

Situating Insidious Trauma in Neikekhienuo Mepfhu-o's *My Mother's Daughter*: A Feminist Consideration

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*I remember, I remember
The skeleton stories of the victims
On less known pages of forgotten
Books
Marked 'Lest we forget'; 'Bearing Witness'.*

Achinglui Kamei, "I Write for You" (2021)

ABSTRACT

In response to the classical model of trauma theory, new perspectives on re-visioning or re-examining the concept have emerged, ushering trauma studies in new directions. From this new perspective, the works of feminist clinical psychologists Maria P. P. Root, Judith Herman, and Laura S. Brown radically perceive the classical model as biased and restrictive as it excludes the traumatic experiences of gender, class, sexual orientation, and other minorities as authentically classified as trauma. A nuanced feminist theory, termed insidious trauma, studies the trauma prevalent in this section of individuals and groups. This inclusivity has facilitated the recognition of their invisible, unspoken, or hidden painful experiences along with their narratives of survival and recovery as part of the mainstream trauma narrative discourse. Though the pervasive issue of violence and abuse behind closed doors is a social concern even in a strict patriarchal set-up, it is often bracketed as a 'private issue' between two individuals, thus invisibilising the traumatic experience of the wounded women. Through the lens of insidious trauma, domestic violence and abuse are considered real trauma recurring as the day-to-day experiences of women. A feminist consideration of Neikekhienuo Mepfhu-o's award-winning 2nd Gordon Graham Prize for Naga Literature 2019 (Fiction), *My Mother's Daughter*, reads as a case of insidious trauma bearing all the essential markers. It explores the relationship between the patriarchal system, hegemonic male power, and control in a larger framework, and in particular, decodes how the acts of violence and abuse perpetrated upon the mothers/daughters have systematically invisibilised their unbearable suffering and terror experiences, leading them to severe insidious trauma.

Keywords: Feminist Re-visioning/re-examining; Insidious Trauma; Patriarchal System; Gender; Domestic Violence.

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I. INSIDIOUS TRAUMA: A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

The chief concern for feminist psychotherapists and theorists centres on their understanding of trauma interconnected with inquiries on minorities with specific importance to gender. They stressed the need to study trauma from an inclusive perspective, focusing on women and other minorities' experiences. Feminist clinical psychologists, Maria P. P. Root, Judith Herman, and Laura S. Brown observed Caruth's claim that a single event of magnitude as the locale of trauma obliterated the reality of its corrosive impact that occurs in the everyday lived experiences of minorities. Three points of the Caruthian trauma theory have undergone re-visioning or re-examination. Caruth considers the traumatic event must be "outside the range of human experience" (Brown 119), meaning outside of the regular human range and representation due to its peculiar condition of the victim's state of 'unspeakability,' wherein the magnitude of the single event is qualified as the traumatic stressor or, identifying it as the source site of trauma; ii. The universalisation of trauma in the claim made by Caruth, "trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures," paving the way towards "cross-cultural solidarity

and to the creation of new forms of community” (Craps 46); iii. The compulsive endless repetition of traumatic experiences eventually conflates the distinction between past, present, and future with the tendency to overemphasise the degree to which the past is re-enacted continually in the present leading towards “an endless crisis of survival” (Bonds and Craps 77).

Craps mentions the seminal work of Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, where she examined the complex relationship between crisis and survival emerging from traumatic experiences. She locates the paradoxical intricacies between the interpretation of trauma as providing evidence of survival after a catastrophic event and the delayed acknowledgement of the traumatic incident may reveal the act of surviving itself as a crisis (Craps 85). However, the three feminist psychologists underpin the impossibility of healing and recovery if the traumatised is perpetually revolving within the ‘hurting space’ and perceive Caruth’s ‘unclaimed experience’ and “irresolvable” concepts as restrictive. From a feminist perspective, the road to recovery is integral because it maps the transition from victimhood to a recovered entity. An alternative prescriptive suggestion felicitates the possibility of ‘speakability’ of traumatic experiences since it paves the way for healing, recovery and reclamation of selfhood.

In Root’s essay *Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality*, her conceptualisation of insidious trauma defines it as:

Insidious trauma is usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power (240).

Within this framework, it argues that the traumatic experiences of women and other minorities are not a single traumatic event but recurring experiences of every day that have a magnitude of impact on individuals. In other words, mainstream trauma theory has failed to recognise the severe psychological “wounds of trauma” that can crush their “human spirit” (38). For instance, the existing threat of coercive undermining in deciding which experience is trauma invisibilises the hardships and struggles of battered women and their daughters. Instead, Root argued that traumatised experiences should have a subjective interpretation of the individual experiencing them, as the psychological component is an intrinsically important parameter. Gender-based social injustice to women in general, and female victims of domestic violence and abuse in particular, is a systematic destabilisation of female agencies in curbing their voices to speak up and defend their fundamental human rights to freedom and security. The well-known Caruthian enterprise for “cross-cultural solidarity” failed to accommodate the trauma of gender, race, queers, and other minorities. She observed that repetitive insidious trauma deprived the sense of safety and security, while simultaneously demolishing the integrity and selfhood of the person. Commenting on Root’s insidious trauma, Kanaki K.S. and Manali Karmarkar point out that she has also referred to PTSD (in DSM III), and noted that “it fails to address the impact of insidious trauma. This results in victim-blaming because the survivor’s response is attributed to their congenital weaknesses and is therefore pathologized” (386)

Brown’s article *Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma* ponders over the need to find meanings of the “different sorts of events that constitute an assault on the integrity and safety of those who are not members of the dominant classes” and questions “how some experiences have been excluded and turned inward on their victims” who blamed for what has happened to them. The concept of “real” trauma percolates through the dominant narrative of imaging it as a form of trauma where the “dominant group can participate as a victim rather than as the perpetrator”(122). She refers to her colleague Root’s concept of insidious trauma as “ the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being, but which do violence to the soul and spirit” (128). The necessity of feminist intervention places into perspective “to look beyond the public and male experiences of trauma to the private, secret experience that women encounter in the interpersonal realm and at the hands of those they love and depend upon” (122).

Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence- From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* reveals that “ Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless” leading to atrocities. She distinguishes traumatic events as “extraordinary, not because they occur rarely, but rather because they overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life” and “involves threats to life or bodily integrity or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror and evoke the responses of catastrophe”, and “the severity of traumatic events cannot be measured on any single dimension” (33-34).

THE NOVEL

Neikekhienuo Mepfhu-o is a contemporary Naga woman writer and educator from Kohima, Nagaland. She is an Assistant Professor currently teaching Functional English at Kohima College (affiliated with Nagaland University). Committed to social issues and concerns, the writer also pens her thoughts through her blog, *Random Rantings*. *My Mother's Daughter* is Mepfhu-o's debut in literary creative writing, which sheds light on the violence and trauma of women and daughters hidden from the public. The novel follows a factual-fiction mode, and the author carefully weaves the narrations of actual women and girls subjected to violence and abuse, be it "verbal, physical, emotional." (xi). It was published in 2019 by the Heritage Publishing House, Dimapur, Nagaland, and clinched the prestigious 2nd Gordon Graham Prize for Naga Literature 2019 (Fiction). Her second novel, *Out of the Wood*, was released in 2022 by the Kohima-based publisher Penthrill Publication.

As someone genuinely invested (in the author's note) to 'listen' to issues sidelined by society, Mepfhu-o maintains her ethical position to remain a faithful confidant of the women affected by domestic violence and abuse. Not only does the author help with a psychological release for the traumatised women in unburdening their 'terrible secrets,' she also facilitates that their stories are being 'heard.' 'Telling' and 'recounting' stories are part of an oral tradition in the Naga society. As an educated, informed third-generation Naga woman, the author ensures that traumatised testimonies find their place in reflective discourse. The author has dealt with the raw materials of 'violent hurting stories' by relying on the technique of 'nameless characters' to maintain the anonymity and privacy of actual respondents. Perhaps the only disclosure of the younger protagonist's great-grandmother Apfotsapfu as belonging to the Angami-Naga tribe functions to initiate the traces/evidence of the treatment of domestic violence and abuse faced by unfortunate women within the closed sociocultural construct of a patriarchal society, causing disenfranchisement of their full autonomy and power. Mepfhu-o explains that "Namelessness allows the readers to focus on the main subject matter of the book instead of the characters...which is on violence and abuse" (xii).

Speaking aloud about the 'unspeakable' categorically names the trauma stressors/aggressors. It also sets out to destabilise the stigma built around an abusive environment vis-a-vis guilt, blame and shame internalised by traumatised women while simultaneously seeking to sensitise an awareness of the pressing issue. Thus, this novel "is not a story of defeat but about building trust and supporting one another" and "empower one another... to find our 'selves'" (xv). The title, *My Mother's Daughter*, suggests weaving a line of the genealogy of women and so befittingly "...but as women, we are really our mother's daughters. We become who they are" (xiv). It further deliberates on documenting the intergenerational trauma of traumatised women, creating a female space of solidarity to raise awareness of the politics of invisibilising the violence perpetrated upon helpless women and reclaiming female agency. The title also deliberately de-centres the hegemonic authority of the male space by creating a centre (enabling) space for women to 'speak.'

The forward note by Easterine Kire encapsulates the crux of the text:

This is a very difficult book to read through...It is a story, not just of violence, but a cycle of violence and the struggle the kind of woman who repeatedly becomes its victim...This is a reality for some women amongst us: the fact that it is the subject of a book means that it exists in our midst no matter how hard the victim tries to mask it from outsiders (Mepfhu-o, vii).

CONTEXTUALISING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND ABUSE: NARRATIVE OF INSIDIOUS TRAUMA

The World Health Organization has profiled violence against women, particularly intimate partner violence and sexual violence, leading to "public health problems and a violation of women's rights". The United Nations, while addressing the global concern on the urgent need to eliminate violence against women in New York, in 1993, has defined it as thus:

Any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life.

Identifying domestic violence as intimate partner violence, the WHO refers to it as behaviour by an intimate partner or ex-partner that causes physical, sexual or psychological harm, including physical aggression, sexual coercion, psychological abuse, and controlling behaviours. In the Editorial column of *The Morung Express*, the September 2022 issue ran the National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) 2021 report declaring Nagaland as "one of the safest states in India for women" (statistically 5.1%) but with a disclaimer that "however, the popular opinion is that the data is not necessarily a reflection of the ground reality." The report

concludes that the efficacy of curbing domestic violence calls for a “collective action” inclusive of “home (family) and “local communities” in creating an “enabling environment” of “honour and respect.” In this sense, Mepfhu-o engages with the ground reality of the untold suffering and trauma of the women cast aside by the closed network of family members and society in which they live. *My Mother's Daughter* focuses on the perpetration of abuse and violence against women by fathers and husbands and further deals with the broader themes of gender disparity and systematic control of the female body and mind. Within a society deeply rooted in a patriarchal system, anti-elements such as alcohol addiction are identified as social problems that can disrupt the peace and harmony of the social environment but are not necessarily concerned with women's safety who are at the receiving end of their alcohol-addicted father/spouse. Even though efforts continue to be underway through the involvement of local bodies and churches, the buck stops with aggrieved mothers/wives/daughters when violence (by alcoholic father/husband) takes place (frequently) within the confines of the domestic sphere. It reveals a stark hypocrisy within the society. While it cannot condone any form of violence, it chooses to remain silent, indifferent, or not interfere with ‘private matters.’ What foments through such concealment under the guise of ‘private matters’ legitimises the inhumane atrocities and brutality committed by men without which they would not have had the licence to do so. Justice in a patriarchal system is gendered and blatantly biased, favouring men irrespective of their questionable behaviour and character. The issue is the question of the violation of female agency and the onslaught of coercive control, which the writer powerfully addresses.

The novel consists of two parts, each with eleven chapters. Part One of the text, entitled *Mother*, is narrated from the mother's point of view. It is the story of a woman forced into an arranged marriage to a man from a “respectable family”(11). She is mentally anguished in this relationship since her alcoholic husband instantly despises and ill-treats her for no reason. The woman is trapped in this torturous marriage because a ‘good Christian’ wife does not divorce her spouse, but tolerates his conniving antics despite living by the breadth of hair. Part Two, titled *Daughter*, is a narration from the perspective of her eldest daughter. As a fourth-generation young woman, she has tried to resist the injustice and cruelty of domestic violence and abuse. Her education informed her about the tyranny of domestic violence and abuse. Later, she secures a good government job and is married to a ‘loving and decent husband’ borne out of their romantic affair. However, the trajectory of the trauma narrative re-enacts when her marriage crumbles into domestic violence by a suddenly transformed psychotic husband who is even more dangerous than her uneducated alcoholic father.

IDENTIFYING THE TRAUMA STRESSORS

An episode of threat, abuse, and physical assault on the mother and daughter unfolds in Chapter Two, Part One. Unable to bear witnessing the physical blow perpetrated on her mother, the daughter sums up her timid courage, pleading with her father to stop beating her mother. Mepfhu-o poignantly captures the wife's state of paralysis and her inability to protect her young daughter, who is physically attacked by her husband. Being frequently beaten up by her husband, she understands what physical wounds and scars can do to one's mental state. Her daughter must meet the same fate as she is taught a cruel lesson for apparently siding on her mother's side.

He comes and pulls me by my hair and slaps me repeatedly across the face...After what seems like the longest time, Father walks out of the room murmuring profanities at me and mother. He said something about how he will kill both of us one day, but I could not hear him properly because of the deafening ringing sound in my ear...

“What are you staring at, child of Satan?” he yells.

She stands there almost in tears but without saying a word.

“Don't hurt mother,” she finally speaks and I nudge her to keep quiet.

“So, you're also like your mother? Telling me what to do!” he laughs and I am scared for her.

He came and forcefully pulls her away from me and starts shaking her violently. I am too scared to even utter a word. I am worried that anything I say or do will trigger an outburst in him against her...He pulls her aggressively and drags her across the kitchen. She is still screaming (9, 13-14).

This instance reveals the inhumanity of a father who has no love for his child. From all moral standpoints, he fails to become a ‘man’ as he completely lacks a moral compass to fulfil his essential parental obligations. His actions reveal the theme of gender disparity, whereby the women are used to gratify his desire to obey and serve

him. Coercive control over a woman's body percolates through excessive bullying, bloody wounds, and permanent scars (both physical and psychological). Commenting on the Naga marriage, Monalisa Changkija states that:

The unequal status and position of women in Naga traditional society is nothing but a natural corollary of the patriarchal system and values upon which our society, irrespective of tribe, is founded (77).

Changkija's critical commentary exposes the unequal status between men and women in Naga society. In *Unhappy* (part two, chapter nine), Mepfhu-o narrates about the bodily harm on the wife by her husband that leaves her with fresh wounds and old scars that continue to itch her with sorrow, pain and anger, "Some of the scars on my body had been doubly-violated, first by my father and then him"(138). The bodily wounds and scars speak of the brutality and unbearable suffering she must endure. They are literal evidence of the history of the inexplicable trauma of women through the ages in a larger trauma narrative of women's 'unaccounted history.' In other words, they have become the sites of insidious trauma. This statement also explains the irretrievability of her broken relationship with her husband. Her persuasiveness in charting a different path, far removed from the insecure, deprived, and traumatic childhood she suffered at the cruel hands of her father, is to ensure a better life, free from fear and uncertainty.

On the other hand, the cyclic pattern of using children as hostages to propagate indirect torture and punishment is doubly traumatising for the mother or wife. In Part Two, Chapter Twelve, aptly titled *Judas Kiss*, in his failure to convince his wife to give up her job and look after the house and children, the husband holds a grudge against her. Her refusal to listen to him was considered an act of rebellion and total disregard. Therefore, to teach a lesson for her 'disrespect,' he intends to punish her:

One night, around seven or eight PM, while he was drinking, he called one of the boys to the room where he was drinking. Our son was around four years at that time... After a few minutes, I could hear my son shouting,

"My Mother is a prostitute!"

"Say it again. This time louder!" he encouraged.

"MY MOTHER IS A PROSTITUTE!"

My boy's sweet voice- the voice that always makes me happy, echoed loudly where I sat paralyzed and heartbroken. I kept telling myself that he was forcing my baby to say it, but I couldn't help but cry uncontrollably... I knew that if I did not have a job, it would just give him more power to control me... Each time, the humiliation grew more intense and unbearable (129-30).

The hostage-like entrapment of the mother-child duo clearly explains the nature of coercive control in their hostile (domestic) environment. Evan Stark has stated that coercive control is a "gendered" term that secures "male privilege" and a regime of "domination/subordination constructed around the enforcement of gender stereotypes" in which men as a group "use their oppressive tactics to reinforce persistent sexual inequalities in the larger society." In the "battered mother's dilemma," a woman has to choose between her own safety and the safety of a child" (8-9). Herman, she uses the term 'captivity,' elaborating thus:

...the domestic captivity of women and children is often unseen. In domestic captivity, physical barriers to escape are rare...Women and children are not ordinarily chained... The barriers to escape are generally invisible. They are nonetheless extremely powerful. Children are rendered captive by their condition of dependency. Women are rendered captive by economic, social, psychological, and legal subordination, as well as by physical force...the perpetrator becomes the most powerful person in the life of the victim, and the psychology of the victim is shaped by the actions and beliefs of the perpetrator...His most consistent feature... is his apparent normality (74-75).

In this light, Brown debunks the "myth of a willing victim of interpersonal violence...to uphold power relationships in a heteropatriarchal society between men and women" (126). Similarly, Herman's clinical psychoanalysis exposes the psychological mind map of psychotic perpetrators. In the textual context, one of the biggest challenges for the battered wife (Part Two) is to unmask her husband's "apparent normal man" and expose his ugly nature. Her husband carefully imagined himself as a perfect son, husband, and father for people to see. However, in the four-walled room of his house, he is a wife beater, a drunkard who denies love and

devotion to his wife and starves his children toward normal, healthy mental growth. Expecting to receive support from her in-laws, the wife recounts her harrowing experiences of frequent domestic violence and mental torture committed by their son, relying heavily on the evidence of the wounds on her neck and arms. The patriarchal power to control is displayed in full force, as her father-in-law schools her on what defines a 'man' and 'wife':

"You know, it is generally agreed that somebody who can beat and control his wife is called a 'man'."
He stressed the word 'man', drawing a deeper tone of voice when he said the word as though to intimate me (130).

In alignment with insidious trauma, Michael P. Johnson's concept of 'patriarchal terrorism' or 'intimate terrorism' recognises the misogynistic power politics as thus:

Patriarchal terrorism, a product of patriarchal traditions of men's right to control "their" women, is a form of terroristic control of wives by their husbands that involves the systematic use of not only violence, but economic subordination, threats, isolation, and other control tactics (284).

Johnson poignantly questioned why patriarchal terrorism escalates, while common couple violence does not. In contrast, unlike the latter, "the causal dynamics of patriarchal terrorism are rooted in patriarchal traditions, adopted with a vengeance by men who feel that they must control "their" women by any means necessary" (286). He explains that escalation may occur in either of two dynamics: the escalation of violence to subdue the partner who resists his control or the motivation of the need to both control and display that control. Textually, the evidence indicates that women repeatedly deal with dangerous men. The condescending attitude of the father-in-law clearly outlines how wife-control tactics seek to degrade and dehumanise the women of the household. By justifying his son's actions, he reasserts male privilege by establishing power and control to rule over women. This type of aggressive male dominance occurs throughout the text. In such a power-control setup, terror as a routine experience of the women since their early years leads to gradual self-annihilation and the rupture of their mental well-being (emotional and psychological state) into total disarray, being persistently hampered by an overwhelming sense of failure, guilt, shame, and self-blame. The severity of their endless agonising reality is further intensified by older women justifying their men's actions. Downplaying the bloody head injury sustained after being hit by her husband, the mother-in-law smirks at her daughter-in-law's cry as childish, dismissing the frightful incident as nothing unusual.

"This is nothing new! You are not experiencing anything new. He is not doing anything new. This is all part of marriage. Your father-in-law used to beat me much more than this."

...

She continued still, " So every married woman will be subjected to one or two beatings. It is nothing to cry about. Sometimes, they get angry at their friends and when they cannot do or say anything to their friends. They come home and beat us. These are all part of married life" (68).

The duplicity of the mother-in-law/daughter-in-law relationship foregrounds the irony of the former's predicament as the victim of violence and abuse but who chooses to deny giving moral support to the younger woman experiencing a similar fate. The daughter-in-law has no point of reference to resisting or fighting such violent coercion, given that her mother has also behaved submissively toward her father's authority. From this uncomfortable utterance by the older woman, two observations can be made: first, it refuses to shift the blame from the battered woman to the man who committed the brutal actions; second, the insinuation that married women expect to be beaten by their husbands blatantly normalises domestic violence at home. When women have no alternative plan for a violence-free marital life, they must adapt to living a pretentious life at the cost of risking their lives. Acts of intimation, coercion, threats, forced isolation, and economic and emotional abuse are clear signs of severe insidious trauma. In other words, women in the text must endure frequent humiliation, verbal assaults, accusations such as mismanagement of household chores or sexual promiscuity with other men, denial of economic self-sufficiency, creation of an insecure environment for their children and themselves, and denial of basic needs such as proper sleep, balanced nutrition, and healthy marital relationships. The patriarchal setup fails to rescue women in distress, and in its absolute silence, it commits structural violence. In Jennifer Freyd's theoretical term, women experience institutional trauma. In other words, an institution's failure to prevent, defend, or protect women from serious wrongdoing leads to a profound sense of betrayal. Trauma is insidious, as betrayal profoundly destroys the trust and hope of violated women.

Another important theme is the politics of silence. Mepfhu-o deals with silence at a multidimensional level: the silence enforced on the mothers and daughters by the fathers/husbands, the silence of older women (mothers-in-law) who choose to turn blind eyes to the miseries and afflictions of their daughters-in-law, the silence of the community outside the site of violence (closed door), the choice to be silent by wives, and lastly, the silence of men on why they perpetrated domestic violence on their wives. However, the worst form of silence occurs when women refuse to show solidarity with other women who are in the bondage of coercive control and violence. On the other hand, the conspicuous textual silence of the perpetrators' sense of guilt or shame (if any) for their violent and abusive actions towards women is disturbing and questionable. Ironically, the patriarchal system constrains men within its framework, rendering them victims of their inherent structure. It has established a rigid framework for masculinity to emphasise the traits associated with dominance, strength, and control. Although this phenomenon identifies the imposition of specific societal expectations upon men, epitomised by the notion of 'masculine men,' nonetheless, it still does not excuse their gross actions of interpersonal violence and rampant abuse of their women. This kind of politics of silence is disadvantageous for women. The disempowerment of female agency is evident here:

Always remember that you are a woman. Just keep quiet and don't interfere in everything. It is not your job to tell what to do. Do you understand?' (13).

The constant threat strained her mental makeup and drove her to the brink of complete submission to his command. The vicious cycle of blame game finally ends with the woman taking the responsibility to own up to the 'mistakes' even when she has not done anything wrong, *I am sorry. I wouldn't do that again. I apologise (13).*

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA: FROM BONDAGE TO RECLAMATION OF FEMALE AGENCY AND SELFHOOD

Interpersonal violence or intimate partner violence does not end with the physically and emotionally abused wife in that children bear witness to the abusive action of their father, the perpetrator. Brown reveals that "Mainstream trauma theory has begun to recognise that post-traumatic symptoms can be intergenerational." (128-29). She opines that for the sake of those for whom "insidious trauma is a way of life", it is morally right to "question a society that subjects so many of its inhabitants to traumatic stressors." (129) Within the textual narrative, Mepfhu-o brings to light the "traumatic stressors" are the patriarchal (abusive) men who cause insidious trauma to their wives and daughters. The text spans the infliction of intergenerational trauma across four generations of women in the family comprising the great-grandmother (Apfotsapfu), the first protagonist's mother (grandmother) in Part One, the protagonist (mother), and her daughter (the second protagonist) in Part Two. Significantly, Apfotsapfu had both positive and negative (unease) impacts on her progeny. Revered as a seer or one with a supernatural connection, she is the only woman in the text with a voice of resistance and a good sense (practical). Through her years of silently witnessing the atrocities perpetuated by the women, she speaks of her rage and restlessness about why women must endure unbearable pain and suffering. She tries to convince them to leave their husbands and stay in her house. Apfotsapfu's house is a haven for traumatised women and daughters in contrast to their dysfunctional houses. The daughters' longing for a safe and happy space reveals their helpless state as abused children, and later as abused adults. Thus, Apfotsapfu's alternative idea of 'home' radically differs from that prescribed by the Naga customary tradition, in which married women are 'owned' by their husbands to serve them in their house. The need to create a female space symbolically represents the manifestation of acute desperation to escape or eliminate the severity of trauma that each woman bears alone. Apfotsapfu's towering presence challenges the notion of masculinity propagated by the men (on the premise that 'real' men do not beat or intimidate their women). The question at hand is why abused women do not accept the invitation of their mentor-guardian Apfotsapfu and take the chance to start anew sans the trauma stressors (abused husbands).

Chronic child abuse and betrayal trauma experienced by each woman may lead to intergenerational trauma. In this context, Herman explains:

Chronic childhood abuse takes place in a familial climate of pervasive terror, in which ordinary caretaking relationships have been profoundly disrupted...In an abusive family environment, the exercise of parental power is arbitrary, capricious, and absolute. Rules are erratic, inconsistent, or patently unfair (98).

In Part One, the daughter (third generation) feels betrayed by her mother for not defending her when her father is violent towards her. She expected her mother to fight (for her) to study in a hostel when her father opposed this move. In her hurt world, she felt betrayed by her mother's meek submission and silence over her father's refusal of her request. Since the fateful incident, the daughter has mentally disassociated herself from

her mother, as she cannot trust her again. This irrevocable psychological damage is two-fold: the close tie between mother-daughter cracks and both experience loss and abandonment. This episode highlights the right of girls to education. In this sense, the hostel connotes literal and metaphorical meanings. On the one hand, the hostel may allow her to escape turbulent prisons. 'House' represents the patriarchal force and hostage-like repressive existence. From a psychological standpoint, it reveals her "breaking point" (in Root's psychological analysis, 237) and wilful desire to stop this menace of domestic violence. On the other hand, the hostel represents the empowerment that she will benefit from through education. The death of Apfotsapfu triggers her to resist, fight, and rebel against a force that has suppressed her for a long time. Unlike her mother, she divorces her violent, misogynistic husband and chooses to live a free life, one defined in her terms. She returned to her mother's house (now a widow) to start a new life. Symbolically, it is a revisit to her repressive traumatic past and a time to ponder her present traumatic condition. Her reconciliation with her mother (the first protagonist) brings peace and solidarity due to their shared past, giving strength and comfort to each other. This return helps both women exorcise their trauma (although traumatic memory lingers in the psyche). Despite their pain and hurt, they embrace moving on to a new chapter. The forgiveness of past hurts and coming to terms with one's victimhood pave the way for the gradual healing of female agency and selfhood. The mother-daughter duo finally created "an enabling space" for themselves:

The house looks and feels like a different place now. For the first time, it is filled with uninhibited laughter and conversations, just as it should be (161).

II. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Mepfhu-o's writing exposes the patriarchy's compliance to the gross transgression of psychological trauma impacting the symptomatic eruption of disturbed traits, making the women's narratives traumatising and tragically sad. The author delicately weaves into the intricate relationship between the patriarchal system, gender, and power. Moreover, she has powerfully asserted her point that domestic violence is as severe as "wounds of trauma" that crush "the human spirit" and that is "the hardest wound to heal" to use Root's words (238). Significantly, the narrative shifts the paradigm from the 'shamed women victims' to the 'shameful/shameless misogynistic men-perpetrators'. This textual tactic of initiating the women to name the trauma stressors for insidious trauma, firstly, projects the patriarchal system for its regressive role of structural violence; secondly, 'speaking out' initialises the women to acknowledge their state of being victimised as the first step towards self-healing and recovery. Brown's thought-provoking remark is worth pondering in light of what this text manages to convey convincingly:

A feminist perspective, which draws our attention to the lives of girls and women, to the secret, private, hidden experiences of everyday pain, reminds us that traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience. Faced with this reality, we will be moved to change our understanding of human responses to those events that are unusual as well... When we begin to acknowledge that reality, we make our professions revolutionary; we challenge the status quo, and participate in the process of social change (132).

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