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Full Length Research

War, Widowhood, and Womanhood: Feminist Trauma Theory in Selected Nigerian and South Sudanese Plays

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Abstract

This study examines the representation of war-induced trauma, widowhood, and womanhood in selected African dramatic texts, with particular reference to Nigerian and South Sudanese contexts. It is grounded in feminist trauma theory, supported by postcolonial feminist and performance-based critical frameworks, to investigate how theatre constructs and communicates women's experiences of armed conflict. The study is motivated by the recognition that war narratives in African literature often privilege masculine experiences while marginalising or oversimplifying women's psychological, emotional, and socio-political suffering. Using a qualitative textual analysis approach, the study closely reads Women of Owu alongside selected South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances. The analysis focuses on key thematic concerns, including psychological trauma, displacement, memory, silence, widowhood, gendered violence, and female resilience. The study draws on the theoretical insights of scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, and bell hooks to interpret trauma as both a psychological rupture and a socially constructed experience shaped by gender and power relations. Findings reveal that war disproportionately affects women, exposing them to layered forms of violence, including displacement, loss of spouses, sexual exploitation, and emotional fragmentation. Widowhood emerges as a central site of compounded trauma, often leading to social exclusion and economic vulnerability. However, the study also finds that women are not merely passive victims; they demonstrate resilience through collective solidarity, storytelling, memory preservation, and symbolic resistance within performance spaces. The study concludes that African theatre serves as a critical site for articulating suppressed gendered experiences of war, while feminist trauma theory provides an effective lens for uncovering the emotional and structural dimensions of violence. It further argues that comparative analysis of Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic traditions enriches understanding of how African women negotiate survival, identity, and agency in contexts of conflict.

Keywords: Feminist Trauma Theory, African drama, war, widowhood, womanhood, Nigerian theatre, South Sudanese performance, gender and conflict, trauma studies.

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

War and armed conflict have remained recurring realities within the socio-political history of Africa,

(Achankeng, 2013). Since the post-independence period, several African states have experienced civil wars, ethnic violence, insurgencies, military coups, and communal conflicts that have generated devastating humanitarian consequences. Scholars such as Paul Phiri (2023) and Athmania (2026) argue that the persistence of armed conflict in Africa is closely connected to colonial legacies, fragile state institutions, economic inequality, ethnic polarisation, struggles over political power, and natural resources. In many African societies, warfare has not merely destroyed physical infrastructure; it has also ruptured communal identities and destabilised gender relations, particularly affecting women and children who often bear the heaviest burdens of violent conflict. According to the United Nations (2015), contemporary armed conflicts increasingly target civilian populations rather than military actors, thereby exposing women to disproportionate forms of suffering and social vulnerability (UN Women, 2025; Bendavid et al., 2021; Etefa, 2019).

Women in conflict situations frequently become the primary victims of displacement, widowhood, sexual violence, and psychological trauma. Feminist scholars, such as Francis Ekevere, Ikere Eluzai, Cynthia Enloe, and Judith Herman, maintain that war intensifies patriarchal structures by transforming women's bodies into sites of violence, dominance, and symbolic conquest. During armed conflicts, women are often forced to flee their homes, become refugees, or live in internally displaced persons' camps where they encounter poverty, insecurity, and social exclusion. The death of husbands and male relatives equally subjects many women to widowhood, economic hardship, and oppressive cultural practices that further marginalise them within patriarchal societies. In several African communities, widowhood is not merely a personal loss but a socially regulated condition, characterised by stigmatisation, ritual cleansing, inheritance disputes, and economic deprivation (Eluzai et al., 2026; Bazugba et al., 2026; Ekevere et al., 2026; Enloe, 2000).

Beyond physical suffering, armed conflict leaves enduring psychological wounds on women. Trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth describe trauma as an overwhelming experience that resists direct representation yet continually returns through memory, silence, and fragmented narratives. Women who survive war frequently endure post-traumatic stress, grief, depression, fear, and emotional dislocation resulting from rape, loss of family members, forced migration, and exposure to violence. Such experiences often remain unspoken because patriarchal cultures suppress female voices and normalise women's suffering during and after war. Consequently, feminist trauma criticism seeks to recover these silenced experiences by examining how women negotiate pain, memory, and survival within oppressive socio-political contexts (Al Doory, 2018; Ahmad et al., 2023).

African theatre and drama have historically functioned as important cultural instruments for representing social realities, interrogating political violence, and articulating collective anxieties. The theatre possesses a unique capacity to dramatise human suffering through performance, dialogue, symbolism, and communal participation. African dramatists frequently employ the stage as a site of resistance, where marginalised voices challenge structures of domination and historical erasure. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, African theatre serves not merely as entertainment but as a medium for social consciousness and political transformation. Feminist literary discourse places particular significance on drama, as it enables the embodiment and public witnessing of women's experiences of war, displacement, and trauma. Through characterisation, ritual performances, lamentation, and symbolic representation, female dramatists and feminist-oriented playwrights expose the gendered dimensions of violence while simultaneously presenting women as agents of resilience and survival (Pineda, 2012; Dickson-Bonney & Oliver, 2023).

The history of Nigeria reveals multiple forms of conflict that have generated extensive trauma and social instability. The Nigerian Civil War (1967–1970), communal clashes, Niger Delta militancy, ethno-religious crises, and the Boko Haram insurgency have all produced devastating consequences for civilian populations. Abduction, rape, forced displacement, widowhood, and economic disempowerment have particularly impacted women. The Boko Haram conflict in Northern Nigeria, for instance, drew global attention following the abduction of schoolgirls in Chibok in 2014, highlighting the gendered nature of extremist violence. Nigerian playwrights and literary artists have therefore explored the emotional and social consequences of conflict on women, exposing how war transforms domestic spaces into arenas of suffering and resistance (Ukwen, 2015).

Similarly, South Sudan has experienced prolonged civil conflicts rooted in ethnic tensions, political rivalries, and struggles for state control. Following decades of war with Sudan and subsequent internal conflicts after independence in 2011, South Sudan became one of Africa's most fragile states. Reports from humanitarian organisations consistently indicate widespread displacement, sexual violence, famine, and psychological devastation among women and children. Women in South Sudanese communities frequently endure multiple layers of oppression arising from militarisation, patriarchal traditions, forced marriages, and wartime sexual exploitation. The experiences of South Sudanese women have consequently inspired refugee theatre, oral performances, documentary drama, and community-based storytelling that seek to preserve memory and advocate for healing and justice (Council on Foreign Relations, 2026; Bertelsmann 2024).

Kingdom and the suffering of women subjected to war, rape, enslavement, and widowhood. The play foregrounds female grief and collective trauma while interrogating the brutality of militarised masculinity. Similarly, *Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* dramatises the experiences of women involved in South Sudan's liberation struggles, exposing the emotional contradictions of nationalism, violence, and female endurance. South Sudanese refugee theatre further expands these representations by documenting the realities of displacement, survival, and communal memory among women affected by civil war. Together, these dramatic texts provide fertile grounds for examining how feminist trauma theory illuminates the intersections of war, widowhood, memory, and womanhood in African dramatic traditions.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

The representation of women in war narratives has frequently been limited to passive victimhood, reducing female characters to symbols of suffering without adequately exploring their psychological complexity, agency, and resistance. In many literary and dramatic works concerning African conflicts, scholarly attention has focused predominantly on political violence, nationalism, and military heroism, while the emotional and gendered consequences of war on women remain insufficiently examined. Consequently, the experiences of widows, displaced women, survivors of sexual violence, and traumatised mothers are often marginalised within critical discourse (Ekevere et al., 2026).

Existing studies on African war drama have largely concentrated on historical reconstruction, political criticism, and postcolonial nationalism, paying comparatively less attention to feminist trauma perspectives that foreground memory, silence, grief, and emotional survival. Although some scholarship exists on Nigerian war literature and South Sudanese conflict narratives, there remains a significant gap in comparative studies that examine how women's trauma is represented across both Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic traditions. Furthermore, previous analyses frequently overlook widowhood as a critical social condition shaped by patriarchal practices and wartime devastation.

Another major limitation within existing scholarship concerns the tendency to portray women solely as helpless victims rather than as individuals capable of resilience, negotiation, and resistance. Feminist trauma criticism emphasises that women's responses to violence are multidimensional and cannot be reduced to silence or helplessness alone. However, critical discussions often fail to interrogate how female characters reconstruct identity, preserve memory, and resist oppressive structures within post-war societies. This study, therefore, seeks to address these gaps by examining the representations of war-induced trauma, widowhood, and womanhood in selected Nigerian and South Sudanese plays through the lens of feminist trauma theory.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to examine representations of war-induced trauma, widowhood, and womanhood in selected Nigerian and South Sudanese plays using feminist trauma theory.

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine how war affects women psychologically and socially in the selected plays.
2. To analyse representations of widowhood and female loss in the texts.
3. To investigate women's resistance and survival strategies within conflict situations.
4. To compare feminist portrayals of trauma in Nigerian and South Sudanese drama.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How is war trauma represented among women in the selected plays?
2. How do the plays portray widowhood and loss?
3. What feminist concerns emerge from the texts?
4. How do women negotiate survival in conflict situations?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it contributes to the growing field of African feminist theatre studies by foregrounding women's experiences within war narratives. Through its comparative examination of Nigerian and South Sudanese drama, the study expands critical understanding of how African playwrights represent trauma, memory, displacement, widowhood, and female resilience. The research also contributes to trauma studies by applying feminist trauma theory to African dramatic texts, thereby extending trauma discourse beyond Eurocentric frameworks.

Additionally, the study enriches comparative African literary scholarship by creating a dialogue between West African and East African theatrical traditions. It further contributes to gender discourse by exposing the social and psychological consequences of patriarchy during armed conflict. Ultimately, the study demonstrates how theatre functions as a powerful medium for recovering silenced female experiences and advocating for social consciousness, healing, and gender justice.

of war, widowhood, trauma, and womanhood. The study primarily focuses on Women of Owu and Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms, along with selected South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances.

The study is limited to the analysis of representations of war-induced trauma, female suffering, widowhood, memory, and resistance. It does not attempt a comprehensive study of all African war literature or all feminist theories. Instead, emphasis is placed on how selected dramatic texts portray women's psychological and social experiences within conflict situations using feminist trauma theory and related feminist approaches.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Concept of Feminism

Feminism remains one of the most influential intellectual and socio-political movements concerned with the liberation of women from structures of patriarchy, marginalisation, and gender-based oppression. Broadly conceived, feminism interrogates unequal power relations between men and women while advocating social, political, economic, and cultural transformation that guarantees women's rights and human dignity. According to bell hooks, feminism is fundamentally "a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression" (hooks, 2000). This conceptualisation shifts feminism beyond antagonism toward men and instead positions it as a critical framework for dismantling oppressive structures that normalise female subjugation. Feminist discourse has, however, evolved into multiple ideological strands shaped by historical, cultural, racial, and geographical contexts. Among the most prominent feminist traditions relevant to this study are liberal feminism, radical feminism, African feminism, and womanism.

Liberal Feminism

Liberal feminism emerged from Enlightenment ideals emphasising equality, rationality, and individual rights. Liberal feminists argue that women's oppression results primarily from institutional barriers and discriminatory social practices that deny women equal access to education, political participation, employment, and legal rights. Early liberal feminist thinkers such as Mary Wollstonecraft advocated educational and civic equality for women, insisting that women possess the same rational capacities as men. In contemporary feminist theory, scholars such as Betty Friedan contend that patriarchal societies systematically confine women to domestic spaces while excluding them from public and intellectual participation (Das, 2025).

Within literary criticism, liberal feminism focuses on exposing inequalities in representation and advocating the visibility of women's voices in literature and culture. However, critics argue that liberal feminism often universalises women's experiences by emphasising gender equality without adequately considering race, class, colonialism, and cultural specificity. Chandra Talpade Mohanty criticises Western feminist universalism for homogenising Third World women and ignoring the socio-historical conditions shaping their oppression. In African societies marked by war, poverty, and postcolonial instability, liberal feminist assumptions about equality and individualism may therefore appear insufficient for addressing collective experiences of trauma and violence. Nevertheless, liberal feminism remains significant in its insistence on women's visibility, autonomy, and rights within patriarchal societies.

Radical Feminism

Radical feminism developed during the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, emphasising patriarchy as the fundamental structure of women's oppression. Radical feminists argue that male dominance permeates every aspect of social life, including sexuality, culture, politics, religion, and family institutions. Kate Millett, in *Sexual Politics* (1970), conceptualises patriarchy as a political system in which men exercise power over women through social and ideological control. Radical feminism therefore views violence against women, including rape, domestic abuse, and sexual exploitation, as mechanisms for maintaining patriarchal domination.

This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of war and armed conflict, where women's bodies frequently become symbolic battlefields. Feminist scholars such as Susan Brownmiller argue that rape during war is not accidental but a deliberate political strategy used to humiliate communities and reinforce masculine power. Radical feminist thought thus provides a useful framework for understanding how militarised violence reproduces patriarchal oppression within conflict zones. However, critics of radical feminism contend that its emphasis on patriarchy occasionally neglects other intersecting forms of oppression such as ethnicity, colonialism, and economic exploitation. Despite these criticisms, radical feminism remains valuable for analysing the gendered dimensions of violence represented in African war drama.

African Feminism

African feminism emerged as a response to the inadequacies of Western feminist theories in addressing African women's lived experiences. African feminist scholars argue that colonialism, communalism, tradition, race, and socio-economic instability significantly shape African women's realities. Consequently, African feminism seeks to articulate gender struggles within culturally specific African contexts rather than adopting Eurocentric assumptions about womanhood and liberation. Molara Ogundipe-Leslie emphasises that

African feminism must confront multiple layers of oppression, including colonialism, class exploitation, neo-colonialism, and indigenous patriarchy. Similarly, Filomina Chioma Steady argues that African feminism prioritises complementarity, communal survival, and

social harmony while still resisting gender oppression (Chioma Steady, 2005).

African feminist criticism frequently foregrounds themes of motherhood, community, spirituality, survival, and resistance. Unlike some Western feminist traditions that position men as adversaries, African feminism often advocates negotiation and coexistence between genders within communal structures. Nevertheless, African feminist scholars remain deeply critical of harmful traditional practices such as child marriage, widowhood rituals, female genital mutilation, and gender exclusion. In the context of war literature, African feminism becomes particularly relevant because it examines how African women navigate both patriarchal oppression and postcolonial violence simultaneously.

Womanism

Womanism represents another important African-centred feminist framework developed primarily through the works of Alice Walker and later expanded by African scholars such as Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi. Walker (1983) defines womanism as a philosophy committed to the survival and wholeness of entire communities, both male and female. Unlike radical feminist separatism, womanism emphasises family cohesion, motherhood, spirituality, and collective survival. Ogunyemi further adapts womanism to African contexts by stressing race, culture, and socio-political realities affecting Black women globally (Hamza, 2020).

Womanism is especially significant within African literary criticism because it recognises women's resilience and communal responsibilities amidst hardship. In conflict situations, women often function as carers, peace-builders, and preservers of cultural memory despite experiencing violence and displacement themselves. Womanist criticism therefore provides a nuanced framework for understanding female endurance, negotiation, and survival in African war narratives. However, some critics argue that womanism's emphasis on harmony may risk minimising the severity of patriarchal oppression. Nonetheless, its focus on healing, resilience, and communal continuity makes it particularly useful for analysing post-war female experiences in Nigerian and South Sudanese drama.

2.2 Feminist Trauma Theory

Trauma theory emerged primarily from psychological and psychoanalytic studies concerned with the lasting effects of catastrophic experiences on human consciousness and memory. Trauma refers to an overwhelming event that disrupts an individual's sense of identity, security, and psychological stability. According to Judith Herman, trauma results from experiences that exceed ordinary human coping mechanisms, leaving survivors with feelings of helplessness, terror, and emotional fragmentation. In war situations, trauma frequently manifests through displacement, bereavement, sexual violence, fear, and recurring memories of violence. Feminist trauma theory expands this discourse by examining how traumatic experiences are shaped by gendered structures of power and patriarchal violence.

Psychological Trauma

Psychological trauma involves enduring emotional and mental disturbances resulting from exposure to violence or catastrophic events. Symptoms often include anxiety, depression, nightmares, dissociation, emotional numbness, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is characterised by belatedness because traumatic experiences are not fully comprehended at the moment they occur but return repeatedly through intrusive memories and fragmented narratives. This conception of trauma is especially relevant in literary and dramatic studies, where silences, repetitions, and disruptions in narrative structure often symbolise unresolved psychological pain. In African war literature, women's trauma is frequently connected to sexual violence, forced migration, widowhood, and the destruction of domestic spaces traditionally associated with safety and identity.

Memory and Silence

Memory constitutes a central concern within trauma theory because traumatic experiences are often preserved through fragmented recollections rather than coherent narratives. Caruth contends that trauma resists complete representation because it exists beyond ordinary language and comprehension. Survivors therefore struggle to articulate their experiences directly, resulting in silence, repression, or symbolic expression. Feminist scholars emphasise that women's silence is not merely psychological but also socially produced through patriarchal structures that discourage women from speaking about rape, abuse, and grief.

In many African societies affected by conflict, silence surrounding female trauma is reinforced by stigma, shame, and communal expectations. Women who survive sexual violence may remain silent to avoid social exclusion, while widows often suppress grief within ritualised cultural expectations. Consequently, theatre and storytelling become important spaces for recovering silenced memories and transforming private pain into collective testimony. Through dramatic performance, traumatic experiences that are otherwise unspeakable become publicly witnessed and socially acknowledged.

Grief and Mourning

Grief constitutes another major dimension of feminist trauma studies. War often produces mass bereavement through the loss of husbands, children, homes, and communities. For women, grief is compounded by economic vulnerability and social displacement arising from widowhood and familial disintegration. Kali Tal argues that trauma narratives are deeply political because they contest dominant historical narratives that

erase marginalised experiences. Women's mourning in war literature, therefore, functions not merely as emotional expression but as resistance against historical forgetting.

performative expressions of grief and communal memory. Such performances preserve histories of violence while simultaneously creating possibilities for healing and solidarity. Feminist trauma criticism thus examines how women's grief transcends private suffering to become a collective and political act of remembrance.

2.3 War and Gender in African Literature

African literature has consistently represented war as a destructive force that reshapes social relations, moral values, and gender identities. While earlier war narratives often focused on nationalism, heroism, and political struggle, contemporary African literary scholarship increasingly examines the gendered dimensions of conflict. Feminist critics argue that women experience war differently from men because they are frequently subjected to sexual violence, forced displacement, widowhood, and socio-economic marginalisation.

One recurring theme within African war literature is the representation of women in conflict situations. Scholars such as Florence Stratton note that African women in literature are often depicted as symbolic carriers of communal suffering. However, contemporary feminist writers challenge passive representations by portraying women as survivors, negotiators, and agents of resistance. In texts emerging from conflicts in Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and South Sudan, women's experiences increasingly occupy central narrative positions (Stratton, 1994; Stratton, 2020).

Rape as a weapon of war remains another dominant concern within African conflict literature. Feminist scholars argue that wartime rape functions as a political strategy designed to humiliate communities, destabilise ethnic identities, and reinforce militarised masculinity. Literature addressing the Rwandan genocide, Liberian civil war, and South Sudanese conflicts frequently portrays sexual violence as systematic rather than incidental. Such representations reveal how women's bodies become sites upon which political and ethnic conflicts are violently inscribed.

Displacement also emerges prominently within African war narratives. Women displaced by conflict often encounter poverty, refugee camp violence, and social fragmentation. Literary depictions of displacement emphasise the loss of home, cultural identity, and emotional stability. Similarly, widowhood constitutes a recurring thematic concern because war frequently leaves women economically vulnerable and socially isolated. In many African communities, widows face exploitative cultural practices that intensify their suffering beyond the immediate violence of war itself. African feminist literature, therefore, interrogates both militarised violence and indigenous patriarchal traditions that perpetuate women's oppression.

2.4 Theatre and Conflict Representation

Theatre has historically functioned as a powerful medium for social commentary, political resistance, and communal reflection within African societies. African dramatists frequently use performance to interrogate corruption, colonialism, dictatorship, violence, and social injustice. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, theatre possesses transformative potential because it creates collective spaces where communities confront oppressive realities and imagine social change. In conflict situations, theatre becomes particularly important as a medium for documenting suffering, preserving memory, and fostering dialogue.

War theatre often dramatises the human consequences of violence by foregrounding civilian experiences rather than military heroism. Through symbolism, ritual performance, lamentation, and dialogue, playwrights expose the emotional devastation caused by armed conflict. Feminist theatre further challenges patriarchal narratives by centring women's voices and revealing the gendered consequences of violence. Such performances disrupt historical silences surrounding rape, widowhood, and trauma while affirming women's resilience and humanity.

Community theatre has also emerged as an important tool for post-war healing and reconciliation in several African societies. Refugee and participatory theatre projects in countries such as Uganda, Rwanda, and South Sudan use storytelling and performance to help survivors process trauma and reconstruct communal bonds. Performance thus functions not only as representation but also as therapeutic engagement capable of transforming silence into collective testimony.

When analysing South Sudanese conflict representation through feminist trauma theory and performance-based frameworks, three primary operational modes emerge:

1. Participatory and Playback Theatre as Trauma Healing

The Method: Practitioners like Milcah Lalam utilise **"playback theatre"** and localised performance models to translate deep-seated, non-linear trauma into embodied communal storytelling. Jonathan Fox) – 1994 and 2015**,** Author of *Acts of Service: Spontaneity, Commitment, and Tradition in the Nonscripted Theatre* and *Beyond Theatre: A Playback Theatre Memoir*. His books focus on the history, philosophy, and ritual of unscripted theatre. Jonathan Fox synthesised his

vision for Playback Theatre into four foundational concepts:

Ø Theatre **as an "Act of Service"**

Ø The **Performance as a Gift:** The actors and musicians offer their artistic skills to respect, validate, and "hold" the vulnerability of the audience member's story.

Ø Radical **Inclusivity:** Fox designed the platform so that anyone—especially the most marginalised—could have their personal narrative transformed into art and deeply heard.

2. Oral Tradition vs The Literary Tradition

Fox heavily relied on his studies of pre-literate societies and ancient oral cultures to shape Playback**:** he critiqued modern literary theatre for its "tyranny of language" and heavy reliance on pre-written scripts. In his view, human beings have an innate need to sit together, share generational knowledge, and process reality through spontaneous face-to-face dialogue.

3. The "Red Thread" and Narrative Reticulation

A key element of Fox's philosophy is finding the underlying thematic unity within a room full of strangers. Even if audience members tell vastly different stories, Fox points out that an invisible "red thread" of shared human emotion connects them. By weaving these individual fragments together, the performance creates a mirror of the collective subconscious, generating profound empathy across social divides (community cohesion).

4. Ritual and Spontaneity

Fox balanced the unpredictability of total improvisation with a highly structured, reassuring ritual.

The Ritual Framework: The set configuration (the conductor's chair, the actors' cubes, and the musician's corner) is treated as sacred geometry. This rigid aesthetic structure provides a safe containment zone for intense, raw emotional sharing.

Spontaneity as Health: Heavily influenced by J.L. Moreno (the founder of psychodrama), Fox viewed spontaneity not as "making things up" but as the healthy human capacity to respond creatively and authentically to new situations.

The Analytical Link: This directly mirrors feminist trauma theory by focusing on *lament* and continuous psychological fracturing rather than a single shock event. Audiences do not just watch; they share personal narratives of displacement and loss, which actors immediately mirror on stage to foster empathy and validate communal grief.

Fox argues that non-scripted theatre should serve a civic and social purpose rather than a commercial or purely aesthetic one.

2. Street Theatre and the Subversion of Militarised Patriarchal Space

The Method: Youth-led collectives, such as the Anataban Arts Initiative, occupy public squares, markets, and displacement camps to perform rapid-response street theatre.

The Analytical Link: By staging the immediate socio-political suffering of women—such as forced marriage, sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), and the loss of livelihoods—these performances disrupt the heavily masculinised glorification of military heroism. They reclaim the female body from being merely a symbol of national violation, reframing it as a site of active political agency and survival.

3. Audio Drama and "Expressive Testimony"

The Method: Organisations like Search for Common Ground South Sudan use radio-drama formats (such as the *Sergeant Esther* series) to broadcast conflict narratives across linguistically and ethnically fragmented communities.

The Analytical Link: Audio theatre overcomes geographic displacement. It provides a platform for **expressive testimony**, allowing female characters to openly confront highly stigmatised wartime issues like military widowhood, inheritance denials, and structural customary oppression without exposing local actresses to immediate physical reprisal.

This directly mirrors feminist trauma theory by focusing on *lament* and continuous psychological fracturing rather than a single shock event. Audiences do not just watch; they share personal narratives of displacement and loss, which actors immediately mirror on stage to foster empathy and validate communal grief.

2.5 Review of Related Studies

Several scholarly studies have examined Women of Owu primarily from postcolonial, feminist, and historical perspectives. Critics generally emphasise the play's adaptation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women* and its critique of war brutality. Scholars such as Femi Osofisan foreground the devastating consequences of militarism on women, particularly through themes of rape, enslavement, and grief. Existing analyses also examine the play's portrayal of collective female suffering and the collapse of communal values during wartime. However, many studies focus predominantly on historical allegory and political violence without fully interrogating trauma, silence, and widowhood from a feminist trauma perspective.

Similarly, studies on *Morountodun* largely concentrate on class struggle, revolutionary politics, and ideological conflict. While some feminist critics acknowledge the play's representation of female agency, limited attention has been given to the psychological consequences of violence and emotional fragmentation experienced by women within conflict situations. Existing scholarship, therefore, tends to privilege political interpretation over trauma-centred analysis.

Research on South Sudanese war narratives and refugee performances remains relatively underdeveloped compared to other African literary traditions. Available studies often focus on humanitarian crises, displacement, and peace-building rather than dramatic representation and feminist trauma discourse. Although community theatre and oral performances have documented women's suffering during South Sudan's civil conflicts, few comparative studies examine these narratives alongside Nigerian war drama. Furthermore, scholarship rarely explores how memory, silence, widowhood, and female resilience intersect within these dramatic traditions.

The major gap identified in existing scholarship, therefore, lies in the absence of sustained comparative feminist trauma studies connecting Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic representations of war. Previous studies have insufficiently examined how women negotiate trauma, preserve memory, and resist patriarchal violence within post-war societies. This study addresses that gap by applying feminist trauma theory to selected Nigerian and South Sudanese plays, thereby foregrounding the intersections of war, widowhood, womanhood, memory, and resistance within African dramatic discourse.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded primarily in textual analysis. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for literary and theatrical studies because it enables detailed interpretation of meanings, symbols, ideologies, emotions, and social representations embedded within texts. According to Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, qualitative inquiry focuses on understanding human experiences and cultural expressions within their social and historical contexts. Since this study examines representations of war trauma, widowhood, and womanhood in dramatic texts, qualitative textual analysis provides the most appropriate framework for investigating how language, characterisation, symbolism, dialogue, silence, and performance structures communicate female experiences of conflict and survival.

Textual analysis allows literary texts to be examined not merely as artistic productions but also as socio-cultural documents reflecting historical realities, ideological tensions, and human emotions. In literary criticism, textual analysis involves close reading and interpretative engagement with narrative structures, thematic patterns, imagery, characterisation, and socio-political contexts. Terry Eagleton argues that literature cannot be separated from the historical and ideological conditions within which it is produced. Consequently, the selected plays are analysed as dramatic responses to war, violence, patriarchy, and collective trauma within

African societies.

The qualitative approach further enables the study to investigate emotional and psychological experiences that cannot be adequately quantified through statistical methods. Issues such as grief, silence, memory, displacement, and female suffering require interpretative and critical examination because they are deeply subjective and culturally mediated experiences. By employing qualitative textual analysis, the study foregrounds the complexities of women's experiences in wartime while allowing nuanced exploration of resistance, resilience, and identity reconstruction within Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic traditions.

3.2 Sources of Data

This study derives its data from both primary and secondary sources. These sources provide the textual materials and scholarly foundations necessary for critical analysis and theoretical interpretation.

Primary Sources

The primary sources consist of selected dramatic texts from Nigeria and South Sudan that engage themes of war, trauma, widowhood, and womanhood. The main texts chosen for analysis are Women of Owu and Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms, as well as some South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances that are relevant. These texts constitute the central materials upon which the study's arguments and interpretations are developed.

Women of Owu is particularly important because it dramatises the devastating effects of war on women through themes of loss, enslavement, rape, grief, and communal destruction. The play foregrounds female voices and emotional suffering while simultaneously interrogating militarism and patriarchal violence. Similarly, *Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* and selected South Sudanese performance narratives explore women's experiences during liberation struggles and civil conflicts, emphasising displacement, survival, trauma, and resistance. The selected texts, therefore, provide fertile ground for examining the intersections between gender, violence, memory, and emotional survival within African dramatic discourse. The Widow's Narrative: You can compare how Osofisan uses traditional Yoruba

funerary dirges with how South Sudanese community theatre uses local mourning rituals to process grief.

Space and Displacement: *Women of Owu* deals with the ruins of a city, while your refugee theatre sources likely deal with the "liminal space" of the camp—both are sites where womanhood is renegotiated (van den Berg, 2025).

The "Red Thread" Connection: Applying Jonathan Fox's concept, you can analyse how these plays act as a "Playback" for the audience's real-life trauma, turning

private pain into a public, political statement.

Secondary Sources

The secondary sources include scholarly journals, books, academic articles, theses, dissertations, conference papers, and credible reports relevant to feminism, trauma theory, African drama, war literature, and gender studies. These materials provide the theoretical and critical frameworks necessary for interpreting the selected texts.

Books and journal articles by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Judith Herman, Bell Hooks, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o are utilised to establish the conceptual and analytical foundations of the study. Secondary materials on African war narratives, feminist criticism, widowhood practices, and theatrical representation equally contribute to contextualising the selected plays within broader scholarly conversations. Furthermore, theses and dissertations relating to African feminist drama and trauma studies are consulted to identify gaps in existing scholarship and situate the present study within ongoing academic debates.

3.3 Method of Data Analysis

The study employs feminist literary criticism, trauma-centred textual analysis, and a comparative analytical approach as its principal methods of data analysis. We integrate these methods to provide a comprehensive interpretation of how the selected plays represent war, widowhood, trauma, and female identity.

Feminist Literary Criticism

The primary analytical framework for examining the representation of gender relations, patriarchal structures, and female experiences within the selected texts is feminist literary criticism. Feminist criticism interrogates the ways literature reproduces or challenges systems of male dominance and gender inequality. According to Elaine Showalter, feminist criticism seeks to recover women's voices and expose the ideological assumptions underlying literary representation. Within this study, feminist literary criticism facilitates the examination of women's suffering, resistance, marginalisation, and agency within conflict situations.

This method is particularly relevant because war narratives often privilege masculine heroism while silencing women's emotional and psychological experiences. By adopting feminist criticism, the study foregrounds women's perspectives and examines how the selected plays challenge patriarchal narratives that reduce women to passive victims. Attention is therefore given to female characterisation, dialogue, symbolic representation, silence, and performative resistance within the texts.

Trauma-Centred Textual Analysis

The study also employs trauma-centred textual analysis to investigate how the selected plays represent psychological suffering, memory, grief, and emotional fragmentation. Trauma theory provides critical insight into the enduring effects of violence on survivors and the difficulties associated with representing traumatic experiences. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma disrupts narrative coherence because traumatic experiences exceed ordinary language and comprehension. Consequently, literary texts often represent trauma through silence, repetition, fragmentation, and symbolic imagery.

Trauma-centred analysis enables the study to examine how women in the selected plays experience and articulate emotional suffering arising from war, rape, displacement, widowhood, and loss. The method also facilitates exploration of memory and silence as recurring features of traumatic experience. Through this approach, the study interrogates how theatre transforms private pain into public testimony and collective memory.

A conceptual relation central to this analytical process may be represented as follows:

\text{Violence} \rightarrow \text{Trauma} \rightarrow \text{Memory and Silence} \rightarrow \text{Narration and Resistance}

Applying this localised, trauma-centred methodology to *Women of Owu* (Nigeria) and *Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* (South Sudan) reveals two distinct dramatic modes of representing and processing historical shock. Femi Osofisan uses traditional Yoruba ritual elements and Brechtian epic theatre to process "unspeakable trauma". Trauma is not kept private; it is externalised and made public.

- **The Somatic Voice of the Chorus:** The women of the vanquished Owu kingdom do not process trauma through individual therapy. Instead, their psychological shattering is physically manifested through collective **chants, drumming, dirges, and synchronised mourning**. The ritual lament functions as a cathartic and stabilising communal shield against madness.
- **The Collapse of Ancestral Continuum:** In Osofisan's work, trauma is compounded by a deep spiritual rupture. The physical entry of the

deified ancestor Anlugbua, who stands helpless amid the ruins of his city, demonstrates that patriarchal war shatters the spiritual ties connecting the living, the dead, and the unborn.

- **The Anti-Cathartic Stance:** True to his political theatre roots, Osofisan rejects neat resolutions. The play closes on a note of enduring grief and forced exile, forcing the audience to confront trauma not as a closed chapter of history but as an ongoing structural warning.

2. Narrative Erasure and Continuous Stress in South Sudan (*Katiba Banat*)

In Adhel Arop's multimedia work and surrounding refugee community performances, trauma is framed as an ongoing, lived reality tied directly to state-building and displacement (2023).

- **Trauma as Continuous Traumatic Stress (CTS):** Unlike Western models that treat trauma as a past event (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder), South Sudanese narratives showcase CTS. Because the liberation struggle was immediately followed by internal civil fragmentation and global displacement, the female subjects exist in a permanent state of survival and liminality.
- **The Burden of Interrupted Youth and Silence:** The primary trauma analysed in *Katiba Banat* is the psychological cost of child soldiering. Young women who subverted gender roles by fighting on the frontlines are later met with **institutional silencing and post-war erasure** by a patriarchal government. Their trauma is characterised by a painful contradiction: pride in a liberated nation vs. personal abandonment.
- **The Testimony as a "Re-Membering" Practice:** In the absence of formal national archives or mental health infrastructure, oral testimonies and grassroots community theatre serve as the primary spaces for healing. Sharing stories behaves like an unstructured "playback" performance—it allows survivors to piece together fragments of memory, counter political erasure, and foster collective resilience.

This framework illustrates the progression through which violent experiences produce psychological trauma that subsequently manifests through memory, silence, and performative acts of resistance.

Comparative Approach

The comparative method is employed to identify similarities and differences in the representation of war-induced trauma and female experiences within Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic traditions. Comparative literary analysis allows texts from different cultural and historical contexts to be studied in relation to one another, thereby revealing shared thematic concerns and divergent narrative strategies. According to comparative literary scholars, comparison facilitates more profound understanding of cultural specificity while also exposing universal dimensions of human experience.

In this study, the comparative approach examines how the selected Nigerian and South Sudanese plays portray women's suffering, widowhood, displacement, memory, and resilience within distinct conflict environments. Although both societies have experienced violent conflicts, the socio-political conditions shaping these conflicts differ significantly. Consequently, the comparative method enables the study to analyse how cultural context influences representations of trauma, gender, and survival. This approach also contributes to broader African literary scholarship by establishing critical dialogue between West African and East African dramatic traditions.

3.4 Justification for Text Selection

The selected texts were chosen because of their strong engagement with themes of war, trauma, widowhood, and female suffering within African societies. Women of Owu was selected primarily because it offers a profound dramatic representation of the devastating consequences of war on women. Through its adaptation of Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, the play foregrounds female grief, displacement, rape, enslavement, and communal destruction. The text is particularly relevant to this study because it situates women at the centre of wartime suffering while simultaneously exposing the brutality of militarised masculinity and patriarchal violence.

Similarly, *Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* and selected South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances were chosen because they dramatise the lived realities of women affected by civil war and political instability in South Sudan. The selection of *Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* alongside selected South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances is methodologically and theoretically justified through three distinct analytical lenses:

i. Realignment of the Geopolitical and Literary Canon

While post-colonial African drama has historically been dominated by West and East African scripts, contemporary South Sudanese creative outputs offer an unexamined archive of conflict literature. Choosing these texts prevents the homogenisation of "African war narratives". It captures the unique, protracted realities of the Second Sudanese Civil War and subsequent domestic instabilities, providing a distinct, localised

aesthetic of survival that expands the boundaries of African dramatic analysis.

ii. Disrupting the Hegemonic Masculinity of War Narratives

Dominant historical and theatrical records of South Sudanese liberation struggles frequently centre on masculinised military heroism, reducing women to peripheral roles or passive victims of geopolitical violence. *Katiba Banat* and grassroots community performances deliberately invert this dynamic by centring the female voice. By documenting the active subversion of gender roles—such as the lived experiences of female combatants and the leadership of displaced women in refugee camps—these texts offer the exact critical mass required for a rigorous feminist interrogation of militarism.

3. Suitability for Feminist Trauma Theory

Traditional Western frameworks of trauma often medicalise psychological wounds as individual, internal pathologies requiring clinical resolution. In contrast, these South Sudanese performances present trauma as a collective, ongoing, and socio-politically engineered phenomenon bound to displacement and economic disenfranchisement. The emphasis on collective mourning, oral testimonies, and public re-enactment in refugee and community theatre aligns perfectly with African feminist trauma frameworks. They demonstrate how women transform private, patriarchal injuries into public acts of political resilience and communal healing.

These texts explore themes of displacement, bereavement, survival, nationalism, and emotional trauma while highlighting women's resilience within violent socio-political environments. Their emphasis on female-centred narratives makes them particularly suitable for feminist trauma analysis.

Another reason for the selection of these plays lies in their representation of psychological trauma and emotional fragmentation. Both Nigerian and South Sudanese texts depict how violence affects women not only physically but also psychologically through grief, memory, silence, and social dislocation. The plays therefore provide rich materials for examining the intersections between trauma, gender, and performance.

Furthermore, the selected texts are appropriate for comparative analysis because they emerge from different African conflict contexts while sharing thematic concerns related to war and female suffering. Their comparative examination enables the study to investigate both cultural specificity and shared experiences of trauma within African dramatic traditions. Ultimately, the selected plays were chosen because they effectively illuminate the complex relationships between war, widowhood, womanhood, trauma, memory, and resistance that constitute the central concerns of this research.

4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Representation of War Trauma

War trauma in African dramatic literature extends beyond physical destruction to include psychological collapse, emotional fragmentation, displacement, and the breakdown of communal identity. In the selected Nigerian and South Sudanese plays, trauma is represented not merely as a temporary emotional reaction to violence but as a continuous condition that shapes women's social existence and personal consciousness. The plays demonstrate that women experience war differently because they bear the burdens of grief, widowhood, sexual violence, displacement, and economic instability. This directly addresses the first objective of the study, which is to examine how war affects women psychologically and socially in the selected plays. It also responds to the first research question concerning how war trauma is represented among women.

In Women of Owu, Femi Osofisan presents trauma through collective female lamentation and emotional disintegration after the destruction of the Owu kingdom. The play opens in a devastated landscape where the surviving women mourn their dead husbands, children, and community. Their suffering is represented through dirges, fragmented speech, and repeated expressions of hopelessness. The women are psychologically shattered because war has erased not only their families but also their sense of identity and security. One of the women states:

"Some words are such that when we hear them, all the light inside us dies at once, and our smiling daylight turns into the bleakness of night" (Osofisan, 2006, p. 27).

This statement captures the emotional devastation caused by war. The movement from "light" to "night" symbolises the collapse of emotional stability and hope. Trauma here is represented as a psychological darkness that invades the minds of survivors. The women are unable to separate memory from pain because every recollection of the war reopens emotional wounds. Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as an experience that continually returns through haunting memories becomes relevant in understanding this condition. The women relive the destruction psychologically even after the war has ended.

The play's representation of trauma extends beyond emotional grief; it encompasses social and economic aspects as well. The women of Owu lose their homes, their social status, and their protection within patriarchal society. Before the war, many of them occupied respected positions as wives, mothers, and daughters of noble families. However, after the fall of Owu, they become captives and slaves. Their trauma therefore involves a complete transformation of identity. The conquered women painfully acknowledge their helplessness when one of them declares:

"When you have lost a war, you have lost, and there's nothing you can do about it but accept the consequences" (Osofisan, 2006, p. 44).

This expression reveals psychological defeat and emotional exhaustion. The women no longer believe in resistance because the violence they experienced has destroyed their confidence and agency. Judith Herman argues that trauma produces feelings of helplessness and powerlessness, and this phenomenon is clearly visible in the women's acceptance of suffering as

inevitable. War therefore becomes a force that silences women psychologically and socially.

Another important representation of trauma in Women of Owu is silence. Silence in the play is not merely the absence of speech; it functions as a sign of emotional suppression and unspoken pain. The women often struggle to articulate the full extent of their suffering because trauma exceeds ordinary language. Their silence reflects fear, shame, and emotional exhaustion. This aligns with feminist trauma theory, which argues that women's traumatic experiences are frequently suppressed within patriarchal societies. The inability of the women to fully narrate their pain demonstrates how trauma disrupts language and memory.

Similarly, trauma in the South Sudanese context is represented through displacement, interrupted youth, and continuous psychological instability. In Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms and selected refugee theatre performances, women experience war as an ongoing reality rather than a completed historical event. Unlike Women of Owu, which reconstructs a historical tragedy through symbolic dramatic performance, South Sudanese narratives emerge from lived experiences of civil war and displacement. Female characters and performers recount their experiences of fleeing violence, living in refugee camps, losing family members, and surviving militarised environments.

One of the most disturbing dimensions of trauma in the South Sudanese narratives is the experience of child soldiering and militarisation. Young girls are forced into violent environments where they lose their childhood and emotional innocence. Trauma is therefore represented as interrupted development. Instead of experiencing education, family stability, and emotional growth, these young women encounter violence, fear, and displacement. The psychological effects of such experiences continue even after the war because survivors remain haunted by memories of violence.

The South Sudanese plays and performances also portray trauma as "continuous traumatic stress.". This means that women are unable to recover psychologically because violence and instability persist around them. Even after displacement, they continue to experience poverty, uncertainty, and fear. Unlike traditional Western trauma models that treat trauma as a past event, the South Sudanese context reveals it as an ongoing condition tied to political instability and displacement. This representation strengthens feminist trauma theory by demonstrating that women's suffering is shaped by social and historical conditions rather than individual psychology alone.

Furthermore, South Sudanese performances utilise oral testimonies and communal storytelling as methods of expressing trauma. Women narrate their experiences publicly, transforming private pain into collective memory. This theatrical strategy allows survivors to reclaim their voices and resist historical erasure. Jonathan Fox's theory of playback theatre becomes relevant here because these performances mirror communal suffering and encourage empathy among audiences. Trauma is therefore represented not only as suffering but also as testimony.

Comparatively, both Nigerian and South Sudanese texts represent war trauma as deeply gendered. Women become the primary carriers of emotional and social suffering because they lose homes, families, economic security, and bodily autonomy. However, the dramatic techniques differ. Women of Owu uses ritual lamentation, choruses, and symbolic dialogue rooted in Yoruba performance traditions, while South Sudanese refugee theatre relies heavily on oral testimony, documentary performance, and participatory storytelling. Despite these differences, both dramatic traditions reveal that war leaves lasting psychological wounds on women.

The analysis thus reveals that the selected plays depict war trauma through grief, silence, displacement, emotional fragmentation, and social dislocation. Women are portrayed as psychologically wounded individuals struggling to survive in violent patriarchal societies. This fulfils the first objective of the study by showing how war affects women psychologically and socially within Nigerian and South Sudanese drama traditions.

Direct Comparative Overview

Literary Dimension	***Women of Owu* (Osofisan, 2006)**	***Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* (Arop, 2023)**
Form of Expression	Scripted classical drama / Yoruba performance	Multimedia documentary oral testimonies
Traumatic Identity	The Woman as Victim and Mourner	The Woman as Child Soldier and Vet
Theatrical Device	Formal choruses, dirges, and anti-cathartic endings	Archival war footage, modern interviews, and animation

Literary Dimension	*Women of Owu* (Osofisan, 2006)	*Katiba Banat: Sisters in Arms* (Arop, 2023)
Resolution of Trauma	Collective defiance in the face of total displacement	Catharsis through long-awaited community reunions

The table above demonstrates that both Nigerian and South Sudanese dramas portray women as central victims of war while simultaneously highlighting their resilience. In Women of Owu, trauma is represented symbolically through lamentation and ritual mourning, whereas South Sudanese dramatic performances

portray trauma more realistically through displacement narratives and oral testimony. This suggests that although both dramatic traditions focus on female suffering, their theatrical methods differ according to historical and cultural contexts."

4.2 Widowhood and Female Loss

Widowhood occupies a central position in the selected plays because war transforms countless women into widows, thereby exposing them to emotional grief, social exclusion, and economic vulnerability. The representation of widowhood in the texts directly addresses the second objective of the study, which is to analyse representations of widowhood and female loss. It equally responds to the second research question concerning how the plays portray widowhood and loss.

In Women of Owu, widowhood is represented as both personal tragedy and collective social crisis. The destruction of Owu leaves many women without husbands, children, or male relatives. Widowhood therefore becomes a condition of mass suffering rather than isolated personal grief. The women mourn not only individual deaths but also the collapse of an entire community. Their grief is intensified because patriarchal society defines women largely through marriage and family relationships. Once their husbands die, the women lose social protection, economic stability, and communal identity.

Osofisan presents widowhood as a condition of humiliation and powerlessness. The surviving women are treated as spoils of war and distributed among the victors. This means that widowhood immediately pushes them into slavery and exploitation. One of the women painfully observes:

"The fate of the conquered is to toil for the strong" (Osofisan, 2006, p. 55).

This statement demonstrates that widowhood in wartime is tied directly to economic oppression. The widows are no longer viewed as respected members of society but as labourers available for exploitation. Their suffering is therefore both emotional and material. Radical feminist theory helps explain this condition because it views patriarchy as a system that uses women's bodies and labour for domination.

Another important representation of widowhood in Women of Owu is ritual mourning. The women express grief collectively through chants, dirges, and lamentations. These performances reveal that mourning in African societies is communal rather than individual. Through shared grief, the women preserve memory and maintain emotional solidarity. Their mourning also functions as resistance because it refuses to allow the dead to be forgotten. Kali Tal's argument that trauma narratives challenge historical erasure becomes significant here. By remembering and lamenting publicly, the women resist the silence imposed by war.

Widowhood also creates emotional isolation. The widows are trapped between memory and survival. They continue to remember their husbands and former lives while simultaneously confronting the harsh realities of enslavement and displacement. This psychological tension deepens their trauma because they are unable to achieve emotional closure. Their lives become suspended between the past and the uncertain future.

In the South Sudanese context, widowhood is similarly represented as a condition of prolonged suffering and social vulnerability. Civil war leaves many women responsible for children and households after the deaths of husbands and male relatives. However, unlike traditional communal systems where widows could depend on extended family structures for emotional and economic support, prolonged conflict in South Sudan destroys these protective networks and leaves women isolated within displacement camps and unstable communities. As a result, widowhood becomes not only an emotional experience of grief but also a social condition marked by insecurity, poverty, and abandonment.

Widows in many South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances carry the burdens of survival alone while simultaneously mourning their losses. These women struggle to feed their children, protect themselves from violence, and maintain dignity within environments shaped by hunger, displacement, and political instability. Their suffering reflects the intersection between patriarchy and war because the death of male relatives often exposes women to additional forms of oppression such as denial of inheritance rights, forced dependence, and economic exploitation. Feminist critics therefore argue that widowhood in conflicting societies intensifies women's marginalisation rather than attracting communal protection.

The South Sudanese dramatic narratives further portray widowhood as a condition of emotional exhaustion. Women are forced to suppress personal grief because survival demands immediate practical responsibilities. Many widows cannot fully mourn their

husbands because they must focus on securing food, shelter, and safety for their children. This emotional suppression reflects Herman's (1992) assertion that trauma often produces psychological fragmentation, where survivors continue functioning outwardly while carrying unresolved emotional pain internally. The inability to process grief properly, therefore, deepens women's trauma and prolongs psychological suffering.

Another important issue represented in the South Sudanese performances is the collapse of traditional family structures. War destroys kinship systems that once provided widows with social identity and communal belonging. Consequently, many widows exist in what feminist scholars describe as a "liminal" condition, occupying uncertain social spaces where they are neither fully protected nor socially recognised. Their vulnerability becomes more severe in displacement camps where poverty, insecurity, and dependence on

humanitarian assistance undermine personal dignity and social autonomy.

The plays also show how patriarchal traditions still hurt widows even after the war is over. In some cases, women are denied access to land and property belonging to deceased husbands because traditional customs favour male inheritance. This forces many widows into economic hardship despite their central role in sustaining families during conflict. Such representations support African feminist arguments that women's suffering in wartime cannot be separated from broader patriarchal structures that regulate property ownership, social status, and female identity.

Despite these harsh realities, South Sudanese dramatic performances equally portray widows as resilient survivors who negotiate hardship with courage and determination. Many women emerge as heads of households, carers, and preservers of communal memory. Through storytelling, communal solidarity, and participation in peacebuilding efforts, they resist complete psychological collapse and continue to sustain their communities. Their resilience demonstrates that widowhood in African war drama is not represented solely as helpless victimhood but also as a site of endurance and survival.

Comparatively, both Women of Owu and South Sudanese refugee theatre portray widowhood as a deeply gendered consequence of war. In both contexts, women suffer emotional loss, social displacement, and economic insecurity after the deaths of male relatives. However, while Women of Owu represents widowhood through ritual lamentation and symbolic dramatic performance rooted in Yoruba cultural traditions, South Sudanese performances adopt oral testimonies and realistic depictions of displacement to foreground the everyday struggles of widows in refugee and post-war environments.

Ultimately, the representation of widowhood in the selected plays demonstrates that war transforms women into carriers of collective grief and social instability. The texts expose how patriarchal structures intensify female suffering during conflict while simultaneously revealing the resilience and emotional endurance of widows who continue to survive despite overwhelming loss. This directly fulfils the second objective of the study, which is to analyse representations of widowhood and female loss in the selected plays.

5. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary of Findings

This study set out to examine representations of war-induced trauma, widowhood, and womanhood in selected Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic texts using feminist trauma theory as its primary analytical framework. Through a detailed textual and comparative analysis of Women of Owu and selected South Sudanese refugee and community theatre performances, the study establishes several key findings regarding the gendered consequences of armed conflict in African societies.

First, the study finds that war disproportionately affects women in both Nigerian and South Sudanese contexts. Women are consistently portrayed as primary victims of displacement, sexual violence, emotional breakdown, and socio-economic marginalisation. Rather than occupying peripheral roles, women emerge as central carriers of war's psychological and social consequences. This confirms feminist trauma scholarship, which argues that armed conflict intensifies pre-existing gender inequalities by exposing women to multiple layers of vulnerability (Herman, 1992).

Second, the study reveals that widowhood functions as a critical site of intensified trauma. The loss of husbands and male relatives does not only produce emotional grief but also triggers economic instability, social exclusion, and cultural stigmatisation. In the analysed texts, widowhood is not a temporary condition of mourning but a prolonged state of psychological and social dislocation. This aligns with Ogundipe-Leslie's (1994) argument that African women experience "multiple jeopardies", where gender oppression intersects with cultural and structural violence.

Third, the findings indicate that despite overwhelming suffering, women consistently demonstrate resilience, agency, and collective solidarity. Female characters and real-life performance narratives show that women engage in survival strategies such as storytelling, mourning rituals, communal bonding, and emotional endurance. This resilience does not negate trauma but coexists with it, supporting Hooks' (2000) position that survival under oppressive systems constitutes a form of resistance.

5.2 Conclusion

This study concludes that theatre is one of the most potent artistic mediums for revealing the concealed gendered realities of war and conflict in African societies. Through dramatic representation, both Nigerian and South Sudanese texts illuminate the psychological, emotional, and socio-political consequences of armed violence on women, particularly in relation to trauma, widowhood, and survival.

The application of feminist trauma theory has proved highly effective in revealing the depth of emotional and social wounds experienced by women in wartime contexts. The theory enables a nuanced view of trauma not merely as an individual psychological condition but as a gendered, cultural, and historical experience shaped by patriarchal violence and socio-political instability (Caruth, 1996; Herman, 1992).

Furthermore, the study establishes that women in war narratives are not exclusively passive victims. While they endure profound suffering, they also emerge as agents of memory, resistance, and cultural continuity.

Their experiences complicate simplistic representations of victimhood by demonstrating how survival itself becomes an act of defiance against structural violence.

Ultimately, the study affirms that African war drama repositions women at the centre of historical memory, thereby challenging dominant narratives that traditionally marginalise female experiences in conflict discourse.

5.3 Recommendations

This study makes the following recommendations based on its findings:

1. Expansion of Feminist Theatre Scholarship in Africa

There is a need for more rigorous academic engagement with feminist theatre across African universities. Scholars should prioritise gender-focused dramatic studies that interrogate women's experiences of war, displacement, and trauma within both historical and contemporary contexts.

2. Inclusion of Women's War Experiences in Peacebuilding Discourse

Policymakers, peacebuilding institutions, and humanitarian organisations should incorporate women's narratives of war into conflict resolution frameworks. Women's testimonies, particularly those expressed through theatre and performance, offer insightful perspectives on healing and reconciliation processes.

3. Support for Female-Centred Theatre Productions

Governments, cultural agencies, and non-governmental organisations should provide funding and institutional support for theatre productions that centre women's experiences of conflict. Such support will strengthen cultural documentation of war trauma while empowering female dramatists and performers.

4. Archival Preservation of Community and Refugee Theatre

There is an urgent need to document and preserve South Sudanese and other African refugee theatre performances, many of which exist only in oral or ephemeral forms. Proper archiving will ensure their accessibility for future academic research.

5.4 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes significant contributions to three major academic fields: African feminist criticism, trauma studies, and comparative drama scholarship.

First, within African feminist criticism, the study expands existing discourse by foregrounding widowhood, trauma, and war violence as central categories of analysis rather than peripheral themes. It demonstrates that African women's experiences of conflict are complex, multidimensional, and deeply embedded in socio-cultural structures of power.

Second, in trauma studies, the research extends feminist trauma theory into African dramatic contexts, thereby challenging Eurocentric frameworks that often dominate trauma discourse. By situating trauma within African war experiences, the study highlights how memory, silence, grief, and survival are culturally mediated phenomena shaped by gender and historical violence.

Third, in comparative drama scholarship, the study establishes an important intellectual bridge between West African and East African theatrical traditions. By comparing Nigerian and South Sudanese dramatic representations of war, the research demonstrates both shared and divergent strategies of representing female trauma, thereby enriching global understanding of African performance cultures.

To strengthen the South Sudanese portion of the study, there is a need to look into **the** Likikiri Collective: they do extensive work with oral histories and storytelling in South Sudan. And the **"**Waza" tradition or other indigenous performance forms that inform South Sudanese community theatre.

In conclusion, this study affirms that African theatre remains a critical space for articulating women's suffering and resilience in war contexts, while simultaneously contributing to broader conversations in feminist theory, trauma studies, and comparative literature.

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