

Abstract:

This thesis sees two texts, Véronique Tadjo's *The Shadow of Imana* and Tarfia Faizullah's *Seam*, as conversational openings into discourses concerned with memory, community, trauma, nationhood and temporality within the field of contemporary African Literary criticism. As a thesis in the discipline of Literary Studies, it is engaged too in conversations surrounding form, subjectivity, representation, language and poetics.

This thesis attempts to read some elements within the scope of what is broadly termed 'memory studies' alongside these texts, wondering in which ways that lens might illuminate these works, and in turn how these texts might complicate that scope. In particular, this research believes in the potential for productive and meaningful engagement with pasts that remain present in order to establish routes into a more desirable future.

Tadjo's text arises out of the aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide, while Faizullah's poetry collection is intimately organised around the Bangladeshi War of Liberation. Both these events were horrific, and continue to play out and impact the lives of individuals and nations long after their supposed endpoint. This thesis will argue, in allyship with thinkers such as Homi Bhabha and Avery Gordon, that all critical subjects have a responsibility to such pasts, to acknowledge their workings in the present, and the mechanisms in which they continue to structure various national and global futures.

The complex temporality of such rupturing violence calls into question simpler temporal trajectories that plot the future as progress. The first chapter muses on the potential of remembering oneself into a community, whether that is one that is prescribed for the subject by normative discourses or not. The second chapter, working closely with Walter Benjamin's theories on excavation, wonders where these memories, or these pasts, might be sought out in the midst of traumatic silence. The third chapter considers the design of the nation, how it both depends upon and rejects particular modes of storytelling, and how that ambivalence can be harnessed and driven towards a more just and desirable future.