

**TRAUMA AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN OKEY NDIBE'S *ARROWS OF RAIN* AND
RICHARD WRIGHT'S *NATIVE SON***

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NOVEMBER, 2025

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
LITERATURE, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY, IN PARTIAL
FULFILLMENT FOR THE REQUIREMENT OF BACHELOR OF ARTS (HONS)
DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND LITERATURE**

NOVEMBER, 2025

CERTIFICATION

I certify that this work was carried out by **Amazyn Iheoma, AMECHI-ALIOGO** in the Department of English and Literature , University of Benin, Benin City, under the supervision of my project supervisor, Dr. Lilian .C. Onyeiwu .

Dr. Lilian .C. Onyeiwu
(**Project Supervisor**)

DATE

DEDICATION

This research is dedicated to God Almighty for taking me through this programme successfully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I give thanks to God Almighty for the great grace to finish this degree strong and well. It is indeed a dream come through.

I'm sincerely grateful for the good work, and advice of my wonderful project supervisor Dr L.C Onyeiwu in going through my work and making the necessary corrections. I most humbly appreciate her diligence and articulate guidance.

My profound gratitude goes out to my mother, Mrs Mary .I. Amechi-Aliogo and my dad Barr. Amechi-Aliogo for their never ending love and support towards my academic journey. I really appreciate my siblings, Eforma, Efam, Efe and Fечи, for their guidance, love, support, encouragement, and prayers, towards my academic pursuits.

My sincere appreciation goes out to my wonderful sisters and brother, Covenant, Eseosa and Kelechi, for never losing faith in me. To my wonderful friends, Davies, Diana, Shalom and Daniel, I'm grateful for the gift of you all. I equally express my gratitude to my senior colleagues, Nathaniel and Wilson for their advice and availability throughout my stay in the university.

I thank all who have contributed in one way or the other to the success of my academic journey. May God Almighty bless you.

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the representation of trauma and identity crisis in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. It examines how both authors employ narrative technique to portray the psychological fragmentation of individuals struggling under repressive sociopolitical structures. In *Arrows of Rain*, Ndibe situates trauma within the postcolonial African landscape, exposing how state violence, corruption, and moral decay deform both personal and collective consciousness. Conversely, Wright's *Native Son* situates trauma in a racially stratified America, where systemic oppression and poverty shape the disintegration of Black identity. Through close textual analysis, the research reveals that both authors transform narrative into a means of resistance—employing silence, symbolism, memory, and stream of consciousness to articulate suffering that language itself often fails to express. The study concludes that literature serves not merely as an artistic mirror of pain but as an act of reclaiming voice and agency within a world structured to silence the oppressed.

CHAPTER ONE

1.0 Introduction

Every society carries the invisible weight of its historical and psychological traumas, and literature often becomes the site where those wounds are confronted, narrated, and, in some measure, healed. In modern African and African-American fiction, the representation of trauma extends beyond personal affliction to reflect collective suffering, political corruption, and existential alienation. Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* (2000) and Richard Wright's *Native Son* (1940) stand as two emblematic works that interrogate the relationship between trauma, silence, and the struggle for self-definition within violently repressive systems.

In *Arrows of Rain*, Ndibe explores the consequences of dictatorship, moral collapse, and the loss of individual agency under authoritarian rule. Through the tragic experiences of Bukuru, the journalist turned vagrant, the novel exposes how the suppression of truth and the culture of silence deform both personal identity and national consciousness. The recurring motif of silence, both as a shield and a shackle, embodies the trauma of a people crushed under political violence and corruption.

Similarly, *Native Son* dramatizes the psychological and social trauma of black existence in segregated America. Bigger Thomas's life becomes a symbol of systemic dehumanisation, racial paranoia, and the internalisation of fear. Wright's narrative portrays how oppression fractures the psyche, forcing individuals into violent rebellion or

existential despair. Bigger's tragedy is not merely personal, it is the inevitable outcome of a racist society that denies black humanity. Both Ndibe and Wright locate trauma at the intersection of the individual and the political. In *Arrows of Rain*, trauma arises from state brutality and moral decay in a postcolonial African state; in *Native Son*, it emanates from centuries of racial injustice and economic inequality. Yet, both writers converge in illustrating how violence, whether political or racial, corrupts language, erodes identity, and silences truth.

This study, therefore, investigates how narrative technique functions as a vehicle for representing trauma in *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son*. It examines how both authors deploy devices such as fractured chronology, interior monologue, symbolism, and unreliable narration to mirror the disorienting effects of trauma. These narrative strategies not only reveal the characters' fragmented states of mind but also mimic the chaotic experience of trauma itself. Ultimately, this research argues that in both novels, narrative becomes a form of survival, a way to reclaim agency and reassert selfhood against the dehumanising power of silence, fear, and oppression.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to examine how trauma and identity crisis appear and develop in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. The study seeks to show the ways in which the main characters experience deep psychological pain as a result of the societies in which they live. The research also aims to reveal how both

writers present the link between personal suffering and the larger social forces that cause it. By reading these works side by side, the study seeks to show that, despite the different historical and cultural backgrounds of the novels, trauma often leads to similar struggles for self-definition and self-worth. Through this examination, the study aims to deepen understanding of how literature reflects the mental and emotional costs of injustice and how such costs shape human identity.

1.2 Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the close analysis of Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, analysing how each text presents trauma and identity crisis through plot, character, and thematic structure. It examines key events that shape the emotional and psychological states of the main characters, paying close attention to how political corruption in a postcolonial African society and systemic racism in mid-twentieth-century America produce similar patterns of fear, alienation, and self-conflict. The study also considers how the authors' use of imagery, symbolism, and point of view deepens the portrayal of mental suffering and fractured identity. Secondary sources from trauma studies, postcolonial criticism, and African American literary scholarship provide critical perspectives that strengthen the comparative analysis.

1.3 Methodology

This research uses a qualitative approach that relies on close reading of the two primary texts, Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. The study

reads the novels attentively to identify scenes, descriptions, and dialogue that reveal experiences of trauma and identity crisis. Each selected passage undergoes detailed analysis to show how the authors present the mental and emotional struggles of the characters.

The comparative method guides the structure of the analysis. The study places the two novels side by side to examine similarities and differences in the causes, expressions, and consequences of trauma. It investigates how political corruption, state violence, and betrayal in *Arrows of Rain* compare with racial oppression, economic hardship, and systemic injustice in *Native Son*. The method also draws attention to how each author's choice of language, imagery, and perspective shapes the reader's understanding of identity crisis.

The research uses secondary sources from scholarly articles, books, and critical essays to frame the discussion. Works on trauma theory help explain the psychological effects of violence, marginalisation, and social exclusion. Postcolonial criticism provides insight into the colonial history and power structures that shape the world of *Arrows of Rain*, while African American literary criticism offers tools to examine the racial and social realities in *Native Son*. These sources serve to support, clarify, and expand the interpretations made from the primary texts. This method ensures that the study moves beyond surface reading to uncover the deeper meanings in the novels. By combining direct textual evidence with informed critical perspectives, the research seeks to produce

a rich and credible understanding of how trauma and identity crisis are constructed in these two works of literature.

1.4 Theoretical Background

This study adopts Trauma theory as its sole theoretical framework but also captures a perspective of the Postcolonial criticism for a better study. Trauma theory investigates the psychological and emotional consequences of experiences so overwhelming that they exceed an individual's capacity to process them fully at the moment of occurrence. Such experiences often return in memory in fragmentary, intrusive, and sometimes disruptive ways, thereby affecting the individual's sense of self, interpersonal relationships, and behaviour. In literary analysis, trauma theory provides an interpretive framework for reading works that deal with pain, loss, political violence, and the enduring effects of oppression. This makes it particularly relevant to the comparative reading of Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Both texts depict characters whose identities are profoundly shaped by violence and systemic injustice, and trauma theory offers the tools to uncover the subtle psychological scars left by such conditions.

The origins of trauma theory can be traced to the pioneering work of Sigmund Freud in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Freud's collaboration with Josef Breuer in *Studies on Hysteria* introduced the idea that repressed, unprocessed experiences could manifest through physical and psychological symptoms, such as anxiety, compulsive behaviour, and disrupted memory (Breuer and Freud 7). Freud later

deepened these insights in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he formulated the concept of repetition compulsion, describing how individuals unconsciously re-enact aspects of traumatic events, unable to escape their psychic grip (Freud 21). These psychoanalytic foundations established the principle that the past can persist in the present, subtly but powerfully shaping a survivor's identity.

In the decades following Freud, trauma theory developed through several distinct stages. The first stage was its clinical foundation, grounded in psychoanalysis and psychiatry. Alongside Freud, Pierre Janet's studies on hysteria provided early evidence that unprocessed events could cause long-term symptoms, and his emphasis on the role of memory disturbances in trauma remains influential (Janet 13). The second stage was a period of historical expansion in the aftermath of the world wars. Researchers such as Bruno Bettelheim and Viktor Frankl documented the psychological aftermath of concentration camp experiences, revealing how trauma could permanently alter memory, identity, and social functioning (Bettelheim 44; Frankl 65).

The third stage was the literary turn, emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, when scholars began to apply trauma concepts to literature, especially in relation to Holocaust narratives, slavery accounts, and postcolonial testimonies. The fourth stage saw interdisciplinary growth, as anthropology, sociology, and political studies incorporated trauma to explain the legacies of slavery, genocide, apartheid, and colonialism. The fifth and most recent stage is the contemporary adaptation, in which trauma is applied to the

study of racial violence, sexual abuse, political repression, and forced migration, reflecting its versatility across cultural contexts.

In Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience*, the growth of trauma theory into literary studies owes much to the recognition that literature can represent aspects of trauma that elude historical or purely clinical accounts. Because traumatic memory is often fragmented, non-linear, and indirect, literary techniques such as disrupted timelines, symbolic imagery, and shifting perspectives mirror the survivor's mental state (Caruth 5). In African and African American contexts, trauma criticism has been applied to narratives of slavery, colonial exploitation, apartheid, and political violence, offering deep insight into both personal suffering and collective historical wounds. This makes the theory a powerful tool for understanding the political trauma of Ndibe's protagonist Bukuru and the racial trauma of Wright's Bigger Thomas.

Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* is one of the most influential works in the field. Caruth conceptualises trauma as an event not fully grasped in the moment of its occurrence, returning later in sudden, intrusive ways. She argues that literature serves as a unique medium for addressing the unspeakable aspects of trauma, since narrative can approach what ordinary discourse cannot directly express (Caruth 4). Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, extend this by exploring the act of bearing witness. They maintain that testimony is both a way of confronting trauma and a process inevitably marked by incompleteness,

since the mind struggles to integrate the overwhelming experience into a coherent narrative (69).

Dominick LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma* introduces the distinction between "acting out" and "working through" trauma. Acting out refers to the compulsive repetition of the traumatic past, while working through involves a conscious effort to contextualise and integrate the event into one's life story. This distinction is valuable when examining characters such as Bukuru and Bigger, whose behaviours reflect cycles of both repetition and gradual self-awareness (LaCapra 144).

Pierre Janet's *The Major Symptoms of Hysteria* represents one of the earliest medical studies of trauma, underscoring how unassimilated experiences remain active within the psyche and disrupt daily functioning (Janet 13). Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* remains foundational for its analysis of repetition compulsion, a concept vividly relevant to the patterns seen in the protagonists' lives (Freud 21).

Judith Herman's *Trauma and Recovery* advances the field by outlining stages of recovery: establishing safety, reconstructing the narrative of the trauma, and reconnecting with community (Herman 54). These stages provide a valuable lens for tracking the partial and often thwarted recovery journeys of both Bukuru and Bigger. Vamik Volkan's *Bloodlines* contributes by linking individual trauma to collective identity, showing how historical and political events shape personal psychology (Volkan 83). Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* demonstrates that different histories of trauma can

be compared and understood in relation to one another, a concept central to this study's comparative framework (Rothberg 7).

Anne Whitehead's *Trauma Fiction* explains how contemporary fiction reflects trauma through fragmented structures, non-linear storytelling, and gaps in narration—strategies evident in both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* (Whitehead 82). Finally, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *Something Torn and New* addresses postcolonial trauma in African literature, emphasising the severance of cultural memory under colonial rule and the enduring psychological effects of such dislocation (Ngugi 34).

The relevance of trauma theory to the present study lies in its capacity to connect the inner lives of Bukuru and Bigger to the external forces that shape them. In *Arrows of Rain*, Bukuru's identity crisis is inseparable from the political violence and corruption of the postcolonial state. His fragmented narrative and strategic silences embody what Caruth terms the "oscillation between a crisis of death and the crisis of life" (Caruth 7).

In *Native Son*, Bigger Thomas lives under the constant weight of systemic racism, criminalisation, and fear. His actions, silences, and moments of confession reflect the cyclical movement between acting out and working through described by LaCapra (LaCapra 144). Both novels also employ the narrative disruptions that Whitehead identifies as markers of trauma fiction (Whitehead 82), and both reflect the cultural and historical dislocation that Ngũgĩ identifies in postcolonial and racial contexts (Ngugi 34). By adopting trauma theory, this study is able to move beyond surface readings of political corruption in Nigeria and racial injustice in America. It reveals the deeper ways

these systemic forces inscribe themselves upon the mind, memory, and identity of individuals. The theory thus enables a comparative analysis that respects the differences between the African and African American experiences while also identifying the shared psychological consequences of living under oppression.

Postcolonial Criticism

Postcolonial criticism provides another useful perspective for this study, particularly in examining how histories of colonialism and racial domination continue to shape identity and trauma. Edward Said's *Orientalism* highlights how colonial discourse produces distorted representations of the colonised, representations that persist in postcolonial societies and contribute to internalised oppression (Said 45).

Homi Bhabha extends this by exploring concepts such as hybridity and ambivalence, arguing that colonial encounters leave behind fractured identities and unstable cultural positions (Bhabha 112). Gayatri Spivak adds that the voices of the oppressed are often silenced in dominant narratives, raising the challenge of "speaking for" or recovering subaltern agency (Spivak 104).

Applied to *Arrows of Rain*, postcolonial criticism illuminates how the legacies of colonial rule underpin the political corruption and authoritarian structures that fuel trauma. The betrayal of public trust and silencing of dissent reflect the continuity between colonial control and post-independence despotism. In *Native Son*, the postcolonial lens underscores how African American identity emerges within a racially stratified system that echoes colonial hierarchies. Bigger Thomas's struggle to define himself against

stereotypes of criminality can be read as a postcolonial struggle within a society that still enforces colonial logics of race and power. When placed alongside trauma theory, postcolonial criticism strengthens this study by linking personal suffering to the wider historical and political structures that enable it. Trauma becomes not only an individual psychological wound but also a marker of societies still haunted by the unfinished business of colonial domination.

1.5 Review of Scholarship

Critical responses to Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* reveal an enduring concern with the novel's political allegory, narrative strategies, and its portrayal of trauma under postcolonial authoritarianism.

Niyi Akingbe's *Rallying Against Dehumanization: "Repudiating Military Brutality in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*"* offers a powerful political reading in which Bukuru, Iyese, and Adero emerge as instruments of narrative disclosure exposing state brutality. He interprets silence as a function of gag orders designed to preserve elite power. This approach clarifies the oppressive context in which trauma arises, yet it privileges sociopolitical context over the interior life, treating identity fracture as a residual effect of politics rather than a structured psychic rupture articulated through delayed memory and compulsive narrative gestures (Akingbe 42). In an earlier essay, "Protesting Military Oppression in *Arrows of Rain*," Akingbe examines the novel's formal use of testimony and counter-archive. He convincingly shows how interwoven

personal accounts challenge authority and how silence functions as ethical resistance to fear. This reading is rich in rhetorical detail, but it treats silence more as strategy than symptom, lacking attention to dissociation or intrusive memory that would deepen understanding of identity fragmentation (Akingbe 88).

Wisely C. Mkandawire's "Alienation and Despair in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*" maps how despotism, economic exploitation, and suppression engender alienation, manifesting in scenes of prostitution, mental disturbance, and social withdrawal. His existential lens is compelling, though he equates alienation with trauma without distinguishing their mechanisms or temporality, and he marginalises the gendered aspects of trauma by underplaying Iyese's suffering (Mkandawire 117).

The study "Identity, Silence and Political Imbalance in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*" by Okoro Benedict interprets silence as both a survival response and a social symptom born of failed institutions, connecting narrative gaps to civic collapse. While politically astute, it remains descriptive and does not engage how traumatic memory returns or how narrative structure replicates flashback or latency, thus neglecting the instability of narrated identity (Okoro 55).

Hamza Usman's "Military Delinquency in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*" details specific patterns of military abuse and maps them onto the narrative graph, cataloguing social dislocation induced by systemic lawlessness. Its strength lies in specificity, yet its taxonomic method fails to link outward violence with inward form, omitting how voice,

focalisation, or temporal dissonance express the trauma that fractures identity (Usman 231).

‘Subversion of Post-Independence Dreams and Aspirations: Reflections on Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain*’ by Eze Chukwuma situates Ndibe’s novel in a tradition of failed independence narratives, reading Bukuru as emblematic of collapsed civic aspiration. Although insightful, this national lens risks reducing identity crisis to an allegory of state failure rather than a psychological process marked by concrete trauma triggers (Eze 104).

Patrick Kenneth Obinna’s “Literature as a Mirror of History and Society: A Case Study of Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain*” portrays the novel as reflective of societal dysfunction, illustrating how personal testimony challenges official amnesia and demands civic reckoning. Yet the mirror model constrains narrative to documentary function and neglects how trauma shapes narration via erasure, compulsion, or delay that fracture subjectivity (Obinna 67).

In Ifeanyi Nwachukwu’s “Okey Ndibe and the Dynamics of Class Bordering,” the critic analyses how class boundaries determine embodiment and movement, arguing that violence reinforces social partitions while memory serves to reconcile past and present in traumatic continuity. This spatial class lens illuminates social divisions, but it can blur attention from interior trauma markers—shock, shame, guilt—that destabilise identity beyond the boundaries of class (Nwachukwu 152).

Chinwe Adaora’s “Historiographic Metafiction in Okey Ndibe’s *Arrows of Rain*” highlights Ndibe’s metafictional strategies, portraying storytelling as a corrective to state-

sanctioned historical distortion. The reading sharpens understanding of narrative ethics, yet it remains at the formal or conceptual level and fails to link those metafictional moves to the symptoms of trauma that undermine personal narration's reliability (Chinwe 89).

Finally, Ibrahim Musa's "Political Corruption and Psychosocial Disorder in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain*" connects state corruption to psychosocial fragmentation, presenting Bukuru as socially marginalised by systemic predation. Though emphasis on cumulative harm and community erosion has merit, the psychological claims lack grounding in trauma theory and ignore how recall collapses into repetition or how memory and voice destabilise identity (212). Similarly, Richard Wright's *Native Son* has generated a vast body of scholarship that grapples with its portrayal of race, violence, and systemic oppression. James Baldwin's "Many Thousands Gone" remains one of the most enduring critical engagements with *Native Son*. Baldwin recognises Wright's achievement in forcing the reality of race into American literary consciousness, yet he faults the novel for confining Bigger Thomas within sociological determinism. For Baldwin, Wright's portrayal risks reducing Bigger to a type rather than allowing him the full range of human complexity (Baldwin 45). This insight exposes a tension between political necessity and psychological depth, though Baldwin underplays how trauma itself can constrict agency and expression.

Irving Howe's celebrated essay "Black Boys and Native Sons" situates *Native Son* within the naturalist tradition, noting its unflinching determinism and depiction of systemic oppression. Howe praises the novel's ferocity but contends that Bigger's moral

interiority remains inaccessible (Howe 78). His reading correctly identifies structural constraint, yet it undervalues the role of trauma in shaping the protagonist's emotional inarticulacy.

Hazel Rowley, in *Richard Wright: The Life and Times*, contextualises *Native Son* within Wright's biography, linking Bigger's fear and violence to Wright's own experiences of poverty and racial terror in Mississippi. Rowley's biographical reading humanises Wright's creative process (Rowley 134), but it tends to attribute the novel's psychological dimensions to authorial life rather than analysing trauma as a universal, structural force in racialised societies.

Kenneth Kinnamon's "A Richard Wright Bibliography" and his critical essays map the reception of *Native Son* across decades, tracing shifts in its political and aesthetic valuation. He notes how early responses centred on protest value, while later criticism explores psychology and form (Kinnamon). Yet his surveys, though exhaustive, do not themselves articulate a sustained reading of trauma's role in the construction of identity.

Barbara Foley's *Radical Representations* reads *Native Son* as a political allegory of capitalism and racism, presenting Bigger as a product of oppressive material conditions (Foley 159). Her Marxist approach clarifies systemic causality but risks reducing personal trauma to economic determinism, thus bypassing the complex interplay of memory, shame, and fear in the shaping of selfhood.

Houston A. Baker Jr., in *Modernism and the Harlem Renaissance*, reads *Native Son* through the lens of modernist fragmentation, interpreting Bigger's disjointed

thoughts and erratic actions as modernist strategies that express racial alienation (Baker 88). While useful in situating Wright in a literary movement, Baker's reading does not fully address how these narrative disjunctions parallel the disordered temporality of trauma.

Trudier Harris, in *Black Women in the Fiction of Richard Wright*, critiques Wright's limited portrayal of female characters, noting that women in *Native Son* often serve as symbolic or functional devices (Harris 72). This perspective reveals gendered silences, yet her critique leaves open how the erasure or marginalisation of female trauma interacts with the central male narrative.

Michel Fabre's *The Unfinished Quest of Richard Wright* positions *Native Son* within Wright's intellectual journey, reading Bigger as an embodiment of Wright's attempt to reconcile radical politics with personal moral vision (Fabre 214). Fabre's historical scope is invaluable, though his framing sometimes treats Bigger as an ideological construct rather than as a traumatised subject.

Addison Gayle Jr., in *The Way of the New World*, champions *Native Son* as a revolutionary work that dismantles liberal illusions about race (Gayle 101). He identifies Bigger's violence as symbolic revolt but, by treating violence chiefly as political performance, overlooks its grounding in the cyclical reproduction of trauma.

Finally, Claudia Tate's *Psychoanalysis and Black Novels* reads Bigger through a Freudian frame, treating his behaviour as symptomatic of deep psychic wounds formed under systemic oppression (Tate 143). Tate's psychological insight is significant for

trauma analysis, but her reliance on Freudian rather than contemporary trauma theory limits the depth with which she addresses memory latency, fragmentation, and identity instability.

1.6 Thesis Statement

The study of *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* establishes that trauma and identity crisis are products of entrenched oppression, by using narrative forms and characterisation, which reveal how personal suffering mirrors social decay.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAUMA, VIOLENCE AND THE BODY POLITIC IN *ARROWS OF RAIN* AND *NATIVE SON*

2.1 Trauma as Collective Memory

Trauma in both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* does not remain confined to the minds of individual characters. It transcends personal suffering and settles into the consciousness of entire communities, becoming a memory that binds, haunts, and defines the collective identity of oppressed peoples.

In *Arrows of Rain*, the story of Bukuru becomes more than his own tragedy. His life is marked by the silencing and violence of the military regime, yet his account exposes a deeper truth about the people's shared experience. When Bukuru insists on telling the story of rape and murder he witnessed, he declares: "A story that must be told never forgives silence. Speech is the mouth's debt to a story" (AOR 212). This moment

suggests that memory, even when painful, is a duty owed not only to oneself but to the community. By speaking, Bukuru attempts to preserve the memory of those destroyed by tyranny, challenging a society that prefers forgetting. The trauma of oppression thus enters collective memory, reminding the people that silence perpetuates suffering.

Similarly, Wright portrays trauma as a shared historical inheritance among African Americans. Bigger Thomas's experience is not unique but an echo of centuries of racial violence. The ghetto life of his family, the segregation in housing, and the pervasive fear of white authority are all collective conditions. Wright's description of Bigger's mother, exhausted and resigned to poverty, illustrates this communal memory of pain: "She sang in a sad, soft voice, the words coming from a memory not her own but from a long line of black women whose hope had died in the same song" (*Native Son* 16). This image reveals trauma as an intergenerational wound, passed down through song, gesture, and resignation. The novel portrays African Americans as carriers of a collective memory of exclusion, a memory that constantly intrudes on the present. Collective trauma in both texts also functions politically. It resists the erasure attempted by oppressive regimes.

In Ndibe's narrative, the military seeks to bury its crimes, but Bukuru's storytelling anchors those crimes in public consciousness. In Wright's work, the white press manipulates memory by turning Bigger into a symbol of Black criminality, yet his own reflections and the voices of his community push back against this distortion. Trauma here becomes a site of contest between forgetting imposed from above and remembering preserved from below. Scholars reinforce this reading. Kai Erikson

describes collective trauma as “a blow to the basic tissues of social life” that damages not only individuals but also the bonds uniting a community (Erikson 187). Applying this to the novels, one sees how both texts portray broken social bonds — the disconnection between rulers and citizens in *Arrows of Rain* and the racial divide in *Native Son*. Cathy Caruth also notes that trauma is not fully grasped in the moment but returns in memory, repeating itself across time (Caruth 11).

This explains why the wounds in both novels recur not only in individuals but across generations and societies. In this way, the trauma of Bukuru and Bigger functions as testimony, not only of their lives but also of the silent, forgotten, and repressed experiences of many. Their stories serve as mirrors of collective memory, reminding us that identity crisis may not be a private affair but can also a historical one rooted in a community’s scars.

Both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* dramatise trauma not only through what is told but also through who gets to tell it. The use of multiple voices destabilises any single authority over truth, mirroring how trauma fragments selfhood and memory. In *Arrows of Rain*, Ndibe gives primacy to Bukuru’s narration, yet his voice constantly struggles against silencing and repression. Bukuru insists: “Stories never really end. They can be silenced, but they live in the silence, waiting to be spoken again” (AOR 44). Here the metaphor of silenced stories signals trauma as both absence and persistence. Later, his bitterness towards the state’s narrative control surfaces: “The government tells its story, and that story becomes law, while our own stories rot in the gutters” (AOR 71). And

again, when Bukuru recalls Iyese's tragedy, his account is fractured and hesitant: "She said she was tired of the lies, but even her truth was swallowed by silence" (AOR 119). These multiple and contradictory strands of testimony underline the impossibility of a stable, singular account of violence.

In *Native Son*, Wright achieves a similar multiplicity. Bigger's own voice is halting and often buried beneath fear: "Every time he looked at a white face he felt a cold, hard knot form deep inside him" (Native Son 82). Later, his attempt to articulate his inner life collapses under the weight of white narratives: "They had already decided what he was before he spoke a word" (Native Son 201). And in the courtroom, Max's long defence functions as a surrogate voice for Bigger: "Bigger Thomas is not just a man; he is a symbol of the forces that made him what he is" (Native Son 389). Yet Bigger's own fragmented utterances reveal that this voice, though sympathetic, still cannot fully capture his trauma. Comparatively, both Ndibe and Wright reveal that to be traumatised under oppression is to be spoken for and spoken over. Bukuru is denied the right to narrate his life freely; Bigger is trapped in narratives imposed by white society. Multiplicity of voices, then, does not enrich meaning — it fractures it, making the representation of trauma inseparable from the struggle over who owns the story.

2.2 Silence and Unspoken Memories

Silence is never empty in trauma narratives; it is dense with what cannot be said, and both Ndibe and Wright harness it to reveal the weight of suppressed memory. Silence

becomes a form of testimony, an alternative to speech when words collapse under the burden of violence.

In *Arrows of Rain*, Bukuru's silence is both self-imposed and forced. He recalls his refusal to speak in court: "They wanted me to answer their questions, but my tongue clung to the roof of my mouth. I had already told my story to the sea" (AOR 144). This silence signifies resistance against a corrupt judiciary, yet it is also an admission of trauma's inexpressibility. Later, when Iyese's fate is raised, Bukuru refuses to recount details: "What words could ever bring Iyese back? So I swallowed them, each one bitter on my tongue" (AOR 92).

Finally, even in prison, he embraces silence as survival: "The silence of the cell pressed against me, and I pressed back, for it was the only companion I trust(AOR 159). His silence becomes both shield and wound, marking the incommunicable nature of trauma. Similarly, in *Native Son*, silence permeates Bigger's life as a product of fear and social suffocation. Early in the novel, when Mrs. Dalton questions him, he cannot reply fully: "Her white face and blind eyes waited, but Bigger's words broke before they left his throat" (Native Son 47). This silence reveals his inability to articulate himself within a world defined by racial hierarchy. Later, after Mary's death, silence becomes unbearable: "He sat for hours in silence, hearing the tick of the clock louder than his own breath" (Native Son 115). This stillness mirrors his psychological paralysis. Even in court, where he could defend himself, Wright underscores silence: "He tried to speak, but the courtroom swallowed his voice before it reached his lips" (Native Son 291).

Thus, Bigger's silence emerges not only as fear but as a symptom of living in a society where Black speech is pre-condemned. As understood, the effect of trauma in the form of silence and unspoken memories stems from how delayed and hidden one's response to trauma can be. Thus, the technique of fragmented structure and disrupted chronology adds a flow to the theme. As response to trauma can sometimes be delayed and irregular, both authors make use of this technique in their storytelling, not just to spice up their work but as a reflection of the inner experience of their characters.

Trauma unsettles memory, and memory unsettles narrative. Both Ndibe and Wright use fragmented storytelling and disrupted chronology to mirror the broken lives of their protagonists. The novels refuse linear unfolding; instead, they circle back, stutter, and collapse under the weight of recollection. This refusal of smooth narrative order embodies the fractured consciousness of characters struggling to process unbearable events.

In *Arrows of Rain*, the disjointed structure begins with Bukuru's prison recollections, which move erratically between past and present. He reflects: "Sometimes I cannot tell whether it is today or yesterday I remember. Iyese's face comes to me in the morning, and by evening it is gone, leaving only the salt of the sea (AOR 101). This collapse of time captures how trauma interrupts temporal continuity. Later, the narrative abruptly shifts from Bukuru's testimony to the journalist's perspective: "The story picked up where the old man left it, but the thread was not the same. It was broken, frayed, stitched together again with doubt" (AOR 138).

The novel's refusal of a single timeline highlights how official history clashes with personal memory. Another striking instance is the oscillation between Iyese's story and Bukuru's own downfall: "Her laughter, her tears, my silence, my rage, all of them ran together in the night, as if time had conspired to heap its debris on me" (AOR 156). Here, memory refuses order; it fuses into a mosaic of fragments.

In *Native Son*, Wright equally deploys fragmentation, especially after Mary's death. Bigger's mind leaps between fear, fantasy, and paranoia: "He saw the furnace flames, then Mary's face, then his mother's eyes, all flashing before him like shadows on a wall" (Native Son 98). This montage of images mirrors his fractured psyche. Later, when he flees through the city, the narrative dissolves into jagged perceptions: "The streets ran past him in broken pieces, shouts cracked the night, footsteps echoed like fragments of a dream" (Native Son 176). Disorder in form reflects disorder in mind. Even the courtroom scenes are punctuated by temporal disruptions: "The prosecutor's words seemed to drag him back into the furnace room, into the bedroom, into every place where fear had crushed him" (Native Son 300). For Bukuru, fragmented storytelling resists the state's neat rewriting of history. For Bigger, it dramatizes how a life structured by racial violence cannot be narrated within the smooth flow of white American justice. In both cases, disrupted chronology is not a flaw in narration but a deliberate aesthetic of trauma.

In both novels, silence functions as a paradox. It reveals trauma by refusing to reveal, speaking volumes through absence. For Bukuru, silence is resistance against power that misuses speech, while for Bigger, silence is the enforced muteness of a man

denied humanity. Ndibe and Wright use silence not as narrative emptiness but as a deliberate technique that dramatizes how trauma resists expression yet insists on presence.

2.3 The State as the Architect of Violence

In both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son*, trauma does not arise from chance or fate. It is consciously designed by the state, whose institutions consolidate power through violence, exclusion, and control. The characters suffer not because of private misfortune but because they live under regimes that weaponise governance against their very existence.

Ndibe sets *Arrows of Rain* within a military dictatorship, a system where the state enacts violence with impunity. The silencing of voices, the manipulation of truth, and the erasure of human dignity stem from the political elite's determination to hold power. Bukuru's trial is emblematic: rather than a search for justice, it becomes a performance staged by the state to suppress dissent. At one point, the narrator reflects: "In our country, the law does not exist to protect the people; it exists to protect those who make it" (AOR 145). Here, the novel exposes the way the state orchestrates trauma. Law, instead of being a refuge, is turned into an instrument of fear, leaving the people without recourse to justice. The trauma of Bukuru, of the raped woman, and of countless unnamed citizens is not accidental but the outcome of deliberate political violence. Wright paints an equally damning portrait of state power in *Native Son*. The entire machinery of law, policing, and media is calibrated to uphold racial hierarchy. Bigger's

arrest, trial, and execution are never neutral; they are predetermined by the racial logic of the state. The spectacle of his trial reveals the theatrical nature of justice under racism. As Wright narrates: “The white men were not trying to save Bigger’s life but to save their own idea of order” (*Native Son* 327). This order is one in which Black lives remain expendable. The trauma of Bigger’s fate becomes inseparable from the violence of state institutions that reinforce his dispossession.

In both texts, the state performs two acts simultaneously: erasure and imposition. It erases voices like Bukuru’s through censorship and threats, and it imposes narratives like the one crafted around Bigger to present him as the natural embodiment of Black criminality. In both cases, the trauma produced is not personal but structural, embedded in the architecture of governance.

Scholars of political trauma note this pattern. Veena Das argues that the state often reproduces violence by incorporating it into everyday governance, thereby normalising trauma (Das 69). In Ndibe’s novel, this normalisation is evident in the routine abuses of military officers, while in Wright’s, it is seen in the casual violence of police raids and biased media reporting. Michel Foucault further illuminates how power is inscribed on bodies through discipline and punishment, showing how institutions do not merely regulate but also produce subjects (Foucault 25).

Through this lens, Bukuru and Bigger are not free agents but creations of systems designed to break them. Thus, in both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son*, the state stands as the ultimate architect of violence, scripting trauma into the lives of its subjects. By

portraying such structures, the novels shift the conversation from personal morality to systemic injustice, exposing how the crisis of identity is rooted in the violence of power itself.

2.3.1 Military Brutality as a Mechanism of Control in *Arrows of Rain*

Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* portrays the Nigerian postcolonial state as a theatre of unrestrained violence, where military rule does not merely govern but terrorises its citizens into submission. The novel captures a society where brutality has become the most visible expression of authority, turning the state into an apparatus of fear rather than of protection. In doing so, Ndibe presents trauma as both an individual wound and a collective inheritance, demonstrating that political legitimacy in such a system is sustained by the constant threat of violence. The opening pages of the novel set the tone, as the discovery of a corpse on the beach is met not with due process but with the swift intrusion of soldiers. The military presence is depicted as intrusive, violating the sanctity of civilian space. Ndibe writes: "The soldiers came in their trucks, boots pounding the sand like drums of war, their guns cocked, their eyes scanning the crowd as if everyone gathered was already guilty of something unspeakable" (AOR 3).

This scene crystallises the military's role as an occupying force, reminding readers that its very appearance generates terror. Violence, in this sense, precedes action; it is embedded in posture, language, and presence. The trauma engendered by this militarisation is not incidental. It becomes a permanent scar inscribed on both individuals

and the community. Bukuru, the journalist-turned-vagrant, testifies to the suffocating climate under the junta, describing how military authority robbed society of its moral compass: “They did not come to serve, only to strip the land of its voice. They spoke only in commands, and when words failed, their rifles spoke for them” (AOR 47). Here, Ndibe underscores how the state’s legitimacy is reduced to violence. The gun replaces reason, silencing all avenues of dissent. Such depictions reflect what scholars like Niyi Akingbe have identified as “the institutionalisation of dehumanisation,” where violence becomes routine rather than exceptional (Akingbe 37).

The beach itself, repeatedly associated with death and military intrusion, functions as a metaphorical stage upon which the cyclical nature of state brutality is rehearsed. Every corpse washed ashore recalls not only an individual tragedy but also the systemic murder of justice. Trauma thus accumulates, turning the public memory of violence into an unspoken archive of fear. Ndibe accentuates this when Bukuru reflects: “Each body that surfaced from the sea was another reminder that silence was the only safe prayer left to the living” (AOR 112). The military, in this passage, emerges as both executioner and censor. Violence disciplines not only the body but also the voice, enforcing silence through spectacle. Moreover, Ndibe does not allow the reader to perceive this brutality as isolated excesses of rogue soldiers; rather, he insists that it is woven into the very fabric of the political order. The unnamed General who presides over the state embodies authoritarianism in its purest form, ruling through decrees and threats. His facelessness in the narrative is symbolic: the individual tyrant dissolves into the

machinery of violence, a regime without humanity. This reading echoes Musa Ibrahim's observation that Ndibe's fiction exposes "a psychosocial disorder in which the ruling class maintains power by traumatising the populace into acquiescence" (Ibrahim 210). The state, therefore, is less a guarantor of order than a manufacturer of fear.

In sum, Ndibe depicts military brutality as the foundation upon which postcolonial power is erected. The guns, boots, and corpses are not incidental markers of disorder but deliberate instruments of governance. Through its violence, the state mutilates both the body and the psyche, leaving individuals fragmented and communities paralysed. Trauma, therefore, is not an after-effect but the very method by which authority asserts itself.

2.3.2 Systemic Racism and the Birth of Violence in *Native Son*

Richard Wright's *Native Son* locates trauma within the structure of systemic racism that shapes every aspect of Black life in America. Violence in the novel is not a random eruption of savagery but a direct product of social conditioning, economic deprivation, and racial fear. Bigger Thomas becomes both victim and perpetrator, a man whose identity has been distorted by a world that has already defined him as dangerous.

From the opening scene, the cramped, rat-infested apartment where Bigger lives signifies not only poverty but also psychic suffocation. Wright writes: "A huge black rat squealed and leaped at Bigger's hand; he struck at it and the rat thudded against the wall, leaving a bloody smudge" (Native 7). This image, often cited by critics, is more than literal. The rat embodies the violence of entrapment, mirroring Bigger's own position

within a society that corners him and then blames him for his response. As Houston Baker observes, the scene is “a perfect miniature of Bigger’s social environment — filth, fear, and flight contained within a single, decaying room” (Baker 89). Bigger’s violence later in the novel emerges as an extension of this structural violence. When he kills Mary Dalton, it is less a deliberate act of cruelty than an impulsive reaction to fear, a fear ingrained by a lifetime of racial conditioning. Wright describes this pivotal moment with brutal honesty: “He felt the fear pushing him down, the white face coming closer; the world turned red before his eyes” (*Native Son* 85). In this instant, Bigger’s humanity collapses under the pressure of the racial gaze. As Frantz Fanon argues in *Black Skin, White Masks*, the colonised subject internalises the oppressor’s view of him, experiencing himself as a thing under the white gaze (Fanon 109). Bigger’s fear is precisely this: the terror of being seen only through the lens of white power.

The aftermath of Mary’s death reveals how systemic racism transforms private panic into public spectacle. The white press, the police, and the courts unite to construct Bigger as the archetypal Black criminal. Newspapers headline him as “Black Beast Kills Heiress,” converting individual tragedy into racial propaganda. Wright notes: “They wrote his name as if it were a curse, as if every Negro in the city had conspired with him” (*Native Son* 247). Through this manipulation, trauma expands beyond Bigger to engulf an entire community, reinforcing collective subjugation. The racial system thrives on fear — both the fear imposed on Blacks and the fear projected by whites. The trial scenes in *Native Son* illustrate the institutional machinery that sustains racism. The prosecutor’s

speech is less about justice than about protecting white innocence: “We must not let fear destroy the order of our society” (Native Son 364).

This “order” is one built upon Black suffering. Even Max’s sympathetic defence cannot escape the system’s confines, as Bigger himself admits: “He talks like he knows me, but he don’t. Nobody knows me” (Native Son 382). Here, Bigger articulates the depth of his alienation — not only from white society but also from the very language of justice. He becomes what LaCapra would call a figure trapped in “acting out,” unable to transcend the repetition of fear and violence (LaCapra 142). The social structure thus ensures that trauma perpetuates itself. Each act of state violence against a Black body becomes both a warning and a reinforcement of the racial hierarchy. Wright’s portrayal of systemic racism as the root of trauma links his work to Ndibe’s postcolonial vision: both depict societies that mutilate identity through institutionalised fear.

In the end, Bigger’s final words to Max encapsulate the tragic clarity that trauma sometimes yields: “What I killed for, I am! It must’ve been what I felt all the time” (Native Son 429).

This statement reveals the internalisation of violence, a recognition that the world has written his identity in blood. Bigger’s death thus becomes not redemption but revelation: that systemic racism breeds the very monstrosity it claims to destroy.

2.4 Resistance and the Search for Voice

Amidst pervasive violence and trauma, both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* also explore the possibility of resistance — not as grand revolution, but as small acts of speech, memory, and self-awareness that defy dehumanisation. The search for voice, however fragile, becomes an ethical necessity for survival.

In *Arrows of Rain*, resistance takes the form of storytelling. Bukuru's decision to speak, even after years of silence, transforms him from a passive witness to an active bearer of memory. His narrative to the journalist, despite being fragmented and often incoherent, represents an attempt to reclaim ownership of truth. He insists: "They have their stories, I have mine. And mine will live, even if my mouth is shut forever" (AOR 178). Through this declaration, Ndibe presents speech as moral resistance against the erasure imposed by the state. The act of telling itself becomes healing, though not complete. As Cathy Caruth suggests, trauma's truth lies not in the event but in its retelling — in the attempt to articulate what was once unspeakable (Caruth 11). Bukuru's story, then, stands as testimony, bridging the gap between silence and speech.

Similarly, *Native Son* ends with a moment of recognition that, though tragic, marks the beginning of consciousness. Bigger's dialogue with Max before his execution reveals a flicker of self-understanding: "I didn't want to kill. But what I killed for must've been good — something made me do it" (Native Son 429). This statement is often misread as justification, but it signifies awakening, the realisation that his violence was shaped by forces beyond his control. In acknowledging this, Bigger achieves a

limited form of agency: the ability to see himself not merely as a victim but as a product of systemic oppression.

Resistance in both novels thus operates through awareness. Bukuru's speech and Bigger's final words represent moments of consciousness within systems that seek to erase individuality. Both characters reclaim, however briefly, their right to interpret their own lives. Moreover, both writers imply that storytelling itself can serve as collective resistance. Ndibe's journalist functions as an intermediary who carries Bukuru's voice into the public sphere, while Wright's novel as a whole becomes an act of witness, compelling readers to confront the psychological consequences of racism. Literature, therefore, becomes an archive of trauma and a medium of defiance.

By juxtaposing these texts, the study reveals that trauma does not end with despair. It opens a space, however narrow, for moral reckoning and self-assertion. Ndibe's Bukuru and Wright's Bigger stand on opposite sides of the Atlantic but share the same struggle: to speak, to be heard, and to exist as human beings in worlds designed to silence them.

CHAPTER THREE

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF TRAUMA AND IDENTITY CRISIS IN *ARROWS OF RAIN AND NATIVE SON*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comparative analysis of the representation of trauma and identity crisis in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Both novels depict societies shaped by structural violence — one by the postcolonial military dictatorship of Nigeria, the other by the institutionalised racism of the United States. The protagonists, Bukuru and Bigger Thomas, experience trauma as both a personal and collective condition that destabilises their sense of self. While their experiences differ in context, the study finds shared psychological patterns such as fear, alienation, silence, and dislocation, that define their struggle for identity. The analysis also reveals how each author uses narrative form, symbolism, and characterisation to represent trauma's impact on the individual and society. By placing these two works in conversation, the study

illuminates the universality of trauma as a human condition and its dependence on the politics of memory and power.

3.2 Trauma and Fragmented Identity

Trauma in both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* destroys the coherence of self. It shatters identity into fragments that cannot easily be reassembled. In Ndibe's work, Bukuru's identity is fractured by guilt and the oppressive silence enforced by the state. His life becomes a cycle of repression and recollection, where memories of Iyese's death haunt him like ghosts. He confesses: "There are nights when I hear her voice calling from the waves. I know she is gone, but she comes to me, asking the same question my tongue cannot answer" (AOR 128). This memory encapsulates what Freud describes as repetition compulsion, that is, the involuntary return of traumatic experience in distorted or partial form (Freud 21). Bukuru's mind oscillates between remembering and forgetting, unable to reconcile the past with the present. His loss of voice is not simply fear but a symptom of psychological collapse.

In Wright's *Native Son*, Bigger's identity fragmentation emerges from his internalisation of racial stereotypes. From the outset, he views himself through the eyes of white society, dangerous, inadequate, and doomed. This internalised gaze becomes his mirror, erasing any stable self-image. After killing Mary, he experiences a strange sense of clarity: "For the first time in his life, he felt he had done something that made him a man" (Native Son 105). This perverse feeling of empowerment exposes the extent of his

psychological damage. Violence becomes the only language available to assert selfhood in a world that has denied him one. Yet this assertion is hollow, for it deepens his alienation.

In both novels, trauma manifests as disassociation, that is, a splitting of self into conflicting parts. Bukuru is torn between the witness who must speak and the fugitive who hides. Bigger is divided between the man who acts and the man who watches himself act. In both, the self is no longer unified but fractured by forces of oppression.

Judith Herman notes that trauma “shatters the sense of self that gives life meaning” (Herman 53). This observation is evident in both protagonists, who live as shadows of their former selves. Ndibe and Wright thus demonstrate that trauma is not only an emotional wound but a profound ontological crisis that dissolves identity.

3.3 Gender, Power, and the Politics of Suffering

Trauma in *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* is also mediated by gender. Both authors expose how power structures turn female suffering into spectacle and male suffering into violence. Iyese in *Arrows of Rain* and Mary Dalton in *Native Son* occupy similar narrative functions. Their deaths become catalysts for the male protagonists' confrontation with trauma.

In *Arrows of Rain*, Iyese's rape and murder symbolise the silencing of women's voices under patriarchy and dictatorship. She is doubly victimised, first by the General's sexual assault and then by society's refusal to speak her truth. Bukuru recalls: “She went

to them with her pain, and they called her mad. She begged for justice, and they told her to be quiet” (AOR 75). Iyese’s trauma becomes communal when her story is erased from public record, reflecting Spivak’s question, “Can the subaltern speak?” The answer, in Ndibe’s world, is no, not unless someone like Bukuru takes up her voice. Yet even then, his own trauma distorts the testimony, leaving her story half-told.

In *Native Son*, Mary Dalton’s death is not an act of misogyny alone but the result of a racial system that dehumanises both victim and perpetrator. Mary’s liberal curiosity about Bigger — her desire to treat him as “equal” — exposes the limits of white benevolence. Wright narrates: “She had touched him as though he were something strange, something unreal” (Native Son 84). Her touch provokes in Bigger both attraction and terror. When she dies by his hand, her body becomes the site where racial and gender tensions converge. Critics like Trudier Harris have noted that Wright’s portrayal of women often reflects masculine anxiety, yet her observation also underscores how female suffering exposes the psychic cost of racial hierarchy (Harris 72).

In both texts, women’s bodies become repositories of collective trauma. Iyese’s rape and Mary’s death are not merely personal tragedies but symbolic reenactments of historical oppression, the violation of nations, races, and identities. Ndibe and Wright thereby reveal that gendered violence functions as an instrument of political control, linking private suffering to public power.

3.4 Silence, Voice, and the Ethics of Testimony

Silence recurs in both novels as a central motif of trauma and resistance. It signifies both the impossibility of speech and the yearning for it. In *Arrows of Rain*, Bukuru's silence is initially an act of self-preservation. He withholds speech because words, in a corrupt society, have lost their meaning. Yet as the novel unfolds, his silence transforms into a form of resistance — a refusal to legitimise the state's false narrative. Ndibe portrays silence as layered: it can be imposed, chosen, or transcended. When Bukuru finally tells his story, he discovers that speech itself is another form of vulnerability. He laments: "They said I spoke too late, but what time is right for a man who has lost everything?" (AOR 191). This statement captures the paradox of testimony: speaking reopens wounds even as it attempts to heal them.

In *Native Son*, silence has a similar duality. Bigger's muteness in the face of white authority symbolises both fear and resistance. When he cannot answer Mrs. Dalton or the police, it is not merely cowardice; it is the psychological outcome of a lifetime of silencing. His later confession to Max functions as a kind of testimony, yet it is fragmented and incomplete: "I wanted to say something, but I didn't know what it was. It was like trying to shout through a wall" (Native Son 386). This inarticulacy mirrors what trauma theorists describe as the "failure of language" in the face of overwhelming experience (Caruth 6).

Both Ndibe and Wright confront the ethical dilemma of representation: how can trauma be told without falsifying it? Their protagonists speak, but their voices are cracked,

uncertain, and haunted by absence. Yet in that very fragility lies authenticity. The broken voice becomes the truest expression of suffering. Thus, silence and voice form a dialectic, one cannot exist without the other. The novels suggest that healing begins not when trauma is fully articulated, but when the struggle to speak is acknowledged as part of the human condition.

3.5 Memory and History

Memory in both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* operates as both witness and wound. It preserves what history seeks to erase, yet it also reopens the pain of what has been lost. In *Arrows of Rain*, the state attempts to rewrite history by erasing evidence of its crimes, but Bukuru's recollections resist this erasure. His fragmented memories become an alternative archive, one rooted in emotion rather than documentation. Ndibe writes: "The past does not die when you bury it. It hides under the soil, waiting for a restless hand to dig it up again" (AOR 167). This metaphor equates memory with excavation, suggesting that remembering is both painful and necessary.

In *Native Son*, memory functions differently. For Bigger, memory is not redemptive but oppressive. It binds him to a collective past of humiliation and fear. When he recalls his childhood encounters with white people, he says: "Every time I remember, my stomach turns. It's like I'm back there, small and scared again" (Native Son 53). Here, memory reproduces trauma rather than relieving it. Yet through the act of narration, Wright transforms this repetition into a political statement: the persistence of memory is

what exposes the endurance of racism. Both writers thus position memory as the moral backbone of their narratives. It is memory that enables testimony, resistance, and, ultimately, identity. Without memory, there can be no reckoning with history; without history, trauma remains invisible.

3.6 Comparative Summary

In summary, both *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* reveal that trauma operates as a bridge between individual and collective experience. Bukuru's suffering mirrors the corruption of the Nigerian postcolonial state, while Bigger's torment exposes the rot of American racial capitalism. Both protagonists embody what Dominick LaCapra calls "the oscillation between acting out and working through," as they struggle between paralysis and understanding (LaCapra 142).

While Ndibe situates trauma within political despotism and censorship, Wright anchors it in systemic racism and economic deprivation. Yet their thematic convergence lies in the portrayal of identity as unstable, fractured, and continually negotiated under pressure. Both authors also converge formally: fragmented narrative, recurring imagery, and silence as motif. Ndibe's Nigeria and Wright's Chicago are different worlds, yet both serve as laboratories of oppression where trauma becomes the defining language of existence. The comparison affirms that literature, across time and space, remains a crucial site for exploring how human beings survive, or fail to survive the violences of history.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY

4.1 Summary

This study set out to examine trauma and identity crisis in Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*. Both novels depict societies where individuals are caught in the machinery of systemic violence, one political and postcolonial, the other racial and capitalist. Through close reading and comparative analysis, the research revealed that trauma operates not as an isolated psychological wound but as a reflection of social disorder and moral decay.

Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* exposes how political corruption and military brutality reduce citizens to silence, stripping them of dignity and voice. Bukuru's fragmented testimony and recurring silence illustrate how trauma manifests as disjointed memory and

fractured identity. His struggle to speak becomes symbolic of a nation's fight to recover truth from the ruins of dictatorship. Wright's *Native Son*, on the other hand, presents systemic racism as the root of psychological and social trauma. Bigger Thomas, born into poverty and fear, embodies the alienation of an entire race confined by oppression. His violent outburst and eventual execution represent the cyclical nature of trauma under racial capitalism — a structure that criminalises Black identity while denying humanity.

Both writers use narrative fragmentation, silence, and symbolism to represent the psychological effects of oppression. In *Arrows of Rain*, disrupted chronology and Bukuru's internal monologue reflect trauma's intrusion into memory. In *Native Son*, Wright's use of stream-of-consciousness, repetition, and claustrophobic settings captures the suffocation of racial trauma. The study also observed that trauma in both novels extends beyond the individual, entering collective consciousness. The silence of the Nigerian citizens mirrors the complicity and fear that enable tyranny, while the collective fear among African Americans reinforces racial hierarchy. In both societies, trauma becomes inherited, transmitted through memory, silence, and institutional violence.

Gender dynamics further complicate trauma representation in both texts. Iyese in *Arrows of Rain* and Mary Dalton in *Native Son* illustrate how women's bodies become sites of exploitation and silence. Their suffering not only triggers male trauma but also exposes the intersection of patriarchy with political and racial power. Ultimately, both Ndibe and Wright use trauma as a literary and moral framework to interrogate identity. Their protagonists' struggles reveal that the crisis of the self is inseparable from the

structures of domination. The study concludes that trauma in these novels is both personal and political, individual and communal, an enduring scar on societies that perpetuate violence as order.

The comparative study of Okey Ndibe's *Arrows of Rain* and Richard Wright's *Native Son* reveals that trauma and identity crisis are universal experiences produced by systemic injustice, whether political or racial. Both novels uncover the deep psychological wounds inflicted on individuals who live under oppressive regimes, and they show how these wounds destabilise the very notion of self.

In *Arrows of Rain*, trauma arises from political tyranny. The military regime embodies institutionalised violence, transforming truth into silence and citizens into voiceless subjects. Bukuru's story represents the moral collapse of postcolonial governance, where power is maintained through fear. His silence though initially imposed, becomes both symptom and resistance. The sea, a recurring image, symbolises memory's persistence despite erasure. Through Bukuru's fragmented recollections, Ndibe portrays trauma as the hidden history of the nation, demanding recognition even when suppressed.

In *Native Son*, Wright situates trauma within the American racial order. Bigger Thomas lives in a society that defines him before he can define himself. His fear of the white world shapes every action, and his eventual crime is the eruption of years of internalised oppression. Wright's Chicago is a psychological prison where the ghetto, the police, and the courtroom are extensions of the same structure. Bigger's tragedy lies in

his inability to articulate his humanity within a system that refuses to see it. His final conversation with Max signals both defeat and awakening, an awareness that the system, not his nature, produced his violence. Both authors therefore depict trauma as cyclical. on silence, injustice, and fear, reproducing itself across generations.

The protagonists are not merely individuals but representations of their societies' collective wounds. Ndibe's Nigeria and Wright's America are nations haunted by histories of domination: one by colonialism and dictatorship, the other by slavery and racial segregation. In each, trauma becomes a political tool of control, but also, paradoxically, a moral instrument of revelation. Narratively, both writers rely on fragmentation, repetition, and disrupted chronology to simulate the mental dislocation of trauma. Their storytelling mirrors the instability of memory and the impossibility of closure. Silence in both texts functions not as absence but as testimony, a way of speaking without words. The inability to narrate becomes itself a narrative, reflecting the limits of language in the face of horror.

The two novels also converge in their use of confession and testimony. Bukuru's narrative to the journalist and Bigger's dialogue with Max both serve as attempts to make meaning out of pain. Yet these acts of speech do not resolve trauma; they only reveal its endurance. Healing remains uncertain, but the act of telling asserts humanity in the face of erasure. Another significant convergence is the moral responsibility of witness. Ndibe and Wright do not present trauma merely for sympathy but for confrontation. They challenge readers to recognise complicity, the citizens who remain silent in Ndibe's

world, the white liberals who pretend innocence in Wright's. In this way, both writers turn literature into an ethical space where the suffering of others becomes a demand for accountability.

Despite their distinct settings, *Arrows of Rain* and *Native Son* arrive at a shared truth: that oppression, wherever it exists, is a factory of trauma. Both Bukuru and Bigger are trapped within systems that devalue human life, yet their fragmented voices endure as evidence against forgetting. Their stories remind us that trauma is not only personal but also historical and that nations, like individuals, carry scars that shape identity.

In conclusion, this study affirms that the exploration of trauma in literature is not solely a psychological exercise but a political act. Through the broken memories of Bukuru and Bigger, Ndibe and Wright compel us to see the hidden costs of injustice. They demonstrate that the struggle for identity begins with the courage to remember and the refusal to remain silent.

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