

Research Article

Narrating Violence and Its Attendant to Trauma in Immaculée Ilibagiza's *Left to Tell*

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Abstract

The Rwanda genocide has spawned a great deal of new literary works that draw inspiration from its experience. Specifically, over the last three decades, violence and trauma are vital contributing thematic focuses in Rwandan post genocide literary works. This study was therefore designed to examine the representations of the experiences of the victims of the genocide in order to establish how violence induces trauma in the characters. Postcolonial theory and trauma were adopted as the framework basically to examine the challenges of violence perpetuated by the state against her citizens, as well as interrogate the traumatic state of the characters, while interpretive design was used for critical analysis of the text. Immaculée Ilibagiza's *Left to Tell* inscribes different traumatic situations such as bereavement, grief, psychological dislocation, and physical threat to life, as influenced by interpersonal and collective violence to describe her experiences and that of other victims as they journey in isolation and silence as the perpetrators of the genocide lurk around their protector's residence. The writer exposes the dangers of socio-political violence. This prose narrative helps to unburden the writer's pains while helping others to have a grasp of the challenges Rwandans faced during the genocide. This study establishes the dangers of bad governance, the harsh realities of war and the intertwined relationship between violence and trauma.

Keywords

Rwanda, Genocide, Postcolonial Theory, Violence, Trauma

1. Introduction

Trauma narrative is one of the preeminent features of Rwanda literature because of its traumatogenic contexts. As such, it is vital to give a background information on this prose narrative. The Rwanda 1994 genocide began on the 6th of April 1994 and within 90 days claimed the lives of almost one million Tutsis and moderate Hutus in Rwanda. Among these numbers are the family members of Immaculée Ilibagiza. The author documents her experiences before, during and after the genocide because these violent experiences left her traumatised.

At this juncture, it is vital to define violence and trauma to foreground the meeting point of the duo. The word violence comes from the Latin word *Violentia*, meaning vehemence, which in turn means an intense force. Etymologically, "violence" is similar to "violation" and therefore suggests harm and destruction that would characterise a violent or traumatic event like rape, terrorism or war. Consequently, violence in its main sense denotes injury and also infringements involving individuals or assets. Scherer [11] points out that violence is any harm suffered physically,

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emotionally or psychologically by an individual [13]. It might be inflicted intentionally or unintentionally. Trauma is caused by various factors among which violence is a weighty aspect. The act of violence takes its toll on the human mind, affecting the human psyche and the magnitude of this reaction is seen in reactions to the people and events around them. While, the American Psychiatric Association (APA) [3] describes trauma as a first-hand experience of an event involving real or imminent death or serious injury or other risks to one's physical integrity; or experiencing an event involving death, injury or risk to the physical integrity of another person; or hearing of severe hurt or death risk, accidental or gruesome death, and wound sustained by a member of one's family or friend. As such, there is a relationship between trauma and traumatic events as they both are results of violence on an individual or a group of people. Hence, this study discusses the representations of violence and trauma in Immaculé Ilibagiza's *Left to Tell*. Its specific objectives are:

- 1) To discuss violence as an oppressive tool and its attendant to trauma.
- 2) To support the claim that trauma is an after effect of violence.

2. Theories

According to Caruth [7], trauma theory is an unsolvable problem of the unconscious that illuminates the inherent contradictions of experience and language. This Lacanian approach crafts a concept of trauma as a recurring sense of absence that undermines knowledge of the extreme experience, thus preventing linguistic value other than a referential expression [6]. The truth about trauma lies within its capacity to tell about the escape from death, or its referential force, and attest to its endless impact on a life. According to Becker [4], Trauma theory focuses on the aspect of disorder and vulnerability caused by external factors, such as human or natural violence, terror, violation. Likewise, Trauma theory maintains that literature has the powerful potential to express pain and can be used for healing and to harness survivorship and that giving testimony can aid empowerment [2].

This research adopts the definition of postcolonial theory as suggested by Edward Said [10]. He asserts that the present is the mirror to the past, and it would be absolutely gullible to study it ignoring the role played by the colonialists in forming the present. Said posits that the Orient's false representation as the barbaric "other" was invented by thinkers in comparison to the western world [9]. He is against the idea that the horror of colonialism ended with it, he argues that the repercussions of colonialism are still prevalent in the form of chaos, coups, civil wars, corruption and bloodshed that suffuse many former colonies. The influential coloniser enforced a language and a culture, while the people of the Orient were neglected or distorted in the pursuit of occupying and exploiting their resources.

3. A Discussion of *Left to Tell* Immaculé Ilibagiza's Attendant to Trauma

Immaculé Ilibagiza describes *Left to Tell* as follows: "*This is my story told as I remember it...and I remember it as though it happened yesterday. It is a true story...*" [1] (p. xvii). This quotation supports the assertion that traumatic events can be completely re-enacted because they are safely kept in the subconscious mind of the victim. *Left to Tell* is an autobiography, Immaculé depicts her growing up before the genocide in the first portion of the memoir. She grew up with her three siblings in a middle-class Tutsi family that appreciated education. Throughout her life, strains with the majority Hutu ethnic group are present but rarely make her feel unsafe. Like the remainder of her family, she has friends and relatives who are Hutus. Immaculé describes her life in primary and secondary schools, and ultimately, the university. The genocide begins at university when she is home for Easter. The second half of the book tells her tale while taking cover in Pastor Murinzi's toilet. She and seven other females endure the 91 days of horror in their country in a small bathroom. In this period, Immaculé connects with God, prays daily for hours to preserve her health, and learns critically to forgive the murderers. From two books and a dictionary, she also learns English. The women eventually depart for a safe French camp, but Immaculé discovers that her entire family was killed except for her brother Aimable. Immaculé is the only bilingual refugee (she speaks French and Kinyarwanda), so she plays a significant part in the refugee camp. Ultimately, when the genocide and war are over, she ends up first at an RPF base and then back in Kigali. She rebuilds her life, gets a job from the UN, and joins her future husband, John, American United Nations personnel in Rwanda to set up a criminal court. Ultimately, Immaculé moves to the United States and becomes an author and motivational speaker.

Trauma generates emotions, and unless these emotions are processed at the right time, they become trapped in the mind and body. Instead of healing from the hurtful events, the trauma inhibits the body as energy in the unconscious. These emotions are presented in different forms like sadness, anxiety, fear, hate, etc. Unless it is uncovered and treated, it becomes a burden. One of the ways to treat trauma is what this author has been able to achieve, and this is to de-stress her mind by documenting her traumatic journey. On this premise, it is pertinent to consider representations of ethnic differences and their attendance to psychological trauma.

Immaculé first hears about the division between Hutus and Tutsis in her fourth grade. Her teacher takes a roll call and asks students to state their ethnic affiliations. She was asked about her tribe, but unfortunately, she could not answer. Buhuro, her teacher, sends her out of the classroom until she identifies herself. The class is her first encounter with the division that permeated the Rwandan society, and this would be the foundational course that her traumatic experience would develop on because the change she is experiencing

outside her home and from a stranger takes a psychological toll on her. Immaculée's parents did not tell them about Rwanda's history, which is that the German and Belgian colonialists preferred the ruling Tutsi class and set up a system that dominated the Hutu socially and politically. The Hutus took over and made the Tutsis second-class citizens after the Belgians' departure in 1962. The 1959 Hutu rebellion against the Belgians and the 1973 coup resulted in the killing and expulsion of many Tutsis. However, in the inadequate experience of Immaculée, everyone seemed at the same level, with Hutus and Tutsis frequently getting married, friendly and otherwise associated. She experiences another prejudice at age 15 when she took entrance examinations for well-known public schools funded by the government. Although she had the second highest score in her college, due to her Tutsi origins, she was ignored, the same for the Tutsi kid who scored the highest mark. After two years at a substandard private school, going through all the challenges of being second fiddle, she decides not to give up on her dreams and reads austere. Miraculously, she gains admission to study at the Lycée de Notre Dame d'Afrique, the country's top all-girls college. At the prestigious school, situated in a hostile Tutsi town, she makes good friends with the well-fortified Tutsis. A step out of the school walls brings her closer to the danger of being a Tutsi. Anytime she leaves, she hears the muttering of Tutsi in a menacing tone [1] (p. 21). She consistently lives in fear and her mind is disturbed.

This fear aggravated because of the consistent threat to her life. The key characteristic of a traumatic event is a threat to life. There are other events such as social anxiety disorder characterised by humiliation and rejection in social circles. In 1990, Immaculée had her first near-death experience. After being expelled in the 1959 and 1973 ethnic tensions, Ugandan Tutsi rebels formed an alliance with the Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) and tried to regain their rights and influence in Uganda. This situation was the centre of every discussion in her school. One night, Immaculée passes through a terrifying experience that almost claims her life at the dormitory because of this situation. This she describes thus:

Danida, one of my dorm sisters, believed every horrible depiction of the rebel soldiers. One night I must have woken her as I slipped out of bed to use the outdoor bathroom. It was cold, so I had a large scarf wrapped around my head and was wearing oversized pajamas to keep warm. I must have looked a little frightening because when I tried to open the dorm door to get back inside, Danida slammed it shut in my face. The entire campus echoed with her terrified screams. "Help me! Help me! Oh my God, help! It's an RPF soldier – he's come to kill us, to eat us...he has horns on his head!..." I heard the sound of heavy footsteps on gravel and spun around. The school's biggest security guard was charging towards me in the dark, holding a spear leveled directly at my heart. My knees buckled, and I dropped to the ground. He stopped just inches from me. "Jesus Christ, Immaculée, I almost killed

you! Who the hell is screaming like that?" he said [1] (p. 25).

The two girls in the above quotation are both living in an ethnic tension-soaked environment. Also, Danida might have reacted the way she did because of Immaculée's height. The above might have transpired out of fear or mere imagination but it foregrounds the depth of danger the girls might be subjected to in the case of any attack. They believe the RPF soldiers are out to kill the Hutus and in any case of such, there will be a reprisal attack. Her movement around her school sometimes puts her in danger of a physical threat to her life by the Hutus. At one point she was told about her height and how she would be killed. The threat has become so rampant that Clementine, a Tutsi friend of Immaculée, shows her an electric box of over 1500 volts.

She tells Immaculée that "If Hutu extremists invade the college and there is no way we can flee, we can come here, pull that lever down and stick our hands in. We will die immediately, it's better to be electrocuted than to be tortured, raped and murdered" [1] (p. 26).

At barely twenty years of age, they are already planning their death to avoid pain before the genocide but they explicate how ethnic differences have been promoting oppression.

In 1991, Immaculée received a scholarship from the National University of Butare; despite her high grades, she did not think it would happen due to her Tutsi background. Fortunately, she and some of her friends got admitted. She loves her independence, including beautiful pocket money. She begins to see a Hutu, John. Despite the fierce assaults in the north, her university life is thrilling and socially vigorous. However, the *Interhamwe* actively became part of a youth movement controlled by the president's political party evolving into the extremist Hutu militia. The country starts its descent into anarchy, as Immaculée observes, devoid of restraint, the anarchistic violence and intimidation the *Interhamwe* inflicts upon Rwanda. She describes what she sees as a more disturbing encounter while going to a friend's wedding with her elder brother.

At least 300 *Interhamwe* were standing in the road blocking our way, all of them looking ridiculous in their clownish outfits, but dangerously wild-eyed as well. Many of them seemed to be drunk or on drugs, as they danced around in circles, yelling and cursing at passersby [1] (p. 34).

They wield machetes and offer their butts as a pictorial and imaginative exploration of the inferno they could unleash. Merely looking at the mobsters, Damascene is stunned. He loses his intuition of right judgement as the elder brother, leaving the duty to Immaculée. She eventually sees to them getting to their destination safely.

The threats were not limited to physical encounters alone. She constantly rises to the hatred broadcast from the RTLM. Rather than being a radio station, it is a radical hate device that spreads anti-Tutsi toxins; it promotes the extermination of the Tutsi by the Hutu. Her peaceful nights of sleep are regularly

interrupted by obnoxious sounds of persecution and death threats. This is an attempt to psychologically build fear and anxiety in the subconscious of the Tutsis.

In the wake of the genocide, as the death threats increase and Immaculée's family sees how difficult it will be for her to survive, they arrange for her to leave the house. She runs for cover because it is too hard and dangerous for her as a young lady to be at her residence. She moves to the pastor's house for safety. On sighting her, her teacher, Buhoro, and friend Janet, both turn away from her in repugnance. It was expected from Buhoro, but Janet's response shocks Immaculée because she thought she was going to protect her. This creates a sudden check and fear in her heart.

Sadly, the death toll continues to increase while her brothers, Damascene and Vianney arrive at the Pastor's house to notify her about their tragedy. Damascene leaves to hide in Bonn's house, a Hutu. Five women seeking shelter from the rebels arrive and hide in the bedroom of Immaculée while they hear massacres and shrieks of death outside. Everyone is hiding in a utility room with a muggy ceiling. Pastor Murinzi insists that Augustine and Vianney leave because hiding with them is too dangerous for men. Immaculée must ask them to leave in the morning, trembling in her heart, she feels like a woman that slipped her child into a bunch of wolves. They went out of the gate, and the darkness swallowed them.

After she leaves the Pastor's house, her survival is also a problem for some people. For example, the Tutsi soldiers find it hard to accept that Immaculée could still be living if she were a Tutsi but perceive her as a Tutsi mole. She was about to be killed, but a soldier, Bazil, her former neighbour, a Hutu whose allegiance is with the RPF identifies her before she is shot dead. He guarantees the soldiers that she is a Tutsi in need of help and accompanies the rest of the exiles who are in need of security with Aloise.

One additional facet of the representations of trauma is the perpetual sense of regret that ensues from decisions not made on time. One of such is documented below:

I wish I had known that that night was to be our last family supper together. I would have stood up and thanked God for all of them. I would have told everyone sitting around that table how much I loved them and thanked them for loving me. But I didn't" Immaculée recalls [1] (p. 41).

The above establishes the dawn of losses that beset Immaculée during and after the genocide. It shows the tenacity of peace and how things are changing rapidly. Immaculée has no idea that, given the unhappiness and chaos of the *Interhamwe*, this is their last meal together. Regret is a repetitive emotion. The Author keeps feeling this rush of emotion as she grieves, wondering what she should have done differently.

She narrates her ordeal thus: Damascene expresses his fear over the *Interhamwe*, and their peaceful vacation is troubled. Their father does not believe anything could go wrong, but Damascene asks him to help the family across Lake Kivu and flee to safety before it is too late. Unfortunately, their father

was unperturbed. Damascene wakes Immaculée up that night to tell her that the president is dead. Immaculée recalls that a few days before that, on the radio, she overheard the Hutu extremists saying all Tutsis would be killed if anything happens to the president. The family soon learns that Twaza, their uncle, was killed in Kigali and it is prohibited for civilians to leave their homes. This, Immaculée recollects, was on the morning of April 7th, 1994.

The following few days are thronged with tension and fears, with many sleepless nights. Her father, formerly living in self-denial of the imminent danger, and her brother's hope of survival is gradually eroding. Immaculée attempts to study for her examination, convinced it is a phase that would pass like the ones her parents have survived. At least 10,000 local Tutsis gather outside their homes to ask for the way forward and seek guidance from their father on the third day. The next morning, hundreds of *Interhamwe* armed with machetes assembled, but they were driven away by the crowd at her house. Immaculée hands her father her scapular, in return, he gives her his rosary. It is the last gift they exchange. After fighting them and rallying the other Tutsi males, the murderers return as their dad enters a rage, but her mother begs that he does not confront them, and they eventually leave. The unfortunate genocide has started and some of them will not live to tell the tale while the survivors will live with the regrets of not being proactive.

In addition, another traumatic experience for Immaculée is the solitary confinement. Pastor Murinzi in *Left to Tell* directs Immaculée and the other females down the corridor into the forty-eight inches by thirty-six inches bathroom in his bedroom. They must maintain a pin-drop silence so that they do not risk being discovered. The house is searched the next morning; Pastor Murinzi gets the *Interhamwes* to leave. She does not understand how long her ordeal will last and believes it is for a few days. However, the warm, tight dark quarters smother her. "When morning broke, the birds in the pastor's shade tree began singing. I was jealous of them, thinking, how lucky you are to have been born birds and have freedom after all, look at what we humans are doing to ourselves [1] (p. 75)." She shares her resentment about being a part of a nation that justifies the killing of innocent lives that she can see all around her. Humans are fortunate to be humans in comparison with other animals because of their higher level of perception. On the other hand, as Immaculée goes through her ordeal, she feels caged, but the birds are safe and free to move around.

Hundreds of individuals come around the house the next day, crying out for the Tutsis' death. They search the neighbours' houses to check if they were hiding Tutsis. These are people Immaculée knows. She hears a voice in her ears saying that she will not survive. Immaculée asks God for the first time to assist her to thrive and pass through her thoughts. Once the Pastor arrives, Immaculée pleads with him, persuading him to switch his wardrobe to their bathroom in front of the door so that when the searchers return, the women's hiding place would not be seen.

As time passes, the women quickly adapt to their small, shared space, and are scared. The Pastor tells them that men will return to the house shortly to find them. Fear envelops Immaculée and she utilises all the hours of waking to pray. This is her escape from a mental breakdown. Immaculée also suffers excruciating psychological bashes due to her isolation and fear.

Additionally, traumatic information can be defined as any information received with an intense negative response. This information might cause fear, pain, panic attack, shock or disbelief, etc. Initially, from the Pastor, Immaculée comes to know that there seems to be no end in sight for the killing of the Tutsis, and most Hutus want to exterminate them. Immaculée is filled with resentment. The murderers reappear for a second moment to search the house. When Immaculée listens to them, she realises she is hoping and praying to God with a heart filled with hate.

She quickly realises that in His eyes, the murderers are like children and she has to forgive them, not hate them. She knows that God cannot love and accept her if she lives with unforgiveness. Once Immaculée has come to this understanding, she will daily return to her mind in the bathroom, clearly remembering His wisdom and directing her prayers with her rosary. Praying is the only thing that keeps her spirit alive. She says “When I wasn’t praying, I felt that I was no longer living in His light, and the world of the bathroom was too bleak to endure” [1] (p. 95).

In the same vein, when Pastor Murinzi’s warm attitude begins to go south, he provides Immaculée with other information that affects her well-being. He tells her that her father was hiding his arms and planning to kill Tutsis, and she snaps back at him, exposing his lies. She learns that the open insolence of the Pastor towards her and her father means that he thinks she would not survive the violence since Rwandans are cloistered individuals who would never talk to someone, who would once again be equal to them. This further break her down.

Horrible news continues to crop up in the life of Immaculée. She discovers she is abandoned by Janet, her colleague in the Pastor's yard. Also, the new president is thanking the killers for doing a great job. A radio broadcast reports that a massacre took place at the University. An old Tutsi woman is rejected by the pastor, and the pastor could hear her attempting to escape the killers but she knows she cannot. She dies trying to.

Sadly, the radio keeps beaming out provocative odium toward Tutsis. The nation has gone into complete rancour with local government authorities supplying firearms such as machetes and weapons to ordinary people who have taken on the fad of extermination. The Pastor sheds light on what happens to the weary and tired women, battling to remain alive nonetheless. He tells them that he intends to send them as Abashi Bush men’s wives to a distant island in Lake Kivu because the genocide was still ongoing in full force.

One night, the Pastor unexpectedly brings two more females to the bathroom: sisters Malaba and Solange. They

took shelter with the godmother of Malaba, Marianne's daughter of the Pastor, but must leave to avoid further danger. They fake being part of the killers to pass securely; they saw stacks of bodies and horrendous violence. They gave this information to the rest of the women in the bathroom, worsening their fears.

On a particular day, she overheard the people speaking about a master’s graduate whose head was crushed and Immaculée immediately believes it is Damascene, but the Pastor convinces her otherwise. She hysterically cries, pulls herself together, and never cries in the bathroom again. However, it is Damascene, who challenges them to kill him instead of bargaining or pleading for mercy.

Go ahead,” he said. “What are you waiting for? Today is my day to go to God. I can feel Him all around us...I pity you for killing people like it’s some kind of child’s game. Murder is no game: If you offend God, you will pay for your fun. The blood of the innocent people you cut down will follow you to your reckoning. But I am praying for you...I pray that you see the evil you’re doing and ask for God’s forgiveness before it’s too late [1] (p. 154).

Damascene would not tell the murderers where Immaculée is and dies for his allegiance. Immaculée Ilibagiza repeatedly portrays Damascene as her soulmate and bosom friend, leaving a note with tear drops that becomes a continuous component of his letter to her before he passes on. He asked her to be strong because their parents and Vianney have been killed. He was hopeful about his survival and thought to keep in touch with his sister, but it was not feasible. He died trying to survive.

Unexpectedly, John, the boyfriend of Immaculée, visits the pastor to communicate with Immaculée, but he has changed a lot and is cold to her predicament. In addition to being entrapped, she is also worried about his freedom and falls because of his unexpectedly unloving behaviour towards her, out of love for him. He is not openly aggressive but does not fully grasp what she is going through and is emotionally dysfunctional toward her. She is emotionally exhausted because of this visit which compounded her psychological state of mind.

After two months of living in hiding, Immaculée hears the arrival of the French from Sembeba. They were received by the Hutu, who assumed they supported the carnage but were open to establishing safe places for Tutsis and protecting Tutsi survivors. Immaculée indicates to the pastor that one of these secure camps should be covered by women. It was like a message of hope but getting to the camp seemed impossible. After three months of hiding. One night, Pastor Murinzi takes them out to an empty bedroom to watch a movie: their first time out of hiding, sadly the light of the TV caught the attention of one of the houseboys of the Pastor, who sneaks to inform a group of *Interhanwes* about the Tutsis women. Immaculée knows she would not be spared if the men discover her. Another houseboy is still in doubt and appears convinced the bathroom houses women. This results to panic attack for the

women. They agree they must go to the French camp.

Various traumatic information keeps coming to Immaculée as she meets her brother's friend Jean-Paul who is continuously disturbed with nightmares because of the massacres he witnessed. She is informed Kigali has crumbled causing a slight decline in the genocide; however, the country is still not secure. Jean-Paul also recounts to her how her family members died: a week into the genocide, her father was murdered, because on April 14th; he attempted to request food for the displaced persons shrouded in the Kibuye stadium and sadly was shot in the street. A few days after her father's death, her mother also follows when she assumes Damascene is being slain and pursued to restrain the killers. Tragically, she is the one hacked to death. At the Kibuye stadium alongside Augustine and scores of other people, Vianney was killed while Damascene was viciously executed. After all, his friend, Bonn's brother gave him away to the killers because he would not tell the killers Immaculée's location. The only survivor was Aimable. He was in Senegal.

Also, individuals experiencing trauma show strong predictors of coping mechanisms. The ability to cope with violence for a long time is indicative of a mental health condition. To cope is to make a specific alteration physically, emotionally, or mentally so that one can manage or adapt to situations. According to Algorani and Gupta [14], coping mechanisms are cognitive and behavioural approaches used to manage internal and external stressors.

The women are conveyed in the back of a shielded truck by French soldiers to their base camp. She meets countless cousins and aunts from the side of her mother. Esperance, her aunt, sends her a letter written by Damascene to her parents. His final remarks still echo in Immaculée's ears. After reading the letter, Immaculée is shattered. In the letter, he acknowledges that he understands that every member of his family is no longer alive, save for Damascene, who is yet to be confirmed dead. He pleads with her to stay strong and asserts that in this life or the next, they will meet again. This is the first pain after freedom that Immaculée masks.

Secondly, the females are well protected within the garrisoned border within the French camp. They have food and a safe place to lay their heads, same for the troops. The captain proffers to execute anyone Immaculée desires, but it arouses hatred in her. She appears unhurt but still prays for the killers to come in contact with God's mercy. She takes her relationship with God and the quest for forgiveness as means of coping with her pain. Immaculée becomes a camp translator because the troops can only interact in French and Tutsi only understand Kinyarwanda. She also develops a relationship with the French soldier Pierre but snubs his romantic advances. She and Florence pally up, a woman who sails through the killings taking refuge under the dead family's bodies in a truck packed with human cadavers, then hurled by the Hutu killers off a cliff.

In the long run, their camp turns into a transit center for the homeless, who then move to a new, bigger site run by the

French. Immaculée remains at the old camp to carry out entries. Aloise, a politically allied woman, comes in with her children. Immaculée's mother paid Aloise's school fees when her family was unable to afford it and Aloise said she would find a way to pay Immaculée for her mother's generosity. She could go stay with her in Kigali as a daughter when the fighting ends and her friends could also join her. This is the first close contact with means of survival. On this promise, Immaculée places her strength for survival.

Sometime in August, the captain precipitously informs Immaculée that the women should get ready to go and stay with Tutsi soldiers in the next two hours. In daylight hours, the remaining 30 women get into the truck. As far as Immaculée could see from under the tarpaulin, the road is full of Hutus. The captain tells the females they must clear up because there is rancour in the territory and the troops are prohibited from fighting, Immaculée is dazzled and amazed that the French captain would not insist on the protection of the females despite the mob of *Interhamwe*, but he was sure of his decision.

They are enclosed on the edge of violence by animosity but she maintains a high level of firmness. When Aloise's wheelchair gets stuck, Immaculée, Jean-Paul, and their friend Karega head up to the Tutsis' camp. They are confronted with taunts and threats of pugnacity, and Immaculée pleads for protection for the entire time and to dislodge hate from the killers. They arrive in one piece at the camp but are blocked in their faces by weapons at the RPF sentry post, but are later freed. Her new path leads to eventual freedom and that was how she survived the genocide. Immaculée uses various means to ensure she remains strong as she navigates her ordeal.

As much as she wants the genocide to end, she harbours that this freedom is a pain because of the various outcomes she envisages:

I knew that those boys would never see their parents again, and that in all likelihood, all their relatives were dead. I feared that their future would be filled with sadness, abuse and denied opportunities - the kind of lives where bitterness and hatred easily take root [1] (p. 165).

From the above quotes she deduces the following:

I saw the circle of hatred and mistrust forming in those innocent eyes, and I knew that God was showing me another reason He'd spared me. I vowed that one day, when I was strong and capable enough, I would do everything I could to help the children orphaned by the genocide. I would try to bring hope and happiness to their lives, and steer them away from embracing the hatred that had robbed them of their parents, and of a family's love [1] (p. 165).

From the foregoing, it is revealed that Immaculée comprehends that the genocide would not end until the run of hatred in the country is ended. The country might linger in carnage for a while. Immaculée recognises this in two young boys who cannot understand where their parents went and are apprehensive, but when they get to terms with the revulsion

that destroyed their lives, everything would change. As the circle of hatred continues, Immaculée is broken, and mistrust grows in her heart. During her brief stay in the camp, Immaculée endeavours to adhere to her godly memo to forgive the hatchet men, but this is quizzed again when she sights mass graves. She fathoms she would have to exit Rwanda so she can engage in self-healing to offer a helping hand of healing to others someday. All the things she has been learning during the genocide about God and forgiveness are strategies for survival. They were coping mechanisms at the time she was facing the violence. She eventually saw that she might have to face her trauma to heal and help others heal.

However, her hope is restored, as promised by Aloise. The refugees will soon leave with Aloise for Kigali. The RPF Major helps them with a truck and driver to bring Immaculée and her friends to Aloise's house while filling it with sufficient sustenance to last months. They are driving through Kigali and see the town being reduced to rubble; desolate and destroyed by the uprising. They drove first to the UN to look for Aloise's husband, Fari, who is also familiar with the relatives of Immaculée. Immaculée discovers Aloise gives birth to a child dying of fever as the genocide thickens.

Aloise's house, deserted and partly damaged for months, requires a week to clean and renovate what they can. As they settle in gradually, Immaculée resolves she has to nail down a job, and the only vacant places are in the UN, as Fari tells her. Immaculée tarries at the UN every day, but none is offered to her as there is none. Immaculée pleads with God to assist herself as she wants to obtain her funds and academic certificates from her former Butare dormitory. Through these ordeals, she remains strong and determined.

After the genocide, Immaculée refuses to wallow in the pain of the past rather she looks out for opportunities in the ruins. In her despair she remains optimistic. Several situations give Immaculée the strength she needs to cope and fight for survival. One such situation is when one of her lecturers at Butare saw her in Kigali and offered her a ride to the campus. Similar to Kigali, the campus is destroyed. Immaculée knows that there would not have been many of her colleagues surviving the carnage. Upon arrival in her room, everything was in ruins except a package containing her high school diploma, a progress report from the university, and \$30. Immaculée praises God for answering her prayers and returns to Kigali. She bought nice clothes, and cologne, and made her hair, so she can look nice enough to get a job.

Also, she goes to the UN in Kigali and asks the personnel manager for a placement, it is just a secretarial job that is available, and she could not use a laptop or communicate in English efficiently. She departs furiously, but Pierre Mehu, a man she meets at the vestibule offers her one. His secretary educates her on typing and using their filing system, and she soon excels at the UN typing and English tests and can tie down a job as an official keeping tabs on relief supplies.

Immaculée likes her new job, especially with all the expertise she can get and the opportunity to meet foreigners.

This is possible because of her positive approach to life. Her friends from the French camp left Aloise by October, and more than a million Tutsi migrants who lived in exile worldwide returned to the country, while two million Hutus have bolted. Immaculée senses she must take on life changes and moves in with her college roommate, Sarah, who traces her to Aloise.

Sarah's elderly parents live with her, and Immaculée can start processing her ordeals during the genocide. She eventually writes Aimable, her brother, something she avoided because of the fear and pain. Unless he leaves school, which she encourages him not to do, he cannot bear to come to see her. Instead, they communicate with each other every week.

To further bring hope to her, at the United Nations, Immaculée receives an offer from a Senegalese officer to accompany her wherever she goes in the nation. She requests to visit her hometown. She is ready to face her past to cope with her new reality. She and Sarah return by helicopter to Mataba. They arrive in 30 minutes; Captain Traore supervises them in the military yard, where they are properly catered for. He devotes an armed escort to her house to guide her within a five-mile radius.

Immaculée is devastated when she sees her destroyed village and home and sees the Hutu neighbours she knows participated in the murders. Some Tutsi neighbours inform her about her mother and Damascene's burial places. Immaculée is overwhelmed with rage, and which has tested her faith. She confesses "My soul was at war with itself" [1] (p. 196).

She wants to give her mother and brother a befitting burial the next day. With the help of her neighbours, she exhumes the body of Damascene but passes out when she sees it. She decides not to look at the corpse of her mother. She is pleased with the support of her neighbours and friends during the memorial but realises that they have all misplaced their faith and hope, while she is fortunate to have maintained her faith and her strength. They dig graves in her demolished previous home for her family and perform a priest's shorn burial rites.

She loathes the murderers of the Hutu and seeks revenge, but she understands that this is the lure of the devil. She asks God to forgive her even more, the men who hurt her family are deserving of her sympathy. Immaculée can discard the hate and remind herself to look to God at all times when she feels taken over in the future with negative emotions. She keeps drawing hope from God in her despair.

A further point in this traumatic discourse is exile. Exile encompasses more than simply living in a foreign country. It involves grappling with the profound awareness of being estranged from oneself. The acknowledging that one does not truly belong in a place. This experience is intertwined with a strong sense of not belonging, amplifying feelings of disconnectedness. Oripeloye [8] explains that exile encompasses both the physical uprooting of a community from their native land and the psychological disorientation experienced by individuals as a consequence of feeling

estranged and alienated. While, according to Lois Tyson [12], being “unhomely” is not the same as being homeless. To be unhomed is to feel not at home even in your home because you are not at home in yourself: your cultural identity crisis has made you a psychological refugee so to speak [12] (p. 368). This level of psychological torture is common in Rwanda.

At a point in time, the Tutsis in Rwanda were taken away from their homes. They could not understand if it was for some time or the rest of their lives. Immaculée’s parents were banished into Nyamata at Bugesera district. It becomes obvious as the situation remains the same that they are going to remain where they have been banished because they do not have the liberty or access to move back to Rwanda and live amidst the Hutus. As shocking as it might look for a group of people to be sent into exile right within their nation without any offence, it becomes crystal clear that their ethnicity is the yardstick for the assigned punishment. They are left in the middle of nowhere and they must start afresh. It was a form of mental torture adopted by the Hutus, used on the Tutsis, for them to understand they are inferior and cannot live close to or around their superiors. Everyone experienced this despair. They knew they would never go back home because they were Tutsis. They were left to live like a plagued set of [1] (p. 24).

All the people in this district are Tutsis, as such are subjects of varying degrees of humiliation, but what left most of them traumatised is the constant threats to life. Grenades are thrown carelessly and often, and homes are often raided, to ensure they keep the portraits of Kayibanda hanging in the place of honour.

Another vital point is that Immaculée suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder. This is conspicuous in her narration. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fourth Edition defines Post-traumatic stress disorder as the development of the character of symptoms following exposure to an extreme traumatic stressor involving a direct personal experience of an event that involves actual or threatened death or 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 [3] (p. 424). This mental health condition has three main categories: re-experiencing, avoidance, and hyperarousal. Re-experiencing involves an intrusive recall of the traumatic event, sleep disturbance or nightmare-related events, anger, or anxiety. Avoidance includes avoiding reminders, places, or people related to events while hyper-arousal includes sleep disturbances or nightmares, irritability, or aggression [5].

According to Zepinic [15], traumatic memories are highly emotional, life-altering events that would appear to have the best persisting into the entire life. They sometimes cause a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, etc. they are imprint events in which the setting and measures are out of

the individual’s ability to control; they are qualitatively different from normal narrative memory and include sensory, affective, motor reliving experience, and the behavioural re-enactments. The experience of trauma can lead to the generalisation and triggering of traumatic memories across a wide range of situations. Anything that serves as a reminder of the initial trauma can be perceived as threatening, regardless of its origin. This occurs because individuals who have been traumatised often become fixated on the traumatic event. Their reactions are driven by the perception that the original traumatic experience still exists and activates protective mechanisms that failed to safeguard them during the initial occurrence.

In *Left to Tell*, Immaculée is able to connect with Aimable, her brother in late 1995. His scholarship administrator resolved that Rwanda is calm enough to journey to and funds his ticket home. Their union was an unforgettable one. Rather than a huge outpouring of emotion, the meeting was cautious, as if their hearts were protected. They hugged and kissed, but with care, because she was afraid of his pain and he too of hers. Though it might be hard to discuss the occurrences that took place, the muses are hard to prevent. Immaculée is a woman who has bottled up her emotions for so long. However, later at night, she cried her heart out. She discusses her family members in the present tense but she never confers on what happened with them with her brother.

Lastly, Immaculée struggles to pardon the murderers. She loathes them and wishes that they are all dead and begs for their victims only but when she is full of hatred for many of her human creations, she knows that she is duplicitous and begs for help for herself and her family. With every doubt in her mind, she moves deep into a dark place with a dark voice whispering to her. This is the crucial dilemma that Immaculée must asphyxiate in her confinement. She asserts,

I held on to my father’s rosary and asked God to help me, and again I heard his voice: Forgive them; they know not what they do. I took a crucial step toward forgiving the killers that day. My anger was draining from me – I’d opened my heart to God, and He’d touched it with His infinite love. For the first time, I pitied the killers. I asked God to forgive their sins and turn their souls toward His beautiful light. That night I prayed with a clear conscience and a clean heart. For the first time since I entered the bathroom, I slept in peace [1] (p. 94).

The allegory of prayer as a shield and safety net against anxiety and enabling the devil to break into her core brews. Immaculée is consumed with mental darkness that Satan sends to her to pitch her against God and mankind. She figures out that the only way to avoid hate and rage is to rely on God’s help and learn to forgive those who did horrible deeds to her family and country. She made efforts to pray to God to forgive the killers, but thinks it was impossible. Immaculée does this to fight against depression.

Even a few minutes not spent in prayer or contemplation of God became an invitation for Satan to stab me with his

double-edged knife of doubt and self-pity. Prayer became my armor, and I wrapped it tightly around my heart [1] (p. 85).

Until she prayed and opened her heart for forgiveness, she couldn't sleep peacefully. After this, her emotions were free from a cage. Tsang et al. [16] assert that in mental health, forgiveness is linked to lowering anxiety symptoms. Also, Freedman and Enright [17] found out that forgiveness produces emotions that lower physiological stress and reduce post-traumatic stress disorder. This is also further explicated by Kalayjian & Paloutzian [18], "In forgiveness, positive thinking and feelings supplant negative ones. Forgiveness results from changing motivations from negative to conciliation. In decisional forgiveness, a person alters intentions about how to behave towards another, and in emotional forgiveness moves from unforgiving emotions to orienting them positively toward the offenders.

4. Conclusion

Rwandan Literature is not decorated with aesthetics, rather it deals with critical issues that affect the lives of the citizens. Also, from the analysis it can be deduced that violence is mostly the originator of trauma. Trauma affects the productivity state of individuals and can be sometimes extremely destructive. Immaculé is a victim of violence that tampered with her psychological wellbeing and that of her country at large. For trauma to be understood, it must be transformed into a narrative which enables it to be verbalised, communicated, integrated into one's own and other's knowledge of the past. The main essence is not to understand it alone but also to elucidate the lingering dangers of violence and the need to always embrace peaceful coexistence.

Abbreviations

APA American Psychiatric Association

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Abimbola Afeyisetan Ayo-Afolayan: Creative Writing and Literary Criticism

Emmanuel Babatunde Omobowale: Medical Humanities/Literature, Medicine/Bioethics, Creative Writing and Literary Criticism