



# Dismantling the Trauma Paradigm in Helon Habila's Measuring Time

Augustine Uka Nwanyanwu

1. University of Port Harcourt, Nigeria

## Abstract:

The paper argues that Helon Habila's *Measuring Time* is a narrative that significantly explores the traumatogenic experiences in the lives of the characters. The article explores the recollected theories of trauma on the individual psyche, and its effects on memory, especially its representation in the narrative. The argument centers on the temporality of traumatogenic events upon identity and its effects upon the individual's memory, and its actuality in Habila's narrative. It argues that the narrative traces Mamo's repeated, conscious or unconscious representation and enactment of their father's failure to show love to his family and abandonment, starting from their mother, Tabita, and his attempts to understand his father's actions from his own and his brother, LaMamo's positions as subjects affected by their father's abandonment and emotional neglect. The aim of the paper is to apply a Caruthian analysis and interpretation of the text to posit that Mamo's and LaMamo's hatred of their father, Lamang is the result of Auntie Marina's unconscious recollected tales of their father's abandonment of their mother, Tabita, which forms the twin's experiences of their mother in marriage and in turn constitutes their traumatogenic experiences and fuels their desire to achieve authenticity or fame as an act of dismantling their traumatic experiences in the narrative. The paper argues for a re-modeling of the complications inherent in the ways traumatic experiences might be analyzed, interpreted or narrated. The major contribution of this work is the observation that diverse trauma theories are merged in the narrative; Freudian, Taian, Brownian and Caruthian "traumatogenic experiences" are resonances which permeate the narrative texture of Habila's narrative. Few scholars have dwelt on the traumatogenic experiences of dysfunctional parenting and dysfunctional partnership in marriage in this narrative. This observation makes the present study expedient.

*Keywords: trauma, memory, abandonment, Caruth, Habila, authenticity.*

## INTRODUCTION

Inter and intra-personal traumatic experiences have been the dominant realities of most individuals in the Nigeria in the twenty-first century, arising from fractured socio-economic realities and debilitating socio-cultural distortions. The traumatogenic experiences of individual characters in Helon Habila's narrative arise from the limitations imposed on them by social and family encumbrances that negate personal aspirations and desires of the characters.

The paper explores the traumatogenic encounters that constitute individual experiences in Helon Habila's narrative *Measuring Time*. It identifies the flashbacks and recurrent moments in which the scenes of traumatic encounters are captured in the lives of the major characters. This study examines the graphic illustration of the repetition of traumatic experiences in the lives of the major characters. The argument that underlies this study is that the resonance of Freudian and Caruthian traumatic encounters permeates the narrative structure of the narrative.

Following the observations of Sigmund Freud, Cathy Caruth in *Unclaimed Experience* argues that “the experience of a trauma repeats itself... through the unknowing acts of the survivor and against his very will” (Caruth 2). In other words, the repetitions of catastrophe in the psyche of the individual are what Freud has described as “traumatic neurosis,” that is “the unwitting reenactment of an event that one cannot simply leave behind” (qtd. in Caruth 2).

In Habila’s work, the traumatogenic encounters of the protagonist, Mamo and the other major characters are the outcome of dysfunctional parenting and marriage as the experiences of Zara, and Tabita, Mamo’s mother illustrate. This paper explores the different forms that different character’s experience traumatic encounters in the novel.

Thus, a Caruthian analysis of Habila’s *Measuring Time* would posit that Mamo and LaMamo’s hatred of their father is the result of Auntie Marina’s stories of their mother’s abandonment, which forms the twin’s recollected memories of their mother’s dysfunctional marriage and concretizes their traumatogenic experiences, which in turn constitutes the boys’ repeated desire to poison and hurt Lamang, their father.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A modern study on the theory of trauma emerged “in the context of research about the Holocaust” (Kaplan 1). “Trauma” is what Ruth Leys described as “Mimesis,” which has become a dominant feature of modern African fiction (Leys 8). Ruth Leys therefore appropriates the term trauma “to describe the wounding of the mind brought about by sudden, unexpected, emotional shock” (Leys 4). She further argues that “Trauma was...an experience of hypnotic imitation...because it appeared to shatter the victim’s cognitive-perceptual capacities... (Leys 8-9). In his influential work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Sigmund Freud posits that trauma is not only a “physical injury” but also a “psychological injury” (Freud 34). Following Freud, traumatogenic experiences are basically seen as recollected experiences shattering the victim’s identity and psychical perceptions of reality.

From the foregoing, it is important to state that this study will investigate those traumatogenic experiences in Habila’s narrative that can be identified in filial relationships that traumatize the characters in Habila’s novel. As the narrative shows the wound is both emotional and psychological. Lamang’s abandonment and lack of affection for his wife and children are traumatogenic experiences to the protagonist Mamo and his brother, as well as their late mother, Tabita, and Zara who are victims of insidious trauma, arising from dysfunctional relationships. Abandonment induces psychological traumatogenic experiences that have become the daily realities in the lives of the twins. The essay explores the role of abandonment and lack of affection in marital relationship in the narrative. *Measuring Time* depicts the traumatogenic experiences of the victims in Habila’s narrative. The essay identifies the traumatogenic experiences that initiate other forms of trauma in the lives of the characters: abandonment, rejection and betrayal which come under “family trauma” (Kaplan 19). It is Lamang’s abandonment of their mother, Tabita in marriage that constitutes the twin’s recollected painful memories of their mother and their father’s lack of love and affection for his immediate family.

Valerie O’Riordan has stated that Cathy Caruth’s contextualization of trauma draws from a tripartite theoretical formulation:

*The 1980 edition of the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorder (DSM111), in which post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was first defined; Paul de Man's work on referentiality and signification and Freud's writings on repetition, trauma and melancholia.... (O'Riordan 2).*

This implies that the Caruthian theory of trauma appropriated the three postulations that have influenced how traumatogenic experiences are analyzed, examined and interpreted.

Caruth frames her argument on the fact that not only can trauma be defined as "a break in the mind's experience of time," but also can be examined "in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 4, 61). The shock of trauma causes a disruption in a way that the victim becomes "characterized by dissociated memories" (O'Riordan 3). In other words, this act of repeated disruption in memory causes the victim to be "constituted by forgetting" (Caruth 20). The traumatogenic experience creates a void space in the memory or psyche of the trauma subject. This shocking void constitutes what Valerie O'Riordan has described as "the shocking force of the traumatogenic event" (O'Riordan 3).

The dissociated disconnected memories in the victim of a traumatogenic experience represents what Caruth has described as the "impossible history" of the survivor of the trauma event which is a history that "can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* 5, 8). Therefore, the crisis of representation, of history and truth, and of narrative time is what constitutes a rupture or disruption in the personal identity of the victim (Luckhurst 5). Luckhurst frames this disruption in the memory of the victim of the trauma as "an unresolvable paradox" in the enactment of an experience that is no longer available to the memory of the victim (Luckhurst 5).

In view of the above Most identifies three components that determine traumatogenic experiences. These are: Repression (*vaerdrangung*), that is to say that a traumatic experience is never forgotten but repressed. It is realized from a consciousness of a trauma that is never forgotten but repressed. It is transmuted from consciousness and does not in the least cease to exist. The second what he calls "Deferal" (*nachtraglichkeit*), suggesting that events produce effects, not only when they occur, but also reoccur later. In other words, experiences earlier in life can produce neurotic symptoms years later akin to liminality. And finally, over-determination or *Uberdeterminierllage*--- that is to say that no event in a person's life has only one effect or cause in later experiences (Most 34). Thus, traumatogenic experiences elicit a multitude of causes that produces painful memories.

Laura S. Brown has introduced a new dimension of analyzing traumatic events and as it should be perceived. She posits that trauma is what happens to people in private, especially those in turbulent family relationship as a result of lack of affection, neglect, lack of love or abandonment. Brown has not ignored the trauma occasioned by war and other natural disasters but introduced the idea "insidious trauma that affects the marginalized subjects, especially women and children arising from partner abandonment and parental neglect and lack of affection (Brown 110). This position justifies the analysis of the effect of abandonment, neglect, and lack of affection on women and children who are viewed as the marginalized segments of the society. This is because human beings react differently to the ways that their immediate environments create a crisis or disruption in their minds. Insidious trauma aesthetics looks at the way affection when withdrawn can disrupt the mental memory of the victims involved in the family. Therefore, traumatogenic

experiences are “manifested or enacted in the guise of symptomatic dreams... and literal repetitions or imitations of the inaccessible event... (O’Riordan 3).

Habila’s narrative, *Measuring Time*, portrays the essential pattern of trauma fiction, and this study seeks to show the manifestations of trauma in the experiences of the protagonist, Mamo and other major characters rather in the text. This approach is driven towards a Caruthian inspired analysis. Thus, trauma narrative is an apt comprehension and interpretation of the crisis that has enmeshed human identity in the contemporary era, a grief that makes man to question the essence of existence, a state of nothingness that compels man to question the notion of the divine supreme being in the affairs of men.

### **THE TRAUMA PARADIGM AND THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY IN HELON HABILA’S MEASURING TIME**

The plot structure of Habila’s *Measuring Time* narrates the traumatogenic story of the people of Keti, a small rural community in the northern part of Nigeria, the setting of the narrative. The narrative explores the issues of history, hypocrisy, suffering and that characterized the lives of the people of Keti in the hands of their political and traditional leaders, focusing on socio-political issues of royal corruption, deceit, and neglect that deny the people of Keti the right to a meaningful human existence. Using this as a thread Habila’s narrative revolves on Lamang’s family and the royal family of the Mai, to expose how social neglect and lack of filial affection has generated a disruption on family and interpersonal relationships. The narrative however reflects on how traumatogenic experiences characterize social and family experiences through the failures of Lamang as a husband, father and politician, and the Maia’s traditional leadership failure coupled with the socio-political failure of Nigeria’s political elite.

The narrative through Lamang, the Mai, the Waziri, and their collaborators tries to infuse into the plot structure the fact that those who acquire leadership positions through dubious means are most likely to fail their people and inflict trauma on them. Thus, traumatogenic experiences are what have characterized the people’s experiences with their political leaders since independence. The people of Keti are only used as subjects by their political and military leaders to secure positions for themselves and families while the people are abandoned to lick their psychological injuries as a result of leadership failure. The narrative uses the protagonist, Mamo, and his twin brother, LaMamo and other major characters like Uncle Iliya and Zara to chart the cause of a new vision of essence ensconced in the attainment of fame and authenticity. Habila through these characters expose the situation of terror, anguish and trauma that has characterized human relationships.

The plot structure is rectangular shaped: it follows the rise and fall of Lamang in his quest to achieve political authenticity and fame; it chronicles Mamo’s slow rise to authenticity and essence, and his brother, LaMamo’s vision to achieve fame by liberating mankind from the forces of operation; it follows Uncle Iliya’s quest to achieve equitable education for the poor of rural Keti; and finally, the plot of the novel follows the sacrificial quest of Reverend Drinkwater and his daughters, Kai and Malai who clearly sought for authenticity in their quest for salvation of souls for God in Nigeria. Each of these structural designs is bridled with its traumatogenic experiences to the characters and others affected by their actions.

First, the narrative follows the failed political career of Lamang, who at the beginning of the narrative is quite an unsuccessful man and a philanderer who inherits his wealth from his father-

in-law who had no male heir after his death for marrying his daughter, Tabita, the most beautiful maiden in Keti. Tabita is marred by a sickle cell disease, combined by trauma of Lamang's abandonment dies during the birth of the twins Mamo and LaMamo. Inheriting this wealth, Lamang ventures into cattle business and begins to think that he can use his wealth to maneuver himself into political authenticity by becoming the chairman of his Local Government. Lamang uses his wealth as a tool of getting the people to vote him into political office. He therefore uses his compound as a television viewing centre and provision for free refreshment for the poor. In addition, Lamang promises to provide them with other basic needs like water after being elected as chairman. From this moment the people of Keti trooped into his compound for free food and drinks, while anticipating for other necessities of life, making them forget the original philandering life of Lamang, his inherited wealth, immoral and licentious life style which made him abandon his wife and contributed to the untimely death of Tabita, as well as his failure to care for his children, Mamo and LaMamo.

Lamang in his quest to achieve political fame uses the youths as agents of perpetrating social crimes in the society. He recruits his nephew, Asabar who has failed in his education as his thug in his quest for political power. Lamang instead of properly directing Asabar employs him as his political thug. Thus, Asabar joins his uncle and recruits other youths to form a gang to hijack electoral materials during elections for Lamang and his political party, the new victory party. They take to alcohol and smoking marijuana and other illicit drugs. While they were hijacking electoral materials during the general election, Mamo learns of it and thought that his father, Lamang was acting alone and informed the police as revenge for his father's ill-treatment of their mother, Tabita. The police laid ambush for Asabar and his gang. Some of them were fatally shot and Asabar's wound led to being confined to a wheelchair for life, which traumatizes Mamo for his role of giving intelligence about his cousin. Thus, Lamang's political journey ends in defeat as he is arrested and detained for electoral offences and his party heavily defeated at the polls.

As a result of the emotional wounds inflicted on them by their father's neglect and stories of Lamang's abandonment of their mother in marriage, the twins, Mamo and LaMamo's seek to travel to far-flung places to achieve individual authenticity. Together with their cousin, Asabar, they escaped from home in search of their dream of fame. Mamo and LaMamo's determination to run away from home is the consequence of paternal lack of affection and stories of their father's abandonment of their mother in marriage. Their restlessness to escape home is crystallized in their decision to kill Duna, the dog of the old village witch, Nana Mudo. The twins and their cousin Asabar, killed the dog by poisoning it with akara (beans cake) soaked in battery acid. The boy's intention is to kill the dog and take its rheum and rub into their eyes so that they could have vision as sharp as the dogs in their quest for fame and authenticity.

Thereafter, the trio left home in pursuit of the dream of fame without saying goodbye to their parents. As they set out, Mamo felt the pang of disappointment as a result of his inability to continue with the adventure to the military due to his sickle cell crisis. Meanwhile LaMamo and Asabar continued and Mamo returned home to brood over his father's lack of affection, and LaMamo continued as far as Liberia where he joined rebel forces to fight for the liberation of the oppressed and loses one of his eyes. Asabar eventually gave up the wild military adventure to report back to Mamo. Back home, Mamo did odd things, and in the cause of time enrolled to study history in the university, however, his sickle cell illness yet again forced him to drop-out of the university. Shortly after, his uncle Iliya recruited him to teach at Keti Community School (KCS), and it is in this village school that he meets Zara, a female teacher who separated from her

husband George, a soldier due to lack of affection and abandonment in marriage. A close relationship now developed between Mamo and Zara as they became confidants.

However, Mamo's attainment of fame and authenticity coincided with his discovery of writing as the height of immortality. The discovery of Reverend Drinkwater's *A Brief History of the Peoples of Keti* when he visited Zara in her late father's apartment in the state capital inspired him to write his review essay entitled "A Review of Drinkwater's *A Brief History of the Peoples of Keti*," published by the journal *History Society Quarterly* of the Department of History, Makerere University, Uganda, which Zara helped him to type and send to the editor of the journal, Professor Batanda of the History Department, Makerere University. The publication of this essay launched Mamo into fame and stardom, as he became the most popular person sought after in Keti in living memory. As a result of his fame, uncle Iliya invited him to accompany him to complain to the Mai about the closure of the KCS so that he may appeal to the Governor for intervention. Upon their visit to the palace the Waziri and the Mai hired Mamo to write the biography of the Mai and the royalty because of his fame in writing. This engagement with the royalty and his period of working in the royal palace brought more popularity and respect from the high and low, including the military administrator, who on a visit to the palace invited him to the state capital.

Now, writing for Mamo becomes the pathway to his immortality, and he begins to imagine other biographies, intending to draw his inspiration from Plutarch's classic *Lives* and Reverend Drinkwater's *A Brief History of the Peoples of Keti*. The success of his review of Reverend Drinkwater's work fertilized his imagination to begin to think of writing a "biographical history," that Professor Batanda had suggested after publishing his essay "A Brief History of the Peoples of Keti." The success of the essay established Mamo as a living legend in Keti memory. Pastor Mela helped to make the essay popular in the local church by photocopying and pasting it in the church notice board.

Consequently, people begin to consult him in matters of history and how to write history. Because of his legendary status, the Waziri hired him to work for the palace as its secretary. Specifically, the Waziri's reason for employing him as palace scribe is for Mamo to write the biographical history of the Mai to mark his tenth anniversary. It is during this event that the palace plans a fundraising which proceeds will be used to drill wells or boreholes for the people to get water. An excited Mamo accepted the offer and helped organize the tenth anniversary of the Mai of Keti, while considering writing the biography as a career and a chance to achieve fame and authenticity. The fundraising of the Mais's *dubar* was a huge success and the committee realized over fifteen million naira, which Mamo hoped would be used to drill the wells and boreholes for the benefit of the poor.

But rather than use the money realized to drill the wells, the Waziri and members of the committee in collaboration with the Mai, without the knowledge of Mamo shared the money among themselves with nothing left to drill the water project. Mamo felt betrayed, used, deceived and traumatized by this corrupt and oppressive action of the Mai and the palace.

It is during this traumatogenic moment that LaMamo, after so many years of separation from his brother returned home from his sojourn from Liberia and other war-torn African countries. This reunion was quite traumatogenic in many respects to Mamo: his decision to agree to write the Mai's biography; the closure of Keti Community School (KCS), where his uncle Iliya is headmaster; the death of his father, Lamang after he suffered stroke; his confidant, Zara elopement with her

South African boyfriend to start a charity organization; the failure of the Mai to use the money raised to drill wells and the crisis generated and the sight of LaMamo with one eye were traumatogenic experiences that marked the narrative structure of Habila's *Measuring Time*.

Amidst the anger of the Mai's handling of the funds, LaMamo with his military experience in Liberia rallied the incensed villagers and attacked the palace, the Waziri is mobbed and killed, the Mai's life is spared after pleading with the angry crowd, the riot police that intervened fatally shot LaMamo, and as a result of poor medical attention, he died while being taken to the village clinic. These encounters and more formed the narrative pattern of the narrative.

### TRAUMATOGENIC EXPERIENCES IN HABILA'S MEASURING TIME

One of the key moments in the narrative is the scene where Tabita reflects on her abandonment in marriage. Shortly before her death, during the birth of the twins, she contemplates on her traumatogenic experience as a result of her husband's abandonment during her pregnancy for her mistress, Saraya:

*"...she contemplates how life had given her all she had wanted with one hand and then taken it away with the other; she had married the man of her dreams, but he was in love with another woman, and life had given her a child, but she knew she wouldn't live to see it grows and run in the fields..."*. (Habila 15, *emphasis mine*)

Cathy Caruth therefore described trauma "... as the response to an unexpected overwhelming violent event that are not fully grasped as they occur, but return later in repeated flashback, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena" (Caruth, *Unclaimed* 91). Tabita is yet to understand the reason for Lamang's abandonment in marriage. Thus, Tabita's trauma in marriage relationship with Lamang arises because her affection, attraction, respect, intimacy and her husband's commitment---- privileges which Lamang owes her have collapsed and withdrawn and given to Saraya, his mistress. As Sternberg has noted the lack of the "intimacy component, passion component and a commitment component" in family relationship may trigger an insidious traumatogenic experiences, hence Tabita's experiences in marriage are traumatogenic (Sternberg 332). Tabita is traumatized because her abandonment for Saraya after she and her late father had shown Lamang much love and affection constitute "negation of intimacy... and passion... devaluation and diminution," causing her serious psychological pains and torture during childbirth leading to death (Sternberg 301).

It is significant to note that Robert Sternberg's theory of hate and negation of commitment is shown in the narrative through Lamang's abandonment of his family and his actions activate a Caruthian traumatogenic experiences in the narrative. Lamang's irresponsibility made him to abandon the twins to his sister, Auntie Marina. The boys never met their father until after three years and the narrative voice relays the traumatogenic experiences of this encounter:

*The twins stayed with their uncle Iliya for the first three years of their lives, believing him to be their father, his wife their mother, and their cousin Asabar, whose meal they shared, their brother. But after three years Lamang came and shattered their illusion, he took them away--- that was the day the seed of their hatred for him was planted, and when they grew older and began to hear the song about the king of women, and of his maltreatment of their mother, the seed sprouted into a tree.* (Habila 16, *emphasis mine*)

Lamang showed his lack of respect when he failed to attend Tabita's funeral. However, Auntie Mrina's stories of the couple's initial affection and bond were quite therapeutic, especially the story of Lamang's wedding to Tabita. He recalls its healing effects as he was growing up under the care of Auntie Marina: "Mamo imagined the stories insinuating themselves into his veins, flushing out the sickle-shaped, hemoglobin-deficient red cells... it was the stories and not the folic acid tablet...slowly working the magic in his veins, keeping him alive" (Habla 19).

This proves that the stories one hears may provoke love and hate, as well as activate traumatic experiences. However, the reactions of Mamo and LaMamo to the stories of their mother's abandonment produces traumatogenic experiences that made them resolve to make him pay for the pains he caused Tabita. This rupture of the memory because of their mother's treatment in marriage aroused Mamo's pathological hatred of their father. He inscribes in his imaginary diary while growing up: "HATE THY FATHER, MAKE HIM PAY" (Habla 20). This reaction confirms the assertion that "trauma produces new subjects" (Kaplan 1). Therefore, Mamo's reaction to his mother's traumatic experiences in marriage constitutes what Luhram has called "quite traumas" (qtd in Kaplan 19). This is an experience which people of the same emotional bonding share, and in this case abandonment and lack of care is the common traumatogenic experiences that both Tabita and the twins share in the relationship with Lamang as husband and father.

What Mamo experiences concerning his mother's abandonment in marriage is aptly described as "psychic trauma" (Caruth vii). This is where a victim is physically unharmed but exhibits the symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of a rupture in their emotion. As it is Mamo bears a witness to his mother's suffering in marriage. This "involves intense personal suffering" of the victim which is the result of a "disorder of memory" (Leys 2). It is this unexpected emotional shock which Lamang allows his family to experience that compels Mamo to form an emotional bond of identification with Tabita, a bond that is both "anterior and interior, a libidinal bond" (Leys 30). It is the desire to recover from their ruptured psyche that made the twin to pursue the dream of fame or authenticity because their relationship with their father had broken to the point, they could not say goodbye to him on the morning of their departure: "Saying goodbye to their father was not part of their plan" (Habla 48).

As Habla has shown in *Measuring Time* the Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 had traumatogenic effects on the experiences of the characters caught up in that conflict. The trauma of Nigeria's historical tragedy is reignited with the miraculous return of Mamo's Uncle Haruna from the war years after being declared dead in that war when he could not return home to Keti like others when the war ended after several years. The civil war experience has damaging impactful trauma on Haruna's psychology because it ruptured his memory: "But Uncle Haruna's mind refused to remember anything that had happened before the day he had turned up in Keti. The doctor from the hospital who came on occasions to see him said Haruna's mind had withdrawn into itself..." (Habla45).

As the narrative structure shows Lamang's lack of affection is an insidious traumatogenic event that drives the twins to seek comfort and authenticity in adventure in places like Chad, Libya and Liberia. When Lamang learned that LaMamo had disappeared in search of adventure while Mamo returned home because he could not continue with their escape because of his health crisis, he was furious. Mamo told his father how the desire for adventure had captured their imagination: "We wanted to travel...by boat...on the Niger, like Mungo Park...to Bamako, then by land to Timbuktu..." (Habla57). For this revelation, an enraged Lamang said to Mamo: "You are lucky you



didn't go far, with your weak and useless body, otherwise we would now be telling a different story. Is there anything that you lack in this house? Is there anything that I haven't provided for you and your brother? (Habla 57-58, emphasis mine).

Mamo reflected on Lamang's lack of care to his family that are traumatogenic experiences that ruptured his memory and contracted his mind with painful recollections: "We have everything Mamo felt like answering, except your love" (Habla 58, emphasis mine). Therefore it is Lamang's lack of affection and love for his children that made Mamo conceal the truth about LaMamo's whereabouts from their father because he wanted him to suffer and be tortured too: "Mamo felt tempted to confess the truth, but he always stopped himself in time... He didn't want to put his father's mind at rest, what would be the point of that? For once he wanted to be the torturer and his father the tortured..." (Habla 59, emphasis mine).

Asabar gave up the wild military adventure to report to Mamo about LaMamo's desire to join the Chadian rebels and go to Libya to be trained. When Asabar told the story to Lamang he felt traumatically confused: "Lamang stared straight ahead, his face stony listening to Asabar repeat his story. He listened, not saying a word. The only thing he said after Asabar's narration was "Chad, Libya", then he sighed" (Habla 63). Lamang's reaction arises from his ruptured psyche. Therefore, this shock induces his traumatogenic encounter with the escape of LaMamo.

Lamang's lack of affection for Mamo is a traumatogenic experience for the boy, especially his habit of making uncomplimentary remarks about his son. This is gleaned when his concubines, Rabi, Doris and Asabe came to serve his friends during one of his political meetings in his house. As Mamo passed the sitting room, Lamang remarked:

*"...his brother is my splitting image, taller, strong. He is right now in the army, abroad, a fine young man, not like his brother...weak...too weak..." (Habla 78). Lamang's lack of affection and respect for Mamo induces insidious trauma which echoes in his earlier remark: "We have everything...except your love" (Habla 58). This response emerging from a deep rooted-consciousness concretizes his traumatogenic experiences at his father's lack of affection for his immediate family.*

Iliya's quest for authenticity is complicated by his traumatogenic encounters with the ministry of education. His quest is driven in the provision of affordable education for the children of the poor. His humanistic ideal is in sharp contrast to Lamang's ambition to attain power for his personal glory. Iliya's quest finds expression in his desire to establish the KCS village school which he managed. Mamo's epiphany emerges concerning his uncle's quest for authenticity when the narrative voice reveals Iliya's noble ideals:

*Iliya daily resisted the temptation to increase school fees.... He'd explain to Mamo the precarious situation of the students: they were the children of peasants, grand children of peasants...and some would grow into adults with permanent bitter expressions in their faces. In some the bitterness would trickle into the heart and find vent in petty crimes. (Habla 88)*

Iliya identifies lack of social affections by political and community leaders as inducing the common man's traumatogenic experiences, hence he wants to use affordable education as a means of social recovery. In doing so, Iliya is psychologically traumatized and shattered when he

received a second letter from the ministry of education threatening to shut down the KCS, prompting him to summon an emergency staff meeting to brief them on the developments and the operations of the Keti Community School (KCS):

*“Let me explain, for those of you who don’t know how the school is sponsored. The twelve clans contribute voluntarily...at the end of the year to the clan elders, who then hand over the money to me. That is how we pay your salaries.... I go from...family to family, soliciting for contributions.... I have been trying to get the local government to give a hand, but up to now we’ve only had promises. And now the ministry wants to finally shut us down.” (Habila 110, emphasis mine)*

The threat of shutting down KCS is a traumatogenic experience that shatters Iliya’s psychological memory. He recalls his passion with education after his war experiences, training as a teacher, teaching career and retirement:

*Education became his one moving passion in life, and when he retired from government service...he had convinced the community to start the KCS, which they did, and he had poured his whole energy into it, working without pay or rest...everything he had worked for and believed in was about to go. (Habila113)*

In a classic traumatogenic experience Iliya finds it difficult to deal with the shock of the threats by the education ministry to shut down the KCS. His pain of loss is defined by what Kali Tai called “liminality,” that is, a painful psychological wound that is extremely problematic, revealing his difficulty reverting to his normal lifestyle were the school to be shut down (Tai 78).

Another character who suffered insidious and liminal traumatic experience in Habila’s narrative is Zara, the kind woman who later fell in love with Mamo. Zara’s cause of trauma is abandonment and abuse in marriage by George, the army officer who abandons her for other girls. Zara tells Mamo her traumatogenic encounters in marriage and how their marriage fell apart and led to divorce:

*... He was kind to me, gentle and generous...it was great. Then things changed after the baby...they made him head of a task force on petroleum. He bought cars and went away...with his friend and their girlfriends, leaving me home with the baby. Those were terrible times, I feel sad even now talking about it... (Habila 106, emphasis mine).*

This confirms Caruth’s assertion that trauma is “a distortion of the event, achieving its haunting power as a result of distorting personal significances attached to it. The pathology consists...in the structure of its experience...the event is not assimilated or experienced...in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it” (Caruth, Trauma...4). In other words trauma is a wound that imposes itself on the memory of the victim. It is important to note that what induces Zara’s emotional trauma is the insidious nature of it arising from the psychological shock of abandonment while nursing a baby, hence her traumatogenic experiences are both insidious and liminal which makes her suffer from “spoilt” memories of traumatic marriage experience. It is the remembrance that triggered Zara’s emotional distress.

Lamang's own traumatogenic experience is crystallized in the loss of his party's chairmanship election because his opponent, Danladi had stolen his very words and ideas of "Reverse Osmosis to present to the convention delegates before he could do so (Habila 115). Lamang's loss not only shocked, infuriated him and led to his resignation from the party, but also caused his psychological trauma and eventual death as a result of the emotional wound and Mamo found himself awake most nights as his father:

*... took his walks or paced his room at night unable to listen to his father's footsteps pacing back and forth in his room, he'd also imagine his uncle in his room pacing back and forth, measuring time with each step and he'd feel the guilt...because there was nothing, he could do to assist his uncle in his time of distress. (Habila 121, emphasis mine)*

This indicates that Lamang, Iliya and Mamo all suffered from traumatogenic experiences that go beyond the bounds of "normal conception" (Tai 15). This is because their various conditions of loss re-imposed in their memory unsettled for a long time after their shocks of loss, hence classic luminal and traumatogenic experiences--- excruciating events which interrupted their normal lives because the victims could not easily get back to their pre-liminal conditions.

When Lamang learns about his brother, Iliya's experiences with the ministry of education, he was angry for not being told, but offered to see the governor when he visits the state capital and seek for his intervention. Lamang is angry that his brother did not inform him about the problems of the KCS because they thought that he had become politically irrelevant after his chairmanship election defeat. Lamang's line of thought made Mamo angry. As he was with Zara discussing the situation, he imploded about Lamang's attitude of self-glorification: "What is it about my father, that even when he tries to help, his effort still comes across as self-glorification?" (Habila 149). However true to his promise Lamang delivered on his promise as the KCS was struck off from the list of schools under review, prompting an elated Iliya to remark as he broke the news to Mamo: "This is a surprise...reading out the letter to Mamo who only nodded.... There is no explanation, just like that. Someone...in his capacity as God has decided that we are to be "spared this time" (Habila 149). Iliya's experiences of heading the KCS had put him "on the edge of disaster" (Blanchot 1). The letters threatening to close the KCS induce symptoms of imminent disasters that have caused Iliya psychological "suffering," hence can be described as his experience of his society "disastrously" (Blanchot 3).

Lamang's lack of affection towards his children's welfare is shown when Mamo showed him the essay. His attitude of diminution contrasts with Iliya's excitement and encouraging words: "Mamo told Zara how, when he had shown his father the essay, Lamang had quickly flipped through the pages and dropped it on table. I'll look at it later---- 'I am in a hurry right now.'" (Habila 160). Therefore, as a result, Mamo suffers what critics described as "helpless traumatization" (Mayer, Salovey & David 202). This is a situation when a trauma victim acquires an emotional intelligence that simply enables him to understand his feelings and thoughts and become attentive to them in order to control them when there are traumatic encounters that may endanger his psychological balance. Thus, Mamo has become used to his father's lack of affection and insidious traumatogenic experiences that he learns to tolerate a helpless situation that reoccurs in his relationship with his father, and so has become used to Lamang's lack of affection.

When he thinks of his father, Mamo always recalls the feeling of abandonment that had always existed in Lamang's relationship with his sons:

*... different thoughts ran and crossed each other like naked wires, throwing sparks. He thought of his childhood, of his feelings of abandonment of he and his brother always felt...waiting for weeks for their father to return from one of his trips, he'd walk in only to pass them on the veranda with barely a glance....*  
(Habla 183)

Mamo's traumatized psyche due to his father's lack of affection makes it difficult to heal the wound of his spirit mind. As Root has observed the spirit mind "is the worst affected when a person is traumatized" (Root 238). Therefore, feelings of abandonment and lack of intimate affection are shattering insidious traumatogenic experiences that marked Lamang's relationship with his children. Therefore, Mamo's cold feeling towards his father even in dead is attributed to his disgust and hatred of his poor parenting. As Auntie Marina alerted him to come and see his father's dead body in his room, Mamo described his feelings as he sighted the dead Lamang:

*Then he touched the face, putting his fingers over the nose, but there was no breath passing. He stepped back and turned to her. He felt no emotion, just a vague hollowness in his chest, but no tears fell from his eyes. He watched his auntie step forward and raise the sheet in a single motion and cover the body with it....* (Habla 185)

Mamo's cold feeling at his father's death is as a result of a broken connection in father-son relationship which has shattered any form of emotional attachment, the bonding together that brings about "proximity, familiarity, positive share of experience, interdependence, and friendship" (Tobore 3). This implies that there is a complete disintegration of filial bond that exists between father and son. The bond of filial commitment is replaced by features of negation of intimacy, such as passion of anger, fear, and "devaluation and diminution" (Sternberg 301). It is the negation of intimacy that induced a feeling of disgust, repulsion and distance at his seeing Lamang's dead body. This disgust and repulsion arise as a result of the character of the dead Lamang. Mamo's consciousness here invokes the typical Caruthian trauma paradigm, and is a useful invocation of the liberal danger which his conscious and unconscious repeated feeling of abandonment represents.

Similarly, Zara suffers traumatogenic moments concerning her decision to leave Mamo in pursuit for authenticity. We can glean this at the moment of her refusal to marry Mamo. Mamo had proposed to marry her when he said: "...we can start afresh. I have the job at the palace, we can even get married...with my sickle cell we might not...have children, but you already have child..." (Habla 190). Mamo's marriage proposal is in conflict with Zara own quest for actualization as her reaction shows: "But she was shaking her head and looking at him sadly.... We can't marry...you don't need to be tied down. I have so much on my mind too...we will only make each other sad" (Habla 190). In fact, Zara's refusal to marry Mamo is tied to her dream for authenticity. The moment arrived when her former South African friend offered her an opportunity to come to South Africa and join him to run an orphanage in Durban. For Zara, this is her chance for authenticity she couldn't allow to slip, as she informs Mamo: "I would rather be sad somewhere alone than to be here and drag you down" (Habla 190). This shows that her insidious experience of abandonment is a recurrent injury that has shattered her memory. Therefore, going to work in Durban will offer her the opportunity to attain her fame and healing. She declares: "It is such a

noble thing to do, to work with children, some of whom are sick and dying...I have to. I fear that if I don't get outside myself, my troubles, I will do something I will regret, something crazy" (Habila 191). Therefore, loneliness and abandonment are traumatogenic events which have disrupted both Mamo and Zara's minds. Mamo felt it more after Zara's departure:

*"...he had thrown himself into settling his father's affairs, seeking through activity to make his mind numb and not dwell on his loneliness...he had always been a lonely person...the only time in his life when he had not felt lonely was when his brother was around---but after Zara the loneliness had turned into a raging pain... (Habila 197).*

In other words, Mamo's traumatogenic experiences of loneliness and abandonment may be explained using the Caruthian model in which his feelings are described as a "secondary marker" which underscores the structure of his traumatic experiences (O'Rordan 1). Therefore, his traumatic moments constitute the "catastrophe" of his experiences (Caruth, Unclaimed Experience 2)

The narrative revolves around individuals who have used their dreams of leaving a mark to dismantle their traumatogenic moments, while achieving authenticity. Reverend Drinkwater inevitably found his moment of authenticity clearly expressed concerning the missionary work, just as Zara found hers in charity work, Iliya in the provision of education for poor children and Mamo in writing. As Drinkwater's moment of enlightenment is revealed in a vision, the young man took the necessary steps to actualize his dream: "The young Drinkwater then studied for two years at a missionary institute in New York before embarking on his trip to Nigeria in 1911" (Habila 205). In obedience to his calling, he consulted and this brought him in contact with Reverend Angus Williams, an old missionary who had worked in India. This old missionary worker inspired him with his divine work in India and he decided to marry Angus's daughter Hannah fore he set out for missionary work in Nigeria. After a brief period, he had gone back to New York to bring his wife and two sons in furtherance of his missionary work in Ketu, northern Nigeria where he lived with his family. In Ketu, he lived, worked and died. Their daughters Mai and Malai were both born in Ketu in 1953. Reverend Drinkwater died a fulfilled man in Ketu doing his missionary work, and his wife died one week after her husband and both buried in Ketu beside each other.

For Mamo, the biography of the Mai of Ketu he has undertaken to write offered him with the opportunity to achieve authenticity, thereby enabling him to dismantle his traumatogenic experiences. However, after a short interview with the Mai, Mamo realized what a difficult challenge writing the biography would pose:

After this rather short interview Mamo returned to his office and spent the rest of the day doodling and browsing...unsure what to do next...suddenly he felt helpless, inexperienced and a bit desperate...but determined to forge ahead--- this was a chance he was resolved to exploit...he encouraged himself by sending his mind into the future.... He reflected on the irony of life, how his illness which had stopped him from pursuing his childhood dreams of martial glory.... (Habila 215)

Like Reverend Drinkwater before him his dream of authenticity "was not impossible, and that was the beauty of this project, the working for the palace...the only limitations were that of imagination" (Habila 215). Thus, cheered by his thoughts of impending glory, Mamo went back to

work when he got home. The American sisters, Drinkwater's daughters, Kai and Malai lent Mamo their mother's diary that allowed him insight on the Mai's historical background. Drawing insights from Hannah Drinkwater's diary Mamo "...sat down at his reading table, with his pen and paper" (Habla 216). In fact, Mamo's biography started unsurprisingly with the reign of Mai Alhassan, the present Mai of Keti. As he went to work, he reflected on the travesty of the biography of the Mai of Keti as he reasoned: "What really is there to write about their lives? Their combined lives wouldn't be worth more than a chapter in a decent book" (Habla 231, emphasis in the original). However, it was the knowledge that the biography would offer him fame and authenticity that renewed his energy: "He knew that were he to be honest with his heart, he'd right now put down his pen and walk out and never return. But what of fame...what of immortality?" (Habla 232). Thus, Mamo's moment of immortality emerged during the fundraising organized at the Mai's palace. It was at this ceremony that the Mai introduced him to the military governor which finally dismantled his traumatogenic experiences. In that moment of actualization addressed Mamo: "Everyone has been talking about you. How did you do it?" (Habla 240). To show that this moment marked his immortality he had attained, the military governor added: "Mai, I didn't know he was so young. I thought all Traditional Council employees were old men...such talented people hidden away in the village...send them to work for me in the capital" (Habla 240-241).

To show that the trauma of abandonment is a traumatic encounter that reoccurs repeatedly, Mamo is shattered by the news he received from Zara's ex-husband, Captain George, an aid to the military governor concerning her. Mamo felt physically and psychologically traumatized. When Auntie Marina asked him why he was not going to work a day after the Mai's Turban ceremony, he felt the trauma of Zara's abandonment descend on him. He felt that Zara had married Themba, her South African friend: "...he felt tempted to tell her about Zara...this was a personal pain, a personal disappointment. He'd sit in a corner alone like a wounded dog and lick his wounds" (Habla 244). Then gradually, Mamo started building strategies of dismantling his traumatogenic experiences: "At night he sat out on the veranda with his auntie beside him and together they would star anxiously into the dark cloudy sky---all night long, the clouds would pass, raising hopes of rain, but by morning, the sky would be clear again" (Habla 245).

Indeed, the prospect of attaining authenticity does not completely dismantle the traumatogenic experiences of abandonment. Mamo learns this after the failure of the Mai and the palace to drill the wells for the poor after realizing huge sums of money during the fund-raising party. He realized that there would be collision with the Waziri, hence he was prepared to resign. But after a brief conversation with the Waziri concerning a young man Prince who claims to be the authentic heir to the Mai throne he decided to stay on his job: "The best thing was to stay and find a way of either blackmailing the Waziri to do the right thing or...to expose him. Only by doing that would he clear his own name" (Habla 255}.

Similarly, despite pursuing and realizing her dream of charity work, Zara is still traumatized by repeated recollections of memories of her troubled childhood: "Then in school I feared not being liked by the other girls...I still fear failure but for a different reason...I fear it for myself. I don't want to fall below my expectations..." (Habla 266).

Finally, Mr Graves is another character who attained authenticity in the narrative. Graves's moment of authenticity was the periods of his travel adventures and conquests of the Sahel Savannah. He arrived to Nigeria in 1896 and is credited for being the first European to occupy the

Nigerian territory: "These must have seemed very exciting prospects for an eighteen-year-old Yorkshire boy looking for adventure" (Habila 224).

## CONCLUSION

The thrust of this paper can now be summed up. The premise that underlies the study is that Helon Habila's narrative captures how the experiences of the major character manifest multiple features of memory and psychic disruptions. The argument is that the major characters yet seek to recover their damaged psychical identities by the pursuit of human essences which is a process of dismantling the traumatogenic encounters generated by the psychological wounds. Thus, the essay examines the experiences of the characters in the narrative using classical trauma paradigms that interrogate how the human psyche reacts and copes with the shattering of memory. In the process of exploring the Caruthian model of traumatogenic experiences, the essay finds out the traces of both Kali Tai's trauma of liminal conditions, a recurrent shattering of the mind that makes it difficult for trauma victims to overcome their post-traumatic disorders, as well as what the trauma theorist Laura S. Brown has described as insidious trauma which is the result of abandonment, lack of care and affection by close family members. The key finding is that the narrative reverberates with the echoes of these tripartite traumatic conditions: Caruthian traumatogenic encounters; echoes of Kali Tai's liminality; and Laura Brown's insidious trauma. Finally, the significance of Habila's artist genius is his creative representation of the diverse multiple trauma paradigms in the narrative, *Measuring Time* and to subject the narrative to this kind of rigorous analysis is a major contribution of this study.

## REFERENCES

- Blanchot, Maurice. *The Writing of the Disaster*. New edition, Translated by Ann Smock, University of Nebraska Press, 1995.
- Brown, Laura. "Not Outside the range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 100-112.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- - . *Unclaimed Experience*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Pasific Publishing Studio, 2010.
- Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy*. The University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Luckhurst, R. *The Trauma Question*. Routledge, 2008.
- Most, G.W. "Emotion, Memory and Trauma." *The Oxford Hand book of Philosophy and Literature*, edited by Richard Eldridge, Oxford University Press, 2009.
- O'Riordan, Valerie. "David Venn's Legend of Suicide: Dismantling the Trauma Paradigm." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, DOI: 10.1080/0011161920222110853, 2022.
- Root, M.P.P. "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality." *Personality and Psychopathology: Feminist Reappraisals*, edited by Laura S. Brown and Mary Ballou, The Guilford Press, 1992, pp. 229-226.
- Sternberg, R.J. "A Duplex Theory of Hate: Development and Application to Terrorism, Massacres and Genocide." *Review of General Psychology*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2003, pp. 299-328.
- Tai, Kali. *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*. Cambridge University Press, 1996.