

Memories from Turbulence to Calm: Reading Survival, Silences and Stories from Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*

¹Manngai H Phom, ²Rakhee Kalita Moral, HoD,

¹Research Scholar, Department of English, Cotton University, Assam, India

²Department of English, Cotton University, Assam, India

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51244/IJRSI.2026.1308000191>

Received 24 August 2026; Accepted: 29 August 2026; Published: 15 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Naga literature has been studied as a post-colonial response to the underpinning of colonial aftermath and as veneration to Indigenous cultural continuities. As a region that experienced the tumultuous adversities of war and insurgency it holds memories of trauma, pain, dispossession and cultural breakdown. In *These Hills Called Home: Stories From A War Zone* by Temsula Ao, marginalised stories are resurfaced whereby personal and communal experiences are narrated. The stories express the hurt and pain of the insurgent day where personal trauma, socio-economic losses, displacement and torture. As postcolonial literature, the collection engages in centering indigenous expression and perspective of the war days; the cultural approach to adapting and confronting the day of trials. Ao brings in her elements the atrocities in social life of the everyday disrupted by the war, people of all ages not sparing even children as victims. This resonates with what post colonial theorist Linda Tuhiwai Smith contests in her book *Decolonising Methodologies*, on how story telling is active remembering and countering formative histories, and historical commemoration from Indigenous cultural perspective. Ao's stories from the memories of the remembered past highlight memories of cultural survival, personal struggle and communal response to the tumultuous days. Her attempts to create a cultural imagination of the Naga's encounter with the predicament combine the projection of wits, endurance, tenacity, resilience, and resistance from the accounts and stories of the survivors. In this discussion I will examine the aspect of postcoloniality in Ao's story, locating the narratives as a cursor to understanding the present using a decolonial approach. I will further highlight some key motivations to analyze and read the text as contestations to existing notions of histories by engaging the Indigenous perspective employed to counter historical narrative; mechanizing silenced narratives, collective consciousness and shared memories, supported by personal stories and testimonials presented in the book.

Keywords: Counter-Narration, Decolonization, Indigeneity, Memories, Postcolonial lives

INTRODUCTION

Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories From A War Zone* (2006) represents a direct literary intervention against the historical obliteration of Naga subjectivity due to the Indian state's militaristic actions. Since the first time Nagaland experienced military intervention, decades of conflict have ensued. In response to this decades-long conflict in Nagaland, Ao uses storytelling as a form of counter-memory; a means to rewrite narratives that have been omitted from official historiography. Ao's use of fiction to illustrate actual events (disappearances, village burnings, state violence) supports Michael-Rolph Trouillot's argument that historical silences result not merely from a failure to recollect memories but rather from a refusal to document them. Trouillot states, "Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial junctures: the creation of facts, the assemblage of facts, the retrieval of facts, and the retrospective significance of those facts" (Trouillot, 1995.p. 2). Like the silences described by Trouillot, Ao's stories highlight them by presenting personal memory as a legitimate source of historical knowledge. Viewing the collection through the lens of postcolonialism, the collection resonates with Linda Tuhiwai Smith's principles for decolonizing research, especially with her emphasis on storytelling as

a culturally relevant method of resistance and recovery. Using oral traditions and local cosmology as a basis, Ao's narratives provide a voice to Indigenous ways of knowing and recalling that challenge colonial epistemologies. For example, in the story "The Last Song," a young girl defiantly sings prior to her death, transforming a violent act into an act of cultural assertion. This moment reflects Smith's statement that "storytelling is not simply a method; it is a way to retrieve the past" (Smith, 2021. P. 5). By focusing on the daily lives of ordinary Naga people and their emotional responses to their surroundings, Ao creates what may be described as a collective archive—an area where memory, trauma, and resistance coexist. Through her fiction, Ao blurs the lines between history and storytelling and emphasizes that individual experiences and collective cultural memories are essential elements of historical truth.

These Hills Called Home therefore, exemplifies how Indigenous storytelling serves as both witness and archival record, documenting the complexity of a conflict that state histories typically attempt to simplify or eliminate. My analysis will examine Ao's work as a response to silencing imposed upon marginal writers by various agencies and how these marginalized writers regain control of their position as narrators of their own stories.

Temsula Ao (1945) is a renowned Indian writer, poet, ethnographer, and academic from Nagaland whose contributions to Naga writing and preservation of oral traditions have been recognized internationally. Most of her work is written in English and addresses themes related to conflict, gender, identity, memory and most notably, the interface between traditionalism and modernism providing a unique indigenous viewpoint within the context of postcolonial literature. Her most significant collections of short stories and novels include *These Hills Called Home: Stories From A War Zone* (2009) which describes the bleak days of insurgency and militarization in Nagaland and *Laburnum For My Head* (2009) for which she received the Sahitya Akademi Award for its poignant portrayals of women's lives and their daily interactions in the post-war environment. Her poetry collections *Songs That Tell* and *Songs From the Other Life* are anthologies of poems reflecting on her experiences as a victim in the war aftermath and as a resident of Nagaland combining lyrical introspection with socio-cultural protestations. The *Ao-Naga Oral Tradition* is an ethnography of the Ao Nagas written by Ao demonstrating her expertise as an ethnographer—a seminal contribution to Indigenous knowledge systems with a combination of customs, folklore, and mythology of the Ao Naga tribe. In addition to receiving numerous awards for her academic and literary achievements (T. & Padmanabhan, 2020, p. 2), Ao has also received the Padma Shri (2007).

In addition to preserving and reclaiming their history through oral narratives, Ao in her stories notes that Naga people are "restricted from their routine activities, demonstrating to them that the 'freedom' they enjoyed could so easily be robbed at gunpoint by the 'invading' army" (11). Through her storytelling, Ao presents her characters as historical subjects whose underpinnings she explores using various themes such as homeland, identity, history, socio-cultural resurgence, violence, memory, trauma and vulnerability placing the culture in the transnationality traverse while addressing that socio-political morbidity against the backdrop of insurgency. Her engagements with history, memory, indigenous and ethnic values retain the authenticity in her narratology engaging local voices via orality. "There are no winners, only victims and the result can be measured only in human terms" (x), writes Ao. Her stories are embedded with aspects of orature which stir cultural consciousness and further evoke themes of civil unrest, indignation, exploitation of power, human rights violations and cultural and historical ignorance within the community (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022. P. 3). Her use of fiction to explore real events including disappearances, village burnings and state violence correlates with Michel-Rolph Trouillot's argument that historical silences are generated not only by what is forgotten but by what is never recorded. Story-telling is critical for the Indigenous community to create a historical site through the discourse which Ao skillfully delivers via an auto-ethnographic mode of narrating Nagaland's protracted struggles. Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories From A War Zone* (2006) is a collection of short stories that illustrates the experiences of socio-political chaos in Nagaland resulting from memory of human consequences of prolonged conflict between Naga rebels and the Indian government (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 3). Utilizing both oral tradition and local history, Ao's narratives focus on everyday life experiences of people (primarily women) whose experiences are shaped by episodes of militarization, trauma, and subsequent displacement (Brar & Khanna, 2025.p 12). The stories portray the moral ambiguities associated with war and how it affects those who live through it. Unlike conventional portrayals of heroism and villainy, the stories emphasize the lasting psychological effects of war on the community including persons such as the grieving mother, resilient survivor, and disillusioned soldier.

Ao examines themes of identity, memory, cultural resistance, and violence. These stories serve as counter-narratives to what official histories describe as historical truths and thus function as a form of literary resistance recovering lost voices from silence-imposed. *These Hills Called Home* serves as a collective archive representing storytelling as a means of memorialization and recognizing literature's role in recovering and maintaining cultural memory and addressing historical silences (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 3).

Contextualizing Violence

Nagaland's Forgotten War in the state's modern history is primarily defined by the violent clashes between Indian armed forces and the Naga nationalistic and secessionist movements (Waterman, 2020, p. 128). Cycles of violence, control and militarization have affected this region since the 1950s. The suffering of the people of Nagaland is evident in these cycles of violence; however, their suffering seems to be marginalized in the broader mainstream Indian historical narrative (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 10). In addition to marginalization in the historical narrative of India, the intergenerational effects of the violence on the Nagas, such as the psychological and emotional harm, are usually overlooked. Michel-Rolph Trouillot states that it is not the silence of history but the silence of remembrance that creates historical silences and maintains political violence, state violence, and violence that persists throughout time (Jones, 2024, p. 14). Nagaland is an extreme example of profound state violence that has impacted the lives of its ordinary citizens resulting in trauma and vulnerability. The narrative of Ao fills in the gaps created by history and illustrates a vivid articulation of the silencing fall-out of trauma. Rather than attempting to portray a chronological account of the conflict, Ao creates a mosaic of memories, vivid realities, voices, and testimonials that convey the enduring psychological distress caused by the conflict (T. & Padmanabhan, 2020, p. 2). These representations in fragmented forms express the dissonant consciousness experienced by those who have lived through the constant threat of violence, which is intrinsically linked to intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational trauma has been studied extensively in psychology and cultural studies (O'Neill et al., 2016, p. 179) but confines itself to examining the transmission of traumatic experiences from one generation to another. Initially developed to study the descendants of Holocaust survivors, this concept has expanded to include Indigenous studies by studying the scars left by colonial violence, displacement and the destruction of cultural identity. In the Naga context, the study of intergenerational trauma is not limited to the direct experiences of state and insurgent violence but also includes forms of enforced silence, fear and humiliation and anxiety and vulnerabilities that result from these experiences.

Bearing the Wounds of the Past: Intergenerational Trauma

Temsula Ao's book *These Hills Called Home: Stories From A War Zone* (2006) emphasizes the atrocities committed against civilians through political violence by highlighting the consequences and experiences in the area (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 3). By using a fictional narrative in which she places her story in the real-time historical events of the conflict, Temsula reveals multiple layers of experiences suffered by the victims and also through generations in their community. Collectively, while redirecting the brutal experiences of armed conflict along with other forms of torture, burning of villages, enforced disappearances, the narratives of Ao also present multiple levels of impacts due to violence; namely the transmission of trauma across generations and communities. The intergenerational trauma framework provides a method for reading Ao's narratives that portrays inherited suffering, shared collective memories, and the vulnerability of identity in the midst of violent catastrophe. As a form of cultural survival and resilience, Ao embeds historical context into her fictions as a counter-narrative to existing historical accounts. This concept emphasizes the importance of narrative as a means for processing and presenting collective experiences of trauma and therefore adds to our understanding of how trauma affects identity and memory in affected communities. "An Old Man Remembers" contains a description of Sashi and Imli's lives in the jungle. Sashi recounts the brutal violations of human rights he experienced during the Naga insurgency and describes them to his grandson Mao. Sashi feels that the memory is too painful to recall and should be forgotten. After the death of his wife, Sashi decides to live alone in the jungle with Imli away from social and family contacts. Sashi views his solitary journey as only for him to conceal his trauma and not share his pain; thus allowing his trauma to evolve slowly into solitude.

Thus unaware of the entire story, Mao questions him like a murderer. "Grandfather, is it true that you and grandfather Imli killed many people when you were in the jungle? Old man Sashi was completely taken aback by the question." (Ao, 2005) The above quote illustrates how in "An Old Man Remembers" Sashi is questioned

by his grandson Mao who perceives him as a murderer and not a freedom fighter without hearing his story from his perspective. Situations like this cause members of the older generations like Sashi to realize the necessity of sharing their stories with younger generations since stories that are not understood completely will either be misinterpreted or distorted by future generations. Inherited trauma can be exemplified in "An Old Man Remembers". An elderly man named Sashi who has experienced village raids and lost family members describes his experiences with both sorrow and emotional detachment. These memories extend beyond personal experiences; they serve as a repository for communal grief and the memory of lost traditions and illustrate the collective impact of trauma on communities. "Although he tried to live a normal life as an ordinary villager, he could not conceal from his wife the inner turmoil that troubled him constantly. Often his wife had to wake him up when he moaned and groaned in his sleep. Many times he woke up screaming because of bad dreams..." (Ao, 2005. p. 67) Although Sashi lives in relative peace during the current cease fire agreement period, he still suffers from memories of previous violence surfacing in unexpected ways - through tears, mourning and even nightmares. These involuntary responses indicate a deep psychological disturbance stemming from unprocessed trauma. Judith Herman, memory studies critic writes that "remembering and telling the truth of terrible events are prerequisites both for restoring social order and for healing individual victims" (Herman, 2015.p. 17). Memory functions for Sashi more as an emotional reflex shaped by experiences too difficult for him to put into words than as a conscious archive. His decision to recount these stories to Mao allows him to re-visit what has remained unstated and provide voice to emotions that have been suppressed for years. In doing so Sashi not only seeks personal relief but also starts to integrate his private memories into a larger fractured narrative of Naga cultural history. The silence of the old man's actions demonstrates a type of response to trauma. He remained silent unless asked by journalists. This demonstrates how trauma is often not expressed verbally among individuals close to each other. This exemplifies Cathy Caruth's theory regarding traumatic memory: events are unforgettable yet inarticulate (Raj, 2024, p. 58). What remains unexpressed often manifests itself in other forms - repetitive behavior, emotional instability or failed relationships. Ao's narratives demonstrate how silence can act as both a protective mechanism resulting in deliberate erasure of trauma and an experience of unexpressed and unrelieved anguish endured only by victims who cannot convey their unresolved sorrow to their offspring.

Selected Textual Analysis

"The Last Song" is a narrative about two women (Abneyo and Libeni), a mother and a daughter, who are physically damaged during the turbulent years. The narrative portrays the vulnerability of women in the war-torn areas, such as the sexual assault of the mother and daughter by the Indian militants for paying taxes to the insurgent groups (Padmanabhan & Suganya, 2022). "... Although by the time the fourth assailant mounted her, she was dead. Abneyo, while terribly bruised and dazed by what had occurred to her, was still breathing... There were witnesses to their despicable actions. He turned to his men and instructed them to open fire on the individuals now raising the bodies of the two women." (Ao, 2005, p. 13). The dedication of the new church building was when the soldiers entered the church and assaulted many, kicking them. Abneyo and her mother became prey for the soldiers. "During those days, villages were destroyed, people were tortured, and women were sexually abused" (Pou, 2018. B). Women and children have always been the victims of the larger casualties at war wounded beyond physical; they are assaulted psychologically and emotionally. "Sexual violence against women in war and conflict has been seen as one of the biggest crimes against humanity. It is not just a humiliation of the community but violates an individual's rights to live with dignity. Yet, time and again, "rape" has been used as a weapon in war." (Pou, 2018. P. 28). Abneyo sings defiantly while being mutilated and subsequently killed by the soldiers. Her voice, fragile but unwavering, becomes a metaphor for the lost innocence and resilience both culturally and politically. Abneyo's last song becomes an example that the later generations may hold onto that is not only as a reminder of loss but as an infallible site of collective identity. In postcolonial Indigenous contexts stories of such kind become poignant resources of history in the partial accounts of official documentation. Linda Tuhiwai Smith in *Decolonizing Methodologies* emphasizes storytelling as a mode of Indigenous research as a vital resource and memory-making or (re)historicizing (Porsanger, 2004, p. 106). For Ao, storytelling is both an act of grieving and a way of survival while also ensuring that voices like Abneyo's are not erased by the forces that function to silence them. Gendered trauma and the silent suffering of women in "These Hills Called Home" are primarily depicted as carriers of intergenerational pain (Padmanabhan & Suganya, 2022. P. 3). They are frequently targeted, making them sites for political violence - through rape, torture or genocide (Pou, 2018. P. 23).

In "Death Of A Hunter," a grieving woman not only mourns over her slain husband but also for the disintegration of her family structure and sense of security. Like many of Ao's female characters, she has become a silent vessel of trauma hidden in her grief and silence. Temsula Ao's "The Night" delves into the life of Imnala, a young Naga woman who endures societal scrutiny and patriarchy amidst the fierce political conflict with resilience. Imnala's life is characterized by hardship; she becomes pregnant twice outside of marriage each time abandoned by her partners. Her father, a village elder, and her mother, a woman of firm disposition, silently endure the social stigma alongside their daughter. Despite the criticism and the village council's scrutiny, Imnala decides to raise her children, confronting the difficulties with determination. Her unwavering stance challenges the patriarchal norms of her society highlighting the double standards women often encounter. Through Imnala's story, Ao critiques the societal structures that perpetuate gender inequality and emphasizes the strength necessary to resist them. The tale serves as a testament to the resilience of women who despite adversity assert their agency and challenge oppressive norms.

"The Night" is a powerful narrative that portrays a woman's struggle against societal constraints emphasizing the importance of personal agency and resilience in the face of adversity. A sign of superficial cultural stringency is seen in "The Last Song" at the hour when Abneyo and Libeni's inert bodies were declined and disavowed by their own people to be taken to the graveyard. It was believed that "the deaths of these unfortunate people were considered to be from unnatural causes and according to tradition they could not be buried in the village graveyard." (Ao, 2005.p. 28) Despite being loved and praised for her melodious strains Abneyo could not be protected by her village people out of fear of the harsh consequences from the armed personnel. Abneyo and Libeni's sacrifice and suffering in the face of death did not receive any honorable burial; it was unacknowledged. Their bodies were kept outside the village without any headstones erected for them (Ao, 2005.p. 28). This illustrates the persistent recurrence of the old beliefs and customs despite the acceptance of Christianity. What happened to the two was considered a humiliation to the Naga community. The villagers wanted to erase part of the story from the history of the villages to preserve their dignity. Abneyo and Libeni in this regard are rejected by their own people. "When the cry is not answered, the sense of basic trust is shattered. Traumatized people feel utterly abandoned, utterly alone, cast out of the human and divine systems of care and protection that sustain life." (Ao, 2006. P. 27). For an experience to be accepted as a part of the larger communal experience it requires a process of internalization: collective or shared agony and not as individual private experience. In the story both mother and daughter underwent an experience in which the villagers failed to recognize their anguish within the collective trauma in accordance with the historical discourse of Nagas. The silencing of the women's experiences in the Naga history exposes the structural underpinning promulgated by patriarchy while their male counterparts and their experiences, physical torture and labors, are validated in history as patriotic. Active writing with reference to historical events especially of the vernacular memorial process requires truth telling which Ao centers as cultural remembrance projecting the discrimination towards women's memories. Ao's women are not to be passively read as victims. They are seen often taking on the role of cultural bearers holding onto oral traditions, songs, and memories that will shape the emotional landscapes of future generations. In domestic they exhibit and execute their roles where most traumas are hidden and inherited. Children for example are not aware of what happened but they grow up amidst the pervasive atmosphere of fear and grief.

Cultural dislocation and the fragility of identity A second major impact of intergenerational trauma is an unacknowledged and unconscious deletion of cultural identity. Many of Ao's characters exhibit feelings of disconnection in terms of their physical environment, their culture and emotionally. Young people in particular, who grow up disconnected from their ancestral heritage and are unsure of how to understand their confusing past, experience alienation in relation to their culture due to the generational divide and disconnection from one's culture. The conflict between forgetting and recovering is a central dilemma in relation to the problem. Remembering for some, is too painful; for others, forgetting as an act of deleting is perceived as a betrayal of self. The cultural dislocation is compounded by the absence of institutional acknowledgement of Naga suffering (Baruah,2003.p.23). Due to the absence of acknowledgment, communities must depend on their own mechanisms for preserving memory such as their oral traditions, storytelling and rituals. Ao's stories illustrate this very process of preservation. Through the examination of memory as tools in narrative form, she promotes and resists both erasure and distortion. Ao's fiction does not seek to provide closure to any issue; rather, it relates moments of continued grief and suffering, emphasizing that healing begins by acknowledging the trauma.

Resistant Lives, Resilient Living

After World War II, Nagaland was a hostile environment for communities due to the Indian militia and Naga insurgent groups after the declaration of the Arm Force Special Power Act (AFSPA) 1958. This operation was enforced by the Indian government to control the aggression of the Naga who were protesting to live as a separate nation. This resulted in various destruction and reductions of human rights, especially the civilians, who were victims of the operation while the perpetrators were shielded by impunity. In 202, on the 6th of December 2021, Indian Army's Para commandos shot 14 civilians in Nagaland's Mon district. This was the case of "mistaken identity" (India Today 2021). This shows the decade-long political instability in the region, which also suggests the precariousness of the people and the uncertainties developed over time.

Daily torture, threats and attacks were made on these communities with fear and insecurity. They had nothing left but resentment (Longkumer, 2021. p.12). The last story in Temsula's book *The Hills Called Home*, titled "A New Chapter", discusses the socio-political and economic tensions in Nagaland. Temsula writes about the transition phase that occurred in the mid-1960s after Nagaland became a state (Longkumer, 2021. P. 12). With political instability occurring beneath the surface leading to dilemma and secession following a long period of insurgency and militarization, the narrative emphasizes the psychological and cultural revival experienced by Nagas. The story explores a community trying to heal and recover, and individuals attempting to restore their pre-war lives despite the omnipresent tensions of militancy and war. Merenla, the main character of the story, experiences the reality of post-statehood in a different way. Many Nagas during this time were confused and disoriented, unable to accept the circumstances that Merenla represents. Her struggle represents the collective struggles reflecting the complexities of reconciling traditional identities with the larger ideological framework of the Indian nation-state (Khumanthem Gunibala Devi & Sangeeta Laishram, 2016). The story emphasizes the dilemma of identity crises resulting from conflict and chaos. The narrative implies that although there was a cease-fire agreement reached between India and Nagaland, there remains a degree of chaos. Reflections of self, identity and the wounds of a fragmented society remain evident. In the last song, the elderly woman relating the story of Abenyo and Libeni to the younger generation describes the day as the black sunday of the village. She laments that younger generations "have forgotten how to hear the voice of the earth and wind" (Ao, 2005, p, 24). Temsula Ao attempts to address the reality that many younger generations of today are unaware of their history.

Therefore, their identity is lost. She also states that many do not understand the language of water and earth and are not interested in learning about previous events or historical truths. Through storytelling, the old woman attempts to retrieve lost stories so that younger generations will develop an interest in them, eventually celebrating the lives of Abenyo and Libeni, who formerly existed in the chaotic environment of war where they eventually perished.

Although violence and sadness are prevalent throughout these hills called home, Ao's stories provide a space for healing (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 3). Relinquishing through stories, regardless of how painful it may be, becomes a method for recognizing and integrating trauma. Survivors who speak about their experiences, regardless of their reluctance, regain control over their past. Communities listen and participate in the intergenerational transmission of not only trauma but resiliency. Literature in this context serves as a form of witnessing (Goshi, 2026). Literature provides examples of issues that could not be documented through formal channels. As Ao has stated in interviews, storytelling is crucial and deeply rooted in naga oral tradition and its purpose is not simply for amusement but essential. Storytelling sustains a sense of belonging and centuries-old traditions, particularly during times of displacement and loss. Ao's use of fiction to communicate traumatic memory counters narrative and blurs the lines between history and literature, implying that literature may indeed present a more accurate portrayal of lived experience by including all perspectives who experienced catastrophic days. The imbroglio of uncertainty. During the post-statehood era, nagas were left with uncertainty. Whether to exist or not exist was a decision. To continue fighting for a larger socio-cultural vision of a free Naga or to comply with a new political identity resulting from Nagaland's statehood merging with India. Complying with a new identity--meant protection from surveillance by India's military under AFSPA (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 3). Dolly Kikon, a Naga scholar mentions that the rift between the Naga insurgent and the Indian government "escalated in the early 1950's, especially after the Naaga people voted in favour of the independence from India in the plebiscite of 1951" (Kikon 2016, 94).

However, this would place individuals at risk from insurgent groups as sympathizers of India while at war against Indian-State forces for the liberation of their land claiming sovereignty of an independent nation and vice versa. Tamsula Ao conveys the essence of this time in her collection of everyday lives while she engages with readers what history fails to record; not accounts by numbers or data, but testimonies of lived memories, subjectivity of personal memories thereby contributing naga cultural continuities in a broader context of naga historical imagination (Longkumer, 2021. P. 32). In her fourth story "The curfew man", set against the backdrop of insurgency in Nagaland, the plot deals with moral dilemmas and personal losses experienced by individuals caught between conflicting loyalties. The story depicts the life of Satemba, a former Assam police constable whose injured knee caused him to be unfit for service and retire. Struggling to support his family, he was persuaded by the sub-divisional officer to work as an informer for the government. Caught in a difficult environment, his precarity led him to fight between Indian military forces and Naga insurgent groups. His wife Jemtila considered it too dangerous for him to be in this position and warned him many times. The situation escalates when satemba encounters a group of strangers (presumably members of an insurgent group) who threaten and physically assault him resulting in injuries in both knees. This incident leads satemba to reconsider his choices and his moral obligation in acting as an informer. Jemtila is relieved that this will keep him alive with broken legs rather than spying in a curfewed town where he is susceptible to suspicion and attacks. In another story from the collection called shadows, we observe the dark side of post-insurgency world in naga context. A heartbreaking account of Imli, a young underground member brutally killed by his ruthless leader named Hoito. His friends mourn over his death. The story illustrates atrocities endured by militant personnel and reveals dark aspects of factional divisions between factions resulting in insecurity and hardship for survival for Nagas associated with militants where divisions have created animosity and hatred instead of unity.

CONCLUSION

Ao's stories are not direct representations of past events; nevertheless they serve as important taxonomic functions. In absence of comprehensive knowledge concerning the Naga struggle, her stories serve as substitutes. These stories represent counter-archives recording voices, emotions and memories omitted from dominant histories at some point. To clarify, they refute Michel-Rolph Trouillot's assertion concerning trauma: "silences enter into the process of historical production at several levels (Trouillot, 1995)." Ao also intertwines by magnifying underreported stories of history: villagers, widows, children and elders. Such an approach could be interpreted as libretto criticizing unsuccessful dialogue between Indian and Naga nationalist movements writing everyday sufferings endured by people. Tamsula Ao does not romanticize either side of the pair; instead she draws attention to victims from both sides. Her trans-generational perspective also reminds us that trauma does not cease once a peace agreement is signed; rather trauma continues shaping associations of memories and establishing identities long after violence ends.

These Hills Called Home is not merely a collection of heart-breaking stories; it is also a record of how violence can kill across generations. Driven by intimate stories of intergenerational trauma Ao illustrates how psychological scars left by conflict do not heal; instead they transfer into memory, identity and culture (Suganya & Padmanabhan, 2022, p. 2). Her stories challenge erasures enacted by institutional silence and reaffirm the necessity of remembering even when facing overwhelming pain. Through storytelling Ao establishes a collective archive honoring deceased loved ones comforting those still living and warning future generations. In relation to postcolonial and Indigenous trauma Ao's work is essential in understanding how history is experienced, felt and transmitted.

REFERENCES

1. Ao, T. (2005). *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. In Medical Entomology and Zoology. Japan Society of Medical Entomology and Zoology. <http://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BB03273237>
2. Baruah, S. (2003). Confronting Constructionism: Ending India's Naga War. *Journal of Peace Research*, 40(3), 321–338. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343303040003005>
3. Brar, J. S., & Khanna, P. (2025). Resistance and Resilience: Naga Women's Voices in Tamsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home*. *Asiatic IJUM Journal of English Language and Literature*, 19(2), 106–118. <https://doi.org/10.31436/asiatic.v19i2.3950>

4. Goshi, V. C. & M. V. (2026). TEMSULA AO'S THESE HILLS CALLED HOMES: STORIES FROM A WAR ZONE - AS AN USHERANCE TO THE SOCIAL COMMITMENT OF A WRITER. Zenodo (CERN European Organization for Nuclear Research). <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18518803>
5. Hartmann, W. E., & Gone, J. P. (2014). American Indian Historical Trauma: Community Perspectives from Two Great Plains Medicine Men. *Deep Blue* (University of Michigan), 54, 274–288. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-014-9671-1>
6. Herman, J. L. (2015). Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence--From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror. Medical Entomology and Zoology. https://bvbr.bib-bvb.de/443/F?func=service&doc_library=BVB01&local_base=BVB01&doc_number=028922790&sequence=000002&line_number=0001&func_code=DB_RECORDS&service_type=MEDIA
7. Jones, S. (2024). Silencing the past: Power and the production of history By Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Boston: Beacon Press. 1995. *Museum Anthropology*, 48(1). <https://doi.org/10.1111/muan.12306>
8. Khumanthem Gunibala Devi, & Dr.Sangeeta Laishram. (2016). NARRATIVE OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL REALITIES: A STUDY OF TEMSULA AO'S THESE HILLS CALLED HOME: A STORY FROM A WAR ZONE. *International Journal of Advanced Research*, 4(9), 917–920. <https://doi.org/10.21474/ijar01/1561>
9. Kikon, D. 2016. Memories of Rape: The Banality of Violence and Impunity in Naga Society.” In *Faultlines of History: The India Papers II*. edited by U. Chakrevarti, 94-126. Delhi: Zubaan.
10. Killing of Civilians in Nagaland: What is AFSPA and Why is it so controversial?, *India Today*, 2021. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/nagaland-civilians-killing-what-is-afspa-and-why-is-it-so-controversial-1885000-2021-12-07>
11. Longkumer, I. W. (2021). Reading Terror in Literature: Exploring Insurgency in Nagaland through Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. *Sanglap Journal of Literary and Cultural Inquiry*. <http://sanglap-journal.in/index.php/sanglap/article/view/27>
12. McDuié-Ra, D. (2012). Northeast Migrants in Delhi. In Amsterdam University Press eBooks. Amsterdam University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048516230>
13. O'Neill, L., Fraser, T. N., Kitchenham, A., & McDonald, V. L. (2016). Hidden Burdens: a Review of Intergenerational, Historical and Complex Trauma, Implications for Indigenous Families. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 11(2), 173–186. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-016-0117-9>
14. Porsanger, J. (2004). An Essay about Indigenous Methodology. *Nordlit*, 8(1), 105. <https://doi.org/10.7557/13.1910>
15. Pou, K. B. V. (2020). Women in Conflict Areas: Insights from Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. *SHILAP Revista de Lepidopterología*. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3700298>
16. Raj, R. (2024). History, Fiction, and Trauma. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 16(1), 54–65. <https://doi.org/10.5130/ccs.v16.i1.8667>
17. Smith, L. T. (2021). Decolonizing Methodologies. In Zed Books. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350225282>
18. Suganya, V., & Padmanabhan, B. (2022). “Transgenerational Transmission of Chosen Trauma”: Locating Micro-Experiences in Macro-Historical Events and the Quest for Cultural and National Identity in Temsula Ao's *These Hills Called Home: Stories from a War Zone*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v14n2.ne28>
19. T., R. K., & Padmanabhan, B. (2020a). Psychosocial Impacts of War and Trauma in Temsula Ao's *Laburnum for My Head*. *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, 12(5). <https://doi.org/10.21659/rupkatha.v12n5.rioc1s9n4>
20. Trouillot, M.-R. (1995). Silencing the Past. https://openlibrary.org/books/OL785467M/Silencing_the_past
21. Waterman, A. (2020). Counterinsurgents' use of force and “armed orders” in Naga Northeast India. *Asian Security*, 17(1), 119–137. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14799855.2020.1724099>