

**TRANSITION AND TRAUMA: THE CHANGING WORLDS OF CHIMAMANDA
ADICHIE'S *DREAM COUNT***

Marycynthia Ijeoma ODOH

Damilola Olawumi OWOEYE

Department of English and Literary Studies

Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper explores transition and trauma in Chimamanda Adichie's *Dream Count* and discusses how trauma impacts the inner and existential lives of four women. It considers a taxonomy of suffering that includes existential loneliness (Chiamaka), relational betrayal (Zikora), systemic hardship (Nafissatou), and ideological disillusionment (Omelogor). Through the lens of Cathy Caruth's attempts to theorize trauma and its ramifications, these readings support the arguments that trauma is both layered and an experience which disrupts and transforms someone on a deeply personal level but that trauma also has the capacity to create resilience. The fragmented, non-chronological narrative of the novel itself has also been taken to be a willful literary imitation of this jagged processing of memory and trauma. The collective trauma that serves as the backdrop for personal crisis and agonized overthinking about self-worth and connection is the COVID-19 pandemic. Restructuring intimacy, identity and knowledge through trauma so that female solidarity and forcibly reclaiming one's all Purpose becomes a pathway to resilience is yet another complexity and depth added to humanity in postcolonial and modern scholarship.

Keywords: Trauma, Transition, Identity, Trauma Theory, Feminist Critique

Introduction

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count* (2025) is an achingly beautiful literary meditation on fractured self, psychic tenuousness and the fragility of interpersonal connection in a globalized and post-pandemic world. While Adichie's earlier novels, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah*, center the historical conflict and diasporic negotiations of race, class, and belonging, *Dream Count* turns inward, inviting readers into the intimate emotional lives of four women whose lives fall apart due to personal, relational, and structural crises. The novel's COVID-19 temporality magnifies these affective breaks, creating what Cathy Caruth has termed an "epistemological crisis," whereby trauma fractures consciousness and cannot be directly represented linguistically (Caruth 4).

A productive function of trauma theory is to bring attention to that which exceeds the normal categories for processing experience. Caruth has been especially influential in defining trauma as an event that was never assimilated and thus "remains unavailable to consciousness," recurring,

instead, in symptoms, dreams, and temporal disruptions rather than in narrative (5). This is the lens through which *Dream Count* must be read, a novel in which the characters cope with symptoms of compulsive memory, withdrawal, hypervigilance, existential dread. Judith Herman further clarifies what is at stake in such suffering; complex trauma, particularly that from prolonged interpersonal betrayal, fundamentally alters identity, trust, and one's ability to relate (53). Her characters are indicative of this fragmentation. Chiamaka's isolation, Zikora's betrayals, Omelogor's disillusionment, and Nafissatou's victimization by institutions all show trauma as a rupture in established systems of meaning, resulting in a fragmented self-struggling to reconstitute itself.

At the same time, *Dream Count* interrogates transitions, psychological, emotional, geographical and ideological, that occur on the other side of a traumatic rupture. The characters move from disconnectedness to tentative connection, from emotional numbness to vulnerability, from corporate performance to intellectual honesty. These transitions are not smooth or linear but painful negotiations of the residues of trauma.

Through the internalization of the pandemic experience and the inevitable shattering of the false sense of stability, the story reveals how trauma propels one into liminal spaces that require a reworking of identity.

Also, Adichie's transition from themes of collective historical trauma in *Half of a Yellow Sun* to relational and systemic trauma in her later work marks a shift in the politics of representing African subjectivity within a globalized framework. De Mey writes that narration and testimony are integral to overcoming the silencing force of trauma (38), and Adichie's characters search for meaning in memory, conversation, and vulnerability with one another in a similar way.

This paper explores the relationship between trauma and transition in *Dream Count*, motivated by three goals: to consider how trauma appears within the text, to understand what causes this trauma and how traumatic rupture shifts the interiority of the characters' worlds. By deploying trauma theory and postcolonial feminist scholarship to frame Adichie's novel, the article's ultimate conclusion is that the contemporary African woman, as revealed in this novel, survives in a world of dread, of indeterminate possibility, and of tentative renewal.

Review of Literature: Trauma and Transition in Adichie's Works

The following analysis of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's engagement with fractured selves and psychic rupture is brought into conversation with relevant criticism of trauma transition, and psychological transformation. *Dream Count* is too new for critical parsing, but Adichie's previous novels, *Purple Hibiscus*, *Half of a Yellow Sun* and *Americanah* find a similar impulse toward the violent fracturing, disruption or rending of the characters' worlds. Getting acquainted with these frameworks sets the theoretical stage for approaching trauma and transition in *Dream Count*.

Trauma theory distinguishes between discrete, single events and the psychological effects that result from these (Type I trauma) and more chronic, repetitive, harm (Type II or complex trauma), each with varying effects on psychological life (Briere and Scott 15). Adichie fictions contain both of these types: Kambili, in *Purple Hibiscus*, suffers from structural domestic violence, and the characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* suffer from acute violent invasion on a background of chronic deprivation.

Relatedly, scholars point out the embodied nature of trauma, where traumatic memory is stored in the body rather than articulated through conscious, discursive means. The physical symptoms depicted by Adichie—Kambili's mutism, Olanna's paralysis, Ifemelu's depression—follow the clinical understanding of trauma as psychological and bodily.

Transitions magnify the impact of trauma. Gill further identifies periods of transition in identity as especially emotionally tumultuous and Miller points to how accumulated stress compounds individual susceptibility during transition (102). Relatedly, the experience of migration as a powerful psychological transition which Adichie's migrant characters undergo, and which specifically characterizes the experience of migration for Ifemelu, Ifemelu, the protagonist of *Americanah*, is that it destabilizes belonging, disrupts the continuity of culture, and necessitates the re-visioning of identity. Further, trauma suspends development, a point made in research on transitional-age youth (Frounfelker et al. 410) with parallels in the developmentally stunted characters who populate Adichie's coming-of-age narratives.

Thus, while trauma scholarship focuses on trauma, another body of literature focuses on resilience and post-traumatic growth. In an explicitly positive view of the psyche, Woolard suggests that people can find new sources of strength and capacities for meaning-making following trauma,

conditional upon being enabled to have agency and being in supportive relations. Adichie's fiction often dramatizes such processes: Kambili begins to heal through alternative family structures in Nsukka, characters in *Half of a Yellow Sun* find purpose through storytelling and communal solidarity, and Ifemelu reconstitutes voice and identity through creative expression.

There are many points of departure, but, that leave Western trauma models useful but incomplete. Much trauma scholarship is culturally narrow, failing to take into account collective trauma, postcolonial histories, or African sociocultural paradigms of healing. While Western paradigms center individual pathology, Adichie's narratives often contextualize trauma within larger collective, political, and historical frameworks. And while Adichie's work has received the attention of feminist and postcolonial analyses, few critics have approached her fiction through the lens of trauma theory specifically to look for insights in those domains of narrative, memory, and psychological interiority.

In sum, existing literature shows that trauma disrupts identity, embodiment, and relational life, and transitions can exacerbate these ruptures, or provide opportunities for redefinition. As these scholars' contributions show, much of Adichie's oeuvre is consistent with these findings while also pushing scholars to consider how postcolonial histories, collective memory, and culturally specific modes of resilience might usefully extend the field of trauma studies.

These frameworks serve as the groundwork for analysis into how trauma manifests, is embedded, and becomes transformational in the emotional and relational lives of the novel's female characters, as represented in *Dream Count*.

Methodology

This study employs the qualitative literary-critical method of close textual analysis. Since *Dream Count* (2025) has not yet accrued much scholarship, the analysis primarily depends on careful reading of the primary text itself in order to understand the ways in which trauma and transition function in narrative structure, imagery, and characterization. Focusing specifically on formal devices in the novels such as narrative fragmentation, non-linear time, dreams, and virtual spaces such as Zoom and WhatsApp, the analysis finds that each of these formal devices reflect the disorienting and emotionally splitting properties of trauma. The primary theorist whose work I draw on in this project is trauma theorist Cathy Caruth and in particular her theorization of trauma

as an event that cannot be assimilated and thus, is in the belated experience. This perspective is useful for placing the narrative itself within the characters' painful reality of intrusive memory, emotional blunting and warped time. It also takes note of the gendering of the traumatization process and cultural paradigms of womanhood and of interpersonal connection and care affect the impact of psychological diagnoses and the act and culture of seeking help and receiving psychological treatment. The characters' experience with and response to trauma. Following all formal analysis, a content analysis is conducted about the types of trauma found in the novel, relational, cultural, and structural trauma, the results of which are theoretically analyzed in the following sections. The paper offers a finely tuned reading of the articulation of trauma and transition, which is provided in *Dream Count* based on close reading and minimal theorization.

Theoretical Framework

This study is theoretically based in trauma theory, in particular in the seminal work of Cathy Caruth articulation of trauma as what derealizes and floods consciousness.

For Caruth, a traumatic experience is one that has not been "assimilated" by the mind and thus returns afterwards as intrusive memories, repetitions, and disturbances of time (4-6). This frame is particularly fruitful in understanding the modes of psychological dislocation, for example between traditional... that permeates *Dream Count* wherein, rather than a single traumatic event, characters are traumatized by a schism that perseverates in dreams, virtual correspondence, and fragmented memories.

Caruth's model explains the way that the disjunctive, non-linear novelistic form is in fact a reflected by the collapsing of time within characters' intra character wars. To explore the relational and interpersonal aspects of trauma foregrounded by the novel I turn to Judith Herman's Complex Trauma theory. Herman sees longterm betrayal, coercion or emotional abandonment as seriously damaging the capacity for trust, for relationship functioning and in general the capacities that are integral to the formation of selfhood (53-59). This framework emerges as integral not only to the emotional devastation of Zikora and Omelogor, but whose traumas begin in close ruptures, in conflict with mothers, and extreme forms of personal disillusionment.

Herman's focus on the injury of disconnection and the difficult path toward reconnection provides a lens through which to examine these characters' responses to betrayal and isolation.

Since *Dream Count* places trauma within larger social and structural contexts, the analysis also incorporates work on systemic and historical trauma. Nafissatou's story in particular is about how personal pain collides with class hierarchy, misogyny and institutional failure. Also, African trauma studies foreground the "culture of silence and shame" that often characterizes conversations around sexual violence and emotional vulnerability (Ahmed 66), which sheds light on the initial difficulty characters experience when they attempt to articulate their experiences.

Combined, these three theoretical standpoints present a psychoanalytic, relational, and structural framework by which to understand the novel's articulation of trauma and transition. They show how Adichie portrays trauma as an internal psychological rupture as well as a psycho-social condition mediated by gender, migration, institutional authority, and structural inequality.

Discussion

Manifestations of Trauma in *Dream Count*

In Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Dream Count* trauma is conceived not as a catastrophic singularity but rather as a constellation of psychic injuries, affective disjunctions, and relational ruptures that accrue over time and permeate the quotidian world. The novel charts the inner lives of its four main women, Chiamaka, Zikora, Omelogor and Nafissatou; all have lives organized around memory and anxiety, around alienation and feeling untethered. In this regard, this section will examine the various forms of trauma experienced by the protagonists of these novels: psychological, somatic, relational and structural suffering.

Chiamaka: Isolation, Bodily Inscription, and the Trauma of Disconnection.

Chiamaka's interior world is emotional shutdown and loneliness, exacerbated by the isolating circumstances of the pandemic and the way digital connection was not able to heal ruptured relationships. Her trauma comes not from spectacular violence, but from chronic emotional deprivation, "the slowly accumulating stress of not being heard," as the psychologist James Pennebaker puts it. "I have always wanted to be known, truly known, by another human being," she writes early in the novel (3). This statement is a lifelong psychological scar created by the process of alienation and by the absence of someone actually wanting him or loving him. Chiamaka's longing here points to a late coming awareness of harm, how too late one can know the value of having been seen, how living without it is itself a kind of harm.

Ironically, during virtual family gatherings she feels even more disconnected, as the emotional absence is amplified. She writes, "At the end of each Zoom call, I felt lonelier than I had been before, not because the call had ended, but because it had been" (4). What should connect instead amplifies distance. Relatedly, Sherry Turkle notes that we are "alone together" and while technology "intimacy" is promised, what is produced is "the illusion of connection" (154).

Trauma also inscribes itself somatically, and appears at moments when Chiamaka's body registers anxiety that her conscious mind has not yet articulated. She describes pressing her palm to her chest during a period of rising dread: She writes, "I pressed my palm to my chest and held it there... frightened of them, their unusual boldness, as though my world were about to be overrun not just by deer but by other lurking creatures" (5). Nature itself is the uncanny, a reflection of trauma's perceived world. Bessel van der Kolk writes, "the body keeps the score"; traumatic memory resides in the body's automatic reactions before it is conscious (53). The early description of this body-embeddedness in the novel makes explicit this persistence: "sadness had crawled up her chest" (21) is a visceral metaphor that reflects van der Kolk's claim that emotions are for individuals who have survived trauma experienced as an intruding physical sensation rather than as a natural occurrence.

Chiamaka's failure to articulate her feelings, her experience of words "dying in her throat" (25), is also indicative of the silencing force of trauma.

The silence is not a choice, but forced by psychic overload. Herman writes that "traumatic events are almost impossible to put into words," as they defy the normal order of understanding (1). Chiamaka's silence is not only a marker of trauma, it is also suggestive of the fact that the mind is attempting to find a linguistic vehicle for intolerable affect.

Zikora: Betrayal Trauma and the Collapse of Relational Trust

It is proximity and intimacy that provide the psychological rupture for Zikora; her injury is the disrupted attachment that Herman identifies as "the fundamental trauma" (55). The cruel abandonment by her boyfriend, her mother's judgment, doubles the wound to her relational security.

Similarly, Jennifer Freyd, who has developed a theory of betrayal trauma, explains that "betrayals by those we depend on can have especially toxic effects since they require those who are betrayed

to dissociate knowledge of the betrayal in order to sustain the relationship” (8). Zikora has a similar experience, where her expectations about who will help her and support her lead to harm and she becomes alienated and unable to trust her own reality.

This internalized sense of dehumanization is Zikora’s own injury, and the novel reveals the extent of it. She remembers feeling “like a piece of garbage, drained of value” (37). This metaphor encapsulates the “dehumanizing” nature of betrayal that Herman describes, in which the survivor begins to see herself as the betraying others view her (56). Zikora’s identity has become linked to abandonment, her selfhood collapsed into the simple fact of her rejection.

Zikora’s difficulty in articulating her disappointment, her assertion that “the words curled back inside her” (39), also conveys this linguistic trauma. As Dori Laub observes, trauma engenders “an event without a witness,” in which survivors have difficulty testifying even to themselves about what has transpired (75). Zikora’s internal monologue is recursive, ruminative, and self-silencing in this way as well. The bathroom is a liminal space in which the carefully curated performance of normalcy comes undone, if only for a moment.

Omelogor: Disillusionment, Identity Fragmentation, and Existential Exhaustion

Omelogor is a traumatized subjectivity formed through aspiration, corporate pressure, and identity dislocation, a sort of suffering that Lauren Berlant calls “slow death”, the cumulative erosions of everyday emotional labor under conditions of precarity (754) . Unlike narratives of trauma that center specific acts of violence, Omelogor’s crisis is a chronic, ongoing experience of institutional apathy and professional disillusionment. Arlie Hochschild’s concept of “emotional labor” helps elucidate Omelogor’s plight; the constant management of feeling required by service work and corporate culture exacts a psychological toll that can no longer be borne over time (7). Omelogor’s existential numbness is articulated when she reflects that “She felt hollowed out, as though her life had been emptied of meaning” (55).

Hollowness is the feeling of absence of self and meaning through complex trauma. Her confession that “she no longer recognized the woman in the mirror” suggests an alienation of identity; the subject sees herself as other (57). In this moment of misunderstanding, we see what Caruth defines as “the splitting of the self” that occurs when a traumatic event cannot be processed and within a particular structure of meaning.

It was a Zoom-meeting crying scene her tears fell silently as she stared at the screen, the digital trauma of loneliness, workplace alienation and pandemic pressure. This moment reveals the feeling for what Herman calls the sense of being trapped those survivors have: Omelogor cannot disconnect from the work she is overworked yet is equally incapable of performing the work she must do to be competent.

Nafissatou: Systemic Violence, Social Betrayal, and the Trauma of Injustice

Nafissatou's story is one of structural and legal betrayal. Her experience, not an isolated one, formed a web of gendered violence, inequality and bureaucratic failure. Nafissatou's trauma, unlike the emotional and relational pain experienced by the other protagonists, originates in her encounter with a justice system that denies her humanity. Her understanding that justice was not built for women like her is a psychic break, the moment the world itself becomes unsafe (78). Herman notes that "the sense of safety in the world, or even in a safe place in it, is lost" for survivors of systemic trauma (51).

Her trauma recurs as fear: "Nafissatou kept waking at night, her breath shallow with panic" (80). This constant hyper vigilance is consistent with Herman's point that the ongoing fear felt by victims of systemic violence comes from the fact that the threat "is not an individual but an entire sociopolitical structure" (88). She also notes that "the shame clung to her skin" (82). African trauma specialists have observed the gendered and racialized nature of shame, leading Ahmed to write of a "double burden of harm and silence" (66).

Her repeated cry, "He will send people to kill me!" each time collapsing the temporal borders which might separate a survivor from the experience of trauma, reveals the persistent hallucinatory aspect of trauma (10). Caruth notes that trauma consists of "the inability to escape repetition" (63). Nafissatou's fear is real, in the sense that retaliation is a very real threat, and also symptomatic of trauma's collapsing of time. Her rejection of therapy, saying "I cannot talk to stranger" (10) reflects both trauma's inability to be contained within narrative form and the cultural stigma surrounding mental health.

Factors Responsible for Trauma in Dream Count

Trauma in *Dream Count* thus does not occur as an accidental rupture, but is the result of intersecting emotional, relational, cultural, and structural forces that overwhelm the characters' ability to maintain stability. Herman claims that "trauma can only be understood in the social context that shapes the perpetrator, the victim, and the societal response" (9). This section looks at what was traumatic in each of the characters individual lives, how larger social and cultural formations and thus individual pain were created large scale social, economic and cultural formations.

Chiamaka: Emotional Isolation, Pandemic Loneliness, and Fear of Vulnerability

Chiamaka's trauma is layered, physical isolation during the pandemic but also deeply emotional avoidance. She writes that long before the lockdown she had "built a wall around her heart" (23), a defense against disappointment that becomes injurious. During the pandemic this emotional architecture breaks down and her loneliness has a somatic weight; she "felt sadness crawl up her chest like a slow-moving animal." 21). Van der Kolk remarks, "trauma is not just an event that took place sometime in the past; it is also the imprint left by that experience on mind, brain, and body" (21) and Chiamaka's somatic experience is writ in this layering; past injuries flood the present via sensation.

Her silence is salt to his wound. When she tries to voice her feelings "her words died in her throat" 25. Years of repressed feeling become psychic paralysis. Later, when her affair with Darnell sours, she must face the truth she has been deferring: "We are in love and then we are not in love. Where does love go when we stop loving?" (62).

Her suffering is fuzzy and social. She is reminded of the crime of being single by family and peers. Her aunt tells her that without marriage and children 'your life will just feel empty and meaningless' 62. This private desire becomes a public failure through these gendered expectations, further exacerbating her vulnerability. Her trauma is intimacy, emotional self-silencing, cultural monitoring of women's happiness, and the loneliness of lockdown.

Zikora: Maternal Rejection, Romantic Betrayal, and Intergenerational Shame

Zikora's trauma is rupture, rupture of trust in romance and maternal emotional austerity and patriarchal cultural codes. Her partner Kwame's withdrawal, "his face...went still" at the news of her pregnancy (125), accelerates her psychic disintegration. She imagined her life in stages: "a lucrative and prestigious job, then a splashy Catholic wedding, followed by two children" (109). The imagined future that she loses is something she is unprepared for and it fractures her identity and brings her sorrow.

Labor and abandonment are that trauma fused. She gives birth alone, waits obsessively for a Kwame's reply: "She sent another text: Your son... and then she knew that he had just" blocked her number" (142). The blocking is a form of symbolic deletion or denial of acknowledgment that itself exacerbates the physical and mental suffering of parturition. Freyd has argued that betrayal trauma is so damaging in part because it is "a violation of trust by someone on whom the victim depends." (22).

She is also culturally shamed. She fears exposure; she is haunted by "the monster of shame" (130) and paranoid that "everybody knew" she had been abandoned (130). Brené Brown, for example defines shame as "the intensely painful feeling or experience of believing that we are flawed and" therefore unworthy of love and belonging" (69) and Zikora internalizes this belief through cultural messages about single motherhood and female propriety. Her trauma is romanticized through betrayal, maternal emotional coldness, patriarchal stigma, and pattern of silence passed down through generations.

Omelogor: Capitalist Burnout, Identity Performance, and Emotional Overextension

Omelogor's trauma is depletion rather than cataclysm. Her breakdown is documented in her admission to feeling "hollowed out, as though her life had been emptied of meaning" (55). Years of hyper-performance in corporate and social spheres splinter her identity: "She no longer recognized the woman in the mirror" (57). The pandemic exacerbates this fissure by collapsing the public and the private.

Her tears streamed silently as she looked at the screen on a zoom call, illustrating how the culture of digital surveillance converts emotional collapse into a sort of invisible spectacle. And of course,

her suffering occurs in the shadow of an existential crisis, the pandemic. Terror has a new meaning that cannot be shaken from the news of the virus. The world was splintering and fracturing from an out of season peak. The trauma is not personal but atmospheric, a generalized anxiety and instability based on geopolitics. Extending this concept, Franco Berardi argues that late capitalism creates “semiocapitalist pathologies” of constant connection and the destruction of rest that manifest in rampant burnout and affective depletion.

Omelogor’s traumas are capitalist overwork and alienation from self, emotional labor overload and dehumanization through digital interaction, and the fraughtness of pandemic time. She knows, but cannot find her way out of, her unhappiness, trapped in Berlantian cruel optimism in which attachment to and desire for normative success prevent flourishing (2).

Nafissatou: Structural Oppression, Gender-Based Injustice, and Institutional Betrayal

Nafissatou’s trauma is perhaps the most brutal revelation of systemic violence in this novel.

Her rape by a French VIP “he did not think of her as a person... she was a thing, a thing to own and invade and discard” (203) shows that trauma is political and institutional, not only psychological.

Then comes the institutional betrayal as the prosecutor attacks her credibility, suggesting that her request for a translator means she is making things up (223). The law becomes a means of violation rather than a place of protection. Herman notes that “the law is there to protect men from the might of the state but not to protect women or children from the might of men” (72). Public shaming adds an injury on top of injury. Media narratives make her a spectacle: a newspaper headline labels her a “PROSTITUTE” (230). She knows “she would never wash off this stain of shame”. Threatening letters, journalists descending on her village, threats to her life: “He will send people to kill me!” (221) produce a trauma stemming from structural injustice, misogyny, class vulnerability, and lack of state protection. Nafissatou is further marginalized along the multiple axes of her gender, race, class, and immigration status, as intersectionality theory would suggest, as Crenshaw (1244) has shed light on.

Nafissatou’s story reflects trauma as a social injury, produced by institutional misogyny, cultural shame, and structural power inequalities that rob poor women of safety, dignity, and voice. Her trauma reveals, too, how individual pain cannot be separated from structural conditions, how

violence is reproduced through the legal system and media representation, through economic markets and cultural narratives that deny certain women the ability to be credible witnesses to their own lives.

How Trauma Transforms the Worlds of the Characters in *Dream Count*

In *Dream Count* trauma is not only static but also reconstitutes the affective, psychological, and relational realities of the four women pushing each into different ways of seeing, being, and knowing the self and community. Consistent with Caruth's theorization of trauma as an "unclaimed experience"—an experience that continues to vibrate until it is brought to consciousness (4–6)—Adichie also depicts trauma as simultaneously destabilizing and generative, shattering previously known identities but also tentatively creating new pathways to the self and the possibility of ethical regeneration. Here, the paper explores how trauma alters the worlds of each protagonist.

Chiamaka: From Structured Emotional Distance to Painful Self-Confrontation

Chiamaka's world, at the novel's beginning, is one of emotional restraint and self-protective distance. Underneath this structure but is a longing, 'for what I then did not know as the splendence of being truly known,' unspent (35). Darnell is the unstable emotional architecture that Dark is; her relationship with Darnell points toward this instability. She acknowledges having "held on for so long" even when the relationship was hollow, until "letting go... mystery dissolves to dust" (62). Trauma shatters her sense of control.

The pandemic accelerates this unraveling. Lockdown suspends her temporally: "I felt trapped in my house, with the sensation of my days being erased" (349). The learned tactics of emotional detachment and internal privacy crumble in the face of separation of several years. She is painfully turned inward, a turn which leads to her realization that "the world has changed and you look back to take stock of how you've lived" (386).

Trauma flips this world, from dependency to relational resilience, as her ability to define and control her own emotional experience is restored. Herman underscores that, "the fundamental human experiences that are at the heart of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others" and, "recovery from trauma depends...upon the empowerment of the

survivor and the creation of new connections” (133). Trauma redirects her from avoiding feeling to facing herself, a grueling but necessary re-orientation toward vulnerability and relational truth.

Herman notes that trauma recovery requires “the survivor to reconstruct the trauma story” in a way that incorporates, rather than dissociates, painful experience (175), and Chiamaka begins this process by naming what she has lost and what she desires.

Zikora: From Silent Endurance to Emotional Recognition and Self-Awareness

Zikora’s inner landscape is violently ruptured by betrayal and abandonment. “a splashy Catholic wedding... followed shortly by two” children” (109)—crumbles when, while pregnant, Kwame disappears on her. As she awaits his response in labor, her world contracts into terror and disbelief: “Your son...he weighs 6 pounds 13 ounces” (142), then the shock of being blocked. Trauma undoes her romantic certainties and destabilizes her sense of selfworth.

But this collapse creates transformation. She is haunted by “the paranoia of the abandoned” (130) but, through mothering and her relationship with her child, she reconstructs meaning. At the conclusion of the novel she professes, “You don’t know love until you have loved your child... I don’t know what I would have done without my mother” (386). Here we see a radical change from the centrality of identity and worth derived from romantic love to maternal and filial love as central, anchoring relationships.

Trauma reorients her world from dependency to relational resilience as her ability to define and control her own emotional experience is restored. Herman stresses that, “the fundamental human experiences that are at the heart of psychological trauma are disempowerment and disconnection from others,” and that, “recovery from trauma depends...upon the empowerment of the survivor and the creation of new connections” (133).

Omelogor: From Corporate Perfectionism to Ethical and Existential Reorientation

Omelogor’s transformation takes place less through individual crisis than through collective disillusionment with increased scale by collective catastrophe. Like her internal collapse, she realises as the pandemic spreads that “the world was splintering and fracturing” (351).

This reckoning is compounded by the injustice of Nafissatou and the moral poverty and Americans’ addiction to celebrity that is her company’s success. Instead, she communalizes her

life. Omelgor does this. She writes simply, ‘God blesses me and I want to bless women... help another woman when you can’ (310-311). Trauma shifts her orientation from achievement to ethics, the lived experience of supporting Herman’s argument that recovery is the project of reconstructing the lived experience of social relationships and moral engagement (196). She must also confront what Hochschild calls “the colonized self,” the part of us that has the corporate values that deny authentic feeling (198). Omelgor begins to differentiate personal from professional aspirations people expect him to have. Lorde calls this ‘the transformation of silence into language and action’ (40) growing interest on her part to women’s collective solidarity, the rejection of isolationism for collective fight and support.

Nafissatou’s world is torn apart by sexual violence and institutional betrayal. She is dehumanized, rendered ‘a thing, a thing to own and invade and discard.’ The law, she writes, heaps injury upon injury until she feels that “like a condemned dog...her life would never be the same” (213). Public humiliation follows: “PROSTITUTE” blares in the news (230), and her social life reduces to stigma and fear.

By the time they are finally dropped (387) the damage has been done. But in sustaining and bonding, there is transformation. Chiamaka watches “Nafi unfurl, a woman becoming anew before my eyes” (391). Such a becoming anew does not erase trauma, but folds it into a new self and world. Nafissatou’s pre-trauma world is one of faith in institutions, post-trauma her world shifts to survival, womanly solidarity and the slow road to dignity.

Nafissatou’s transformation also includes what Herman describes as a “reconnection” to ordinary life and community (196). And she remakes connections that acknowledge her value, though institutions do not. Her healing, this novel implies, depends upon being seen, believed and validated, specifically by other women, by women who believe her story.

Also, her experience produces what Crenshaw has described their experience as intersectional consciousness, understanding of multiple systems of oppression and its portraiture of individual lives” (1245). Nafissatou narrates her pain not as individual pathology but as structural injustice perfectly predictable at intersections of racism, sexism, classism and xenophobia. But this awareness is excruciating but also an awakening; it allows her to shed shame and lay blame where it belongs.”

Conclusion

Dream Count is a transition moment for Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as she shifts from macro traumatic conflict narratives to micro cartographies of emotional and interpersonal suffering. This study argues that Adichie's shift is not a depoliticization of her work, but an expansion of the political, to include the slow violence of pandemic isolation, capitalist exhaustion and institutional abandonment. Building upon the articulation of Caruthian unassimilated memory and Herman's account of complex relational injury, the analysis pushes further into the novel in order to arrive at an understanding of how that novelist delineates the traumatic event as a catastrophic restructuring of identity and agency. Tellingly, the story itself deploys a multiaxial representational strategy: trauma emerges in Chiamaka's physical paralysis, Zikora's emotional explosions, Omelogor's existential burnout, and Nafissatou's hypervigilance.

In the narrative, these states become activated as instruments for making the "invisible" suffering of these women, who are positioned as outsiders/less than, visible. Most significantly, the present study contends that *Dream Count* embeds trauma in structural precarity, from patriarchal shame to digital mediation (the alone together phenomenon) to systemic racism. Rejecting redemptive tropes of "overcoming," Adichie depicts transformation as a painful and provisional disrupting and reorienting of one's ethics. Finally, the novel adds to trauma studies in a specific way by focussing on the African female experience within a globalized and digitized framework. It means that recovery is not individual heroic labor but collectively reconstructing meaning. In this manner Adichie is implicitly critiquing the moving importation of these traumatized narratives from the West and her novel creates a trauma reflective space of resilience as resistance and rooted in collective action and dignity restored in systemically destroyed space.

Recommendations for Further Studies

Based on the research findings, the recommendations are:

1. For future scholarship to attempt to build towards African women's literature as much as modern texts, the juxtaposition of personal trauma in *Dream Count* and historical collective trauma in *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

2. Future work will consider how the narrative strategies that Adichie employs are multilingual at multiple scales of violence, and a more nuanced understanding of trauma.
3. Another thematically similar text is *Dream Count*, which falls within the larger framework of African women's writing, linking to writers like Tsitsi Dangaremba and Yaa Gyasi.
4. The effect of digital communication on the storytelling of traumatic narratives in Africa Genre, perhaps especially in view of the pandemic, should be researched.

Works Cited

- Adichie, Chimamanda Ngozi. *Dream Count*. Fourth Estate, 2025.
- Ahmed, Sara. *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.
- _____. *The Promise of Happiness*. Duke University Press, 2010.
- Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. The New Press, 2010.
- Bell, Emma. "Pandemic Precarity: COVID-19 and the Intensification of Women's Vulnerabilities." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2021, pp. 133-148.
- Benjamin, Jessica. *The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination*. Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Berardi, Franco "Bifo". *The Soul at Work: From Alienation to Autonomy*. Semiotext(e), 2009.
- Berlant, Lauren. *Cruel Optimism*. Duke University Press, 2011.
- _____. "Slow Death (Sovereignty, Obesity, Lateral Agency)." *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 33, no. 4, 2007, pp. 754-780.
- Bolaji. Doctoral research on migration trauma and transition to adulthood in African asylum-seeking and refugee care leavers. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, 2025.
- Bowlby, John. *Attachment and Loss, Vol. 1: Attachment*. Basic Books, 1969.
- Briere, J., and C. Scott. *Principles of Trauma Therapy: A Guide to Symptoms, Evaluation, and Treatment*. Sage Publications, 2012.
- Brown, Brené. *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead*. Gotham Books, 2012.

- Butler, Judith. *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*. Verso, 2004.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Cheng, Anne Anlin. *The Melancholy of Race: Psychoanalysis, Assimilation, and Hidden Grief*. Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. University of California Press, 1978.
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. 2nd ed., Routledge, 2000.
- Crenshaw, Kimberlé. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color." *Stanford Law Review*, vol. 43, no. 6, 1991, pp. 1241-1299.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. *Depression: A Public Feeling*. Duke University Press, 2012.
- Davis, Angela Y. *Women, Race & Class*. Random House, 1981.
- De Mey, Marc. "Narrative and Testimony in Trauma Recovery." *Journal of Trauma Studies*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2019, pp. 35-48.
- Deer, Sarah. *The Beginning and End of Rape: Confronting Sexual Violence in Native America*. University of Minnesota Press, 2015.
- Erikson, Kai. "Notes on Trauma and Community." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, edited by Cathy Caruth, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 183-199.
- Fisher, Mark. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative?* Zero Books, 2009.
- Fraser, Nancy. "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation." *The Tanner Lectures on Human Values*, vol. 19, Stanford University, 1996, pp. 1-67.
- Freyd, Jennifer J. *Betrayal Trauma: The Logic of Forgetting Childhood Abuse*. Harvard University Press, 1996.
- Frounfelker, R., V. Vorhies Klodnick, K. T. Mueser, and S. Todd. "Trauma and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among Transition Age Youth with Serious Mental Health Conditions." *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 26, no. 3, 2013, pp. 409-412.
- Gill, S. "The Impact of Transitions and How to Cope with Them." *Cruse Scotland*, 10 Sept. 2021.
- Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*. Harvard University Press, 1982.

- Gobodo-Madikizela, Pumla. *A Human Being Died That Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness*. Houghton Mifflin, 2003.
- Goldman, Emma. "The Tragedy of Woman's Emancipation." *Anarchism and Other Essays*. Mother Earth Publishing Association, 1910, pp. 213-225.
- Han, Byung-Chul. *The Burnout Society*. Translated by Erik Butler, Stanford University Press, 2015.
- Herman, Judith. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "The Generation of Postmemory." *Poetics Today*, vol. 29, no. 1, 2008, pp. 103-128.
- Hite, Shere. *The Hite Report on Women and Love: A Cultural Revolution in Progress*. Knopf, 1987.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell. *The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling*. University of California Press, 1983.
- Honneth, Axel. *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*. Translated by Joel Anderson, MIT Press, 1995.
- Hooks, bell. *All About Love: New Visions*. William Morrow, 2000.
- _____. *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center*. South End Press, 1984.
- Janoff-Bulman, Ronnie. *Shattered Assumptions: Towards a New Psychology of Trauma*. Free Press, 1992.
- Klein, Naomi. *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*. Metropolitan Books, 2007.
- Kohut, Heinz. *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders*. University of Chicago Press, 1971.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Lacan, Jacques. "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience." *Écrits: A Selection*, translated by Alan Sheridan, W. W. Norton & Company, 1977, pp. 1-7.
- Laub, Dori. "Bearing Witness or the Vicissitudes of Listening." *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, edited by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Routledge, 1992, pp. 57-74.
- Lorde, Audre. "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action." *Sister Outsider: Essays*

- and Speeches, Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 40-44.
- . "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, Crossing Press, 1984, pp. 110-114.
- Luckhurst, Roger. *The Trauma Question*. Routledge, 2008.
- Lugones, María. "Toward a Decolonial Feminism." *Hypatia*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2010, pp. 742-759.
- Miller, G. A. "Stressful Life Events and Health Challenges: Towards a Prepared Psychology." *American Psychologist*, vol. 62, no. 2, 2007, pp. 101-115.
- Nussbaum, Martha C. *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Oyèwùmí, Oyèrónké. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.
- Parker, M. M., K. Hergenrather, Q. Smelser, and C. T. Kelly. "Exploring Child-Centered Play Therapy and Trauma: A Systematic Review of Literature." *International Journal of Play Therapy*, vol. 30, no. 1, 2021, pp. 2-17.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Pennebaker, James W. *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*. Guilford Press, 1990.
- Rich, Adrienne. *Of Woman Born: Motherhood as Experience and Institution*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1976.
- Sandoval, Chela. *Methodology of the Oppressed*. University of Minnesota Press, 2000.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford University Press, 1985.
- Scott, J., L. S. Jaber, and C. M. Rinaldi. "Trauma-Informed School Strategies for SEL and ACE Concerns During COVID-19." *Education Sciences*, vol. 11, no. 12, 2021, p. 796.
- Taylor, Charles. "The Politics of Recognition." *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp. 25-73.
- Tomkins, Silvan S. *Shame and Its Sisters: A Silvan Tomkins Reader*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, Duke University Press, 1995.
- Turkle, Sherry. *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other*. Basic Books, 2011.

van der Kolk, Bessel. *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. Viking, 2014.

Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.

Williams, Patricia J. *The Alchemy of Race and Rights*. Harvard University Press, 1991.

Woolard, A. "Experiencing Trauma Can Change Some People's Outlook on Life – Sometimes for the Better." *The Conversation*, 6 Apr. 2023.

Zuboff, Shoshana. *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power*. PublicAffairs, 2019.