally in the domestic sphere (Achunike and Kitause 2014). In which ever sphere it occurs, however, – the victims of rape remain psychologically damaged for life, exhibiting emotions such as fear, insecurity, shame, emotional numbness, depression (Josse 2010; Fredrickson and Roberts 1997). Their outlook on life is altered because of the emotional trauma they are carrying alone. The impact can be implosive leading to self-destructive behaviours such as drug or suicide; or it can be explosive resulting in revenge mission, causing injury on others. This is illustrated not only in the female victims of rape in *Embers*, but also in the male character Qodus, who though not a direct victim of rape, feels emotional devastation after discovering that the girl he loves and wants to marry has been defiled by her teacher. He vents his anger by killing the man and joining the radicalized religious group. The girls also turn suicide bombers to retaliate on the society that has kept them in perpetual condition of victimhood.

While the condemnation of rape rages in the world, and the practice remains

unaffected by it, the difficult part seems to be in the definition. Common to all existing definitions of rape is lack of consent (US Dept of Justice 2012; Olatunji 2012). How does one determine that a particular sexual act was performed without consent? In this study we are relying not just on the words of the victims, because the words of the victim alone are not enough to determine rape. Hence, we are also looking at the context of the action. Context can also be misleading. For example, the fact that one is under captivity does not mean that s/he cannot consent to sex with her/his captor. This is clearly demonstrated in *Embers* when the girls confess that the Boko Haram boys in the jungle are more civil with them than the soldiers in the IDP camp who force themselves on them even as they fight and kick through the ordeal. Talatu who tells the story of how the notorious soldier and camp Casanova, Bayero, barges into her tent uninvited and begins to fondle her breasts and she finds her body responding to it. She confesses, "It's over a decade that I had the touch of a man. ...He took my breast out and slipped it into his mouth. I felt a gush of warmth run through my whole body. It was...electrical" (17).

Finally, and most importantly, we look for confirmation from the perpetrators to

determine rape. We get all the confirmation we need from the soldiers in *Embers*, mostly from the vivacious Bayero, and from the terrorists in *Preamble to Apocalypse*. In the two plays, the perpetrators talk freely about their rights to rape the women. In *Embers* the girls are repeatedly raped by soldiers, camp officials and politicians who, send their drivers at night to carry the girls away to the city (26). In *Preamble*, the girls, who must be virgins as young as ten years old are abducted to be the comfort women for the Mujahideens, whom the Caliph promises one virgin for every mission they accomplish for him. He believes the availability of girls attracts more volunteers to the jihad hence the raid of schools to kidnap young girls.

Rape is an outcome of the sexual objectification that defines the female gender as an object of sexual desires. All are culpable as demonstrated in the two plays and corroborated by media reports that,

Government officials and other authorities in Nigeria have raped and sexually exploited women and girls displaced by the conflict with Boko Haram. Government is not doing enough to protect displaced women and girls and

ensure that they have access to basic rights and services or to sanction the abusers, who include camp leaders, vigilante groups, policemen and soldiers (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/10/31/nigeria-officials-abusing-displaced-women-girls>).

The girls compare their life in Sambisa Forest with the Boko Haram and in the IDP camp with the camp officials and unanimously agree that there is no difference. Idayat's rhetorical question summarizes the opinion of the girls: "Gogo, the hassle here is like being in captivity. How do we define a life of freedom when it bears all the signs of captivity? The real Boko Haram is here, not in the forest of Sambisa" (18).

Following from the above it is taken for granted that women know themselves as objects of rape and they anticipate it having lived with the experience all their lives. They dread it but are not able to stop or prevent it. They, therefore live with the hope that somebody, sometime, somehow will put an end to it. Hope, therefore, plays a key role in the plays where it acts as a motivation for living. We also see what happens when all hope is lost.

Hope is a feeling that things will improve, or a desire will be fulfilled. While the girls in *Preamble* hope to be rescued from the terrorists, the girls in *Embers*, on the contrary, though rescued and in IDP camp which should serve as camp of hope, or a half-way house as we chose to call such a place under normal circumstance, have lost all hope of better life. Their experiences have taught them that there is no hope that a woman can be anything more than a sex object. All through the play Talatu always preached hope to the girls. She believes that hope sustains life. She will not allow the girls to believe that life in Sambisa Forest is better than life in the camp. "Let us continue to hope and pray to Allah for change" (19). However, at the end of the play she comes to the realization that "Both the life in this camp and the one outside are the same. Outside there are graveyards too. You are not going to be saved. You will only get out of here; from the small silent graves back to the big noisy ones that your politicians nurture for you outside" (84).

The soldiers also debate on the efficacy of hope. While Soldier 3 still has hope that God will save the country, Soldier 4 scoffs at the word,

SOLDIER 4: Yes..., hope. The thing they sell to us every time is hope.

They have turned us all into beggars. The politicians dole out coins into our alms-plate. Those coins are what we call hope. The gifts of enforced optimism (25).

A typical illustration of one living on hope is Yisa in *Embers*. This character has no voice in the play. All he does is to respond to the muezzin's call to the zuhr prayer. As soon as he hears the voice of the muezzin, Yisa does his ablution, steps on his mat in front of his tent and prays. This routine happens at the beginning of each part of the play except the last scene after the multiple bomb explosions that reduce the camp to smithereens. He is a symbol of shattered hope. If he represents hope at other scenes, he represents the loss of hope at the last scene indicated in the closing stage direction thus:

The camp is now a complete spectacle of desolation. The call of the muezzin is heard – faintly, as if from afar distance. Yisa remains crouched on the praying mat; his figure looking weary like an ashen piece of a breathless statue. His forehead has already touched the ground in supplication. But he never rises (88).

Hopelessness is thus an over-arching motif in the play and in the end both the hopeful and the hopeless share the same fate as the little embers that have been taken for granted over a long period of time, gradually build up culminating in a huge conflagration.

While in *Preamble to Apocalypse* the story of the girls ends when the soldiers arrive to rescue them from the Boko Haram hideout, *Embers* takes it up from there and follows them into the IDP camp where they are supposed to be rehabilitated before returning them to the society. It is meant to serve as a halfway house for these traumatized victims, hence we see the girls' jubilation that help has come at last, and they believe it when Brigg Usman assures them, "Relax my daughters/ May God be praised we found you" (82). However, in *Embers*, the joy of being rescued turns into nightmare when the halfway house turns into a purgatory, a place of agony and despair. They have journeyed from frying pan into fire. Having experienced sexual abuse in all places, the girls decide that the abuse in the Internally Displaced Persons Camp is more disappointing than that which they experienced in Sambisa jungle.

From all indications, there is no safe place for women no matter their age, religion, or race, if they remain sex objects. In a conflict situation it is more pronounced leading some writers to declare that rape is a weapon of war. It is often the case that invading soldiers rape women of the conquered people to establish their dominance. The scar remains long after the war is over. A classical case is the horrendous abuse of women by the Japanese Imperial Army in occupied territories during the World War II during which numerous comfort stations were built where girls were forcefully taken to service soldiers' appetite for sex (Amnesty International 2016). On the first of January 2021, a South Korean court ordered the Japanese Government to pay the sum of Ninety-One Thousand, Eight Hundred Dollars (\$91,800) to the twelve surviving Korean comfort women, whom the judge, Kim Jeong-gon, said "suffered extreme psychological and physical pain hard to imagine" (*New York Times* 7th January 2021). The ruling offended Japan and threatened to rekindle diplomatic feud between the two countries (Shin, 2021).

Conclusion

Preamble to Apocalypse and *Embers* are two plays written by two young Nigerian playwrights who channel their creative services to addressing violence in the country, in general and against women in particular, using the abduction of 276 schoolgirls from Chibok Secondary School in 2014, as a case study. Avoiding the usual tendency to romanticise and politicize the problem, the playwrights take a 360 degree look at the problem to reveal the role each individual plays through actions, words, attitudes, and behaviours which create the enabling atmosphere for violence to develop and thrive. This is a significant shift in the study of the insurgency which has often focused on the resultant effect of insurgency that always leads to the blame game that has complicated the situation thereby making a resolution elusive. Violence is seen here as an effect not a cause. The authors of the focus plays seem to opine that until attention is paid to the causes that lie in social, political, economic and gender inequalities, these dormant embers will form the preamble to an apocalypse of a cataclysmic end of the nation state. Also, until every member of society can take an honest and hard look at himself to acknowledge his culpability instead of

shifting blames to others, this war will be far from over.

The plays' focus on women is important because women form a metaphor for representing unrelenting neglect, exploitation, and marginalisation of a section of society, and how mistreatment will explode in the end leaving the system in smithereens just as the girls predict in *Embers* that the system needs to destroy itself in order to regenerate (18). With the level of disillusionment portrayed in the plays, it seems the moment has come for that self-destruction of which the girls' suicide bombing undertaking is only a prelude to.

In the quest to find lasting solutions to political and gender violence, it is important to eliminate all forms of oppression and marginalisation in the nation both against individuals and groups. Reparation for sexually abused and exploited women may seem a good start towards ending the age-old practice, but it must be borne in mind that amnesty and negotiations have not ended terrorism. It will take a more profound and holistic approach. As demonstrated in *Preamble to Apocalypse* and *Embers*, it requires getting down to the root course of violent behaviours and addressing the political, economic, social

and gender inequalities that create resentment and backlash. Fighting violence in a violence-prone society requires that every section of society

must be critically probed to see how it is stoking instead of dousing the flames of violence.

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