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# Tissi

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Honors Thesis

Anna Demmitt

Department: English

Advisor: Stephen Wilhoit, Ph.D.

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## Abstract

*Tissi* is a series of short stories depicting the lives of children living in Sudan through the genocide. There are three stories of pain and suffering that depict the lives of Yaya, Abit, and Tahir. Each child is forced to deal with the ill effects of the genocide. The stories conclude with a story of hope of one child who was able to get help in a refugee camp located in Tissi.

## Disclaimer

The children depicted in these stories are fictional characters, although they are based on true events. Tissi is a region of Chad, which borders Sudan, where many Sudanese refugees seek refugee camps.

## Dedication or Acknowledgements

These stories are dedicated to anyone who has been affected by genocide and to all the people who are working hard to end genocide forever.



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*Genocide is the extinction of an entire race of people. Imagine your brother being forced to become a child soldier. Your parents are brutally mutilated and murdered in front of you. You can hear the screams as your friend, your sister, your daughter, are viciously raped...for days.*

*You may be thinking that this will never happen to you, and hopefully it never does. You may be thinking that you would never let this happen, but you already have...*

## **Yaya**

Their hard-pressed hands were a foreign touch. Their hands were rough and fast against her body. Her skin felt as though it still burned where they had touched her. The heat of their touches was mingled with the heavy weight of the sun upon her body. The heat radiated against the open space of the dessert. She dips her hands into the watering hole trying to clean off the dirt of them. But, the water is infested with the

fesses of the animals that roamed the village. She will never be clean of him ... them.

A cry echoes around her. The cry mirrors the screams that occur nightly within her head. This cry seems to be searching for her. She scans the area for the source of the noise. A toddler eases into her vision. He has her nose and mouth, but the eyes of the strangers who haunt her. She opens her arms to him, and he tumbles into her. The warmth of his touch is soft against her hardened skin. Amsalu searches for the comfort of a mother against her flat chest.

He continues to wail in a state of hunger that she can never ease. Amsalu's fiery red hair is a burning reminder that she is useless to her child. His stomach is too large for his body. The roundness of his belly contrasts harshly against his skeletal frame. She holds him as tightly as she dares, always fearing that she will crush the bones that protrude from his body. She scoops him up, but he squirms against the constraints of her arms locking him against her. Abit had always been a fidgety kid too. Her throat burns as she holds back the tears that are always right

behind her eyes. Abit. Abit. Her face hardens, and not a soul can tell what emotions roar behind her eyes.

## **Abit**

The rattling gets faster and faster, as Abit's hands tremble. He lines up the scope and focuses on the figure coming towards him. Pull it. Pull it! PULL IT! He releases his finger and feels the movement below his hands. The man drops before him. The shaking has consumed his body; what started as a light tremble in his hands, is now causing his legs to thrust back and forth below him. No longer able to hold up his own weight, Abit feels his hands careen against the gravelly sand below him. The warm touch of blood trickles down his fingers and mingles with the dust.

How could he have shot; that man is laying just as his own body is strewn. His own blood is covering his body. Over. Done. Dead. Dead. He's dead. I killed him. At that thought, Abit's mouth goes dry. He can feel the heat rushing up from his stomach. Before he can help it, the little

water he drank this morning shoots back out of him. The taste in his mouth feels fitting somehow.

“GET UP YOU LITTLE SHIT!”

The voice rings in Abit’s ears. That’s all he is anymore. No name, no family, no goals, no life, no hope...just shit. Complete shit.

## **Tahir**

Mosquitos cover their bodies like an unwanted blanket, trapping them in their nightmares. Tahir can feel the bed move every time Minoo fidgets to try to rid herself of the bugs. Bakri, he just cries. Tahir can feel the cold sweat on Bakri, but there is nothing he can do but rock him. They spend the whole night wrapped in each other’s arms as Tahir strokes Bakri’s head trying to quell the headaches and give some comfort. But nothing works. Everyday Bakri feels more nauseous and is able to drink and eat less and less. Every night Tahir is scared that the crying will suddenly stop.



As scared as he is, night is his favorite time. Minoo always seems so peaceful. Her small body curled up next to him, her hands gently resting against his leg. Sometimes the light from the moon strikes her face just right, and he can make believe that he sees her smile returning. They are dashing across the village together shouting and yelling. She would always get so mad when he would beat her to the old baobab tree. She is finally at the age where she would have been able to grab onto those lowest branches and pull herself up, without him creating a step with his hands. She would have been so excited; her smile could have split a brick wall. Now it could barely make an appearance.

Her hands leave his leg and he instinctively searches her face for a sign of a nightmare. Are her eyes clenched? Are her teeth grinding? Are her lips quivering? Yes. Yes. Yes. Tahir shakes her feeble shoulders hoping to wake her from her dreams, knowing full well that he was bringing her into another nightmare.

## **Yaya**

Yaya begins the slow drudge through the village. Grocery bags filled with human waste litter the sides of the roads. Makeshift tents appear to be within inches of tumbling to the ground. The smell is overwhelming. Faces peering through the tent openings are all etched with the same fear. Every pair of eyes is haunted by memories. None of the people came from the same villages, but they are all connected. A connection no one wished they had.

## **Tahir**

Tahir sees the young girl pass by his tent. The baby appears to be fighting against her grip, but her arms are relentlessly cradling him to her chest. The baby's red hair stands out stark against her small frame. He wonders if she too is caring for her younger siblings...or even worse. He instinctively turns to Minoo. His little sister is barely beginning to show her age. Thank goodness as a child, she was always a tomboy. She insisted on wearing his clothes instead of her own. That's what she was

wearing when they came. They had no idea that a young girl rested beneath the clothes. They passed over her, unlike so many others. But, Tahir had not waited around. His only thoughts were run. Run. RUN!

## **Abit**

The pain ricochets through Abit's body as he curls as the butt of the gun strikes into his ribs. The pain is all consuming. He tries to stay focused on the feet standing next to his head, but they slowly begin to multiply and sway. Then they are gone completely.

Instead, the dirt has left his mouth, the rocks are not jabbing into the side of his head. He is lying on a mat. The kicks are coming intermittent with screams. The screams are not his own, but he knows the voice....Yaya. There is another noise, laughter, male laughter, angry, hatred, filled laughter. Blackness.

## **Tahir**

He had thought the running would kill them. Pushing farther and farther away. If only distance would set them free.

Their feet pounded against the ground. Silently he prayed for freedom, for life. Bakri was wrapped in a blanket and pressed against his chest. Every step brought them farther from everything they had ever known. The wails from the village seemed to follow them through the wind. No distance would ever be enough to truly escape.

## **Abit**

“What the hell do you think you are doing? I told you to get your ass off the ground! Are you even listening to me?”

Abit can tell that the screams are directed at him. He knows that not responding will bring more pain, but what does it matter anymore? The low hum of a plane is all he can focus on. True freedom. If only that escape were possible. What would it feel like to watch this world, this

horrible world, disappear? To never have to return to this living hell. To truly escape.

He rolls slowly onto his back. The rocks seem to melt away as he gazes up at the sky. The small plane slowly makes its way across the darkening sky. The cloudless sky marks no end for the plane's journey as it continues to coast across the horizon.

## **Tahir**

Tahir had seen it before. Other young children barely able to stand. The sweat seemed to pour off their bodies as they cried. The screams drove their way into his brain. They rattled and bumped out all of his memories. Nothing else could be heard or remembered. Nothing remained but the heart-wrenching screams of children in unbearable pain.

## **Abit**

“WHY (kick) ARE (kick) YOU (kick) STILL (kick) LYING (kick) ON  
(kick) THE (kick) GROUND (kick)?

## **Yaya**

Yaya slowly stumbles into her tent. The tarps slope down, brushing the top of her hair. She begins to mesh the grain against a rock. Pounding the grain, each strike comes down harder than the last, until she is exhausted. Dropping the grain into the frying pan, she watches as it begins to pop and sizzle, morphing into yellow goo. Amsalu watches every single movement she makes. Never once do his eyes leave the food. Yaya smiles a fleeting smile at his wonderment. Suddenly, Amsalu bursts into tears. A cry Yaya knows all too well, but cannot satisfy. Lifting his light body off the ground, she can feel him reaching for something he will never find.

## **Abit**

He couldn't understand the hatred that shot from the man's hands. Every strike brought out the anger that had been harboring within him. Abit had never known this hatred. He had never seen another man's eyes so filled with contempt.

His father was a gentle man. He never believed in laying a hand on him, Yaya, or his mother. He was more likely to offer a hug than a slap. But, maybe that is what had killed him. If only he had fought back, maybe. But, he would have preferred to be dead than like any of these men.

## **Yaya**

They would have been gathered together. Her father would have had his arm gently wrapped around her mother's shoulders. His touch would have been light and protective, easy. Abit would always rest his head against their father's knees. He would curl his legs as close as he could to the fire without burning himself. The warmth seemed to engulf them. Enclose them in their own bubble of happiness and safety.

Their bond would only be broken by the soft murmurs of laughter drifting in from their neighbor's tents. The laughter was soon followed by a smiling playmate begging for a game outside below the glow of the sun. The sun's light would trickle through the branches of the baobab trees, and dance across the waves of the small creek running below.

## **Tahir**

In another time, in another place, he wondered if he would be friends with her and her red-haired baby. He only saw her for a moment when she swept by his tent. Behind the mask, he could imagine a woman filled with life, love, and happiness. Her explosive life would have been contagious, and they would have spent their days laughing. He wouldn't have been able to control a smile whenever he caught her eye, sharing secret jokes at every turn. They would have walked freely outside. Fear would have not contained them. Over the years, their friendship would have blossomed into more. They would never have felt at a loss or alone when they knew they were near each other. Even from afar, her love would have overwhelmed him.

But, all he can see is the pain etched into the creases of her face. The tear stained lines down her cheeks. Her eyes pushing her fear to the front of her face. If only...



## **Yaya**

She could feel their stares. Their eyes followed her everywhere she went, an odd mixture of emotions played across their eyes that she never truly deciphered. The pity was piercing. They knew how it had started. Their eyes always stared at her belly. Their eyes would linger there before they would slowly drift up to meet her eyes. When they met, the pity was penetrating. Shame would flood her face. She was never able to maintain eye contact long. They knew. They all knew.

The pity she disliked, but the hate felt like a stab to her heart. She was caring one of them inside of her. Everywhere she went, the enemy came with her. And they hated her for it. She hid herself, she couldn't handle it. If only they knew how sorry she was, how much she hated it, how much she longed to rid of herself of the alien inside.

## **Abit**

Abit reaches through the darkness as light creeps into the edge of his vision. Pulling his legs beneath his stomach, he slowly begins to rise to

his feet. As the world begins to spin, he reaches out grasping for anything to steady himself.

“Get your grimy, filthy, black hands off of me!” With a push, Abit finds himself again face down in the dirt.

## **Tahir**

Bakri’s cries are insistent now. They never stop, never let up. Bakri just shakes as the fever grows higher and higher. Tahir strokes back the little bit of hair on Bakri’s head. Trying to take in everything about his features. Memorizing the deepness of his eyes and the thin lips that would never smile, laugh, talk.

His mother had always liked to daydream about what their futures would hold. He and Minoo would crawl into bed, and she would sit on the edge of the bed rubbing her bulging stomach. As her hand protectively circled her stomach, she would tell them stories of what the baby’s life would be like. To her estimations, he would have a booming voice that would carry across the village and his laughter would be

medicine to the ears around him. He would expand their farm with his strength and determination. He would make a difference.

## **Yaya**

Abit had been such a gentle baby. The first time she held him, she had been startled by the intensity of his stare. He seemed to be examining every aspect of the world around him trying to figure out how to improve it. He would always adventure towards the creek below the baobab tree. Tirelessly he would reposition the rocks to create a new flow for the water. Slowly, he was trying to bring it the small sprout that was popping out of the ground just out of reach of the valuable water. The only thing that would ever stop his determination would be the sound of a plane passing overhead.

## **Abit**

He used to think that it would be possible. That he could really make a difference in this world. He had wished that one day he would be able to

improve the village around him. He had believed that he would be able to protect his sister from the world that destroyed her. He wasn't even able to keep her alive. There was no way she had been able to survive those hours of torment. At least she was finally free from the tortures of this world, the world he could not improve.

## **Tahir**

The rain used to feel refreshing against his face, but now it only felt like the heat of the world weighing upon him. It reminds him of the tears and the haunted clouds that cover Minoo's eyes. As the rain slices through the thin walls of the tent, he can feel their world caving in around them. Each strike of lightning lights up the smallness of their existence. Each roar of thunder deafens their hope.

## **Abit**

Would forgetting really be possible? Even if he could fly away, it would never leave him. There are some things that can never be forgotten. The

taste of dirt mixed with his own blood. The chill of a trigger pressing against his finger. The screams of Yaya while they... they... took away her youth, body, soul.

## **Yaya**

The ceiling barely stays in focus. The world seems to be centered on the pain exploding from her body. If only it would stop. How long will this last? Please just make it stop. They will never leave me! They control my nightmares and now I will see them throughout the rest of my life! They had no right, no right.

They came in the darkness of night. The only light came from the torches they threw into their tents, into their homes. She knew all hope was lost before it ever began. She had felt their sneers and lust before their hands ever touched her clean body.

## **Tahir**

The last trickles of rain made Tahir strain for fresh air and escape. If only Mino wouldn't always be trapped in this hell. She is too young to never experience freedom and love again. She could finally climb the baobab tree. She would feel the wind in her hair as she climbed to the top. She would be able to see the village, which would be exploding with water and crops, and children would be running and playing. Picturesque happiness. She deserves that. The lines would no longer crease her young face, and smiles would finally return with ease.

## **Yaya**

The first movement sent shivers down her spine. It felt like being invaded by an alien species. The movement was foreign, and brought a tear to her eye. How will she ever get used to this foreign touch. Her mother always talked about the joy she felt when she and Abit first moved in her tummy. She always said that it was the first moment that she knew that the life that would come she would love more than

anything else.

## **Abit**

Abit couldn't muster the strength to rise again. It felt like a hundred bricks were pushing him farther and farther into the ground. The screams were getting louder. If only he could get to Yaya and help her. He needed to stop them, he had to stop them, but he couldn't. He didn't. He had heard her screams for what seemed like days now.

## **Tahir**

Tahir had heard that there was help. There are villages that have been graced by God. Planes came down from heaven to offer deliverance. They have water, drinkable water. They have enough food for everyone; no one is starving to death. They have jobs; they are able to provide for themselves. If only a place like this could actually exist. If only it was real.

## **Abit**

Abit had seen her running. At first, he had thought it was a young boy racing for the edges of the village. Then her shirt had pressed against her newly forming body. He raised the gun and zeroed in on the back of her head, but then she turned. He saw the fear etched into her face. The sheer panic that sprung from her eyes. And he swore that their eyes locked. He felt her pain and fear, and he was transported to the night he was taken. The rough hands grappling against his arms and pulling him from everything that he had ever known and held dear. Stripping him of the chance to stop the screams from Yaya. He knew that he would never be alive again, and he couldn't do that to her. He couldn't drain the life out of her. The gun tumbled from his hands an instant before a punch collided with the side of his head.

## **Yaya**

“Shhhh.” Yaya tried to comfort Amsalu. He could no longer hold himself up. His head lulled to the side, as all of his strength slowly



seeped out of him. His ribs protruded against her chest. She refused to let go, and prayed for a miracle.

## **Tahir**

Tahir felt the moment like a physical blow to his stomach. Minoo set shaking in the corner with her arms clenched around her knees, as she pulled them tighter and tighter against her chest. Tahir pulled Bakri closer to him willing him to cry, wanting him to cry.

## **Yaya**

Yaya noticed as Amsalu's hand fell. She searched his face for the gleam in his eyes, a hint of life, but saw nothing.

## **Abit**

Abit willed himself to be able to stand again. "Get up you worthless piece of shit!" He tried to bring his legs under his body. "I SAID GET UP!"

Every ounce of strength was willed to his muscles. He felt the cold tip of the rifle against the side of his head. He thought he could hear the arrival of the plane.

*Genocide is the extinction of an entire race of people. Imagine your brother being able to safely play outside. Imagine your parents working hard to earn money for you to survive. Imagine your sister not having to wander miles from home to get safe drinking water.*

*You may be thinking that this is not possible during a genocide. You may be thinking that it cannot exist, but it does...*

## **Minoo**

The water flows out cold and clean. The first time it touches her lips, she thinks she is dreaming. She can feel the chill rush over her chapped lips and down her throat. It tickles as it drops into her empty stomach.

She will not feel the emptiness again. The fields are overflowing. The crops expand like a brown blanket protecting and comforting the ground. Promising to never feel the bodies, the blood, the pain, and the tears ever again.

But she is drawn to the edge of the village. Past the running children, whose giggles fill the air like music. A new beat for a new life. Past the

constructed shops, where women sit weaving together baskets and producing stunning necklaces and earrings. Beyond animals pinned to the side of the fields. She finds rest in the shade of the baobab tree. Its branches reach toward heaven. Minoo no longer dreams of climbing to the top of its reaches to escape. She longs to remain in its shade and soak up the love from past loves from its bark. She will live forever under the protection of the baobab tree watching the planes descend.

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