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Trauma and Voicelessness in Razinat Mohammed's the Travails of a First Wife and Abubakar Ibrahim's Season of Crimson Blossoms

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ABSTRACT

Trauma describes an agonising experience – physical, emotional or psychological - that individuals undergo at micro and macro settings. Such an experience often disorients and dehumanises such individuals and deprives them of agency and voice. Traumatic experiences can impose despondency and disconsolation on their victims. This is why the victims of trauma usually require and deserve diverse forms of support to enable them surmount the harshness and pains that characterise it. Sometimes, victims of trauma express their pains to specific people around them. That itself is therapeutic. However, several victims tend to conceal the pains they suffer from trauma, or find nobody trustworthy enough to divulge their pains to. This inability or failure to express their feelings is described in this paper as voicelessness. Voicelessness can be seen as an inevitable concomitant of trauma, which also retards and damages its victims. This paper examines the nexus between trauma and voicelessness as depicted in the lives of the heroines in Razinat Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife* and Abubakar Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*, respectively. The paper adopts Cathy Caruth's Trauma Theory which explores, from a literary point of view, the emotional and psychological responses to distressing events in society, and Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi's African Womanism which examines the power dynamics and gender inequalities, to interrogate the texts under study. The methodology involved a close textual reading, analysis and interpretation to elucidate the issues in the texts. Findings indicate that through the use of literary techniques such as simplicity of diction, the use of the omniscient narrator, interior monologue, etc., the authors have succinctly established the fact that the voicelessness of the heroines in question is as a result of their traumatic experiences. Their inability to voice their sufferings further deepens their trauma, for speech itself could have offered a measure of catharsis, rehabilitation and agency. Therefore, their silence entombs them in a 'zombified' existence. They embody the paradox of yearning for agency while being imprisoned within structures that deny them space for healing. In conclusion, this study reveals that the true burden of trauma lies not only in the sufferings endured by the heroines in the texts under study, but also in its persistent demand to be voiced, even when words are inadequate: this is where African Womanism and other positive feminist theories come to the rescue, to give the traumatised a voice.

Keywords: Trauma, Voicelessness, Women, African Womanism, Zombified.

1.0 Introduction

This paper attempts to establish a nexus between trauma and voicelessness as depicted in Razinat Mohammed's *The Travails of a First Wife* and Abubakar Adam Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*. The paper is structured into four parts: part 1, is the introduction which establishes the theoretical prism through which the novels shall be interrogated, namely, trauma, voicelessness and African Womanism, and how they intersect. Part 2, analyses the novels based on Trauma and how it produces voicelessness in its victims, the heroines of the novels under study, why the tenets of African Womanism critique this situation. Part 3 highlights some of the literary techniques the writers have deployed to make manifest their concerns. Part 4 concludes the study. Trauma is a dominant theme in contemporary literary studies that often requires the application of the trauma theory to explore an individual's experience of a traumatic event or situation, as captured in the texts under study as listed above.

1.1 Trauma

Trauma as asserted by Caruth (1996) is "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed and, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p. 11). It is a powerful force that can disrupt the individual and collective memory and identity. Trauma as a theory was developed by Sigmund Freud through his psychiatric practice with psychologically challenged patients. His observations were recorded in several publications, and they form the foundation on which other scholars have built their studies. One of such scholars is Cathy Caruth, whose perspectives of the trauma theory are on the emotional and psychological responses to distressing events in society as depicted in literary texts. In her work, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), she explains that a traumatic experience is not possessed by any individual or group, and therefore, its impact can never be captured by direct reference. Furthermore, she contends that through the notion of trauma, we come to a new understanding that permits history to arise where immediate understanding may not. Trauma theory seeks to establish trauma as a major factor in the lives of the heroines in the selected texts, and highlights the difficult path that they tread to mitigate their trauma. This study focuses on how the agonising traumatic experiences of the protagonists in the novels *The Travails of a First Wife* by Razinat Mohammed and *Season of Crimson Blossoms* by Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, impacted their lives negatively to the point of rendering them voiceless.

1.1.1 Voicelessness

Voicelessness is a condition that entails the denial or lack of the ability or opportunity to express opinions, thoughts or perspectives as a result of several factors including social, political or cultural suppression or marginalisation. It can also refer to the physical inability to produce speech sounds in linguistics (www.definitions.net/definition/voicelessness). In literary studies, voicelessness is often times created by the author for specific effects. Blundell (2009) asserts that since the mid-twentieth century, a number of writers have relinquished the traditional dialogic form of the novel and presented characters that cannot or will not speak in order to convey, through their voicelessness or speechlessness the extent of the violence and oppression to which they have been subjected (1). Consequently, the presentation of mute characters suggest that voicelessness has a role to play in the literary portrayal of trauma. Silencing a character's voice inevitably raises profound questions about what exists beyond language and highlights the character's devastating experiences that resist articulation. Language stands as the primary means of human expression, therefore, withholding speech even from fictional characters carries immense significance. Withholding or suppressing a character's voice in contemporary writing serves as a veil over unspeakable experiences of terror or trauma, such as rape, domestic violence, and other forms of violation.

In view of the relationship between trauma and voicelessness in the novels under study, it becomes imperative to interrogate the texts within the prism of African Womanism, as propagated by Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi.

1.1.2 African Womanism

This study is also interpreted through the lenses of Chikwenye Okonjo-Ogunyemi's brand of Feminism called African Womanism, which examines the power dynamics and gender inequalities in African societies. The publication of Okonjo-Ogunyemi's book *Africa Wo/Man Palava: The Nigerian Novel* (1996) signals the birth of this theory. The

intersectional lens of the Feminist theory evolves the modes that gender, culture, and societal norms relate with and influence the characters' traumatic experiences, while the Trauma theory provides a framework for examining the psychological and emotional impact of the experiences of the characters. The Feminist theory explores the feminist issues that abound in the texts, and why the heroines' femininity tends to be at odds with their society, tradition and religion.

Various branches of feminism have been identified, including mainstream/liberal, radical, and socialist feminism, with newer forms emerging in recent times. African feminisms reflect cultural differences, lived experiences, patriarchal influences, and the necessity for contextually relevant approaches that amplify women's voices. According to Amaefula (2021) "the plurality of African feminisms signposts the cultural differences among women, including the various dynamics that constitute their lived experiences, patriarchal tenets, and a recognition of the need for relevant African feminist approaches that can give women a voice" (p. 295). The African Womanism theory sees the African woman generally as a home lover and maker, and not a male hater. She values her family, and does not see herself as being in any competition with her man; rather, she seeks ways to negotiate with him for the available space and resources.

1.2 Trauma and Voicelessness in Mohammed's Travails of a First Wife

The keyword in the title of the novel 'Travails' draws the attention of Ahumibe (2018), who refers to the title as 'unpretentious', possibly, 'even too literal' (p. 263). The word 'travail' in the title is used here denotatively. For example, Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary defines 'travail' as (a) Work, especially of a painful or laborious nature: toil. (b) A physical or mental exertion or piece of work: task, effort, (c) Agony, torment (emphasis mine). The title, 'Travails' aptly encapsulates the strenuous efforts that Zarah, the first wife invests in the marriage, along with the agony and torment that she suffers. The society describes her as barren despite having borne a son who is alive and well for her husband, Ibrahim. Tradition and religion dictate that they cannot publicly acknowledge the son as theirs, emphasizing the need to protect and preserve Ibrahim and the child's honour because he was born out of wedlock.

Zarah's love for Ibrahim completely ensnared her, even in her innocence as a primary school girl. The omniscient narrator affirms this: "She [Zarah] could comfortably say for all her life for she had loved him since the day she had seen him walk into the file of pupils, when they waited for the headmaster to climb up the podium for the twice a week general assembly and inspection in the elementary school" (Travails, p.3). Zarah loved Ibrahim totally: "It had always been him, he was the very air that she breathes" (Travails, p.5), but Ibrahim fails to reciprocate that love. (Travails, p.6). Both Zarah and Ibrahim testify to this, "...sometimes she felt that he did not love her as she would have wanted him to. Sometimes she felt it was out of sympathy that he kept her" (Travails, p.3). Despite knowing this, she refuses to separate herself from Ibrahim.

They became involved in intimate relations at a very young age, without a full awareness of the grave consequences of their actions. This results in unwanted pregnancies, followed by the procurement of multiple abortions, which were carried out under unsafe conditions. While still unmarried, Zarah gave birth to a male child, Babagana, whom Ibrahim refuses to acknowledge even after their eventual marriage. Subsequent abortions lead to severe medical complications, culminating in a total hysterectomy, the surgical removal of her uterus. The loss of her reproductive capacity renders the couple childless, creating tension within the marriage, particularly as Ibrahim harbours a strong desire for children. Over time, whatever affection Ibrahim felt for Zarah dissipates, and his attention shifts toward other women. This estrangement culminates in his simultaneous marriage to two additional wives on the same day, an action that damages Zarah emotionally.

The marriage model that is presented in Travails is the polygynous marriage. This type of marriage is prevalent in the Northern Nigerian Muslim communities. The Islamic religion supports it, Surah 4 verse 3, approves that a Muslim man can marry up to four wives. Zarah's husband is well versed in this injunction. When Zarah frowns at the idea, he reassures himself that he is doing the right thing: "As a Muslim man, he knew that he had the option to marry as many as four wives, but why could she not see reason" (Travails, p.7). This form of marriage has over the years, become a concept with divergent views as regards its practice. Zarah had known Ibrahim for thirty out of her thirty-five years of age, and she suffers many losses, overtaken by grief on several occasions. With a hostile home environment, she finds

no one to enunciate her pains to; she becomes voiceless and she internalizes her agonies, thus aggravating her emotional trauma.

On the day Ibrahim's new wives arrive, Zarah experiences such overwhelming emotional trauma that her body itself collapses under the weight of her anguish. Despite having entered premature menopause following the surgical removal of her uterus, she suddenly begins to bleed as well as lose consciousness, unable to recollect herself (p.89). This occurrence reveals what is known in trauma theory as the somatisation of grief, where psychic distress finds expression in the body through involuntary physiological breakdowns. Since she could not verbalize her pains due to her voicelessness, her body had to 'speak', affirming what Blundell (2009), describes as the author 'embodying' trauma. This shows how trauma overwhelms language itself, leaving the body as the only medium through which suffering can be expressed.

Thus, Zarah's sudden bleeding dramatises how unresolved trauma can erupt in unexpected and uncontrollable ways, making the body to malfunction, and inscribing pain on it, when language and consciousness fail. Her collapse thus illustrates the inseparability of the psychological and the physical in trauma, showing how sorrow destabilises not only her sense of identity but also her very bodily integrity. This exemplifies what Caruth (1996) describes as the belated and unassimilated nature of traumatic experience which is not fully grasped at the moment of its occurrence but returns later in disruptive, bodily, or psychic symptoms (p.11). The intensity of her suffering is also captured by Phifer (2022) as she notes that: "In terms of human suffering, no variation of a definition of grief can express the depth of the intense emotion in an individual experience" (p.10).

Zarah is thrown into profound grief as it dawns on her that, the man she has loved for thirty out of the thirty-five years of her existence does not love her, and never really did. He loved what he could get from her: her body, her money and the attention she showered on him. The repeated pregnancies and abortions did a lot of damage to her reproductive organs and body generally, even when she was still a girl.

What makes Zarah's story very pathetic and tragic is that despite her husband's clear demonstration that he does not care about her; she refuses to take a cue from him. She makes excuses for his bad behaviour with thoughts like: "What was she to do? Release him to all the psychedelic and fancy women out there? No! ... His love was of less significance to her; after all, she was his wife by law" (Travails, p.3). On a number of occasions, Ibrahim writes out a divorce paper for her but she falls on her knees crying and begging him to tear up the paper. Zarah lacks the courage to imagine her life without Ibrahim. Her weakness and helplessness embolden him to treat her without compassion and fear. Zarah, therefore becomes the architect of her misfortune, since she depends on her husband-tormentor, and she remains voiceless because she has no friend to bond with and enunciate her pains.

1.3 Trauma and Voicelessness in Ibrahim's *Season of Crimson Blossoms*

Season of Crimson Blossoms (hereinafter known as *Season*) is a novel written by Abubakar Adam Ibrahim. The multi-layered heart-wrenching novel is set in the ultra-conservative Hausa-Fulani Muslim society of Northern Nigeria, and revolves around the illicit relationship between a fifty-five-year-old widow, Hajiya Binta Zubairu, and Reza, a twenty-five-year-old male drug peddler, a miscreant and a political thug. The novel unveils different facets of Northern Nigerian culture and traditions that are intertwined with their religious beliefs.

The omniscient narrator introduces the novel with a highly metaphorical sentence, thus: "Hajiya Binta Zubairu was finally born at fifty-five when a dark-lipped rogue with short, spiky hair, like a field of miniscule anthills, scaled her fence and landed, boots and all, in the puddle that was her heart" (*Season*, p.9). The present researcher agrees with Egya (2020) when he states that Ibrahim's "*Season of Crimson Blossoms* is a rude affront on the Northern Nigerian Islamic and cultural establishment, its constructed narratives of morality and its iron grip on the region's social psyche. It explores subjects that are considered as taboo in Northern Nigeria" (p.349). Egya (2020) asserts that this expression is a revelation to Hajiya Binta herself, a kind of self-discovery that opens up a new world of liberation. This seems to be a liberation not only from her religion-backed self-imposed prison of ethical rules, but also from the ruthlessly puritanical society.

Binta was withdrawn from school by her father and sent to Jos, Plateau State, to become a wife to a man she neither knew nor loved. Prior to this scenario, she had lived with her parents and attended a make-shift school under the Tamarind tree. Her mother, the Fulani woman, had no close relationship with her because she being the first child, tradition forbade the mother from relating with her, calling her by her given name or showing any affection towards her:

Binta was her first daughter and, as was customary, she rarely acknowledged or called her name, lest she be deemed immodest. But each time Binta sneaked a look into her mother's eyes, she glimpsed, before it was blinked away, a clandestine love she wished she could grasp and savour. She would have given anything to hear the sound of her name on her mother's lips. Anything. (Season, pp.23-24)

From her early childhood Binta is subjected to the trauma of being psychologically banished from her mother. It is the tradition that first steals Binta's childhood before she is being whisked away into an unsolicited and loveless marriage. Her husband does not love her, even their conjugal relationship is rigidly controlled by him. The narrator states that:

... he would nudge her with his knees and she would have to throw her legs open. He would lift her wrapper, spit unto her crotch and mount her. His calloused fingers would dig into the mounds on her chest and he would bite his lower lip to prevent any moan escaping. She would count slowly under her breath, her eyes closed, of course. And somewhere between 60 and 70 - always between 60 and 70 – he would grunt, empty himself and roll off her until he was ready to go again. Zubairu was a practical man who fancied their intimacy as an exercise in conjugal frugality. It was something to be dispensed with promptly, without silly ceremonies (Season, pp.50-51).

Deprived of a happy childhood and relationship with her mother, Binta moves into her matrimonial home with a very volatile and cantankerous husband. She produces four children in quick succession, and endures lack in the family. As tradition dictates, Binta also has no close relationship with her first-born child, Yaro, who, bereft of parental care, joins bad company. The patriarch, Zubairu is too disorganised to be a good role-model for his children, and tradition forbids Binta from being close to the boy. Yaro, gets killed when the police raid his gang's hideout (Season, p.148). Shortly after that, Binta's husband, Zubairu is also killed during an ethno-religious riot. Her remaining son relocates her to the suburb of the Federal Capital City.

It is while in her new location that the miscreant and drug peddler, called Reza, scales her fence and robs her at dagger-point. Reza bears a strong resemblance to her late son, Yaro. This unusual sentimental bond lays a foundation for a strange and intimate relationship that flourishes thereafter. An envious suitor, Mallam Haruna, whom Hajiya Binta had scorned in preference to her young lover reports the unholy alliance between this fifty-five-year-old grandmother, Hajiya Binta, (a highly revered member of the Islamic Madrasa), and her twenty-five-year-old drug-peddler lover, to her son, Munkaila, who has ascended the ladder of success to become a respectable member of the political class (Season, p.268). Munkaila is killed by his mother's lover in the skirmish that ensues while he tries to defend his mother's honour, whom he meets in a compromising position with her young lover. Her situation evokes a condition of voicelessness, as her widowhood and loneliness never permitted her to maintain any meaningful relationships all through her whole life; a condition that pushed her into bonding with her drug-peddler lover as her way of searching for human relationship and agency.

2.0 Comparative Synopsis of Literary Techniques

2.1 Simplicity of Diction

One technique that unifies these two writers in the approach to their novels is simplicity in the use of language. Both writers' choice of diction is that of the simple, ordinary, everyday use of words and expressions, which allows for easy reading and comprehension. Words are the building blocks of language, thus the process of selecting words is fundamental to effective communication. Therefore, analysing the style of a work of literature is an attempt to identify and understand diction ([www.https://literarydevices.net](https://literarydevices.net)). The authors' use of simplicity of diction, suggests a deliberate choice to use clear, accessible language.

Considering that the central idea explored, cuts across different social strata, therefore, minimising ambiguity becomes imperative in order to enhance comprehension. For example, Mohammed's *Travails* opens with a simple diction; "It was on a warm Tuesday evening in the month of May after some light showers that had increased the humidity and stuffiness of the atmosphere rather than cool it" (*Travails*, p.1). The introduction is deliberately simple, employing uncomplicated expressions to describe ordinary happenings that resonate with the rhythms of life in that part of the world. In the same vein, Ibrahim's *Season* opens with an equally unembellished image: Hajiya Binta's recurring perception of a strong smell of roaches. What appears at first as a mundane sensory detail gradually morphs into a symbolic premonition, foreshadowing the series of misfortunes that overshadow and scar her life. It states:

It was the same feeling she had had that day, long ago, when her father had stormed in to proclaim that she was going to be married off to a stranger. Or the day that stranger, Zubairu, her husband for many years had been so brazenly consumed by communal ire when he was set upon by a mob of intoxicated zealots. Or the day her first son, Yaro...was shot dead by the police (*Season*, p.9).

This style of using simple diction ensures that readers of various ages and educational backgrounds can engage effectively with the texts.

2.2 The Omniscient Narrator

In writing, the omniscient narrator technique implies the use of an all-knowing voice, that guides the reader through the story in a unique way. He knows everything about the plot, characters, and events in storytelling, and has full knowledge of the story's events, motives, and the unspoken thoughts of the characters, and can describe events that happen simultaneously in different places. The omniscient narrator reports on the encounter between Ibrahim and Kellu, his second wife, in Mohammed's *Travails* during the latter's numerous visits to the former just to check out if he has fixed a date for their wedding after many years of waiting for him to make up his mind:

He avoided looking at her face for he knew that she was always that silent whenever she wanted to say something and he was damned if it was not anything to do with the marriage issue. He waited patiently knowing well that she had little of that attribute. He always found himself at an advantage over her when it came to broaching sensitive issues. She was not good at expressing herself, especially when the matter at hand had to do with her emotions. He therefore, decided to stretch her patience and get her all worked up.

When are your exams starting? He asked.

In three weeks, she replied, looking down at her fingers under the table.

You have to read hard then

Yes

He smiled to himself and pursued his act of wanting the table turned against her so that in the end, she would not venture to ask the question in the first place or if she dared, she would end up feeling very sorry she had mentioned the issue at all (*Travails* p.16).

This narrator has full knowledge of the story's events, motives, as well as the thoughts of the characters, and can describe events occurring simultaneously at different locations and tells the story from different perspectives. Ibrahim proves himself a master of craftiness, adept at manipulating his female partners and stripping them of agency and self-worth. Just as Zarah endures his ruthless treatment, so too does Kellu become his latest victim.

Also, in *Season*, the author employs the omniscient narrator to frame Hajiya Binta's initial encounter with Reza. The narrator recounts the event with the authority of one who possesses full knowledge of the story's events, motives, and the unspoken thoughts of the characters: "Hajiya Binta Zubairu was finally born at fifty-five when a dark-lipped rogue with short, spiky hair, like a field of miniscule anthills, scaled her fence and landed, boots and all, in the puddle that was her heart" (*Season*, p.9). Through this perspective, the narrator unveils not only the external action but also the inner stirrings of Binta's suppressed desires. The omniscient voice provides readers with privileged access to the

characters' emotions and intentions, creating multiple layers of meanings that a more restricted third-person narration would not achieve. In doing so, Ibrahim exposes Hajiya Binta's vulnerability, inviting the reader into the intimate terrain of her conflict and heightening engagement with the unfolding narrative.

2.3 Interior Monologue

Interior monologue is a literary device that presents a character's inner thoughts, emotions, and reflections directly to the reader. It is a way of "hearing" what goes on in a character's mind, often without the mediation of a narrator. It reveals a character's private feelings, motives, and conflicts. Unlike dialogue, it remains unspoken and confined to the character's subconscious and these thoughts influence the character's actions and consciousness of reality. This narrative technique is used by the two writers in portraying the tragic heroines, Zarah and Hajiya Binta. The inability to voice their suffering deepens their trauma as they internalize their pains. Zarah is consumed by the thought of her husband's betrayal; she dwells on it, replays it in her mind, views it in her mind's eyes, debates it endlessly within herself, and is constantly blinded by the hot tears she sheds (Travails, pp.70-71).

Driving to work one morning, fully preoccupied with the same thought, and with tears blurring her vision, she almost collides with a car in front of her. The near accident becomes symbolic of the destructive weight of unenunciated grief that overflows into every aspect of her life. Her husband's cruelty echoes in her mind; his taunt, asking whether "the tears she had shed since knowing him could not fill a drum" (Travail, p.28), becomes a cruel refrain that magnifies her agony. In evaluating her marriage, she concludes with a painful clarity "that their relationship was ninety percent pains, a realization that further entrenches her sense of loss and despair...but in spite of all the pains, she could not explain why refuses to consider some other men but always has to be him" (Travail, p.28).

Similarly, Hajiya Binta in *Season* succumbs to the weight of societal and religious blackmail, turns her judgment inward when she dares to reach out for intimacy and assert her agency through her relationship with Reza. The act, which may be considered as liberating in a sense, rather plunges her into guilt and self-condemnation. She feels unclean, obsessively bathing several times within a short period, drowning herself in layers of perfume, and filling her house with incense in a frantic attempt to mask what she perceives as the stench of sin. The narrator underscores this by observing that "she did not want Hadiza to catch a whiff of the objectionable smell of fornication she was certain she exuded" (Season, p.53). Like Zarah, Binta's silence becomes corrosive; and unable to confide in anyone, she internalizes her shame and grief. This inward turn, born of the absence of a confidante, deepens her trauma and magnifies her alienation, leaving her trapped in a private world of unrelenting guilt.

2.4 Code-Mixing/Code-Switching

Code-mixing and code-switching are common denominators in post-colonial societies like Nigeria. They usually occur in the same environment, and at times, concurrently. Code-switching is the alternate use of two or more languages, or varieties of language, or even speech styles (Hymes, 1986). According to Wardaugh (1998), code-switching is a conversational strategy used to establish, to cross, or to destroy language or group boundaries. On the other hand, code-mixing is the situation where interlocutors change from one code or language to the other interchangeably in the course of a single utterance (Wardaugh 1998). Code-switching and code-mixing are extensively used in Ibrahim's *Season*. A typical case of code-mixing is when Munkaila, Hajia Zubairu's son goes visiting his mother with his family and they are served food by his mother. Obviously enjoying the meal, he speaks: "I've been telling her how much richer food cooked on firewood tastes." His mother retorts, "Oh, trust me, you won't want your wife smelling of all that makamashi, all that burnt and whatnot?" (Season p.96). By mixing her code, makamashi is the local (Hausa) word that sums up everything that has to be said about the resultant mess and discomfort of cooking with firewood in the old, traditional method, and it is understood by all the interlocutors involved.

Other narrative devices that the writers use include, use of local dialects, use of Arabic language etc. All of these devices add aesthetics to the novels, and demonstrate the creative acumen of the two authors.

3.0 Conclusion

Zarah and Hajiya Binta emerge as tragic heroines in their respective narratives. Zarah's tragedy is rooted in her premature attachment to Ibrahim from childhood, a relationship that grew into a lifetime of manipulation, exploitation, and emotional abuse. Ibrahim, a mendacious man adept at deception, strips her of agency and self-worth, leaving her emotionally bankrupt. Isolated within a household filled with people, Zarah experiences profound loneliness. Her husband deliberately fosters rivalry and suspicion among his wives, ensuring that no genuine bond or solidarity is possible within the family. Deprived of companionship, and silenced by the absence of a confidante Zarah is unable to articulate/enunciate her pain. This inability to voice out her suffering exacerbates her trauma, because verbalizing her distress in itself would have been therapeutic, offering a measure of catharsis, rehabilitation, and agency. Instead, her silence entombs or cocoons her in an unhealthy zombified existence, where life continues without vitality or meaning; where she is merely living as a walking corpse.

On the other hand, Hajiya Binta's tragedy arises from cultural betrayal, widowhood, loneliness, and the repression imposed on her by a conservative society. As a woman who has spent her youth and middle age conforming to the rigid expectations of decorum, she finds herself emotionally stifled and cut off from authentic self-expression. Her encounter with Reza becomes both a desperate grasp at intimacy, and a radical assertion of self-expression and agency, yet it also exposes her to guilt, shame, and condemnation, and takes away the power to voice out her pains. In reaching for companionship and desire, she collides with cultural taboos that mark her as deviant, even as her humanity craves a passionate connection. Thus, like Zarah, Binta's voice is stifled, not by silence alone but by the hypocrisy masquerading as the moral gaze of her community, which transforms her pursuit of love into transgression. Both women embody the paradox of yearning for agency while being imprisoned within structures that deny them space for healing, leaving them as haunting symbols of unarticulated /un-enunciated grief and thwarted desires.

In conclusion, the tragic trajectories of Zarah and Hajiya Binta demonstrate how women's lives in the selected narratives are profoundly shaped, and often shattered by structures of silence, patriarchy, and cultural expectations. Though their experiences differ, both heroines embody the devastating consequences of suppressed desires, emotional isolation, and the denial of agency through their voicelessness. Zarah's life unravels through a cycle of manipulation, abuse, and alienation that reduces her to a voiceless shadow within her own household. Hajiya Binta, on the other hand, is entrapped by the weight of series of bereavements including widowhood and the moral codes of a conservative but hypocritical society, which transform her search for intimacy into a stigma, thus impugning both her honour and integrity.

Together, their stories illuminate the multifaceted nature of female suffering: silence becomes both symptom and instrument of trauma, while attempts at self-assertion are punished with further marginalization. By juxtaposing Zarah and Binta, the texts reveal that the women's trauma is not physical or external but deeply etched into their silences, obsessions, guilt, and suppressed desires. Zarah's ceaseless reflection and Binta's internalized shame exemplify how trauma lingers as an unspoken wound, shaping their identities and choices. These narratives reveal that the true burden of trauma lies not only in the suffering endured but also in its persistent demand to be voiced out, even when words fail. Both novels affirm that trauma, though often hidden, influences external actions and attitudes, and speaks volumes about the weight of female pain in patriarchal and conservative contexts. Ultimately, the tragic heroines stand as haunting reminders of how unarticulated/un-enunciated pain and thwarted agency deepen trauma, underscoring literature's role as a cathartic 'voicing out', a site where these silences can be broken, interrogated and ultimately ameliorated.

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