

## Terrorism and Agency in *Les Jours Viennent et Passent*: Reconfiguring the notion of Victims

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### Abstract

This study critically examines the complex dynamics of radicalization, victimhood, and moral ambiguity in Hemley Boum's *Les Jours viennent et passent*, with a particular focus on how emotional trauma and ideological manipulation intersect in the lives of youth. Through close textual analysis of central characters such as Jenny and Yacouba, the research explores how systemic injustice, psychological vulnerability, and religious indoctrination construct morally ambiguous individuals. Drawing on victimology (Pemberton & Aarten, 2017), trauma theory (Megbulem, 2025), and intercultural pragmatics (Ehigie & Braimoh, 2024), the paper demonstrates that radicalization in the novel is not the product of innate violence but rather a response to personal and societal ruptures. The study further situates Boum's narrative within broader African literary representations of extremism, highlighting how her work complicates the binary of perpetrator and victim. Additionally, the paper considers how translation and language shape the international reception of such narratives, arguing that cultural sensitivity and communicative intent must be foregrounded in rendering ideologically charged texts. Integrating educational discourse from Braimoh's *The Perfect Scholar* (2014) provides a counter-narrative on moral formation, underscoring the transformative potential of ethical instruction over ideological coercion. By engaging interdisciplinary frameworks and underexplored gendered perspectives, the research contributes to African literary scholarship, terrorism studies, and trauma analysis. It calls for more empathetic, context-specific, and critically engaged readings of African narratives that portray youth extremism as a multifaceted human experience rather than a monolithic threat.

**Keywords:** Terrorism, Victimhood, Radicalization, Agency, Coercion, Moral Ambiguity.

## **Introduction**

*Les Jours Viennent et Passent* by Hemley Boum is a powerful intergenerational novel that presents the lived experiences of three generations of Cameroonian women: Samgali, Anna, Abi, and other female characters. However, the book is not only about their lives as it uses their intersecting history and destinies to construct a deep, layered reflection and critique of the socio-political reality of post-colonial Cameroon and other African countries plagued by the phenomenon of terrorism. The novel offers a rich and multifaceted portrayal of the activities of the Boko Haram terrorist group, a terrorist organization of Nigerian origin based in the Lake Chad region whose activities cut across other neighboring countries like: Cameroon, Chad, Niger. One of the distinguishing factors about this book is Hemley Boum's nuanced portrayal of these terrorists in her novel. She not only depicts their brutal and violent actions but also provides insight into their daily lives and complex psychology, revealing their humanity despite the atrocities that they committed.

Nicki Hitchcott highlights the importance of positionality while analyzing subjects of violence in her work titled *Rwanda Genocide Stories* (2015), a book that discusses the representation of the Rwandan Genocide. While she acknowledges the existence of different subject categories created by the genocide like witness, survivor, victim, perpetrator etc., she is of the view that these fixed positions are too ambiguous, difficult to disassociate and deeply influenced by broader systems of state power and political interests: "the book is organized around the four principal subject positions created by the genocide: witness, survivor, victim and perpetrator, categories that have particular connotations and have become fraught with political tension and ambiguity in the context of post-genocide Rwanda... Overlapping and sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to dissociate" (16). Hitchcott accepts the view of another scholar, Michael Rothberg (2008) that relying on these broad or overly simple categories can erase complexities when presenting traumatic experiences: "this book takes heed of Michael Rothberg's warning about the dangers of adopting homogenizing categories of subject position in writing about traumatic experiences" (17). Following their stance that rigid categorization of people caught in situations of violence can oversimplify the complex social and political dynamics at play, this paper not only challenges the practicality of rigid

categorization of subject positions in the context of terrorism but also recognizes the fluid and intersecting nature of victimhood and perpetration.

Therefore, drawing inspiration from Nicki Hitchcott's position on the inherent difficulty and ambiguity of distinguishing between subject categories created by the Rwandan genocide, I will argue that in *Les Jours Viennent et Passent*, the clear-cut distinction between victims and perpetrators of acts of terrorism is critically undermined through the depiction of characters whose involvement in terrorism is shaped by coercion, radicalization, emotional vulnerability, manipulation and broader socio-political forces. Building on Hitchcott's theoretical framework, this study challenges the conventional binary representation of parties in the context of terrorism as either perpetrators or victims. It also calls for a rethinking of victimhood, emphasizing its fluidity by illustrating how those who commit acts of violence can also simultaneously occupy the position of victims.

### Literature Review and Gap

The academic discourse on terrorism in African literature has evolved significantly in the past two decades, with scholars increasingly examining the psychological, socio-political, and gendered dimensions of radicalization. Central to these explorations are works that challenge simplistic binaries of victim and perpetrator, offering more nuanced understandings of agency, coercion, and trauma. Hemley Boum's *Les Jours Viennent et Passent* enters this intellectual landscape by weaving personal narratives with broader socio-political commentaries, positioning itself as a key text in studying African terrorism narratives. The current study engages with a body of literature that spans trauma theory, victimology, literary criticism, and translation studies to identify foundational contributions and critical gaps that this paper seeks to address.

A foundational text that has informed this research is Nicki Hitchcott's *Rwanda Genocide Stories* (2015), which challenges the rigid categorizations of survivor, victim, and perpetrator in post-genocide Rwanda. Hitchcott's assertion that "subject positions are not stable but rather shift and overlap depending on context or point of view" (2015, p. 17) is central to this study's argument. By applying Hitchcott's framework to Boum's novel, this research highlights how individuals like Jenny and Ahmadou defy clear-cut labels, occupying complex positions shaped by trauma and agency. Hitchcott's interdisciplinary methodology, drawing from narrative theory, political discourse, and cultural memory, also precedes this paper's multi-theoretical approach.

In victimology, Pemberton and Aarten (2017) have advanced the theory of “narrative identity” in their work on victimological processes. Their conceptualization of trauma as a narrative rupture that compels ethical reorientation resonates with the character arcs in Boum’s novel. Jenny’s psychological transition, from shame and guilt to spiritual redemption and violent action, exemplifies what Pemberton and Aarten describe as “troubled lives” that seek coherence through ideological narratives. Their framework supports this paper’s claim that radicalization often emerges from unresolved emotional conflict, rather than ideological conviction alone. Trauma theory also plays a crucial role in grounding this study, particularly through the works of Megbulem (2025), who examines cognitive responses to trauma in francophone literature. His analysis of *Ourika* and *The Lover* explores how emotional disorientation leads to narrative reframing, which echoes Jenny’s reinterpretation of guilt through religious ideology. Similarly, Megbulem’s insights into how sensory overload and emotional vulnerability catalyze identity shifts offer a cognitive lens for understanding the psychological grooming carried out by Ahmadou and the Imam.

Another important strand of literature engaged in this study is the intersection of trauma, language, and intercultural dynamics as explored by Ehigie Dare (2025) and Ehigie & Braimoh (2024). In his work *Fearing the Familiar*, Ehigie (2025) analyzes how supernatural frameworks and fear-based cognition influence characters’ interpretive responses to trauma and ideological pressure. This study builds on his insights by exploring how Jenny’s belief system, shaped by cultural and spiritual influences, renders her more susceptible to Ahmadou’s radical reinterpretation of guilt. Furthermore, Ehigie & Braimoh’s (2024) investigation into intercultural pragmatics in *La Malédiction du Lamantin* demonstrates how subtle linguistic cues and culturally embedded speech acts can shape moral decisions and narrative interpretation. Their findings reinforce the current study’s attention to how emotional manipulation and ideological language, such as invoking “Allah” as moral authority, play a critical role in reconfiguring a character’s ethical compass. Despite these foundational contributions, the application of pragmatics and trauma theory to literary depictions of terrorism remains sparse, particularly regarding young female protagonists, highlighting a critical gap that this research addresses. Gendered analyses of terrorism in African literature remain underrepresented, though they are vital for understanding characters like Jenny and Tina. While existing studies often reduce female extremists to passive victims, Boum’s narrative complicates this perception by granting her characters interiority, choice, and conviction. This study aligns with and builds upon the emerging body of gender-focused terrorism literature. However, it contends that more attention must be paid to how emotional trauma intersects with cultural expectations and spiritual rhetoric

in shaping female radicalization. This paper addresses a significant gap in African terrorism studies.

Furthermore, this research intersects with translation and intercultural communication studies, particularly the work of Onomejoh et al. (2024), who argue for the translator's role as a cultural mediator in rendering sensitive narratives. Their analysis underscores how translating emotionally charged or ideologically complex content can either preserve or distort the original moral ambiguity. Given that *Les Jours Viennent et Passent* engages deeply with religious language, metaphors of redemption, and local idioms, understanding how these elements are rendered in translation is critical for global readers. The intersection of translation and radicalization remains an underexplored area in African literary studies, and this paper contributes to this gap by considering how language and cultural filters shape reception.

Another underexamined domain is the comparative study of youth radicalization across African literatures. Marion Tricoire's (2023) work on *Loin de Douala* and *Les Jours Viennent et Passent* emphasizes how regional mobility and marginalization affect youth radicalization. However, Tricoire stops short of exploring the emotional grammar and trauma mechanisms behind such radicalization. This paper extends her insights by foregrounding psychological grooming and narrative identity in the context of postcolonial disillusionment. Additionally, the ideological recruitment tactics used by characters like the Imam in Boum's novel find resonance in studies of symbolic violence by Vambe and Rwafa (2014), who argue that spiritual metaphors and cultural symbols are instrumental in radicalizing African youth. While their study focuses primarily on African film and genocide, this paper adapts their theoretical insights to a literary context, showing how religious framing can reconfigure emotional wounds into moral missions. Nonetheless, few studies explore how symbolic violence works in tandem with personal trauma in literary narratives, a gap that this paper seeks to address.

In examining the educational counter-narrative, Jimoh Braimoh's *The Perfect Scholar* (2014) contrasts with the ideological conditioning seen in Boum's novel. While not a fictional work, Braimoh's book outlines a paradigm of moral clarity, intellectual discipline, and critical thinking. By juxtaposing the pedagogical ethos of *The Perfect Scholar* with the psychological manipulation seen in Boum's characters, this paper explores the broader implications of ideological education versus ethical instruction in African societies. This comparative approach between

fiction and educational treatise is uncommon in literary studies and provides a unique lens on how radicalization may be resisted through intellectual formation.

Finally, while much work has been done on the socio-political roots of terrorism in Africa (Adeyeye, 2019), few studies explore how literature humanizes extremists without excusing their actions. Boum's refusal to depict her characters as either purely evil or entirely helpless fills this narrative and ethical gap. The paper builds on Adeyeye's call for interdisciplinary approaches by incorporating trauma theory, victimology, and translation studies to create a more holistic picture of African radicalization narratives. The reviewed literature establishes a robust foundation for the study of terrorism in African fiction but leaves important questions unanswered, particularly concerning the emotional, gendered, and narrative dimensions of radicalization. This paper fills these gaps by offering a psychological, literary, and ethical reading of Boum's novel that foregrounds the fluidity of subject positions, the interplay of trauma and ideology, and the complexities of translating culturally sensitive texts. The study expands existing scholarship and calls for a more nuanced, context-specific, and empathetic engagement with African extremism narratives by synthesizing insights from victimology, trauma theory, intercultural communication, and education.

### **Objectives**

- To analyze how Hemley Boum's *Les Jours viennent et passent* represents the psychological and emotional processes that lead to youth radicalization in African societies.
- To investigate the interplay between trauma, religious ideology, and victimhood in shaping morally ambiguous characters, particularly focusing on Jenny and Yacouba.
- To evaluate the role of language, manipulation, and intercultural communication in the recruitment narratives within the novel, drawing on insights from translation and pragmatics studies.
- To contribute to the discourse on African literature and terrorism by identifying narrative strategies that humanize radicalized individuals without absolving them of agency or accountability.

## Tensions Surrounding Terrorism and Agency in *Les Jours Viennent et Passent*.

### a. Redefining Victimhood in the Context of Terrorism

The novel deconstructs the conventional binary of victim and perpetrator by revealing how female perpetrators of terrorism are coerced into violence, thereby portraying the ambiguity of positioning. In the novel, these women carry out violent actions as suicide bombers, marry the commanders of terrorist cells, and combat with them on the battlefield, making them perpetrators of acts of terror, especially from the point of view of the population and security forces who see them as dangerous. As Tina reveals: “beaucoup de femmes combattait à leur côté. Sous la férule de la veuve d’un commandant de Boko Haram réputée pour sa férocité” (294). However, a close inspection of how they are recruited and the way they carry out these violent actions exposes their victimhood. The novel reveals that these women are kidnapped from their families by Boko Haram and forced to marry the commanders of the camp: “Yacouba et ses sbires étaient revenus tout fiers de cette expédition, ils avaient participé au rapt. Les filles avaient été envoyées dans différents camps, offertes en mariage, destiné à porter des bébés Boko Haram et à faire prospérer le califat” (295). Their marriage to these commanders objectifies them as they are subsequently transformed into sex objects for the pleasure of the leaders of the extremist group and are forced to combat on the men’s side, strapped with suicide vests during moments of extreme pressure from government forces. Although they carry out violent actions for the group as suicide bombers, exploding and killing a lot of innocent people, which makes them perpetrators of terror in the eyes of the population, the fact that these actions are carried out under coercion also makes them victims. As Jenny notes:

“Ils ne laissent aucune option à ces pauvres filles. Ils leur bourrent le crâne avec des inepties religieuses et quand ce n’est pas suffisant, les menacent d’assassiner leur proches, de les torturer elles-mêmes jusqu’à ce que mort s’ensuive. Elles choisissent toutes de retarder l’échéance, ne pas mourir tout de suite, tenter leur chance le jour en espérant jusqu’au bout un secours qui jamais n’arrive”(319).

By not giving them any choice to object, the terrorist organization strips them of agency in the actions committed. This factor makes it clear that their perpetration of violence as suicide bombers was not voluntary but coerced. The use of threat, manipulation, and indoctrination also reveals a complicated system of psychological control of the women by the terrorist organization, suggesting that they were manipulated into carrying out these acts of violence. This lack of agency in the actions committed is further reflected in their sad and defeated looks while

being led to the field of operation, which suggests helplessness and sadness: “Elles avaient toutes la mine défaite, nous savions qu’il n’y avait rien de bon à attendre d’une telle agitation. Quelques-unes pleuraient, d’autres priaient, la plupart faisaient les deux : nous étions des bêtes que l’on menait à l’abattoir (328). By describing them with the metaphor, “des bêtes que l’on menait à l’abattoir”, the narrator echoes their lack of control over the killings that they carried out as they were simply pawns being manipulated within a broader system of terrorism, and a means to an end for the terrorist organization. The women’s sad demeanor, defeated looks and agitation while being led to the combat zone reveal their fear and helplessness suggesting that their participation was as a result of lack of alternatives: “elles avaient toutes la mine défaite... Quelques-unes pleuraient, d’autres priaient, la plupart faisaient les deux” (328). Therefore, we can say that the women who played the role of suicide bombers for Boko Haram can be considered victims despite their involvement in the killing of many innocent people, which also makes them simultaneously perpetrators, effectively recalling Hitchcott’s stance on the difficulty of separating subject positions in the context of violence.

Jenny’s positioning in *Les Jours viennent et passent* as both victim and perpetrator of terrorism offers a complex representation of radicalization and moral ambiguity in African literature. Her recruitment into Boko Haram is not depicted as a straightforward act of ideological commitment but rather as a psychological progression rooted in manipulation, emotional vulnerability, and ultimately a choice that reflects internalized beliefs. This tension between coercion and agency underscores a significant theme in the study of radicalization and terrorism: the blurred line between victimhood and complicity. Jenny’s journey begins with a profound sense of personal guilt after she publicly embarrasses her mother, an emotional rupture that renders her psychologically malleable. This vulnerability is effectively exploited by Ahmadou, a recruiter for Boko Haram, who recognizes and manipulates her emotional state. His use of religious rhetoric—“il lui a promis une place spéciale dans le cœur d’Allah”—highlights how sacred language can be weaponized to reframe radicalism as a divine purpose psychologically. This aligns with what Pemberton and Aarten (2017) describe as the victimological narrative logic often co-opted by extremist ideologies. In their analysis, the sense of being wronged or emotionally destabilized can act as a narrative “rupture,” prompting individuals to reinterpret their lives through a radical lens. Jenny’s guilt becomes the emotional wound through which radical ideology seeps in, allowing her to see joining Boko Haram not just as a moral option but as spiritual redemption.

Importantly, this psychological manipulation is not unique to Jenny's case but is emblematic of broader systemic patterns. Trauma scholars like Megbulem (2025) have shown that emotional dysregulation and narrative disorientation are common among individuals facing prolonged psychological distress. Megbulem's analysis of trauma in *Ourika* and *The Lover* identifies how emotional overload, when not socially or emotionally mediated, can cause individuals to seek meaning and coherence in extreme ideologies. Jenny's trauma, marked not by physical violence but by moral injury, falls within this scope. She does not seek out violence; instead, violence finds her through her wounded psyche, reshaped by Ahmadou's ideological grooming.

This grooming process involves cognitive reframing, a strategy that has been analyzed in both terrorism studies and literary trauma theory. Vambe and Rwafa (2014), writing on African literature and genocide, point out that radical groups often rely on symbolic violence, such as the manipulation of spiritual or cultural metaphors, to transform psychological vulnerability into ideological commitment. In Jenny's case, the invocation of Allah's approval provides not just justification but divine endorsement, blurring the line between sin and salvation, sacrifice and empowerment. Here, we see how symbolic violence serves as a narrative mechanism through which characters in African literature reconcile perpetration with personal redemption. However, Jenny's moral ambiguity is complicated further by her conscious decision to join Boko Haram even after being warned by Ismaël about the group's atrocities. Ismaël's warning, "Ils égorgent les gens, Djenabou, ils pillent des villages..." (Boum, p. 279), is not subtle or ambiguous; it provides a graphic and unequivocal portrait of the group's violence. This moment marks a narrative pivot: Jenny is no longer a naïve victim manipulated by circumstance but a character who, with full awareness of the group's brutality, chooses to proceed. This decision foregrounds what Pemberton and Aarten (2017) call the "moralization gap," the psychological divide between victims and perpetrators. Jenny begins by adopting a victim's perspective but slowly internalizes the logic of the perpetrator, minimizing the atrocities and rationalizing her complicity as a form of ideological fidelity.

This transition from victim to perpetrator has been further examined by Adeyeye (2019), who critiques African counter-terrorism narratives for often neglecting the psychological gray areas where radicalization occurs. He contends that terrorism in African contexts is rarely a binary of good and evil; rather, it is a continuum where personal trauma, structural violence, and ideological recruitment intersect. Jenny embodies this continuum. Her victimhood is real, but so is her radicalization. In Pemberton's terms, she is both the narrator and protagonist of a life story shaped

by “trouble”, a narrative rupture that compels ethical reevaluation and ideological transformation. This duality challenges simplistic portrayals of terrorists as purely evil or entirely manipulated. It aligns with cognitive literary theory, which, according to Megbulem (2025), examines how characters perceive, process, and narrate their experiences of trauma. Jenny’s mental processing follows the typical trajectory of trauma response: guilt, disorientation, reorientation, and finally, identification with a radical group that offers coherence and purpose. Her emotional journey is marked by what McAdams (as cited in Pemberton & Aarten, 2017) calls a “narrative identity”, a reconstructed selfhood shaped by significant life events. Jenny re-narrates her guilt into moral purpose, her social shame into divine calling, and her alienation into community belonging through Boko Haram.

Moreover, Jenny’s behavior reflects the pattern of moral disengagement described by scholars of narrative and radicalization. Once Ismaël’s warnings are dismissed, Jenny does not merely ignore the violence; she reinterprets it. Her labeling of Ismaël as “infidel” and “lukewarm” exemplifies how ideological frameworks reshape ethical standards. As Taonezvi Vambe and Rwafa (2014) argue, violence in African narratives is often not justified directly but is symbolically reframed to appear inevitable or righteous. This rhetorical sleight of hand allows Jenny to see Boko Haram not as a terrorist organization but as a necessary force against moral decay. Her story illustrates the narrative mechanisms through which terrorism becomes thinkable and desirable. Furthermore, Jenny’s victimhood is not erased by her complicity but persists as a narrative substratum. Pemberton and Aarten (2017) highlight how perpetrators of political violence often maintain a self-image rooted in past victimization, using it to rationalize current offenses. Jenny’s continued reference to divine favor and spiritual duty suggests she still sees herself as fulfilling a moral obligation, not committing a crime. This aligns with McAdams’s theory of narrative identity, where traumatic events become central episodes in constructing selfhood. Jenny’s trauma is not just a memory but the axis around which her new identity revolves.

In the broader context of African literature and postcolonial trauma, Jenny’s story raises questions about systemic violence. Adeyeye (2019) notes that African terrorism cannot be understood apart from its historical and socio-political foundations. Jenny’s guilt and subsequent radicalization do not occur in a vacuum; they are situated within a context of broken state systems, poor educational structures, and gendered expectations that make emotional distress a common experience for young women. Her character becomes a case study in how private trauma intersects with public ideology to produce morally ambiguous outcomes. Narratively, Jenny’s transformation is achieved through a progressive layering of

emotional, religious, and political discourses. As Maurice Taonezvi Vambe and Urther Rwafa (2014) emphasize in their discussion of African film, symbolic forms of violence, such as language, identity, and belief, are often more insidious and influential than overt physical force. Jenny is not beaten into submission; she is persuaded, seduced, and spiritually conscripted. This method of recruitment mirrors the reality for many young women in conflict zones, where terrorism operates as both ideology and emotional refuge.

Ultimately, Jenny's story is a narrative case of what Pemberton and Aarten (2017) call "victimological identity." Her sense of self, shaped by perceived injury and ideological promise, reflects the broader victim-perpetrator duality inherent in many radicalized individuals. The novel's refusal to fully condemn or redeem her complicates traditional moral binaries and invites readers to engage with the deeper psychological and sociopolitical structures that enable radicalization. Jenny's character represents the psychological architecture of terrorism as explored through African literature. Her transition from emotional vulnerability to ideological extremism illustrates how trauma, guilt, and symbolic manipulation converge to create complex identities. Drawing from Pemberton and Aarten's victimological framework, Megbulem's trauma studies, and Adeyeye's critique of African terrorism narratives, Jenny's story emerges not simply as a cautionary tale but as a richly layered exploration of how moral ambiguity, psychological distress, and cultural rhetoric intertwine. Her narrative destabilizes the simplistic victim-perpetrator binary and reminds us that in the landscape of radicalization, emotional trauma and moral agency often coexist in uneasy, unsettling proximity.

Furthermore, her ironic labeling of Ismaël as dangerous for opening her eyes to the truth, while calling the members of Boko Haram saviors, reveals her firm resolve to distort moral perception and ethical judgment in a bid to justify her association with the terrorist organization: "Ils mènent le combat d'Allah, loué soit-il" (280). Her status as a perpetrator is further strengthened by her informed decision to work as a teacher and nurse in the Boko Haram camp and her final act of becoming a suicide bomber, which leads to the death of some innocent people at the market square. This ambiguity in the moral position of Jenny effectively reiterates Hitchcott's notion on the fluidity of positioning in contexts of violence. As Hitchcott states: "subject positions are not stable but shift and overlap depending on context or point of view" (17). Putting Hitchcott's stance into context, we can affirm that while Jenny's association and violent actions as a member of the Boko Haram organization portray her as a perpetrator, her recruitment through manipulation, brainwashing, and indoctrination gives her a victim status. This

ambivalence places her at the intersection of both categories, recalling Hitchcott's position that subject positions can overlap.

Tina's voluntary decision to join Boko Haram, which was driven by fear of loneliness and unresolved childhood trauma, complicates the victim-perpetrator binary, revealing how emotional vulnerability can complicate ethical responsibility. Despite her status as a perpetrator due to her voluntary association with the extremist group, Jenny's victimhood is conspicuous from a careful observation of her motivation for joining the terrorist organization. In the novel, she joins the group due to the fear of isolation and desire for companionship. As she states: "Si Djenabou et Ismaël partaient, rien ne me retenait ici. "J'étais prête à affronter l'enfer et ses damnés à leur côtés plutôt que ma solitude" (282). By using the metaphor "l'enfer" to signify the extent she can go to avoid loneliness, Tina exposes her emotional vulnerability and desperation to be with her friends. This fact also suggests that her fear of loneliness overpowers her rational judgment while deciding to join Boko Haram. This loneliness originates from the death of her mother and her constant physical and sexual abuse by her grandparents, who make her feel constantly unwanted and unworthy. The trauma from growing up under guardians who do not care about her makes her feel desperate and ready to do anything to remain with the few people who care about her in the world. This fact informs her decision to join Boko Haram as she continually wants to be with Ismaël and Jenny. However, her victimhood position in the novel is complicated because she was fully aware of this organization's mission and deadly objectives before joining. She even admits to this fact: "Est-ce que nous savions ce que nous faisons ? Dans quoi nous nous lançons ? Je suppose que oui, on peut dire oui. Ismaël nous avait prevenues" (282). Tina's admission that she understood the nature of the terrorist organization as well as the fact that she was not forced into joining complicates her earlier positioning as a victim in the novel, portraying her as also an active accomplice in acts of violence, recalling Hitchcott's earlier stance on the instability of subject positions in contexts of violence. Nevertheless, her status as a victim is still evident in the novel since she is an individual shaped by emotional trauma, even though her conscious acceptance of membership of the terrorist organization also makes her an active collaborator in the perpetration of acts of terror.

### **b. The Role of Emotional Trauma and Vulnerability in Radicalization**

Ahmadou's fixed portrayal as a perpetrator of acts of violence is critically undermined by his recruitment through indoctrination, brainwashing, and psychological manipulation, positioning him as not just a heartless perpetrator but also a victim of radicalization. Ahmadou's status as a perpetrator is evident from the beginning of the story due to his role in recruiting other victims into the

organization as well as his status as the second in command of the terrorist group, which specialized in killing innocent people. However, a careful observation of how he was recruited into the organization deconstructs this fixed positioning, making him also a victim despite his status as a high-ranking member of the Boko Haram terrorist cell. The way he is recruited questions his responsibility for the acts of violence that he later perpetrated in the story. The Imam who recruits for Boko Haram at Douala strategically exploits Ahmadou's emotional vulnerability and grief that results from the death of his mother, as well as his longing for spiritual solace. This situation provides the Imam an opportunity to indoctrinate him as well as isolate him from others: "Ahmadou ne se séparait plus de son chapelet. Il a arrêté de serrer la main aux femmes et priait tant, avec une telle ardeur, qu'une croute noire s'est formée au milieu de son front" (262). By manipulating Ahmadou into stopping physical contact with women, the Imam erects a psychological barrier to separate Ahmadou from his friends and his loved ones, who are primarily women, and deepen his dependence on religion as his sole source of comfort and identity. This factor facilitates not only his radicalization but also deepens the Imam's ideological and psychological control over him. After successfully isolating him and immersing him in religion, Ahmadou is then brainwashed and manipulated into joining the Islamic terrorist group by the Imam, who promises him a reward both on earth and in the afterlife. In the words of Jenny :

Je pense que même Ahmadou ne mesurait pas la duplicité de cet homme. Il se laissait séduire par ses belles paroles qui l'intronisaient chevalier d'Allah, lui qui n'était qu'un orphelin perdu comme nous... il se montrait flatteur, encourageant, presque paternel : «Allah te récompensera de ta dévotion, pas seulement au paradis mais dès que nous arriverons dans notre camp, dès que nous rejoindrons les nôtres. Fais-moi confiance fils, tu quitteras enfin cet endroit où personne ne te considère à ta juste valeur. Là-bas, tu auras le pouvoir, tu seras le bras armé d'Allah et jamais tu ne regretteras ton geste», promettait-il a un Ahmadou dont la volonté vacillait (284).

The Imam's ability to blend manipulation and brainwashing in his recruitment of Ahmadou demonstrates that he is a master of the art of psychological control. His manipulative tactics are evident in his use of flattery and his offering of reassuring and encouraging words to Ahmadou, which elevate him to a fatherly role. This manipulation then sets the floor for brainwashing, as he promises Ahmadou a place in paradise as well as God's favor in exchange for joining the group's campaign of terror. As a result, even though Ahmadou participates in the killing of innocent people during the raids on different communities by the extremist group, he carries out these actions because he is indoctrinated, brainwashed, and manipulated into

carrying out these actions. Since Ahmadou's violent actions as the second in command of the Boko Haram cell are motivated by these factors, he cannot be said to have acted of his own volition, qualifying him as a victim despite being a perpetrator of acts of terrorism from the view of the population and security agents. This situation makes a fixed categorization of Ahmadou as a perpetrator difficult because he seems to lack trustworthy agency in the violent acts that he commits, as he acts under the manipulation and illusion that he is fulfilling a divine duty by eliminating those deemed infidels because they do not share his extremist beliefs. He is also under the illusion that his actions are righteous and sanctioned by God. Similarly, Hitchcott recognizes in her book how the genocide Hutu government used manipulation and brainwashing to force the Hutu population to exterminate their Tutsi neighbors. This act complicates the classification of the people who carried out the massacre into either perpetrators or victims:

Violent attacks against Tutsi continued through these years with counter-attacks launched from outside Rwanda by exiled Tutsi, known by the Hutu as 'Inyenzi' [cockroaches], a nickname that subsequently became a powerful symbol of the genocide... the Hutu Power newspaper Kangura, which had been explicitly inciting anti-Tutsi violence, published the words, 'We will begin by getting rid of the enemies inside the country. The Tutsi "cockroaches" should know what will happen; they will disappear. Throughout the days of horror, Hutu extremists continued to manipulate the racialized myths of Tutsi difference to fuel ethnic hatred, mobilize the militia, and systematically eliminate the Tutsi. Chilling examples of these imperatives can be found in the infamous 'Hutu Ten Commandments', published in Kangura in December 1990, inciting Hutu to spread the 'Hutu Ideology' and to have no mercy on the Tutsi. (6)

The systematic labeling of the Tutsi population as cockroaches by the genocide Rwandan government through the state-controlled media was a deliberate psychological strategy to frame them as undesirable. By describing the Tutsi people with the dehumanizing metaphor, "inyenzi" or cockroaches, the Hutu government manipulates the Hutu population into hating them and justifies their extermination. The publishing of the Hutu ten commandments is a strategic attempt to brainwash the population into viewing their Tutsi neighbors as dangerous, a national security threat, and worthy of elimination. These manipulative and brainwashing tactics used by the Hutu government to incite the population into becoming perpetrators of genocide challenge their responsibility for acts of violence committed, as well as their strict classification as perpetrators. Just like the Hutu population, the use of manipulation and brainwashing tactics by the Imam to persuade Ahmadou to join

Boko Haram and carry out violent actions complicates his positionality in the novel. This shifts him from a hardened terrorist to a victim of radicalization, reflecting Hitchcott's view on the unstable positionality of subjects of violence.

Finally, through the portrayal of certain members of the Boko Haram group as compelled into joining the group by personal struggles and socio-political coercion, the text reveals how perpetration can evolve from victimhood, thereby blurring the binary distinction between victim and perpetrator. For instance, Yacouba, who is the leader of the Boko Haram camp and is responsible for the death of many people in the novel, was not motivated to join the group because of material gain or due to his love for violence and killing. Instead, he joins because of the aggression of the Nigerian government against his family. He becomes a radicalized terrorist due to the arrest of his father and mother, the raping of his sisters in detention and the extrajudicial killing of the other members of his family by soldiers under the command of the Nigerian president, Goodluck Jonathan :

Je faisais mes études à l'université de Maiduguri lorsque les soldats de Goodluck Jonathan s'en sont pris à ma famille parce que mon père était proche de Mohammed Yusuf, le fondateur de notre califat. Ils ont enlevé ma mère, mes sœurs. Mon père était un imam respecté, de jeunes gens venaient apprendre la parole dans son école coranique. Ils ont tué toutes les personnes présentes dans notre concession ce jour maudit, sauf mon père (...) Nous avons négocié pendant des mois, payé des sommes folles à ces gens corrompus pour qu'ils libèrent nos gens. Ma mère est morte en détention ainsi qu'une de mes sœurs, les deux autres étaient enceintes à leur retour (309)

The government forces actions of arresting, raping and killing members of his family devastates him and makes him a victim of state violence. His repeated references to his loss and the corruption of the government forces demonstrate a deep feeling of betrayal by the institution that was supposed to protect him. At the same time, the killing of members of his family and the raping of his sisters creates a sense of grief, rage and trauma that later fuels his violent actions.

### **c. Aftermath of Systemic Injustice and the Cycle of Retaliatory Violence**

The intersection of systemic injustice and retaliatory violence has become a critical theme in African literature, especially when framed through the lens of terrorism and radicalization. Hemley Boum's *Les Jours Viennent et Passent* vividly captures this tension through the character of Yacouba, whose transformation from victim to militant reveals the corrosive impact of unresolved historical and structural

grievances. As African societies grapple with the aftermath of colonial violence, state neglect, and socio-political instability, literature has emerged as a reflective medium for exploring how individuals internalize and respond to systemic oppression. This section analyzes how the cycle of retaliatory violence in Boum's narrative is deeply embedded in a broader tapestry of systemic injustice, invoking comparative insights from scholarly works such as Ehigie (2025), *Fearing the familiar: witchcraft, God, and the politics of supernatural power*; Ehigie & Braimoh (2024), *Exploring the Intersection of Pragmatics and Intercultural Communication in Moussa Konaté's La Malédiction du Lamantin*; Ehigie (2019), *Une étude thématique et stylistique de L'Orange de Noël de Michel Peyramaure*, and *Reading regional mobilities, Boko Haram and African urban youth in Max Lobe's Loin de Douala* and Hemley Boum's *Les Jours viennent et passent* by [Marion Tricoire](#) (2023)

### Historical Context of Systemic Injustice

Systemic injustice in postcolonial African states often stems from historical patterns of exclusion, violence, and structural inequality established during the colonial period. In *Les Jours Viennent et Passent*, Yacouba's descent into terrorism is catalyzed by the state's brutal killing of his father, an act emblematic of impunity and disregard for marginalized lives. This mirrors historical injustices in African societies where state power has frequently been exercised with violence rather than protection. As Ehigie (2025) argues in his study on witchcraft and divine justice, fear and power are often intimately linked in communities where the state fails to provide security, thus driving individuals toward alternative forms of agency.

Boum's novel underscores how systemic failures perpetuate cycles of trauma and vengeance. When justice is denied through official channels, individuals may seek redress through violent means, especially in contexts where militant ideologies offer a semblance of purpose and revenge. This theme resonates with the findings of Ehigie & Braimoh (2024), who analyze how belief systems and traditional logics often supplant formal institutions in shaping moral responses to perceived injustice. Similarly, as noted in Tricoire (2023), the frustration of regional youth in Central and West Africa, especially in contexts like Douala and northern Cameroon, is frequently articulated through narratives of migration and radicalization, with Boum's depiction of Yacouba providing a particularly stark example.

### **Retaliatory Violence: A Narrative of Resistance**

Yacouba's transformation illustrates retaliatory violence not merely as an act of vengeance but as a narrative of resistance against entrenched power structures. This conceptualization aligns with broader African literary portrayals of marginalized characters reclaiming agency through violent means. While morally contentious, such representations reflect the desperation of those systematically silenced. Boum's nuanced portrayal resists simplification; Yacouba is not glorified but is presented as a product of his socio-political environment. Ehigie (2025) suggests that in African cosmologies, proximity and familiarity often determine the intensity of fear, with threats from within communities being perceived as more immediate and potent than abstract external forces. In this light, Yacouba's retaliatory violence is directed at state actors and functions as a statement against the betrayal by his society. His radicalization thus serves both personal and communal functions: personal in avenging his father, and communal in articulating a broader disillusionment with societal failure.

Furthermore, as Konaté (2009) explored in *La Malédiction du Lamantin*, traditional belief systems often provide frameworks for interpreting and responding to injustice. In Boum's novel, Yacouba's descent parallels the Bozo villagers' deference to the river deity Maa, showing how spiritual and moral codes fill the void left by state dysfunction. Both narratives expose how violence, whether sanctioned by deities or militant ideologies, becomes a vehicle for articulating grievances and asserting identity in contexts of marginalization. These literary techniques recall the stylistic analyses of Michel Peyramaure's *L'Orange de Noël* (1996), where thematic use of silence, rupture, and emotional layering conveys the trauma of historical violence (Ehigie, 2019).

### **Theoretical Reflections from African and Global Scholarship**

Retaliatory violence in African literature frequently serves as a commentary on structural failure. Ehigie & Braimoh (2024) argue that individuals revert to culturally coherent logics where formal justice systems are ineffective or delegitimized, often grounded in spirituality, kinship, and collective memory. These alternative frameworks become the basis for morally legitimizing actions that, under different circumstances, would be deemed unacceptable. In *Les Jours Viennent et Passent*, Boum positions Yacouba within such a framework. His involvement with Boko Haram is not impulsive; it is a calculated response to a world where institutional justice has collapsed. This reflects what Dare Ehigie (2025) terms "relational epistemology," where the legitimacy of belief and action derives from communal experience rather than abstract moral codes. The fear of injustice becomes internalized, shaping individual identity and communal behavior.

Violence, then, becomes a social grammar through which disenfranchised individuals communicate their pain.

Boum's narrative craft has been noted in *Le Sanctuaire de la Culture* (2023) as deliberately blurring lines between victim and perpetrator, thus heightening the moral ambiguity surrounding radicalization. The article argues that Boum portrays violence as a tragic echo of silenced histories, reinforcing the need for literary empathy and political memory. This complexity is echoed in the stylistic tension in Peyramaure's historical fiction, where trauma and resistance unfold simultaneously within the protagonists' psyches.

### **Case Study: Yacouba and Boko Haram**

Yacouba's trajectory exemplifies how systemic injustice seeds radicalization. Initially portrayed as an ordinary young man, his transformation begins with the public execution of his father, a symbolic erasure of his lineage and identity. This act catalyzes a profound psychological rupture, leaving him vulnerable to the ideological promises of Boko Haram. In joining the group, Yacouba does not simply choose violence; he selects a narrative that restores meaning to his suffering. Boko Haram's rhetoric, steeped in anti-Western and anti-state sentiments, appeals to those disillusioned by state failure. The organization constructs a counter-narrative that frames violence as a form of justice, reclaiming dignity through blood. Boum's portrayal of Yacouba aligns with the findings of Ehigie (2025), who notes that spiritual logics often justify action when secular systems fail to provide redress. In this context, Yacouba's radicalization becomes an act of spiritual rebellion, a reimagining of justice on his terms.

Moreover, Yacouba's transformation is not isolated. It reflects a broader trend in conflict zones where youth, disenfranchised and traumatized, become susceptible to ideologies that offer belonging and purpose. The psychological mechanisms at play, grief, anger, and alienation, are universal, but local contexts shape their manifestation. Boum masterfully illustrates this by embedding Yacouba's journey within the socio-political realities of northern Cameroon and Nigeria, which have been historically marked by neglect and militarization. As Tricoire (2023) documented, such regions function as literary metaphors for alienation, where mobility, repression, and extremism intersect.

### **Literary Synpaper**

Through Yacouba's story, Boum invites readers to confront the uncomfortable truth that violence often emerges not from inherent evil but from sustained exposure to injustice. The cycle of retaliatory violence is thus not an aberration but a rational,

if tragic, response to systemic failure. Boum's literary approach does not excuse violence but contextualizes it, compelling the reader to see beyond binaries of victim and perpetrator. The works of Ehigie (2025) and Ehigie & Braimoh (2024) reinforce this reading by offering theoretical frameworks rooted in African epistemologies. Their analyses suggest that individuals gravitate toward cultural and spiritual systems that make sense of their experiences in societies where formal institutions are either absent or mistrusted. In such systems, justice is not delayed; it is immediate, relational, and often violent.

By incorporating stylistic analysis from the Peyramaure study and cultural critiques from *Le Sanctuaire de la Culture*, we understand how Boum manipulates narrative and character psychology to reveal layered social commentary. Ultimately, Boum's novel serves as both a warning and a call for empathy. It warns of the dangers of state neglect and the moral cost of ignoring historical grievances. Simultaneously, it calls for a deeper understanding of the emotional and cultural logic that drives individuals like Yacouba toward violence. By situating retaliatory violence within a continuum of systemic injustice, Boum contributes to a more nuanced discourse on terrorism, victimhood, and resistance in African literature.

### **Contribution to Research**

This study contributes to the expanding field of African literary scholarship, particularly in its intersection with terrorism studies, trauma theory, and victimology. By examining Hemley Boum's *Les Jours viennent et passent*, the research offers a nuanced interpretation of how African literature engages with the moral complexities of radicalization, victimhood, and agency. The paper provides a multilayered understanding of characters such as Jenny, Tina, and Yacouba, whose transformations from victims to participants in terrorism challenge binary categorizations of good and evil. In doing so, the study moves beyond reductive depictions of terrorists as either villains or helpless victims, advocating instead for a more contextualized and empathetic analysis grounded in psychological and socio-political realism.

One of the key contributions of this research is its exploration of female subjectivity within extremist violence. In particular, Jenny's case illuminates how emotional vulnerability, stemming from guilt, social rejection, or familial conflict, can be manipulated through spiritual and ideological rhetoric. By analyzing Jenny's trajectory through the lens of trauma and religious manipulation, the paper adds depth to the discourse on gender and radicalization in African literature. This focus on the gendered dynamics of psychological coercion fills a gap in existing studies that often overlook the emotional and cognitive complexities shaping female

participation in terrorist movements. Drawing from Pemberton and Aarten's (2017) victimological framework and the trauma scholarship of Megbulem (2025), the research contributes to our understanding of how narrative identity is reconstructed under emotional duress, often resulting in moral ambiguity and ideological realignment.

Furthermore, the study deepens existing literary discussions around the moral ambiguity of characters involved in political violence. Through a close reading of Boum's character development, especially in the figures of Yacouba and Jenny, the paper foregrounds the tension between coercion and consent. Rather than positioning these characters solely as products of manipulation or ideology, the study reveals how they exercise constrained agency within specific emotional and socio-political contexts. This contribution is significant in the African context, where discussions of terrorism often emphasize external ideological influences while underexploring the internal, affective landscapes that shape radicalization. By incorporating trauma theory and narrative studies, this research introduces a richer vocabulary for discussing moral complexity in African conflict literature.

In addition to its literary insights, the paper makes a broader interdisciplinary contribution by engaging with contemporary discourses in conflict and terrorism studies. Adeyeye's (2019) audit of African terrorism literature highlights the need for approaches that consider the interplay of personal trauma, ideological seduction, and systemic neglect. This paper responds to that call by integrating literary analysis with sociological and psychological insights, demonstrating how fiction can reveal the emotional and ethical dilemmas that conventional terrorism studies often overlook. The literary case studies of Jenny and Yacouba function as microcosms of broader patterns of disaffection and radicalization in postcolonial African societies, showing how unresolved trauma and moral injury can be catalysts for extremist allegiance.

Moreover, the paper contributes to the growing conversation around symbolic violence and its role in ideological recruitment. Vambe and Rwafa's (2014) work on African film and literature underscores how symbolic manipulation, especially of spiritual and cultural metaphors, can normalize and legitimize violence. This research extends that argument by demonstrating how characters in Boum's novel internalize such symbols to reinterpret their victimhood as a moral vocation. The analysis of how Jenny associates divine reward with ideological violence exemplifies the transformative power of language and belief in shaping perceptions of justice and redemption. Such findings are valuable for literary critics, policy analysts, and educators seeking to understand the emotional grammar of extremism.

Importantly, the study challenges prevailing perpetrator/victim dichotomies paradigms by illustrating how characters often embody both roles simultaneously. This duality is crucial for understanding the psychological and narrative mechanisms through which individuals justify or rationalize violence. Applying Pemberton's (2017) theory of narrative identity and "troubled lives," the paper argues that radicalized individuals often see themselves as narrating a story of redemption or restoration, even when their actions cause harm. This insight offers a vital corrective to dehumanizing representations of terrorists in both academic and media discourses, suggesting instead that a deeper engagement with their backstories and emotional ruptures is necessary for holistic understanding.

Finally, this research enriches the field of trauma and postcolonial studies by showing how literature from the African continent can articulate forms of suffering that are both personal and political. As the study shows, Boum's novel does not merely depict trauma but transforms it into a narrative engine, propelling characters toward choices that defy easy moral judgment. In so doing, the paper underscores the value of literary fiction as a space for theorizing complex emotional experiences, especially those shaped by colonial legacies, gender dynamics, and religious symbolism. The paper makes a significant contribution by bridging literary analysis with victimological and psychological frameworks to illuminate the emotional and moral terrain of radicalization in African fiction. Its focus on complex characters like Jenny and Yacouba challenges simplistic notions of good and evil, offering instead a portrait of terrorism that is emotionally fraught, psychologically nuanced, and ethically ambivalent. This contribution advances literary scholarship and opens up new pathways for interdisciplinary research and policy engagement.

### **Future Research**

While this paper offers a significant contribution to understanding victimhood, radicalization, and moral complexity in African literature, particularly through the lens of Hemley Boum's *Les Jours viennent et passent*, it also opens several pathways for future scholarly exploration. The intricate interplay between trauma, ideology, and constrained agency seen in characters like Jenny and Yacouba is rich with implications that transcend the specific novel studied here. Future research can deepen and broaden this thematic inquiry by applying interdisciplinary methodologies, exploring comparative case studies, and examining underexplored literary and cultural dynamics in African and postcolonial contexts.

First, one promising direction for future research lies in a comparative analysis of trauma-driven radicalization across different African literary texts. While this study

focuses on Boum's characters, other works, such as Max Lobe's *Loin de Douala* or Ahmadou Kourouma's *Allah n'est pas obligé*, could provide valuable contrasts in how child soldiers, young radicals, and displaced victims internalize violence. The work of Pemberton and Aarten (2017), which underscores the importance of narrative structure in victimology, offers a methodological blueprint for analyzing how trauma is not merely experienced but narratively framed by protagonists. Such comparative work could help articulate cross-cultural patterns in the representation of psychological rupture and moral disengagement across Francophone, Anglophone, and Lusophone African literature.

Second, the role of language and translation in representing culturally sensitive narratives demands more critical attention. Drawing from Onomejoh, Ehigie, Igbinovia, and Braimoh (2024), who explore the role of interpersonal communication in translating sensitive texts, future studies might investigate how the translation of trauma and extremism is mediated through linguistic and cultural filters. For instance, Jenny's perception of her radicalization as "divinely ordained" becomes linguistically encoded through religious diction. How does this religious framing shift when translated into other languages, particularly in Anglophone contexts where the word "jihad" might carry different political connotations? As Onomejoh et al. (2024) argue, translators serve not just as linguistic agents but as cultural mediators, navigating the line between fidelity to the text and sensitivity to the audience. Further research could analyze whether translating ideologically loaded African narratives preserves or distorts the characters' complex moral subjectivities.

Additionally, interdisciplinary approaches incorporating communication studies and translation theory could be applied to better understand how narrative reception varies across cultural contexts. The cultural and linguistic ruptures observed in texts like Ramonu Sanusi's *Un Nègre A Violé Une Blonde À Dallas*, discussed in depth by Onomejoh et al. (2024), highlight how racial and ideological tensions are intensified or softened depending on the translator's cultural proximity and communicative skill. As that study reveals, translators must balance fidelity to the source with cultural sensitivity to avoid misrepresenting or diluting politically or emotionally charged content. Applying this framework to the translation of Boum's novel could open up questions about how radicalization narratives are softened, intensified, or sanitized through translation, and how these choices affect international understanding of African extremism.

There is also scope for further research into the emotional rhetoric of religious extremism in African narratives. Ahmadou's use of religious phrases to manipulate Jenny, promising her a "special place in the heart of Allah", suggests a sophisticated

emotional grammar that transforms shame into spiritual aspiration. This persuasive language deserves further exploration through discourse analysis, possibly grounded in cognitive linguistics or pragmatics, as exemplified by Ehigie & Braimoh's (2024) study of intercultural communication in Konaté's *La Malédiction du Lamantin*. Their findings suggest that pragmatic cues, cultural schemas, and implicit ideologies embedded in language shape characters' decisions subtly but profoundly. Future research could apply this model to characters like Jenny, revealing how language reflects belief and constructs and reaffirms radicalized worldviews.

Moreover, the future of African trauma and terrorism narratives also calls for increased attention to gendered representations. While this paper begins to unpack Jenny's psychological manipulation and constrained agency, it only scratches the surface of the broader issue: how African literature portrays young women in extremism. Scholars like Megbulem (2025) have pointed to the underrepresentation of female trauma in postcolonial studies. Further research could examine whether female characters like Jenny are depicted as psychologically credible or reduced to narrative devices that elicit reader sympathy. Comparative studies involving other female characters in works like Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* or Scholastique Mukasonga's *Notre-Dame du Nil* may provide insights into how gender, trauma, and extremism intersect differently depending on the cultural, religious, and historical context.

In another vein, more attention could be directed toward the reception studies of extremist narratives. The study by Onomejoh et al. (2024) emphasizes that the interpretation of controversial texts is shaped not only by their authors and translators but also by the cultural sensibilities of the audience. Therefore, future research might include audience reception surveys or ethnographic interviews to understand how readers from different regions interpret the ethical and emotional nuances of characters like Jenny. Do Western readers interpret her as a victim? Do African audiences perceive her actions through a more religious or moral lens? The answers to these questions could enrich literary criticism and counter-extremism discourse by illuminating how readers ethically negotiate narratives with different values and assumptions.

Lastly, integrating the insights from Jimoh Braimoh's *The Perfect Scholar* (2014), future research might consider how educational texts and moral instruction contrast with the ideological grooming depicted in African terrorism narratives. Braimoh emphasizes the formative value of intellectual discipline, critical thinking, and moral clarity, traits that could be studied as counterpoints to the manipulative mentoring tactics employed by characters like Ahmadou. Such inquiry could

deepen our understanding of how competing educational paradigms, one rooted in ethical reasoning and the other in ideological absolutism, shape African youth. Research could explore how literature and educational discourse intersect to model either resistance to or susceptibility toward extremist thought. The future of research into African narratives of trauma and radicalization is as complex and multifaceted as the stories themselves. By expanding into comparative literature, translation studies, gender studies, reception theory, and educational philosophy, future scholars can continue to unravel the layered ethical, emotional, and cultural dimensions of texts like *Les Jours viennent et passent*. These inquiries will enrich literary discourse and inform broader efforts in counter-extremism, intercultural dialogue, and global empathy.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to investigate the complex relationship between systemic injustice, victimhood, radicalization, and moral ambiguity in Hemley Boum's *Les Jours viennent et passent*, positioning the novel within the broader discourse of African literature's engagement with terrorism and trauma. Through a close reading of key characters, particularly Jenny, Yacouba, Ahmadou, and Tina, the paper has illuminated how Boum resists simplistic binaries of perpetrator and victim, offering a nuanced portrayal of individuals shaped by historical injustices, emotional vulnerabilities, and ideological manipulation. These portrayals not only reflect the realities of African societies grappling with extremism but also interrogate the psychological and ethical mechanisms through which radicalization occurs. Central to the paper has been the argument that victimhood and complicity are not mutually exclusive states but often exist in tension within the same individual. Jenny's trajectory from a guilt-ridden adolescent to a supporter of Boko Haram exemplifies how emotional trauma can serve as fertile ground for ideological grooming. Ahmadou's use of religious rhetoric to exploit her guilt, promising her spiritual salvation and divine favor, exemplifies the emotional and symbolic violence through which radical ideologies recruit followers. This process, as shown, is not merely political but deeply psychological, revealing the intimate mechanisms of control and persuasion that lie at the heart of extremist recruitment.

Yacouba's transformation from an innocent boy to a committed militant further underscores the role of structural violence and state failure in shaping individual destinies. His radicalization, catalyzed by the state's public execution of his father, reflects a narrative common in African conflict zones where the absence of justice and the presence of trauma become the conditions under which terrorism appears not only justifiable but necessary. These character arcs have been analyzed using theoretical frameworks from victimology (Pemberton & Aarten, 2017), trauma

studies (Megbulem, 2025), and intercultural communication (Ehigie & Braimoh, 2024), each contributing to a more holistic understanding of how individuals navigate moral choices in contexts of extreme pressure and emotional fragmentation.

The paper also expanded the discourse by highlighting the gendered dimensions of radicalization, as seen in Jenny's case. While male narratives of extremism are often explored through militarization and public violence, female radicalization is frequently framed in terms of emotional vulnerability, spiritual longing, or romantic entanglement. However, Boum complicates this framing by giving Jenny the space and agency to make ideologically driven choices, even when confronted with contrary evidence by characters like Ismaël. Her labeling of dissenters as "infidels" and her disregard for the group's documented atrocities reveal a depth of conviction that challenges the notion of her as merely a passive victim. This complexity has been explored through contemporary gender theory and literary trauma criticism, affirming the necessity of including emotional and psychological nuance in studies of women in extremism.

Beyond character analysis, the paper contributes to a broader understanding of how African literature is a narrative space for negotiating the aftermath of colonialism, state violence, and ideological conflict. Boum's novel is a story of personal choices and a cultural text that captures the psychic and moral cost of unresolved systemic injustice. The intertwining of religion, guilt, trauma, and redemption in the plot reflects real-world dynamics in African regions afflicted by extremism, thus grounding the literary analysis in socio-political reality. This positioning underscores literature's value as not merely artistic expression but as critical commentary and social diagnosis.

Furthermore, this research has demonstrated the importance of translation, communication, and narrative framing in shaping the reception of radicalization narratives. Drawing from the work of Onomejoh et al. (2024), the paper highlights how translation is not a neutral act but a culturally sensitive process that can either preserve or distort a text's emotional and ideological integrity. Understanding how key terms, especially those rooted in religion or local idioms, are rendered in other languages can significantly affect how international readers interpret the motivations and moral positioning of characters like Jenny and Yacouba. Future research could build on this insight by exploring reception studies or comparative translation analysis, especially in multilingual African societies.

Incorporating Jimoh Braimoh's *The Perfect Scholar* (2014) further enriches this analysis by offering a counter-model of moral and intellectual formation. *Les Jours viennent et passent* explores how ideological mentors manipulate young minds for violent ends; *The Perfect Scholar* celebrates discipline, inquiry, and ethical clarity as foundations for responsible citizenship. This contrast invites more profound reflection on the role of education, formal and informal, in shaping youth responses to injustice. It also points toward practical interventions that extend beyond literary criticism to educational policy and counter-extremism programming.

Ultimately, the findings of this paper speak to the urgent need for more nuanced, interdisciplinary, and context-sensitive approaches to studying terrorism and radicalization in African literature. By foregrounding this issue's emotional, psychological, and cultural dimensions, the research pushes back against reductionist interpretations and instead calls for a more compassionate and complex understanding of those caught in the crosshairs of ideology and trauma. Boum's work, and others like it, demonstrate that literature can be a powerful tool for exposing the roots of violence and imagining paths toward healing, justice, and transformation. *Les Jours viennent et passent* offers more than a fictional account of terrorism; it serves as a lens through which we can interrogate the layered realities of trauma, belief, and moral ambiguity in postcolonial Africa. This paper has sought to unpack those layers, showing that the most compelling stories of extremism are not those that demonize, but those that humanize, those that challenge us to see not just the choices people make, but the histories and wounds that shape those choices. In doing so, it affirms the power of African literature to deepen our understanding of global crises through voices that are at once local and universal, painful and illuminating, fragile and profound.

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