



UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

***ATTACHMENT TRAUMA AND ROLE OF SECURE BASE IN SELECTED
LITERARY WORKS OF BLACK WOMEN WRITERS***

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LITERARY WORKS OF BLACK WOMEN WRITERS**

By

SHAMAILA DODHY

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

February 2018

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in the fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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February 2018

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Most research in the field of trauma studies has been limited to the sufferings of Whites, focusing predominantly on the agonies of Holocaust victims and repercussions of military operations on war veterans. Some researchers have examined victimization of black women in light of Trauma Studies with reference to slavery, racism, colonialism and the concept of beauty but my research will strive to focus on those fictional characters who suffered from *attachment trauma*. These characters are perpetrated by their close relations who are supposed to protect them and safeguard their rights. Traumatic experiences of these characters by their family-members result in psychological disorders. This aspect has hardly been explored. I intend to fill the gap by examining contemporary African and African-American literature produced by black women in the light of Jon G. Allen's *Attachment Trauma Theory*. This study seeks to analyze the fictional works of Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996), Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997), Zeldia Lockhart's *Fifth Born* (2010), and Yejide Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012). The study aims to examine the silenced characters that have experienced not only physical intrusion but also substantial psychological and emotional trauma. I aim to explore how *attachment trauma* and *attachment anxiety* are related to emotional damage of these characters. Life becomes frightful as one has to survive in intimidating domestic environment with lingering traumatic memories. In this study, the role of *secure base* will also be identified as a means of recovering the shattered selves of the characters. This research will evaluate if affectionate and caring attachment figures have comforting, healing and therapeutic effects on the suffering individuals. These individuals struggle to achieve integrity and independence while coping with humiliation and loneliness. This *Trauma Fiction* conveys traumatic knowledge using stylistic features where the concept of time freezes like the experience of trauma. These pain narratives authenticate female resistance against violent patriarchal structures of the social order.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**TRAUMA PERAPATAN DAN PERANAN DASAR JAMINAN DALAM
KARYA SASTERA TERPILIH PENULIS WANITA KULIT HITAM**

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Kebanyakan penyelidikan dalam bidang kajian trauma adalah terhad pada penderitaan orang kulit putih, memfokuskan lebih banyak ke atas agoni mangsa Holokus dan reperkusi operasi ketenteraan ke atas veteran peperangan. Beberapa orang penyelidik telah meneliti pemangsaan wanita kulit hitam dari segi Kajian Trauma dengan merujuk kepada perhambaan, rasisme dan konsep kecantikan tetapi kajian ini berusaha untuk memfokuskan watak fiksi yang mengalami trauma perapatan. Watak tersebut dipermangsakan oleh ahli keluarga rapat yang sepatutnya melindungi mereka dan mengawal selamat hak mereka. Pengalaman traumatik watak tersebut oleh ahli keluarga mereka mengakibatkan kecelaruan psikologikal. Aspek ini masih belum diterokai. Kajian ini berharap dapat mengisi jurang dengan meneliti kesusasteraan Afrika dan Afrika-Amerika kontemporari yang dihasilkan oleh penulis wanita kulit hitam dari sudut Teori Trauma Perapatan Jon G. Allen. Kajian ini cuba menganalisis karya cereka penulis Yvonne Vera *Under the Tongue* (1996), Toni Morrison *Paradise* (1997), Zelda Lockhart *Fifth Born* (2010), dan Yejide Kilanko *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) yang bertujuan untuk meneliti watak minor yang mengalami bukan sahaja gangguan fizikal tetapi juga trauma psikologikal dan emosional yang cukup banyak. Kajian ini juga bertujuan untuk menerokai bagaimana trauma perapatan dan kebimbangan trauma berkaitan dengan kemusnahan emosional watak tersebut. Kehidupan menjadi suatu ketakutan disebabkan seseorang itu harus dapat bertahan dalam persekitaran domestik yang menakutkan beserta kenangan traumatik yang berlarutan. Dalam kajian ini, peranan dasar jaminan juga telah dikenal pasti sebagai cara mengembalikan keberkecayaan diri watak tersebut. Penyelidikan ini juga menilai sekiranya watak penyayang yang mengambil berat perapatan mempunyai kesan penenang, penyembuhan dan terapeutik ke atas individu yang menderita. Individu penderita tersebut bersusah payah untuk memperoleh integriti dan kebebasan di samping bertahan dengan penghinaan dan kesunyian. Fiksi Trauma tersebut membawa pengetahuan

traumatik menggunakan ciri stilistik, iaitu konsep masa dibekukan seperti pengalaman trauma. Naratif kesakitan tersebut membuktikan penentangan wanita terhadap kekerasan struktur patriakal bagi peraturan sosial.



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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

The contemporary age is certainly a time marked by historical upheavals. From world wars to civil wars, violent political regimes and genocides, massive migration resulting in displacement and diaspora, painful legacy of slavery and colonialism have shaped the contemporary history. People have raised voice against the sufferings to seek justice for the wrongs done to them. Trauma Studies have emerged as a primary response to traumatic events. The term trauma, Cathy Caruth observes, originally refers to “an injury inflicted on a body” (Unclaimed 4). Later the connotation transformed in Freudian Theory as now it refers to mind’s response to witnessing or experiencing an event resulting in shattering of the victim’s sense of wholeness.

Though multidimensional aspects of trauma are studied by the critics but the critical endeavors of Sigmund Freud cannot be ignored by the contemporary theorists. The interest in trauma studies began with the study of soldiers returning from war-fronts whose mental health severely deteriorated due to the impact of prolonged stress they faced in trenches or in concentration camps. The memory of traumatic events is also studied in detail to explain the deep psychic pain of the victims. The memory of violent events is so overwhelming that the victim is left with dissociative problems and personality disorders. The trauma theory has advanced by deriving the concepts and studies both from Freudian psychoanalysis and psychiatric notions of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. Trauma theory identifies those events which cannot be fully absorbed resulting in unspeakable traumatic experiences. These events remain in the life of victim in form of vague memories, repressed thoughts, hallucinations and flashbacks. The victim can never completely recover from these emotional shocks of the past and remains trapped in illusive reality. Shoshana Felman says that trauma survivors do not live with “memories of the past, but with an event that could not and did not proceed through to its completion, has no ending, attained no closure, and therefore, as far as its survivors are concerned, continues into the present and is current in every respect” (*Testimony* 69).

Both Sigmund Freud and Caruth used literary metaphors to identify and clarify the concept of trauma. Caruth stresses, as earlier Freud did, that the traumatic event remains unavailable to willful recall. This results in disorienting the victim because the mind tries to recognize the event that was never experienced consciously. Even time seems to break down for the victim because “the traumatic memory persists in a half-life, rather like a ghost, a haunting absent presence of another time in our time” (Luckhurst 81). So, the past refuses to go back in time causing the victim to re-experience the pain repeatedly. In the field of trauma studies, Freud is the one who

introduced the idea that trauma is a dialectical process because the original event is neither incorporated completely by the consciousness, nor by the memory that later generates that experience.

Trauma studies in the field of Literary Criticism gained prominence in late twentieth-century. Anne Whitehead emphasizes the influence of the concept of trauma on literary studies in the following words: “the term ‘trauma fiction’ also signals a recent journey of the concept of trauma from medical and scientific discourse to the field of literary studies” (4). She further argues that there is “a specific affinity of literary criticism to trauma studies” (4). Literary works depict not only the private trauma of an individual but also elucidate social reasons which become the cause of abuse, thus offer an extensive spectrum by revealing intimate feelings and presenting societal critique also. The narratives of trauma presented the issues of gender-politics, race, and class. This results in *trauma fiction* which performs an ethical function as it investigates the causes for and the consequences of a traumatic experience.

The term trauma fiction, somehow, appears contradictory to Whitehead because the traumatic event is so overwhelming that it resists language while fiction is narration of events. This has given rise to a new style of writing to preserve the historical records of collective trauma like slavery and colonialism plus individual trauma which is mostly borne by woman at domestic level. For this, “[n]ovelists have frequently found that the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection” (3).

For Whitehead, quite like Roger Luckhurst, the *ghost* is the most appropriate embodiment of “disjunction of temporality, the surfacing of the past in the present” (6). This is one of the reasons that many novels are being written to explore haunted histories. Many deal with the issues of those people who have not been able to reconcile with the horrors of the past or with the ghost of a person who died too suddenly or unexpectedly. Like Luckhurst, she also gives the example of Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* because it deals with Seth who is haunted by the ghost of her daughter whom she herself has murdered in fear of slavery, the daughter returns back to the mother to claim her love which was denied to her. The novel also presents “the unresolved trauma of slavery” (6) which disturbs almost all the characters as the horrors of slavery are so over-whelming that they fail to accept the fact that now they are free and are no more a part of bonded labor. Caruth calls it “crisis of truth” (*Explorations* 7) and this crisis functions beyond the level of individual to mark the ways in which the historical experience can be analysed at cultural level.

It is the responsibility of the listener to respond to the testimony with a collaborative relationship and at the same time to maintain a distance to avoid appropriation. A subtle balance must be sustained between witnessing the testimony and respect for

the experience of the victim with a reasonable distance. There is a relationship between trauma and place as the survivors live among pieces of memory scattered across landscape. The landscape helps in “rescuing and redeeming the stories of the conquered and the dispossessed” (Whitehead 10) past. It sometimes becomes a redemptive counterforce to the catastrophe. These sites of memory, cultural and geographical locations, become significant redeeming forces. Whitehead has drawn attention towards those writers who have “mimicked [trauma’s] symptomology at a formal level” (161) through “repetition, indirection and the dispersal of narrative voice in works of trauma fiction” (161).

Kali Tal in *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* not only observes the mental condition of Vietnam War Veterans but discusses the trauma of those women who are sexually abused. She observes that trauma is a life-threatening event that disrupts one’s preconceived ideas about the world. It is enacted in a liminal space outside the range of normal experiences of life which makes difficult for writers to represent the experience of trauma accurately. The victim reaches at such a point where the sense and the non-sense merge transfiguring the narrative into fragmented form. It is a sorrowful fact that rapists are protected by criminal justice which demands rape-victims to prove that the incident was not accordant. Moreover, the victim is supposed to bring substantial proof against the perpetrator which is very demanding. The rape-victims are not supported by the judiciary, so they remain afraid of persecution by rapists who usually harass them socially and psychologically. Tal has focused not only on the psychological repercussions of the victim but has criticized the legal system which “tends[s] to be prejudiced against the prosecution and to be lenient with the defendant;” (19). The persecutors outrightly dismiss the case of acquaintance rape against them. That is why acquaintance rape is the most unreported crime. Unfortunately, in case of children, it is always thought that they must have fantasized so the benefit of doubt is given to the persecutor.

The psychological trauma against women is kept hidden under thick cover, considering it a private truth. Judith L. Herman in her monumental text, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, vividly says, “[t]o speak about experiences in sexual or domestic life was to invite public humiliation, ridicule, and disbelief. Women were silenced by fear and shame, and the silence of women gave license to every form of sexual and domestic exploitation” (28). There is democracy in public life but in homes women are living in a primitive autocratic environment. Women should be conscious of the fact that they should “overcome the barriers of denial, secrecy, and shame that prevented them from naming their injuries” (29). This feminist awareness empowered victims to cross the barriers of privacy by supporting one another and taking a collective action. It is in the decade of 70s that women established the fact that rape is an atrocity and a crime of violence. It is a type of controlling and subordinating women through terror. It is recognized as a life-threatening event because mostly the victim is threatened of mutilation and death by the perpetrator. The after-effects of rape are long-lasting as “victims complained of insomnia, nausea, startle responses, and nightmares, as well as dissociative or numbing symptoms” (31).

The initial focus of investigation by women of 70s was the assault by strangers called *street rape* which led to the investigation of *acquaintance rape*, *date rape*, and *rape in marriage* (31). These exposed other forms of violence like domestic battery and varied types of private coercion. From the rape of adults, the study moved on to the analysis of abuse against children. Herman draws an interesting comparison between the affectees of rape, domestic battery and incest with the survivors of war. She says that just as war-veterans have horrifying repercussions similarly these women suffer immensely, so one can say that there is a continuous war going on at homes also, which she calls *the sex war* and the casualties of this war are “[r]ape victims, battered women, and sexually abused children” (*Trauma and Recovery* 32).

In case of domestic violence, the perpetrator enslaves the victim by exercising autocratic control in every aspect of life of the victim for the justification of his behavior. He also demands love and respect from her. Victim is kept in a state of constant fear. Most of the time the threat of death is enough to control the situation rather than resorting to physical harm. So, the physical control is linked to psychological domination. Herman further adds that in addition to fear “the perpetrator seeks to destroy the victim’s sense of autonomy” (*Trauma and Recovery* 77). This is achieved by keeping a strong hold on victim’s bodily functions which results in physical debilitation. She is not allowed even to have contact with friends or relatives to achieve complete domination.

With the rise of Feminism, women have gathered courage to raise voice against the sufferings borne by them in silence. There has been an ongoing power struggle especially in the representation and treatment of traumatic experiences related to women. The afflicted women are silenced through oppression and marginalization which results in turning them voiceless. In a state of voicelessness, it becomes challenging to express the psychological trauma which by its nature is the *unspeakable* narrative of the victim. Black women writers were the first to highlight the grave issue of domestic violence, especially incest, which was kept secret to save the perpetrator from shame and family-name from humiliation. Maya Angelou’s autobiography *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (1969) and Toni Morrison’s *The Bluest Eye* (1970) are the first two writings through which women reacted to the physical and psychological harm being brought to them by their blood relations.

Since 1990s, *trauma studies* have provided valuable insights into traumatic experiences of victims of Holocaust, slavery, colonialism, and horrifying memories of war-veterans. In contrast, my point of departure is that I will study those characters that are betrayed neither by foes nor by unknown people but by their close relations who are supposed to protect them and safeguard their rights. They experience *attachment trauma*—a trauma perpetrated by a closely attached person, which is far more invasive as compared to those women who are assaulted by unknown men. According to the studies by Jon G. Allen, another attachment figure in form of mother/caregiver is usually there to comfort the child whenever she is in pain or traumatized. Allen proposes that trauma can be cured by an attachment figure who offers the victim a *secure base*. He says that a secure base is a foundation

provided by secure attachment figure where one can revert to receive consolation in tough times. But with the constraints of patriarchal society, are these attachment figures able to help rape victims to recover from such an atrocious and heinous crime such as marital rape or incest? There have been many cases where even a mother refuses to recognize the pain of her daughter to avoid shame and humiliation that the victim brings to the family. In such cases, the victim is forced to remain silent and voiceless. This aggravates the stress of the victim, a condition known as *attachment anxiety*. The dilemma continues as the victim is required to live in the same vicinity with perpetrator who is a close relative but at the same she struggles to avoid the presence of the perpetrator which makes the life difficult.

I examined the characters of the selected novels in light of Jon G. Allen's *Attachment Trauma Theory*. I argue that these characters intensely suffer from *attachment anxiety* and other psychological ailments which are associated with emotional disorders of the victim. This study examined if these victims still look for comfort from any other attachment figure. It has also studied why these attachment figures that provide secure bases are at times unable to help these victims. My thesis will contribute to the field of literary studies through analysis of attachment trauma in the novels written by black women writers.

This dissertation will focus on the emergence of black woman fictional narratives that center on trauma and looks how attachment trauma is faced and overcome by an individual. The writers in question are black women writers. In this thesis, I attempt to address a research gap by examining attachment trauma across a range of fiction by: Yvonne Vera, Toni Morrison, Zelda Lockhart and Yejide Kilanko. No critic has analyzed their selected works using Attachment Trauma Theory. One intrinsic component of my study here is to show the prevalence of traumatic moments, and illustrating the ability of fiction to focus on and significantly address serious issues, including violence, anxiety and prevalence of traumatic memory in *Under the Tongue* (1996) by Yvonne Vera and *Paradise* (1997) by Toni Morrison, *Fifth Born* (2002) by Zelda Lockhart and *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) by Yejide Kilanko. More specifically this dissertation will explore the ways in which fiction utilizes trauma to comment upon and enhance the conventions of the genre.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

While there has been much scholarly work done analyzing the works of black women in light of Trauma Studies with reference to slavery, racism, and the concept of beauty but my research will strive to study the works of contemporary black women writers in light of Jon G. Allen's *Attachment Trauma Theory*. Black women writers are widely read because their works are textual representations of the issues of class, race, and gender which focus on mental and thought processes of traumatized people and at the same time cast a light on their epochs in a significant way. These writers have artistically presented their own observations of life to the texture of their writings making them more truthful and close to reality.

Related to this relationship of life and psychological terrains, the entire process of the present thesis reflects the idea of Attachment Trauma Theory that if a person is deceived by an attachment figure, quite paradoxically the individual receives consolation from some other attachment figure that helps the troubled soul to continue life. So, my framework subverts the experience of trauma as a mechanism employed by the characters to heal and recover their broken selves. Based on this central principle, any interpretation of a literary text would be inadequate if the critic ignores the role of *secure base* when the victim is in a state of trauma. Such an ambivalent psychoanalytic criticism on Yvonne Vera, Toni Morrison, Zelda Lockhart and Yejide Kilanko is non-existent in literary criticism.

Bessel van der Kolk observes that research has repeatedly verified that those human beings who are exposed to betrayal, abandonment and abuse by their caretakers suffer from complex psychobiological disturbances but “our diagnostic system continues to lump together all trauma-related symptomatology under the category of *PTSD*” (“Towards a Development of Trauma Disaster” 57). It is hoped that studies on psychological trauma will disrupt and question the patriarchal structures of the society that perpetuate female victimization which are still very strong. Judith L. Herman in *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror* brings together hitherto experiences of trauma caused by domestic and sexual violence along with war and terrorism to present a more inclusive and general approach to trauma. In Epilogue to the book which she writes in 2015, she mentions the significance of attachment relationships with reference to mentalizing but there is hardly any research, so far, analyzing attachment trauma with reference to silenced women; the research gap I intend to fill. One intrinsic component of my study here is to emphasize that *Under the Tongue* (1996) by Vera and *Paradise* (1997) by Morrison, *Fifth Born* (2002) by Lockhart and *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) by Kilanko are the novels which are true depiction of emotional turmoil of the selected characters that have undergone attachment trauma. My thesis also looked for and elaborated on the anxiety which the victim experiences for nurturing fear for the future and depression of the past. The emphasis however is on the role of secure base in the process of restoring faith in close relations.

Based on the above explanation, the central argument of the present study can be reviewed as follows: Less attention is paid to the contemporary African and African-American literature produced by women in the light of Attachment Trauma Theory. The works of Vera, Morrison, Lockhart and Kilanko suggest that the maltreatment perpetrated by a close relative is more tormenting and distressing, than the harm done by an enemy or an unknown person. This in turn results in *attachment anxiety* which is associated with emotional disorders. However, the study has analysed if *secure base* becomes a mean of recovering the broken self which is essential for survival.

1.3 Scope of the Study

Contemporary fiction is being exhaustively examined from the perspective of trauma studies. My research has been carried out from the viewpoint of Attachment Trauma Theory. I have done analysis of the writings of two African writers: Yvonne Vera and Yejide Kilanko and two African-American writers: Toni Morrison and Zelda Lockhart from the perspective of Attachment Trauma Theory; Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996) and Morrison's *Paradise* (1997) appeared in late twentieth-century while the works of Lockhart's *Fifth Born* (2002) and Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) appeared in twenty-first century. The time-period chosen is long enough (1996-2012) which enabled me to trace a wider and at the same time contemporary psychological and social issues of the society. These four writers belong to two different continents with dissimilar cultural and geographical backgrounds but share the same ethnic context. They have never been discussed jointly from the perspective of Attachment Trauma Theory so far.

Part of the scheme of the thesis is to examine main characters of the selected texts that experience trauma from close relations which is awfully shocking and unexpected; so to reconcile with the bitter truth becomes very challenging for them. These traumatic experiences shake the foundations of their belief and faith in the attachment figures consequently resulting in changing and reshaping their worldview. The research has minutely examined the stressful times of the characters that have experienced not only serious physical intrusion but also substantial emotional trauma.

This research looked at the works of Cathy Caruth, Judith L. Herman, and Dominick LaCapra with special reference to Jon G. Allen's Attachment Trauma Theory and their application to the aforementioned texts. This selection is based on the idea that these black women writers, writing in the contemporary age, are voicing the experiences of the vulnerable members of the society. Two of them are living in America while the other two belong to Africa. Though it is believed that these two continents are not only spatially miles apart from each other but also in terms of culture and development they are very different. It is highlighted in the research that the people of these two dissimilar continents are suffering from same type of problems. This work examined intimate lives of black women across time and space. My work has broadened the intellectual horizon of the readers because the works of Yvonne Vera, Toni Morrison, Zelda Lockhart and Yejide Kilanko have not been explored profoundly from the perspective of Attachment Trauma Theory as Matina Kopf in her article "Writing Sexual Violence: Words and Silences in Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue*". She thinks that the novel unfolds complex processes of witnessing, listening and remembering in which readers have to actively participate. Kopf suggests that Vera transforms the isolating, broken, and hardly understandable language of traumatic memory into the strength of narrative memory so that it can be shared. Kopf has only talked about language. Similarly a thesis titled "'Shuttles in the Rocking Loom of History': Dislocation in Toni Morrison's Fiction" by Jennifer Ann Terry addresses the theme of dislocation, negotiating black diaspora focusing

on the sites of remembering, displacements, and losses. Most of the work of Terry is allocated to the study of dynamics of militarism and the losses of Vietnam. Unlike my study, Terry's work deals with the degeneration of the utopian vision of all black settlement in the West. She also examines how institutional religion supports patriarchy, conservatism and ethnic absolutism in dissimilarity to Consolata's "non-institutional forms of worship" (193). In contrast to my work this is a study of racial and gender politics plus the collapse of establishment of an ideal state. I have dealt with the collapse of an individual, Mavis, and how she herself has to find her way out to overcome it.

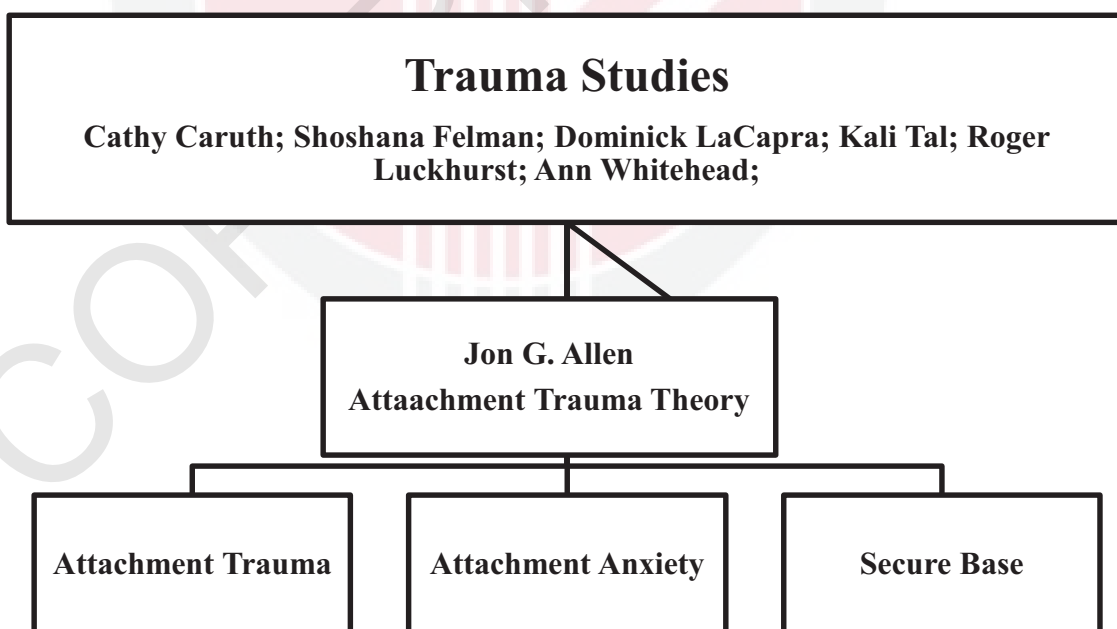
1.4 Theoretical Framework

Londoner John Bowlby and his major collaborator Canadian Mary Ainsworth in late twentieth-century worked on the importance of mother-figure or care-giver that plays an essential role in the personality development of a child. Bowlby was severely criticized by other psychologists because he rejected Freud's *drive theory*. His books on attachment and empirical research of Ainsworth led to the foundation of Attachment theory in 1980s. He propounds that attachment is an emotional bond that is developed during childhood which continues to be an emotional base and impacts till old age. Recognizing its importance, Karl H. Brisch writes, "attachment theory is today one of the most solidly founded theories of human development . . . served as a considerable building block and has contributed to the understanding of human development throughout the life cycle" (14). Whenever a child experiences anxiety, he wants to be in close contact with the care-giver where he is certain to find safety and security. When this happens, a child develops *secure attachment* to an *attachment figure* who sensitively responds to his needs. On the contrary, if a child is ignored and snubbed he will develop *insecure attachment* which will affect him throughout his life. Longitudinal studies have proven that if the individual experiences trauma, a person with secure attachment is safeguarded from developing psychopathology.

Jon G. Allen added a substantial new level of sophistication to the theory, but his model is rooted in attachment theory (Fonagy xii). He believes that a strong secure attachment can put an end to anxiety and depression, a natural consequence of attachment trauma through "mentalizing emotional pain" (*Restoring Mentalizing* xxii) otherwise it will be transmitted to the next generation. He goes beyond the bounds of psychiatry and addresses existential-spiritual treatment of trauma thus bringing it close to the understanding of a common man. He guides the individual to develop close relationships where one can take refuge in troubled periods of life. If one develops and practices skills to heal the wound, there is a possibility of growth and change. There is a constant danger of retraumatization because the memory of traumatic experience does not leave the victim easily. This makes the victim more dependent on secure base to find solace. On other hand, physical abuse terrifies the helpless victim which results in avoidance. This "avoidance can result in diffusion of identity and dissociation" (Allen, Lemma, Fonagy *Handbook* 432). In a conference paper, Allen strongly suggests creating connections where they are most needed. He

concludes his paper by saying “[e]stablishing mentalizing in the context of attachment in individual therapy can be a bridge to other attachment relationships, but patients must not remain on the bridge” (“Attachment and Mentalizing as Change Agents in Psychotherapy” 6).

Drawing on trauma theory particularly attachment trauma, this thesis has read psychological trauma in relation to attachment figures. The enigma of trauma thus lies in the fact that it not only involves a past event, but it also occupies the present. Trauma focuses on traumatic event, questions one’s integrity and sense of control, resulting in a situation where trust in both the self and others is damaged. I have studied these characters in light of Jon G. Allen’s *Attachment Trauma Theory*. I contend that these characters intensely suffer from various psychological ailments. This in succession leads to *attachment anxiety* which is associated to emotional disorders of the victim. This study examined if *secure base* helps them in their situation of trauma. The present study argued that paradoxically it is some other attachment figure that might make the victim disremember the traumatic past. The trauma narratives not only discuss mental and emotional turmoil of an individual but also obliquely point at the cultural context in which they are produced, and perpetrators protected. The repressive masks are removed to expose the ugly facts of life. The questions related to domestic violence largely remain unaddressed and unexplored, so this study recognized and addressed knowledge gap which seems significant to the understanding of attachment trauma and its representation in contemporary black women fiction.



1.5 Methodology

To investigate and answer my research questions, the research design I have adopted is hermeneutic and interpretative. I have related literary texts with non-literary texts of trauma studies to study attachment trauma in the characters of the selected contemporary fiction. My thesis explicated African and African-American fiction written by black women writers in relation to psychological trauma which revealed characters' hidden pain, the memory of traumatic events and the struggle to overcome relentless traumatic memories by reviewing literary texts and trauma studies simultaneously.

Qualitative study is conducted through textual analysis of the selected texts. I studied the impact of Attachment trauma, a trauma perpetrated by a close relation for whom it is tacitly believed that he will safeguard and protect vulnerable members of the family. The society's ambivalent response to such experiences of the female gender is also voiced out; concluding that trauma fiction re-surfaces in fragmented form as traumatic flashbacks, nightmares, intrusive images, and repetitive re-enactments. I have also highlighted the personal and societal problems encountered by women. The selected fiction demonstrated the significance of unspoken and silenced issues of the female gender specifically of black women because "[t]heir neglect by political movements and social science investigators parallels the evidence from numerous social and economic indicators that black women are neglected by society as a whole" (Allen and Britt 61).

The methodological scope of the present thesis has mainly focused on the studies of Jon G. Allen, one of the most influential psychologists of the contemporary age. Along with attachment trauma, the phenomenon of attachment anxiety is studied in detail. The theoretical framework of attachment trauma helped me in understanding the behavior of realistically portrayed characters in the same way that we understand the behavior of real people in real life situations. These characters are not tangible beings but have many parallels with people around us.

Moreover, the concept of secure base is also studied in relation to attachment trauma. Allen was inspired by Bowlby who conceptualized the foundation of human sociability related to complex neurobiological systems that cause infants to seek closeness with their caretakers. Allen believes that for emotional attunement similar reciprocal systems work in adults too. I have discussed the role of secure attachment, to see if it helped the suffering individual who might recover by the support of an Attachment Figure. Therefore, the study examined if the secure base is successful in recovering the broken self which is essential for survival.

I have drawn from a wide range of texts from two different continents to obtain comprehensive results. I have used library to search interpretations and evaluations of the selected texts which comprise the primary source of the thesis. The

commentary and discussion by research scholars and experts in the concerning fields are used for reliability and validity of the research. Library research is undoubtedly significant equipment; so most of the source materials are consulted from the library to validate the work.

1.6 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study necessitate the researcher to establish significant connections between literary texts and researches in trauma studies. This thesis has tried to accomplish three main objectives.

- Objective 1: To identify distinct characteristics of *attachment trauma* and highlight how a human mind absorbs and processes a traumatic event as depicted by female characters of the selected novels.
- Objective 2: To examine representation of *attachment anxiety* which affects mental health and thought processes of the victimized characters.
- Objective 3: To analyze the function of *secure base* on voiceless and traumatized victims in the process of recovery in the selected novels.

The first objective of the present study is to identify the impact of Attachment trauma in the selected novels by black women writers. To explore Attachment trauma—trauma perpetrated by an Attachment relation which is acutely harrowing as the feelings of loss and failure are far more invasive than if the victim is assaulted by an unknown person. The signs of trauma like flashbacks, hallucinations and nightmares in female gender are also examined. It has illustrated how a human mind experiences and processes a traumatic event. The physical violence endured by a black woman results in severe consequences on the individual which mark the society. Such traumatic experiences result in her loss of confidence and trust in male gender which affects her perception of the world.

The second objective is to examine how much *attachment anxiety* is associated to the emotional turmoil of the victim. The research has highlighted that in case of attachment trauma the perpetrator is a close relative, so avoiding that attachment figure becomes a tight spot which results in increase in attachment anxiety. On the contrary, if the victim is assaulted by an unknown man, then the anxiety decreases with the passage of time because the perpetrator and the victim are not living in the same vicinity, so the victim has not to worry about how to avoid the presence of the perpetrator.

The third objective is to analyze if the victim recovers when she is supported by *secure base*. To recognize if the suffering and mental disorders of the victim can be successfully treated with the help of secure base. To see how healing might proceed among trauma victims. The study is intended to give a profound understanding of the

tragic endeavour of the protagonist in struggle to acquire strength while bearing shame and disgrace.

1.7 Research Questions

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the study sought to answer the following questions:

- How is *attachment trauma* depicted through the characters of the selected novels?
- How does *attachment anxiety* affect mental health and thought processes of the victimized characters?
- What role does *secure base* play in the process of healing? Can anxiety of the victim be reduced with help of secure base?

1.8 Significance of the Study

The selected novels by black women writers are much more than about slavery, racism, feminism and Eurocentrism. They provide an insight to the probable causes and solutions into behavioral problems. In recent years, authors and literary critics have interrelated the study of trauma to literature which lets knowledge of psychological trauma and its symptoms to reach larger audience and give authors opportunities to explain how a human mind absorbs and processes the traumatic event, how it stays with the victim in form of nightmares and flashbacks, what strategies does the victim adopt to endure the injury. This study has explicated the relationship of *trauma fiction* and *trauma theory*. The study is rooted in the idea that the boundaries between literature and trauma studies are porous.

This research has been carried out from a new perspective of Attachment Trauma Theory which would enrich the scholarship on the selected fiction. It would help the readers to learn to cope with their disorders and disabilities, and to overcome mental and emotional challenges that each one of us face at one time of the life or the other. The core focus of this study is to help the people to increase their sensitivity, responsiveness to their emotional needs and to manage their behavior more effectively. People should listen to their inner silence and acquaint themselves with fundamental traits of consciousness. The study emphasized that listening to the inner silence would familiarize them with profound peace. They should recognize the feeling of love which is emanated by the whole universe and discover a sense of joy that is not dependent on any circumstance. They should consciously try to replace the vacuum within themselves by driving away the tendency of mind to be restless. Thus, by identifying the factors which affect the emotional health of a person, one can lead a better life.

I have explored sufferings of female characters presented by female writers who belong to two different parts of the world. They, in their struggle to survive, develop different strategies to sustain in this world. One of the strategies is to narrate the experience as narration will help them to completely imbibe the past and to go forward into the future. The secret fears along with the hidden pain can be discussed with some attachment figure who can keep their secrets. Silence has to be broken. These four writers address complex, challenging and intercultural needs of those who have experienced trauma. The needs of the suffering individuals should not be ignored by the responsible members of the society. The current study would introduce sensitivity among the readers for the suffering humanity. The reader would listen to multiple narratives from diverse cultures. Through this, I hope to demonstrate the universality of the issue.

This study has provided an insight into how some traumatized characters are successful in finding a secure base to come back to life in comparison to those who are unable to do so. It has a potential to inform the attachment figures of trauma victims about the strategies they should adopt in helping the victim to come out of the traumatic situation. Time and energy should be spent to make them feasible members of the society, otherwise they will be wasted which would be counted as a big loss of the society. Attachment figures should try to restore their sense of security and confidence by listening to their broken narratives like a psychiatrist. With reference to literature this issue has largely remained unidentified and uninvestigated.

The significance of this study lies in the analysis of African and African-American texts together to explore attachment trauma in two different spaces. This has highlighted the consequences of attachment trauma on female characters in two different societies. The significance of the work lies in citing the selected works of Vera, Morrison, Lockhart, and Kilanko concurrently examining the attachment trauma and the role of secure base in the recovery of the individual. These illustrative works of the respective writers are considered to be the best and the most representative works of these writers. Moreover, they are longish works of the writers which helped me to understand the development and transformation of the protagonists.

The uniqueness of this study also lies in its theoretical and conceptual framework besides selection of writers. This study is based on the works of Caruth, Herman, LaCapra, and principally of Allen. This work incorporates the concepts of attachment trauma, attachment anxiety, and role of secure base in the recovery of trauma victim.

1.9 Justification of Selection of Texts

I have selected four black women writers who live in different countries but share the same ethnic background. These four writers discuss the issue of violence which women bear silently at their homes. The idea behind selecting them is to suggest the universality of painful experiences of women at home. A life of a woman inside her home where it is believed that she is very safe can sometimes be quite traumatic.

Two selected works are written by African writers: Yvonne Vera and Yejide Kilanko while the other two by African-American writers: Toni Morrison and Zelda Lockhart. Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996) and Morrison's *Paradise* (1997) appeared in late twentieth-century, while the works of Lockhart's *Fifth Born* (2002) and Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) appeared in twenty-first century. The time-period chosen is long enough (1996-2012) to enable me to put forward wider and at the same time contemporary psychological issues of the individuals. Technologically we are advancing at a faster pace. In the last two decades, human-life has immensely changed; but I think that the condition of woman inside her home is more or less the same.

1.10 Limitations of the Study

The present thesis has presented trauma studies of contemporary theorists and establishes their influence on contemporary trauma fiction by analyzing various texts written by black-women writers. Besides exploring the literary texts, I have referred to mainstream ideologies of trauma studies. The research is limited to look at the stressful times of black women characters of the selected fiction. It has not recognized traumatogenic institutions like enslavement, marginalization, and racial violence experienced by these characters. For the literary part, the study is limited to four novels of black women writers, two from Africa and two from America, the time-period ranges from 1996 to 2012.

- i. Yvonne Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996).
- ii. Toni Morrison's *Paradise* (1997).
- iii. Zelda Lockhart's *Fifth Born* (2002).
- iv. Yejide Kilakos's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012).

Trauma studies are incorporated into the scheme of critical investigation to give an empirical proof to the work. I have drawn upon the writers of late twentieth-century like Caruth, Whitehead, Herman, and finally focused on contemporary Jon G. Allen. Their original texts form *primary sources* of my theoretical framework while the conceptual framework is based on the writings, findings of empirical analysis and case studies of a renowned psychologist Jon G. Allen. Interpretations and readings of other scholars complement my study. While tracing theoretical background of this study, a description of conceptual framework is presented to introduce clarity to the

project. For this, I have focused on Attachment Trauma Theory expounded by a contemporary American psychologist Jon G. Allen. The psychiatric and medical readings of trauma are excluded from this study.

1.11 Scheme of the Thesis

In the second chapter of my thesis I have reviewed the existing literature on the topic of my research. The first part has given background to trauma studies and presented the main principles of the major exponents of trauma theory. In the last part of the chapter, I have reviewed the extent of work already done on the selected fiction in terms of the issues of women who have undergone attachment trauma, which would enable the reader to recognize the gap, which my project has bridged. Chapter three is an explanation of the specific theoretical framework that I have adopted for my thesis. I have defined and justified my preference to a comparatively new facet of trauma studies.

Based on the explanation offered earlier in the *Scope of the Study*, my fourth chapter has analyzed the attachment trauma in the characters of the selected African and African-American fiction of Vera, Morrison, Lockhart and Kilanko. The texts which are analysed in chapter four are Vera's *Under the Tongue* (1996), Morrison's *Paradise* (1997), Lockhart's *Fifth Born* (2002), and Kilanko's *Daughters Who Walk This Path* (2012) from the perspective of Attachment Trauma Theory. The concluding chapter is dedicated to the findings of my project as well as recommendations for those who are interested in doing research in this domain.

1.12 Definition of Terms

Agency: The capacity to take action on your own behalf; implies freedom, choice, and responsibility (Allen *Coping with Depression* 260).

Attachment: The emotional bond that develops in close relationships, the prototype being the mother-infant bond (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 298).

Attachment Trauma: Trauma in attachment relationships; often interferes with establishing and maintaining secure attachments (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 298).

Attachment Anxiety: Attachment trauma instills fear of emotional closeness and dependency (Allen *Mentalizing in Clinical Practice* 213).

Interpersonal Trauma: Trauma inflicted deliberately or recklessly by another person (e.g., sexual assault or accident stemming from drunk driving) (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 298).

Learned Helplessness: A response to repeated uncontrollable stress; learning to be helpless, evident in a failure to learn to escape the stress once it becomes avoidable

by the survivor due to repetitive and uncontrollable stress in unavoidable circumstances (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 298).

Mentalizing: Apprehending mental states in oneself and others, for example, thinking about feelings; in relationships, the experience that each person has the other person's mind in mind (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 298).

Negative emotionality: A spectrum of emotion ranging from calm contentment at the low end to fear and panic at the high end (Allen *Coping with Depression* 261).

Psychosis: Loss of touch with reality; it may take form of hallucinations, delusions or severely disorganized thinking (Allen *Coping with Depression* 261).

PTSD: Posttraumatic stress disorder; a psychiatric disorder that may develop after the exposure to traumatic events, symptoms of which include re-experiencing the traumatic event (e.g., in a form of flashbacks or nightmares), hyperarousal, avoidance, and numbing of emotional responsiveness (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 298).

Resilience: Capacity to cope effectively with adversity; enhanced by secure attachment and the capacity to mentalize (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 299).

Rumination: Mulling over depressive concerns without progress in problem solving; makes symptoms worse (Allen *Coping with Depression* 261).

Safe Haven: Feeling of security by contact with an Attachment Figure (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 299).

Secure Base: Foundation for autonomy and exploration—including exploring the mind of oneself and others—provided by a secure attachment relationship (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 299).

Stress pileup: An accumulation of stress that erodes the capacity for coping, often manifested in episodes of depression (Allen *Coping with Trauma* 299).

Trauma: Lasting adverse effects of exposure to extremely stressful events (Allen *Coping with Depression* 84).

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