

**NARRATING TRAUMA AS A STRATEGY OF RECLAIMING THE FEMALE
AGENCY IN TOMI ADEYEMI'S *LEGACY OF ORISHA* TRILOGY**

MODESTA NAFUNA BARASA

**A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Award of the
Degree of Master of Arts in Comparative Literature of Masinde Muliro University of
Science and Technology,**

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Signature..... Date.....

Dr. Chris Wasike

Department of Language and Literature Education

Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology

Signature..... Date.....

Dr. Marciana Were

Faculty of Education and Social Sciences

Tom Mboya University

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DEDICATION

To: My family: Husband and babies

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ABSTRACT

This research examined how Tomi Adeyemi's female characters reclaim agency through narration of trauma in her *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy (*Children of Blood and Bone*, *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*, *Children of Anguish and Anarchy*). The study was guided by the following objectives: to examine how strategies of first-person narrative voice and temporality depict female trauma, explore how the narrators reclaim agency and empowerment to achieve healing and self-actualization and analyse how narrating trauma shapes the development of female identities in Adeyemi's trilogy. The female identities in the trilogy refer to the young female protagonists who are on the journey of reclaiming agency in the aftermath of trauma. The study engaged the theories of Frantz Fanon, Cathy Caruth, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak to interrogate the intersection between trauma, identity, and resistance. Fanon's postcolonial psychology illuminated how colonial violence produces psychic trauma allowing an understanding of the female characters' internal conflicts. Caruth's trauma theory highlighted how traumatic experiences are represented in trauma fiction and how the victims of trauma reclaim agency in the aftermath of traumatic experiences with reference to the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy. Spivak's concept of subaltern was essential in examining how female voices, often silenced within colonial structures, use narration as a means of self-expression and resistance. The methodology involved close reading of the primary texts to identify the scenarios where the author has used first-person narration and manifestation of trauma and what they represent. Narratology was also useful in the critical reading of the trilogy to help analyse how voice and temporal shifts communicate painful experiences. This study is an important contribution to the interpretation of African indigenous knowledge and its positioning in the Western modernity as it foregrounds the juxtapositions of African indigenous imagery in modern symbols of trauma. It contributed to the interpretation of African indigenous knowledge by showing how Tomi Adeyemi integrates African spiritual and cultural frameworks into her portrayal of trauma, thereby challenging the dominance of Western modernity in defining psychological and historical suffering. The findings of the study are a testament to the role of narration in representing traumatic experiences of the girl child, how they reclaim their agency and how the experiences contribute to the shaping of their identities.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Female Trauma

Psychological and emotional distress experienced by female characters as a result of systemic violence, loss, displacement, or marginalization, especially in a postcolonial context.

Narrative Voice

The point of view (first-person narration) through which the story is told, which allows insight into characters' internal experiences and perceptions of trauma.

Temporality

The use of non-linear time structures such as flashbacks, memory fragments, and anticipations to depict trauma as repetitive, disjointed, and unresolved.

Agency

The capacity of female characters to act independently, resist oppression, and redefine their identities in the face of trauma.

Reclaiming Voice

The act of female characters articulating their experiences of trauma, often through testimony, narration, or confrontation.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT	ii
DECLARATION	iii
COPYRIGHT	iv
DEDICATION	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
DEFINITION OF TERMS	viii
CHAPTER ONE	1
INTRODUCTION	1
1.0 Background to the Study	1
1.2 Statement of the problem	13
1.3 Objectives of the study	14
1.4 Research questions	14
1.5 Justification of the study	15
1.6 Scope and Limitation	16
1.7 Significance of the study	17
1.8 Research Methodology	18
1.8.1 Research Method	18
1.8.2 Data Sampling	19
1.8.3 Data classification	19
1.8.4 Data Analysis	19
1.8.5 Ethical Considerations	20

CHAPTER TWO.....	21
NARRATING TRAUMA AND RECLAIMING FEMALE AGENCY: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	21
2.0 Introduction	21
2.1 Literature Review	21
2.2 Theoretical Framework	51
CHAPTER THREE	55
VOICE AND TEMPORALITY: NARRATING TRAUMA IN TOMI ADEYEMI'S CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE	55
3.0 Introduction	55
3.1 Narrating trauma: Zelig's Narrative Voice and Trauma in the Legacy of Orisha trilogy..	56
3.1.1 Narrative voice and postcolonial perspective.....	59
3.1.2 Amari's Narrative voice	62
3.1.3 Historical parallelism	68
3.1.4 Feminist perspectives	72
3.2 Narrating Trauma: Temporal Disruption and Memory in the Legacy of Orisha trilogy ...	75
3.2.1 Zelig's Memory and Temporal Disruption.....	75
3.2.2 Amari's Temporal Disjunction.....	78
3.2.3 Indigenous Epistemologies and Temporality.....	81
3.2.4 Conclusion.....	86
CHAPTER FOUR.....	87
THE BURDEN OF INHERITED WOUNDS: TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN CHILDREN OF VIRTUE AND VENGEANCE BY TOMI ADEYEMI.....	87
4.0 Introduction	87
4.1 Fragmented Selves: Disintegration of Female Identity through Trauma.....	87
4.2 Vengeance and Self-assertion	91

4.3 Zelig as a witness.....	98
4.4 The Pursuit of Justice	100
4.5 Conclusion.....	107
CHAPTER FIVE.....	109
BEYOND TRAUMA: AGENCY IN CHILDREN OF ANGUISH AND ANARCHY BY TOMI ADEYEMI	109
5.0 Introduction	109
5.1 Resistance and Formation of Agency.....	109
5.2 Voice and Resistance	116
5.3 Spirituality as Resistance and Self-Definition	119
5.4 Agency through Sisterhood and Solidarity	129
5.5 Echoes of Agency: Orisha and the Gen Z Uprising.....	134
5.6 Conclusion.....	135
CHAPTER SIX.....	137
ADEYEMI'S TRAUMA FICTION: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS. 137	
6.0 Conclusion.....	137
REFERENCES.....	140

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Background to the Study

The representation of trauma in African literature has evolved beyond mere recollection of pain to a powerful means of resistance, survival, and identity reconstruction. Contemporary African women writers have increasingly employed narrative as a space to voice the silenced experiences of female subjects who suffer under intersecting forces of colonialism, patriarchy, and political violence. Within this context, voice narration becomes both a therapeutic and political act and a means through which women reclaim agency from historical and psychological oppression. The intersection of trauma and agency thus provides a critical framework for understanding how African female characters navigate the aftermath of violence and reclaim their subjectivity.

Trauma is a complex phenomenon that can arise from various sources including personal loss, violence, abuse and societal oppression. Herman (1992) defines trauma as an event that overwhelms an individual's ability to cope, leading to profound psychological and emotional impacts. It can be manifested in various forms such as acute trauma, chronic trauma, and complex trauma (Van der Kolk, 2014). Trauma also disrupts the narrative coherence of an individual's life, fragmenting memory and identity (Caruth, 1996). This makes it difficult for survivors to articulate their experiences and reintegrate into society. When these disruptions are gendered, they often reveal the ways in which societal and cultural structures impose trauma in women, not just as individuals, but as a collective group.

This study approaches trauma from the way it is imagined in works of fiction. Ann Whitehead (2014) explores how contemporary literature represents trauma, particularly in fiction that engages traumatic histories. She argues that trauma fiction often employs experimental narrative techniques such as fragmentation, repetition and unreliable narration, to mimic the

disorienting effects of trauma. According to her, “trauma disrupts conventional storytelling, leading authors to employ these techniques to reflect its psychological impact” (Whitehead, 2004, p. 84). Trauma fiction serves as a form of testimony, allowing silenced voices to be heard, and thus, challenging dominant historical narratives (pp. 5-6). The study draws on these arguments to examine the strategies that Adeyemi uses to represent trauma in her fictional trilogy in her female subjects from whom she predominantly anchors her girl child protagonists and how these female protagonists reclaim agency through narration in the aftermath of trauma.

The young female protagonists in the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy represent the vulnerable groups in our society who are pitted against all-powerful, oppressive forces but still register admirable victories. The concern of this research was to discern trauma as a painful experience embodied in the female subject and how it is expressed through narration to reclaim agency of the female subject. Although Ann Whitehead’s *Trauma Fiction* (2004) focuses primarily on western literary strategies for representing trauma, Afrocentric trauma theorists parallel many of her insights while addressing the unique historical and ongoing traumas of colonialism, slavery, and racial violence. Ngugi wa Thiong’o (1986) emphasizes the necessity of decolonizing narrative forms to represent the psychic disruptions caused by colonization, advocating for a return to indigenous languages and storytelling traditions. Similarly, Achille Mbembe (2001) discusses how colonial trauma produces fragmented temporalities and hallucinatory representations, which are in line with Whitehead’s concerns about fractured narratives. Saidiya Hartman (1997, 2008) advances the concept of “critical fabulation,” blending historical fact and speculative storytelling to address the gaps left by archival silences, employing narrative fragmentation similar to the techniques Whitehead identifies in trauma fiction. Christina Sharpe (2016) further develops these ideas by suggesting that Black life is perpetually lived “in the wake” of trauma, necessitating narrative forms that embrace

fragmentation, non-linearity, and incompleteness. All these concerns informed the research on the strategies that Adeyemi used for narrating trauma and reclaiming agency of the female subjects.

Intertwined with trauma is memory. Memory is useful in helping the victims of trauma process their traumatic experiences. Whitehead (2014) posits that trauma memories are distinct from regular memories due to their involuntary nature and the emotional weight that they carry. She argues that trauma memories often resurface in fragmented forms, lacking coherent narrative structure (Whitehead, 2014, p. 45). This fragmentation can lead to confusion and distress for individuals trying to make sense of their experiences. From Afrocentric trauma perspective, memory is a powerful but ambivalent tool for processing traumatic experiences. While it can help victims reclaim agency, reconstruct disrupted histories, and foster communal healing, it can also reactivate pain and underscore the profound losses inflicted by colonialism and slavery. Again, Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasizes that the recovery of collective memory, through language, story-telling and cultural practices is essential for resisting colonial amnesia and restoring African selfhood. However, Siadiya Hartman (2008) complicates this optimism by showing that the memory of colonialism is often marked by gaps, silences, and overwhelming sorrow. She acknowledges that reconstructing memory can sometimes reopen wounds even as it seeks to honor the lost memory. These scholars insinuate that, rather than offering closure, trauma operates as a continuous, uneasy engagement with the past, a necessary but painful process that sustains resistance and affirms Black existence in the face of enduring structural violence. The concept of memory is important to this study because for one to understand trauma as a lived experience as embodied in the female subject, it is necessary to engage the mind so that the elements of trauma are expressed through remembrance in the process of narration and reclamation of agency.

Literature, in this case, fiction, serves as a potent medium for expressing trauma, offering

authors a way to externalize and give voice to their characters' suffering (Felman & Laub, 1992). This is because, it is where the female subjects become a canvas on which the effects of trauma are written. Female authors in particular, have utilized their writings to explore the ways in which trauma impacts the women, their identity, and agency. This has led to a body of works that foregrounds the physicality of trauma and how women reclaim their bodies and voices in the aftermath of violence. It is against this backdrop that this study examined how Adeyemi uses the literary technique of first-person narrative voice in *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy as a medium for communicating experiences of trauma and reclaim the agency of the female subjects.

The interplay between individual and collective trauma is also profound in understanding of trauma. Kurtz (2021) notes that, like any psychological issue, individual trauma cannot be understood without taking into account its social and collective suffering, suggesting that personal narratives cannot be disentangled from social narratives. This is in concurrent with Siegel (2003) who argues that “we cannot fail to account for the social and interactive nature of consciousness” (p,18). This foregrounds the idea that trauma inherently involves social elements. The study drew on this argument by examining how Adeyemi's trilogy addresses both individual and collective trauma with individual trauma narratives being largely shaped by the experiences of collective suffering and how the female victims reclaim their agency in the aftermath of their trauma.

The female subject in trauma narratives thus often embodies both personal and collective histories of violence, subjugation, and oppression. Narration therefore often serves as a form of resistance, where women reclaim their bodies and voices, challenging the systems that perpetuate their trauma. Herman (1992) emphasizes the need for narrative as a means of healing, asserting that storytelling plays a crucial role in the recovery process. Moreover, the concept of embodied trauma highlights how physicality and emotion are intertwined in the

experiences of women who have endured violence and abuse. Laub (1992) discusses the importance of narrative construction in bearing witness to trauma. Laub's work illustrates that the act of narrating trauma can serve as both an acknowledgment of the pain and an assertion of agency over one's own story. Additionally, Sullivan (2001) posits that women's bodies serve as powerful media through which stories of suffering and resilience are communicated. In her view, Sullivan underscores the significance of bodily experience in shaping narrative forms and content, suggesting that the body becomes a critical site of meaning-making in the context of trauma. She also notes that trauma often results in the body "holding" psychological wounds, impacting one's ability to move freely and feel connected to one's body. These bodily constraints reflect both psychological trauma and societal oppression, which often forces women to occupy less space, avoiding expressive or expansive gestures. It is in regard to this that the study examined the use of voice in expressing the psychological effects of trauma as experienced by women and its role in healing.

Moreover, Ruddick (1996) explores how feminine narratives of trauma often confront societal norms and power structures, revealing a deep connection between individual suffering and collective experiences. Furthermore, feminist theorists like bell hooks (1984) and Judith Butler (1990) have examined the ways in which the female subject is both a site of oppression and empowerment. hooks (1984) explores the female subjects not just as a physical entity but as an embodiment of trauma that speak to broader social and cultural issues. She notes that the female subjects often become a battleground where personal traumas coalesce with societal traumas, such as gender-based violence, systemic oppression, and cultural expectations. According to her, the representation of women in literature thus becomes a crucial vehicle through which authors confront and critique the disparities rooted in gendered experiences of trauma. hooks discusses the narrative strategies employed by female authors to convey the lived realities of trauma. The narratives often utilize fragmented structures and non-linear

storytelling methods, reflecting the disorienting nature of trauma itself (Van der Kolk, 2014). These narrative techniques serve not only to engage the reader but also to challenge conventional forms of storytelling that may overlook the complexities of embodied experiences. Books also emphasizes the importance of reclaiming agency over one's narrative by arguing that the act of narrating trauma becomes a powerful means of reclaiming one's body and voice within a culture that has historically marginalized women (Bourke, 2014). It is in line with the foregoing arguments that this study sought to examine the narrative strategies that Adeyemi uses to express female trauma and how she reclaims female agency.

On the other hand, Butler (1990) explores the assertion that the female subjects is often a site of trauma, both physically and psychologically. She argues that societal constructs surrounding femininity contribute to the way women experiences trauma, particularly within contexts of violence and oppression. She notes female subjects are not simply a surface on which social meanings are inscribed but are actually shaped by cultural practices, which in turn are influenced by relations of power. This highlights the dynamic interplay between societal norms and the lived experiences of women, suggesting that trauma cannot be understood in isolation from these external pressures. However, in her later works, Butler expands upon the notion of the women as a site of trauma by introducing the idea of the body as a site of resistance. She posits that while the female figure is subjected to various forms of violence and oppression, they can also serve as a powerful instrument of agency and reclamation. Butler (2015) states, "the female subject itself, as a site of trauma, is also a cite of radical resistance" (p. 57). This duality illustrates the complexity of the female experience, where a woman is simultaneously a victim of societal norms and potential site for reasserting autonomy. This study examined the girl child both as a site of trauma and resistance as expressed through narration. These perspectives allow for a nuanced understanding of how women's trauma narratives in the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy challenges oppressive frameworks

and contribute to broader themes of resilience, healing and empowerment.

In Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, the narratives of trauma among young female protagonists form a central motif that ties the characters' struggles and resilience together. This trilogy consists of the novels, *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018), *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019), and *Children of Anguish and Anarchy* (2024). The novels, set in the fictional land of Orisha, explore the intersection of trauma, memory, and identity, particularly through the experiences of its girl child protagonists. The depiction of trauma in the novels is closely tied to the physical and psychological experiences of the girl child, which represents the broader discussions in trauma theory about the suffering and the reclamation of female agency.

Tomi Adeyemi is a Nigerian American author, writing coach, and creative entrepreneur best known for her critically acclaimed *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy. Born on August 1st, 1993, in the United States to Nigerian immigrant parents, Adeyemi grew up immersed in both Nigerian Yoruba culture and Western traditions, influences that profoundly shape her writing. She studied English Literature at Harvard University and later pursued West African mythology, religion, and culture during a yearlong fellowship in Brazil. This experience significantly influenced her writing, as she drew from Yoruba mythology and spiritual traditions to create the rich, magical world of Orisha in her *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy.

Her trilogy engages deeply with symbolic and emotional truths that resonate with real-world histories and lived experiences, particularly those related to systemic oppression, racial violence and cultural trauma. She interweaves the legacy of colonialism, the transatlantic slave trade, and the ongoing struggles of marginalized communities to reproduce an enigmatic narrative. While the trilogy is not a referential truth in terms of factual correspondence, it engages with what Cathy Caruth describes as "the *truth of trauma*: the emotional, psychological, and

communal realities that transcend individual events” (Caruth, 1996, p. 61). This truth of trauma, therefore, lies not in its factual recounting (referential truth) but in its ability to reveal the ongoing impact of the event on the survivor. Adeyemi uses the framework of fantasy to explore these truths, offering a narrative that is symbolic, allegorical, and deeply resonant with the lived experiences of marginalized groups. Her trilogy further offers a platform for exploring issues like race, cultural heritage, and systemic violence through the lens of magical, action-packed story.

The trilogy’s central narrative revolves around the oppression of the maji, a group of people endowed with magical abilities, by the ruling class, the Kosidan. This hierarchical structure mirrors the systemic oppression faced by marginalized groups in contemporary society. Various scholars have noted how the depiction of systemic oppression in fantasy literature serves as an allegory for real-world societal injustices. A critical analysis of Adeyemi’s work reveals that the systemic violence inflicted upon the maji resonates with historical realities of colonialism and racial subjugation. According to Marjorie J. A. Smith (2020), “the methods of control and violence employed by the Kosidan reflect persistent societal structures that perpetuate racism and disenfranchisement” (p. 186). This is true because, the maji in the text are persecuted, marginalised, and stripped of power by the ruling Kosidan elite.

Adeyemi is significantly inspired by Orisha mythology in writing her *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy. The Orisha are deities from Yoruba community of Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. The Yoruba mythology plays a crucial role in shaping the world, characters, and magical systems in the trilogy. Some of the key influences of Orisha mythology on the trilogy include magic system, cultural context and spiritual themes. The magic in Adeyemi’s world is directly linked to the Orishas, as characters possess powers derived from these deities. In the trilogy, those with magical abilities are connected to the various Orishas, each of whom governs specific cosmic elements like water, air, fire, and life itself. Adeyemi also brings out

the rich spiritual and cultural history of the Yoruba people into her work by using the Orisha mythology as a framework for her narration of trauma resulting from violence instigated by desires associated with modernity such as capitalism that leads to amassing of power and unbridled expansionism. This gives her fantasy world a distinct West African flavour, differentiating it from more Eurocentric fantasy traditions. Spiritual themes such as divine justice, the struggle between humans and gods are reflective of traditional Yoruba beliefs. Adeyemi uses Orisha mythology to explore and address trauma, linking personal and collective suffering with spiritual healing and resistance. The Orishas provide characters with a framework to confront and work through their traumas, offering not only supernatural abilities but also a sense of cultural and personal empowerment.

The trilogy is a sequel to works of writers such as D.O. Fagunwa, Amos Tututilla, Ben Okiri, Soyinka and Obotunde Ijemere who also exploited the Nigerian mythology in their writing. Fagunwa's works are among the first to incorporate Yoruba oral traditions, folklore, and mythological elements into the modern novel. His narratives are deeply rooted in Yoruba cosmology, featuring spirits, gods, and mythical creatures that are central to Yoruba belief systems. His famous novel "*The Forest of a Thousand Daemons*" (1938), written in Yoruba, illustrates the synthesis of myth and narrative, using mythological themes to explore moral, spiritual and philosophical questions. Wole Soyinka also explores Yoruba mythology extensively in his early writings. As a playwright and poet, he draws on Yoruba cosmology, rituals, deities such as Ogun and Esu, and traditional beliefs to convey complex themes related to identity, morality, and the clash between tradition and modernity. His early plays such as *A Dance of the Forest* (1963) are rich with Yoruba mythological symbols and characters, often used to critique society and explore the human condition. In addition, Obotunde also explores Yoruba mythology in his works. His famous play, *The Imprisonment of Obatala* draws heavily on Yoruba myths and religious practices. The play revolves around Obatala, a prominent deity

in Yoruba cosmology, exploring themes of creation, divine error, and moral lessons embedded within Yoruba traditional beliefs. Through his plays, Obotunde integrates Yoruba mythological figures, rituals, and strives to address both cultural identity and humanistic concerns. The works of these early writers are important to understanding Adeyemi's trilogy since they lay the literary and cultural groundwork for exploring Yoruba mythology, cosmology, and oral traditions in the trilogy. These works also authenticate the fantasy nature of the novels, highlighting the ambiguity of myth and culture as a source of suffering and healing, providing the symbol of resistance against oppression, which is meted out by colonial and African authoritarianism in the trilogy.

The first novel of the trilogy, *Children of Blood and Bone* is about Zelig Adebola, a young Diviner, navigating a world marked by oppression, loss, and the lingering effects of trauma. The story is set in the fictional world of Orisha, where King Saran has purged magic to eradicate Diviners and Maji, a group once capable of wielding powerful forces. As a result, Zelig's identity as a Diviner is fraught with danger and alienation, especially after the murder of her mother in the king's raid to eradicate magic. Zelig's trauma is central to her character and the narrative, as she constantly grapples with the memories of her mother's death and the brutal subjugation of her people. Her journey to reclaim agency is deeply tied to her reclaiming her heritage and identity as a diviner. The trauma she experiences is compounded by the oppressive regime that seeks to erase her culture, forcing her to confront both the grief of personal loss and the weight of cultural survival. As she embarks on a quest to restore magic alongside Amari, the princess of Orisha, together with her brother Tzain, Zelig battles not only external enemies but also internal struggles. Her agency is tested as she must reconcile her anger, fear, and desire for vengeance with her commitment to free her people. By embracing her diviner identity and unlocking her powers, Zelig finds a means to reclaim her lost sense of self and wield the strength that trauma had initially stripped from her.

Amari's journey also intersects with themes of trauma and agency, as she evolves from a sheltered princess complicit to her father's oppressive rule to a resistant ally who rejects her privileged role and joins the fight for justice. Through Zelie and Amari, Adeyemi examines the intersection of trauma, identity, and agency in the face of systemic oppression, illustrating how reclaiming one's heritage can be both a path to personal empowerment and a means of collective resistance.

Children of Virtue and Vengeance, the second book in Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy picks up after the events of *Children of Blood and Bone*, where Zelie, Amari, and other rebels successfully restored magic to Orisha. However, their victory has unforeseen consequences, as the ritual not only empowers the Diviners but also grants magic to nobles with magic ancestry, leading to a new group of powerful foes called the titans. Zelie, grappling with brutal losses and betrayals she has endured, struggles to reconcile her identity both as a warrior and a person scarred by grief. She is caught between her desire for revenge and her hope for peace, which creates tension in her relationships and complicates her leadership of the Iyika rebellion. Her trauma shapes her choices and worldview, as she wrestles with her responsibility to her people and her fear of further loss. Similarly, Amari faces an identity crisis as she tries to claim her place as queen and bring unity to Orisha. Her journey reflects her struggle for agency, as she confronts her family legacy and attempts to distance herself from her father's oppressive rule. Through the alternating perspectives of Zelie, Amari, and others, Adeyemi examines how trauma can fracture identities but also inspire resilience. The narrative emphasizes the choices that trauma survivors make to resist or succumb to the cycles of violence, ultimately asking what it means to rebuild oneself and one's community in the aftermath of devastation.

Children of Anguish and Anarchy, the third book in Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, dives deeper into the themes of trauma, identity, and agency within the fantasy world of Orisha. Zelie, Amari and their people navigate new layers of political and personal conflicts

in a land torn by magic, monarchy, and oppression. After successfully eliminating King Saran who they thought to be the greatest enemy, a new battle begins between them and a new monarchy led by King Baldyr who causes more pain to Zelig by killing more of her maji people. In order to win over the new monarchy, Zelig, Amari and their people are left with no choice but to form an alliance with the nobles and titans, who were formerly their greatest enemies for a long time, in order to annihilate the new enemy, the Skulls and King Baldyr. Both Zelig and Amari face deep psychological scars from the events, as they endure loss of family, the pressures of leadership, and the horror of violence.

Adeyemi explores how trauma is not a single event but an ongoing influence that shapes decisions, behaviors, and identities with the pain leading to reclamation of agency. Identity becomes a battleground as Zelig and Amari wrestle with who they are versus what society expects or demands. Zelig finds herself burdened by her role as a leader for her people, caught between her personal desires and her duty to the oppressed. After a long battle between the new coalition headed by Zelig and the Skulls, she and her people eventually manage to eliminate King Baldyr, the greatest threat to the Kingdom of Orisha leaving the maji with a feeling of fulfillment. Zelig and Amari's journey to regain control over their lives is as much about confronting their internal fears as it is about fighting external enemies. Adeyemi portrays agency as a form of healing from trauma, where each choice to fight, to lead, or to love becomes a step towards reclaiming their voices and shaping their destinies

Adeyemi's use of the genocide of the maji can be read as a parallel to real-world African genocides, particularly in its depiction of state-sanctioned ethnic cleansing, intergenerational trauma, and systemic oppression. Adeyemi's portrayal resonates with historical cases such as the Rwandan Genocide 1994 where Rwanda experienced a swift and a brutal genocide over approximately 100 days, during which extremist Hutu militias targeted the Tutsi minority and moderate Hutus resulting in the death of an estimated 800,000 people (Des Forges, 1999, p.

12). The trilogy also resonates with Herero/Namanga genocide (1904-1907) where the German colonial administration in present-day Namibia orchestrated a campaign against the Herero and Nama peoples. Following uprisings against the colonial rule, German forces, under General Lothar von Trotha, implemented policies leading to mass killings, forced displacement into the Omaheke Desert, and the establishment of concentration camps (Gewald, 1999, p.85). The genocide of the maji in the trilogy, therefore, mirrors these real-world historical traumas with the study focusing on the girl child and how she manages to reclaim agency and healing in the aftermath of the trauma.

In summary, the trilogy provides a powerful lens through which to explore the intersections of trauma, identity, and agency among marginalised female subjects. Through the author's fusion of African indigenous knowledge systems and postcolonial realities, Adeyemi reimagines trauma not only as a site of pain but also as a catalyst for resistance and self-reclamation. However, despite the rich narrative strategies and the depth of female representation in the trilogy, limited scholarly attention has been given to how these strategies articulate trauma as a transformative force within a postcolonial framework. This gap in scholarship necessitates a critical examination of how Adeyemi's narrative techniques reveal the complex processes through which female characters negotiate trauma and reclaim agency.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Literary artists have increasingly contributed to discourses surrounding trauma by imagining mechanisms through which the complexities of distressing events can be explored in order to mitigate the effects on the victims. Works in the field of trauma reconstruct the representation of how survivors of traumatic events and critics transform traumatic memory to an active memory, by articulating what was previously unspeakable through an act of remembrance with an aim of reclaiming the agency of the victims. Although Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of*

Orisha trilogy has received significant attention for its Afrofantasy worldbuilding and political themes, there has been limited scholarly focus on how the narratives articulate female trauma and agency through literary techniques. Most existing analyses emphasize race, power, and resistance but overlook how narrative strategies becomes tools of healing and empowerment. This study addressed this gap by examining how Adeyemi's portrayal of female characters reveals the complex ways trauma shapes female identity and how narration itself becomes a site of resistance and reclamation.

1.3 Objectives of the study

The study sought to examine how the literary technique of narrative voice expresses trauma and how trauma is embodied in the female subjects. It sought to:

- (i) examine how narrative strategies of voice and temporality depict emotional and cultural trauma among female protagonists in Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy.
- (ii) explore how narrating trauma shapes the development of female identities in Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy.
- (iii) analyse how the narrators reclaim agency to achieve healing and self-actualization in the trilogy.

1.4 Research questions

- (i) In which ways do the narrative strategies of voice, and temporality depict female trauma in the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy?
- (ii) How does narrating trauma shape the development of female identities in the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy?
- (iii) In what manner do the narrators reclaim agency to achieve healing and self-actualization?

1.5 Justification of the study

Studies on trauma and women have gained increasing attention in both literary and postcolonial scholarship. Scholars such as Cathy Caruth (1996), Felman and Laub (1992), Tal (1996) have laid the foundation for modern literary trauma theory by exploring how trauma disrupts narrative, memory and identity. Caruth, in particular, emphasizes the importance of bearing witness to trauma through storytelling, suggesting that narration offers a way for survivors to process the unspeakable. Feminist scholars have further nuanced this field by showing how women's trauma is often shaped by gendered violence, silence, and marginalization. Works by Herman (1992) and Brison (2002) highlight how women experience trauma not only through war or displacement, but also through domestic violence, sexual abuse, and cultural silencing, which are forms of trauma often dismissed or devalued in dominant discourse.

In postcolonial contexts, trauma studies intersect with the legacies of colonial violence, racism, and displacement. Scholars such as Fanon (1967) and Bhabha (1994) have interrogated how colonized subjects, are doubly silenced, first by colonial powers and then by patriarchal systems within their own societies. Recent feminist postcolonial scholars have further emphasized how women's voices and bodies become contested sites of memory, trauma, and resistance. However, much of this work focuses on historical, realistic, or autobiographical texts, with comparatively little attention paid to speculative or fantasy literature, particularly by African women writers.

This study addresses the gap by examining how Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy uses trauma narration as a strategy for reclaiming female agency. While scholars have explored the trilogy's mythological, political, and anti-racist themes, there is limited scholarly engagement with how trauma, particularly female trauma, is narrated and transformed into a tool for empowerment. The study thus, fills a critical gap by focusing on how female characters in speculative postcolonial fiction reclaim power through the act of narrating trauma.

This study contributes to the studies already done in the field of trauma by taking an approach that gives attention to the role of narration, that is, first person narrative voice as a strategy used to convey trauma among women in *The Legacy of Orisha*. Adeyemi's trilogy makes a significant contribution to trauma studies in African literature by relocating trauma from purely historical or realistic narratives into speculative spaces, where magic, myth, and memory become tools of both suffering and survival. Her work contributes to the existing literature by bringing in the use of Afro-diasporic fantasy as a narrative space for reclaiming female agency. Unlike traditional trauma texts that often depict women as passive victims, Adeyemi positions her female protagonists as active agents of resistance, whose narration of trauma is central to their transformation and empowerment.

1.6 Scope and Limitation

This study focused on trauma among female characters in the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy. It examined how trauma is represented in the narratives of female protagonists, and how their experiences of trauma shape their identities and contributes to the reclamation of agency. The primary focus was on the use of first person narrative voice as a mechanism through which trauma is communicated and agency asserted.

The study was limited in several ways. First, it focused solely on female characters and did not analyse male characters in the trilogy who may also offer valuable insights into trauma and resistance. Second, the study was limited to textual analysis and did not include empirical research such as reader-response studies or interviews, which could offer further understanding of how readers interpret and relate to the character's trauma. In addition, female agency was prioritized because women in postcolonial setting often face layered forms of trauma, both as colonized subjects and as gendered bodies within patriarchal structures. Analyzing their narrative becomes crucial in understanding how female voices navigate and resist these dual oppressions.

Lastly, Tomi Adeyemi was selected because her work stands at the intersection of African cosmology, Black diasporic experience, and speculative fiction, a unique blend that allows for the imaginative reconfiguration of trauma, memory and resistance. Though her trilogy is fictional, it deeply resonates with the historical and political realities of marginalized communities, making it a rich text for exploring the politics of narration and identity.

1.7 Significance of the study

The study holds significance on multiple fronts, that is, literary, social, cultural and global. It contributes to the critical conversations on trauma, gender equity, and the protection of women in both fictional and real-world contexts.

First, it contributes to the growing body of trauma literature by centering the experiences of African female characters whose pain is often marginalized in mainstream discourses. By focusing on Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, the research explored how trauma, which is rooted in both personal and collective histories of violence, is not just a site of suffering but also a space for transformation. The narrative strategies used to depict trauma offer insight into how female characters reclaim agency through memory, voice and resistance. This enriches literary trauma theory by widening its scope to include African speculative fiction and black female voices.

To add on, the study advances the discourse on gender equality and equity by highlighting the structural and symbolic challenges women face in postcolonial, patriarchal societies. It demonstrates how trauma is gendered and how women bear brunt of not just physical violence, but also emotional, spiritual, and systemic oppression. By showcasing their reclamation of voice and agency, the study aligns with broader feminist efforts to amplify women's experiences, challenge gender hierarchies, and advocate for equitable spaces for female leadership, autonomy, and justice.

The study also speaks directly to contemporary concerns about the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence (GBV). Through fictionalized accounts of trauma including state violence, familial abuse, and systemic silencing, the research reflects the lived realities of millions of women across the world. It prompts critical reflection on how societies respond to female suffering and how voice can become a vehicle for justice, healing, and policy advocacy. By analysing trauma in this context, the study contributes to the cultural work of raising awareness and demanding accountability for GBV.

Furthermore, the study has global significance. Although Adeyemi's trilogy is grounded in African cosmology, its themes such as racial violence, gender oppression, and resistance are universally resonant. In a world grappling with colonial legacies, rising gender-based violence, and the silencing of marginalized voices, the study offers a literary framework for understanding how trauma can be narrated as a form of empowerment. It provides a tool for educators, activists, and policymakers to appreciate how fiction can influence social consciousness and help cultivate empathy, solidarity, and transformation.

Ultimately, the study not only deepens academic understanding of trauma and narrative but also contributes to global conversations on human rights, gender justice, and the transformative power of voice.

1.8 Research Methodology

1.8.1 Research Method

This study adopted a qualitative research method grounded in literary analysis. The qualitative approach was suitable because it emphasizes interpretation, meaning, and contextual understanding rather than numerical data. The research focused on the interpretation of narrative structures, language, and thematic elements in Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy (*Children of Blood and Bone* (2018), *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019), and

Children of Anguish and Anarchy (2024)). The study employed postcolonial trauma theory as its main analytical framework, drawing from theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Frantz Fanon, Homi Bhabha, and Gayatri Spivak. These theoretical lenses allowed for an exploration of how trauma and agency intersect within the text, and Adeyemi's narrative strategies serve as tools for reclaiming identity and power.

1.8.2 Data Sampling

The study used purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that allowed the researcher to intentionally select texts relevant to the study's objectives. The *legacy of Orisha* trilogy was chosen because it vividly explored the aftermath of historical violence, racial oppression, and female trauma within a postcolonial African-inspired setting. Within the trilogy, key scenes and passages that depict trauma, memory, resistance, and identity reconstruction were selected for close reading. The choice of female characters was deliberate as their experiences represented the intersection of gender, trauma, and identity.

1.8.3 Data classification

The data in the study consisted of textual evidence including narrative techniques, dialogue, imagery, and symbolism from the trilogy. The data was classified into thematic categories that corresponded to the study objectives: narrative strategies of trauma representation, formation of female identity through trauma and reclaiming agency of the female characters. The classification ensured systematic organization and facilitated coherent analysis of how Adeyemi uses narrative form to convey postcolonial and gendered trauma.

1.8.4 Data Analysis

The study employed textual thematic analysis. Through close reading, the study identified and interpreted passages that reflect the psychological and cultural dimensions of trauma. The analysis involved: examining narrative voice and temporality to understand how trauma is

experienced and communicated, how trauma shapes identity and ways through which resistance and healing is achieved.

1.8.5 Ethical Considerations

Although the study does not involve human participants, ethical responsibility was maintained through proper academic conduct. It ensured intellectual honesty by avoiding plagiarism and representing the author's ideas with fidelity. In discussing trauma, sensitivity was maintained to avoid exploitative or sensationalist descriptions. The study approached trauma narratives with respect for the lived and historical realities they symbolically represent. Prior to data collection and analysis, I obtained research permit from the university and research authorization from National Commission for science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI). Approval from NACOSTI ensured that the research met national ethical standards and that it posed no harm to the public or academic community.

CHAPTER TWO

NARRATING TRAUMA AND RECLAIMING FEMALE AGENCY: A LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 Introduction

This chapter offered a critical review of relevant existing literature related to trauma, female agency, and postcolonial narratives in African and diasporic fiction. It situated the study within a broader academic context by examining scholarly works that have explored the intersection of trauma theory, gender studies, and postcolonial discourse, with particular emphasis on female subjectivities. The chapter also outlined theoretical framework that underpins this study. It provided a critical lens through which the text is analysed, enabling a nuanced understanding of the character's psychological landscapes and social-political struggles. Together, the literature review and theoretical framework provide a foundation for the analysis that follows in subsequent chapters.

2.1 Literature Review

Cathy Caruth's trauma theory offers a foundational framework for understanding how literature bears witness to traumatic experience through narrative representation. In her seminal works *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996) and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), Caruth conceptualizes trauma as an event that is not fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly through flashbacks, nightmares, and repetitive actions. She argues that trauma represents a rupture in the psyche that disrupts temporality and subjectivity, making it resistant to direct representation. According to her, the essence of trauma lies not merely in the violent event itself but in its delayed, haunting return, an unassimilated experience that demands narration as a means of witnessing and understanding. The act of narrating, therefore, becomes a process of both confrontation and recovery, allowing the traumatized subject to bear witness to a truth that cannot otherwise be spoken.

Caruth's theory is particularly relevant to the study of Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy because it illuminates how narrative strategies such as fragmented temporality, shifting perspectives, and first-person narration reflect the workings of trauma within the characters' psyches. In *Children of Blood and Bone*, *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*, and *Children of Anguish and Anarchy*, Adeyemi constructs a world where collective and individual traumas rooted in genocide, loss, and colonial violence shape identity and agency. The female protagonist's recurring memories of her painful past, for instance, exemplify Caruth's notion of belatedness, as the trauma reemerges in fragmented recollections that continually destabilize her sense of self. Similarly, Amari's struggle with guilt and displacement echoes the repetitive return of traumatic memory that Caruth describes. Adeyemi's use of multiple focalizations and disrupted temporal sequences allows readers to inhabit the disorientation of trauma, mirroring Caruth's assertion that trauma can only be represented through its symptoms rather than through direct depiction.

Through Caruth's lens, the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy can be understood as a narrative of witnessing, both individual and communal. Adeyemi's characters attempt to articulate pain that resists language, and through storytelling, they transform private suffering into collective memory. This aligns with Caruth's argument that trauma is not simply personal but also historical, carrying an ethical imperative to bear witness on behalf of others. The female protagonists' narratives of pain, resistance, and reclamation serve as acts of testimony that bridge the personal and the political, echoing Caruth's belief that trauma narratives have the potential to connect disparate experiences of suffering across time and space. Adeyemi's blending of African indigenous spirituality and modern symbols of oppression further complicates Caruth's Western-centered framework by situating trauma within a postcolonial context, where the afterlives of slavery, racism, and disenfranchisement are inscribed upon Black female bodies.

Despite its profound insights, Caruth's trauma theory also presents a theoretical gap when applied to postcolonial texts like Adeyemi's. Her framework, rooted in Western psychoanalysis and primarily based on Holocaust narratives, tends to universalize trauma, often overlooking the sociopolitical dimensions of violence and the cultural mechanisms of healing present in non-Western societies. Caruth's emphasis on the individual unconscious neglects the collective and systemic nature of trauma that defines postcolonial histories. In Adeyemi's trilogy, trauma is not only psychological but also structural stemming from colonial hierarchies, racial violence, and intergenerational oppression. The healing process, too, is not confined to individual therapy or narration but is embedded in communal rituals, ancestral memory, and spiritual restoration. This distinction exposes the limitations of Caruth's theory and underscores the need for a hybrid approach that integrates both Western trauma theory and African indigenous epistemologies.

By engaging with Caruth while situating Adeyemi's work within an African postcolonial framework, this study fills the gap between Western theoretical models of trauma and the lived realities of colonized and racialized subjects. Adeyemi's narrative strategies challenge Caruth's Eurocentric assumptions by demonstrating that trauma in African diasporic contexts is not only about belated memory but also about the ongoing struggle for identity, resistance, and agency. The *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, therefore, extends Caruth's discourse on trauma by transforming narrative witnessing into a form of empowerment, showing how storytelling and collective remembrance can reclaim agency in the aftermath of historical and cultural erasure.

Dominick LaCapra (2001) makes a significant contribution to trauma theory by distinguishing between "acting out" and "working through" trauma. He argues that trauma is not only a psychological phenomenon but also a historiographical and ethical challenge that must be addressed through responsible narrative practices. According to LaCapra, "acting out" is a repetitive and melancholic reliving of the traumatic past, while "working through" involves a critical engagement that allows the subject to process trauma and reintegrate it into historical

consciousness. His emphasis on narrative, memory, and ethical historiography offers a useful framework for understanding how trauma can be addressed constructively through writing and reflection. LaCapra also stresses the importance of distinguishing between victims and perpetrators, cautioning against over-identification or conflation, which can lead to moral and political ambiguity.

While LaCapra provides an important ethical dimension to trauma theory, his work remains largely situated within Western historical and philosophical contexts, focusing on events such as the Holocaust or postwar trauma in the global North. This framing does not fully account for the ongoing, systemic, and colonial forms of violence that persist in postcolonial African societies and their literary representations. This element challenge LaCapra's Eurocentric assumptions and call for a broader theoretical lens that recognizes alternative modes of survival and agency rooted in African traditions and postcolonial struggle.

Dori Laub, a psychoanalyst and Holocaust survivor, situates trauma within the dynamics of testimony and listening. His collaboration with Shoshana Felman in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, psychoanalysis, and History* (1992), foregrounds the idea that trauma constitutes an event that cannot be fully known at the moment of its occurrence. According to Laub (1992), traumatic event is "not experienced fully in time" but returns belatedly, demanding a process of narration that is co-created between a survivor and a listener (p. 57). Testimony thus becomes an event in itself and an act through which both witness and listener reconstruct the lost event and generate meaning from rupture.

Laub emphasizes that the act of giving testimony involves a double process: the survivor must become a witness to their own trauma, and the listener must create the conditions for that witnessing to occur. The listener's role is not passive but a form of "bearing witness" (Laub, 1992, p.85). Because trauma fragments memory and speech, testimony often emerges in broken

narratives, silences, or repetitions that gesture toward what cannot be fully articulated. Laub argues that this fragmentation is not a failure of narrative but the form through which trauma is expressed. The gaps and repetitions signal the unspeakable nature of the experience and the survivor's struggle to reclaim a sense of self.

In literary representation, Laub's framework encourages reading the narrative form itself as a site of witnessing. Fragmented temporality, multiple perspectives, and disrupted chronologies mimic the psychological disorientation of trauma. The text becomes testimonial space in which characters, narrators, and readers participate in acts of witnessing. Within Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, Laub's notion of testimony is reflected in female characters' fragmented narration, where memory and violence intertwine. Within Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, Laub's notion of testimony is reflected in her female characters' fragmented narration, where memory and violence intertwine. Their voices intertwine between silence and speech, embodying what Laub describes as the "struggle to articulate the impossible" (p.82). Adeyemi's use of first-person narration transforms each character's voice into a testimonial site, compelling readers to assume the ethical position of the listener.

Laub's theory also underscores the ethical dimension of reading trauma. The reader is not merely an observer but a secondary witness who must engage emphatically with the text's silences and ruptures. Adeyemi's depiction of generational violence and systemic oppression thus extends Laub's argument. Trauma in the trilogy is both personal and collective, and narrative becomes a means of restoring historical continuity that colonialism and racial violence have denied.

While Laub focuses on witnessing and testimony, Judith L. Herman, a psychiatrist and trauma theorist, situates trauma within a clinical and sociopolitical framework. In *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence, from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* (1992), Herman

defines trauma as an event that overwhelms the ordinary systems of care and control, leaving the victim powerless and disconnected from self and community. Her seminal contributions lie in three stage model of recovery: establishing safety, remembering and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life.

Herman argues that recovery begins when survivors regain a sense of safety, both physical and emotional, that allows them to confront repressed memories. The second stage involves the act of remembering, transforming traumatic memories into narrative memory through testimony. The third stage reconnection, restores agency and allows survivors to reengage with social life. Crucially, Herman extends trauma theory beyond clinic, asserting that trauma theory is both personal and political. Recovery, therefore, requires not only psychological healing but also social acknowledgment and justice.

In literary studies, Herman's framework provides a structural lens for analyzing character development and narrative progression. The process of recovery mirrors the narrative arc of trauma fiction, where characters move from chaos to reconstruction. Adeyemi's female protagonists exemplify this trajectory. Their experiences of violence and dispossession correspond to Herman's first stage of instability and loss of safety. Through acts of remembrance, ritual mourning, storytelling and reclaiming magical identity, they begin to articulate their trauma. However, Adeyemi complicates Herman's linear model by revealing that recovery in a postcolonial context is never complete. Vengeance, guilt, and structural injustice continually reopen the wound.

While Dori Laub and Judith Herman have significantly advanced trauma theory by emphasizing the importance of testimony, bearing witness, and recovery through narration, their frameworks primarily evolved within western clinical and historical contexts, especially in relation to Holocaust survivors and western therapeutic practices. Their theories illuminate how trauma

disrupts memory, voice, and identity, and how narrative reconstruction can restore agency. However, they do not often account for the specific cultural, colonial and gendered dimensions of trauma as experienced in African postcolonial contexts.

Michael Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory reframes collective remembrance by arguing that memories of distinct historical violence need not compete in a zero-sum economy of attention but can instead circulate productively across communities to generate comparative ethical awareness and solidarities. Rothberg (2009) demonstrates that acts of remembrance are shaped by contemporaneous political struggles and that memorial practices often borrow, reshape, and illuminate one another rather than displace each other. Applied to Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, Rothberg's framework legitimizes readings that situate the novels' fictional archive, its oral histories, public testimonies, and ritual recollections, within broader global histories of state violence, racialized dispossession, and colonial trauma. In this regard, Rothberg's argument provides a theoretical foundation for understanding how Adeyemi's narrative intertwines personal grief and collective memory. The multidirectional approach allows the trilogy's representation of trauma, particularly the female protagonists recurring experiences of loss, to resonate with larger cultural narratives of oppression and genocide rather than existing as isolated psychic events. Through this lens, the trilogy's narrative voice and temporality perform political and ethical work beyond personal catharsis, enabling both characters and readers to link individual suffering with wider historical memory and to imagine solidarities that transcend temporal and cultural boundaries.

Stef Craps's *Postcolonial Witnessing* (2013) provides an essential corrective to universalist models of trauma theory by demonstrating that trauma must be read within its historical, cultural, and colonial contexts. Craps critiques the Eurocentric tendencies of early trauma theorists, who often privileged Holocaust testimony and Western psychoanalytic categories, thereby marginalizing colonial and racialized forms of suffering. His call for a more culturally

sensitive and ethically situated trauma criticism highlights the necessity of accounting for collective and structural trauma, as well as the diverse cultural forms through which different societies narrate and heal from suffering. Within the context of Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, Craps's postcolonial framework illuminates how the author employs indigenous epistemologies, ritual, spirituality, and communal memory, as alternative forms of witnessing that resist colonial erasure. These modes of storytelling, which rely on ancestral connection and shared remembrance, function as acts of testimony that affirm identity and agency in the aftermath of violence. Craps's insistence on attending to asymmetries of power and cultural specificity ensures that interpretations of Adeyemi's narrative avoid flattening postcolonial trauma into a universal psychological condition.

The theoretical perspectives of Rothberg and Craps both inform and complicate the analysis of trauma representation in Adeyemi's trilogy. Rothberg's model supports the notion that the novels engage in a network of multidirectional remembrance, where different forms of trauma; personal, communal, and historical, interact to produce new ethical and political insights. Conversely, Craps's critique cautions against uncritical comparison by emphasizing the need to maintain sensitivity to the unique sociocultural and historical conditions of postcolonial trauma. Together, these perspectives demonstrate that *Legacy of Orisha* represents trauma not only as a psychological wound but also as a cultural and political phenomenon rooted in the afterlives of colonialism. Adeyemi's use of fragmented temporality, polyvocal narration, and ritualized storytelling transforms the experience of trauma into a multidimensional narrative of resistance and remembrance. The convergence of Rothberg's multidirectional memory and Craps's postcolonial witnessing thus offers a nuanced interpretive framework that the trilogy both participates in global conversations about trauma and memory and asserts the distinctiveness of African modes of testimony and recovery.

Ato Quayson's (2007) concept of *aesthetic nervousness* offers a compelling framework for analyzing how African literature communicates postcolonial tensions. He argues that African texts often reflect an aesthetic dissonance when attempting to reconcile indigenous knowledge systems with Western literary forms. This nervousness manifests stylistically through fragmentation, disjointed timelines, and narrative instability as a formal response to historical trauma and colonial disruption. Quayson's theory is valuable for understanding how the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy destabilizes narrative through magical realism and non-linear temporality to echo the fractured identities of its characters. However, while Quayson acknowledges historical trauma, his framework is not explicitly trauma-theoretical, nor does it center gender or the embodied experiences of women. His analysis tends to universalize postcolonial experience without a sustained focus on the specificities of female pain, psychological wounds, or agency. This created a critical gap which my study sought to fill by using trauma theory to foreground how Black African girls experience and narrate trauma, not merely as symptoms of postcolonial disorder, but as agents who actively resist, reconfigure identity, and reclaim voice through culturally embedded strategies and voice. The research builds on Quayson's aesthetic insights but reorients the analysis toward gendered agency and the political ethics of female testimony in speculative African fiction.

In his more recent work, *Tragedy and Postcolonial Literature* (2021), Quayson extends his examination of suffering and narrative to explore how tragedy functions within postcolonial contexts. He argues that tragedy in African and diasporic literature is not merely about fatalism but rather reflects the tension between systemic injustice and individual moral agency. This framework was useful for interpreting how Adeyemi's characters confront moral dilemmas and structural violence. However, Quayson (2021) still foregrounds classical and Western tragic paradigms, even while critiquing them, which limits the scope for analyzing gender-specific trauma in speculative or magical-realist settings. His analysis tends to prioritize philosophical

and ethical dimensions over affective, embodied, or psychically wounded subjectivities, particularly those of women. My study, therefore, identified a critical gap in Quayson's theorization of postcolonial suffering, that is, the need to center female experiences of trauma and resistance.

Tal (1996) offers foundational insights into how trauma disrupts identity, narrative, and cultural memory. Tal contends that trauma is not simply a past event but a force that fractures language and destabilizes the self, making narration itself a struggle. She argues that survivors often rely on fragmented, repetitive, or disrupted narrative forms because conventional storytelling cannot capture the extremity of their experience. Furthermore, Tal views testimony as a political act: through narrating trauma, marginalized survivors challenge dominant historical discourses and assert their presence and truth. This concept of "survivor literature" as a genre that resists closure and insists on bearing witness has profoundly shaped trauma theory.

While Tal's work provides a crucial foundation for understanding the narrative consequences of trauma, her focus primarily centers on Western and war-related experiences, with limited engagement with postcolonial or gender-specific contexts. The present study builds on and expands Tal's framework by situating trauma within a postcolonial African-futurist and feminist context. In this study, trauma is not only a site of fragmentation but also a site of resistance and transformation. Female subjects utilize narrative voice not merely to survive trauma, but to reclaim agency and rewrite their identities in defiance of colonial and patriarchal oppression. Thus, the study extends Tal's insights by illustrating how trauma narration becomes an act of female empowerment and epistemic resistance, especially in Black diasporic literature that intersects with gendered and racialized violence.

Feminist theory and trauma provide lens through which to examine the experiences of trauma among women. Authors such as Judith Herman (1992) have highlighted the necessity of

understanding trauma within social and political contexts. Herman posits that trauma is not merely an individual psychological event but is deeply embedded within systemic structures of oppression, more so for women who face gender-based violence. The experiences of trauma and the female subject cannot also be understood without considering cultural and intersectional dimensions. BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and people of Colour) women's experiences of trauma are often shaped by systemic oppression and cultural marginalization (Crenshaw, 1989). The narratives of women from marginalized communities often highlight how systemic oppression exacerbates trauma. For instance, Gloria Anzaldua's "Borderlands/La Frontera" explores the trauma faced by women on the U.S.-Mexico border, addressing issues of cultural displacement and identity. Anzaldua's work emphasizes that trauma is not uniformly experienced; rather, it is deeply intertwined with social and cultural contexts. Overall, feminist scholars advocate for reclamation of the female subject in the context of trauma. The work of Laura S. Brown (1995) emphasizes healing through female awareness and empowerment, arguing that women's bodies must be sites of agency and resistance rather than mere objects of trauma.

Feminist literary scholarship has also centred the experiences of women as subjects of both oppression and resistance, with specific focus on how literature reflects and contests patriarchal structures. Foundational feminist theorists such as Simone de Beauvoir (1949), bell hooks (1984), and Judith Butler (1990) have explored how female subjectivity, embodiment, and power are constructed, policed, and resisted. While their contributions remain influential, much of early feminist criticism tended to universalize women's experiences, often ignoring the intersections of race, colonial history and geography that shape trauma and resistance for women of color.

The emergence of Black feminist thought and intersectionality, particularly through the work of Crenshaw, offered a powerful corrective by insisting that gender could not be understood in isolation from race, class, and culture. Black feminist writers and scholars such as Bell Hooks,

have emphasized the unique and compounded traumas faced by Black women and girls, especially in systems rooted in white supremacy and patriarchal domination. Their insistence on the importance of voice, visibility and lived experience resonates with the way Adeyemi centers young Black women as protagonist who confront colonial violence, sexual violation, and silencing.

Despite these advances, relatively little feminist scholarship has focused on speculative fiction by African or diasporic women, particularly texts written for young adult audiences. Scholars such as Womack (2013) and Morris (2015) have begun examining Afrofuturism and Black girlhood in speculative fiction as sites of liberation and imagination. Womack argues that Afrofuturist narratives allow Black women to reclaim control over representation, history, and futurity. However, while these frameworks celebrate empowerment and cultural reclamation, they often do not interrogate trauma in depth or explore how trauma shapes identity, memory, and resistance in girl protagonists.

Feminist trauma theorists such as Felman & Laub (1992), as well as contemporary African scholars like Mama (2001) and Nnaemeka (2004), have examined how trauma is gendered in postcolonial contexts. Nnaemeka's concept of nego-feminism, a feminism of negotiation rather than confrontation, provides a culturally grounded framework for understanding how African women navigate structural violence and patriarchal control while seeking healing and agency. Similarly, Mama (2001) highlights the psychological and political trauma that African women face due to colonial legacies and gender-based violence, emphasizing that resistance must be both personal and collective.

Obioma Nnaemeka's (2004) concept of nego-feminism, or "negotiated feminism," offers a significant departure from Western feminist paradigms by centering African women's lived experiences, relational ethics, and communal responsibilities. Nnaemeka argues that African

feminisms are inherently rooted in negotiation and complementarity, rather than confrontation, emphasizing that African women negotiate their agency within complex socio-cultural systems rather than opposing them outright. This concept shifts the feminist discourse from individual autonomy to communal interconnectedness, privileging the strategies African women use to assert their subjectivity without destabilizing the fabric of their societies. In literary studies, nego-feminism has been applied to analyze how female characters resist patriarchal oppression through indirect, relational, and dialogic means (Nnaemeka, 2004). However, while Nnaemeka's theory offers a culturally grounded framework, it risks romanticizing negotiation in contexts where structural violence such as colonial trauma, state brutality, and gender-based subjugation is neither negotiable nor reciprocal. The emphasis on harmony may underplay the intensity of trauma experienced by African female subjects whose resistance often arises not through negotiation but through rupture, disobedience, or symbolic violence. This study departs from Nnaemeka's framework by investigating how trauma disrupts traditional relational ethics and reconfigures the female subject's agency in more volatile, non-negotiable ways. The gap lies in the need to theorize African female trauma not only in terms of negotiation but also in terms of postcolonial rupture, affective dislocation, and narrative rebellion.

Amina Mama's (2001) scholarship offers a profound interrogation of the intersections between gender, power, and postcolonial trauma in African contexts. In her seminal work *"Beyond the Masks: Race, Gender and Subjectivity,"* Mama exposes how African women are subjected to layered traumas that are both psychological and political, rooted in histories of colonial violence, militarism, state repression, and patriarchal domination. She argues that African women subjectivities are continuously shaped by a legacy of dispossession, bodily control, and silencing, often reinforced through state institutions and cultural expectations. Drawing on feminist and psychoanalytic frameworks, Mama traces how internalized oppression, fear, and self-censorship manifest as psychic wounds, making African women's trauma both personal

and collective. Her analysis is crucial for understanding the gendered consequences of postcolonial violence and how women navigate systems of power that simultaneously exploit and erase them. However, while Mama's work is instrumental in theorizing African women's trauma, it remains largely grounded in non-literary and sociopolitical analysis, with limited attention to fictional or narrative representations of trauma.

Margaret Atwood's literary corpus, especially *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985) and *Alias Grace* (1996), has also significantly shaped feminist literary discourse on trauma, power, and female agency. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, Atwood explores how patriarchal theocracies manipulate women's bodies and memories as tools of state control, crafting a dystopian narrative that resonates with real-world histories of gendered oppression. Similarly, *Alias Grace* examines trauma through the lens of memory, madness, and criminality, exposing how women's narratives are often distorted or silenced within patriarchal and legal frameworks. Atwood's stylistic use of unreliable narration, fragmented memory, and layered storytelling reflects trauma theory's understanding of the non-linear and disruptive nature of traumatic experience, especially in contexts of sexual and institutional violence. Her work has become a cornerstone for feminist and trauma-centered literary analysis, offering insights into how narrative structures mirror psychic fragmentation and political silencing.

However, Atwood's narratives—while deeply insightful—are shaped by Western, settler-colonial contexts and often center white, Western women's experiences. Her conceptualization of trauma and resistance, although politically charged, does not sufficiently engage with the complexities of postcolonial trauma, racialized identity, or Africa-specific epistemologies of survival and healing. Furthermore, the oppressive structures in Atwood's works often leave little room for characters to reclaim transformative agency beyond endurance or subversion. This creates a gap that my study sought to fill.

Laura Alexander's *Women Writing Trauma in Literature* (2022) offers an important contribution to trauma studies by focusing on how women authors narrate experiences of violence, loss, and psychic rupture. Her work explores the literary strategies female writers use—such as fragmentation, disjointed temporality, silence, and unreliable narration—to represent trauma in ways that resist linear, patriarchal storytelling. Alexander argues that women's trauma narratives are not only testimonies of suffering but also acts of political and literary subversion, reclaiming space and voice in a historically male-dominated literary tradition. This focus on form, voice, and the ethics of representation provides a useful framework for analyzing how trauma is gendered, narrated, and resisted in literature.

However, Alexander's study is grounded primarily in Euro-American literary contexts and privileges Western canonical texts. It does not adequately engage with non-Western, postcolonial, or African women's trauma writing, nor does it account for the cultural and historical specificity of colonial violence, racialized trauma, or the intergenerational memory of slavery and imperialism that shape the narratives of African and diasporic women. While Alexander highlights the power of female-authored trauma fiction, she remains within the confines of realism.

Mikayla G. Criegeer's literature review, *Reclaiming Voice Following Sexual Trauma Utilizing Photo-Narrative Therapy* (2020), presents an innovative engagement with trauma recovery by exploring how visual storytelling and narrative therapy can assist survivors of sexual trauma in reclaiming their voice. Criegeer draws upon interdisciplinary research in psychology, art therapy, and feminist theory to argue that photo-narrative therapy, through the combination of image and text, creates space for survivors to externalize, process, and re-narrate their experiences. This method disrupts traditional, linear models of healing and centers the survivor as both subject and author of their trauma narrative, thereby re-establishing agency and autonomy.

Crieger's work is especially valuable for its emphasis on non-verbal modes of expression, which are crucial in contexts where trauma resists articulation.

While Crieger's review offers rich insight into therapeutic interventions for trauma, it is rooted primarily in clinical, Western frameworks and individual-centered approaches. Her study does not engage with collective or historical trauma, nor does it account for the structural and postcolonial dimensions of violence that shape many women's experiences in formerly colonized societies. Furthermore, the focus on therapeutic recovery sidelines the potential for trauma narratives to also function as political tools of resistance and cultural reclamation, particularly in literature. This study extended and repositioned Crieger's insights by moving beyond psychological therapy into the realm of postcolonial literary trauma, where voice reclamation is both aesthetic and political.

Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy occupies a unique space in this discourse. As a young adult fantasy series grounded in Yoruba cosmology and postcolonial allegory, it centers the experiences of Black female characters who undergo profound psychological, physical, and generational trauma. Yet, as of this writing, there remains a limited body of scholarly literature that interrogates how Adeyemi's work depicts trauma through narrative form and how female protagonists reclaim agency through narration. Most existing analyses are journalistic or thematic, lacking a sustained theoretical engagement with trauma and gendered resistance.

In *Reclaiming Narratives in Postcolonial Literature: The Role of Black Writers in Challenging Colonial Myths and Constructing New Histories* (2024), Dr. Rashmi G. H makes a significant contribution to postcolonial literary criticism by interrogating how Black writers use literature as a political and cultural tool to reclaim silenced histories, subvert colonial narratives, and reconstitute collective memory. Through close readings of postcolonial texts from Africa, the Caribbean, and the African diaspora, Dr. Rashmi argues that literature becomes a counter-

discursive space where myths of imperial benevolence, racial superiority, and cultural erasure are exposed and dismantled. Central to her thesis is the recognition that storytelling for Black writers is not merely artistic but deeply political, embedded in the struggle for epistemic justice, historical visibility, and cultural affirmation.

Dr. Rashmi highlights how Black writers disrupt the Eurocentric construction of history by reinscribing indigenous perspectives, oral traditions, and precolonial knowledges into their works. In doing so, they create alternative archives of memory, resisting the colonial project's effort to represent the colonized subject as ahistorical, voiceless, and subordinate. Writers such as Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Toni Morrison are cited as exemplars in this reclamation, using fiction to foreground African worldviews, challenge colonial education systems, and recover narratives of resistance. Dr. Rashmi also pays attention to form and structure, noting how non-linear time, intergenerational memory, and symbolic imagery are used by Black writers to convey the fragmentation and endurance of postcolonial trauma.

While Dr. Rashmi's work provides a crucial foundation for understanding the political function of postcolonial literature, her analysis predominantly focuses on male-authored realist narratives, and does not fully address how Black women writers, particularly in speculative genres, expand the boundaries of historical reclamation and narrative resistance. The study acknowledges the role of writers like Morrison but offers limited engagement with female-centered trauma or the specific ways gendered violence and silencing intersect with colonial histories. Moreover, the genre of speculative fiction, especially African-inspired fantasy, is largely absent from the discussion, despite its growing prominence in postcolonial literary production.

It is this gap that my study sought to fill. While Dr. Rashmi's work effectively foregrounds how Black writers challenge colonial myths through realist and historical fiction, my research built

upon her insights by turning to Black women's speculative fiction, specifically Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy—as a space where postcolonial trauma, resistance, and female agency are not only represented but radically reimaged.

In the realm of African and diasporic Literature, scholars like Evaristo (2019) and Norridge (2013) have begun exploring how Black women writers use narrative as a form of healing and resistance. However, few have focused specifically on speculative fiction, and even fewer have critically examined how narrative strategies such as first-person voice, articulate the trauma of Black female characters. Furthermore, while there is growing interest in Africanfuturism and Black speculative fiction, studies often prioritize themes of liberation and technology (Okorafor, 2019) over emotional and psychological recovery from trauma.

In addition, In African literary scholarship, trauma has been explored primarily in relation to the violence of colonialism, war, dictatorship, and gender-based oppression. Writers such as Ngugi wa Thiongó, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Yvonne Vera, and Bessie Head have received considerable academic attention for their portrayals of historical trauma and female suffering. Scholars like Nnaemeka (2004), and Musila (2015) have explored how African women writers confront trauma through acts of narration, cultural memory, and embodiment. However, much of this literature focuses on realistic fiction and historical settings, with limited attention paid to speculative or fantasy narratives as legitimate sites for engaging trauma.

Michael Olamide Okekunle and colleagues' article *Traumatic and Psychological Impacts of Abuse in African Novels: A Reading of Oyinkan Braithwaite's My Sister, the Serial Killer and Lara Brown's Once Upon Our Childhood* (2021) offers a relevant contribution to trauma and gender studies within African literature. The authors investigate how abuse, particularly emotional, physical, and gendered abuse, leaves lasting psychological imprints on women and girls, and how these impacts are communicated through literary representation. Their dual

analysis of a contemporary Nigerian noir novel and a more intimate, semi-autobiographical narrative enables a multi-layered engagement with trauma, complicity, and the inheritance of violence within African socio-political and domestic spaces.

Lutho Mtongana's scholarly engagement with *Memory, Trauma and Narrative in Yvonne Vera's The Stone Virgins and Delia Jarrett-Macauley's Moses, Citizen and Me* (2018) offers a nuanced and compelling analysis of how postcolonial women writers articulate trauma through narrative form, character interiority, and historical reconstruction. In his reading of Yvonne Vera and Delia Jarrett-Macauley, Mtongana focuses on how female-centered trauma fiction negotiates the intersections of memory, gendered violence, and national history. Both *The Stone Virgins* and *Moses, Citizen and Me* are set against the backdrop of political conflict, Zimbabwe's Gukurahundi and Sierra Leone's civil war respectively, and reveal the psychic and bodily scars left by these events on women and children.

Mtongana argues that memory in these narratives functions not only as a recollection of the past but as a contested, fragmented process that reflects the trauma of colonial and postcolonial violence. He highlights how the authors deliberately employ non-linear storytelling, poetic language, and narrative silences to reflect trauma's resistance to conventional narration. Yvonne Vera's use of elliptical prose and fragmented consciousness mirrors the psychological rupture experienced by female characters who suffer rape, war, and social exile. Similarly, Jarrett-Macauley's novel interrogates the relationship between memory, testimony, and healing, particularly through the lens of former child soldiers and their reintegration into society.

Mtongana's work is valuable for its sensitive literary analysis of postcolonial trauma through a gendered lens, and it contributes significantly to African literary trauma studies by showing how women's bodies and voices become the sites where the violence of the nation-state is

inscribed and resisted. Importantly, the study also reflects on the ethical responsibilities of narrative, how authors reconstruct violent histories without re-exploiting victims, and on how storytelling itself may become a medium for healing and reclaiming agency.

However, Mtongana's focus remains grounded in realist and historical fiction, and the trauma he analyzes is mostly rooted in specific, documented national conflicts. While this offers historical and political clarity, it limits the exploration of alternative, speculative, or mythic frameworks through which African women might narrate or transcend trauma. Furthermore, although Mtongana insightfully addresses memory and silence, he does not fully explore how narrative can move beyond bearing witness into the realm of transformative resistance, particularly when characters reclaim not only voice but also magical or cosmological agency.

Mosigisi Kevin Morwani's study, *"The Construction of Female Agency in David Mulwa's Prose Fiction,"* (2021) offers a focused analysis of how female characters assert themselves within the social, political, and cultural landscapes of Mulwa's Kenyan fiction. Through a critical reading of Mulwa's narrative strategies and character development, Morwani argues that female agency is constructed through resistance to patriarchal norms, moral conviction, and participation in community transformation. The study is significant in its effort to recover African women's presence and voice within male-authored African literature, and it contributes to broader conversations about gender representation in postcolonial fiction. Morwani also pays attention to how cultural norms are both challenged and reinforced through female characters' actions, showing how agency is negotiated rather than absolute.

However, Morwani's analysis is largely confined to realist, male-authored narratives, and the construction of agency is often situated within traditional moral and social frameworks. The female characters in Mulwa's fiction, while active and resilient, often derive their agency through socially acceptable forms of resistance, such as upholding communal ethics or serving

in caretaking roles, rather than through revolutionary or transformative power. The study does not interrogate how trauma, particularly gendered or historical trauma, shapes or disrupts the formation of agency. Nor does it engage with speculative or imaginative reconfigurations of agency that move beyond realist representation.

Mahmood Mamdani's *When Victims Become Killers: Colonialism, Nativism, and the Genocide in Rwanda (2001)* provides a critical historical and political framework for understanding how colonial trauma, when unaddressed, can reproduce itself through cycles of violence, vengeance, and distorted identities. Mamdani examines how colonial structures in Africa racialized identities, institutionalized division, and left deep psychological and political scars that re-emerged in post-independence conflicts. His concept of the "bifurcated state" where colonial governance divided citizens, reveals how trauma is not only personal but also systemic and inherited, shaping how oppressed groups internalize victimhood and sometimes reproduce violence.

While Mamdani's work is grounded in political history and does not explicitly focus on literary narratives, it offers a powerful theoretical lens for understanding how trauma shapes collective memory, identity, and agency. This perspective was particularly relevant to the present study's analysis of Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* where female characters are caught in postcolonial world marked by institutionalized violence and historical erasure. Their narrative trajectories reflect how trauma can give rise to both resistance and cycles of vengeance, mirroring Mamdani's insights on how former victims, when denied healing or justice, may reproduce the violence of their oppressors. This study therefore builds on Mamdani's work by translating his social-political insights into a literary and feminist framework, exploring how Black female characters navigate the tension between inherited trauma and the pursuit of restorative agency.

In *Trauma and Transformation in African Literature* (2020), J. Roger Kurtz expands trauma theory by foregrounding African literary responses to violence, colonialism, and identity rupture. His concept of the African moral imagination, the use of narrative to repair, reconfigure, and reassert meaning after trauma, places African literature not as a recipient of Western trauma theory, but as a theoretical contributor in its own right. Through close analysis of works by Achebe, Ngugi, Farah among others, Kurtz emphasizes that African writers narrate trauma not solely through fragmentation and silence, but through culturally rooted forms of moral transformation, often blending personal pain with collective recovery.

In order to deal with the consequences of colonial wounding, many post-colonial literatures indicate that trauma itself gives rise to a strong need for narrative. For example, Patricia Grace, a Maori writer, essentially argues that the injustices and wrongs of colonialism are producing a restless state in which trauma must be brought to light through narrative. Thus, a cohesive narrative empowers individuals, and even cultures, because of its critical role in cultural survival. Grace's novel *Baby No-eyes* represents the narration of traumatic memories by the metaphor of unwinding bandages. The bandages of painful memories in this metaphor are removed through the act of oral storytelling, by revealing the injustices done to people and their families, and by bringing to light their own acquiescence, remorse and shame. This implies that telling the story of trauma leads to health; as protagonist Gran Kura (1998) states, it is a "ridding oneself of sickness" (p. 148). This claim confirms that while trauma is a condition that can stay unexpressed for a very long time, it cannot be cured until it is brought to light by narrative coherence. The narrative strategies employed by Grace in her novel, *Baby No-eyes* have significant parallels with the narrative techniques adopted in Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy.

Anne-Marie De Beer and Elisabeth Snyman's (2015) essay, "*Shadows of Life, Death and Survival in the Aftermath of the Rwandan Genocide*," offers a compelling examination of how

survivors of mass violence navigate the threshold between death and life in post-genocidal contexts. Drawing on the narratives of genocide survivors, the authors explore the shadowy space in which trauma is neither wholly past nor fully present, but instead haunts survivors' consciousness as an ever-lingering presence. Their analysis foregrounds how trauma destabilizes not only memory but also identity and belonging in the aftermath of collective violence. This work is significant for understanding the affective, psychological, and narrative dimensions of trauma, particularly in contexts where the social fabric has been torn by state-sanctioned violence.

However, while De Beer and Snyman's work enriches trauma studies by analyzing the Rwandan genocide through personal narratives, it remains grounded in nonfictional, testimonial accounts and does not engage with fictional or speculative literary strategies through which trauma can also be represented, imagined, and reconfigured. Their study does not consider how postcolonial fantasy fiction might bear witness to intergenerational or inherited trauma, especially as experienced by young, Black female protagonists within African-inspired worlds.

Kurt Borg (2018) explores how narrative coherence is paramount in different dominant discourses as it is seen as empowering traumatized individuals by allowing them more influence over their lives. His article focuses on the narratives of sexual abuse by Alice Sebold and Susan Brison to demonstrate how narrative coherence works in the legal and political frameworks of textification as a hegemonic standard that circumscribes how trauma is narrated by promoting certain types of self-narration while silencing other forms. Narrative coherence is perceived to be powerful in mental health discourses as it is seen as a measure of empowering traumatized people by allowing them more influence over their own lives. My own research used literary fiction to try to see how Adeyemi uses fictional techniques to mirror traumatic experiences.

In the Kenyan context, studies such as those by Waliaula (2013) and Ndigirigi (2011) have analysed trauma through the lens of post-election violence, focusing on how female characters negotiate identity and memory in the wake of national trauma. These studies contribute to our understanding of the social and political dimensions of trauma but remain largely silent on young adult narratives, fantasy genres, or how female agency is reclaimed through culturally symbolic storytelling frameworks rooted in African epistemologies.

Marie Béatrice Umutesi's *Surviving the Slaughter: The Ordeal of a Rwandan Refugee in Zaire* (2004) is a powerful autobiographical account that documents the harrowing experience of a Hutu woman fleeing post-genocide Rwanda during the retaliatory violence that targeted civilians in refugee camps. Her memoir brings into focus a neglected aspect of the Rwandan crisis by offering a complex, often uncomfortable perspective that challenges simplified binaries of victim and perpetrator. Through her lived testimony, Umutesi offers a deeply personal portrayal of dislocation, gendered vulnerability, survival, and the trauma of being cast as collateral in the aftermath of national conflict.

Her work is valuable for trauma studies because it highlights how African women negotiate trauma not only as victims of violence but also as subjects entangled in shifting political identities. Umutesi resists the dehumanizing silence imposed on survivors by bearing witness to suffering that is often erased from international discourse. Her memoir extends beyond the immediate horrors of genocide to consider the long-term consequences of displacement, hunger, fear, and betrayal, particularly for women navigating war zones with no institutional protection.

Athana Mutisya Peter's scholarly work *Narrating Publicness in Selected Contemporary Kenyan Women's Autobiographies* (2021) offers a critical intervention into African life writing by examining how Kenyan women use autobiography as a political and cultural strategy to

claim space in the public sphere. Focusing on autobiographies by prominent Kenyan women such as Wambui Otieno, Njoki Ndung'u, and Wangari Maathai, Mutisya argues that these life narratives transcend the private realm to articulate collective histories, challenge patriarchal silencing, and reconfigure the gendered dynamics of public participation.

Mutisya's key contribution lies in his framing of "publicness" as a narratable identity, which Kenyan women claim through deliberate acts of self-inscription. Drawing from postcolonial and feminist theorists such as Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, he suggests that autobiography becomes a vehicle not only for personal testimony but for social activism. Kenyan women's autobiographies, in this reading, are positioned as counter-narratives that rewrite colonial and post-independence masculinist discourses that have historically marginalized women's voices and political contributions.

Importantly, Mutisya illustrates how these autobiographical texts confront national histories that have sidelined women's roles in liberation struggles, governance, and intellectual life. Through the performance of "narrative publicness," these women inscribe themselves as both witnesses and participants in national memory. This aligns closely with trauma theorist Cathy Caruth's notion that testimony is an act of bearing witness that connects the individual to collective trauma and recovery.

However, while Mutisya's analysis is rigorous and deeply rooted in African feminist thought, it is limited by its focus on realism and nonfictional self-representation. The autobiographical genre, by its very nature, is bound to the historical and the factual. As a result, Mutisya's work engages predominantly with representations of trauma and agency through conventional, realist frameworks, privileging overt political expression and national identity formation.

Mutisya does not fully explore how form, narrative technique, and voice contribute to agency. This study placed particular emphasis on how Adeyemi uses first-person narration to center

female experience and ensure that the trauma of girl characters is not only represented but felt and processed narratively. In contrast to autobiographies that follow linear timelines and retrospective reflection, Adeyemi's novels used fragmented temporality and nonlinear memory to dramatize the incompleteness and recurrence of trauma.

Tabitha Esther Kaburia's *Narrating the Nation: Conceptualization of Postcolonial Female Self and Identity by Selected Kenyan Women Writers* (2020) contributes significantly to the body of scholarship interrogating the intersection between nationhood and female subjectivity in postcolonial African literature. Drawing on the works of prominent Kenyan women writers such as Grace Ogot, Margaret Ogola, and Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor, Kaburia argues that Kenyan women writers play a crucial role in redefining the nation by centering women's experiences, memories, and identities within the national narrative. Her work explores how postcolonial Kenyan women negotiate the burden of patriarchal nationalism, using literature as a platform to contest exclusion and assert visibility.

Kaburia's analysis foregrounds the intimate link between personal trauma and national trauma, showing how the female body becomes a site of inscription for both colonial violence and post-independence disillusionment. She reads the literary representations of Kenyan women not as passive figures in nation-building projects, but as active subjects who engage in rewriting the terms of belonging, kinship, and citizenship. Her feminist-postcolonial framework allows for a nuanced reading of the gendered experience of nationalism, especially in contexts where women's agency has been systematically suppressed by both colonial and postcolonial patriarchal structures.

Even though Kaburia's insights are foundational for understanding how literature intervenes in the construction of female identity within postcolonial African states, her analysis remains tethered to nation-centered narratives and realist literary modes. The emphasis on national

belonging, though important, limits the exploration of other imaginative terrains where identity and resistance are constructed beyond the nation-state. Moreover, Kaburia's reliance on *historically grounded realism* does not fully account for the genre-shifting practices of contemporary African women writers who are exploring trauma and female agency through speculative, fantasy, and non-linear storytelling forms. This study extended Kaburia's theorization of postcolonial female identity by foregrounding trauma as a catalyst for transformation.

Oyaru (2017) explores how silence has been viewed as an enunciation technique for trauma. He points out that the occurrence of fear will make a person refuse to speak because of the horrific scenes that the person may have experienced. He provides examples of the Nairobi, Westgate Mall and Garissa University terrorist attacks that took place in Kenya in the recent past. He further argues that sexual assault as a result of rape or sexual harassment may leave a victim of rape with pain or disruption that the individual tries to cope with. Such events may make literary writers want to deploy mute characters in their works with the intention of portraying the terrible situations that characters would have encountered.

By contrast, the present study shifts focus from silence alone to a broader range of narrative strategies, including voice and temporality as tools of narrating trauma and reclaiming female agency. Unlike Oyaru's focus on male or gender-unspecified characters whose silence often reflects passivity or suppression, this study demonstrates how female protagonists actively transform trauma into a platform for agency and liberation.

Seline Atieno Oketch's *The Changing Image of Women in Francis Imbuga's Oeuvre* (2014) offers a critical examination of gender representations in the dramatic works of one of Kenya's most acclaimed playwrights. Oketch traces the evolution of Imbuga's female characters from traditionally passive and domesticated figures to more assertive, politically conscious, and

transformative agents in later works. Her study underscores how literature can mirror and critique the social and political positioning of women, especially in patriarchal postcolonial societies.

One of Oketch's core arguments is that Imbuga's later plays reflect a gradual shift in gender ideology, portraying women not just as victims of societal constraints but as challengers of normative gender roles. By analyzing characters such as Lulu in *Aminata* and Rosa in *Man of Kafira*, Oketch reveals how Imbuga's women navigate male-dominated institutions and assert agency in both the private and public spheres. This progression signals an ideological move towards gender equity, framed within the realism of East African post-independence struggles.

However, while Oketch's work is valuable in recognizing shifts in literary portrayals of women, it remains primarily centered on male-authored texts and rooted in realist dramaturgy, which may not always allow for a full exploration of trauma, memory, or interiority. Her analysis focuses more on character function and ideological positioning than on the psychological and emotional landscapes that shape female subjectivity—especially in the aftermath of violence, war, or cultural dislocation. Moreover, while Imbuga's women grow in agency, their development often remains constrained by patriarchal narrative arcs, where empowerment is granted within male-defined parameters of acceptability.

Lynda Atieno Ouma's analysis of *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (2017) by Warsan Shire provides a poignant reading of how trauma is inscribed on and through the female body. Ouma argues that Shire's poetry does not merely describe trauma but embodies it, using visceral, corporeal imagery to communicate the deep psychological and physical wounds endured by women, particularly in contexts of displacement, war, and gender-based violence. The female body becomes both a site of memory and resistance, marked by scars that testify to both suffering and survival.

Ouma's study is significant in the way it foregrounds the interconnection between trauma, gender, and exile, particularly in diasporic African contexts. She notes how Shire's poetry uses stark and intimate language to give voice to silenced women especially those who carry cultural taboos, shame, and sexual trauma across borders and generations. The fragmented structure of Shire's work, marked by non-linear narration, metaphor, and repetition, mirrors the fractured psyche of the traumatized subject, aligning with trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth and Judith Herman, whom Ouma draws upon to frame her reading.

However, Ouma's work, while powerful in its exploration of individual and familial trauma, remains grounded in lyrical poetry and personal narrative, focusing on internalized pain rather than external forms of resistance or collective political action. While the analysis of embodiment is compelling, it does not extend to how trauma can be transformed into revolutionary agency, nor does it deeply explore the intersection of trauma with postcolonial power structures, state violence, or organized resistance, an issue central to the study.

Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy has received increasing scholarly attention for its engagement with themes of postcolonial trauma, resistance, identity, and empowerment. Scholars have positioned the trilogy as a landmark work within African diasporic speculative fiction and young adult literature, with particular emphasis on how it reimagines Yoruba cosmology and postcolonial history through the lens of fantasy.

A significant body of scholarship has explored Adeyemi's portrayal of racial trauma and intergenerational memory. Marshall (2021) argue that *Children of Blood and Bone* constructs a "fantastical genealogy of Black pain," in which the protagonist embodies both personal and collective trauma rooted in systemic violence, akin to real-world histories of slavery and colonization. Similarly, Jackson (2020) highlights how Adeyemi uses speculative elements to

“mediate Black suffering through myth,” allowing readers to access historical trauma in a symbolic, affective manner.

In terms of female subjectivity and agency, researchers have examined the roles of female protagonists who challenge the patriarchal and monarchical systems. According to Omotayo (2022), Adeyemi challenges the trope of the passive female victim by creating characters who actively resist oppression through both political and spiritual means. Amari’s evolution from royal daughter to revolutionary leader has been interpreted by scholars like Ndlovu (2023) as a feminist subversion of royal power structures, while Zelig’s internal struggle reflects the burden of inherited trauma and the complexities of reclaiming identity through magic.

Several studies have also examined Adeyemi’s narrative techniques. Drawing on narratology and trauma theory, scholars such as Mbatha (2022) argue that Adeyemi’s use of first-person narration and focalization allows for a multi-layered representation of trauma. Each protagonist’s voice becomes a medium through which personal pain and political consciousness are expressed. This strategy aligns with Cathy Caruth’s (1996) theory of trauma as a wound that speaks belatedly through narrative, positioning Adeyemi’s work within a tradition of testimonial literature.

However, despite the growing body of work, few studies have directly addressed the link between trauma narration and the reclamation of female agency. Much of the scholarship tends to isolate trauma as thematic or aesthetic rather than as a strategy of empowerment. This study builds on existing literature by foregrounding how narrating trauma functions not only as a form of testimony but also as a mode of reclaiming female voice, identity, and political subjectivity. By doing so, it contributes a nuanced analysis of narrative as a site of resistance and healing in *Legacy of Orisha*.

In summary, existing scholarship on trauma theory including foundational contributions by Caruth (1996), Laub (1992), Herman (1992), Rothberg (2008), and Craps (2013) has provided valuable frameworks for understanding the representation of trauma, memory, and testimony, particularly within Western and Holocaust-centered contexts. These studies have extensively explored how narrative structures, temporality, and voice serve as vehicles for witnessing and articulating trauma. However, there remains a significant gap in extending these theoretical insights to African literary contexts and foreground postcolonial histories and indigenous epistemologies. Few studies have examined how narrative strategies in African fantasy literature such as Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy mediate female trauma within postcolonial and culturally hybrid framework. This study addresses this gap by analysing how Adeyemi's use of voice and temporality communicates female trauma and functions as a strategy for reclaiming agency. Through the integration of Western trauma theory and postcolonial perspectives, this research contributes to a broader understanding of how African female experiences of violence, memory and resistance are narrated within the intersection of indigenous knowledge systems and modern symbolic structures of trauma.

2.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrates trauma theory, feminist literary theory, and postcolonial theory to examine how Tomi Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy narrates trauma as a strategy for reclaiming agency. These interrelated theories provide the critical tools for analyzing the representation of female trauma, voice, resistance, and the reclamation of identity within a postcolonial African context.

Drawing on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, this study views trauma as an experience that defies complete articulation, emerging through fragmented memory, delayed narration, and temporal disruption. Caruth (1996) argues that trauma is characterized by *unspeakability*, a wound that cannot be fully known or expressed at the moment of its occurrence but returns belatedly

through flashbacks, dreams, and repetitions. This framework is essential for interpreting the disjointed temporal structure and narrative fragmentation in Adeyemi's trilogy, where past atrocities continuously intrude upon the present. The female protagonists' traumatic memories resurface in cyclical patterns that distort linear temporality, illustrating Caruth's notion of the *return of the repressed*. The narrative's oscillation between memory and present action reflects the impossibility of closure and the lingering effects of colonial and patriarchal violence. Caruth's emphasis on witnessing and testimony also underpins the analysis of how Adeyemi transforms the act of storytelling into a mode of healing where voicing pain, even in fragmented form, becomes an act of survival and reclamation.

Feminist literary theory complements this by foregrounding the politics of voice, identity, and agency. Drawing on Helene Cixous's notion of *écriture féminine*, this study interprets Adeyemi's use of first-person female narration as an act of empowerment through language. Cixous (1976) calls for women to "write the body," to express female experience through personal and emotional language that defies patriarchal structures of discourse. Adeyemi's narrative achieves this through the confessional and emotive voices of her female characters who articulate trauma not as passive victims but as active agents reclaiming selfhood through speech. The fluid, affective, and sensory dimensions of their narration evoke Cixous's feminist aesthetics of voice as a site of resistance and transformation.

Incorporating bell hooks and Kimberle Crenshaw, the study further situates the question of agency within the framework of intersectional feminism. hooks (1989) emphasizes that resistance emerges through self-definition and the reclamation of identity against systems of domination, while Crenshaw's (1989) theory of *intersectionality* underscores how race, gender, and class interlock to shape women's experiences of oppression. Within Adeyemi's postcolonial world, the female characters' struggles cannot be separated from the racial and structural hierarchies that define their marginalization. Their journey toward agency involves

confronting both patriarchal and racial violence, mirroring Crenshaw's argument that empowerment must address overlapping forms of subjugation.

Moreover, Gayatri Spivak's seminal question "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988), complicates the study's feminist lens by interrogating whether marginalized women can truly achieve voice within dominant systems of representation. Spivak's notion of the subaltern as one who is silenced by both colonial and patriarchal discourses resonates with the silencing of female Diviners in Adeyemi's trilogy. However, through narrative reclamation and performative storytelling, Adeyemi enables her female protagonists to transcend this imposed muteness. The female characters evolving voices thus symbolize the subaltern's partial recovery of speech, an act of narrating the self against structures that historically denied it.

Finally, postcolonial theory provides the overarching context for understanding the intersections between trauma, identity, and resistance. Drawing on the works of Frantz Fanon and Homi Bhabha, this study interprets the trilogy as a postcolonial narrative of psychic and cultural restoration. Fanon's (1963) conception of colonial violence as both physical and psychological clarifies how Adeyemi depicts trauma as an inheritance of systemic oppression that dehumanizes the colonized subject. Bhabha's (1994) notion of *hybridity* and the *third space* illuminates the ways in which Adeyemi reconfigures Orisha as a site of negotiation between African indigenous knowledge and the residue of colonial influence. Through this lens, trauma becomes both a burden and a site of renewal and an impetus for reclaiming identity through memory, ritual, and collective solidarity.

The intersection of trauma theory, feminist literary theory, and postcolonial theory thus establishes a comprehensive framework for analyzing Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy. Caruth's ideas elucidate how narrative form and temporal disruption communicate trauma; Cixous, hooks, Crenshaw, and Spivak reveal how voice and gendered subjectivity shape female

resistance; while Fanon and Bhabha contextualize these struggles within broader postcolonial dynamics of power and identity. Together, these theories enable an understanding of how Adeyemi narrates trauma not only as a psychological condition but as a transformative process through which female characters reclaim agency, articulate subaltern voices, and resist the lingering structures of colonial domination.

CHAPTER THREE

VOICE AND TEMPORALITY: NARRATING TRAUMA IN TOMI ADEYEMI'S CHILDREN OF BLOOD AND BONE

3.0 Introduction

In Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone*, the deployment of first-person narrative voice serves as a crucial strategy in articulating the complexities of female trauma. Adeyemi's narrative choice allows for a nuanced and affective exploration of the internal landscapes of her female protagonists, primarily Zelig and Amari, whose lives are shaped by state-sanctioned violence, loss, and systemic oppression. The first-person voice does not merely recount events; it performs the act of bearing witness, enabling a dialogic relationship between the narrator and the reader. This narrative form aligns closely with the theoretical frameworks of trauma theory by Cathy Caruth and postcolonial critique, wherein voice is not only a medium of storytelling but also a form of resistance and testimony.

The chapter further explores how disrupted chronology, repetition, and narrative pauses mirror the belatedness and incomprehensibility of trauma. By dislocating linear time and privileging personal voice, Adeyemi allows trauma to be communicated in a way that honors its complexity, while also offering space for resistance, survival, and eventual transformation.

Ultimately, this chapter argues that voice and temporality are central to Adeyemi's aesthetic and political project. They serve as conduits for articulating the gendered dimensions of trauma within a postcolonial landscape, while simultaneously challenging dominant narrative traditions that have historically effaced female pain and resilience.

3.1 Narrating trauma: Zelig's Narrative Voice and Trauma in the Legacy of Orisha trilogy.

According to Caruth (1996), trauma is not simply a wound that can be spoken and healed but an experience that escapes full comprehension. It is “not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature returns to haunt the survivor later on” (p. 4). In Adeyemi’s text, Zelig’s narrative voice mirrors this paradox. She speaks from the position of one haunted by memory, the memory of her mother’s brutal death and the systemic persecution of her people, the Diviners: “Deep down, I know the truth. I knew it the moment I saw the maji of Ibadan in chains. The gods died with our magic. They are never coming back...I close my eyes, fighting back the tears that want to fall. The chain they jerked around Mama’s neck. The blood dripping into the dirt” (Adeyemi, 2018, p.21). Her narration, often broken, repetitive, and emotionally charged, enacts Caruth’s idea of the *unspeakable*: trauma cannot be fully articulated, but it insists on being retold. Zelig’s repeated invocations of her mother’s execution, “So tight the majacite links draw blood from her skin” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 73), capture the compulsive return of memory, a hallmark of Caruth’s theory. The voice itself becomes a symptom of trauma, simultaneously expressing and concealing pain, revealing what cannot be directly spoken.

The first-person narration intensifies this dynamic by immersing the reader in Zelig’s inner turmoil. Through the immediacy of her voice, the text reproduces trauma’s temporal distortion, collapsing the boundary between past and present. Caruth’s notion of temporal disruption, the idea that trauma disrupts linear time and re-emerges belatedly, finds powerful expression in Zelig’s narration. Her memories of her mother’s death are not contained within the past; they intrude repeatedly upon her consciousness, shaping her present identity and decisions. When she describes how every time she ‘close’ her eyes, she sees “the chain jerked around Mama’s neck,” the syntax and imagery evoke a continuous loop of reliving, rather than remembering.

Adeyemi thus uses Zélie's narrative voice to convey the cyclical temporality of trauma, transforming the reader into a witness to an ongoing, unresolved wound.

Her voice also becomes a medium of testimony, which is another central concept in Caruth's framework. For Caruth, the act of narration is not merely cathartic but ethical. To tell a traumatic story is to bear witness to an event that defies comprehension. This dynamic is evident in *Children of Blood and Bone*, where Zélie's narration transcends personal confession and becomes collective remembrance. Through her voice, the silenced history of the Diviners marked by colonial domination, racial violence, and cultural erasure is retrieved and retold: "The silent memories of the Raid fill the reed hut, drenching the air with grief. All of us lost the maji members of our families that night" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 21). Adeyemi's use of first-person narration positions Zélie not only as a victim of trauma but also as a witness whose voice preserves memory and affirms identity. This aligns with Caruth's argument that trauma "is not simply an event that is experienced, but an event that is experienced in its unassimilable form, as the event that one cannot entirely possess" (1996, p. 5). Zélie's inability to find closure or articulate her suffering completely does not signify failure; rather, it reflects the ongoing struggle to voice the unrepresentable.

Voice in Adeyemi's narrative also operates as a strategy of resistance. While Caruth highlights trauma's unrepresentability, Adeyemi pushes beyond silence to reclaim voice as a tool of empowerment. Zélie's decision to speak, to tell her story despite its pain, subverts the colonial and patriarchal systems that sought to silence her people. In this sense, Adeyemi expands Caruth's framework by merging trauma narration with postcolonial resistance. The act of narration itself becomes a reclamation of agency. Zélie's voice re-inscribes the erased histories of Orisha and transforms suffering into collective strength. This articulation of trauma as voice and voice as survival echoes Caruth's belief that narrative, while never fully capturing trauma, provides a means of ethical engagement and communal restoration.

Caruth (1996) defines trauma as “the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge” (p. 153). Because of this, the traumatized subject struggles to articulate the experience directly, as the traumatic event exceeds the limits of language. Zélie’s voice reflects precisely this struggle. Her narration is charged with silences, repetitions, and abrupt emotional shifts that reveal her difficulty in processing the pain of her mother’s execution and the continued persecution of her kind. The trauma of witnessing her mother’s death becomes the psychic wound that shapes her identity and narrative. Early in the novel, her inability to articulate her grief, the loss of her mother and the Diviners, mirrors Caruth’s notion of unspeakability. The event is known only through its haunting return, through the language of absence. Yet, even in this fragmentation, she speaks, and it is in this act of voicing the unutterable that her resistance begins. By giving language to what was intended to be silenced, Zélie transforms her broken narrative into testimony.

This transformation from silence to speech is what Caruth describes as the ethical dimension of trauma narration. For Caruth, to speak trauma is not to resolve it but to bear witness to the incomprehensible. In Zélie’s narration, the act of recounting her pain becomes both testimony and defiance. Her voice bears witness not only to her personal suffering but also to the systemic violence inflicted on the Diviners, a community whose collective trauma echoes the historical traumas of colonization and racial oppression. Each time she recalls her mother’s death or the loss of her people, she resists the erasure that trauma and oppression attempt to enforce. Her voice is not just self-expression but it is communal remembrance. This act of testimony aligns with Caruth’s view that trauma demands to be transmitted to another, that is, the listener or reader, who becomes a secondary witness. Through Zélie’s narration, readers are drawn into the process of witnessing Orïsha’s pain, participating in a shared act of remembrance that counters historical silencing.

Importantly, Adeyemi reinterprets Caruth's framework within a postcolonial context. While Caruth's theory originates in Western trauma studies, *Children of Blood and Bone* situates trauma within the racialized violence of a colonially-inflected world. In this context, Zélie's voice serves as a counter-narrative, a resistance against the hegemonic forces that control speech, memory, and history. Her voice destabilizes the authority of King Saran's oppressive regime by asserting the truth of Maji suffering that the monarchy seeks to suppress. This aligns with Caruth's idea that trauma, though rooted in silence, generates an ethical obligation to speak a speech that interrupts dominant narratives. By voicing her trauma, Zélie not only heals herself but also reclaims the historical memory of her people, thereby using voice as a collective tool of liberation.

3.1.1 Narrative voice and postcolonial perspective

Postcolonial theory enhances our understanding of this narrative strategy by situating Zélie's trauma within the larger historical and political context of colonial violence. Scholars like Homi Bhabha (1994) and Frantz Fanon (1963) emphasize the ways in which colonial regimes silence the voices of the oppressed and produce psychic trauma through systemic dehumanization. Adeyemi's choice to employ first-person narration resists this silencing by privileging the interiority of her Black female protagonists. Zélie's voice becomes a counter-discourse, a reclamation of narrative space long denied to Black women. Her recollections are not only personal grievances but political testimonies that indict structures of power. This is particularly evident in her recurring memories of her mother's murder by King Saran, a tyrant who represents the colonial logic of domination and erasure.

The act of remembering, voiced in the first person, becomes a political act. Zélie's testimony asserts the legitimacy of her pain and the necessity of its recognition. The narrative does not offer closure or healing in the conventional sense but insists on the validity of unresolved grief. As LaCapra (2001) suggests, trauma narratives often resist resolution, remaining in a state of

"working through" rather than "acting out." Adeyemi aligns with this notion by allowing Zélie's voice to dwell in discomfort, to oscillate between rage, sorrow, and resilience. Her internal monologues are fraught with ambivalence, a reflection of the psychic fragmentation that trauma engenders.

Moreover, the first-person voice fosters intimacy and complicity between the narrator and the reader. The reader is not a distant observer but is drawn into the emotional immediacy of the narrative. This intimacy mirrors what Felman and Laub (1992) describe as the testimonial encounter, where the listener or reader is implicated in the process of witnessing. Adeyemi utilizes this relational dynamic to evoke empathy and provoke reflection, making Zélie's trauma not only comprehensible but ethically urgent. Her narrative voice does not plead for pity; it demands recognition and justice.

From a feminist perspective, the first-person voice also challenges patriarchal narrative structures that often marginalize or silence female pain. Zélie's voice, raw and unfiltered, subverts the trope of the silent, suffering woman. Her testimony is not sanitized for palatability but presented with all its emotional intensity and narrative complexity. This aligns with Spivak's (1988) call to "let the subaltern speak," a plea that finds resonance in Adeyemi's narrative design. Through Zélie, the reader encounters a female subject who articulates her trauma in her own terms, resisting both colonial and patriarchal imperatives to silence or appropriate her voice.

King Saran, the antagonist in the novel, kills Zélie's mother and oppresses her people out of a desire for control and fear of their magical abilities. The Maji once wielded immense power, which was a threat to the stability of his rule. By executing Zélie's mother who was a powerful and respected figure among the Maji, and ordering the massacre of many other Maji, Saran enacts a brutal strategy to suppress any potential challenges to his authority. His actions are

also driven by his belief in the superiority of those without magic, known as Kodisan. He justifies the brutal treatment of the Maji as necessary to maintain order and the “natural” hierarchy between the magic wielding people and the non-magical. The killing of Zelig’s mother is both a political and personal act of vengeance, as he views the Maji as a direct threat to his kingdom and his own power. This establishes a cycle of trauma in Zelig as is revealed through her words.

This act of state violence, performed to instill terror and erase diviner identity, echoes the colonial strategy of silencing indigenous spiritualities and annihilating cultural knowledge. As Spivak (1988) asserts in her seminal work, colonial regimes often erase the voices of the colonized, particularly women, rendering them invisible in historical discourse. Zelig’s recurring memory of her mother’s death functions as a counter-narrative- an unrelenting testimony that refuses to allow her mother’s story to be buried by imperial propaganda. Her traumatic testimony also challenges colonial ideologies by expressing the spiritual and emotional costs of dehumanization. When she experiences torture at the hands of King Saran, her body and mind nearly break: “He rips me from my body. I see Mama’s corpse fall again. The chain around her neck “(Adeyemi, 2018, p. 407). This moment collapses the boundary between past and present, real and remembered, a hall mark of trauma narrative. From a postcolonial perspective, this moment is not only a personal violation but also a symbolic reenactment of the colonial practice of control over indigenous bodies and memory, using psychological violence to dominate the mind. Saran’s assault exemplifies how colonial regimes attempt to dominate the psychic lives of the colonized. His ability to manipulate Zelig’s trauma reproduces what Fanon (1963) describes as the colonizer’s fixation on breaking the spirit of the colonized through bodily and psychic domination. Zelig’s pain is not just a consequence of individual cruelty, but a strategic attack on collective cultural memory-an attempt to silence the very voice that bears witness to the atrocities committed by the

monarchy. Her body becomes a contested site, echoing Spivak's (1988) observation that the subaltern woman's body is where imperialist ideologies inscribe their control. Yet, Zélie's survival and continued narration of this event turns the forced witness into a form of resistance. She transforms from passive victim to active bearer of testimony.

King Saran's torture further reflects the colonial desire to possess and destroy indigenous forms of knowledge and power. Zélie, as a Reaper, carries ancestral magic tied to spiritual traditions of the diviners. Her ability to connect with the dead threatens the regime's control over truth and history. By targeting her specifically, Saran attempts to extinguish the cultural lineage that she represents. In this way, his violence is epistemic as well as physical, a manifestation of what (Mignolo, 2011) calls the "coloniality power," wherein the colonizers impose a hegemonic knowledge system by invalidating and brutalizing native traditions.

3.1.2 Amari's Narrative voice

In *Children of Blood and Bone*, the character of Amari also offers a complex and deeply affective portrayal of trauma through her first-person narrative voice, which functions both as a medium for communicating the psychological aftermath of violence and as a form of testimony that bears witness to personal and collective suffering. While Zélie's narrative reflects the trauma of direct oppression, Amari's voice exposes the internal trauma of complicity, guilt, and awakening within the oppressive hierarchy of Orïsha. An analysis grounded in Caruth's trauma theory particularly her concept of unspeakability, temporal disruption, and bearing witness, reveals how Adeyemi uses Amari's voice not only to express the psychological fragmentation of trauma but also to transform that voice into an act of resistance and moral self-redefinition.

Caruth (1996), defines trauma is an experience so overwhelming that it cannot be fully grasped or articulated at the moment of its occurrence. Instead, it returns later in fragmented memories, disjointed emotions, and belated realizations. Amari's narrative embodies this

delayed structure of traumatic understanding. Her trauma originates not only from witnessing her father's brutal execution of her servant and friend, Binta, but also from the slow revelation of her family's complicity in a system that dehumanizes the Diviners: "Father strikes fast. Quick like lightning. One moment Binta stands. In the next, Father's sword plunges through her chest. No! I clasp my hand to my mouth before I can scream, nearly falling onto my back. Nausea rises to my throat. Hot tears sting my eyes" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 43). Through rhetorical questions, she mourns her friend Binta and the maji who were killed by her father King Saran. She painfully asks; „Where would i be now if Father had allowed Binta to live? What would all of Orisha look like if he had just given these maji a chance?“ (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 135). Her first-person narration, often punctuated by stammering thoughts, abrupt pauses, and conflicted self-reflection, captures Caruth's notion of the unspeakable. Amari cannot initially find the words to describe what she has witnessed. Her voice falters, shifting between denial and disbelief. This narrative hesitation mirrors Caruth's assertion that trauma is "the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior knowledge" (Caruth, 1996, p. 153). Her voice, therefore, emerges as a fractured space where silence and speech coexist, embodying the difficulty of translating shock into language.

Her first-person voice captures the shock and paralysis of trauma, the inability to react as violence unfolds. Her voice becomes a vessel for suppressed anguish, gradually unraveling as the narrative progresses. As the narrative continues, Amari's first-person reflections expose the psychological toll of her attempt to reconcile her royal identity with her moral awakening. Her sense of guilt, survivor's remorse, and political responsibility intertwine, surfacing in her interior monologues: "Memories of Father before the Raid play in my head, a paranoid man with grinding teeth and forever graying hair. The man who ordered Inan and me into the palace cellar, placing swords in our hands though we were far too young and weak to lift them... *The maji will come for you, he warned.* The same words every time he forced us to spar... Those

maji are dead. Slaughtered. Tossed to the bottom of the sea” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 41). The memories of her friend Binta also overwhelms her; “I thought Binta and I would see the world together” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 120). This is consistent with Caruth’s (1996) assertion that trauma is experienced through repetition and haunting memory. Her narrative enacts this dynamic: her recollections of Binta recur, not merely as flashbacks but as emotional undercurrents that shape her decisions and self-perception. The testimonial function of her voice is crucial in portraying the layered nature of trauma personal, political, and intergenerational.

Amari’s first-person accounts serve as a powerful form of testimony that foregrounds the trauma of living under a colonizing regime. Her personal voice disrupts the dominant narrative constructed by her father, King Saran, whose regime is founded on violent oppression and silencing of the Maji. Through her narration, Amari testifies to both her own trauma and the systemic violence enacted upon Orisha’s marginalized communities to which her friend Binta belongs. Her growing awareness of her positionality allows her to see how imperial violence is replicated not just physically but socially and emotionally. Her relationship with Binta is a pivotal marker of this realization. When she is murdered by her father for touching a magical scroll, Amari’s worldview begins to shift: “That scroll didn’t kill Binta...Father did” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 56). This moment of clarity is a critical act of witnessing, as Amari recognizes the structural and ideological violence masked by authoritarian justification.

King Saran orchestrates a massacre of more diviners during the celebration of the solstice festival. During the solstice festival in Ibeji, which initially appears to be a joyful moment where the oppressed diviners and Kosidan come together in unity, Saran uses the opportunity to launch a surprise attack. He sends in armed guards to slaughter the celebrants, leading to the deaths of many innocent diviners and sympathizers. This act reaffirms his brutality and determination to maintain power through terror and control. Amari witnesses the attack first-

hand, and it becomes another traumatic moment in her journey. Her horror and guilt deepen as she sees the cost of her father's tyranny. This moment contributes to Amari's testimony as a survivor of a violent regime:

“All that remains now is blood. Hollow corpses. Ash. I close my eyes and clasp my hand to my mouth, a futile attempt to block out the painful sight...How many families has father left like this, broken beyond repair, mourning their dead? How many times will I allow him to do it again? We can bring Father's tyranny to an end” (Adeyemi, 2018, pp. 351-353).

The massacre during the solstice festival functions as both collective trauma for the diviners and a deeply personal one for Amari. As a member of the oppressive ruling class who actively rebels against her father's regime, Amari occupies a liminal space, a “hybrid” position Homi Bhabha's (1994) terms. This hybridity allows her to witness the trauma from a dual perspective: as someone raised by the colonizer (King Saran) and as someone now aligned with the colonized (the maji/diviners). Her first-person narration accounts turn this event into a testimony that bears witness to colonial violence providing intimate access to emotional weight of witnessing state-sanctioned slaughter, intensifying our awareness of how empire operates not only through physical violence but also through psychological control and fear. She also exposes the dehumanization inherent in colonial violence. King Saran forces attack without warning, framing the massacre as a necessary act to maintain order. However, Amari's account disrupts this logic by centering the humanity of the victims and her own emotional collapse. This act of narrating the silenced pain of others is aligned with Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's (1998) question, “can the subaltern speak?”- in this case, Amari uses her voice to speak not only for herself, but for those denied the opportunity to testify. The massacre becomes a moment in which the personal and political converge: “How many families has father left like this, broken beyond repair, mourning their dead? (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 351-353).

These rhetorical questions mark a turning point in Amari's transformation, as she moves from a position of inherited power to one of ethical agency.

Amari's use of voice reveals the paradox of postcolonial trauma, where the perpetrator's lineage bears its own form of psychic dislocation. Her internal conflict and the tension between her royal identity and her emerging empathy for the oppressed, illustrates the transmission of colonial and patriarchal ideologies that perpetuate violence. Through her self-narration, Adeyemi exposes how trauma is not confined to the colonized but also implicates those who inherit the structures of domination. Yet, by choosing to narrate her story from a position of vulnerability, Amari breaks from the silence of complicity. Her voice becomes a form of ethical rebellion, one that destabilizes the authority of her father's violent legacy and aligns her with the collective struggle for justice.

Her narrative transformation from fear to courage echoes Caruth's belief that trauma, while unrepresentable, carries within it the potential for connection and ethical awakening. Her initial silence, born of shock and repression, gives way to an emergent voice that seeks truth and solidarity. When Amari asserts her determination to fight for the Diviners by stealing the magical scroll her father had taken from the maji during the Raid "I unroll the scroll and trace the strange symbols", (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 45), her voice no longer speaks from trauma alone but from the process of reclaiming agency. This transition reflects Caruth's argument that testimony allows survivors to "speak beyond the wound," transforming the repetition of pain into a mode of witnessing that reaffirms life. Through this evolution, Adeyemi demonstrates how trauma can become a foundation for empathy and collective healing.

Another of the most emblematic markers of Amari's trauma is the scar on her back, inflicted during a childhood sparring session with her brother, Inan, King Saran forces Amari into combat to "toughen" her, but the session results in a permanent wound and emotional scarring. Amari recounts the moment vividly:

“Memories of Father before the Raid play in my head. The Man who ordered Inan and me into the palace cellar, placing swords in our hands though we were too young and weak to lift them” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 41).

This incident, framed by the king as training, is in fact an act of disciplinary violence. It serves as a means of reinforcing patriarchal power and instilling colonial ideology within the domestic space. As Spivak argues, women in postcolonial narratives are often denied voice and reduced to symbols of empire. Amari’s silencing through shame and pain exemplifies this dynamic. Her scar thus becomes a physical manifestation of what Caruth (1996) describes as “a wound that cries out”- a site of trauma that cannot be fully comprehended at the time of injury but returns through memory and narrative (p. 4). Her later reflection on the scar is not just a moment of recollection but an act of testimony. She gives voice to the pain previously muted by fear and internalized shame. The act of narrating pain is inherently political. In reclaiming her body’s history, Amari challenges the legitimacy of the authority that scarred her, marking her transition from silent victim to active witness.

For Amari, the trauma presents a unique case in postcolonial literature. Unlike Zelie and diviners, whose trauma stems from systemic oppression and cultural genocide, Amari initially belongs to the ruling class responsible for that very violence. Yet, through a series of transformative experiences, she becomes disillusioned with the monarchy’s ideologies and violently ruptured from the comforts of privilege. Her trauma, then, can be read as an allegory for the psychic crisis of the colonizer’s conscience, a concept explored in postcolonial studies, to examine how members of dominant groups respond to the recognition of their complicity in colonial violence. Her trauma is not born from witnessing the suffering of the colonized from a distance, but from being personally implicated in it. This aligns with what Albert Memmi (1965) calls the “colonizer who refuses”- a subject who recognizes the moral cost of colonialism and chooses to reject its privileges, even at great personal cost. Her ensuing

journey of fleeing her palace, allying with Zelig, and confronting the truths of Orisha's past symbolizes the 'unlearning of colonial ideology.' As Fanon (1963) asserts, decolonizing is not a gentle process but "always a violent phenomenon" (p.35), especially for those who benefit from colonial structures. Amari's trauma then represents the internal violence of this decolonial process: the stripping away of identity, safety, and inherited power. The fact that her trauma results not just from loss, but from recognition, makes it allegorical of the psychological cost of confronting one's complicity in oppression.

Amari's guilt and shame mirror the "postcolonial melancholia" described by Paul Gilroy (2005), in which former imperial powers (and their elites) must reckon with the brutalities of their colonial pasts. Her narration reflects this tension when she says, "I used to think Orisha was a safe place. Now all I see is rot" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 148). This disillusionment does not immobilize her; rather, it becomes the basis for ethical transformation. Her trauma thus serves as testimony-not only to her own pain but to the falseness of the empire's narrative. Her evolving consciousness, marked by increasing empathy, moral clarity, and sacrifice, stands as a repudiation of colonial ideology from within.

3.1.3 Historical parallelism

Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) engages deeply with historical trauma through its fictional representation of the genocide of the Maji. This systemic extermination of magic-wielding diviners by King Saran's regime serves not merely as a fantastical narrative device but an allegorical echo of real-world African genocides- particularly the Biafran War (1967-1970) and the Rwandan Genocide (1994). Adeyemi's narrative functions as a vessel for remembering and bearing witness to the violent legacies of colonialism and its aftermath. Zelig's voice about the loss of magic, her Maji people and mother, though fictional, draws clear parallels with the mass executions and ethnic cleansing that marked both the Biafran and Rwandan conflicts. In both historical cases, civilians were targeted based on Identity-

Igbo in Biafra, Tutsi-in Rwanda, just as the Maji are persecuted for their magical heritage. The choice to begin *Zelie*'s story with the memory of genocide mirrors Cathy Caruth's (1996) assertion that trauma is "a breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world," compelling a return to the moment of catastrophe through narrative (p.4).

By portraying the Maji genocide through the lens of young, Black female survivor, Adeyemi inserts a subaltern voice into the archive of postcolonial memory. *Zelie*'s first-person testimony becomes a narrative of survival that refuses to let the violence be forgotten. Spivak (1988) famously questioned whether the subaltern can speak, Adeyemi's novel offers an answer: not only can the subaltern speak, but she can also bear witness to the histories that have been silenced or suppressed by dominant powers. *Zelie*'s voice becomes a vehicle through which Adeyemi allegorizes the political and emotional aftermath of historical African traumas.

The Biafran war, which Adeyemi has cited as one of her influences, was marked by ethnic conflict, starvation, and a deliberate policy of suppression by the Nigerian state. Much like the diviners in *Children of Blood and Bone*, the Igbo people were demonized, stripped resources, and targeted by military forces (Madueke, 2018). Similarly, the Rwandan Genocide saw the dehumanization of the Tutsi people, with state sponsored militias and media fueling the annihilation of over 800,000 civilians in just 100 days (Mamdani, 2001). Adeyemi encapsulates these dynamics through the state-sponsored massacre of diviners during the solstice festival in Ibeji: "But the farther I run, the more bodies fall to the ground, the more spirits bleed into the earth" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 342). In this scene, the ritualistic violence and scale of bloodshed reflect the structural and affective dimensions of genocide as a historical trauma.

From a postcolonial trauma lens, Adeyemi is not merely invoking genocide to shock but to memorialize. According to Bhabha (1994), the postcolonial subject must reclaim the

interstitial space” between memory and identity, using narrative as a mode of survival (p. 13). Zelig’s traumatic memory is not just personal but communal, providing testimony on behalf of those who, like many in Biafra and Rwanda, did not survive to speak. The Maji genocide thus becomes a metaphorical mirror—a fictionalized testimony that reframes and reanimates real-world African suffering within the space of speculative fiction.

Within the Nigerian context, Adeyemi’s novel plays an especially prominent role in excavating the racial and ethnic tensions that have existed in the country since colonial times. This aligns with what Frantz Fanon describes as ‘predatory identities.’ Notably, the post colony itself nurtures and promotes these identities, forming a nation based on ethnicity and racial identity which in turn breed untold violence. Bhabha (1994, p. 85-92) explores how colonial discourses create predatory identities by demanding that the colonized subject mimic the colonizer while remaining “other.” This duality sustains colonial dominance by making the colonized both a threat and subordinate. These sentiments are echoed by Frantz Fanon (1963) who describes how colonialism fosters a predatory dynamic, where the oppressor constructs an identity based on the subjugation and dehumanization of the colonized with the colonizer’s identity being maintained through systemic violence and economic exploitation (pp. 45-50). In such a climate, artists usually devise a manner through which to narrate these histories, especially when that history is full of painful memories. For that matter, the study examined how Adeyemi uses magic as a metaphor for identity and testimony. Magic in the novel is racialized and politicized, positioning the Maji both as victims and threats under the rule of the monarchy. This mirrors Fanon’s (1963) concept of colonial violence, where the oppressor creates a predatory identity to justify subjugation.

The monarchy frames the Maji as dangerous and animalistic, reinforcing the idea that they must be controlled and eradicated, an act that leaves Zelig wounded and traumatized. Fanon explains that such colonial systems sustain themselves by constructing the colonized as violent

threats to social order: “The settler paints the native as a sort of quintessence of evil” (Fanon, 1963, p. 41). King Saran demonizes magic, portraying it as an existential danger to Orisha, thereby legitimizing the oppression and killing of the Maji. This marries with Bhabha’s (1994) notion of colonial mimicry, where the colonized are positioned as both feared and desired. The monarchy fears the power of the Maji but simultaneously exploits their identity to maintain its own dominance. Bhabha describes this process as the colonial subject being “almost the same, but not quite” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 86), reflecting how magic is essential to Orisha’s culture yet violently suppressed. Magic serves as a form of testimony particularly in the way *Zelie*’s journey mirrors Felman and Laub’s notion of testimony as a response to trauma. As Felman and Laub notes, testimony is necessary for bearing witness to a traumatic event whereby the survivor gives testimony as a process by which she reclaims her position as a witness (Laub, 1992, p. 57). Adeyemi’s choice of first-person narration, primarily through *Zelie* becomes a vehicle for bearing witness to cultural loss, physical violence and inherited trauma. Her voice becomes a testimonial account, a first-hand narration of trauma that, as Cathy Caruth (1996) argues, does not just recount the past but re-experiences it through narrative. This direct address positions her not only as a narrator but also as a witness who testifies on behalf of her people.

Stef Craps (2013) extends Caruth’s trauma theory by criticizing its Eurocentric bias and arguing for the inclusion of non-western traumas in global conversations. Adeyemi’s narrative aligns with this shift by using *Zelie*’s voice to Centre African-inspired histories of oppression and resistance. The “I” perspective transforms personal pain into a collective testimony, reflecting the historical suffering of Black diasporic communities under slavery, colonization, and racialized violence.

The suppression of magic and the killing of the Maji leads to what Frantz Fanon describes as the “violence of the oppressed”- the inevitable resistance that arises in response to colonial

brutality. Zélie's journey embodies the struggle of post-colonial subjects who inherit the trauma of past violence. Her desire for vengeance is evidenced through her training with Mama Agba, who trains her together with other diviner girls on how to protect themselves against the monarchy (pp. 8-10), reflecting the way colonized people, having suffered oppression, may adopt violent resistance as a means of reclaiming agency. However, as Fanon argues, this response, while understandable, risks entrenching cycles of destruction unless coupled with a transformative vision for liberation. Zélie not only bears witness to her trauma and that of her people but also fights to reclaim the silenced history of the Maji. Her character parallels the Biafran war survivor's need to bear witness, as seen in the memoirs like Chimamanda Ngozi Adiche's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), where characters struggle to document the war's atrocities. Adeyemi's use of first-person perspective creates a literary space where trauma is acknowledged and remembered, reinforcing the idea that testimony is crucial in bearing witness and resisting historical erasure.

3.1.4 Feminist perspectives

In Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone*, the narrative voices of Zélie and Amari embody what Helene Cixous (1976) theorizes as *écriture féminine*, a feminine mode of writing that disrupts patriarchal language and expresses the silenced dimensions of women's experience. Cixous urges women to "write themselves," to reclaim their bodies, emotions, and histories through language as a form of empowerment. In Adeyemi's text, both Zélie and Amari articulate trauma and resistance through first-person narration that captures the emotional and bodily dimensions of female experience. Their voices become sites of power, through which Adeyemi redefines feminine identity not as passive victimhood, but as active survival and agency. The use of *écriture féminine* in this postcolonial context allows female voice to emerge as both therapeutic and revolutionary, reclaiming narrative authority from the structures of patriarchal and colonial domination.

Cixous asserts that patriarchal discourse represses women's voices by defining language through masculine logic, hierarchical, rational, and restrictive. Against this, *écriture féminine* is fluid, emotional, and body-oriented. It privileges multiplicity, intuition, and desire. Zelig's voice reflects this dynamic vividly. Her first-person narration pulses with visceral emotion, rhythmic fragmentation, and sensory imagery that translate her trauma into an embodied language. For instance, her memories of her mother's death are written not as detached recounting, but as a physical eruption. Her "blood pounding," her "magic surging," her "body trembling." This corporeal mode of narration aligns with Cixous's call for women to write the body, to inscribe what history has suppressed. Zelig's voice, in its intensity and rhythm, refuses linear, rational containment and instead, it embodies the fragmented yet creative force of female experience. Through this writing, Adeyemi allows Zelig's trauma to be expressed in a form that mirrors the chaos and fluidity of emotional memory, transforming what was once a site of pain into an assertion of vitality and power.

Amari's voice, though initially subdued, also evolves into an expression of *écriture féminine*. Her early narration is marked by hesitation and guilt. She internalizes her father's patriarchal control and feels complicit in her mother's presence. Yet, as the narrative progresses, her voice becomes increasingly assertive, emotional, and embodied. Cixous describes *écriture féminine* as the process of "returning to the body which has been stolen," and Amari's narrative arc enacts this reclamation. As she rebels against her father's tyranny and aligns with Zelig, her voice shifts from obedience to defiance. Her growing confidence in expressing anger, empathy, and love reflects her rediscovery of her own body and agency. When Amari narrates her refusal to remain silent about injustice "I will not allow Father to kill more maji" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 312), her words echo Cixous's revolutionary call for women to "break out of the snare of silence." Adeyemi thus uses Amari's narrative transformation to dramatize the feminist act of

self-writing. Through voice, Amari literally writes herself into existence beyond patriarchal control.

Both Zélie and Amari's first-person voices serve as collective testimony. While Cixous's *écriture féminine* emphasizes the personal and bodily, in Adeyemi's context, these voices are interwoven with communal trauma. Their speech bears witness not only to their individual pain but to the historical and cultural silencing of women in colonized societies. This interconnection transforms personal expression into political testimony. Zélie's impassioned narration channels the collective voice of the Maji, while Amari's awakening mirrors the broader struggle of women against systems of domination. Adeyemi thus fuses *écriture féminine* with postcolonial resistance, demonstrating that feminine self-writing is inseparable from the reclamation of cultural and political identity.

Ultimately, the use of first-person voice in *Children of Blood and Bone* is both a literary and political act. It refuses the detachment of an omniscient narrator and insists on intimacy, immediacy, and truth-telling. Through this narrative strategy, Adeyemi amplifies the experiences of her female protagonists, allowing them to bear witness to trauma in a way that is deeply personal yet collectively significant. Their voices reverberate beyond the text, challenging the reader to listen, to empathize, and to remember. In doing so, Adeyemi positions first-person narration not just as a stylistic choice but as a transformative mode of storytelling that affirms the dignity, resilience, and agency of traumatized female subjects. Each of the female protagonists narrate in the first person, giving readers intimate access to their internal experiences of loss, fear and grief. Zélie in particular bears witness to the generational and racial trauma experienced by the maji. Her narration captures the visceral pain of losing her mother during the Raid and the ongoing psychological consequences of living under an oppressive regime. The first-person narration does more than simply report events but performs the trauma. The reader is not just told what happened but instead, they are invited to feel it with the narrator.

3.2 Narrating Trauma: Temporal Disruption and Memory in the Legacy of Orisha trilogy

In *Children of Blood and Bone*, Tomi Adeyemi manipulates temporality, the movement between past, present, and future as a narrative strategy to convey the disorienting and repetitive nature of trauma. Drawing on Caruth's trauma theory, particularly her concept of temporal disruption, the novel reflects how traumatic experience resists linear narration and reconfigures time as cyclical, fragmented, and recursive. Caruth (1996) argues that trauma "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (p. 4). In this sense, trauma is not bound to the past. It inhabits the present, continually returning through memory and flashback. Adeyemi's manipulation of temporal structures mirrors this logic. She constructs a world in which the wounds of the past persist in the consciousness of the living, and history is not a completed event but an ever-returning reality. However, Adeyemi extends this notion through a feminist lens, where temporal dislocation also reflects the gendered and sociopolitical dimensions of trauma. By integrating Judith Herman's and Kali Tal's insights on the politics of trauma, Adeyemi transforms time into a feminist and postcolonial site of resistance, where remembering becomes an act of survival and reclaiming narrative control becomes an assertion of agency.

3.2.1 Zélie's Memory and Temporal Disruption

Caruth's concept of temporal disruption is central to understanding Zélie's psychological fragmentation. The trauma of witnessing her mother's execution during the Raid does not remain confined to the past but continually invades her present consciousness. For instance, she recalls the "screams," "the chain around her mother's neck," the way her mother's body was hanged for everyone to see and her mother's body being dragged away, images that invade her mind without warning and disrupt her present (Adeyemi, 2018. pp. 21, 73, 143, 256). These memories are not presented in full, coherent scenes but as sensory impressions and emotional jolts. Her narrative voice oscillates between the immediacy of memory and the

urgency of survival, collapsing chronological distinctions between then and now. This mirrors Caruth's assertion that trauma "is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its unassimilated nature returns to haunt the survivor later on" (1996, p. 4). In *Children of Blood and Bone*, this haunting manifests through flashbacks, dream sequences, and moments of paralysis where Zélie relives her mother's death as though it were recurring in real time. Adeyemi's nonlinear temporality thus externalizes the inner rhythm of trauma through the repetition, intrusion, and belated re-experiencing that define the traumatized mind.

However, Adeyemi extends Caruth's temporal model through a feminist reinterpretation, aligning with Herman (1992) and Tal (1996), who foreground the gendered dimensions of trauma. Herman, in *Trauma and Recovery*, emphasizes that trauma fragments not only time but also identity and narrative coherence. For women, this fragmentation is compounded by social silencing and patriarchal structures that deny their experiences legitimacy. Zélie's temporal instability, the way she relives her mother's death and the persecution of the Maji symbolizes this double oppression. The psychic disintegration caused by violence and the cultural repression of her voice. Adeyemi situates her female characters within a patriarchal and colonially-inflected world that mirrors the silencing of women's trauma in real-world histories. By structuring the novel through cycles of trauma and resistance, Adeyemi exposes the temporal effects of both gendered and racialized violence. Zélie's flashbacks and moments of paralysis are not only symptoms of personal trauma but also manifestations of historical continuity, the echoes of the collective suffering of Maji women silenced through centuries of persecution.

Herman's theory also highlights the importance of reconnection and testimony in healing, suggesting that recovery begins when the survivor moves from re-experiencing the trauma to narrating it coherently within time. This process of reintegration is evident in Zélie's temporal

journey. Initially, she is trapped in repetitive loops of memory, unable to differentiate between past and present. However, as the narrative progresses, she begins to retell her pain to others such as Amari, her brother Tzain, and eventually the broader Magi community. This act of narration reorders fragmented time, transforming cyclical suffering into linear growth. Adeyemi's use of temporality thus maps Zélie's psychological trajectory from disorientation to narrative control. Through speaking her trauma, Zélie reclaims authorship over time itself, transforming trauma's disruptive force into a means of reclaiming identity and purpose. This evolution parallels Herman's three stages of recovery: safety, remembrance, and reconnection. Her ability to narrate the past without being consumed by it marks the beginning of temporal and emotional healing.

Similarly, Kali Tal's feminist trauma theory in *Worlds of Hurt* (1996) emphasizes that trauma narratives, particularly those of women, are both personal testimonies and acts of cultural resistance. For Tal, to write or speak trauma is to resist erasure; it is a reclamation of voice against systems that attempt to silence pain. Adeyemi's manipulation of temporality enacts this resistance by transforming repetition, the hallmark of trauma, into remembrance. Zélie's recurrent memories of her mother's murder are not merely pathological but political; they preserve collective history in defiance of King Saran's attempt to erase Maji identity. Each return to the past becomes a form of witnessing, aligning with Tal's assertion that trauma testimony resists dominant historical narratives. In this sense, Adeyemi reconfigures temporal disruption from a symptom of psychological suffering into a feminist strategy of remembrance. Zélie's inability to "move on" becomes an ethical refusal to forget. By refusing the closure of linear time, Adeyemi foregrounds the endurance of historical trauma in postcolonial societies especially those shaped by slavery, colonialism, and cultural annihilation.

3.2.2 Amari's Temporal Disjunction

The character of Amari in Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) provides a rich site for exploring how temporality functions as a narrative and psychological strategy for articulating trauma. Through Amari's fragmented sense of time, Adeyemi depicts the intersection of trauma, gender, and postcolonial identity. Her temporal disorientation embodies what Cathy Caruth (1996) describes as the *belatedness* of trauma, the notion that trauma is not fully experienced at the moment of its occurrence but is re-lived later through flashbacks, repetition, and haunting returns. Read alongside Gayatri Spivak's (1988) concept of subaltern speech and Oyeronke Oyěwùmí's (1997) critique of Western gendered temporality, Amari's temporal experience reveals how Adeyemi fuses trauma theory with African feminist thought to challenge patriarchal and colonial structures of knowledge. Her disrupted temporality thus becomes both a symptom of trauma and a medium through which feminist resistance and ethical witnessing unfold.

Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma centers on the paradox of unclaimed experience, an event so overwhelming that it escapes direct registration and returns later in the form of involuntary repetition (Caruth, 1996). Amari's experience of witnessing her father murder her beloved servant Binta exemplifies this delayed recognition. In the immediate aftermath, Amari's consciousness cannot fully absorb the brutality. It is only later, as she flees her kingdom and confronts the oppression of the Maji, that the memory resurfaces as intrusive flashbacks: (Adeyemi 2018, pp.121, 168, 303, 304). "I thought we could escape through the tunnels beneath the palace. Once we got out, we would never go back...but did Binta always know it was a dream she'd never see? The question haunts me..." (p. 122). It's like watching the magical light explode from Binta's palms only for Father's sword to rip through her chest" (p. 346). These repeated recollections disrupt the linear flow of her narrative voice, demonstrating what Caruth identifies as trauma's temporal rupture—"the confrontation with an event that, in its unexpectedness or horror, cannot be placed within the schemes of prior

knowledge” (Caruth, 1996, p. 153). Through Amari’s recollections, Adeyemi transforms time into a field of psychic tension, where the past constantly intrudes upon the present. Her fragmented narration enacts trauma’s dislocation, illustrating how the traumatized subject exists in a perpetual state of temporal collapse, unable to distinguish between then and now.

However, Amari’s temporal fragmentation also carries ethical significance. According to Caruth (1996), the act of testifying about trauma creates an ethical relation between the survivor and the listener. By voicing her experiences in the first person, Amari begins to transform her trauma into testimony, engaging in a process that acknowledges historical violence and invites recognition. Yet, her positionality as a former agent of privilege complicates this gesture. Gayatri Spivak’s (1988) interrogation of the question, “Can the subaltern speak?” becomes particularly relevant here. Amari’s trauma arises partly from her complicity in structures of royal power that silenced and dehumanized the Maji. When she attempts to narrate their suffering, she risks speaking for them rather than with them, thereby reproducing the very hierarchies she seeks to dismantle. Her temporality, oscillating between guilt and empathy, thus becomes an ethical dilemma, where the urgency to bear witness is shadowed by the awareness that her voice may overwrite subaltern memory. In this way, her narrative embodies Spivak’s caution that privileged testimony must remain self-reflexive, acknowledging the asymmetries of power that shape who is heard and who remains silent.

Oyeronke Oyewumi’s (1997) perspective further deepens the understanding of Amari’s temporal evolution by interrogating how gendered notions of time are socially constructed. In the royal palace of Orïsha, Amari’s future is scripted according to patriarchal and dynastic expectations. Her worth defined by lineage, obedience, and succession. She is confined within the palace walls and limited to make her own decisions. Her dress code is also dictated by her mother Nehanda and Father: “I adjust the navy gele on my own head and try to appear regal, wishing the servant hadn’t wrapped it so tight” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 34). Oyewumi argues that

such temporal hierarchies reflect Western impositions of gendered power, where women's time is seen as reproductive and subordinate to male-centered historical progression. Adeyemi subverts this temporal model by forcing Amari into a confrontation with cyclical, communal forms of time, those grounded in shared suffering and ancestral memory. Once exiled, Amari's perception of time shifts from linear advancement toward cyclical remembrance; "Late at night, when everyone in the palace had gone to sleep. Binta and i would run through the painted halls by torchlight" (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 120). This aligns her experience with African feminist notions of relational temporality (Oyewumi, 1997). The disruption of her royal timeline thus signifies a decolonial act of reorientation. Amari learns to perceive time not as a tool of hierarchy but as a medium of collective healing and moral accountability.

Through the interplay of Caruth's trauma theory and feminist temporal frameworks, Amari's temporal disjunction emerges as both symptom and strategy. The narrative's oscillation between past and present mirrors the fragmentation of the self under trauma but also performs resistance against hegemonic linearity. By refusing closure, Amari's story resists the royal and colonial logic of historical progression that erases marginalized pain. Her belated awakening that is delayed but inevitable, embodies Caruth's claim that trauma insists on being heard, even against the will of the subject. Yet, as Spivak (1988) warns, such acts of speech must always be ethically mediated to prevent re-inscribing silences. Adeyemi responds to this challenge by positioning Amari's temporal transformation as incomplete. Her journey toward ethical witnessing is ongoing, contingent upon her ability to create space for Maji voices rather than merely translate their suffering.

To sum up, Amari's temporality in *Children of Blood and Bone* exemplifies how Adeyemi fuses trauma theory, feminist critique, and postcolonial ethics to portray the complexity of female trauma. Caruth's (1996) notion of belatedness illuminates the psychological structure of Amari's memory, revealing how trauma distorts time and self-perception. Spivak's (1988)

critique of subaltern representation interrogates the ethics of Amari's testimonial voice, while Oyewumi's (1997) African feminist insights redefine her temporal journey as a rejection of patriarchal and Eurocentric chronologies. Adeyemi thus transforms temporality into a narrative strategy that both communicates trauma and enacts resistance, suggesting that reclaiming agency for women like Amari requires not a return to linear progress but a reimagining of time itself, where memory, voice, and ethics converge as instruments of postcolonial and feminist recovery.

3.2.3 Indegenous Epistemologies and Temporality

From a postcolonial feminist perspective, Adeyemi's manipulation of time also functions as resistance against historical erasure. Colonial trauma is often represented through the suppression of indigenous temporalities. Colonial discourse privileges progress and linear time, while traditional African cosmologies perceive time as cyclical, interconnected, and ancestral. Adeyemi merges these two conceptions to challenge Western linearity, creating a temporal structure that honors African memory while exposing colonial violence.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o emphasizes the role of memory and storytelling as collective, cyclical process in African societies. He argues that oral traditions, including spirits, myths and songs, are vital modes in preserving collective trauma and resistance through cycling retelling (Ngugi, 1986, p. 15). This cyclical view resists the linear, Eurocentric concept of time and allows trauma to be revisited, re-narrated, and reinterpreted across generations as a form of survival. Moreover, Achille Mbembe discusses African temporality and spirituality as frameworks through which history and trauma are experienced. He writes that African subjectivities are deeply intertwined with the dead and the spirit world, suggesting that trauma is not merely a personal or linear phenomenon but one that echoes across temporal and spiritual realms (Mbembe, 2001, pp. 14-15). The spiritual layering introduces a more holistic and sacred way of bearing witness to trauma. Mbembe critiques Western historicity for failing

to grasp the multiplicity and simultaneity of African time, which he sees as “both cyclical and nonlinear” enabling a return to past trauma not as pathology but as reactivation of memory for communal processing (p.16). Through Zelig’s character, Adeyemi articulates a temporality in which ancestral memory, communal suffering, and ritual healing intersect, suggests that trauma in African diasporic contexts cannot be divorced from historical, cultural, and spiritual continuities.

Zelig’s trauma is not a rupture from the past but a return to it, enacted through magical rituals, and spiritual visitations. As she recalls her mother, Zelig reflects:

“Her feet emerge first, skin black at the night sky. It’s radiant against her red silk robes, rich and flowing on her unearthly form. Gold jewelry drips from her wrists, her ankles, her neck; all highlight the shimmering headdress hanging from her forehead...But when the spirit touches my face, the familiar love spreads through my body. Tears fall from her beautiful brown eyes as she whispers, “Hello, my little Zelig.” Hot tears sting my eyes as I collapse into her spiritual embrace” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 448).

Here, temporality is layered. Zelig’s presence of her mother is not confined to memory but is spiritually present. This affirms Mbembe’s notion that trauma echoes across temporal and spiritual realms.

Mpofu (2021) asserts that trauma in African and diasporic contexts is transmitted through collective and ancestral memory. Zelig’s personal grief is inextricably tied to the communal trauma of the maji people whose magic and history have been systematically erased. Her regular rituals and chants are acts of remembrance that reactivate suppressed cultural memory. As she accesses her magic, she notes, “it’s as if those who came before are with me now”

(Adeyemi, 2018, p. 305). Her rituals and chants highlight the view that memory is not a psychological function but a spiritual inheritance that transcends generations.

Mama Agba's recounting of the Raid to the young girls she trains, among them Zelig, is also a temporal strategy that Adeyemi utilizes to narrate trauma. Through a story within a story, Mama Agba tells the story of the Raid to the girls:

“In the beginning, Orisha was a land where the rare and sacred Maji thrived. Each of the ten clans were gifted by the gods above and given a different power over the land. There were Maji who could control water, others who commanded fire. There were Maji with the power to read the minds, maji who could even peer through time...Those in power began to abuse magic, and as a punishment, the gods stripped them of their gifts...On that fateful day, King Saran didn't hesitate...He used the maji's moment of weakness to strike” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 20).

Mama Agba's tale about the Raid, where the maji were killed by King Saran's forces function as a form of historical retelling that both reflects the trauma of the past and seeks to preserve the memory of these events for future generations. This aligns with Ngugi wa Thiong'o's ideas on the power of storytelling as a form of preserving a group's history (Ngugi, 1986). According to Ngugi, the retelling of traumatic events is a way of countering the erasure of indigenous histories by colonizing powers, preserving the memories of the oppressed peoples. In this context, Mama Agba's narrative becomes a form of testimony that not only recounts the suffering of the maji but also preserves their legacy, ensuring the trauma of the Raid is not forgotten. Mama Agba's tale is significant since it serves as a collective act of remembrance, giving voice to a silenced history. Her tale brings the past trauma into the present, enabling the younger generation, like Zelig, to understand their origins and the ongoing struggle against the oppression they face. Adeyemi uses Mama Agba's tale not only as a recollection but as a bridge that connects past suffering to present resistance. Her narration ensures that the trauma

is continually acknowledged, working as a form of “historical memory” which aligns with Ngugi’s assertion that trauma must be retold to reclaim a reflective identity.

Similarly, Lekan’s tale about the gods to Zelig, Amari and Tzain during their visit in Chándomblé temple serves as a form of ancestral memory that brings the past into the present.

He recounts:

“In the beginning, our Sky Mother created the heavens and the earth, bringing life to the vast darkness. On earth, Sky Mother created humans, her children of blood and bone. In the heavens, she gave birth to the gods and goddesses. Each would come to embody a different fragment of her soul” (Adeyemi, 2018, p. 138).

Lekan who is the last living Séntaro (a sacred high priest of the maji religion), possesses deep knowledge of maji rituals and history. He plays a vital role in guiding Zelig by teaching her about the history of the Sky Mother and assisting her in reconnecting with her magical abilities. By teaching Zelig about the gods and their roles in the spiritual and physical world, Lekan connects her to a deeper historical and cultural identity. This knowledge is crucial for her journey because it enables her to understand that the trauma she is experiencing is not unique to her but is part of a larger, ongoing struggle. His teachings create a sense of continuity where the god’s powers and the experiences of past generations are still relevant and capable of informing actions in the present. Furthermore, his teachings serve as a testimony that anticipates the future. It is not just a recounting of trauma but a way of preparing Zelig and the next generation to carry forward the fight for justice. His words suggest that the future is dependent on learning from the past, understanding the trauma, healing from it, and using the strength of ancestral knowledge to confront and overcome ongoing oppression.

Temporality as a strategy aligns also with post-colonial trauma in the sense that it reflects the ongoing nature of historical violence. As Kalua (2009) argues, postcolonial narratives often use “temporal disjunction” to express how colonial violence resists closure and continues to

shape subjectivities (p. 19). Adeyemi's world of Orisha becomes a metaphorical terrain for this temporal layering whereby, past trauma is not left behind but carried in the bodies and minds of the female protagonists. For instance, the reactivation of magic by Zelig powerfully symbolizes the resurfacing of intergenerational pain. Adeyemi uses magic not simply as a plot device but as a metaphor for the reawakening of a collective, ancestral trauma that has long been silenced, suppressed, or forgotten under violent oppression. This aligns with trauma theorist Marianne Hirsch's concept of "post memory" which describes the transformation of traumatic experiences across generations, often reactivated through symbols, rituals, or objects (Hirsch, 2008). The return of magic in *Children of Blood and Bone* is not purely an empowering moment but also a means of reliving the trauma of genocide and cultural erasure. In this sense, magic becomes the medium through which intergenerational pain resurfaces, echoing Caruth's theory that trauma "returns belatedly" and "inscribes itself through an unconscious act of repetition" (Caruth, 1996, p.11).

The persistent return of the Raid mirrors both Caruth's "belated trauma" and a precolonial sense of cyclical temporality, where ancestors' pain and strength coexist in the present. This fusion allows Adeyemi to reclaim African temporality as a mode of survival and transmission of knowledge. Thus, temporality becomes not only a narrative strategy but also an epistemological act of decolonization.

3.2.4 Conclusion

Children of Blood and Bone masterfully employs first-person narration and temporality as key strategies for narrating trauma. Through the use of first-person voice, Adeyemi immerses readers directly into the emotional and psychological landscapes of her characters, particularly Zelig and Amari, allowing their pain, fear, and resilience to be felt with visceral immediacy. This intimate perspective not only foregrounds the personal dimension of their suffering but also challenges readers to bear witness to trauma as a lived, ongoing reality rather than a distant event. Simultaneously, Adeyemi manipulates temporality, shifting between memory, flashback, and present experience, to reflect the fragmented and nonlinear nature of traumatic memory. In doing so, she captures how trauma persists, interrupts, and reshapes the characters' sense of time and self. Together, these narrative techniques deepen the emotional resonance of the story while positioning trauma as a force that is both deeply personal and inextricably linked to broader histories of violence, oppression and resistance.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BURDEN OF INHERITED WOUNDS: TRAUMA AND IDENTITY IN CHILDREN OF VIRTUE AND VENGEANCE BY TOMI ADEYEMI.

4.0 Introduction

In *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019), Tomi Adeyemi continues her epic fantasy series by interrogating the long-term psychological and cultural consequences of trauma through the lives of her female protagonists. While the first novel, *Children of Blood and Bone*, ended with a fragile hope for liberation, the sequel disrupts this trajectory by showing how trauma lingers, evolve, and ultimately shapes identity in complex and often destructive ways. Drawing on a postcolonial framework, this chapter argues that Adeyemi portrays trauma not only as a historical wound, but also as an active force that contributes to the construction of negative identities for her female protagonists, identities marked by guilt, alienation, rage, and disconnection. By examining how trauma functions within the text, this analysis reveals that the path to empowerment in a postcolonial context is not linear, but fraught with emotional and psychological fragmentation.

4.1 Fragmented Selves: Disintegration of Female Identity through Trauma

The internalization of colonial violence is a central concern in postcolonial theory, particularly in the work of Frantz Fanon. Fanon (1963) asserts that colonial experience systematically dehumanizes the oppressed, stripping them of cultural identity, dignity and agency. This degradation is not only external but deeply internalized. Fanon argues that “the colonized subject is constantly on his guard. Confused by the innumerable tensions that rack the colonial world, he is literally a ‘neurotic’” (Fanon. 1963, p. 18). This neurosis, he explains, stems from the constant violence and cultural alienation imposed by colonial rule, which embeds itself in the colonized individual’s psyche. The most devastating consequence of this psychological colonization is the internalization of inferiority. Fanon writes, “the native’s self-image is one of inadequacy and dependency, imposed by the colonizer’s discourse that portrays him as subhuman” (Fanon, 1963, p. 250). This results in self-hatred, as the colonized

subject begins to view themselves through the lens of the oppressor, believing in their supposed lack of worth and rationalizing their own marginalization.

The internal conflict that arises from this self-perception often leads to identity fragmentation, where the colonized individual struggles between resisting colonial narratives and subconsciously accepting them. This is evident in *Zelie's* arc, as her exposure to systemic violence, particularly the murder of her mother and trauma of the Raid, leads to a fractured self-perception. Though she gains magical power and a place of influence within the maji rebellion, her emotional numbness, fear, and withdrawal reveal a psyche burdened by trauma: "If I had never touched that scroll...if I'd never found out about that ritual- "I wanted magic back to keep Baba safe. All that it did was send him to an early grave. What use are these powers if I can't protect the people I love?" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 4). She begins to view magic as a curse rather than a blessing, internalizing a sense of danger and death that disconnects her from her own agency. The magic also becomes inseparable from the trauma, violence, and loss that have defined her experience. Initially, magic represents hope, cultural heritage, and liberation. But as the events of the book unfold, magic becomes a source of pain, fear, and destruction, both for *Zelie* and those she cares about.

After the ritual that restores magic, *Zelie* is haunted by the unintended consequences. It not only empowers the oppressed maji but also grants abilities to their enemies, the titans. This reversal blurs the line between savior and oppressor and makes *Zelie* question whether their fight for magic was worth the cost. Her mother is still gone, her people are still dying, and now her powers mark her as a target rather than a symbol of freedom. Psychologically, this shift reflects trauma's tendency to warp meaning. According to Caruth (1996), trauma is not just the experience of violence but the way that experience continues to rupture understanding over time. *Zelie* cannot separate her magic from the repeated cycles of grief, betrayal, and guilt she endures. Each use of magic reminds her of what she's lost and what she's become,

leading her to see it not as a gift, but as a curse that isolates her, endangers others, and reinforces her survivor's guilt.

According to Fanon, the colonized subject does not emerge from the oppression unscathed but rather carries deep psychological scars that manifest in self-doubt, emotional instability, and internalized violence. Rather than embracing the role of a revolutionary hero, Zelig becomes emotionally withdrawn and haunted by her losses. She says, "I'm not ready to be an elder" (p. 121). "I don't know how I'm supposed to protect an entire clan when I couldn't protect Baba. I can barely protect myself" (p. 123). She further states, "I know being an elder will help me take out Inan, but with each passing day, the freedom I crave seems to slip further and further away" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 123). Zelig does not want to become an elder because the role represents a burden of responsibility she feels emotionally and psychologically unprepared to carry, especially in the wake of her trauma. Though she has been a key figure in restoring magic, Zelig is deeply haunted by the loss, violence, and betrayal she has endured. For instance, she says, "Magic used to be a thing that made me feel most alive, but now it's impossible to wield it without thinking of everyone who's died" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 123). Becoming an elder would mean stepping into a leadership role that requires not only strategic thinking but also emotional strength and the ability to guide others, qualities she doubts she still possesses. Her reluctance can be read as rooted in unresolved grief and survivor's guilt. She blames herself for the death of loved ones and the unintended consequences of the ritual that restored magic.

As Fanon (1963) discusses, the psychological scars of colonial violence can paralyze revolutionary consciousness, turning trauma inward and causing the oppressed subject to question their worth and agency. Fanon's argument is echoed by Mbembe (2001) who explores how colonial violence continues to haunt the *postcolony* through what he calls "the living death" of the subject, whose agency is suspended by the persistent weight of historical

trauma: “The colonial subject is rendered spectral- trapped between life and death, presence and absence. Resistance becomes haunted by this spectrality, producing acts that are often erratic, fragmented, and inconclusive” (Mbembe, 2001, p. 17). David Scott (2004) also critiques how revolutionary futures are often constrained by the trauma of past failures and violent ruptures, a perspective that aligns with Fanon’s concern about the weight of history: “Postcolonial memory is burdened with a melancholia that can make new political imagination difficult, as the revolutionary past becomes a source of paralysis rather than inspiration” (Scott, 2004, p. 134). Zelig embodies this internal conflict. Though others see her as a hero, she sees herself as broken and unworthy of leading her people.

For Zelig, becoming an elder would require her to make decisions that could cost more lives, a moral weight she no longer wants to bear. This fear of failure and further loss reflects Caruth’s (1996) notion that trauma lingers by disrupting one’s sense of time and agency. This is in agreement with Dori Laub (in Felman & Laub, 1992) who stresses that trauma fractures the subject’s control over their own narrative and temporality: “Trauma breaks the continuity of experience, creating a gap in the subject’s self-understanding and ability to narrate life in a coherent temporal sequence” (Laub, 1992, p. 57). Zelig is trapped in a cycle of remembering and reliving past pain, making it difficult for her to imagine a future where she can lead without repeating those same traumas which in turn fragments her identity. Rather than moving forward as a revolutionary leader, she is caught in cycles of grief, guilt, and fear, unable to reconcile her past pain with her present responsibilities.

Dominic LaCapra (2001) explains that such trauma results in “acting out,” a compulsive reliving of the traumatic event that prevents the survivor from fully processing or integrating it (p. 21). This repetition leaves Zelig emotionally paralyzed, as seen in her reluctance to lead, her fear of magic, and her withdrawal from those who support her. Laub similarly asserts that trauma “shatters the internal referent” of the self, severing the victim from a coherent sense of

identity (p. 57). Zelié's identity splintered between the hopeful warrior she once was and the fearful survivor she has become. The lingering effects of trauma ultimately distort her self-perception and undermine her sense of agency, making it difficult for her to inhabit a stable identity or imagine a future unbound by violence. Her fractured identity oscillating between survivor's guilt and emotional detachment, mirrors Fanon's description of the colonized subject as someone whose mind has been shaped by violence so profoundly that liberation itself becomes psychologically destabilizing.

4.2 Vengeance and Self-assertion

Zelié's trauma does also contribute to the formation of a vengeful identity, shaped by grief, loss and the internalized violence of colonization. Her desire for justice and liberation becomes increasingly entangled with anger, fear, and emotional exhaustion, which pushes her toward vengeance rather than healing. Her trauma does not merely disrupt her agency or alienate her from her community but also actively construct a vengeful persona that reveals deeper, unresolved wounds of both personal and historical violence.

Fanon (1963) argues that the colonized subject internalizes violence and rage, which often turns inward or against their own people when not consciously redirected: "the colonized man will first manifest aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people" (p. 52). Zelié's increasing anger and emotional detachment from those around her reflect this internalized violence. She becomes angry and emotionally detached from those around her when she loses her Second known as Mázeli who also doubles up as her close ally. Mázeli's death is a devastating moment for her, one that underscores the tragic cost of leadership and deepens emotional unraveling. His death occurs during the failed ritual involving the moonstone, which was meant to consolidate and unify the power of the maji. Instead of empowering their cause, the ritual results in Mázeli's death, a brutal reminder that magic, even when wielded with hope of liberation, carries unintended and destructive

consequences. The ritual happens during their confrontation with the monarchy driven by the desire to avenge the loss of their loved ones. Though they manage to kill the monarchy's general using the ritual, the cost that Zelig pays is the loss of him: "I turn to Mázeli, but he doesn't move. Blood drips from the corners of his mouth. His fingers fall limp" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 266). Literally, the ritual backfires, overloading him with power he cannot contain, leading to his collapse. Symbolically, his death represents the loss of innocence and hope in the resistance. He was young, idealistic, and fiercely loyal to Zelig. His death signals that even the most devoted and promising followers can be destroyed by the very power they seek to master.

Mázeli's death devastates Zelig and heightens her guilt. She blames herself for his death, as she led the ritual and convinced him to be part of it. She narrates, "My hand flies to my throat as the guilt suffocates me...He could've lived. He should've lived. It was my duty to keep him safe. But I failed" (Adeyemi, p. 277). This mirrors her trauma from earlier losses, like her mother and father, reinforcing the belief that those closest to her always die. The emotional toll of losing someone she deeply cared for pushes her further into isolation: "leaving my room was a mistake. There's nothing for me out here" (Adeyemi, p. 299). She starts to detach from those around her, especially those who might emotionally depend on her, for fear of losing or failing them.

Homi Bhabha's concept of the "unhomely" sheds light on Zelig's psychological state. Bhabha (1994) describes the "unhomely" as the condition in which the boundary between the personal and the political collapses, as the subject becomes estranged from both identity and community (p.9). Zelig becomes "unhomed" within her own struggle-no longer seeing magic as a source of pride or resistance, but as a curse tied to death and loss. Her discomfort within both maji and royal spaces signals her liminality; she belongs fully to neither, and this alienation fuels her desire not to rebuild, but to retaliate.

The death of her Second shifts Zelig's hope to Vengeance. Her motivations are increasingly fueled by anger rather than idealism, as grief hardens into rage: "There will be no mercy. No peace. No terms of surrender. We will connect our life forces wield the power of the gods! We will march to Lagos and tear its walls" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 364). Masterson (2010) writing on African trauma narratives emphasizes that postcolonial trauma often generates fractured, nonlinear expressions of resistance. He argues that postcolonial trauma must be understood "not as a single moment of crisis, but as an ongoing condition shaped by systemic violence, dislocation, and erasure of memory" (p. 142). Zelig's desire for vengeance reflects precisely this continuity of trauma. Her identity is not rooted in a single traumatic event, but in an accumulation of suffering that distorts her revolutionary goals into a reactive, survivalist mentality.

The death of Zelig's father also marks a pivotal moment in her psychological transformation, pushing her toward a vengeful and emotionally fractured identity. Baba, how she refers to him, represents more than familial love. He is Zelig's last connection to pre-traumatic life, symbolizing cultural continuity, moral restraint, and intergenerational wisdom. Her father is killed after she and her companions (Amari, Tzain and other majis) successfully restore magic during the climatic ritual in Ibeji. Saran murders him to break Zelig's spirit and sends a message that no amount of magic or rebellion can undo his power. She blames herself, believing that her actions, restoring magic and defying the monarchy led to his death. She narrates, "I can't keep my father alive. The ritual that cost Baba his life haunts me as I prepare to lay him to rest. My heart hangs with all the pain he endured; every sacrifice he made so that I could bring magic back" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 2). This moment marks a turning point where her grief hardens into both rage and emotional detachment, setting the foundation for her vengeful and conflicted identity in the sequels. From Afrocentric lens, Baba's death echoes the intergenerational loss rooted in colonial trauma and destruction of African epistemologies.

As Wole Soyinka (1999) asserts, the rupture of ancestral and spiritual lineages through colonial violence leaves the colonized with a “psychic dislocation,” wherein the self cannot reconcile history, identity, and belonging (p. 36). Zelig embodies this dislocation whereby her grief evolves into rage as she internalizes the loss not merely as personal tragedy, but as the erasure of cultural memory.

Despite the emotional bond and budding trust between them in *Children of Blood and Bone*, Zelig sees Inan as a traitor. He promises to stand with her and bring peace between maji and nobles, but ultimately aligns with his father, King Saran, which leads to Baba’s death. In *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*, Zelig cannot forgive this betrayal. It shatters her belief in compromise and intergroup reconciliation. She also sees the monarchy as the source of generational violence, oppression, and suffering. The return of magic does not bring peace but rather fuels more war, making her increasingly disillusioned. Inan’s continued attempts at diplomacy appear naïve or manipulative to her, and she comes to believe that the monarchy cannot be reformed, only overthrown. For instance, her attempt to kill Inan in the dreamscape serves as a powerful manifestation of her vengeful identity, shaped by trauma, betrayal and disillusionment: “Black tree roots explode from the ground, wrapping Inan’s calf. They coil around his body like snakes, dragging him backward. I don’t know how I control Inan’s dreamscape, but I don’t care. I glide forward as the roots bind him against a tree, circling his waist, his chest, his neck” (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 60).

The dreamscape, a psychic space meant for connection and understanding ironically becomes the site where Zelig enacts her deepest rage. Rather than seeking reconciliation, she turns the dreamscape into a battleground, driven by the pain of Inan’s betrayals and the irreversible losses she has suffered. Her action reflects what Caruth (1996) terms as “belatedness” of trauma. She cannot act when the original betrayal occurs, so her unconscious mind seizes the dreamscape as the space to replay and respond to the trauma (p. 11). From a Fanonian

perspective, her action is a classic example of how the oppressed, when denied justice and healing, may turn to symbolic or literal violence as a form of reclaiming power. Fanon (1963) explains that this vengeance is not simply destructive but an attempt to assert humanity in a system that has denied it (p. 44). Inan becomes the focal point for Zelig's cumulative grief, Baba's death, Mama's death, the failure of peace, all are projected onto him. This aligns with Homi Bhabha's (1994) idea of "psychic splitting," where the colonized subject must navigate the tension between identification and rejection of the oppressor (p. 115). Also, Bhabha argues that trauma under colonial systems often manifests through mimicry and resistance, but when trauma overwhelms identity, the subject may oscillate between empowerment and self-alienation (p. 86). Zelig's vengeful shift reflects this oscillation. Once a liberator, she now believes violence is the only language power understands.

Zelig is also directly involved in the *Iyika*'s (a rebel group who fight against the monarchy in Orisha made up primarily of maji and diviners) attack on the palace rations, and this moment serves as a powerful act of vengeance that reshapes her identity. When the *Iyika* burn the food supplies, Zelig declares, "If the monarchy wants to starve us, let them know hunger, too" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 213). This statement reflects her shift from a freedom fighter toward a vengeful insurgent, driven less by strategy and more by the emotional weight of loss and injustice. The destruction of the rations, critical resources that even innocent civilians rely on, marks a troubling shift in Zelig's moral compass, revealing how trauma can distort the lines between justice and retribution. As Caruth (1996) argues, trauma is not fully experienced in the moment, but returns in repetitive, often violent actions as the subject attempts to confront what was once unassimilable. Zelig's participation in the attack can thus be read as an act of "acting out" her trauma, not a rational political choice but a compulsion rooted in unresolved pain. This moment is emblematic of how her trauma feeds into vengeful identity, transforming her from a liberator into someone who mirrors the violence she once fought against.

Her journey to Chándomblé to retrieve the sacred scrolls plays a crucial role in shaping her vengeful identity, which is increasingly defined by her trauma and desire for retribution against the monarchy. The scrolls contain ancient knowledge of magic that the maji hope to use to overpower Queen Nehanda and the titans, but Zelig's personal motivation reveals the depth of her transformation. When they enter the temple, Zelig's primary concern is not only regaining her people's power but seeking a magical weapon to confront the monarchy's oppression. This is shown when she states, "We went to Chándomblé to recover our scrolls and now we have them... We'll train our maji until they are strong enough to face Nehanda and her titans. And when that day comes, we'll end the war in the only way the monarchy will respect" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 212).

Her pursuit of the sacred scrolls ultimately strips her of her agency in profound ways, even as she seeks power to resist the monarchy. At its core, her desire for vengeance is rooted in reactivity, a response to the trauma she and her people have endured. By focusing on the scrolls as a means to overcome the monarchy's oppression through violent retribution, she shifts from a stance of active resistance to one of passive submission to her trauma. Her actions are no longer fully self-directed but are instead responses to the pain and loss she has experienced. As Caruth (1996) suggests, trauma often locks individuals in a state of perpetual reactivity, unable to truly transcend the experiences that define them. Zelig's pursuit of the scrolls, which promises magical power, reveals how she has become entangled in the very forces of vengeance and violence that once oppressed her people. Rather than exercising free will, Zelig is driven by a desire to settle scores, which undermines her agency because it constrains her ability to move beyond revenge and into a space where she could heal and grow.

Zelig's fixation on vengeance strips her the opportunity for healing. Healing requires recognition of pain without becoming consumed by it. As Homi Bhabha (1994) suggests, the oppressed often feel caught in a paradox where they must reclaim their identity in opposition

to the colonizer, but in doing so, they risk reproducing the same violence they suffered. Zelig's refusal to embrace peace or reconciliation with her past and her desire for retribution rather than healing, locks her into a vengeful identity that prevents her from fully owning her power. This diminishes her agency, restricting her to a state of conflict and emotional turmoil, rather than empowering and healing. She is no longer in control of her choices since her trauma controls her, and as a result, she becomes enslaved by the very force she sought to overcome.

Fanon argues that colonial violence is not merely physical. It invades the psyche of colonized, often producing cycles of violence among the oppressed. He writes, "The colonized man liberates himself in and through violence," but this process risks becoming mimicry of the colonial structure itself, where "the very forms of authority which he detested are now adopted by him" (p. 94). Zelig, once a symbol of resistance and empathy, increasingly imposes harsh orders, silences dissent, and begins to value strength over compassion, mirroring the hierarchical, fear-driven rule of the monarchy she opposes.

Similarly, Homi Bhabha discusses the phenomenon of "colonial mimicry," where the colonized subject unconsciously replicates the structures and strategies of colonial power in a bid to assert identity or legitimacy (p. 126). Zelig's rise to leadership is accompanied by increasing rigidity and alienation from her community, especially when she becomes reluctant to trust her allies and even considers eliminating perceived threats to her control. Her trauma prevents her from engaging in the vulnerability required for communal healing, causing her to emulate the very domination she resists. Caruth also offers insight into how trauma can distort agency. She notes that trauma is "not simply an effect of destruction, but also...the enigma of survival" (p. 64). Zelig's need to survive, emotionally and politically, leads her to adopt language and behaviors of domination. Her decisions are often shaped by fear, a hallmark of post-traumatic response, which inhibits her ability to reflect and form empathetic connections.

Adeyemi demonstrates that unresolved trauma can transform pain into vengeance, revealing how psychic wounds reshape identity in destructive yet politically charged ways. For Zélie, trauma becomes a double-edged force. It exposes their vulnerability while simultaneously fueling their desire to reclaim agency through retribution. Zélie's emotional detachment, distrust, and compulsion to fight reflect Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as an unhealed wound that returns through violent repetition. Her vengeance against the monarchy and the oppressors of the maji signifies not only a response to personal loss but also an enactment of collective historical suffering.

Adeyemi thus frames vengeance as both a symptom and a consequence of trauma and a distorted attempt at restoring dignity in a world still marked by injustice. The vengeful identity of Zélie embody the psychological cost of living within a cycle of oppression where healing is deferred and justice remains elusive. Ultimately, Adeyemi exposes the paradox of postcolonial trauma. While vengeance offers a temporary sense of empowerment, it perpetuates the same violence it seeks to end. Through this lens, *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* becomes not merely a tale of rebellion but a meditation on the need to transform trauma into collective healing rather than retribution.

4.3 Zélie as a witness

Adeyemi crafts Zélie's emotional detachment, fear, and vengeful impulses as more than personal suffering. They become a form of bearing witness to the deep wounds of postcolonial trauma. Through Zélie's psychological fragmentation and violent choices, Adeyemi illustrates how trauma reverberates across generations, shaping both personal identity and collective resistance. In this way, Zélie functions not only as a character navigating grief but as a testimony to the unspoken, unresolved histories of colonial violence, marginalization and cultural erasure in Orīsha. Her emotional detachment is a hallmark of unresolved trauma. Her growing numbness dissociation reflects the effects of repeated loss and oppression,

particularly after the death of her loved ones and the betrayal by institutions of power. As Caruth (1996) explains, trauma is defined by its incomprehensibility and belatedness. It is not fully experienced in the moment of occurrence but returns in fragmented, intrusive ways. Zelig expresses this during the burial of her father when she states, “Speaking the sacrament aloud brings me right back to Mama’s burial. To watching her corpse go up in flames. As the prayer passes, I think of all those who might rest with her in alafia. Everyone who died so we could bring magic back” (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 5). Her inability to separate past trauma from present experience illustrates how unprocessed trauma overwhelms identity and perception, leaving her trapped in a cycle of memory and pain. According to Felman & Laub (1992), trauma survivors often carry the burden of “bearing witness” not only for themselves but for others whose stories remain silenced. Zelig, in this context, becomes a vessel for both her own suffering and the collective trauma of the maji, forced to shoulder the emotional and historical weight of her people’s oppression.

This trauma is not confined to emotion. It manifests as fear, an embodied symptom of postcolonial violence. Zelig’s fear is more than psychological; it is inherited and structural a condition Homi Bhabha describes as “unhomely,” in which personal experience becomes politicized, and history intrudes into the psyche. Zelig’s inner turmoil is not just about her past but about history of marginalization imposed on the maji. Her fear of betrayal, death, and disempowerment is tied to the broader experience of living under a regime that systematically devalues her people. As Bhabha notes, this “splitting” of identity results in a self that is fragmented by historical contradiction and displacement.

4.4 The Pursuit of Justice

Adeyemi also depicts Amari as a character trapped in the liminal space between oppressor and liberator. Initially presented as a figure of resistance in *Children of Blood and Bone*, her journey in the sequel complicates that image. As she attempts to wield political authority in a volatile Orisha, Amari's trauma inflicted by familial betrayal, political rejection, and internalized guilt, manifests as a fractured identity that undermines her agency. This chapter argues that Amari's trauma operates within and is intensified by postcolonial power structures, producing an identity incapable of effective resistance.

Amari's psychological trauma is born from both personal and collective violence. She is burdened by the memory of killing her father, the tyrannical King Saran, and the presumed death of her brother Inan, which she believes was necessary for revolution. This past not only haunts her but also becomes the basis for her political illegitimacy. Caruth (1996) describes trauma as "the response to an unexpected or overwhelming violent event or events that are not fully grasped as they occur" (p. 91). Amari's experience is marked by this inability to "grasp" or process the violent disruptions that frame her new identity as a rebel queen. Early in the novel, Amari laments, "The ghost of father's voice rings through my head. I drove my sword into his chest to free Orisha from his tyranny, but now the kingdom's in chaos" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 9). Her words reveal not just her loss of political control, but a loss of self-mastery. She no longer recognizes her own power as coherent or justifiable.

Fanon's analysis of postcolonial identity provides a framework for understanding this fragmentation. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (2004) asserts that the trauma of colonial domination results in "constant process of self-alienation" (p. 16). Although Amari is a princess and formerly part of the dominant class, her attempt to align herself with the oppressed maji places her in a space of dislocation. She no longer belongs to the monarchy, and yet the oppressed her with suspicion. Zelie, for instance, openly mistrusts her: "Zelie's face goes cold, and I stop in my tracks. I want to fix the chasm between us, yet every word we

speak drags us furthest apart. She stares at me for a long moment, that horrible, empty look in her silver eyes” (Adeyemi, 2017, p. 53). This rejection echoes Fanon’s notion that the postcolonial subject, especially one attempting to defect from the colonizer’s role, is caught in a no-man’s-land where neither side fully accepts them. Amari also faces rejection from her own mother Queen Nehanda. Her mother’s emotional violence intensifies her trauma. The Queen’s rejection reflects the internalized logic of colonial domination. Nehanda views Amari’s empathy and desire for peace not as strengths but as signs of political weakness. She scorns Amari’s attempts to build alliances with the maji, seeing her as soft and unworthy of the throne: “Bold promises...Elegant lies. But these aren’t the words of a devoted leader. Only the vitriol of power-hungry tyrant” (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 35).

Nehanda’s rejection mirrors Fanon’s assertion that colonial power structures fracture the family unit, turning it into an instrument of ideological control: “The family...is the conveyor of an ideology of submission” (Fanon, 2004, p. 151). Amari’s mother does not merely disapprove of her politics, she represents the continuation of *necropolitical power*, using emotional and physical punishment to discipline her daughter into silence. Achille Mbembe’s (2003) notion of *necropolitics*, or the sovereign’s power over life and death, plays out not only in Nehanda’s war tactics but also in her symbolic execution of Amari’s voice and authority. By imprisoning Amari for challenging the monarchy’s violent rule, Nehanda effectively renders her daughter’s trauma politically illegible: “I will not allow you and your maji insurgents to run this kingdom into the ground...You are under arrest for your crimes against the crown! Anyone who aids you shall be taken down!” (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 37). The familial rejection thus strips Amari of both private belonging and public legitimacy, reinforcing what Gayatri Spivak (1988) describes as the condition of subaltern, one who “cannot speak” because her discourse is erased by hegemonic forces (p. 287). Amari’s trauma is not only the result of her experience in war and betrayal but also inscribed by a maternal figure who

enforces colonial violence within the intimacy of family, reducing Amari to a subject whose pain disqualifies her from power.

Gender further compounds Amari's trauma and silencing. As Spivak (1988) asks in her seminal essay, "Can the subaltern speak?" she argues that within hegemonic discourse, marginalized women are doubly muted, both by colonial structures and patriarchal silencing (p. 287). Although Amari is of noble blood, her gender and her alignment with the marginalized maji place her in a subaltern position. Her voice, though loud, becomes unintelligible to those in power and those in rebellion. Even her mother weaponizes this silence, treating Amari as a failed daughter and ineffective leader: "Before you stands a traitor...A rebel who allies with liars and thieves. An insolent child who has endangered us all with magic just so she can be queen!" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 36). Here, Amari's trauma is reinscribed through the maternal voice of the colonizer- a woman who herself is complicit in the patriarchal violence of the empire.

Dominic LaCapra's distinction between "acting out" and "working through" trauma furthers this reading. LaCapra (2001) explains that trauma that is merely "acted out" results in compulsive repetition, while "working through" involves critically engaging with one's pain to gain agency (p. 70). Amari remains stuck in the former. She repeatedly attempts to assert authority in ways that mimic the very structures she wishes to dismantle, crowning herself queen without community consensus and using force to coerce loyalty. Her statement, "I have to take my place on Orisha's throne. I am the only one who can usher in an era of peace. The queen who can fix everything my father broke" (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 7) is revealing. Her trauma has taught her that leadership must mirror the oppressive tactics of her father, reinforcing the colonial logic of domination rather than enabling a new paradigm of liberation.

Adeyemi also presents Amari as a deeply traumatized character whose obsession with the throne is both a product of her suffering and a reflection of her desire to bring peace. However,

her trauma, far from empowering her, ultimately constructs an identity that strips her of agency. Her fixation on becoming queen, rooted in the desire to heal, avenge, and assert control, leads her to replicate the structures of violence she seeks to dismantle. Her obsession with the throne is not born solely from ambition but from trauma. As the daughter of King Saran, she witnesses and experiences violence, including the murder of her friend Binta and her own act of patricide: “Two moons ago I sat at a palace luncheon as my father murdered my best friend. Her name was Binta, and was a diviner whose only crime was the magic that coursed through her skin” (Adeyemi, p. 31). In the sequel, her trauma is deepened by her rejection from her mother, Queen Nehanda, and by the loss of her brother and trust from Zelig. These layers of betrayal fracture her sense of self and drive her to believe that claiming the throne is the only path to restore peace and validate her suffering. She declares, “If my mother refuses to back down, I’ll take her out...I’ll end her war and ascend the throne.” She further declares, “I am Orisha’s queen...their queen even if they don’t want me. No matter how hard it gets, I don’t get to run. It is my duty to serve and protect every person in this kingdom” (Adeyemi, pp. 50, 51). Here, Amari casts herself as both a victim and a savior, believing that political power will heal both personal and collective wounds.

However, Amari’s trauma-driven obsession blinds her to collaboration and compromise, leading her to repeat the logic of domination. She grows increasingly authoritarian in her approach, making unilateral decisions, suppressing dissent, and resorting to violence. “I know my mother better than anyone. If I can figure out her strategy, I’ll know how to counterattack” (Adeyemi, 2019, p. 49). She also declares, “I am the child of King Saran. The daughter of Queen Nehanda. I was raised to win at all costs, no matter who gets hurt in the process” (p. 373). Fanon (2004) argues that the colonized subject, when traumatized and the granted power, often mimics the structures of the oppressor: “The colonized man...is the result of a colonial situation. Violence is his only way of proving to himself that he is a man” (p. 16). For Amari,

violence and conquest become proof of strength and tools of legitimacy. Her trauma, rather than enabling liberation, binds her to the very forms of oppression she seeks to overcome. Cathy Caruth (1996) explains that trauma is “not locatable in the simple violent or original event...but rather in a way its very unassimilated nature-the way it was precisely not known in the first instance-returns to haunt the survivor later on” (p. 4). Amari is haunted by past betrayals that she never fully processes, and instead of working through these traumas, she reenacts them.

Furthermore, towards the end of the novel, Amari’s climactic decision to unleash a catastrophic magical weapon that kills both enemies and allies, particularly the very maji she once sought to protect, represents the pick of her political and moral collapse. Although she does not explicitly intend to sacrifice the maji to ascend the throne, her trauma driven desperation to defeat her mother and secure power blinds her to the human cost of her actions. This devastating moment marks the culmination of a traumatic arc in which Amari, in trying to overcome oppression, mimics its logic. Her act of destruction both alienates her from her allies and disqualifies her from the moral legitimacy required of a ruler. This study argues that Amari’s political downfall stems not from mere ambition, but from unprocessed trauma that transforms her from a symbol of liberation into an agent of violence and loss.

The pivotal moment of Amari’s downfall occurs when she calls upon overwhelming magical force to annihilate Nehanda’s army. In her desperation to end the war destroy her mother’s power, she uses the incantation or artifact that causes an explosion of fire and death, indiscriminately killing enemy soldiers and maji fighters alike. Amari herself admits, “Though nothing sits in my stomach, it all comes up at once. I feel every ounce of pain. Every shriveled-up corpse. Despite everything I want, I’m just another monarch terrorizing this kingdom. I’m the very monster I hunt” (Adeyemi, p. 372). This moment severs the ideological bond between Amari and the maji resistance. She gets arrested by Zelig. This is as Zelig commands, “Get her

to the ahéré!...Lock her up!” (p. 358). Everyone comes to hate her including her lover Tzain. Though she does not explicitly intend to sacrifice the maji, her decision demonstrates a collapse in judgement, born from the compulsion to eliminate Nehanda at any cost. Her trauma does not simply motivate her resistance but disfigures her political ethics, transforming justice into destruction.

Fanon’s postcolonial framework helps clarify this tragic trajectory. His notion that the colonized liberates themselves in and through violence, but warns that without a rehumanizing political vision, this violence risks becoming self-consuming. Amari’s trauma, witnessing Binta’s death, killing her father, being rejected by her mother, accumulates into a fractured psyche that can only conceptualize peace through force. Her decision to burn the battlefield, while aimed at Nehanda, reflects the internalization of colonial necropolitics, where sovereignty defined through the power to kill. Mbembe’s notion of necropolitics reflects this. In choosing to destroy indiscriminately, Amari ceases to act as a healer or liberator and instead becomes the sovereign in the necropolitical sense, wielding power not to nurture, but to eliminate.

This moment of betrayal can also be read as a traumatic repetition, or what LaCapra refers to as “acting out.” Rather than working through her trauma, Amari compulsively reenacts the structures of violence that originally victimized her. In trying to destroy her mother, Amari inadvertently mirrors her. The emotional logic of this decision is tied to a trauma that has not been integrated, what Caruth describes as an unassimilated experience that returns through repetition and not remembrance. She cannot articulate or process her grief and rage but instead, externalizes it through firepower, making her trauma legible only through destruction.

Amari’s use of violence to assert legitimacy also reflects a breakdown in her identity as a potential leader. While she once embodied the ideal of a new Orisha, one where monarchy and maji coexist, her decision alienates her from both sides. Spivak’s theory of the subaltern speaks

directly to this silencing. The subaltern in attempting to speak through hegemonic discourses, is often rendered unintelligible because her language and logic are already co-opted by dominant paradigms (p. 287). In attempting to speak through violence, Amari becomes unreadable to both the maji and the monarchy. She is no longer a revolutionary, but not yet a tyrant. She occupies a liminal space of political death, where her voice and vision no longer hold meaning.

Children of Virtue and Vengeance portrays Amari's journey as a harrowing descent into the complex terrain of trauma, identity, and the pursuit of justice. Her noble intentions which are to dismantle a violent monarchy, to bring peace to Orisha, and to elevate the oppressed maji, are gradually corrupted by the scars of her unprocessed trauma. Rather than empowering her, Amari's trauma produces a fractured identity in which agency is not reclaimed but progressively lost. The accumulation of personal and political betrayals, her father's murder at her own hand, the execution of Binta, her brother Inan's betrayal, and queen Nehanda's rejection, create an overwhelming emotional burden. Rather than allowing Amari to develop a coherent political self, these traumas erode her capacity to act with clarity, integrity, and autonomy. Instead, her actions are driven by compulsion, vengeance, and fear, leading to decisions that paradoxically reproduce the very systems of oppression she seeks to dismantle.

Fanon's (2004) insights are particularly instructive in tracing this collapse. Fanon warns that without the construction of a new, humanized political identity, the formerly colonized risk becoming the mirror image of the colonizer. This is precisely the arc that Amari follows. Her political imagination narrows to the same logic of control and violence that governed her father's reign. Instead of offering a liberatory alternative, Amari increasingly exercises power through death, culminating in the tragic battlefield scene where she sacrifices both enemies and allies in a desperate bid for resolution. This moment is not simply a moral failing, but the manifestation of a fractured self whose agency has been overtaken by trauma's repetition

compulsion what Caruth (1996) defines as the inability to fully know or integrate traumatic events, which instead re-emerge as destructive behavior. Amari therefore does not choose violence with full awareness but is entrapped within trauma's recursive structure, making it impossible for her to act freely or ethically.

Furthermore, Dominick LaCapra's (2001) distinction between "acting out" and "working through" implies a conscious engagement with one's wounds, "acting out" is characterized by compulsive return and emotional paralysis. Amari, consumed by vengeance and haunted by past loss, repeatedly acts out her trauma without confronting it, making her susceptible to power's most violent temptations. Her longing for the throne, once justified by a desire to bring justice, becomes inseparable from the desire to defeat her mother, to prove her worth, and to assert control in a world that has constantly robbed her of it. This desperation alienates her from allies and leads to her political isolation, what Mbembe describes as a descent into *necropolitics*, where power is defined by the ability to kill rather than to nurture life.

Ultimately, Amari's fractured identity, shaped by trauma, dislocation, and repeated rejection, renders her incapable of constructing a sustainable vision of leadership. Her descent from would-be queen to political pariah illustrates how trauma, when unprocessed, can strip even the most powerful individuals of agency. She is left not as a victor, but as a cautionary figure, bearing witness to the necessity of healing before power can truly be transformative.

4.5 Conclusion

In *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*, Tomi Adeyemi portrays trauma as a defining force in the construction of female identity. For Zelig and Amari, trauma is not a momentary rupture but a sustained experience that reshapes their sense of self, agency and belonging. Zelig's identity becomes increasingly marked by emotional detachment and vengeful rage, while Amari struggles with guilt, self-doubt, and the burden of leadership. Rather than depicting trauma as a purely destructive force, however, Adeyemi shows how it can simultaneously

fracture and forge identity, revealing both the vulnerabilities and the enduring strength of her female characters. In doing so, Adeyemi illustrates that in a postcolonial context, female identity is inextricably tied to survival, memory, and the ongoing struggle against oppression. The shaping of female identity through trauma in *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* thus becomes an act of bearing witness to both personal and collective histories of violence, and a testament to the possibility of transformation even amid enduring pain.

CHAPTER FIVE

BEYOND TRAUMA: AGENCY IN CHILDREN OF ANGUISH AND ANARCHY BY TOMI ADEYEMI

5.0 Introduction

Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Anguish and Anarchy* (2024) reimagines the struggle for liberation through the intersecting lenses of race, gender, class, and power. Building upon the foundations laid in *Children of Blood and Bone* and *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*, the novel explores how overlapping systems of domination, colonial legacies, patriarchal norms, and spiritual hierarchies shape the identities of Zélie and Amari. Using Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989, 1991) theory of intersectionality and bell hooks' (1984, 2000) concepts of feminist resistance and consciousness, Adeyemi constructs a narrative that transforms trauma into agency. Analyzed alongside postcolonial theorists such as Frantz Fanon (1963) and Homi Bhabha (1994), the novel emerges as a radical articulation of intersectional resistance that situates Black female empowerment within a decolonial and spiritual context.

5.1 Resistance and Formation of Agency

Children of Anguish and Anarchy follows Zélie and her companions (Amari, Tzain and Inan) in the aftermath of the magical revolution that defined the second novel, *Children of Virtue and Vengeance*. As they confront renewed imperial expansion by King Baldyr, where she uncovers the spiritual legacy of the Sky Mother's Temple and the true scope of Orisha's historical colonization, Zélie's disillusionment deepens as she encounters both betrayal and spiritual rapture, culminating in a redefinition of her purpose and power. Her path towards agency is not linear but cyclical informed by ancestral knowledge, personal suffering, and the imperative to liberate her people from both physical and psychological chains.

In the opening chapters of the novel, following the fall of the monarchy and the rise of the maji, Zélie and her companions – Amari, Tzain, and Inan- are captured during a pivotal battle

by the Skulls, a group of masked, pale-skinned invaders. They are imprisoned and transported across the sea on a foreign ship, stripped off their magic and freedom. The Skulls led by King Baldyr, aim to exploit Zelig's unique powers for their own gain. This harrowing experience sets stage for Zelig's journey of reclaiming her agency. Stripped of her magic, she is haunted by memories of her family. The Skulls seek a maji with the blood of the sun, a power Zelig unknowingly possesses. Despite the torment, she clings to hope, determined to escape and reunite with her loved ones. Drawing strength from her mother's teachings and the goddess Oya, she endures the pain. Witnessing the suffering of other captured maji, including her brother Tzain fuels her determination to escape and warn Orisha of the impending threat. As the Skull's ship sails away from Orisha, Zelig and the captured maji devise a plan to escape. With Tzain's help, they work together to overpower their captors and seize the control of the ship. Their successful escape is a testament to their resilience and unity. Before their escape, Zelig engages into a fight with King Baldyr and the Silver Skull, after the king shoves the medallion into her chest meant to harvest her power during a "Blood Moon" ritual. Zelig asserts:

“Though I can hardly see, I reach for everything in sight. My fingers grasp at a fallen chicken bone. When Baldyr comes for me, I swing widely, stabbing through his cheek. A brass candleholder falls to the left. I grab it and beat Baldyr over the head. I swing the candleholder again, choking the king across the jaw” (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 53).

Kimberley Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality (1989) is crucial to understanding Zelig's resistance. Crenshaw posits that women of color experience oppression through intersecting systems of race, gender, and class that cannot be analyzed separately. Zelig embodies this complexity. She is a dark-skinned Diviner (racially marginalized), a woman in a patriarchal society (gendered oppression), and a spiritual leader targeted by colonial violence (religious and cultural oppression).

In the novel, Zelig's fight with King Baldyr is not merely physical. It symbolizes the confrontation between intersecting forces of colonialism, patriarchy, and racial erasure. Baldyr represents white colonial domination and the exploitation of Black bodies and spiritual heritage. When Zelig declares confronts the King with his Skulls, she confronts not only a king but centuries of historical silencing, an embodiment of Crenshaw's argument that oppression operates through multiple axes that must be resisted collectively.

Through this intersectional struggle, Zelig's resistance becomes multidimensional. She fights for herself, her people, and the restoration of a cultural identity stripped by colonial power. Her intersectional awareness transforms her resistance into a reclamation of collective agency, illustrating Crenshaw's (1991) insight that empowerment for marginalized women requires dismantling all interlocking systems of domination.

This act of physical violation also mirrors Frantz Fanon's discourse on the objectification of the colonized body. Fanon articulates that colonialism reduces the native to an object, stripping away individuality and agency: "The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive, 'They want to take our place.'" Fanon (1964, p. 16). However, Zelig's refusal to succumb to this violence, and her immediate engagement in combat, becomes a defiant assertion of agency. From a postcolonial perspective, this moment echoes Frantz Fanon's theory that the colonized body becomes a battleground where identity and autonomy must be reclaimed through resistance. Zelig also embodies Caruth's notion that trauma is not only an experience of helplessness, but also a site of potential testimony and action. This insinuates that Zelig's fight is not simply physical but a refusal to be silenced, reclaiming of her narrative, and a disruption of the Skull's power, symbolizing the broader fight against colonial oppression and the journey toward self-determination.

Zélie, Amari, Tzain, and Inan are compelled to set aside their internal divisions to fight a common colonial threat: the Skulls and their tyrannical leader, King Baldyr. This is as Zélie asserts: “We are it... We are the only true defense Orisha has left. Whatever we’ve done to hurt each other, whatever scores we have to settle, it ends now. We can’t afford to be at each other’s throats” (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 127). Crenshaw (1989) argues that solidarity among women of color emerges through the recognition of these layered differences. Adeyemi captures this when Zélie, after years of mistrust decides to trust Amari and her brother Inan even after their betrayals. This acknowledgment of shared trauma transforms individual suffering into collective strength. By combining their distinct perspectives, Amari’s moral awakening and Zélie’s spiritual resilience, the two women form an intersectional alliance that unites the divided factions of Orisha. Their cooperation demonstrates Crenshaw’s (1991) principle that agency for marginalized subjects is not achieved in isolation but through the interdependence of those oppressed by overlapping systems of domination.

Through their union, Zélie and Amari dismantle the colonial logic that pits oppressed groups against each other, a logic that mirrors what Fanon (1963) calls “the internalized division of the colonized.” Their collective resistance thus enacts a *postcolonial healing*, forging agency through intersectional unity rather than hierarchical leadership. bell hooks (1984; 2000) argues that resistance grounded in love and solidarity transforms oppression into empowerment. In Adeyemi’s narrative, the collaboration between Zélie, Amari, Tzain, and Inan embodies hooks’ vision of a “love-ethic resistance,” a radical practice of care and community that sustains liberation. Though Inan’s loyalty fluctuates and Tzain’s role is often protective, their participation in collective struggle symbolizes the broader communal awakening necessary for liberation.

hooks (2000) maintains that “resistance rooted in love is a political act that sustains life,” and Zélie’s eventual forgiveness of Inan reflects this ethic. Inan’s betrayal in earlier installments

created a rupture within the resistance movement, but Zélie's willingness to collaborate with him in the face of a greater colonial threat marks a shift from vengeance to transformative solidarity. This dynamic echoes hooks' (All About Love, 2000) claim that love allows for the "reconstitution of community" after trauma.

Amari's evolution also demonstrates hooks' idea of consciousness-raising as liberation (Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, 1984). Her initial guilt transforms into an active commitment to justice when she recognizes that her privilege must be repurposed for the collective good. Together, Zélie and Amari embody hooks' principle that feminist agency arises when women resist patriarchal division and instead embrace interdependence. Their resistance is not individual heroism but shared survival, a love-fueled defiance against the empire that seeks to erase them.

John Masterson's reading of Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *The Disorder of Things* also provides valuable framework for understanding how postcolonial narratives construct agency. Masterson notes that "resistance must be reconstituted beyond individual acts of heroism, in collective, often fractured, solidarities" (Masterson, 2012, p. 108). Zélie's initial distrust of Inan, and Amari's conflicting loyalties, mirror the fractured identities of postcolonial subjects grappling with legacies of betrayal and violence. Yet their decision to unify against the Skulls is a reconstitution of resistance, an act that transcends personal wounds to reimagine liberation as a communal project. Though the alliance is imperfect, it is rooted in shared suffering under neocolonial subjugation, aligning with Masterson's call for "pluralized resistance in the shadow of empire" (p. 112).

Achille Mbembe's concept of *necropolitics*, the sovereign power to determine who may live and who must die, is embodied in King Baldyr, whose foreign invasion and weaponization of ancient metal mark him as a colonial figure of death and domination. Mbembe writes, "Under the conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and survival blur" (Mbembe, 2003,

p. 40). The characters' decision to unify, therefore, is not simply strategic but a refusal to allow death to be dictated by the colonizer. Their alliance is a reclamation of life and futurity, one that asserts agency not through ideological purity but through pragmatic resistance to extermination. Their struggle highlights Mbembe's claim that "living under occupation requires a constant negotiation of agency in a space where the very capacity to choose is constrained" (p. 36). In that constrained space, unity becomes both a survival mechanism and a revolutionary act.

Wole Soyinka, in his reflection on postcolonial trauma and cultural rebirth, insists that resistance must be rooted in ethical action and cultural memory. In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Soyinka asserts that "the communal will to survive finds its expression in rituals of renewal and confrontation with the abyss" (Soyinka, 1976, p. 145). Their journey to Baldeirik, where the king resides, their spiritual trials, and their final stand against the Skulls are acts of mythic resonance, struggles that situate their rebellion within a longer historical continuum of resistance. In this sense, their unity is not merely political but metaphysical. It signals a return to the source- a reclamation of Orisha's ancestral strength to combat foreign desecration. Soyinka's perspective reveals that agency, in this context, lies in the ability to remember and reanimate indigenous systems of power in the face of annihilation.

While the novel is rooted in African cosmologies and diasporic histories, its treatment of power, resistance, and collective action intersects within western theories of subjectivity and political action. Michel Foucault's analysis of power, particularly in *Discipline and Punish and The History of Sexuality*, challenges the notion that agency exists outside or beyond power structures. For Foucault, power is not merely repressive but also productive since it creates the conditions in which subjects become intelligible. Zelig and her allies operate within a network of power relations shaped by both Orishan and foreign institutions. Their alliance, rather than being an expression of freedom from domination, is a strategic reconfiguration within the field

of power. Foucault writes, “Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet...resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). The group’s unity against the Skulls, then, is not the negation of power but a redistribution of it, an act of agency grounded in the reappropriation of discourse, magic, and political authority that has been monopolized by Baldyr.

Furthermore, Hannah Arendt’s argues that agency is located in the realm of *action*, which is inherently plural and public. Arendt emphasizes that true political agency emerges when individuals act in concert, creating new beginnings through collective will. The alliance of Zelig, Amari, Tzain, and Inan fulfills this criterion of action-in-plurality. Despite deep personal divisions and betrayals, their cooperative resistance to the Skulls is a political act that interrupts the continuity of domination and asserts the capacity to create a new order. Arendt writes, “Power is what keeps the public realm...in existence; it is the potential that springs up whenever people get together and act in concert” (Arendt, 1958, p. 200). Their unity thus becomes an assertion of political being, not merely reacting to oppression, but shaping a future grounded in mutual interdependence.

Moreover, Friedrich Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* asserts that, consciousness is formed through recognition; the enslaved subject develops self-consciousness through labor and resistance, eventually surpassing the master’s static identity (Hegel, 1997). Zelig’s arc, in particular, echoes this movement. Her captivity by the Skulls parallels the slave’s position, yet it is through struggle and rebellion that she attains full subjectivity and moral authority. Inan, too, undergoes a transformation. His earlier alignment with domination is destabilized as he is forced into more reciprocal relationship with those he once opposed. The collective rebellion against Baldyr becomes, in Hegelian terms, a moment of *Aufhebung*- a dialectical sublation in which past contradictions are transcended and preserved in a higher synthesis. The alliance is thus not simply an end to conflict, but a qualitative transformation of the self through

recognition and struggle. These contributions reveal the character's rebellion as a profound act of becoming in the face of imperial violence.

Tomi Adeyemi constructs a powerful narrative where resistance becomes inseparable from the reclamation of agency. Through characters such as Zélie and Amari, Adeyemi redefines resistance beyond physical rebellion to encompass the psychological, spiritual, and narrative dimensions of liberation. Using resistance, Adeyemi crafts spaces in which Black women reclaim the power to speak, to lead, and to reimagine their futures outside the boundaries imposed by colonial and patriarchal systems.

5.2 Voice and Resistance

Through a dual first-person narrative voice, Adeyemi in *Children of Anguish and Anarchy* allows Zélie and Amari to articulate their fragmented subjectivities, transforming the act of narration into a form of agency reclamation. The novel's use of first-person voice is not a neutral stylistic choice but a political act that resists historical silencing of Black women and reclaims the authority to define one's own experience. This narrative strategy aligns with bell hooks's (1989) notion of "talking back," Crenshaw's (1989) framework of intersectionality, and postcolonial theories of resistance articulated by Fanon (1963), Spivak (1988), and Bhabha (1994).

Even after King Baldyr attempts to control Zélie's body and magic by shoving a medallion into her chest, her refusal to surrender psychologically signifies her deeper strength: "We brought King Saran to his knees. When Queen Nehanda stood against us, we razed Lagos to the ground. I won't allow myself to cower now. I won't bow to any other crown" (Adeyemi, 2021, p. 47). This line, rendered in first-person, situates the reader directly within Zélie's psychic landscape. Her pain becomes intimate, immediate, and embodied. The use of "I" foregrounds her personal suffering, but also functions as collective testimony for the oppressed Maji. Her voice is filled with defiance. By narrating her journey, she resists being spoken for

by the oppressive state or by male revolutionaries who often attempt to dictate her role. The very act of her storytelling becomes a feminist rebellion. She refuses the narrative of victimhood and reclaims her subjectivity through speech.

Her affirmations are also a sign that she is reclaiming control over her own body and mind in a situation designed to humiliate and dominate her. Though small, they defiant acts of resistance, internal strategies for survival that protect her from complete psychological collapse. In bell hooks's (1989) terms, this act of speaking from the margins is itself a radical reclaiming of space. hooks argues that "to be in the margin is to be part of the whole but outside the main body" (p. ix). Through Zélie's "I," Adeyemi brings the marginal into the center of narration, allowing her protagonist to rewrite the colonial narrative that historically rendered African women voiceless or peripheral. This moment embodies hook's idea of reclaiming the self through language, as Zélie's voice subverts the silence historically imposed on Black women. Zélie's storytelling becomes an assertion of her humanity against systems that have dehumanized her lineage.

Crenshaw's (1989) framework of intersectionality also explains how Zélie's oppression operates across gender, race, class, and spirituality. Her voice bears the layered pain of being a Black woman and a diviner in a world that both racialized and spiritualizes power to exclude her. For instance, when she recalls her mother's murder and the subsequent stigma of being a diviner, she narrates: "i grew up knowing magic was a curse. My skin, my hair, my blood, all marks that made me less." (p. 76). Through this confession, Adeyemi uses Zélie's voice to articulate multiple intersecting identities, that is, woman, maji, daughter, survivor. Crenshaw's concept helps to see how Adeyemi constructs Zélie's voice as a space where these intersecting oppressions are both acknowledged and resisted.

Zélie's narration also transforms from individual testimony into collective agency. In the epilogue, she declares: "We weep because, against all odds, we have prevailed. In our sacred

klands, we find the truth-the power no king can erase“ p. 370). Here, Adeyemi fuses the personal with the communal, fulfilling hook’s belief that feminist liberation is rooted in shared struggle. Zelig’s voice becomes plural. The “I“ becomes “We.“ Her narrative thus transcends the individual trauma of the protagonist and becomes a collective act of remembrance and empowerment for her people. Through this shift in pronouns and tone, Adeyemi positions narration itself as a political act of reclamation. The first-person voice becomes a chorus, echoing Fanon’s notion that true liberation is collective and transformative.

Adeyemi also uses Amari’s first-person voice as a subtle but powerful strategy of self-liberation and resistance. Through her narration, Amari moves from a place of internalized powerlessness, haunted by guilt over her royal lineage, to one of self-realized agency. Her narrative perspective becomes a site where she negotiates her trauma, transforms guilt into action, and redefines her identity beyond the constraints of patriarchy and colonial hierarchy.

Hooks (1989) emphasizes that reclaiming the right to speak is central to the liberation of the oppressed, especially women who have been silenced by patriarchy. In the first chapters of the text, Amari’s narrative voice is hesitant and self-doubting. It reflects the lingering effects of both royal indoctrination and patriarchal suppression. She narrates:“Long before the Raid. The years when I looked up at Father and still saw a radiant king. The man who would chase every monster away“ (p. 68). This moment exposes the internalized oppression that hooks describes as psychic colonization, where patriarchal conditioning convinces women of their inferiority. Amari’s narration externalizes this internalized voice of domination, thereby naming and confronting it, which is the first step toward reclaiming selfhood.

As the narrative progresses, Amari begins to challenge these silences. Her first-person narration increasingly asserts defiance:“It was my sword that sent Father to his death. It was my vow to protect the people of Orisha...To go home, back to Orisha, no matter the price. To be buried in my own land“ (p. 69,70). Here, Adeyemi uses Amari’s narrative transformation

to illustrate hook's notion that "talking back" is an act of resistance. The movement from self-doubt to self-assertion mirrors the broader feminist reclamation of voice. Her narration becomes a political act of self-definition, allowing her to speak not as the daughter of a tyrant but as a woman forging her own moral agency.

Moreover, postcolonial theorists emphasize the importance of voice and self-representation in resisting colonial domination. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) critical question, "Can the subaltern speak?" highlights the way colonial systems silence the voices of the oppressed. Adeyemi's decision to allow her female protagonist to speak in the first person directly challenges this silencing. Zélie who embodies different aspects of colonial oppression is granted narrative authority. Her voice is not mediated or filtered through an omniscient narrator, but instead emerges with immediacy and emotional rawness, reclaiming her right to self-definition.

Through the polyphonic narrative structure of *Children of Anguish and Anarchy*, Adeyemi turns voice into a revolutionary tool. Drawing from hooks' insistence on "talking back," Crenshaw's intersectional analysis of oppression, and postcolonial theorists' call for decolonial reclamation, Adeyemi reimagines narration as an act of survival, testimony, and power. Zélie and Amari's first-person voices resist erasure, transform trauma into testimony, and affirm Black womanhood as a site of strength. In reclaiming the right to narrate, they reclaim the right to exist fully, defiantly, and freely.

5.3 Spirituality as Resistance and Self-Definition

Tomi Adeyemi employs indigenous spirituality particularly the Orisha pantheon, rituals, ancestral connection, and communal rites as a central strategy for reclaiming female agency within a postcolonial and patriarchal world that historically devalues African epistemologies. Through Zélie and Amari, Adeyemi reimagines spirituality as both a site of trauma and resistance, where reclaiming one's divine and cultural roots becomes synonymous with reclaiming identity and power

Zelie's embrace of indigenous spirituality becomes a path to personal agency in the face of colonial violence. After the Skulls and King Baldyr forcibly suppress her magic and identity, Zelie turns inward, reconnecting with her ancestral lineage and the divine powers of Orisha to resist psychological and spiritual erasure. While in the cell of a moving ship, Zelie prays to Oya for help in the middle of her despair and disillusionment: "I don't know how to carry on. I don't know how to hold on to the will to live. "Oya please..." I whisper the words, risking the heartbreak of another unanswered call. But thunder still rumbles through the ventilation. Shaft. I have to believe that even this far from Orisha's shores, the thunder means Oya is here to last" (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 13). Her belief in the Oya, the deity of life and death grounds her in a worldview that predates colonization, affirming a sacred identity that cannot be rewritten by imperial narratives. In the face of imperial violence and epistemic domination by King Baldyr and his colonial regime, Zelie spiritual practices become acts of reclamation and resistance. Her faith in Oya functions as both a personal anchor and a counter-discourse to the colonial narrative that seeks to devalue and erase Orishan cosmology. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o explains in *Decolonising the Mind*, "The biggest weapon wielded and actually daily unleashed by imperialism...was the cultural bomb" (Ngugi, 1986, p. 3). This "bomb" is meant to make colonized people reject their traditions, languages, and belief systems. Zelie's prayer to Oya, especially in moments of crisis, directly counteracts the erasure. Rather than seeking salvation through colonial forms of power-technology, militarization, or assimilation-Zelie turns inward toward the spiritual systems of her ancestors. In doing so, she affirms the legitimacy and strength of indigenous knowledge and refuses to allow her spirituality to be colonized.

John Masterson (2010) highlights the importance of narrative and symbolic resistance in postcolonial literature. He emphasizes that reclaiming cultural symbols and belief systems is central to disrupting colonial hegemony. Zelie invocation of Oya not only asserts personal faith but also restores a collective cultural identity that colonialism attempts to dismantle. As

Masterson notes in his analysis of African postcolonial narratives, such symbolic reclamations often serve to “reconfigure notions of power” by destabilizing colonial authority and re-centering indigenous worldviews (p.88). Through spiritual devotion, Zelig resists the imperial framing of maji culture as primitive or dangerous and instead elevates it as sacred and powerful. Furthermore, Oya-as a deity of death and transformation becomes a metaphor for Zelig’s own journey. Her embrace of Oya is not just religious, but existential. She embodies the transition from grief and victimhood to action and transformation. In this sense, spirituality is not an escape from political struggle, but a mode of empowerment that fuels Zelig’s resistance and grounds her identity.

Zelig’s spirituality not only restores her own agency but becomes a catalyst for collective resistance. As a Reaper, her connection to the dead and her rituals of communion link her to generations of maji who have been silenced by King Baldyr. She says: “I reach for every spirit that has fallen, everybody tossed to the seas by the Skulls. I think of every maji we lost on their ships, every New Gaan left floating in the Black Bay. No life will be lost in vain” (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 365). Her leadership in sacred ceremonies is not just symbolic, it is functional, reviving cultural memory and uniting Orisha’s oppressed peoples in a shared sense of purpose and identity. This communal spirituality resists the fragmentation that colonial trauma often produces. According to Caruth, trauma “is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known,” and can therefore fracture narrative coherence (1996, p. 4).

Zelig’s spiritual rituals, especially after regaining her Reaper status following the attempt of King Baldyr to harvest her powers, offer a form of collective testimony that transcends this fragmentation, allowing survivors to bear witness together. Her act of honoring the dead is not only mourning but also restoring a sense of shared history, identity, and sacred duty that binds the community in resistance. This echoes Fanon’s insight that “the colonized man finds his freedom in and through violence” (Fanon, 1963, p. 13). Zelig’s form of violence is spiritual,

memory based, and community centered. The act of remembering their gods becomes an act of war. In stark contrast to King Baldyr's technological domination and attempts to harness magic through invasive tools (like the medallion), Zelig's spirituality emerges as a decolonial force. The Skulls view magic as a resource to be extracted and controlled- a mirror of historical colonial enterprises that sought to commodify land, bodies, and beliefs. Zelig resists this framework by insisting that magic is sacred (Adeyemi, p. 363). By rooting her identity in the divine, she reframes her trauma not as defeat, but as sacred suffering that demands resistance. Her fight is spiritual, not merely strategic. This offers Zelig's spirituality as a counter-narrative to the colonial project: where the Skulls seek to erase and replace, she seeks to remember and restore.

While in a battle with the Skulls, Zelig is abducted by King Baldry and taken to the coast of the sea. During this moment, the King readies himself to harvest Zelig's magical powers. However, Inan manages to set a trap in the King's deck by pouring sulfur, normally used by the king to torture his enemies, on the floor of the boat. He does this in order to distract the King from harvesting Zelig's power. While in a confrontation with the King, as an act of resistance, Zelig manages to harness her Reaper magic and ignite the King's boat redirecting his attention. She says: "With my Reaper magic twisting inside me, I sense a pathway I couldn't summon before. The medallion pulses in my chest as I call for the surge...I fall to the ground as my lightning shoots through the vessel like a spear. The smell of sulfur leaks through the air. My lightning ignites a flame below deck. In a rush, the blaze expands. Then the whole world explodes" (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 256, 257).

Instead of succumbing to the role of victim or captive, Zelig asserts her will through a fierce act of magical resistance. She symbolically dismantles a structure of imperial power, refusing to let her oppressors control the outcome of the conflict. Her decision to destroy the deck is more than a moment of tactical rebellion. It is a profound act of political and cultural agency.

The deck as a symbol of Baldyr's militarized, technological control over magic, represents the colonizer's attempt to dominate indigenous knowledge systems and weaponized them for imperial power. By obliterating it, Zelig rejects not only Baldyr's dominion but the entire colonial infrastructure that seeks to co-opt and pervert the spiritual traditions of maji. This moment is deeply tied to Fanon's (1963) theory that decolonial violence, when directed at oppressive systems, becomes a means for the colonized subject to restore agency and self-worth. Zelig's magic, often framed as a divine inheritance from the Orishan gods, becomes an extension of her righteous anger and restored selfhood. She chooses destruction over compromise. For Fanon, such acts are necessary for the colonized subject to assert humanity and reclaim agency. He writes, "Decolonization is always a violent phenomenon" (Fanon, 1963, p. 35), and Zelig's use of her ancestral magic to dismantle the tools of imperial control exemplifies this cathartic violence.

Mbembe's (2003) concept of *necropolitics* -the use of social and political power to dictate how some people may live and how others must die- offer complementary reading. The deck is a tool of necropower: it allows Baldyr to control the life-force of maji, reducing them to batteries for empire. Zelig's refusal to allow her magic to be harnessed, and her decision to annihilate the device entirely, becomes an act of reclaiming life from the machinery of death. As Mbembe argues, colonial domination often operates through the "instrumentalization of human existence" (p. 14P). By destroying the deck, Zelig disrupts this instrumentalization and asserts that her magic, and by extension her identity, is not a commodity to be exploited but a sacred inheritance to be protected. Her act mirrors what Caruth (1996) describes as the belated nature of trauma response: where trauma initially silences and paralyzes, healing often emerges through belated acts of testimony and assertion. Here, she does not plead for freedom, she takes it, rewriting her narrative through destructive but cathartic force. Furthermore, her destruction of the boat echoes Ngugi wa Thiong'o's (1986) notion that delocalization requires

reclaiming the cultural and symbolic structures stolen by colonial rule. In destroying a vessel of imperial escape, Zélie is not only punishing her enemies but declaring that the systems of colonization, literal and symbolic, will not endure. In this moment, Zélie fully embodies a self-determined subject: a Reaper not defined by fear or prophecy, but by conscious, liberatory action.

When Zélie loses consciousness while using her reaper magic, it is the ancestral, spiritual knowledge of Yeva and Mae'e, passed down through generations of Orishan women, that revives her. Amari whispers to Mama Gaa to save Zélie (Adeyemi, p. 263). With the help of an elderly woman called Yeva, they all disappear to the underground where they perform sacred chants that redeem Zélie's life (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 264). Their sacred chants function as more than a healing ritual. They are a reclamation of a cultural legacy that colonial powers have sought to erase. As Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986) emphasizes, the restoration of indigenous languages and oral traditions is central to delocalization, because they contain the memory, resistance, and identity of the oppressed. The chants, in this context, are not merely spiritual but political acts of revival that assert the value and efficacy of indigenous knowledge systems over imposed colonial ones.

Adeyemi therefore utilizes spirituality as a strategy to reconfigure the female body as a site of sacred agency rather than trauma. Throughout the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy, Zélie's and Amari's bodies bear the marks of violence, fear, and loss. However, Adeyemi transforms these wounded bodies through ritual practices that reconnect them with ancestral power. This transformation resonates with Caruth's (1996) conception of trauma as a return of the repressed, wherein healing emerges through the rearticulation of pain. By engaging in collective spiritual rites, the female protagonists convert traumatic memory into active memory, turning the body into a vessel of resistance and renewal. Ritual thus becomes a

performative act through which trauma is narrated and transmuted into strength, restoring dignity to the colonized and violated self.

In another confrontation between the Skulls and the Orishans, Zelig stabs herself in the chest during the Blood Moon ritual meant to make King Baldyr a god, in an attempt to stop him from becoming one (p. 334). Her action leads to her physical death. However, Inan sacrifices his life at Mount Gaa for Zelig to live: “I dreamed of a lifetime spent with her in my arms. I made her a promise back in that cage. I swore she would live to see our homeland. I can’t stop King Baldyr. I can’t battle every Skull. But I can still offer her this” (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 348, 349).

This can be interpreted as a transformative act that ultimately reclaims agency for Zelig. While his selfless act may initially appear as a moment of loss, it is, in fact, a strategic intervention that disrupts the prevailing dynamics of power and oppression. By sacrificing his life so that Zelig may live and continue her journey, Inan not only redeems his own past transgressions but also clears the path for Zelig to emerge from the shadow of both personal and systemic trauma. This pivotal moment liberates her from the confines of previous relational dependencies and allows her to embrace her role as a leader and inheritor of indigenous power. The sacrifice functions as a symbolic decolonization of Zelig’s identity, wherein the extinguishing of one life ignites the reclaiming of another’s agency. The act aligns with Fanon’s (1963) assertion that reclaiming one’s identity often necessitates rupturing the chain of colonial subjugation. It also echoes Caruth’s concept of trauma as a transformative event that, while painful, enables recovery and redefinition (Caruth, 1996). Thus, Inan’s sacrifice can be seen as both redemptive and liberatory, a moment that only redeems him but also empowers Zelig to redefine her destiny, re-establish her connection with her ancestral roots, and lead her community in the struggle for self-determination.

Zelie's journey culminates in a powerful act of resistance. After Inan's sacrificial death, she reclaims her Reaper magic and uses it to animate the dead, ultimately killing the colonizer King Baldyr: "Dozens of animations turn to hundreds. In the blink of an eye, there are thousands. The spirits of my people fight through the glowing seas, tearing through the crashing waves...a thousand bolts of lightning come crashing down, stealing the last of the king's life" (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 367). This moment, while dramatic and emotionally charged, is more than a plot climax. It is a significant articulation of postcolonial agency. Zelie's act can be read as a reclaiming of spiritual, political, narrative, and cultural sovereignty in the face of colonial violence.

Wole Soyinka emphasizes the centrality of myth and spirituality in African epistemologies. For Soyinka (1976), myth is not merely folklore but a vessel of historical and existential truth that grounds African identity. Zelie's Reaper magic is intrinsically tied to the Orisha and ancestral forces, reflecting a cosmology rooted in Yoruba metaphysics. When she reclaims this power to animate the dead and combat Baldyr, she symbolically restores a sacred heritage that has been suppressed and vilified by colonial forces. This act, from Soyinka's perspective, is a metaphysical rebellion against colonial attempts to desacralize African spiritual systems. By embodying her ancestral power, Zelie becomes not only a warrior but a custodian of cultural memory, asserting that African cosmologies are sources of strength rather than superstition.

Achille Mbembe's concept of *necropolitics* elucidates how colonial powers exert control through the regulation of death, rendering certain populations disposable (Mbembe, 2003). King Baldyr's rule epitomizes this dynamic. His conquest is not merely territorial but ontological, seeking to eradicate the maji and their magic. Zelie's power as a Reaper, which allows her to commune with and raise the dead, directly challenges this logic. By turning the tools of death against the colonizer, she subverts the necropolitical regime. Her act is not only

revenge but reclamation. She repossesses the ability to define life and death, reconfiguring the maji from victims to agents. Through Mbembe's lens, Zolie's use of death as a weapon against her oppressor transforms the terrain of power, affirming that those rendered killable can still reclaim sovereignty.

John Masterson (2014) argues that postcolonial texts often stage a reassertion of agency through narrative reorientation and redemptive violence. For Masterson, violence in postcolonial contexts is not gratuitous but laden with historical necessity. It serves to disrupt colonial continuity and re-inscribe indigenous agency. Zolie's defeat of Baldyr can be read as an act of redemptive violence. It is not violence for conquest, but for liberation and healing. Her action reclaims the narrative of Orisha from one of victimhood to one of resistance. Zolie says:

“In the building crowd, I see them-the seeds of the dreams I once shared with the little prince. An Orisha where the maji are safe. A land where we don't have to be afraid. We can rebuild all that we've lost, creating a true nation beyond our brutal wars and raids” (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 369).

Zolie becomes the author of her people's future, and her magic is the pen with which she rewrites their story. This narrative agency aligns with Masterson's notion of literature as a battlefield for historical and ideological reclamation.

To add on, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) insists that decolonization must involve the reclamation of cultural memory, language, and epistemology. In Adeyemi's world, magic is more than power. It is a language of memory, tradition, and identity. The colonization of Orisha involved the suppression of this magical language and the silencing of maji history. Zolie's act of reanimating the dead is a radical retrieval of suppressed cultural narratives. Each animation becomes a metaphorical voice of the past, a resurgence of buried memory. This is as Zolie asserts: “I reach for every spirit that has fallen, everybody tossed to the seas by the Skulls” (p.

365). This act fulfills Ngugi's vision of cultural resistance. Rather than adopting the colonizer's logic and language, Zélie roots her resistance in indigenous epistemologies. Her magic becomes a decolonial practice, an embodied archive of maji history, culture, and resistance.

Drawing on Crenshaw's (1989) theory of intersectionality and hooks' (1992) analysis of Black female subjectivity, Adeyemi's portrayal of spirituality reveals the interlocking dimensions of race, gender, and cultural oppression. Zélie's magical connection to the gods serves as a metaphor for reclaiming voice and subjectivity in a society that renders Black women invisible and powerless. Her spiritual awakening parallels hooks' concept of "radical subjectivity", wherein Black women resist dehumanization by asserting ownership over their bodies and narratives. Similarly, Amari's initiation into the spiritual order, despite her royal and non-magic background, marks a transgressive crossing of social boundaries that dismantles hierarchies of purity and legitimacy. Through indigenous spirituality, Adeyemi crafts a feminist reclamation of power that resists both patriarchal and colonial constraints, creating what Crenshaw would call a multilayered site of empowerment for women positioned at the intersection of multiple oppressions.

A defining feature of Adeyemi's spiritual framework is its collective orientation. The practice of Orisha magic is inherently communal. Its power emerges through shared rituals, chants, and collective energy. This communal spirituality resists the Western notion of individualism and reflects the African philosophical principle of Ubuntu, encapsulated in the maxim "I am because we are." Adeyemi's emphasis on communal rituals illustrates that female empowerment in Orisha is inseparable from collective agency. This conception aligns with Homi Bhabha's (1994) theory of the "third space," where hybrid cultural expressions subvert colonial binaries. The spiritual community of the maji thus operates as a hybrid space of

resistance and regeneration, enabling women like Zélie to lead from within a collective rather than from hierarchical structures of domination.

Adeyemi situates indigenous spirituality as both a healing and revolutionary force. By intertwining spiritual practice with female empowerment, she reclaims African cosmology from colonial misrepresentation and positions it as a vital epistemological and emotional resource for reconstructing agency. Through the re-sacralization of the female body, the embrace of communal rituals, and the reclamation of ancestral language, Adeyemi transforms spirituality into a postcolonial strategy of resistance. Her depiction of Zélie and Amari's spiritual evolution exemplifies the process through which African women reclaim subjectivity, not through assimilation into colonial systems, but through reconnection with indigenous spiritual consciousness that validates their existence, voice, and power.

5.4 Agency through Sisterhood and Solidarity

Adeyemi constructs sisterhood and female solidarity as vital mechanisms through which women reclaim autonomy, resist patriarchal violence, and reconstruct collective identity in postcolonial Orïsha. Within Adeyemi's narrative, solidarity transcends emotional bonding. It becomes a political and epistemic act of survival. The relationship between Zélie and Amari evolves into a transformative alliance that redefines traditional notions of female rivalry imposed by patriarchal and colonial structures. Through their shared struggles, mutual protection, and emotional witnessing, Adeyemi demonstrates that sisterhood is not simply a social bond but a form of collective resistance that restores voice, agency, and belonging to women traumatized by systemic oppression.

The bond between Zélie and Amari becomes a site of radical resistance against imperial oppression. As two women shaped by trauma, Zélie as a Diviner who has survived genocide and Amari as the daughter of a tyrant king, they defy the expectations imposed upon them by both colonial and patriarchal structures. They also bury their differences and together decide

to fearlessly confront King Baldyr. Their confrontation with the king becomes a moment of postcolonial empowerment. Amari gives support to Zelig by joining her to the battlefield and facing off the Skulls together. She also uses her magic to defeat them. This is as Amari asserts: “I rip through the Skull’s head, tearing apart their memories as if I could tear them limb from limb. My magic leaves the warriors on the stone floor, seizing as they stare up at the Blood Moon” (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 355). In moments when Zelig is in despair, Amari is always there to give her full support and comfort. For instance, she calls out for help when Zelig loses her consciousness and even prays to Mama Gaa to spare her life (Adeyemi, 2024, p. 323, 324).

Through their solidarity, Adeyemi challenges the silencing of marginalized voices and reclaims agency through collective resistance. Their relationship represents a deliberate dismantling of the colonial binaries that seek to divide the oppressed. While they begin their journeys with conflicting identities, their shared experiences of loss and violence forge a bond that defies historical hierarchies. This act of standing together in the face of overwhelming power mirrors Fanon’s theory that decolonization is inherently “a program of complete disorder” (Fanon, 1963, p. 36). Fanon insists that liberation cannot be achieved through passive negotiation but through direct and often violent confrontation with colonial systems. Zelig and Amari do not ask for freedom, they seize it. Their resistance is thus a reclamation of their right to exist, to lead, and to imagine a future free from imperial control.

Furthermore, Adeyemi’s depiction of sisterhood addresses Spivak’s critical question in *Can the Subaltern Speak?* - whether the oppressed can ever reclaim their voice in a world structured to silence them. Spivak (1988) argues that even when the subaltern subjects speak, their voices are frequently co-opted or misinterpreted by hegemonic discourse. However, Zelig and Amari refuse to be silenced by either colonial narratives or internalized oppression. Their decision to act, especially in unison, becomes a form of testimony, a reclaiming of speech and agency in the face of systems that would deny them both. Adeyemi positions their voices at the center

of the narrative, resisting the literary and political marginalization of Black female subjectivity that Spivak critiques. This way, the novel becomes not just a fantasy epic but a postcolonial intervention.

Moreover, their solidarity provides a model of what Fanon terms “collective catharsis,” a necessary stage in the healing of colonized people. For Fanon (1963), liberation is not merely political but psychological. It requires a reawakening of dignity and unity among the oppressed. Zelie, having been deeply wounded by repeated loss and betrayal, finds renewal in her bond with Amari. Likewise, Amari’s transformation from complicit princess to revolutionary leader is made possible through her alliance with Zelie and her rejection of her father’s colonial legacy. This sisterhood becomes a counter-narrative to colonial fragmentation. In resisting the forces that would pit them against each other (class, trauma, and betrayal), they exemplify the power of interdependence and shared struggle as tools of decolonization.

Other powerful moment that Adeyemi showcases postcolonial resistance is when Zelie and Mae’e choose to face King Baldyr together, despite knowing the danger he poses. After installing the medallion in Zelie’s chest, the king’s next target is Mae’e who is believed to wield very powerful magic that Baldyr yearns for to make him a god. Despite being aware that they are the king’s target, together they fearlessly sail to his kingdom determined to end his tyranny. Despite a warning from Amari, they remain persistent. Amari tells them: “The safest place for you both is new Gaa.” Zelie answers, “No place is safe...Not until this king is dead!” (p. 308). Amari also warns Mae’e: “Mae’e, no!...If you go, you are only giving him what he wants” (p. 308). However, Mae’e relents: “There are two ways this ends...We kill him now, or he kills everyone we love” (p. 308). They both choose to walk into that battlefield which they eventually lose. They are overpowered by the king who ultimately manages to shove a medallion into Mae’e as revealed through Zelie’s perspective: “Mae’e’s shrill cries

pierce the night. King Baldyr shoves the medallion into her sternum. The hierophant thrashes against the painted stake. Violent tremors rock her body, and travel throughout the land” (Adeyemi, p. 326). However, Zelig cuts the king short from completing his ritual by stabbing herself through her heart (p. 329).

Baldyr’s desire to control Zelig’s and Mae’e’s abilities reflects what Spivak (1988) identifies as the colonial compulsion to silence the subaltern and reconfigure them into passive vessels of domination. However, instead of submitting to this erasure, Zelig resists by taking her own life. Her action not only signals their commitment to resistance but also reaffirms their agency in the face of systemic violence. Mae’e and Zelig’s determination to confront King Baldyr despite their shared vulnerability serves as a powerful articulation of postcolonial agency. The King’s desire to capture Mae’e and extract her magic by installing a medallion in her flesh reflects a long-standing colonial impulse to control and exploit indigenous knowledge and spiritual power. Yet instead of submitting to fear they resist.

This conscious decision to act, even in the face of immense danger, aligns with Fanon’s assertion that decolonization is not a passive transition but a program of complete disorder that requires the colonized to reclaim their humanity through rupture and confrontation. Mae’e, knowing that she is a target of the king’s colonial violence, reclaims her subjectivity by choosing to stand and fight. This act challenges Spivak’s provocative question of whether the subaltern can speak. In joining Zelig to the battlefield, Mae’e refused to be a silenced, extractable body and instead asserts her voice through resistance. Their solidarity, rooted in mutual recognition and shared struggle, becomes a form of feminist agency that redefines strength not as the absence of fear, but as the ability to act despite it. By standing together, they transform vulnerability into defiance, illustrating that agency, particularly in postcolonial contexts, is enacted not only through victory but through the will to resist systemic oppression with courage and unity.

Adeyemi's construction of solidarity is deeply informed by intersectionality, a framework articulated by Crenshaw (1989) to describe the overlapping systems of oppression affecting Black women. Zelig and Amari occupy distinct social and racial positions. Zelig is a marginalized Diviner who bears the physical and psychological scars of systemic violence, while Amari is a privileged royal shaped by her father's oppressive regime. Their alliance thus embodies a cross-class and cross-cultural feminist coalition that transcends divisions created by colonial hierarchies. Adeyemi uses their evolving relationship to demonstrate that true solidarity emerges not from sameness but from a mutual recognition of vulnerability and shared resistance.

Through their journey, Zelig learns to transform anger into collective strength, while Amari learns to dismantle her inherited privilege to participate in communal liberation. Their intertwined growth reflects Crenshaw's insistence that feminist resistance must account for the interdependence of identities and experiences. By depicting sisterhood as a site of intersectional empowerment, Adeyemi situates female solidarity as a foundational element in the reconstruction of postcolonial agency.

Adeyemi employs sisterhood as a mechanism for healing historical and personal trauma. Drawing on Caruth's (1996) notion of trauma as an unassimilated experience that demands witnessing, Adeyemi transforms the relationship between Zelig and Amari into a space of testimonial healing. Their emotional intimacy allows them to bear witness to each other's pain. Zelig's grief over her mother's death and Amari's guilt over her family's brutality. In their shared vulnerability, they convert trauma into narrative and silence into testimony. This act of mutual recognition parallels Felman and Laub's (1992) assertion that trauma recovery necessitates a listener who can absorb and validate the sufferer's story. Adeyemi's depiction of these emotional exchanges positions female friendship as a psychological and narrative space of regeneration. Through the solidarity of shared pain, Zelig and Amari reclaim the capacity to

feel, to speak, and to act, transforming trauma into a catalyst for political consciousness and collective action.

Through the representation of sisterhood and solidarity, the author reclaims agency for her female characters by transforming personal pain into collective strength. The alliance between Zélie and Amari embodies a decolonial feminist consciousness rooted in cooperation, empathy, and shared resistance. By centering female relationships as instruments of empowerment, Adeyemi dismantles patriarchal narratives that position women as competitors or victims and instead reconstructs them as collaborators in liberation. In doing so, she situates sisterhood as both an affective and political tool through which African women resist colonial fragmentation, recover their voices, and redefine the meaning of agency in a postcolonial world.

5.5 Echoes of Agency: Orisha and the Gen Z Uprising

The literary strategies for reclaiming agency resonate powerfully with the real-world in Kenya in July 2024, where Generation Z mobilized en masse protest against exploitative fiscal policies and systemic corruption. What marked these protests was not just the numbers, but the mode of expression. Young Kenyans reclaimed the streets and digital space, using social media platforms to construct counter narratives, bear witness to police brutality and amplify subaltern voices that had long been excluded from state power structures.

In Spivak's terms, these young Kenyans disrupted the hegemonic narrative. Although Spivak argues that the subaltern cannot truly "speak" within dominant structures because their voice is often co-opted, ignored, or rendered unintelligible, the 2024 Gen Z uprising in Kenya revealed a nuanced moment where the subaltern not only spoke, but spoke back. By narrating their pain, their rejection of powerlessness, and their collective hope, they challenge the notion of voicelessness, just as Zélie and Amari do in Adeyemi's fiction.

Furthermore, just as Zelig reclaims her Diviner identity in defiance of a regime that criminalized her existence, Kenya's youths reclaimed their right to shape national discourse in a state that historically marginalizes youth voices. Through artistic protest, and digital resistance, they created a new grammar of political agency, much like the narrative resistance Adeyemi crafts through first-person narration and temporal shifts.

Both instances, Adeyemi's fictional narrative and Kenya's youth-led protest, illustrate that while Spivak's critique of structural silencing remains crucial, the subaltern can sometimes reframe the terms of their marginalization and claim visibility through new epistemologies and modes of resistance.

In sum, Adeyemi's female characters and Kenya's Gen Z protesters speak to each other across fictional and real geographies. They embody a reclamation of voice, affirming that even within systems designed to erase or silence them, resistance can emerge through narrative, performance, and collective action. Both contexts demonstrate how the subaltern, particularly the female or youthful subaltern, can disrupt silence and inscribe agency in spaces where none was granted.

5.6 Conclusion

In *Children of Anguish and Anarchy*, Tomi Adeyemi constructs a narrative of postcolonial resistance by centering female agency within a framework that challenges colonial domination and patriarchal structures. Through characters like Zelig and Amari, Adeyemi reclaims voices historically silenced by empire, deploying multiple strategies rooted in postcolonial thought. These include rejecting colonial gaze, collective resistance, sisterhood and solidarity and the use of first-person narration to foreground marginalized perspectives. Together, these strategies form a tapestry of liberation that resists both historical and contemporary forms of oppression.

Adeyemi's portrayal of resistance is firmly rooted in Frantz Fanon's (1963) understanding of decolonization as a violent, cathartic act. Zelie's direct confrontation with King Baldyr and the Skulls reflect Fanon's theory that the oppressed must reclaim their agency through struggle. These moments are not merely physical battles but symbolic acts of reclaiming power and identity from colonial forces. Zelie's resistance is both individual and collective, as she stands not only for herself but for the entire maji population, embodying a communal form of insurgency. In doing so, Adeyemi aligns her narrative with postcolonial movements that emphasize the necessity of resistance in the journey toward liberation.

Integration of indigenous spirituality further reclaims cultural knowledge suppressed by colonial regimes. Zelie's connection to the gods and the ancestral realms revives spiritual traditions that validate indigenous ways of knowing and being. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2002) argue, reclaiming suppressed cultural practices is fundamental to postcolonial recovery. Adeyemi's depiction of magic as both a burden and a gift reinforces the complexity of this reclamation that it is not an easy inheritance but a sacred one that requires accountability, strength, and healing.

First-person narration becomes another crucial strategy through which Adeyemi centers female agency. By allowing Zelie to narrate her own experiences, Adeyemi gives readers access to her interiority, trauma, and resilience. Caruth (1996) argues that testimony enables trauma to be communicated and witnessed authentically. Adeyemi's narrative structure reflects this, allowing the protagonist to articulate her suffering and in doing so, reclaim authorship over her own story. This narrative choice resists colonial silencing and affirms the right of marginalized voices to speak their truth.

Ultimately, *Children of Anguish and Anarchy* is a powerful post-colonial text that reclaims female agency through a multifaceted resistance.

CHAPTER SIX

ADEYEMI'S TRAUMA FICTION: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

6.0 Conclusion

The chapter provides conclusions based on research findings as well as discussions and recommendations for future research. The purpose of this research was to determine the role of literary voice in narrating trauma as experienced by young female protagonists and how they reclaim her agency. The study was guided by the following research objectives: to examine how narrative strategies of voice and temporality depict trauma, how the narrators reclaim agency to achieve healing and self-actualization, and how narrating trauma contributes to female identity in the *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy which consists of *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018), *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019) and *Children of Anguish and Anarchy* (2024) by Tomi Adeyemi. Guided by objectives that explored narrative strategies of voice, temporality, and indigenous spirituality, the research employed qualitative textual analysis to interpret how Adeyemi's narrative reimagines trauma not as a fixed psychological rupture but as a collective historical experience shaped by colonial oppression, racial violence, and gendered subjugation. By integrating the insights of theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Frantz Fanon, bell hooks, and Kimberlé Crenshaw, the study situated Adeyemi's work within both the continuum of African diasporic trauma narratives and the broader discourse of postcolonial resistance.

From the findings, it emerged that the author artistically used different strategies for communicating trauma as experienced by the girl child. The strategies employed by the author include first-person narrative voice and temporality. These strategies convey and disrupt the conventional ways of understanding and making traumatic experiences accessible. From the findings, it emerged that Adeyemi used first-person narrative voice as evidence that bears witness to the trauma of the female protagonists Zelig and Amari. It also emerged that temporality was used as a strategy to portray how past memories trauma still haunt today's

lives of the protagonists and thus allowing the past to interfere with their present lives. The findings also examined how narrating trauma contributes to the fractured identities of the girl child due to the painful experiences they have undergone. To achieve this, the findings analyzed different characters exhibited by the protagonists which contributed to the understanding of their history of trauma. The study found out that violence, loss of lives, and oppressive systemic structures are the forms of trauma that contributed to the fractured identities of the female protagonists. The study further demonstrated that at the center of traumatic experiences, the girl child could still emerge as a site of agency and empowerment as she negotiated its way around traumatic experiences. From the findings, it emerged that the female protagonists could attain agency by empowering themselves using their voice, fostering supportive relationships, and resisting oppressive structures and status quo. By doing so, the female protagonists embark on the journey of healing and emerges out strong.

By foregrounding black female subjectivity within a mythic yet politically resonant landscape, this study contributes to the growing body of African speculative fiction scholarship and expands the boundaries of trauma theory to include indigenous and communal modes of witnessing. It also underscores the importance of reinterpreting female resistance as a dynamic process rooted in both personal transformation and collective solidarity. Adeyemi's trilogy ultimately offers a counter-narrative to colonial erasure, reimagining memory as an act of survival and storytelling as a form of decolonial agency.

Future research could build on these findings by conducting comparative analyses between Adeyemi and other African or diasporic writers such as Nnedi Okorafor, N.K. Jemisin, or Marlon James to explore how diverse authors use speculative fiction to negotiate postcolonial trauma and reimagine African identity. Scholars might also examine the reception of the trilogy among African and diasporic youth readers to assess its impact on shaping decolonial consciousness and gender identity formation. Another promising area lies in the intersection

of indigenous spirituality and trauma recovery, where further research could interrogate how African epistemologies of healing, rooted in ancestral connection, orality, and ritual, offer alternatives to Western trauma paradigms.

Additionally, future studies could explore how Adeyemi's narrative form draws from African oral traditions and how storytelling functions as both a healing and political act. The increasing cinematic interest in the trilogy also invites interdisciplinary exploration of how film adaptation translates the trilogy's core themes of trauma, spirituality, and agency into visual form. Comparative trauma studies that place Adeyemi alongside postcolonial literatures from the Caribbean, South Asia, or Latin America would expand the global dialogue on how colonization shapes collective memory. Finally, linguistic analyses examining Adeyemi's mythopoetic language, rhythm, and African-inflected diction could reveal how language itself becomes a decolonial tool for resisting erasure and asserting identity.

Ultimately, this study affirms that Adeyemi's *Legacy of Orisha* trilogy stands as a powerful literary intervention that transforms trauma into a narrative of survival and liberation. Through its imaginative reclamation of indigenous spirituality, sisterhood, and voice, the trilogy redefines the meaning of resistance and demonstrates the enduring power of African storytelling to heal, empower, and reimagine the postcolonial self.

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