

The Fragmented Self in Akwaeke Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*

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Abstract

This study examines the fragmented self in Akwaeke Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with your Beauty*. The protagonist Feyi experiences fragmentation caused by loss and trauma. The objectives of this study are to investigate the influence of trauma on a person's identity and self as well as to examine how well the issue of the fragmented self is captured in the text and to investigate the socio-cultural experiences that shape the characters fragmented self. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory serves as the theoretical framework for examining trauma, loss, grief and healing in the primary text. It provides a good foundation for exploring trauma as an unclaimed experience, the belatedness of trauma, inexpressibility of trauma and the concepts of "acting out" and "walking through" to show how trauma causes fragmentation in the life of the character Feyi; where her past continuously invades her present. The study finds that the character Feyi experiences fragmentation not only due to personal reasons like loss but also due to socio-cultural expectations. Her character shows that trauma and fragmentation are not only personal but also collective.

Keywords: *Fragmented, Trauma, Belatedness, Inexpressibility, Unclaimed Experience, Loss.*

INTRODUCTION

The term "Fragmented self" cuts across Psychology, Philosophy and Literature hence there is no fixed point of origin for the term. It rather emerges from different discussions among various disciplines about the instability, multiplicity and complexity of the self. A fragmented self can be said to be a state where a person's sense of identity is not in cohesion but rather split into different disconnected parts. The fragmentation of the self explores a lack of coherence in an individual's being and essence. A normal disposition of an individual is evident in his or her correct articulation of memories, emotions and thoughts. Inconsequentially, a disconnected or fragmented self is the direct opposite of this due to the disarticulation and incoherence of a person's emotions, thoughts and perception of one's self. This is to say that in a fragmented self's emotions, thoughts and even memories are seen to be in a state of disjointedness and this leads to disconnectedness to social norms and internal chaos.

In literature, the concept of a fragmented self is often explored in modernist and post-modernist texts to serve as a form of representation of the complexities of identity in a rapidly changing world. A fragmented self in literature often refers to a narrative or character presentation where an individual's sense of identity is not unified but rather multiple, disconnected, incoherent and sometimes conflicting aspects of self. Through the use of distinguishing writing techniques and form in literally works, authors like James Joyce, T. S. Eliot and Virginia Woolf have been able to capture the complexities and multiplicity of human

experience therefore enacting the sense of fragmentation of self in modernist and post-modernist worlds. While psychologists examine the fragmented self as a disruptive experience undergone by a person on his psychic self, Literature dramatizes the fragmented self through the use of writing techniques like stream of consciousness, breaking forms, narratives and language used in the text to explore and enact a profound sense of fragmentation in individuals of the modernist world.

Heinz Kohut in his work, *Self Psychology* posits that fragmentation is the subjective experience of the breakdown of self into disconnected pieces (17). In the *Analysis of Self* by Kohut, he asserts: "The self is the central organizing and motivating force in human experience". (3) This underscores his belief that the self plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's experiences and behaviors. Kohut also explores the concept of the fragmented self, which occur when an individual experiences disruptions in their sense of identity. He noted that inadequate empathic responses from caregivers can lead to this fragmentation, resulting in various psychological difficulties. He observes that "a fragmented self arises from a lack of adequate empathic responses"(56). For Kohut, fragmentation occurs when early caregiving is empathetically insufficient, hence the self does not consolidate cohesively, the individual is thus left with a fragmented self with experiences such as feelings of inner emptiness or disintegration, lapses in self-esteem regulation and explosive rage or depression when the fragile self is injured. Furthermore, Liang explores the complexities of identity and the psychological experiences of individuals. In his seminal work, *The Divided Self: An Existential Study in Sanity and Madness*, he introduces the idea that individuals can experience a split or division within their sense of self. He posits that this fragmentation often arises from societal expectations, family dynamics, and the pressures of conformity. This division can lead to feelings of alienation and disconnection from one's true self. In his therapeutic practice, Liang emphasizes the importance of understanding patients' perspectives. He advocates for a more empathetic and humanistic approach, where therapists engage deeply with an individual's experience of fragmentation, fostering a safe environment for exploration and healing. He writes about the experience of the divided self, reflecting that "it is as if I am in a world that is not my world, and I am not in this world"(26). He also addresses the societal impact on individual identity, stating, "the individual is not an island; he is a product of his relationships, and when these relationships are destroyed, the self becomes fragmented"(43).

Existing studies in Emezi's works often emphasize themes of queerness and non-normativity, however, to the best of this researcher's knowledge, there is no known attention given to the text *You Made a Fool of Death with your Beauty* and the fragmentation of the self experienced by the characters Feyi and Alim on the accounts of love, grief and healing. Therefore, this study seeks to evaluate a fragmented self from the lens of trauma and also explore how Emezi represents self and identity as points of conflict and potential transformation in the text. The aim of this study is to examine how Emezi captures and explores the fragmented self in *You Made a Fool of Death with your Beauty*. The objectives of the study are to investigate the influence of trauma on an individual's self and identity, to examine how well the issue of a fragmented self is captured in the text and to investigate the socio-cultural experiences that shaped the protagonist's fragmented self.

The study focuses specifically on how the fragmented self is constructed and represented through the themes of grief, trauma, love and cultural expectations, utilizing Cathy Caruth's Trauma analytic theory as the central framework. It examines the protagonist's fragmented state of mind and the socio cultural influences that shaped it. For a comprehensive

understanding, reference will be made to other texts, articles and scholarly works to provide a broader perspective on the topic.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on Literary Representation of the Fragmented Self

The representation of the fragmented self in literary works has been subjected to serious academic studies by various literary critics. These critics in their various studies have examined the ways writers depict broken identities using narratives. One of such studies is Nidhi Kumari's study of Anita Desai's novels. Kumari's article discusses the fragmentation of female characters in the novels due to conflict between tradition and personal choice. She observes that the women in the text studied inhabit a fractured self because of the tension between family demands and inner needs (274). Her study illustrates that fiction can be used to portray women's struggles with fragmented identities. However, while her study is based on Indian women in the mid-twentieth century, the present research is concerned with characters in Nigerian fiction in a more recent context. The present study analyses grief and desire as parts of the main causes of fragmentation in the selected novel of Emezi. Fragmented self has also been studied in postcolonial literature. In Sonika Sethi's article "Fractured Selves", she investigates fragmented subjectivities using *Shree's Tomb of Sand*. According to her, the story creates a "dual identity" by joining personal loss with collective memory (587). She explains that the fragmented narrative represents a self that is broken between past and present. The study reveals that fragmented self is tied to decolonization and collective memory. Ngozi Ulogu makes a similar point about Adichie's novels. In her article, she posits that alienation and fragmentation of identity in Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* result from "depression and shattering experience" (154). She also notes that "individuals feel dehumanized, lonely and helpless in a seeming hostile and precarious world" (67). The contribution of the study lies in its analysis of trauma and social breakdown as major causes of fractured identities in Nigerian literature. Through the studies by Sethi and Ulogu, we can deduce that Nigerian and Indian literature represent fragmentation of self as being caused by social and historical forces. This differs from the current study which looks like psychological force instead of the social and postcolonial history.

Other critics examine narrative techniques as writers' medium of representing fragmentation in literary works. Mengkorn Pum in his article explains that modernist writers like Joyce and Woolf use stream of consciousness to "open up a space for both self-fragmentation and self-reconstruction" (3). In this style, the mind is portrayed as "intimate, unstable and revelatory" (4). This study is pertinent because it shows that fragmentation can be expressed through form as well as theme. The current research differs in that in the use of narrative technique to represent fragmentation of self. Instead, it is concerned with mental and emotional aspect of fragmentation using Caruth's Trauma analytic theory. Ali, Hussain et al in their text *Shattered Selves* approach fragmentation in Bhutto's *The Runaways* from the perspective of postmodernism. According to them, the characters in the novel embody a "fragmented postmodern identity" built on "borrowed causes" and the loss of authenticity (586). They maintain that the novel's two major protagonists, Monty and Sunny, are emblematic of "shattered selves," individuals whose identities are "fragmented, unstable, and decentered by the cultural logic of late capitalism and the collapse of traditional metanarratives" (574). Michelle Philip adds that "the self is not a stable, fixed or an essential or unified entity but rather, a product of social and linguistic prompts that are fluid: constantly being negotiated

and re-negotiated in relation to social and cultural contexts” (47). He further states that “characteristic features of the postmodern novel are fragmented narratives, non-linear timelines, and multiple perspectives, which reflected the fragmented and subjective nature of reality” (53). In all, we can deduce from their analysis that postmodern literature deliberately embraces fragmented selves. However, the current study differs by focusing less on global instability and more on the way grief and intimacy break identity in a Nigerian setting.

African writers have also represented fragmentation through the experience of migration and exile of characters. Andrew Nyongesa in his study explains that studies from diverse fields attest to the non-unified nature of the self and its vulnerability to different social and cultural contexts. For him, migration produces “a ‘compartmentalization’ or ‘fragmentation of the mind’ into two or more selves to reflect the new fragmented world” (1). Nyongesa also notes that trauma and fragmentation are connected when he describes the self as being under “constant depression, alienation, hopelessness and search for wholeness” (2). His work is relevant for its analysis of the way migration leads to fractured selves. Yet, unlike his focus on exile and displacement, the present research is concerned with characters who remain tied to both Nigeria and the diaspora but whose fragmentation comes mainly from grief and love.

Review of Studies on Emezi’s *You Made a Fool of Death with your Beauty*

The literary works of Akwaeke Emezi have gained critical attention among literary scholarship. Various critics have studied her works for their depiction of identity, trauma and queerness. However, most of the studies are concerned with her earlier works such as *Freshwater* and *The Death of Vivek Oji*. To the best of the knowledge of the researcher, there is limited available writings on Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with your Beauty*. One of the earliest reviews appeared in *The New York Times* where R. O. Kwon described the novel as “an unabashed ode to living with, and despite, pain and mortality” (n.p.). Kwon observes that Emezi refuses the notion of grief as something resolved in neat stages, instead she portrays it as a lasting, cyclical burden. Feyi’s struggle to live after the sudden loss of her husband is an example used by Kwon to drive home his observation. Her attempt to rediscover joy, intimacy and artistic expression further buttress his point. The review suggests that Emezi’s novel represents the reality of grief in a society unequipped to make space for mourning. Kwon’s primary analysis deals with the novel’s celebration of resilience. In contrast, this current study turns more to the ways grief fragments Feyi’s sense of identity which places her between past loss and present desire. Similarly, Kuhelika Ghosh, while writing for *Brittle Paper* emphasizes the novel’s depiction of second chances at love. She notes Emezi’s own words that while the novel was intended to be “a fluffy romance,” the character of Feyi instead revealed “all this darkness” bound up with grief (n.p.). Ghosh stresses that the novel allows Feyi to be “profane and promiscuous” and still has a “happily ever after.” The review shows the novel challenges cultural and gender expectations. It does not analyse the interaction of grief, trauma, and cultural pressures in the fragmentation of self in the novel. Furthermore, Olukorede Yishau discusses the novel as a story of broken people who deal with grief in divergent ways. He states that “there is no manual to deal with grief and the mistakes human beings make while handling grief”. According to him, Emezi’s characters are drawn with imperfections, each concealing aspects of themselves they cannot easily share. The review positions grief as a unifying thread binding Feyi, Alim and other characters. What stands out in Yishau’s reading is his claim that there is “no easy way to forget a loved one.” which makes grief an enduring presence in life. This resonates with the current study’s concern but differs in some ways. The study of Yishau only stops at describing grief’s persistence while this current work examines mental

fragmentation and ruptures in identity that results from such grief. Another perspective comes from Charlotte Romansdegare. In her text, she analyses the sensual quality and sentence structures of the novel. While analysing the art installation scene, she notes that Emezi's language engages multiple senses and evokes Feyi's inner pain (n.p.). Romansdegare argues that such passages reveal that grief is inseparable from embodied experience. Hence, the novel mirrors the rawness of emotion. Her study of language and form is important to the discussion of the novel. Yet her emphasis remains on aesthetics. On the other hand, this current study interprets the same stylistic elements as means of representing the fragmented state of self.

The above reviews show that the depiction of the fragmented self in literature has been written about by literary critics in other literary texts. Kumari and Sethi discuss cultural and postcolonial divisions, Ulogu examines Nigerian novels and trauma, while Pum, Ali, Hussain, Muhammad, and Philip link it to modernist and postmodern techniques. Caruth, LaCapra, and Luckhurst connect it to trauma theory, and Nyongesa explains the effects migration and exile have on fragmented identity. The studies place emphasis on group or social experiences which differ from the current study that looks at the personal experience of Feyi where grief and love fracture the self in Emezi's novel.

Theoretical Framework and Research Methodology

Samir Krumah in his work "Literary Theories and Movements in English" defines literary Theories as intellectual frameworks used to analyze, interpret and evaluate literary texts (32). He argues that literary theories are inevitable because they provide a systematic way of understanding literature by examining its structures, themes, meanings, and the extended cultural and historical contexts in which it is produced and received. Literary Theories are like lenses that help readers and critics view literary texts from different angles (33). Most readers and critics often explore literature from their own point of view; hence, the presence of literary theories helps to diversify understanding and create new meanings.

Trauma theory's origin dates back to the 19th century western medical and psychiatric contexts, one of its early sightings is with the works of physicians like Jean-Martin Charcot and his student Pierre Janet. Charcot investigates hysteria and trauma pioneering the idea that psychological shock can cause neurological-like symptoms even without injury. While his student Janet Pierre expands on those ideas to develop the concept of dissociation. For Sigmund Freud, his interest in trauma begins in his early work on hysteria alongside Josef Breuer, as recorded in *Studies on Hysteria*. They observe that many patients show physical symptoms without a clear medical cause, which they trace back to painful or shocking experiences that have been repressed. Freud finds that when patients talk about these experiences, often through hypnosis or free association, their symptoms improved. This leads him to conclude that trauma is linked to the mind's attempt to protect itself by pushing unbearable memories out of conscious awareness, a process he called repression (288-292). In his later work *Beyond The Pleasure Principle*. Freud explains that trauma is something that the mind cannot process fully when it happens, so it returns later in dreams or flashbacks. He establishes the concept of "repetition compulsion" and argues that victims unconsciously relive traumatic events in dreams or behaviour as a way to master what they cannot understand at the time. Freud suggests that this repetition is the mind's way of trying to master or gain control over an experience that is originally overwhelming. The repetition does not necessarily bring relief but shows how the trauma continues to haunt the individual. According to Freud, this constant return to the trauma reveals a conflict between the "pleasure principle," which seeks comfort and satisfaction, and what he called the "death drive," an instinct pushing the person toward self-destruction or the

re-experiencing of pain (18-24). His notion that trauma resists full understanding and expression lays the groundwork for later thinkers like Cathy Caruth and Shoshana Felman, who posit that trauma disrupts language and narrative. Freud's concept of repetition and the return of the repressed also inspired literary critics to analyse how trauma shapes storytelling, often leading to fragmented or non-linear narratives that mirror the workings of the mind after trauma. Cathy Caruth is a prominent scholar in trauma studies and this is established in her works. Caruth's views on Trauma are developed through her books *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* and *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. She builds on Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic ideas and Jacques Derrida's Deconstruction combining them with literary and philosophical thoughts. Her works represent a unique turn on how trauma is understood, not merely as a psychological issue but as a crisis of representation, memory and language. In her text *Unclaimed Experience*, she posits that trauma is "the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the intent to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (4). For Caruth, trauma is not simply a memory of a past event but a dreary return of what was never fully experienced or assimilated. She builds heavily on Sigmund Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (18-24), where Freud discusses the concept of "repetition compulsion". Freud posits that survivors of a traumatic event tend to relive their experiences involuntarily, as if caught in a loop. Cathy centres on this idea to create her concept of *belatedness and latency* in trauma analysis. She explains that trauma is marked by belatedness, which means that the experience is only known after it has occurred, through flashbacks, nightmares or repetitive behaviours. Caruth argues that literary texts like Marguerite Dura's *Hiroshima Mon Amour*, is a trauma narrative which communicates trauma through a disjointed and fragmented narrative. In Caruth's later work *Literature in the Ashes of History*, she explains survival itself as traumatic, she argues that the survivor is burdened with the responsibility of bearing witness to the dead. This expands her earlier focus from the structure of traumatic experiences to the moral and philosophical questions it raises about human experience, responsibility, and testimony (14). By linking psychoanalysis and Literature, Caruth transforms trauma from a clinical concept to a critical lens through which individual view history, literature, and ethics in the aftermath of a catastrophe.

Another crucial contributor to trauma analysis is Dominick LaCapra. His contributions to Trauma theory marks a departure from psychoanalytic and deconstructive approaches used by some scholars like Cathy Caruth. In LaCapra's *Representing the Holocaust*, he combines psychoanalysis, literary theories and historiography to examine the challenges of writing and thinking about extreme historical violence. The texts contribution to trauma analysis exposed that trauma not only affects individuals but also societies, it shapes their memory and history and how it is being represented demands crucial attention. LaCapra insists on separating what he calls "structural" (psychological) dimensions of trauma from the historical dimensions, he posits that without this distinction, there is a risk of turning the Holocaust into a universal metaphor for human suffering rather than recognizing its specific historical context. For LaCapra, understanding trauma requires careful attention to the consequences of events and the voices of the real victims and survivors (72-74). Also in LaCapra's *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra makes an influential contribution to trauma studies in his distinction between "acting out" and "working through". Taking concepts from Freudians psychoanalytic vocabulary and reinterpreting them for historical and ethical analysis, LaCapra describes "acting out" as a compulsive repetition of trauma wherein the victim or community remains trapped in the past. He posits that acting out occurs when people remain stuck in the past, constantly relieving their pain as if the traumatic event were happening all over again. This repetition can

show up as nightmares, flashbacks or repetitive behaviour. It occurs as a form of psychological paralysis where the person or community involved cannot move forward (21-23). On the other hand, "working through" refers to a process of critical engagement and mourning that allows individuals or society to acknowledge and assimilate trauma without being consumed by it (21-23). He argues that "working through" means finding a way to face and process the trauma. It does not mean forgetting or pretending it didn't happen, it basically means trying to understand and integrate it into one's life's story or collective history. "Working Through" according to LaCapra allows people to mourn, reflect and to continue living meaning fully despite the pain.

This study adopts a qualitative method of analysis, as it focuses on the fragmented self. This research work relies on Cathy Caruth's tenets of trauma theory such as Trauma as an Unclaimed Experience, the Belatedness of Trauma, the Inexpressibility of Trauma to portray the importance of trauma narratives and LaCapra's concept of "Working Through" as a mechanism for healing and acceptance of traumatic experiences. In the analysis of a literary text using trauma theory, certain tenets are applicable to its exploration which include; Trauma as an Unclaimed Experience, The Belatedness of Trauma, The Inexpressibility of Trauma, The concept of Repetition Compulsion, The Ethics of Witnessing and Testimony in Trauma, Trauma, History and Collective Memory, Political and Social Dimensions of Trauma, Healing, Recovery, Acting out and Working Through. These tenets serve as tools that make trauma theory applicable in this study.

Influence of Trauma on Identity and The Fragmented Self in Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*

In Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*, there is a connection between identity and trauma. The novel tells the story of Feyi Adekola, the protagonist. It represents her as a character whose identity is altered by traumatic loss. This is evident in the very opening of the text with a statement that "Milan was the first person Feyi had fucked since the accident" (1). This reference to "the accident" establishes trauma to be a dominant preoccupation of Feyi's present reality. The text narrates that five years before the novel's present action, Feyi's husband Jonah died in a car crash that she survived. This traumatic occurrence creates what Cathy Caruth calls an "unclaimed experience," that "is not fully experienced or understood at the moment it happens" (15). It opens a mental wound in her life that later disrupts her self-perception. Basically, trauma is Feyi's major disruptor of her sense of self. An illustration of this is seen in her internal reflection: "She was a monster and a traitor, but it was fine, it had to happen" (Emezi 8). This self-reflection tells us that she no longer sees herself to be a normal person. This self-perception is a revelation of the manner in which trauma has fractured Feyi's identity. She can no longer be a woman moving forward with her life. Instead, she experiences herself as "monstrous" in an attempt to survive. Being a "monster" suggests that Feyi's sense of self has been distorted by trauma, as she struggles to reconcile her continued existence with Jonah's death. Though Jonah is long dead, but the effect lives on in Feyi's life. The text uses this instance to exemplify the belatedness of trauma in Feyi's delayed emotional responses. Caruth proposes that trauma "does not unfold at the time of the event where it occurs but manifests itself afterwards through reoccurring memories and flashbacks" (6). This is evident in Feyi's nightmares which continue five years after the accident. The novel describes one such episode: "Jonah. They're pulling her to safety, and someone's shouting that the car's about to blow. She's trying to find her voice, to pull it out of her bruised throat, but it's taking too long" (Emezi 268). One thing to note here is the use of present tenses. The present-tense narration of

the dream sequence illustrates the continued eruption of the past trauma into Feyi's present. Thus, it collapses the line between then and now.

Furthermore, Feyi's identity is fragmented by her inability to process her grief. The novel depicts the way she compartmentalizes her pain. According to the narrator, "Feyi did not want the money, but she needed it, that obscene check, and maybe she even needed the accompanying guilt. It was a punishment that felt necessary, like balance" (Emezi 9). This passage reveals the creation of a fragmented moral economy in Feyi's psyche by trauma. Her moral self has been divided that she does not want to corrupt herself with "the money." But at the same time, she needs it. It leaves her with a fragmented self in relation of what is right or wrong. It suggests that her sense of self has become divided between the part that wants to live and the part that feels she should not have survived when Jonah did not. Additionally, the text describes the inexpressibility of trauma using Feyi's difficulty in speaking about what happened to Jonah. When she finally tells Nasir about her past, the narration notes: "It was the end of the story.' Feyi pressed her napkin to her eyes. 'Jesus. Sorry'. We were in a car accident five years ago. Nothing much happened to me, but Jonah... Jonah died" (Emezi 81). The brevity of her account followed by immediate tears shows that trauma resists full expression in language. Caruth posits that "trauma resists representation because it overwhelms the structures of language and comprehension" (Emezi 11). Feyi's inability to elaborate, is an example of this inexpressibility. In addition, the novel also portrays the way trauma affects Feyi's approach to her own body and desires. Her first sexual encounter after five years of celibacy occurs with Milan. Due to trauma of many years, she approaches the sex with recklessness and a deliberate refusal to protect herself. According to the narrator, "She wrapped her legs around his hips. 'It's fine.' Reckless" (Emezi 14). This reckless behaviour reminds one of what trauma theory identifies as "acting out," where "the victim or community remains trapped in the past" (LaCapra 14). Here, Feyi is no longer mindful of what becomes of her. Anything that comes out is "fine" for her. Feyi's risky sexual choices can be understood as a form of self-destruction. It is a way of testing whether she deserves to survive and experience pleasure. In a similar way, the text dwells further on the uncertainty about her right to exist and move forward as a result of traumatic loss. In her words, "Everyone said it's what he would have wanted, but she was fairly sure he would have wanted to live. Most people didn't get what they wanted" (Emezi 9). This passage shows Feyi caught between different versions of herself. The first is a widow who should remain faithful to Jonah's memory. The second is a living woman who has desires and needs of her own. The trauma she experienced has created a split in her identity by making it impossible for her to be one coherent self.

Also, Feyi's artistic practice reveals the manner in which trauma has shaped her identity. The novel describes her work: "Grotesque as it was, nothing she painted or stitched together could bruise her the way her own life had" (Emezi 9). It can be deduced from this that Feyi's identity as an artist is tied to her trauma. She makes "grotesque" work not despite her pain but because of it. In this way, using art is a way to externalise the internal fragmentation she experiences. Her art becomes a space where she can represent the unrepresentable aspects of her traumatic loss.

Moreover, the novel also shows the way trauma has affected Feyi's capacity for future-oriented thinking. She tells Joy, "I don't know if I want to get all intimate with someone else" (33) which reveals the barrier created by trauma between her present self and any imagined future. Her identity has is frozen at the moment of loss. It makes it difficult to conceive of herself as someone who might love again or build a new life. This kind of disruption is

characteristic of trauma, which "alters one's sense of time" and causes "the past [to] continually intrude upon the present" (Caruth 42).

To conclude, Feyi sees herself to have a divided identity. On one hand, she is "the soft girl" who wants connection and love. On the other, she is "the widow who would gladly burn the whole fucking world down" (Emezi 246). This split in identity is a direct result of her trauma, which has created irreconcilable aspects of self that cannot come together into a whole. The trauma has made it impossible for Feyi to be one person. Instead, she exists as multiple selves that she displays depending on context and her emotional state.

Representation of Fragmented Self in Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*

In Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*, fragmented self is represented in many ways. Emezi employs different narrative techniques to represent Feyi's fragmented self. For Caruth, trauma literature breaks traditional narrative forms by making use of non-linear storylines, repetition, fragmentation, silence and gaps to reflect the disruption of memory and time caused by (4-5). The novel captures these characteristics by its structure and style. The most prominent representation of Feyi's fragmented self appears by the intrusion of memories of the past into the present narrative. The intrusions are presented by shifts in tense and tone. For example, in the middle of a scene where Feyi is flirting with Milan, the narration shifts suddenly: "For a moment, there was the scream of tires and the mad chime of broken glass, the soft petals of white lilies, and a clod of dirt breaking apart in Feyi's hand, but she brushed it all aside like smoke" (Emezi 3). This interruption of the present narrative with fragmentary images from the past is a depiction of fragmented temporal experience created by trauma. The past does not stay safely in the past. They intrude into the present moment. The scream of "tires and the mad chime of broken glass" are all memories of the past that keep appearing at the present. The fact that she "she brushed it all aside like smoke," does not mean they have disappeared to the past. Such fragmentations recur many times in the novel.

Furthermore, the novel represents Feyi's fragmented self by means of her relationship with different names and identities. She is called Feyi (her living self), Jonah's wife (her past self), and someone trying to be "someone else, someone starting over, someone who wasn't haunted" (Emezi 8). The text shows her attempting to inhabit these different identities in different contexts. She has never been able to embrace them into oneself. When she is travelling with Milan, the narrator tells us:

Everyone had old lives. Somewhere in the blur of the past was a different Feyi—Jonah's wife, a walking ghost. And now she was here, watching thick green roll past the car window, on a strange island with a man driving her up a mountain to his father. The ocean licked the land below, and Feyi closed her eyes, living for a brief moment only in the salt of the breeze. (Emezi 69)

From the above narration, her identity as "Jonah's wife" is just a walking ghost." However, as Feyi, she lives and is ready to rebuild her life with Milan. But that identity is not permanent. It is true that she lives as Feyi but lives a "brief moment only in the salt of the breeze." It gives the suggestion that the self is temporary. This change of selves reflects the fragmentation that trauma caused.

Feyi's artistic work is a metaphor that stand for her fragmented self. The installation piece she creates for the exhibition consists of "four hundred and thirteen gold wedding rings hung suspended from the ceiling at varying heights" (Emezi 258). Among these rings is the one from the accident, "splashed with old blood that Feyi was careful to never clean off" (Emezi 258).

This artwork is a literary representation of her internal fragmentation. Her arts have multiple repetitions of the same object, with the "real" one hidden among copies, all suspended and disoriented in space. The installation depicts Feyi's psychological state. Her installation is described as creating "discomfort" and forcing viewers to confront "disruption" (Emezi 258). The rings chime against each other. It creates sound that prevents peace or resolution. This sound portrays Feyi's internal state. It implies there is no quiet, no rest, only the constant collision of past and present, memory and desire, guilt and longing.

Furthermore, the novel uses repetition to represent the compulsive return of trauma. Feyi's thoughts circle back repeatedly to the same images and moments. The phrase "Jonah. Jonah. Jonah" appears multiple times throughout the text. It depicts what Freud called "repetition compulsion." This repetition in the narrative form itself represents Feyi's inability to move beyond the traumatic moment.

The text shows her "caught in a loop" (Caruth 62), unable to progress linearly through time because the past keeps reasserting itself. Again, the text represents Feyi's fragmentation by the use of her dialogue with herself. She frequently speaks to herself in the second person: "'You got this,' Feyi whispered to herself, her voice catching, her cigarette dying and grey between her fingers. 'You can do this'" (Emezi 20). This self-address points to the split in her psyche. It denotes there is a self that needs reassurance and a self that attempts to provide it. The fragmentation is further emphasised by her inability to maintain consistent emotional states. She shifts between determination and despair, between desire and guilt. Feyi's psychological fragmentation is represented by the use of physical location. She moves between different locations like Brooklyn, Bushwick, Cambridge, and finally the Caribbean Island. In any of the places, she never feels present. Her New York apartment, which she shares with Joy, is described as a place she inhabits but where she does not fully exist. The island represents an even more extreme form of displacement, a "world that was not real" (Emezi 183). This physical displacement is a symbol of her psychological state of being nowhere in full, of being fragmented in different incomplete identities and locations.

The novel's climax where Feyi confronts Nasir at the museum represents her fragmented self by the use of a sudden shift in persona. The "soft girl" who had been crying and apologising changes into someone harder: "The rage unfurled like a bonfire and Feyi let it wash over her, wash away the soft girl, coat her in the widow who would gladly burn the whole fucking world down" (Emezi 246). This dramatic shift between selves from vulnerable to rageful, from apologetic to threatening shows that Feyi does not possess one stable identity. Likewise, the text uses silence and gaps to represent Feyi's fragmentation. There are moments when she cannot or will not speak, when language fails her entirely. These silences are made noticed in the text through ellipses, broken sentences, and narrative gaps. For example, when Alim asks about her nightmares, Feyi's response is fragmented: "Bad dreams." / "Ah." He gave her a commiserating look. "Those are hard" (Emezi 237). The brief and unclear answer indicate that trauma creates holes in communication. It creates gaps that cannot be filled with words.

Finally, the novel represents Feyi's fragmented temporality through its narrative structure. The present action is constantly interrupted by memories, dreams, and flashbacks. The text moves non-linearly through time, jumping between past and present in ways that mirror Feyi's psychological experience. This formal fragmentation reflects the content of her trauma, just as the narrative cannot proceed forward smoothly, neither can Feyi's life.

Socio-Cultural Experiences that influence the Protagonist's Fragmented Self

In Emezi's *You Made a Fool of Death with Your Beauty*, there are many socio-cultural factors responsible for Feyi's fragmentation. They include race, gender, class, migration, and cultural displacement. These elements interact with personal trauma to increase the fragmentation. First, the text describes the way Feyi's identity as a young Black woman artist shapes her experience of trauma and recovery. Her movement from Cambridge to Brooklyn represents a navigation of racialised and gendered place. She reflects that "if she was a monster, then so was the city, glorious and bright and everlasting, eating up time and hearts and lives as if they were nothing" (Emezi 8). This comparison between herself and New York City hints that Feyi sees urban settlement as offering a particular kind of anonymity and absolution for Black women. It is a place where her trauma might be less visible, where she can disappear into the crowd.

In addition, the novel shows that Feyi's relationship with her Nigerian parents influences her fragmented self. When she mentions her parents, she notes that "they didn't understand why she chose the work she had" (Emezi 36). This lack of understanding from her family represents a gap that increases her isolation. Her parents' inability to comprehend her artistic practice as valid work reflects the tensions between immigrant parents' expectations and second-generation desires for self-expression. There is a cultural disconnection here. The value her parents hold so dearly do not matter to her. And hence, there is a misunderstanding between them. This adds another reason for Feyi's fragmentation.

Furthermore, socio-economic class is another factor portrayed in the novel to be among the causes of Feyi's experience of trauma. She pays for her Brooklyn apartment with "the life insurance money, trying to ignore how ghoulish that felt" (Emezi 9). This "blood money" produces a material foundation for her life that is tied to Jonah's death. The novel explores the manner in which late capitalism changes even death and grief into financial transactions. Feyi's fragmented self is constituted by this economic reality in a way. She lives in a place purchased with her husband's death, surrounded by reminders of what she lost and what she gained through that loss. Similarly, the novel illustrates that Feyi's experience of trauma and recovery are also influenced by gender expectations. Her sexual relationships are evaluated by others (particularly by Nasir and Lorraine) using a perspective of female sexual morality. This is exemplified when Lorraine calls her "wutless" (worthless) and hints she is "just a ho" seeking "any kinda fame, any attention" (Emezi 249).

These insults draw on ideas about women's sexuality and value. The fragmentation Feyi experiences is intensified by these gender-based judgments. They position her as either virtuous (the faithful widow) or worthless (the woman who dares to desire again). Being a second-generation Nigerian American, Feyi lives between different realities and contrasts American culture with West African traditions. This is also seen in her friendship with Joy, a second-generation Ghanaian American. The novel captures moments of Joy's parents "trying" to pressure her into a marriage, suggesting a struggle between American independence and West African traditions of marriage (Emezi 69).

While unspoken, Feyi's experiences with her Nigerian immigrant parents also inform her sense of family, community, and belonging. The novel goes on to show the manner in which Feyi's fragmentation is made worse because of the Caribbean island's culture. Although she is visible on the island (as Nasir's guest, an American, and an artist), she is also invisible (her past life, most of the island's inhabitants are oblivious to it). The rumours that circulate about her

and Alim point the ways systems of social control regulate women's sexuality. Lorraine tells Alim, "Your whole family, we the fucking scandal of the week" (Emezi 249). The statement captures communal fragmentation and judgment and their ability to distort Feyi's reality. Being "the scandal" is just one of her many disrupted selves. The text also depicts the way professional and artistic communities have influences on Feyi's identity. Her participation in the museum exhibition represents a moment when her private trauma becomes public art. The curator Rebecca and collector Pooja all interpret Feyi's work by their own frameworks. It indicates that artistic institutions can both validate and commodify trauma. When Pooja commissions a piece after revealing her own loss (death of her daughter Keya), the novel shows the way trauma creates unexpected connections in differences of culture, class, and geography. But this connection is mediated by economic exchange.

Age and generational differences also have effects on Feyi's experience. At twenty-nine, she is caught between expectations for young adulthood (building a career, potentially starting a family) and her status as a widow. Her relationship with Alim, who is forty-seven, is seen to be scandalous partly because of this age difference. Nasir articulates the socio-cultural judgment: "You sleeping with a girl young enough to be yuh daughter" (Emezi 249). This age-based criticism reveals society's definition of acceptable forms of desire and partnership. It creates additional fragmentation for Feyi, who must navigate social disapproval of her choices. The text further portrays slavery and colonialism to be what Marianne Hirsch calls "postmemory" (10).

Postmemory is a kind of trauma inherited across generations. Though the novel does not discuss historical trauma, the characters' relationships to the Caribbean Island, to Brooklyn, to migration and displacement, all carry echoes of this larger history. Feyi's artwork engages with blood as a medium, which connects to histories of violence that extend beyond her personal loss. Her exploration of grief through art participates in a longer tradition of Black artists working in collective and historical trauma. The novel explores heteronormative expectations in the shaping of Feyi's relationships and self-understanding. Her brief sexual relationship with Joy represents a moment of fluidity that contrasts with the heterosexual relationships that structure most of the plot. Joy's pattern of pursuing "straight girls" (Emezi 11) and the complications it creates denotes that sexuality itself is a site of fragmentation for both women, as they navigate desires that do not fit neatly into social categories.

Additionally, the text reveals the way mental health resources and therapeutic discourse are factors that have high impacts on Feyi's experience. She has a therapist she calls when needed to. The therapist helps her to name her anxiety, recognise her patterns, and work toward healing. Nevertheless, Feyi's major development happen in artmaking, sexual connection, and relationship with Alim. Similarly, the novel points out the manner in which artistic communities and institutions influence identity. Feyi's participation and dialogue with other Black Diaspora artists have positive and negative influences on her confidence in her art. Meeting artists like Katherine Agyemaa Agard and Charmaine Bee, Feyi experiences both inspiration and intimidation. The institutional validation of the museum show is important to her sense of self as an artist, but she also feels like an imposter, uncertain whether she "belongs" in this world.

Finally, language itself contributes to Feyi's fragmentation. The experience of moving among English, Spanish, and Creole shapes her identity. Though Feyi speaks English, she is surrounded by multilingual speakers on the island. The text includes phrases in Spanish and Creole. It indicates that language is a marker of belonging and exclusion. Feyi's relationship

with Alim points out the impacts of linguistic and cultural competence in belonging to a group. Alim speaks multiple languages. Feyi's relative monolingualism marks her as American, as outsider. It adds another dimension to her fragmented sense of self. In all, it can be concluded that Feyi's fragmented self is as a result of intersection of personal loss with larger structures of race, gender, class, migration, and cultural identity. Hence, to understand her fragmented self requires attention to the psychological impact of trauma and the socio-cultural contexts that structure the extent trauma is experienced, expressed and potentially healed.

CONCLUSION

This study provides an extensive analysis of Akwaeke Emezi's *You made a Fool of Death with your Beauty* through the lens of Cathy Caruth's trauma theory. Emezi's *You made a Fool of Death with your Beauty* is an engaging text that captures the fragmentation of Feyi's self due to trauma and loss of her husband Jonah. The text also exposes various coping mechanisms adopted by Feyi to cope with her grief. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory tenets help us to understand how well the fragmented self is represented in Emezi's text in the character of Feyi. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, the analysis shows that Feyi's pain is an Unclaimed Experience, something she cannot fully understand and how it keeps resurfacing in her life, blurring the lines between the past and present.

Feyi in the text finds it hard to speak about her pain, her sexual behaviour reflects LaCapra's concept of "acting out, as a way of coping with pain through self-destructive choices. Feyi's fragmentation is first represented by constant intrusions of the past into the present and a division of her self perception into "Feyi", "Jonah's wife" and someone trying to start afresh. Emezi's *You made a Fool of Death with your Beauty* explains that Feyi's fragmented self not only results from personal trauma but also from various socio cultural factors such as race, gender, class, age and cultural displacement. The text shows how Feyi's identity and healing is shaped by racism, gender, class and age. Emezi's text illustrates the fragmentation of self caused by trauma and the socio cultural influences that shape and sustain fragmentation. Finally, silence, ellipses and narrative gaps used in the text express the incommunicability of trauma, while the novel's fragmented, non-linear storylines formally represent Feyi's disrupted and fractured psychological state. This study shows that *You made a Fool of Death with your Beauty* can be analysed through the lens of trauma theory while also addressing the fragmentation of self and identity.

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