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## Trauma and its antisocial effects: A comparative analysis of contemporary African fiction

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### Abstract

This study explores trauma representation in contemporary African fiction using Lola Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. Drawing from Freud's pleasure principle, death drive, repetition repulsion and repression, and Caruth's concepts of trauma's delayed return, inaccessibility, and repetitive experience, the paper analyzes how the novels portray characters dealing with trauma's effects. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle embodies repression, reconciling past trauma as a fourth wife in a polygamous household. *My Sister, the Serial Killer* explores trauma and psychopathy, with Korede grappling with her sister's actions. Both novels delve into human psychology amid trauma, while Freud and Caruth's concept of trauma resonates as characters confront memories shaping their lives. These narratives offer insights into African fiction's trauma representation and its psychological impact. The study highlights the genre's ability to explore trauma's complexity, from repression to transformative influence.

**Keywords:** Trauma, traumatic experience, repression, repetition compulsion, delayed return, repetitive experience, coping mechanism

### Introduction

On Earth, human beings encounter and respond to significant misfortunes, such as life-changing setbacks, catastrophic events, instances of abuse, or the loss of cherished individuals. They typically navigate these challenges by progressing through various stages of grief. However, when an individual finds it challenging to release the anguish of their past, it can lead to the development of trauma. "Such persons find it hard owning up to their pain rather they become stuck and continues to behave as if there is a clear and present danger" (Bessel qtd. in Levine P. 1). The research centered on literary works that explore childhood trauma experienced by characters, with a predominant focus on child abuse as the primary cause. In a typical African society, children often endure trauma primarily stemming from instances of sexual or physical abuse. As these characters mature, they exhibit compulsive and obsessive behaviours, including persistent depression, anxiety, feelings of guilt, social withdrawal, and more. According to Levine P. and Fredrick A. [2], these traumatic experiences can profoundly alter the individual's mind, leading to emotional reactions such as dissociation, denial, and depression in response to significant events. They also argue that trauma triggers profound bodily responses. It induces tension, braces against fear, and leads to freezing and collapsing in helpless terror. The mind's natural defense mechanism typically helps it return to normal functioning after such incidents. However, when this doesn't occur, the effects of trauma become persistent, resulting in a state of being traumatized. Vaknin S [3]. posits that in such cases, the victim's own body can become their adversary, as trauma attacks both one's biological and social being, pushing the victim's psyche to the brink of dissociation. This accentuates the notion that trauma, whether it impacts the body or the mind, leaves enduring effects, disrupting both physical well-being and outward appearance. Ihueze A.O and Anyachebelu I [4]. "acknowledge that trauma is a painful and horrifying experience that leaves in its victims afterwards a sense of new awareness of self, perceptions of the world around her(him) and due to this, reactions to these episodes of trauma may vary" (p. 596).

Trauma typically arises in the aftermath of exceptionally distressing and unsettling experiences, such as natural disasters, instances of sexual or physical abuse, or war.

These individuals are frequently confronted with catastrophic events that imprint painful memories, which can linger throughout a significant portion of their lives. These events not only have a physical impact but also leave a lasting psychological imprint on their minds. While these emotional wounds may appear to heal, they often leave behind emotional scars that continue to haunt the victim. In many cases, individuals struggle to move beyond the grieving phase, leading to the onset of trauma. This is because, as Vaknin S. <sup>[3]</sup> points out, the magnitude of such unfortunate events is often overwhelmingly intense, their nature seems foreign, and their message carries a menacing weight. Those emotional wounds “are called trauma and the reaction they cause ranges from mild phobias through hysteria to even histrionic and violent behaviour directed either at oneself or at someone else” (Foster and Nwiyor 5). Similarly, Eilefson S. <sup>[6]</sup> agrees that trauma “... results in the form of a damaged, debilitated or devastated psyche unable to express or heal itself” (p. 1).

Trauma can be categorized into two primary types: acute trauma and complex trauma. Acute trauma, also referred to as “shock trauma,” arises suddenly and unexpectedly from a single traumatic event. Heller L. and Lapieree A. <sup>[7]</sup> characterized the effects of acute trauma as devastating incidents that immobilize an individual in fear, trapping them in a specific moment in time. Examples of acute trauma include a lengthy and painful childbirth, a single instance of sexual assault, a family member's death, or natural disasters. When these incidents occur repeatedly or in combination, they evolve into complex trauma. Myrick and Brand <sup>[8]</sup> defines it as the “repeated exposure to emotional or bodily harm by important adult during the developmental years” (p. 45). When these experiences occur during childhood, they have a significant impact on a child's development. Various minor types or causes of trauma, including bullying, physical abuse, sexual abuse, violence, grief, sickness, surgery, and others, can be categorized under these two major types based on the frequency and repetition of these incidents. The major or common cause of trauma in our contemporary society takes the form of abuse; child abuse, sexual, physical, emotional abuse or neglect and the most common of them, being child abuse, whose effect can be life-changing.

Trauma primarily manifests itself through memory, and it holds a significant influence in the lives of trauma survivors. The reactions of these individuals are often shaped by the memories they recall or the anxiety stemming from their inability to retrieve certain memories. Memories can trigger trauma, jolting the brain and leaving the mind in a state of shock during recollection. Victims who are able to recall past events “become stuck and continues to behave as if there is a clear and present danger” (Van Der Kolk qtd. in Levine 1, p. 13). Memory in traumatic victims does not simply serve as a “record of the past, but precisely registers the force of an experience that is not yet fully owned” (Caruth 9, p. 151). She challenges the common belief that trauma survivors are fixated on their past, constantly dwelling on it. Instead, she contends that their primary concern is often to avoid thinking about it, yet these memories persistently intrude into their lives. These memories resurface as fresh wounds, persistently troubling and haunting these survivors, despite their efforts to deny or suppress them. Levine P. <sup>[1]</sup> writes that “the past is never dead” (p. 32), thus, through memory, trauma victims

maintain a thread of continuity, which links their present with the past. As an illustration, consider a trauma survivor who experienced a rape years ago. It is challenging for them to move beyond the impact of this traumatic event because any scent, visual, sound, or sensation linked to that incident can be triggered by their memories, often causing the initial pain to resurface.

At this point, this paper aims to delve into the characters found in Shoneyin's <sup>[10]</sup> *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and Braithwaite's <sup>[11]</sup> *My Sister, the Serial Killer* who portray individuals whose psychological well-being has been deeply influenced by their traumatic experiences. It also examines the profound impact of trauma on characters' lives and explores the complex interplay between societal factors and personal experiences. The portrayal of trauma in literature has been a recurring theme across various cultures and time periods, allowing authors to probe into the intricate and multifaceted nature of traumatic experiences. In recent times, contemporary African fiction has emerged as a powerful platform for examining the effects of trauma on individuals and society, shedding light on the psychological and emotional toll that such events take on their characters. To gain deeper insights into trauma's complexities, this study conducts a comparative analysis of two prominent contemporary African novels: *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin <sup>[10]</sup> and *My Sister the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite <sup>[11]</sup>. Both novels stand out for their vivid portrayal of traumatic experiences and their aftermath, providing unique perspectives on characters' responses to life-altering events. By examining how trauma manifests in these narratives, we aim to understand the far-reaching consequences on personality, behaviour, and coping mechanisms.

In this work, Sigmund Freud <sup>[12]</sup> and Cathy Caruth's <sup>[9]</sup> ideas of trauma will be effectively utilized to delve deeper into the characters' coping mechanisms and the long-term impact of traumatic experiences in the novels offering a more comprehensive analysis of trauma in contemporary African fiction. Through these theoretical frameworks, we gain valuable perceptions into the characters' psychological struggles and the significance of trauma representation in fostering empathy and awareness. Caruth, <sup>[9]</sup> writes that “the Greek trauma or ‘wound’ originally referring to an injury inflicted on the body. In its later usage, particularly in the medical and psychiatric literature, and most centrally in Freud's text, the trauma is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind” (P.3). This she believes is suggested by Freud <sup>[12]</sup> in *Beyond the Pleasure Principles* that the wound of the mind is the breach in the minds experience of time, self and the world and not just a wound of the body that can be healed.

### **Adopting Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth Notions of Trauma**

Trauma, a profound disruption to one's psychological well-being resulting from distressing experiences, has long captivated the attention of scholars and psychologists. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, and contemporary theorist Cathy Caruth have each created significant awareness into the nature of trauma and its effects on the human psyche. While Freud's foundational concepts of trauma, such as the pleasure principle, death drive, repression, and repetitive compulsion, have laid the groundwork for understanding the psychological impact of

traumatic experiences, Caruth's <sup>[9]</sup> concepts of delayed return, inaccessibility, and repetitive experience have expanded upon these ideas and highlighted the intricate complexities of trauma.

Freud's psychoanalytic theory places considerable importance on early life experiences, especially traumatic events, in shaping an individual's psychological development. He introduced the concept of the "pleasure principle," which features humanity's innate drive to seek pleasure and avoid pain. However, traumatic experiences disrupt this principle, overwhelming an individual's coping mechanisms and giving rise to intense distress. Additionally, Freud S, <sup>[12]</sup> proposed the "death drive" or Thanatos, suggesting an inherent human inclination towards self-destruction and aggression. Trauma can activate this drive, leading to feelings of despair, guilt, and self-destructive behaviours. Repression, another key concept in Freud's theory, highlights the unconscious mechanism through which distressing or traumatic memories are pushed out of conscious awareness, shielding individuals from overwhelming emotions. This process can give rise to unconscious conflicts and complexes, manifesting in various psychological symptoms. Repetitive compulsion, observed in cases where traumatic memories persist despite repression, emphasizes the influence of these memories on an individual's behaviour and emotions. Involuntary thoughts, dreams, or actions may seemingly diverge from the original trauma but are, in fact, expressions of unresolved distress.

Building upon Freud's foundational ideas, Caruth's trauma theory introduces unique perspectives that shed light on the complex nature of traumatic experiences. Caruth's <sup>[9]</sup> concept of delayed return posits that traumatic events may be too overwhelming to process at the time of occurrence, causing them to remain dormant. These memories can unexpectedly resurface triggered by events or stimuli resembling the original trauma. The inaccessibility of traumatic memories is a hallmark of trauma survivors' experiences. These memories often exist in fragmented and disjointed forms, making accurate verbalization challenging. This inaccessibility may stem from repression or dissociation. Caruth's theory further emphasizes the phenomenon of repetitive experience in trauma. Individuals who have endured trauma may find themselves repeatedly reliving elements of the traumatic event in their thoughts, dreams, and behaviours. This cyclic repetition serves as a means for the mind to grapple with the unresolved and incomprehensible nature of the trauma, highlighting the persistent impact it has on one's psychological landscape.

Therefore, Freud's foundational concepts surrounding trauma, including the pleasure principle, death drive, repression, and repetitive compulsion, provide an essential framework for understanding the psychological aftermath of traumatic experiences. Caruth's innovative concepts, such as delayed return, inaccessibility, and repetitive experience, offer an enriched perspective that delves deeper into the intricate dimensions of trauma's effects. These perspectives collectively illuminate the multifaceted nature of how trauma is experienced, remembered, and expressed.

In recent years, contemporary African fiction has emerged as a powerful and influential literary movement that captivates readers worldwide. Authors from diverse African backgrounds use their unique perspectives and experiences to explore a wide range of themes, with trauma being a

prevailing and deeply impactful subject. Through their narratives, these writers shine a light on the psychological and emotional toll of traumatic experiences on individuals and societies, offering profound insights into the human condition. The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives by Lola Shoneyin <sup>[10]</sup> and My Sister the Serial Killer by Oyinkan Braithwaite <sup>[11]</sup> are two exemplary works within contemporary African fiction that masterfully portray the effects of trauma on their characters. Both novels transport readers to the vibrant landscapes of Nigeria, where they navigate the lives of complex individuals grappling with their haunting pasts. To enhance the clarity of the analysis, providing summaries of the novels is essential.

Shoneyin's *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* revolves around the lives of Baba Segi, a wealthy Nigerian businessman, and his four wives, each grappling with deep-rooted traumas. The arrival of Bolanle, the educated and emotionally scarred fourth wife, disrupts the household's balance, unveiling hidden secrets and illustrating the far-reaching consequences of trauma. The novel explores the intricate emotional landscape of each wife, revealing Iya Segi's masked past traumas, Iya Tope's struggle with infertility and societal pressure, Iya Femi's haunted past of abuse, and Bolanle's burden of sexual assault. Shoneyin's vivid storytelling skillfully captures the complex effects of trauma on personalities, relationships, and family dynamics. The narrative also delves into how trauma can be inherited and impact future generations and the wider community.

Conversely, *My Sister the Serial Killer* by Braithwaite takes readers on a thrilling journey through modern-day Lagos, Nigeria, with a darkly comedic perspective on trauma. The protagonist, Korede, is a dutiful nurse entangled in her sister Ayoola's murderous spree. Growing up in an abusive environment, Korede grapples with conflicted emotions and the traumatic experiences that shapes her. The novel portrays her coping mechanisms, such as denial and rationalization, as she navigates loyalty to her sister versus protecting others from Ayoola's deadly tendencies. As Korede deals with the ethical dilemma of protecting her sister, she confronts her own traumatic past and the psychological toll it takes on her. The narrative delves into themes of trauma, psychopathy, and the intricate relationship between sisters amidst a backdrop of crime. Braithwaite skillfully illustrates the long-term effects of trauma, demonstrating how it impacts relationships and life-altering decisions. These summaries offer insights into the core themes and characters of each novel, setting the stage for a more comprehensible analysis of trauma representation.

Both of these novels also accentuate the importance of African literature as a platform for exploring complex human experiences and delving into the nuances of trauma. They offer unique cultural insights into the ways individuals and societies respond to and process trauma. Through their compelling storytelling, Shoneyin and Braithwaite humanize characters grappling with trauma, fostering empathy and understanding among readers. They also show that trauma can come in different ways as Ihueze and Anyachebelu <sup>[4]</sup> state that "Trauma may result from a single distressing experience or a chain of recurring events that can range from sexual abuse, rape, domestic violence, abandonment, abusive relationships... Notwithstanding the form it takes, trauma is usually distressing – It causes damage to the mind... (p. 596).

### **Freud and Caruth's Concept of Trauma in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *My Sister, the Serial Killer***

Freud's thoughtful insights into trauma, rooted in his foundational concepts, offer a lens through which we can analyze the complexities of trauma in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *My Sister the Serial Killer*. Freud's pleasure principle, death drive, repression, and repetitive compulsion, along with Caruth's theories of delayed return, inaccessibility, and repetitive experience, provide a rich framework for understanding how trauma shapes characters and narratives. Freud's pleasure principle posits that individuals seek pleasure and avoid pain. However, trauma disrupts this equilibrium, as demonstrated in both novels. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the characters' pursuit of pleasure is marred by the haunting impact of their traumatic pasts, leading to destructive consequences. Similarly, in *My Sister the Serial Killer*, Ayoola's pursuit of pleasure through her actions is intertwined with the traumatic deaths she causes, revealing the complex interplay between pleasure and trauma. The death drive, Freud's concept of an instinctual urge towards destruction, finds resonance in both novels. Trauma activates this drive, compelling characters to unconsciously repeat or reenact their traumatic experiences. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle's repressed trauma resurfaces in her interactions with others, driven by the death drive's compulsion to revisit and process distressing memories. Ayoola's repetition of destructive behaviour in *My Sister the Serial Killer* reflects an unconscious attempt to master the trauma through repetition, aligning with the death drive's influence.

Repression, Freud's defense mechanism, is evident in the characters' attempts to bury traumatic memories and emotions. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, each wife conceals her traumatic past, mirroring Freud's idea of repressing distressing experiences to maintain a façade of normalcy. Similarly, Ayoola's repression of guilt and emotions in *My Sister the Serial Killer* shows how trauma can be hidden from conscious awareness, echoing Freud's concept of repression's role in coping with overwhelming experiences. The repetitive compulsion, as introduced by Freud, reflects the characters' unconscious repetition of behaviours mirroring their traumas. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, the wives' repetitive patterns and emotional responses illustrate their unconscious efforts to confront or process past traumas, aligning with Freud's concept of repetition as a mechanism for working through distressing memories. Ayoola's repeated involvement with men who meet tragic ends in *My Sister the Serial Killer* similarly mirrors Freud's notion of repetition compulsion as a way to grapple with unresolved traumas.

Similarly, Caruth's theories further illuminate the novels' exploration of trauma. The delayed return, seen in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, is evident as characters contend with the resurfacing of trauma long after the initial events. Bolanle's repressed memories gradually resurface, impacting her present relationships and echoing Caruth's idea of trauma's delayed impact. Similarly, Ayoola's traumatic past reemerges in *My Sister the Serial Killer*, emphasizing the delayed return's influence on her actions. Inaccessibility, another facet of Caruth's theory, is portrayed as characters in both novels grapple with hidden traumas that influence their emotions and behaviours. Bolanle's

repressed trauma shapes her interactions and decisions, echoing Caruth's notion of trauma's inaccessible nature. Ayoola's concealed emotions and traumatic past similarly align with the concept of inaccessibility, illustrating how hidden traumas manifest in her actions. Also, the concept of repetitive experience, explored by Caruth, is evident in the characters' cyclic behaviours in both novels. The wives' repetitive coping mechanisms and Ayoola's recurring destructive pattern mirror Caruth's notion of repetition as a way of processing trauma. This mirrors how Caruth's concept of repetitive experience can be seen in the characters' actions.

To support Freud and Caruth's concept of trauma, Manda<sup>[13]</sup> believes "the memory tries to find a way into consciousness and ends up having disturbing and ambivalent traces in typical traumatic symptoms of flashbacks, hallucinations, phobia nightmares" (p. 39). This he calls "re-experiencing" (p. 46), as is the case with Bolanle, the manner Baba Segi makes love with Bolanle is described as being devoid of emotion and more like a forced act. According to Bolanle "he doesn't smile or tickle me" neither does he lighten the atmosphere, "he just rams me into the mattress" (Shoneyin 10, p. 41). This description of his loveless style of lovemaking triggers unpleasant memories of her rape incident. "If there was ever a moment when the memory of being raped become fresh in my mind, that was it," (Shoneyin 10, p.42). Therefore, Baba Segi's approach to lovemaking serves as a constant reminder to her of the traumatic experience of her brutal assault. While walking, Bolanle intentionally strengthens her thighs, causing them to become robust and "difficult for anyone to force my legs apart like they did in my dreams" (Shoneyin 10, p.123). This indicates that she experiences recurring nightmares stemming from the incident, where it is replayed in her dreams. The event has had a profound impact on her gait – she instinctively tucks her buttocks in and tightly presses her knees together, a physical reenactment akin to how many survivors of rape attempt to thwart their assailant from accessing their legs. Bolanle has subconsciously adopted these walking patterns, ensuring that her legs remain protected both in waking life and within the realm of her dreams.

In other words, Freud and Caruth's concepts of trauma shed light on the psychological intricacies of characters in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *My Sister the Serial Killer*. Freud's pleasure principle, death drive, repression, and repetitive compulsion, along with Caruth's delayed return, inaccessibility, and repetitive experience, provide a comprehensive framework for understanding how trauma shapes behaviours, emotions, and narrative dynamics in these captivating novels.

### **Comparative Analysis of the *Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *My Sister the Serial Killer***

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Lola Shoneyin probes into the intricacies of trauma as experienced by the characters in a polygamous setting. The novel presents a vivid portrayal of the traumatic pasts of Baba Segi's wives, particularly Bolanle and Iya Femi. Bolanle's trauma stems from a rape incident during her teenage years, and Shoneyin paints a poignant picture of her once lively self, now struggling with feelings of shame and guilt. This traumatic event has a profound impact on Bolanle's self-perception and affects her ability to reconcile her past with her present

life. Following the incident, her previously vibrant personality transformed into a state of melancholy, monotony, and lack of enthusiasm. She struggles to align her former lively nature with her present self in “the girl who stood, cold and wet beneath the agbalumo tree” (Shoneyin 10, p. 96). Bolanle slowly disappeared and now saw herself as a “soiled, damaged woman”, these feelings arise because she believes she has fallen short of upholding the dignity her strict mother demanded of her. She's lost interest in pursuing a career and marriage, and all she desires is for the internal battle between her current and former selves to cease. She clings to her past, trapped in the memories and emotions of the rape, which prevents her from finding pleasure in sexual intimacy with her husband. She says, “Baba Segi only come to deposit his seeds in my womb” proves that she sees sexual intercourse as a mere ritual and not something to be enjoyed (Shoneyin 10, p. 41). Once more, her exactness in divulging her age to the gynecologist concerning the incident (rape) lends weight to the notion that she remains entrenched in the experience without any perceptible distance. Hear her say, “I was fifteen and eight months, four months before my sixteen birthday” (Shoneyin10, p. 37). Forster and Nwiyor<sup>[5]</sup> also observe that, “her ability to summon the resources of memory at such short notice in answer to an apparently unexpected question, shows that she has not moved an inch away, emotionally, from the state in which that life-altering experience has thrust her” (p. 49).

Similarly, Iya Femi's harshness and hostility towards Bolanle can be traced back to her adverse childhood experiences. Before she entered her teenage years, Iya Femi had to endure the gruesome death of her parents and was subjected to physical, mental, and sexual abuse in the Adeigbe household. These traumatic experiences lead to a profound sense of insecurity and psychological trauma, shaping Iya Femi's aggressive and seemingly wicked demeanor. Iya Femi bitterly gives a description of the abuse she is subjected to: “They pillaged the most fruitful years of my life all the time treating me as if they'd found me from in a pit laterine... if I overslept, she would cut me all over with a blade and rub chili powder into the wounds... she stripped me naked, rubbed chili between my thighs and locked me out of the house for a whole day” (10, p. 101). The novel highlights the deep effect of trauma on these characters' lives, revealing how it redirects the course of their existence and influences their behaviour and attitudes. By exploring the characters' traumatic pasts, Shoneyin offers readers insight into the complexities of trauma and its potential to alter one's sense of self and identity. To this, LaCapara<sup>[14]</sup> refers to trauma as a “limiting event” in that the victims never have a clearer understanding of their traumatic experience it intrudes on their lives and limits their ability to making meanings from their experiences (p. 133)

On her side, Braithwaite's *My Sister the Serial Killer* presents how the protagonist, Korede, grapples with the trauma of assisting her sister, Ayoola, in disposing of the bodies of her victims. The novel explores how Ayoola's traumatic experiences, particularly the abusive childhood under their father's reign, have shaped her psychopathy and antisocial tendencies. Her lack of empathy, charm, and calculated actions illustrate the deep-seated impact of trauma on her personality. Her (Ayoola's) inability to overcome the trauma serves as a symbol of her inability to

release her grip on her father's knife. She tells Korede “I think I'll hold on to it the knife is important’ as it is all she has left of him” (Braithwaite 11, p. 33). Korede, on the other hand, copes with her traumatic experiences in a different manner. Her actions are influenced by a sense of familial obligation and a desire to protect her sister, even though she disapproves of Ayoola's criminal acts. Korede's emotional detachment and obsessive-compulsive behaviours, including counting and cleaning, demonstrate how trauma can manifest in various ways and affect individuals differently. Braithwaite's novel offers a compelling exploration of trauma and its potential to give rise to antisocial personality traits. By presenting characters with distinct responses to trauma, the author highlights the intricacy of human emotions and coping mechanisms in the face of distressing events.

Both *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *My Sister the Serial Killer* exemplify how traumatic experiences can lead to the development of antisocial personality traits. In the case of Bolanle and Iya Femi, their traumatic pasts contribute to their aggressive and hostile attitudes, as well as their disregard for the well-being of others. These characters exhibit traits characteristic of antisocial personality disorder, such as impulsivity, manipulation, and a lack of empathy. Similarly, Ayoola's psychopathy is influenced by her traumatic childhood and abusive father. Her calculated actions, lack of remorse, and ability to charm others reflect the classic traits associated with psychopathy. Alternatively, it might be that she experiences a sense of euphoria or vengeance by taking away the one thing he values most. This sensation intensifies because she can avenge herself upon her father, utilizing the knife on other men whom she perceives as sharing attributes reminiscent of her father: she murders Femi due to his explosive anger and Gboyega due to his infidelity, mirroring her father's behaviour (being married yet involved in an affair with her). On the other hand, Korede's coping mechanisms, including emotional detachment and obsessive-compulsive behaviours, showcase how trauma can shape an individual's personality and behaviour, leading to antisocial traits.

In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* and *My Sister the Serial Killer*, the portrayal of trauma is deeply intertwined with gender dynamics. In the former, Lola Shoneyin delves into the patriarchal structure of Baba Segi's household, which exacerbates the wives' traumatic experiences. Bolanle's rape incident is a direct consequence of the patriarchal notion that women's bodies are commodities to be owned and controlled. Her trauma is further exacerbated by Baba Segi's ignorance and insensitivity to her emotional struggles, reflecting the pervasive lack of empathy towards women's experiences in such settings. Likewise, the gendered power dynamics in *My Sister the Serial Killer* play a significant role in shaping Ayoola's psychopathy. Growing up in an abusive household dominated by a father who disregarded the well-being of women, Ayoola internalizes a distorted view of relationships, leading her to resort to manipulation and violence to assert control over men. Korede, as a woman living in a patriarchal society, experiences her own trauma in navigating her sister's actions while grappling with societal expectations of loyalty towards family. These novels illuminate the connection between trauma and gender roles, highlighting how patriarchal structures contribute to the perpetuation of trauma and antisocial behaviours in certain contexts.

In both novels, the characters' responses to trauma vary significantly, illustrating the complexity of coping mechanisms and resilience. Bolanle and Iya Femi's differing approaches to their traumatic pasts demonstrate that individuals respond to trauma in unique ways. Bolanle's resilience lies in her determination to seek a better life outside of the oppressive polygamous setting. Her pursuit of education and her desire to break free from the cycle of abuse demonstrates her strength in the face of adversity. On the other hand, Iya Femi's inability to overcome her traumatic past leads her to perpetuate abusive behaviours onto others. Her hostility towards Bolanle can be seen as a misguided attempt to regain some semblance of control over her life, compensating for the powerlessness she felt as a victim. In *My Sister the Serial Killer*, Korede's resilience is reflected in her attempts to protect Ayoola from the consequences of her actions, even though it takes an emotional toll on her. Her internal conflict, as she struggles to balance her love for her sister with her disapproval of Ayoola's crimes, showcases the complexity of resilience in the face of trauma.

Beyond individual experiences, the novels also address the impact of societal factors on trauma. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Shoneyin portrays how cultural norms and societal expectations shape the characters' traumatic experiences. The stigma surrounding sexual assault victimhood prevents Bolanle from seeking justice and support, contributing to her feelings of shame and guilt. The cultural acceptance of polygamy and the lack of assistance for the wives perpetuate the cycle of trauma within the household. Similarly, in *My Sister the Serial Killer*, societal expectations of loyalty and family ties hinder Korede from seeking help or distancing herself from Ayoola's criminal activities. The fear of being disbelieved or blamed for her sister's actions adds to Korede's trauma and further complicates her coping mechanisms. These narratives lay emphasis on the importance of understanding trauma within the context of societal norms and expectations, shedding light on how such factors can either exacerbate or alleviate trauma's effects.

Both novels explore the potential for healing and redemption following traumatic experiences. In *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, Bolanle's pursuit of education serves as a source of empowerment and recovery. Her unwavering determination to break free from the lingering effects of her traumatic past provides a glimmer of hope and the promise of personal growth beyond the pain she endured. Shoneyin, in *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives*, facilitates her characters' journey toward therapeutic healing by granting them help as storytellers of their own lives. She takes on a third-person narrative role to provide additional details and subtle hints that enrich the characters' narratives. Shoneyin crafts a dynamic akin to a client-therapist interaction, exemplified by Bolanle's ability to openly discuss her past trauma, specifically her rape, with her mother. This particular conversation proves to be a crucial therapeutic moment for Bolanle, allowing her to unburden herself from the trauma that had weighed on her for an extended period. That evening on her way home, she noticed "there was a looseness about my stride" neither has she 'felt such liberty in a long time,' unlike before when she tightened her buttocks and clinched her knees together when walking" (10, p.123). The novel suggests that recognizing

and facing trauma can open the path to transformation and redemption.

*My Sister the Serial Killer* also explores the concept of redemption through Korede's emotional journey. As she grapples with her loyalty to her sister and her longing for a normal life, Korede's internal conflict highlights the intricate process of healing following trauma. To address her inner turmoil, the author employs a form of exposure therapy involving a comatose patient named Muhtar Yantai, who is admitted to the hospital where Korede works. Whenever Korede feels the need to confide in someone about Ayoola's wrongdoings, she views Muhtar as a sort of therapist. This situation persists until Muhtar eventually emerges from his coma. Muhtar "plays the role of a great listener and a concerned friend" and she experiences a cathartic feeling in doing this (Braithwaite 11, p. 21). These attempts of Bolanle and Korede supports Stratford T. <sup>[15]</sup> who writes that because trauma shatters the narratives that structures our lives, we can only be healed by telling our stories again, by "representing in words the trauma that now controls our mental images" (p. 27). The novel's ambiguous ending leaves room for reflection on whether redemption is possible for Ayoola and what it may entail.

The portrayal of trauma and its antisocial effects in contemporary African fiction has broader psychological and societal implications. By examining the characters' experiences in these novels, readers are confronted with the realities of trauma and its profound impact on individuals' lives. Understanding the link between trauma and antisocial personality traits can foster empathy and compassion for those struggling with mental health issues, challenging stigmatizing attitudes towards such individuals. Besides, these literary works provide a lens through which to analyze societal structures and norms that perpetuate trauma. By shedding light on the complexities of trauma and its reverberating effects, these novels can provoke discussions on gender dynamics, power imbalances, and cultural practices that need to be reexamined and reformed.

## Conclusion

This paper delves into the intense impact of trauma on individuals' lives and the interplay between societal factors and personal experiences. Through the analysis of two compelling novels, *The Secret Lives of Baba Segi's Wives* by Lola Shoneyin <sup>[11]</sup> and *My Sister the Serial Killer* by Oyinkan Braithwaite, <sup>[11]</sup> it highlights the complexities of trauma and its far-reaching consequences on personality and behaviour. The comparison of Bolanle and Korede's experiences in these novels accentuates the varied manifestations of trauma and the diverse coping mechanisms individuals employ when faced with adversity. These stories challenge us to empathize with their struggles and consider the psychological and societal factors that contribute to their traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, the gender dynamics portrayed in both novels shed light on how patriarchal structures perpetuate trauma and antisocial behaviour, particularly affecting women within such contexts. The exploration of gender roles and power imbalances within these narratives encourages critical reflections on societal norms and the need for reform. Moreover, the representation of trauma and its consequences in contemporary African fiction has broader implications for mental health awareness and societal understanding.

By engaging with these narratives, readers are confronted with the realities of trauma and encouraged to combat stigmatizing attitudes towards mental health issues. These stories also prompt discussions on the importance of providing support and resources for individuals who have experienced trauma, fostering a more compassionate and understanding society.

Ultimately, the paper contributes to the broader discourse on mental health representation in literature, showcasing the power of storytelling to create empathy and generate meaningful conversations about the human experience. By acknowledging and confronting trauma through literature, we open avenues for healing, redemption, and personal growth. These narratives remind us that through resilience and transformation, individuals can overcome the impact of trauma and find hope for a brighter future. As we continue to explore the complex intersection of trauma, individual experiences, and societal structures, these literary works stand as poignant reminders of the human capacity to endure, adapt, and seek healing in the face of adversity. By understanding and empathizing with the characters' journeys in these novels, we gain valuable insights into the universality of human emotions and the transformative power of empathy, making literature an essential tool in fostering understanding and compassion for all.

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