



Poverty Trauma in Selected Yorùbá Novels

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Abstract

Poverty is a pervasive issue in Yorùbá society, leaving devastating effects on both individuals and communities. However, in spite of its widespread presence, the trauma associated with poverty remains underexplored in Yorùbá literature. This study aims to address this gap by examining the presentation of poverty trauma in selected Yorùbá novels with a view to investigate the manifestation and the healing and recovery strategies adopted in the selected novels. This research employs content and literary analysis to examine two selected Yorùbá novels: *Òbàyéjé* by Bùnmi Olújìnmí and *Ojú Rí* by Kòlá Òní. Trauma theory was employed to examine how traumatic experiences can affect an individual's sense of self, perception of the world, and overall well-being. The study reveals that poverty trauma manifests physically, emotionally, and psychologically, leading to anxiety, substance abuse, and family disintegration. The selected novels depict resilience, community support, and cultural coping mechanisms as effective recovery and healing strategies. The analysis highlights the importance of social support, cultural identity, and community resources in mitigating the effects of poverty trauma. This research concludes that addressing the root causes of poverty is crucial to reducing poverty trauma. This study contributes to the understanding of poverty's effects on mental health in Yorùbá society, emphasizing the need for solutions to address its traumatic consequences.

Keywords: Poverty trauma, Yorùbá novels, Manifestation, Healing and recovery



Introduction

Literature, Yorùbá literature inclusive, recognises human existence and experiences, both positive and negative. In view of this, there are variety of literary works that depict human interactions with one another, animals, and society at large. The interaction creates room for the representation of the resultant human emotions. The representation, however, could be an imagination of the writer that is creatively presented with the aid of elements derived directly or indirectly from societies. The elements hereof are the various occurrences that inform the continuity of humanity whether they are imbued with negativity or positivity. Likewise, the content of the literary works could be real experiences of the author or another person. Without doubt, literature is the product of the society; either fiction or non-fiction. Having stated this, it is pertinent to note that the nature of literature paves the way for a possible connection with other human-related discourse, therefore, the interplay of literature with psychological discourse.

Human are prone to diverse social phenomena that negatively impact their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. One of such situations is poverty. Poverty as a social menace is a global problem and has subsequently moved to the centre of international development policy. Maxwell (2003) confirms that there is an international consensus that recognises poverty as a key development issue, hence the awareness to put an end to global poverty. According to Abbass (2018) perception of poverty goes beyond the original conception in terms of income. Abbass submits that poverty is explicitly not only the inability of an individual to afford the basic needs of life, but also the decline in the strength and prestige of such an individual to participate in any given activity in society. This submission of Abbass (2018) opens the study of poverty as a trauma factor.

Theoretical Framework

Literary trauma theory is rooted in psychoanalysis that was modified by Sigmund Freud in 20th century. The study of the victims of World Wars and the Holocaust also influenced this theory (Bond & Craps: 2020). Currently, trauma study is applied to other traumatic events such as slavery, postcolonial discourse, cultural shock, and domestic abuse, among others. According to Caruth (1995), trauma narratives frequently use fragmented and repetitive language which mirrors how trauma affects



the chronological progression of time and memory. Hence, the analysis of texts through trauma lens enables critics to identify different narrative techniques, including flashbacks, gaps in memory, and dissociation that are used to depict the aftermath of trauma. It is imperative to note that literary trauma theory exceeds just analysing and interpreting literary texts; it acknowledges that literature has the power to aid healing and resilience. By implication, when readers engage with trauma narratives, they develop empathy and understanding, which allows them to confront their own traumatic experiences or bear witness to the suffering of others.

Trauma theory is a framework is used to understand the psychological and emotional impact of traumatic events on individuals. This theory examines how trauma can disrupt one's sense of self, perception of the world, and overall well-being. According to Herman (1992), trauma theory recognises that traumatic experiences can have long-lasting effects on an individual's mental health. In addition, the theory highlights the significance of comprehending the social and cultural circumstances in which trauma occurs. Scholars such as Van der Kolk et al. (1996) assert that trauma is not just an individual's encounter but it is also impacted by wider societal factors. From the foregoing, it is clear that literary trauma theory explores the connection between trauma, literature, and society through the analysis of its psychological, rhetorical, and cultural meanings. It seeks to understand how narratives or stories can express and ultimately heal the wounds caused by personal and collective experiences of trauma. This theory was employed to provide a framework for exploring how trauma affects identity and memory, and how literature can be used to portray these in narratives.

Concept of Poverty

Poverty is derived from old French *poverté* (modern French is *pauvreté*), or from Latin *paupertās*, (from *pauper* ("poor") + *-tas* ("noun of state suffix")). According to the Oxford dictionary, poverty means "the state of being extremely poor and the state of being inferior in quality or insufficient in amount". Meyer (2001) explains that traditionally, poverty was primarily understood as a condition in which individuals earned insufficient income, lacked adequate consumption to meet socially acceptable living standards, and limited assets to safeguard against unexpected challenges.

Meanwhile, poverty is as old as man. This is evident in two popular Holy Books, which are the Qur'an and the Bible. The Qur'an admonishes Muslim faithful to be fair towards the poor. Also, the Islamic



injunction on poverty could be explained by the impact of Zakat. Zaim (1985) asserts that Zakat ensures the redistribution of income. He explains further that it is also used for the purpose of alleviating poverty. Christendom also recognises poverty, with Jesus acknowledging the existence of the poor and affirming God's concern for them, hence he commands Christians to give generously to them and speak on their behalf. This is reflected in Bible verses:

Open thy mouth for the dumb in the cause of all such as are appointed to destruction.

Open thy mouth, judge righteously, and plead the cause of the poor and needy.
(Proverbs 31: 8-9)

The above excerpt depicts the longevity of poverty in society. Poverty exists in different types. Onah (2006) asserts that different types of poverty exist at different times and stages in different parts of Nigeria based on the socio-cultural, economic, and political environment. These types include absolute poverty and relative poverty. Other identified types of poverty, which could be in the form of absolute or relative poverty, are generational poverty, situational poverty, socio-cultural poverty, urban poverty, subjective poverty, and subsistence poverty.

McCaston et al (2005) examined the causes of poverty and came up with three hierarchies of the causes of poverty. These are immediate causes, intermediate causes, and underlying causes. According to McCaston et al, immediate causes of poverty are related to life and survival, and these include disease, famine, environmental disaster, and conflict, among others. Intermediate causes affect people's well-being and opportunities for development and security. These causes manifest in low livelihood productivity, limited livelihood opportunities, lack of skills, inadequate access to food, inadequate care for women and children, lack of basic services like health, education, water, and sanitation among others. The underlying causes of poverty are related to the structural reinforcements of underdevelopment.

Yorùbá Novels



Ògúnṣínà (1992) describes the novel as a literary creation of a world in the author's mind. The novel is a narrative work of prose fiction that tells a story about specific human experiences over a considerable length. Novels allow for more extensive character development, intricate plots and exploration of themes. Yorùbá novel which is an aspect of Yorùbá prose aligns with this conception of novels. Yorùbá novel as a written literature emerged after Yorùbá written drama and poetry (Ògúnṣínà, 1992). This aspect of Yorùbá literature was encouraged by the effort of the Christian missionaries and the desire of some Yorùbá indigenes to promote Yorùbá literature (Ògúnṣínà, 1992). Ìṣòlá (1998) corroborates this view as he notes that Yorùbá novels came along with the reading and writing culture introduced by the Westerners. In spite of the uniqueness, Yorùbá novelists embrace the genre to suit their ways or styles of writing (Ìṣòlá, 1998).

Yorùbá novels cover a wide range of topics concerning human activities and experiences. Ògúnṣínà (1992: 58) affirms that the culture and oral tradition of Yorùbá influence the Yorùbá novels. However, the diversity of the themes and styles employed in the construction of Yorùbá novels necessitates the classification of Yorùbá novels. Ògúnṣínà (1992) posits that Yorùbá novels can be categorised into those in the Fágúnwà tradition, those that directly imitate Fágúnwà's style, and modern novels subdivided into historical, social and crime novels.

Towards The Meaning of Trauma

Trauma was initially a medical term that refers to sudden and severe bodily wounds that emanate from physical injury, ranging from minor wounds to life-threatening injury sustained after an accident. Meanwhile, behavioural health practitioners view trauma as an “emotional” or “physical” wounds that result from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on individual's functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being which eventually leads to psychological distress (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), 2012). Emotional and physical are indicated here to emphasise that trauma can manifest from any source as long as the consequences are traumatic.



Trauma is imbued in the subconscious. Given this, the body unconsciously absorbs events that are overwhelming and subsequently finds it difficult to process, hence leading to a traumatic response. This condition permeates society without discrimination. Every human is susceptible to this condition; how each traumatised victim absorbs the experience into the subconscious and interprets it will determine the traumatic response. Likewise, the resolution of the impact of an event will determine the level of trauma of the victim (Levine, 1997). This is because not everyone will react and become traumatised by the same events. For instance, Passenger A and B, who had the same degree of injury in a motorcycle accident while riding on the same motorcycle, may have different reactions due to a diverse absorption of the event in their subconsciousness. One may prefer not to ride a motorcycle, while the other will be indifferent to the accident. Both males and females can be affected by trauma. Trauma relates to feelings and emotions (Heidarizadeh, 2015). In this sense, trauma does not necessarily connote negative ideas; Heidarizadeh asserts that it is a movement that illustrates an episode of change which begins from trauma suffering and pain to knowledge and understanding. Therefore, the meaning ascribed to trauma transcends psychological conditions. It becomes human reactions to all occurrences around him, be it natural, supernatural, or manmade.

Craps (2014) contends that trauma encapsulates “responses to extreme events across space and time, and guides to their treatment”. These definitions depict trauma as not just the devastating event(s) or experience(s) but also the response of the survivor to the event(s). Mambrol (2018) conceives trauma as an event that is buried within the unconscious. Mambrol describes trauma as a “severely disruptive experience that profoundly impacts the self’s emotional organisation and perception of the external world”. Trauma, in this case, is the result of external factors that massively impact the psychological well-being of the affected individual. In light of this, traumatic incidents and symptoms cannot be separated when defining trauma (Struwig, 2008).

Despite the conception of trauma as an expected reaction to a hostile event, the outcome could lead to interference with an individual’s ability to live a normal lifestyle. From the foregoing, three elements are crucial in the definition of trauma: a defined event, the victim’s interpretation of the event, and the victim’s emotional response to the event.



Despite its roots in Euro-American psycho-social discourse, Adimula and Ijere (2018) explain that non-Western cultures have identified various symptoms and events that could trigger traumatic experiences not included in the DSM-V and International Classification of Diseases (ICD). They note that ‘gender subordination’ could lead to ‘indelible trauma’. Scholars of trauma ideas highlight the sources of trauma as: intimate partner violence, natural disaster, loss of a loved one, sexual assault or any physical or mental wound, rape, female genital mutilation and witness of violence (Adimula and Ijere, 2018). They also point out that poverty, polygamy, and widowhood are great causes of trauma. The observation of Adimula and Ijere takes the discourse of trauma in African situations –Yorùbá society inclusive – to a position where trauma study is not limited based on its Eurocentric view but accepted as a viable lens in assessing and understanding individual and collective emotional and mental well-being. It is pertinent to state that there is no inextricable link between trauma and events. A person can experience what is considered a traumatic event without experiencing the trauma; likewise, one can experience the trauma without experiencing post-traumatic symptoms.

Types of Trauma

Trauma could be categorised based on events or the perpetrator of such events. Classifying trauma based on the type of event informs types such as sexual victimisation/abuse, illness, domestic violence, neglect, physical abuse, terrorism, emotional abuse, victim/witness of community violence, extreme personal/interpersonal violence, natural disaster, intergenerational trauma, complex trauma, acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, torture, child abuse, forced displacement, war, natural disaster, large scale transportation violence. These forms could be grouped into two broad categories: human-induced trauma and naturally-induced trauma.

Human-induced and Naturally-induced Trauma

Human-induced traumas are categories of trauma that are inflicted by humans against fellow humans. Such traumatic acts include child abuse, sexual abuse/assault, torture, physical abuse, emotional abuse, war, domestic violence, terrorism, and community violence. These atrocious events if not comprehended and normally absorbed in the victim’s mind espoused psychological responses



shrouded in trauma phenomenon. It is believed that human-induced trauma has more harmful effects on trauma survivors.

Sexual-related Traumas

Sexual assault is a worldwide phenomenon. World Health Organisation (WHO) (2011) defines sexual violence as any sexual act, attempt to obtain a sexual act, unwanted sexual comment or advances, or act to traffic or otherwise directed against a person's sexuality using coercion, by any person regardless of their relationship to the victim, in any setting, including but not limited to home and work. It is pertinent to note that both males and females are susceptible to sexual assault regardless of age, but the number of female victims is higher than their male counterparts. Sexual assault has a great negative impact on the mental balance of most survivors, hence the possibility of traumatic challenges or experiences. Yuan et al (2006) refer to sexual trauma as one or multiple sexual violations that invoke significant distress. Sex-related trauma could occur in either childhood or adulthood.

Individual and Collective Trauma

As the term implies, individual trauma affects just a particular person. Individual trauma, according to SAMHSA (2014), is an event experienced by one person; instances of such events include rape, bullying, and mugging, among other situations. This can be a single event or multiple or extended events (39). Victims of individual traumas are less likely to disclose their trauma or seek justification of their experiences. Collective trauma also referred to as community trauma, national trauma and cultural trauma, manifest when entirety of a community is affected by trauma shock. This form of trauma is embedded in 'social inequities such as racism, poverty, oppression, and erasure of culture/communities' (Weisner 2020: 4). In furtherance, traumas that affect communities and cultures include widespread violence and abuse that disrupts the sense of safety in a specific community, including neighbourhoods, schools, cities and reservations (SAMHSA 2014: 39).



Childhood and Adult Trauma

Research indicates that children's brains are still developing, thereby making them very vulnerable to trauma. There is a chance that a child may experience increased stress during fearful events, and the body will release hormones associated with stress and anxiety. This experience that occurs during the developmental stage of the child can disrupt normal brain development. Morin (2023) posits that childhood trauma occurs when a child's ability to function and manage diverse situations is tampered with or affected by distressing events. She claims that events that instil fear and are often violent, dangerous, or life-threatening are regarded as childhood trauma.

Adult trauma, however, occurs during adulthood or manifests as a result of repressed childhood traumatic experiences. The implication of this is that adults experience trauma as a result of an overwhelming event(s) experienced during adulthood. Likewise, the consequences of an event that triggers a similar traumatic event that was experienced during childhood could inform trauma in adults. Krystal (1995) affirms that adult trauma is informed by 'the presence of unavoidable danger' (80). He also points out that the awareness of the unavoidable danger and yielding to it are the hallmarks of an adult trauma state.

Causes of trauma

Trauma does not occur in individuals and societies without a cause. What, then, could be the cause of trauma in individuals and society as a whole? The most common responses to this psychological problem would be sexual assault, war, oppression, and financial crisis. Heidarizadeh (2015) corroborates this view as he asserts that 'typical causes of psychoanalytic trauma are sexual abuse, employment discrimination, police brutality, bullying, domestic violence, and particularly childhood experiences' (789).

However, various factors and conditions can cause trauma as an emotional and psychical response to a perceived significant danger. It is imperative to state that trauma can be caused by different stressors for different people. Examples of events that can lead to trauma include: harassment, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse, sudden loss of a loved one, war, and being attacked or kidnapped, among other causes.

**Poverty as a Trauma Paradigm**

Poverty, referred to as *ìṣẹ́* in Yorùbá, is a social menace that can disrupt the mental and emotional state of the concerned individuals. Poverty is a state in which individuals have little or no material means of surviving, which manifests in little or no food, shelter, clothes, healthcare, education, and other physical means of living and improving one's life. This condition is generally perceived in a negative way due to its negative impact on individuals and the community in general.

The idea of poverty as an inclusive human entity is granted in Yorùbá belief, given the array of myths, sayings, and practices that constitute the ideological framework of Yorùbá belief. The Yorùbá perception of poverty is reflected in their proverbs and Ifá divination system among other oral repertoire. Among the Yorùbá, poverty is more than a lack of adequate income; it encompasses a combination of many forms of deprivation. This view reflects in the saying “*òṣì ní ñ jẹ́ ‘ta ní mò ọ́ rí’ owó ní ñ jẹ́ mo bá ọ́ tan*” (No one knows a poor person, but everybody claims kinship to a rich person). It is believed that the wealthy are embraced and appreciated as against the poor. This view is also expressed in Odù Ìrosùn;

Olówó ó wá;
Aláwìn ó wá;
Aṣièrè èèyan
Ní ñbẹ nídií èkọ;
Èèyan tí ò lówó
Ó máa gbòòórùn lẹkùlẹ;... (Abimbólá, 1968: 58).

The rich will come
Debtors will come
It is an insane person
That oversees the Èkọ
A non-wealthy person
You will perceive the odour from the backyard

However, poverty in relation to trauma manifests when the condition overwhelms the affected individuals and consequently impacts the self-worth of the victim. Trauma of poverty encapsulates the physical, emotional and psychological distress that arises from living in poverty. Poverty in this context refers to lack of material resources or income. This, however, can result in a range of adverse outcomes for individuals and communities at large. Living in poverty is undoubtedly traumatic; it can



lead to anxiety, and uncertainty about basic needs. Suffice to say, the Yorùbá acknowledgement of the existence of poverty informs the believe in lexicons like ‘òṣì’, ‘ìṣẹ́’, ‘tálákà’, ‘olòṣì’ and ‘akúṣẹ́’ among others.

Economic Insecurity

Economic insecurity is a form of poverty trauma that ravages the lives of individuals and communities that are trapped in poverty. The novelists’ description of traumatic tenets in relation to economic insecurity is portrayed through the characters’ struggle with basic needs, like an inability to feed well and lack of appropriate shelter.

Lack of basic needs is categorised under absolute poverty. This type of poverty is the most prominent in Nigeria. In this situation, poor people are unable to acquire the basic resources needed to sustain their lives. By implication, absolute poverty erodes the dignity of people and increases dependency. According to Jensen (2009), individuals who experience absolute poverty focus on surviving each day as it comes. It, therefore, becomes logical that Yorùbá novelists depict man’s critical moments as he struggles to provide necessities for himself and his family.

Food Poverty

This occurs when individuals are unable to access, afford, and prepare enough food for an active and healthy life (Long et al, 2020; London Assembly, 2013; Mwatsama & Stewart, 2005). Likewise, O’Connor, Farag, and Baines (2016) assert that food poverty occurs when people lack the financial means to maintain a diet that is both socially and nutritionally acceptable. In view of this, one of the attributes that makes a man a poor person (tálákà) is the inability to make provision for food. Feeding is a necessity. This is the most significant basic need portrayed in some of the novels under study. The Yorùbás believe that the availability of food reduces the plight of the poverty-ridden populace, hence the axiom ‘*tí ebi bá ti kúrò nínú ìṣẹ́, ìṣẹ́ bùṣẹ́*’ (if hunger is removed from poverty, poverty comes to an end) accounts for the importance attached to food even for a poor man. Therefore, the majority of those affected by trauma poverty strive to get food in order to survive. It is imperative to note that the inability to provide food may be caused by the victims due to carelessness or recklessness or as a result of forces beyond the control of man; fate. Suffice to say, in Yorùbá society,



poverty may be an agent of deprivation, shame and sorrow; it is not necessarily the end of life. However, the shame and sorrow triggered almost always cause trauma in the affected individuals.

Poverty Trauma in the Selected Novels

The situation of Ògúnbè mí in *Ojú Rí* is such that he could not afford to eat good food and as well provide adequate meal for his children. He is emotionally hurt by these inadequacies; thus, he worries. Òní depicts this scenario thus:

Ó jẹ obìnrin kélébẹ tí ó jẹ ojú ní gbèsè. Sùgbón ebi tí pa á bá yíí sá, o tí rọ.
Ògúnbè mí diwọ mọrí, bóyá nì wọn tì jẹun látánán (Òní 2005: o.i 13)

She was small statured girl that is attractive. But she is now starving, she is weakened. Ògúnbè mí held his head, perhaps they had not eaten since yesterday

Above, Òní constructs the depth of psychological and emotional impact of poverty trauma by describing Ògúnbè mí – a head of a family and a grown man – as someone who could not hold back the emotional turmoil hence the description; ‘Ògúnbè mí diwọ mọrí’ (Ògúnbè mí held his head). In Yorùbá society and family setting, children depend on their parent for provision of proper meal. However, it becomes a problem when the person responsible for this feat fails as and when due. Hence, when the situation continues without any prospect, the concerned individuals could only become emotionally defeated like Ògúnbè mí as described above. This case shows that living with food insecurity can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and uncertainty, which can trigger trauma symptoms. Ògúnbè mí in *Ojú Rí* experiences these symptoms due to feelings of failure and inadequacy. The shortcomings then provoke self-doubt and regret. Point of note is that in Yorùbá culture, the ability of the head of the family to provide food is a core aspect of caregiving and nurturing.

There is a similar case in *Òbàyéjẹ*, Olújìnmí presents Àjàdí, one of the main characters in the novel, in a flourishing community where people are mainly into agriculture and petty business. In the town, there is availability of food for those that can afford it. The agricultural involvement and description of Ìlọfẹ (the town in question) indicate that there is food security for the community. However, it is in this situation that Àjàdí is depicted as a man who depends on his wife for feeding and survival:



Ó fí ọkàn balẹ lẹ ounjẹ tí ó rí pé ìyàwó rẹ ń sẹ lówó. Ó rò nínú ọkàn rẹ pé, bí ebi bá ti kúrò nínú iṣẹ, fẹ́ẹ́rẹ́fẹ́ ní èyí tó kù. (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i 2)

He puts his mind on the food that his wife was cooking. He thought in his mind that if hunger is out of poverty, what is left is minimal.

Yorùbá society is patriarchal. It is the responsibility of the man of the house who also doubles as the head of the family, to provide for the family. In the excerpt above, Àjàdí relies totally on his wife for sustenance with the belief that the absence of hunger minimizes poverty. The resolution of Àjàdí as portrayed above contradicts the Yorùbá view on the role of the man of the house. This unavoidable situation has adverse effects on his lifestyle, hence the reluctant acceptance of his predicament:

Iṣẹ bàjẹ mọ mi lówó tán, mo ẹni obìnrin ń bọ. (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i 3)

After my work is ruined, I became someone catered to by a woman.

It is debasing for a man to be fed by a woman in Yorùbá culture. The regret he felt is reflected in his thought stated above. The implication of his situation above manifests in the lack of control of his household. When individual lose their source of income, they may undergo loss of fundamental aspect of their identity in the family. This reflects in the situation of Àjàdí. After the damage of the farm that stands as source of income, Àjàdí lost all the power to reprimand his children, especially Ayòbámi – his first child:

Ní ọjó kan Àjàdí fẹ bá ọmọ rẹ wí pé ó lọ sí odò lọ wẹ lásìkò ọjò, ìjà ní Àdìkà fí bá ọkọ rẹ pẹ́tá... bí ó ẹ na Ayò ní ẹgba kan ní Ìyá Ayò tí fọ́n mọ ọkọ rẹ pé kò gbọ́dọ bá ọmọ toun wí rárá. (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i 2)

One day, Àjàdí attempts to reprimand his son for going to the river to swim during the raining season, Àdìkà fought with him over this...as he beats Ayo, his mother jumped at him not to reprimand her son.

Due to Àjàdí's inability to feed his family, Àdìkà – his wife – denigrates him in the presence of their children for his attempt at cautioning their child. She counters:

Láéláé rẹ, má jẹ kí n tún gbọ irú rẹ mọ. Ó ẹ ọ mọ. Ìwọ Olóríburúkú, aṣòróókò, alá pá má lẹ ṣiṣẹ, ọlẹ yì í... A ń ṣàánú rẹ, o tún ń bá ọmọ wí. **Ìwọ lo gbóunjẹ náà kalẹ ni?** (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i 4)



Never in your life have me heard such from you. This must be your last time.
You this ill-fated, unfortunate, idler, lazy person... We feel sorry for you
and you are still scolding the child. Did you provide the food?

The bolded statement in the above excerpt corroborates the power behind the ability of a man to provide food for his family. The relationship between Àjàdí and his wife could have improved if he was able to cater for his household. The condition Àjàdí finds himself adversely impact his status and respect from his wife and children (especially his first son). The circumstances got worse as he could not complain about his wife actions including the spicy and over-salted soup prepared or him:

Oúnjẹ tí Àdíká gbé kalẹ̀ kì í ẹ̀ oúnjẹ ire kan: ata inú ọ̀bẹ̀ nàà pọ̀jù, iyọ̀ inú rẹ̀ sì le rẹ̀ ahọ̀n èniyàn sọ̀nù. Bẹ́ẹ̀ Àjàdí ọ̀ tẹ̀rú tí í sọ̀rọ̀. (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i 3)

The food Àdíká provided was not a good meal, the pepper in the soup was too much, the salt in it can me a man lose his tongue. Still, Àjàdí dare not speak.

His financial situation, that is, his position as an inadequate provider, subjects him to a state of hopelessness, thereby making him anxious, disturbed and sad. This makes him struggle with traumatic situation of constant loss of thought:

Lẹ́yìn tí gbogbo rẹ̀ sinlẹ̀ lára Àjàdí tán, ọ̀ tún bèrẹ̀ sí ronú. (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i3) After it all dawned on Àjàdí, he began to think again.

The use of 'tún bèrẹ̀' in the excerpt above shows that Àjàdí is usually devoured by the thought of his predicament. He, therefore, asks and concludes:

Agbára wo ni ọ̀kùnrin tí kò lówó lówó ní? Àṣẹ̀ ilẹ̀ tí kúrò lẹ̀nu ọ̀kùnrin tí kò fowó ọ̀bẹ̀ sílẹ̀. Baálẹ̀ ilẹ̀ tí kò lówó lówó tí n pàṣẹ̀ lóṣṣẹ̀ ni, ajá lásán ní n gbó. (Olújìnmí 1996: o.i 3)

What power could a man without money possibly possess? The command of the house has left the mouth of a man who could not give money for food. The man of the house who gives order without money is a mere barking dog.

Àjàdí compares himself to a 'barking dog' because giving out 'owó ọ̀bẹ̀' (money for soup) is essential for a man. By implication, he has no authority in his household, hence he became a man with no value and authority. It is definitely traumatic for a man to lack value and authority in a house where he is supposed to be in command, and in a society where patriarchal authority is the ultimate.



Food poverty can incite food insecurity anxiety. This usually emanates from emotional distress and constant worry about availability of the next meal either for the affected individual or for the entire family. An instance of this could be found in *Ojú Rí*. Ògúngbè mí is described by Òní (the novelist) as someone who is anxious about putting food on the table for his family:

...ibo ni òún fẹ́ kó ọmọ dà sí o? Ọmọ méjọ wíndinwíndin. Kí ni òún ó fí maa bó wọ̀n? (Òní 2002: o.i 4)

Where would he keep the children? Eight little children. What would he use to feed them?

Ògúngbè mí's lamentation above is a traumatic expression of the emotional pain he felt. This feeling can be understood in relation to trauma as feelings of failure, guilt, and shame. The feelings, therefore, provoke a sense of personal defeat and inadequacy. To this defeat, he submits:

Òún dáràn... (Òní 2002: 4)

He is in trouble...

This inadequacy, feeling of failure, and anxiety led to his endurance at Máradán's Hotel in spite of the chaotic condition. Not only this, he had to bear the disappointment of waiting for a friend who never materialised, despite being aware of his passive approach to assisting distressed colleagues.

Manifestation of Poverty Trauma

Trauma of poverty can manifest in several ways, including self-destructive behaviours. A common form of this behaviour is abuse of substances. In *Ọ̀bàyéjẹ́*, after Àjàdí lost his farm due to his negligence, he immersed himself in drinking. He spends all the money he earns on the habit. Adégbèsan, one of his drinking friends, confirms the effect of the traumatic event on Àjàdí:

Àírí isẹ́ sẹ́ ló fa sịọ́ tí Àjàdí n sẹ́ tó fí n mu ọ́tí bíi itùn. (Olújìnmí 1996: i. o 16)

Lack of a job was what turned Àjàdí into someone who drinks like a palm weevil



It is pertinent to note that Àjàdí drinks before the catastrophic event; he only does so to socialise and express himself as a wealthy and capable man. Àjàdí does not care about the source of the money he uses to buy alcohol; this is reflected in how he used the money from his wife to satisfy his needs:

Lára àwọn ojò tí inú Àdìkà bá dùn, tí ó bá fún ọkọ rẹ lówó lọ mu ọtí, ojò nílá nì fún un. Kí ó sì tó rí owó náà gbà, ó ti gbòdò bá iyàwó rẹ ru iyò lọ sí ilú kejì. (Olújìnmí 1996: i. o 4-5)

On the days when Àdìkà is happy, if she gives her husband money to drink, it is a great day for him. And before he could get the money, he had to help his wife to carry salt to the next town.

As indicated in the excerpt above, Àjàdí must serve his wife before he can be compensated. This situation can trigger psychological imbalance that may then lead to low self-worth. An instance of this reflects in Àjàdí's reaction towards his wife's food:

Bẹẹ Àjàdí ò tẹ́rú tí í sọ̀rò. Ó mò pé gbogbo ará àdúgbò nì yóó mò ohun tí ó jẹ lósàn-án ojò náà, bí òun bá dùn pínkín. (Olújìnmí 1996: i. o 3)

And Àjàdí does not have the audacity to speak. He knew that all the neighbours would know what he ate that afternoon, if he makes any noise

In furtherance, trauma theory paves room for understanding self-destructive choices as a way that trauma manifest as a result of unresolved psychological disturbance after an extended exposure to poverty. This shows that trauma can weaken a victim's sense of judgement, which might result in harmful behaviours. Òní exemplifies this in *Ojú Rí*. Ògúngbèmi's decision to use his friend for money rituals was prompted by his unstable financial situation. This later backfired, hence the cause of his insanity. Likewise, in *Ọbàyéjé*, Ayòbámi departs from a promising life due to the trauma he experienced growing up by witnessing his parents' tantrums and financial difficulties. Aside from this, he decides to kill his victims without remorse because of the pain and regret of attacking his brother.

In addition to this, poverty trauma incites anxiety. The fear of emotional and verbal abuse Àdìkà subjected Àjàdí to after he lost his means of livelihood kept him away from home when he secured a new job in another town with the help of Adégún. He, however, justifies his decision:



Ojọ tí mo bá dásà pé ata pò lóbè fún Àdíká, gongò yóó sọ... Ọ́tá mi ni mo fẹ́ ní iyàwó, kàkà kí ó gbé mi dídè, o tún dá kún ìṣòro mi ni. (Olújìnmí 1996: i. o 24)

The day I say that there is a lot of pepper in the soup for Àdíká, there will be trouble... I married my enemy as a wife, rather than her raising me up, she makes me more trouble

One of the key factors that contributes to the trauma of poverty is the experience of chronic adversity. In *Ojú Rí*, Ògúngbémí experiences diverse calamity that pushes him below the poverty line. After he resigned from the military, he used his gratuity to procure a bus for a transport business. The bus was completely damaged after an accident; therefore, the source of money from that angle was totally blocked:

Owó tí mòtò ọ̀hún n pa wálé ni òun fí n rágba ràwo, ibẹ́ ni òun ti n sanwó ilé, ibẹ́ ni òun ti n tójú ọ̀mọ. Nígba tí ọ̀nà ibẹ́ sì ti dí báyii, kí iyà bèrè sí í mu òun lórí-lòrùn ni. (Ọ́nì 2002: o.i 3)

The money that the car was making is what he used to purchase this and that, and there he paid for the house, and there he cared for the children. And now that the way is blocked, he should begin to suffer

In addition, Ògúngbémí lost an arm and consequently the newly secured job. This pushes him into another ordeal. He laments:

Şadé, mo ti kàgbàkò lènu işè ọ̀ba o.
Ògúnlabí, mo ti ko tẹ̀mi o.
Ọ̀dẹ ko tiẹ́ nínú igbó
Òmùwẹ́ ko tiẹ́ lódò
Pẹ́kí lalágbèrè ko tiẹ́ láyà obinrin.
Mo ríhun tí mo fẹ́ lènu işè ọ̀ba. (Ọ́nì 2002: o.i 19)

Şadé, I have met with trouble in the government's work
Ògúnlabí, I have met my share
A hunter his in the forest
The swimmer met him in the river
Closely, the adulterer met his end in the chest of a woman
I got what I wanted in the government service



It is observed that to depict the intensity of the emotional pain experienced by Ògúngbèmi, Òní uses poetic style to express Ògúngbèmi's feelings moments after he regains consciousness; after all poetry is a good tool for expressing deep emotions. His frustration in the excerpt above is not just about the loss of the new job but also the permanent loss of an essential part needed for daily activities that could earn income. He also lost his sanity in the quest to find solution to his poor state. When everything was about to be resolved, he lost his first son. These adversities occur one after the other. Similarly, in *Òbàyéjé*, Àjàdí lost hectares of farmland due to fire outbreak that was caused by the cigar's butt he dropped due to intoxication:

Àsé bí mo tí ò bó, tí mo sọ àjókù tábà nú sí inú pápá, iná kò kú. Iná mú pápá, ó sì bó sí inú oko. Bí a tí sọpá tó kí iná yí mọwódúró, àfí bí ó sẹ fẹ jó ní mọ ọn. (Òní 2002: o.i 23)

Not knowing that as I was coming, that I threw a tobacco butt into the fields, the fire did not go out. Fire catches the field, and it goes into the farm. Despite our effort to put out the fire, it nearly burned us

The loss depicted above was not just about property as the loss also manifest as loss of identity and purpose. For instance, Àjàdí in *Òbàyéjé* lost his identity as the head of the family.

Another way that poverty trauma manifest as depicted in the selected novel include intrusive memories, flashbacks and absentmindedness. For Ògúngbèmi in *Ojú Rí*, the memories of the events that pushes him into poverty trauma constantly invade his thought. These memories bring about flashbacks. This is exemplified with how he reminisced about his soldier's day and how he bought and lost his vehicle while he was at a gathering with loud noise and dancing.

Şebí sọjà loun tẹlẹ. Òun kò gboyè kankan lóòótó, şùgbón òun ò jẹun, òun ò yó, òun ò rán àwọn ọmọ nílẹ-ìwé (Òní 2002: o.i 2)

He was previously a soldier. He does not actually have a title, but he eats, he gets sated, he sends children to school

The memories of his service days led to other significant events his life. Àjàdí in *Òbàyéjé* also have flashback of memories about his life before the disaster that resulted to his predicaments.

**Healing and Recovery from Poverty Trauma**

Addressing the trauma of poverty requires a multi-faceted approach that involves addressing the root causes of poverty as well as providing individuals and affected communities with the resources and support they need to heal and recover. This healing approach could be legal or unlawful. The lawful means encapsulate the steps accepted as ethical by the community. This approach, however, include acquisition of skills and knowledge to regain confidence and control of one's life. This step will bring about stability and improvement in socio-economic status. For instance, if Rúùtù in *Ojú Rí* had had access to education instead of having to drop out of school for her siblings, she might have excelled rather than eloping with a man in order to escape her family misery:

Rúùtù bá bá sọjà lọ láàfirìi isẹ tó n kọ. Rúùtù kì í sẹ ọmọkọmọ. Ìgbàgbọ gidi ni. Kì í sẹ pé ó fì sí sá tó bá sọjà sá lọ dájú àwọn òbí rẹ, ó fì yoràn lórùn wọn ni. (Oní 2002: o.i 46)

Rúùtù went with the soldier without gaining freedom from her work. Rúùtù is not a bad child. she is a staunch believer. She did not elope with the soldier to punish her parents, she did so to reduce their trouble.

Not only that, she could not finish her training as a tailor. With this, she became incapacitated in assisting her husband to uplift the family from poverty. In addition, Ògúnlabí – her son – would have escaped his ill-fate of being executed for robbery if he completed his education rather than choosing the criminal path. In a similar case, Àjàdí, and his son – Ayòbámi – could not benefit from the skill and exposure adequate education would have afford them. Àjàdí was deprived of high-level job, and Ayòbámi ended up with a robbery gang. However, Òní exemplifies how new skills and knowledge can help overcome poverty trauma with the character of Délé Kónkòdù. The author describes him as a competent lawyer who becomes successful after several attempts:

Ibi ejọ Ògúnlabí ni Kónkòdù ọmọ rẹ ti di gbajúgbajà èyàn. O di ilúmọká. Ogo rẹ kúrò ní nńkan tẹdàá lẹ fowọ bò. (Òní 2002: o.i 102)

It is from Ògúnlabí's case that his son, Kónkòdù, became popular. He became very popular. His glory became what human can cover.

With this achievement, he was able to cater for his grandparents and mother, thereby lifting them above poverty and eventually helping them to recover from trauma of poverty. From the foregoing, it



is clear that acquisition of skill is germane to those who find themselves in poverty as that was one of the ways to overcome their traumatic situations. Living in a secure and comfortable environment can serve as one of the ways to heal from poverty trauma. This will eliminate danger and stress associated with homelessness.

However, acquiring education could be in form of formal or informal training. These two sides give room for acquiring skills for those that do not have access to formal education. An instance of this is exemplified in *Ojú Rí*. Rúùtù in *Ojú Rí* enrolled for tailoring training. Aside from this, people can as well invest in diverse business of interest to put an end to lack of income and the inability to provide necessary needs. This measure worked out for Àdiká (*Òbàyéjé*) as she was able to cater for her household during the period that her husband was financially insufficient.

The interventions of friends and relation of Àjàdí play a crucial role in overcoming trauma of poverty. His drinking friends identify the causes of his problem hence the search for solution. His life changes after he got a new job:

Bí ó ti wù kí wón pẹ́ tó ní ilé ọ́tí, Àjàdí kò mu ọ́tí ìsọnu mó. Ìwón ti ọmọ́lúwàbí ní ó ń mu. (Olújìnmí 1995: o.i 16)

No matter how long they spent in the pub, Àjàdí no longer drinks recklessly. He drinks moderately.

Aggression against self and others is one of the ways victims adapt to trauma. This situation accounts for Àdiká behaviours towards her husband after the loss of his farm. She finds no other way of coping with her disappointment and the trauma in their household. She therefore channels her anger towards Àjàdí – her husband. This method is not the best choice as it can also lead to other traumatic and dangerous outcome.

Conclusion

This paper examined the presentation of poverty not just as economic condition but as a source of psychological trauma in selected Yorùbá novels. By employing trauma theory as the analytical framework, this study explored how characters experience economic insecurity and how poverty manifests in self-destructive choices, loss of identity, and intrusive memories. It also depicts



addressing the root causes of poverty as one of the means of healing from trauma. Through close textual analysis of character development and representation, this research presents ways in which poverty inflicts scars that impact characters' decisions. This study shows that presentation of trauma in Yorùbá literature exceed physical violence and social unrest, it reflects in daily struggles for survival. Therefore, this paper significantly adds to literary scholarship by expanding the scope of trauma studies within African literary studies to include economic trauma and its psychological effects.

Recommendations

Based on this study, the following are the recommendations:

1. There should be increased funding for research on trauma and its relationship to social determinants like poverty and social vices.
2. There is need for community-based initiatives promoting social support, resilience, and collective healing for marginalised populations.
3. There is need for policy reforms addressing systemic issues like poverty, discrimination, and social injustice to prevent trauma and promote healing.
4. There is also need for authors to portray more traumatic experiences as reflected in the society.

Contribution to knowledge

This study has contributed immensely to knowledge in the field of literary trauma studies in general and Yorùbá literature in particular. However, the adoption of literary trauma studies of Yorùbá novels is a novel step in the interdisciplinary study of Yorùbá novels. Hence, this study's contributions to knowledge are:

1. Interdisciplinary understanding: This study integrates insights from trauma studies, sociology, and literature to provide a comprehensive understanding of trauma, transcending disciplinary boundaries.
2. Contextualisation of trauma: by considering the social, cultural, and political contexts in which trauma occurs, trauma paradigm analysis offers a nuanced understanding of trauma's complex dynamics.



3. Intersectional trauma: trauma paradigm analysis acknowledges the intersectional nature of trauma, examining how multiple forms of oppression intersect and compound trauma.

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