

**THE PORTRAYAL OF INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN MOTHERHOOD IN
OKWIRI ODUOR'S *THINGS THEY LOST***

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DECLARATION

This project is my original work and has not been presented for examination in any other university.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this project to my Uncle Austine Musundi Makokha. As a *father*, you began this journey a few decades ago. Your resilience and inspiration are beyond mention. Without you, certainly I would not have come this far. I remain forever indebted to you; my friend and confidant.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	ii
DEDICATION	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT	iv
ABSTRACT.....	vii
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background to the Study	1
1.1.1 About the Author	2
1.1.2 Synopsis of the Text	4
1.2 Statement of the Research Problem	5
1.3 Objectives of the Study	6
1.4 Research Hypotheses.....	6
1.5 Justification of the Study	6
1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study	8
1.7 Theoretical Framework	8
1.8 Literature Review	12
1.9 Research Methodology	19
CHAPTER TWO: TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVENESS IN MOTHERHOOD	21
2.1 Introduction.....	21
2.2 Trauma in Motherhood.....	22
2.3 Collectiveness in Motherhood	35
CHAPTER THREE: AGENTS OF MOTHERHOOD.....	41
3.1 Introduction.....	41
3.2 Agents of Motherhood.....	42
3.3 Magic Realism as a Voice of Agency	49

CHAPTER FOUR: LANGUAGE AND STYLE	56
4.1 Introduction.....	56
4.2 Interpretation of Symbolism	57
4.3 Expression of Trauma through Poetry.....	62
4.3 Use of Epistolary in revelation of Trauma	77
4.4 Satire in Religion.....	80
4.5 Effectiveness of Lexical Borrowing.....	83
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION	89
WORKS CITED.....	92

ABSTRACT

It is widely perceived that motherhood is a coveted status that many women would wish to go through in fullness of time. The desire to have a family especially children becomes a priority that such women would long for. The desire to be called a mother and the fulfillment to see her children grow to maturity brings immeasurable joy to a mother. However, in some cases this does not happen. On this flipside, motherhood can become a source of trauma that a mother would prefer to run away from. African traditional societies were closely knit that motherhood was collective. The community raised a child. Children treated women of their mother's age like their mothers while the women did the same to children. Challenges that arose in motherhood were handled by the community and thus they were not a huge concern to a particular mother as such. However, communal motherhood is slowly drifting away. Culture is dynamic; and as a result today we are witnessing motherhood that is beset with trauma. This trauma as well becoming intergenerational in that it goes on to affect subsequent generations as if it is hereditary. Whereas African traditional motherhood was complemented by fatherhood, what we see in the novel, *Things They Lost*, is motherhood wrapped in single parenthood. This trauma in the novel guided my choice of research topic: *Portrayal of Intergenerational Trauma in Motherhood in Things They Lost* by Okwiri Oduor. The research examines four generations of women from the first white settler Mabel Brown, to her daughter Lola Freedom, to her granddaughters Nabumbo Promise and Rosette Brown and finally to her great granddaughter Ayosa Ataraxis Brown. All these women suffer trauma that run from one generation to another. My research explores the portrayal of intergenerational trauma in the text under sub-sections: trauma and collectiveness in motherhood, agents of motherhood in revelation of trauma and finally style of the author. Under style, I have explored the use of symbolism, poetry, epistolary, satire and lexical borrowing in revealing intergenerational trauma in the text. In my study, I have been guided by three theories that I find appropriate even though I am aware there may be others that I have left out. Psychoanalytic, Trauma and Liberal Feminism Theories appealed to me. Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory is essential in understanding the personalities of the four generations of women and what drives their motives. Trauma Theories guided me in analyzing mental trauma in the Brown's family. It also helped me to capture the ethical, social, political and historical dimensions that prevail in the text. Liberal Feminism was also instrumental in my analysis as it guided me to assess how a woman's personal and political autonomy has been enhanced in the text. *Things They Lost* captures four generations of women that are unable to overcome trauma that escalates conflict in the family and eventually breaks it down.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

In my study I seek to investigate how the motif of intergenerational trauma in motherhood is portrayed in the text *Things They Lost* by Okwiri Oduor. *Oxford* dictionary defines trauma as a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. Cathy Caruth, in her traditional trauma model, views trauma as an event that fragments consciousness and prevents direct linguistic representation. The model draws attention to the severity of suffering by suggesting that traumatic experience irrevocably damages the psyche. She agrees with Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist and author, that traumatic experience is so sudden and overwhelming that it cannot be put into words. Trauma can relate to, involve or affect several generations. This project aims at establishing the extent to which trauma affects motherhood depicted in the text.

Motherhood is a motif that runs deep in many Women Writings in Africa. This work also investigates the manifestation of this motif and the sociocultural dimensions that shape it in this novel. Indeed when motherhood is mentioned, our minds shift to the role our mothers and to an extent women play in raising children while complemented by men. The mention of the word also evokes the pains mothers endure in the process and joys they feel when they succeed in bringing up responsible and successful young people. The latter is actually the dream of every mother, in that it is bound to erase any pains encountered in growth and developmental stages of the child. On the other hand, children who are seen as victims or beneficiaries of the circumstances, in most cases, tend to appreciate the struggles their mothers go through when they grow up. The bond between mothers and children is thus strengthened that promotes social and emotional well-being in families. However, in some cases, the birth of a child does not automatically translate to a bundle

of joy. The child may actually become one of the many challenges that a mother has to grapple with in her lifetime; the unwanted gift that needs unnecessary attention. Whereas many people will argue that such instances are less pronounced in families, it is imperative to acknowledge that it is an issue that is slowly finding its way into family as an institution. With mothers having to delicately balance between labour market and motherhood, strained mother - child relationships cannot be ignored. When such unhealthy relationships escalate for a long period of time, trauma sets in. My research aims at investigating trauma in these delicate situations and to find out whether the trauma may affect or last beyond a particular generation. Finally, I am to establish how intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the text justifies the title of the text *Things They Lost*. Indeed the title of the text is symbolic and in one way or the other aptly reflects the conflict in the novel.

1.1.1 About the Author

Okwiri Oduor was born in 1989 in Nairobi, Kenya. She developed interest in writing at a very tender age and wanted to be a journalist in her future. Before then, she wanted to become a nun because nuns appeared to wield some powers judging from scowl or frown on their faces. Okwiri Oduor, initially known by the name Claudette, was raised by very strict parents who were very protective of her as a daughter. She was not allowed to do a lot of stuff like her brothers. Her parents controlled what she watched on television and read in books. It is because of these restrictions and lots of free time that she began writing. At first she was fascinated that she could escape, to create characters and play around with them, and make them do things. She created children that had more freedom than she, who could go to places she could not and characters who had conflicts with their parents. She affirms that as a child, she was very bound to follow many rules; religious, home or school. After that, it was just a long process of un-binding herself and

discovering that the world was bigger than she imagined, and her mind was much bigger than what she had been led to believe. There are rules, but you do not need to follow them. She was aware that there were consequences, but that did not kill one. Okwiri recalls an ugly incident when she had a fight with her mother and really felt sad after that prompting her to burn all her manuscripts and diaries.

When she later began writing, she realized that she did not just have to write for herself because people wanted to read what other people are writing. However, her writings were not quickly embraced as she kept getting rejections. Nonetheless she continued writing and attending interviews; re-learning all techniques she had learned. She feels that one cannot give up writing.

Okwiri opines that one cannot disengage what goes on in a writer's life from what they write. She gives an example of a short story, *My Father's Head* which is her very personal story; all the stuff that was going on in her life at the time. However, with the passing of time, when all battles are won or lost; one realizes that there are lots of injustices, love, beauty and other stories to write about.

Okwiri's novella *The Dream Chasers* was highly commended in the Commonwealth Book Prize 2012 while the short story *My Father's Head* won the 2014 Caine Prize for African Writing. Her other short stories include *The Rag Doll* that features in the *Africa 39* anthology and *The Red Bindi*. Her work has appeared in *Granta*, *The New Inquiry Kwani* and elsewhere. She has been a fellow at MacDowell and Art Omi and a visiting writer at the Lannan Center. Oduor has an MFA in creative writing from Iowa Writers' Workshop. She currently lives in Germany.

1.1.2 Synopsis of the Text

Things They Lost is Okwiri Oduor's debut novel published in April 2022. It is a text that explores the tribulations of four generations of women who inhabit an imaginary town of Mapeli in Rift Valley, Kenya. It is a generation of a white settler Mabel Eudoxia Brown who abandons her missionary work and settles in Mapeli, a town named after her by the locals. Ayosa is the last of the four generations. The generations are marked by: Mabel Brown, Lola Freedom, Nabumbo Promise Brown and Rosette Brown, and Ayosa Ataraxis Brown.

The four generations of women fail to integrate in the society they find themselves in. Laced with undertones of racism, tension between the Browns and natives appear to transcend every generation. The Browns' life in Mapeli is beset with hatred from the natives who accuse Mabel for annexing their land; an experience that mirrors colonial experience in Kenya. The killings that take place in the text only heightens trauma in the women's lives. Motherhood, religion and traditions are other issues that dominate the text.

Later, Ayosa breaks the barrier created by the Browns by embracing the natives. Her interactions with Jentrix the apothecary who is looked down upon as a squatter and Sindano the owner of Mutheu Must Go Café heralds a new beginning. Ayosa's decision to bond with Mbiu into sisterhood also reinforces the need to enhance human relationships.

The author employs a number of stylistic devices to raise issues in the text. Magic realism, though treated as an important thematic concern, is a style that is dominantly used to uncover the horrendous secrets of the Browns. With Ayosa's magical abilities to tell the past as it happened, the truth about heinous killings that had taken place in the family are revealed that shake the pillars of the family. Mapeli is also said to be inhabited by wraiths, the Fatumas; magical creatures with

senses like humans, and jinamizis. Symbolism, satire, epistolary, poetry and lexical borrowing – are among other literary devices employed by the author.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

This research investigates portrayal of intergenerational trauma in motherhood in Okwiri Oduor's *ThingsTheyLost*. Motherhood is a popular theme in most African Writings by women. Whereas many researchers have dwelt on the motif in traditional African settings from the perspective of patriarchy, objectification of women bodies and mothers as caregivers, new insights and evolution of the subject continue to attract investigations into this important element of humanity that has seen infiltration of trauma. The number of mothers suffering from trauma is increasing as reports of mothers with mental challenges and rising homicide cases involving mothers murdering or being murdered by their children continue to be recorded more often. Indeed, the worrying aspect is, sometimes such distressing experiences go on to affect not only a particular mother but generations that come thereafter in which from a vertical perspective is viewed as intergenerational trauma . This issue calls for investigation.

In *Things They Lost*, motherhood is riddled with trauma from the onset to the end. There is no interplay between motherhood and patriarchy as in traditional set ups but rather trauma that is passed on from one generation to another in the four generations of women in the text. Okwiri Oduor paints a picture of absurdity where children turn against their mothers: killing them, fighting them, wishing them death, avoiding them and even resorting to finding love outside the family. On the other hand, mothers are drifting away from their children. They are running away from social responsibilities. They tend to find solace without rather than within.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are:

- i. To investigate trauma and collectiveness in motherhood in Okwiri Oduori's novel *Things They Lost*.
- ii. To explore agents of motherhood and how they enhance the issue of intergenerational trauma.
- iii. To analyze the author's use of style in exposing intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the text.

1.4 Research Hypotheses

My study is premised on:

1. Is trauma in motherhood a real concern? If so how do women collectively try to shield mothers from this harsh reality?
2. Who and how are those speaking on motherhood necessary in understanding intergenerational trauma in the text? How does the voice of magic realism intensify the trauma?
3. How effectively has the author employed style to expose intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the text?

1.5 Justification of the Study

Motherhood is a critical issue addressed in many literary works especially in Women Writings in Africa. Even though many writers and researchers have written a lot about the issue, it is undeniable that the challenges faced by mothers over decades have been gradually changing or evolving with time. Today, we witness new African womanhood and consequently motherhood. Whereas numerous 20th Century texts dwelt on patriarchy and fight for women liberation and

empowerment, the 21st Century woman is a liberated independent woman; socially, politically and economically. For this reason, motherhood has evolved too with the emergence of families that consist of mothers only. According to a report published in the Daily Nation newspaper dated August 24, 2022 published by *Transform Nations* under the *Man Enough* programme, 'shows that 45 percent of children living in Kenya are living with one or no parents. This means that more and more children are growing up in single- parent families and in most cases, the absent parent is the father.'(Parenting p4).

These families have unique challenges too in that all decision making falls on the shoulders of one parent as in our case of the mother. Sometimes the inability to cope with high expectations and challenges take a huge toll on motherhood. My research aims to investigate intergenerational trauma that bogs down motherhood in single parenthood. Healthy human relations are important and, therefore, giving an understanding of emerging complexities is vital in enhancing cohesive societies. The killings that take place in four generations of the Brown's family are disturbing. So the question begs; do we blame the women for killing one another? No, killing one another is not justified in any circumstance. What we learn from Lola Freedom's temperament is accumulated anger and confusion from trauma she was going through and her death though not justified in that social continuum, it was a possibility. Lola Freedom's daughter, Nabumbo Promise, keeping going under and her flight life is a further proof of trauma that has eroded peace in these four generations of women led by mothers. The Daily Nation newspaper observes that:

While many upright members of the society are raised in single families, absence of a father in a child's life can have far reaching and diverse effects. From a person's sense of self-esteem, how they form relationships in their adulthood, the kind of parents they become themselves, to criminal tendencies and delinquency; the effects can be generalized yet experienced uniquely by the

individual. (p4) It is thus important for society to rethink motherhood as in single parenthood and come up with psycho-social support systems that can alleviate or prevent generational trauma as experienced in the text *Things They Lost*.

1.6 Scope and Limitations of the Study

My study focuses on intergenerational trauma in motherhood and how it is portrayed in the text *Things They Lost* by Okwiri Oduor. Motherhood being a common theme in most Women Writings in Africa, I pay close attention to intergenerational trauma; with special reference to single parenthood as portrayed in the novel. To effectively analyze this conceptual area, I take interest in the analysis of women characters, collectively, that help in consolidating information to build the motif.

I also explore magic realism by studying the *Fatumas*, wraiths and the Jinamizis to illustrate how they contribute to intergenerational trauma in motherhood. Those speaking on motherhood are also of interest to me, especially the child narrators Ayosa Ataraxis Brown and Mbiu Dash.

On language and style, I focus on Oduor's use of symbolism, poetry, epistolary, satire and lexical borrowing to enhance the issue of intergenerational trauma in the text. Indeed I am cognizant of the fact that there are other elements of style that have been employed by the author to promote the issue of trauma in the text. However, in my study as aforementioned, I focus on the interpretation of symbolism, poetry, epistolary, satire and lexical borrowing.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

In my study, I find *Psychoanalytic Theories*, *Trauma Theories* and *Liberal Feminism Theory* central. These three theories have guided me to understand and analyze the portrayal of intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the text *Things They Lost*.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory is essential in understanding the personalities of the four generations of women and what drives their motives. The theory is based on his belief that the type of personality that an individual acquires in his or her adulthood is determined by his or her childhood experiences, and any traumas in childhood may result in negative personality traits in adulthood. What I find in *Things They Lost* after studying the four generations is deep lying psychological damage of these women living through very tortuous and distressing events in the family. These unfortunate happenings lead to difficulties in the family since these women are unable to cope with these distressing events that consequently lead to destruction of their values and creating a negative impression about themselves in the community. The symptoms of trauma are quite evident in the text. When Mabel Brown kills the local boy Dickson, heralds the beginning of intergenerational trauma through shock, denial, anger, bargaining and depression. When Mabel kills Dickson, she gets shocked; her hands tremble after firing at the boy and rushes after him and drags his lifeless body into her house's attic. For this incident, she lives in fear and denial and meets her death when her daughter Lola shoots her in the head. Already we can see the vicious trend spiraling down Mabel's generation. All that happens in these generations of women stem from their negative childhood experiences.

Based on Ulman and Brothers' (1988) theory of trauma is the view that traumatic experience shatters the individual's sense of self in ways that are intolerable. The self is viewed as the centre of mental activity and plays a vital role in organizing the meaning of experience. This view guides me to understand mothers' actions in the Browns family. When Lola knocks down her son Maxwell to death, it dawns to us that there is something wrong with her as a mother. It is arguable that few mothers can intentionally kill their children despite whichever struggles they go through. We realize this when Lola painfully learns that her son is truly dead and the body drowned in a

well by her sisters that she tries to find out what happened. Her decision to incriminate Nabumbo and Rosette for the death of their brother shows that by the time of knocking down Maxwell, her individual sense of self had been shattered and whatever happened was beyond her control. The theory thus guides me to adopt a sympathetic attitude instead of a condemning one towards the mothers' actions in this *Things They Lost*.

Cathy Caruth in her theory of trauma in a way agrees with Ulman and Brothers (1998) theory of trauma when she claims that the traumatic experience cannot be represented because it occurs before its recipient is prepared to know it. In other words, deeply traumatic experiences are events without witnesses, experienced a moment too late, before the self is there to mediate it. Hence Caruth as well exonerates Lola Freedom from the guilt of murdering her mother Mabel and son Maxwell. Ayosa Ataraxis Brown is as well exonerated from fighting her mother Nabumbo Promise simply because she runs away and abandons her with the *Fatumas*. To illustrate that traumatic experiences are experienced before the self is there to mediate, Ayosa writes a letter to her mother apologizing for fighting her as long as she promises her that she will not leave her again. This implies that Ayosa comes back to self to mediate between her mother and herself after the traumatic experience.

Sigmund Freud further described trauma as any excitations from the outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield there is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus which have broken in and binding of them. I generally find trauma theory appropriate as it addresses the mental trauma that runs in the Brown's family. Similarly, it also presents a social challenge for gaining new and fresh knowledge. We also see characters adopting trauma responses which are: fight, flight, freeze and fawn which have evolved as survival mechanism to help us react quickly to life - threatening

situations. When Ayosa fights with her mother Nabumbo or when Nabumbo runs away from home abandoning Ayosa with the *Fatumas*, are examples that trauma theory guides us to understand that these women are mere victims of trauma. Ayosa's attacks from jinamizis and Nabumbo's receding to the world under reinforce the tenets of trauma theory.

Weldon, Chris in his text *Feminism Theory and the Politics of Difference* observes that Liberal Feminism's primary concern is to protect and enhance women's personal and political autonomy, the first being the freedom to live one's life as one wants and the second being the freedom to help decide the direction of the political community. The Brown's family has liberated itself from the claws of patriarchy and decided to dictate their own lives. From a critical perspective, several feminist theorists have argued that some of the central categories of liberalism occlude women's lived concerns; for instance, paying attention to the private sphere, and any harm that may occur there to women, away from political scrutiny. This private space of women as child bearers and caregivers is often assumed from public scrutiny. Therefore, this implies that as much as women enjoy personal and political autonomy, there are a lot of challenges that they have to endure in privacy. This argument demonstrates why Mabel Brown's generation appears to be content from outward observation, when actually it is sinking into the abyss of depression. Mabel Brown is credited with emergence of Mapeli town and entrenching Christianity among the locals. However, inwardly she is a worried mother who relies on her musket for protection against the townspeople and whose care of her daughter Lola is slowly getting out of her hands. No wonder the very daughter later kills her by shooting her in the head. The killing demonstrates family conflict that only the mother-daughter knew. Lola Freedom also exhibits the same demeanor by dedicating herself to the service of the townspeople as a flying doctor and supporting the church while she is actually suffering in privacy. She is a mother who has decided to try and find solace in alcoholism

which does not work for her. Her economic liberation does little to help her overcome trauma. The Browns suffer in silence despite being empowered women. Liberal feminism thus gives us a chance to examine its shortcoming in that it fails to address the private lives of mothers that give rise to trauma in motherhood. Thus the theory is critical to this study as it sets the stage for generational trauma under investigation.

1.8 Literature Review

Motherhood is a common motif in most Women Writings and African literature in general. Many researchers have done studies on the theme of motherhood in various texts but material on Okwiri Oduor's *Things They Lost*, based on my research, is still lacking. This Oduor's debut novel, gives a unique fresh element of intergenerational trauma in motherhood that, according to my research, little has been done in this area. Most of the studies carried out on motherhood and to an extent, womanhood, have been majorly based on liberation struggle from patriarchy and objectification of women's bodies.

Ogunfolabi, Kayode in his article, *Re-writing motherhood in Flora Nwapa's Efuru* in UMMA- Journal of the Contemporary Arts, examines Nwapa's debut novel, and the potential connection between female objectification, heterosexuality, motherhood and patriarchal domination. He argues that the centrality of motherhood to *Efuru* might suggest its supremacy and consequently, women's fulfillment, but the subliminal text of the novel is that motherhood is not necessarily biological, and that women can find fulfillment in their social and sexual relationships as well as in their material wealth. Not only does *Efuru* create a women-centered space which challenges patriarchal social production, but also their representation as a signifier. My paper agrees with Ogunfolabi on motherhood and collectiveness but rises above patriarchy and female objectification

by focusing on a single independent woman who faces another phase of motherhood that comes with spiraling trauma.

Matiangi, Okeng'o in his MA thesis entitled, *Images of the African Woman in Buchi Emecheta's Fictional Works*, to a large extent also deals with patriarchy and objectification of the woman. He observes that Nnu Ego is almost equated to a slave in *Joys of Motherhood*. It is also clear that a mother is not fulfilled until she bears her husband a male child while it is even a tragedy when she cannot give birth. Nnu Ego's marriage to Amatokwu is terminated when Nnu Ego goes back to her father's home because she cannot give birth.

Though Ibuza men admired a hard-working and rich woman, her life was nothing if she left no male children behind who would inherit their wealth, children who were her own flesh and blood.(166)

This is a sharp departure from my paper that focuses on intergenerational trauma in motherhood where single parenthood is evident. Independent women who do not need men to provide for them or even raise their children but can decide to frustrate or even harm them as in the case of Nabumbo and the loggerman when he runs over his feet by a vehicle.

Whereas Matiang'i expresses the importance of children in motherhood, he fails to emphasize on the effect of children's demands on mothers. Nnu Ego's children suffer malnutrition in Lagos, her husband loses his job when the white family he was working for relocates back to England but this is seen as ordinary pain that women go through in a traditional African setting. Demands of infants on their mothers are ignored, though they pose silent challenges on mothers. Arguably, the traditional African setting had women trained on such expectations and therefore prepared for such eventualities. Lisa Baraitser, *Maternal Encounters: The Ethics of Interruption* evokes the constant,

yet random demands the infant makes on the mother and similarly highlights this potential for breakdown and crisis. In her chapter on filicide in law and literature, Ruth Cain also underlines such dangers pointing to the sometimes unbearable demands of childrearing and silence surrounding these pressures. When Ayosa Ataraxis was born, Jentrix had to plead with Nabumbo to let it live. Nabumbo wanted to throw away the baby; to drown it. Later, as an infant, when Ayosa cried she would take her to the house's attic to be soothed by her late mother's spirits which she believed lived there. This shows the interruption and pressure that Nabumbo has to endure as a mother. Nabumbo's upbringing had not prepared her for such duties and this contributed to her falling inside. Ruth Cain in her text, *HowtoSayHellototheSea: LiteraryPerspectivesonMedico-LegalNarrativesofMaternalFilicide* quotes:Michelle Oberman says that what shocked her most about interviewing convicted filicidal women (Meyer and Oberman 2008) was the realization that most of them were ordinary people under extraordinary pressure (The Scotsman 2012). As I argue below, *Beside the Sea's* evocation of the experience of a woman whose sanity and personhood are unraveling may enable empathy, or at least comprehension, rather than (simply) repulsion or pity (p224). Lola Freedom is an ordinary woman under extraordinary pressure. The fact that she shot her mother Mabel Brown to death and buried her in a shallow grave in her compound is an occurrence that denies her piece of mind. In addition, her struggles to hide the truth about her death from her children Nabumbo and Rosette is traumatizing. No wonder she prefers to be alone while at home; free from care of children. When she knocks down her son Maxwell to death, her sanity becomes questionable. It is strange that a mother would repulse away her child who craves for her love. Eventually when she discovers that her girls Nabumbo and Rosette drowned Maxwell's body into a well, she is overwhelmed to realize that her action had caused the death of her son. Pain of motherhood rises within her and she shifts the blame to her girls for burying their brother. She

calls police officers to come and arrest them only for the officers to decline on grounds that the two were minors. She thereafter sends them to an orphanage for six years and later to a convent.

Nadine Ropke in her seminar paper, *Representing Motherhood: Images of Mothers in Contemporary Young Adult Literature* says:

The role of women in American society has changed tremendously during the last fifty years. Women started to enter the labour force and to free themselves from restrictions of home. Starting to work outside their domestic realm, they became more independent and self-reliant. Expectations on mothers altered and with it the standard assumptions of motherhood were called into question and the vision of a new mother, a person who has her own needs, feelings and interests was emerging. Mothering was no longer regarded as women's primary and sole mission but as one of many roles women could and did assume. *Things They Lost*, to a certain extent, presents a conservative perspective of motherhood where children are emotionally attached to their mothers. This is why Ayosa writes a letter to her mother Nabumbo asking for forgiveness for ripping her hair out so that she can also forgive her for lying to her that she was done leaving when she was not. In a town inhabited by wraiths, I expect Nabumbo to show concern about her daughter's solitary life but rather it is Ayosa who writes to her informing her about temptation from a wraith that had disguised like her mother and tried to lure her out. Nabumbo exemplifies the new motherhood in Ropke's research. A mother who is said to get lost in nowhere-towns and only leaving behind a forwarding address with the postman. Ayosa's heart wrenches with yearning. This change in motherhood in Africa where competing interests are emerging is a major contributor to trauma in motherhood.

Oketch, Seline in her PhD dissertation, *The Changing Images of Women in Francis Imbuga's Oeuvre* observes that:

Parents have the important duty of shaping their children's attitudes positively or negatively towards gender issues in the society. In the traditional societies, boys and girls learnt their roles from older male and female members of their families respectively. It is also in the family where boys and girls are first socialized into the dynamics of power and dominance (127).

In reference to Margret Ogola's *The River and the Source*, Oketch observes that "the girl child prospers and as a woman becomes an inspiration to her daughters and granddaughters who excel and even perform better than men in other spheres" (138). In Okwiri Oduor's *Things They Lost*, the four generations of women have little to learn from their mothers whose lives are shrouded in secrecy. Lola Freedom tries to instill puritanical values in Nabumbo and Rosette by insisting that they repent for any desires and actions that contradict the will of God. This is ironic for a mother who murdered her biological mother Mabel Brown and would later kill her son Maxwell Truth. Though she puts on a deceptive face of a strict mother, deep inside, she is a wounded mother suffering from irreparable guilt and misdeeds. She opts to use religion as a tool to censor and instill values in her children. When this approach appears not to work effectively, she pulls out of parental duties by dumping Nabumbo and Rosette in a convent. These two girls have nothing to borrow from their mother who is an alcoholic and unapproachable. The family as an agent of socialization has failed.

Ciarunji Chesaina in her PhD thesis, *Women in Africa Drama: Representation and Role* examines what is considered as the most important role of women in traditional Africa, that is, the role of women as mothers. In many traditional African communities, a woman's behaviour is censored

according to the expectations of the community about her role as a future wife and mother. It is felt that since a woman's major role in traditional communities is that of wife and mother, it is crucial to ensure that a sense of commitment is ensured through sexual discipline (11-12). Okwiri Oduor's *Things They Lost* presents a contrary perception on motherhood where women are drifting away from their traditional roles. The Browns are not in marriage at any given time. Lola Freedom, Nabumbo Promise, Rosette Brown and Ayosa Ataraxis are raised by single mothers. For this reason, the aspect of mentoring them as future wives does not feature prominently. The Mapeli townspeople have their reservations about the Browns but because their relationship is that of masters and servants, they have little to say apart from terming them a wicked family. The family lacks a sense of commitment through sexual discipline that we see Nabumbo running away from the convent to live a carefree life. The element of fatherhood is a mirage. The closest Ayosa comes to a father figure is through her interaction with the milkman who does not necessarily talk to her. Unfortunately, a wraith ruins her trust when it disguises as the milkman and tries to lure her away from home. This departure from the traditional role of women as wives and mothers can, to large extent, be seen as one of the causes of trauma in the Brown's generations. Motherhood means family, happiness, love and contentment. It is a lucky gift to many that gets it. It brings out the best and worst in anyone. Some days are hard and some easy but ultimately the joy of raising small humans is so powerful. This ultimate joy is what is missing in the Browns family.

Like Nadine Ropkeinher seminar paper, *Representing Motherhood: Images of Mothers in Contemporary Young Adults Literature*, Donna Bassinetal in *Representation of Motherhood* concurs that motherhood has shifted from object to subject standpoint. Donna avers that the main focus of *Representation of Motherhood* is the analysis of mother as subject, as woman with desires, ideas, and fantasies of her own; in counterpoint to mother as object described primarily in terms

of her need gratifying or frustrating aspects to others. Moreover, it also emphasizes the importance of examining the ways in which these subjective notions of motherhood compare to and are distinguished from those patriarchal ideologies, which appear in cultural images and scientific theories and function in the service of women oppression (799-800).

As motherhood shifts from object to subject, with desires, ideas and fantasies of her own; divided attention takes centre stage that gives way to infiltration of trauma. Due to inability to cope with these competing interests, motherhood has been beset with trauma. In *Things They Lost*, the four generations of women suffer trauma due to the notion that motherhood is only one of the many roles a mother should play. Mabel fails her daughter Lola. Lola fails her twin daughters Nabumbo and Rosette. Nabumbo fails her daughter Ayosa. All this happens because commitment to family as a basic unit of socialization is lacking. No wonder Lola shoots her mother Mabel and strikes her son Maxwell to death. Nabumbo and Rosette cannot talk to each other while Ayosa keeps fighting with her mother. There is intergenerational trauma that needs to be stopped in this family.

Nnaemeka, Obioma in *The Politics of (M)Othering and Womanhood, Identity and Resistance in African Literature* observes that:

Female violence is a reaction to male violence. She asserts that telling the story of female violence, novels by black women are in effect telling the story of male violence. The concern for freedom and survival is the impetus for the actions of these desperate women for whom the end justifies the means and for whom extreme situations demand extreme measures. Though victimized by patriarchal social structures that perpetuate their invisibility and dehumanization, black female characters actively resist their objectification, to the point of committing murder (61).

Perhaps to an extent, Nnaemeka sheds light on violence witnessed in the Browns family by vindicating Mabel and Lola. Mabel was provoked by the town boys who poured pig blood on her gate and thus the killing of Dickson was not premeditated. It was merely a reaction to humiliation she was being subjected to. However, Mabel's inability to come to terms with the murder unsettles her as she tries to keep it a secret. The fear and secrecy pushes her into trauma that eventually affects Lola and the entire generations.

In general, many researchers have primarily dwelt on patriarchy and objectification of the female body in reference to motifs of motherhood. I have decided to research contemporary motherhood by paying special attention to intergenerational trauma, a gap that according to my research, calls for investigation in works of art.

1.9 Research Methodology

I closely read Okwiri's debut novel *Things They Lost* which is essential as my primary source of data. For my secondary data, I take an interest in the writer's short story *My Father's Head* published in 2013 as well as any other works as these writings may shed light on her perception on motherhood. I make notes on relevant areas concerning my thematic field which is motherhood by using flashcards and a notebook. The motif of motherhood with close reference to trauma being my focus, I do a deep analysis of the text by examining female characters and how they contribute to this thematic concern. The elements of trauma in motherhood, collectiveness, agency and exploration of magic realism, and style are important in the development of my research topic. In addition, I take interest in a few other texts including Buchi Emecheta's *Joys of Motherhood* and Mariam Ba's *So Long a Letter* as secondary sources of data. These texts provide critical comparative insights into motherhood as a motif.

Trauma, psychoanalytic and liberal feminism theories are at the core of my study. The three theories provide a framework from which I operate in my study. Trauma theory is important in determining behavioural patterns of characters; especially the Brown's family, and how they contribute to the portrayal of generational trauma in motherhood. Trauma theory guides me in addressing trauma that runs in the Browns family. The killing that occurs in the family especially where family members kill one another is strange; a mother running away from her children is unusual. These occurrences are better understood from the lenses of trauma theory that views an individual or self as a centre of mental activity that is vulnerable to outside negative influences.

Psychoanalytic theory is necessary to offer guidance on analyzing personality development of the four generations of women. Whether their varied personalities are normal or abnormal, including mental disorders, is of great interest to me. This study takes an interest in finding out how Mabel Brown, Lola Freedom, Nabumbo Promise and Rosette Brown, and Ayosa Ataraxis behaviours are dictated by unconscious forces, generally the instincts and their morals. The shooting of the native boy Dickson Were by Mabel Brown, the shooting of Mabel Brown by her daughter Lola Freedom and the killing of Maxwell Truth by Lola Freedom are key incidents that this study evaluates.

Nonetheless, I also use liberal feminism to understand challenges of contemporary single parenthood; that is by choice, and how it contributes to intergenerational trauma. The ideas of liberal feminism are rooted in liberalism, a political philosophy that encourages the development of freedom, particularly in the economic spheres. The key ideas of liberalism include individual freedom, democracy, equal opportunities, and equal rights. Liberal feminists apply liberalism to gender equality and claim that oppression of women lies in their lack of political and civil rights. Feminists are critical of the family as a social institution. They believe that the family is a tool of female oppression and in particular the nuclear family serves the needs of men rather than women.

This is through issues such as unequal division of domestic labour and domestic violence. The four generations of women under focus in this text are raised by mothers. These are women who enjoy their freedom to make any decision that affect their lives. That is why Lola Freedom spends most of her time as a flying doctor serving the natives at the expense of her children. In fact strangely, the sight of her children irritates her. She sees them as a burden and intruders into her peace of mind. Nabumbo also feels the same burden of raising Ayosa. She abdicates her role as a mother by running away from her daughter. These women feel oppressed by the demands of the family that drives them into trauma. Further to enhance the notion of liberalism, we see Nabumbo almost killing a loggerman by running over his legs; an action that alludes to women's fight against male domination.

CHAPTER TWO

TRAUMA AND COLLECTIVENESS IN MOTHERHOOD

2.1 Introduction

Trauma and collectiveness in motherhood are issues raised by the author Okwiri Oduor in the text *Things They Lost*. This chapter closely examines how trauma manifests in the four generations of women under study in this text and how mothers or rather women collectively try to alleviate challenges of the intergenerational trauma. According to *Oxford English Dictionary*, trauma is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. It is a mental condition caused by severe shock,

especially when the harmful effects last for a long time. What we witness in *Things They Lost* is nothing short of this definition. Generation after generation in this text goes through distressing experiences that affect the Browns family negatively leaving it at the brink of total destruction and extinction. The efforts of Jentrix the apothecary, Sindano, Mbiu Dash and Sister Maker of Ramani are noticeable. They do not just let the chips fall where they may. In their various capacities, they try to support the family to overcome the trauma even though we realize that what was happening in the Browns family was historical and deep-rooted and the chances of ending the trauma were slim.

2.2 Trauma in Motherhood

Just like the story of seven generations of Jose Arcadio Buendia and his wife Ursula Iguaran in Macondo by Gabriel Garcia Marquez in his novel *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, we witness trauma that causes devastating effects to its victims in four generations of women in *Things They Lost* by Okwiri Oduor. In Macondo, a town established by Marquez, we come across the generations of Buendia's family who are unable or unwilling to escape their periodic misfortunes that are mostly self-inflicted. The unusual and strange events that take place in Buendia's family can be compared to what happens in Okwiri Oduor's *Things They Lost*. Whereas Buendia becomes obsessed with investigating the mysteries of the universe presented to him by Melquiades, the leader of gypsies, and eventually runs mad, *Things They Lost* presents a mother Mabel Brown who tries to painfully hide the crimes she had committed but is later tragically killed by her own daughter Lola Freedom.

Things They Lost is a tragic text that delves into trauma of four generations of women. These are women who defy instincts of motherhood by deriving unhappiness in being mothers. To a large extent, mothers are expected to be happy when they give birth to children and in turn expect

children to appreciate them and even take care of them in old age. Okeng'o Matiangi in his thesis *Images of Women in the Works of Buchi Emecheta* says:

The woman, because she feels that she might not be regarded unless she is a mother, tunes herself also to believe that she is nothing until she bears children particularly male ones. This becomes her burning aspiration. This becomes the goal of every woman in the society (38).

Whereas pain is inevitable in motherhood there is always a lingering hope that joy will come thereafter. A belief that is characteristic of many African literatures. *Things They Lost* is unique in a manner that it presents intergenerational trauma devoid of happiness. When Mabel Brown settles in Mapeli and gives birth to Lola Freedom, we expect joy in the family. This does not happen as revealed later by Lola Freedom's granddaughter Ayosa Ataraxis Brown that Lola Freedom shot her mother to death. This killing comes to haunt her as she tries to hide the truth from her children Rosette and Nabumbo by telling them that Mabel walked away never to return. Lola Freedom sinks into alcoholism, speechlessness and escapism. In addition, perhaps as compensation for her inadequacies, Lola Freedom resorts to generosity outside her home. Nabumbo says:

She thought of all those years she had spent hating her mother for offering to everyone else an abundance of something she could never bring home to her daughters. Now she drew immense comfort from the fact that they too could not have any bit of her mother. Lola Freedom had taken everything when she had keeled inside herself (306).

Cathy Caruth in her *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* claims that the traumatic experience cannot be represented because it occurs before its recipient is prepared to know it. In other words, she puts it that traumatic experiences are events without witnesses, experienced a moment too late, before the self was there to mediate it. Therefore, the traumatic experiences that we witness in *Things They Lost* have nothing to do with the doers of the actions. When Mabel Brown shoots the native boy Dickson Were, we now understand that it was not

premeditated. Neither was Lola Freedom's murdering her mother Mabel and son Maxwell. All these happened because the mothers were unprepared to handle the emotional push at the time.

When Mbiu challenges Ayosa on whether she would choose her mother Nabumbo again if she was given another chance, her thinking is emotional and full of pain.

She would not listen to the blathering pleas of a forlorn woman. *Please – please – please – I – need – you.* Better to be the daughter of a pied crow, or a featherfin squeaker, or a seaside caper. Better to be a daughter of a thunderclap (84).

These illustrate the hate that children have towards their mothers in this text. Nabumbo is described by Mbiu as more of a vagrant than a mother; that woman who would rather sleep with pigs in a trench than come home to her daughter. As much as Mbiu tries to coax Ayosa into accepting the shortcomings of her mother, Ayosa appears to have made up her mind that Nabumbo does not deserve her attention owing to what she is going through. Ayosa's stance is strange and contrary to what we expect in a mother- daughter relationship. Mari Nelson in her poem *Dear Mother* in *Anthology of Poems; Womanic Verses*, illustrate what many would perceive as a genuine bond that exists between children and their mothers.

Dear Mother

Mother of proper care

Mother of my pain

Mother of all my sorrows

Who can ever care?

Mother who has toiled

Mother whose blood I behold

Source of all my being

Mother of my daily bread

Mother of my joy

My sweet mother second to none-

Who can ever care like you?

In this poem, Mari Nelson, through the persona praises her mother for her care through joyous and hard times. She appreciates her blood relations with her mother as being the reason for her existence. She also understands and acknowledges that her mother bears the scars of pain on her behalf; something that only a mother can do. She affirms that a mother is irreplaceable. Ayosa does not share the same sentiments about her mother Nabumbo Promise. Arguably, she is right to resent her because she has not lived up to conventional standards of motherhood that is characterized by love, care and physical presence. But do we blame Nabumbo for these shortcomings? It is reasonable to a large extent to say no because she did not learn the same virtues from her mother Lola Freedom. One can only give what they have. Nabumbo inherited bitterness, rejection, alcoholism, promiscuity, escapism and mental anguish; for that is the world she was raised in. When Mbiu asks Ayosa to tell her a thing she saw about Nabumbo from the Yonder Days, Ayosa says:

When Nabumbo Promise was eighteen, she ran away from the convent. She never was any good at religious life. She smoked a pack of Marlboros each day in the toilets. Some afternoons, she left the convent to watch a film at the cinema. *Alien*, or *TheGodfather*, or *TheDeerHunter*. She would return drunk on cheap whiskey, her clothing suspiciously rumpled, with red bruises trickling down her neck. She put very

little effort into her discernment and knew that the mother superior tolerated her only as a favor to her mother. She left six months later, at the end of her postulancy (93).

It is neither fair to blame Lola Freedom as a mother for failing to inculcate desirable motherly attributes in her daughter Nabumbo. She too was a victim of the similar upbringing thus an intergenerational victim of child neglect.

Mabel Brown had earlier on also shot the native boy Dickson, who among other children spill pig blood on Mabel's gate. This makes her to live in fear for she hides the boy's body in the attic of her house. The relationship between Mabel Brown and the townspeople is strained; an aspect that also contributes to her trauma and that is why she has to stay alert with a musket. The fact that she charges rent on townspeople that squat on her land which is more theirs than hers only complicates their relationship further. In addition, her affairs with gardeners, cooks and drivers and the wild game she killed during her hunting expeditions in a way unsettles her. Perhaps if she had kept off from affairs of the townspeople and wanton destruction of nature, she would be at peace. The spilling of pig's blood at her gate by native boys is an indication of anger and resentment of the townspeople towards the Mabel's family. They feel that the Englishwoman is wicked and should leave Mapeli. Nonetheless, there is an element of racism that alienates the Brown family. The author says:

The town was named after her, the Englishwoman. Yet, somewhere along the line, as though in a game of broken telephone, the name had transformed. Mabel Town had turned to Mapeli Town. Mabel Town had belonged to the Englishwoman, but Mapeli Town was theirs (6).

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf in her autobiography *This Child Will Be Great* illustrates how racial discrimination can cause pain to individuals involved. The identity problem that Sirleaf has to content with parallels that of the Browns due to their mixed parentage. From the onset, Sirleaf faces discrimination as a result of her light skin colour. Being in Africa where majority are black

skinned, her light skin became a challenge when it came to forming friendships, associations as well as seeking political leadership. Despite the fact that her father was a Gola, an indigenous Liberian community, it is her mother's Germany lineage that most Liberians associated her with. In school, her classmates would often remark that she was different because of her long hair and her light skin. This would make her cry at times as to why she was not born black.

The only problem at school was that some of my classmates teased me about the fairness of my complexion. They said it was too light to be a real African and called me Red Pumpkin, a name that hurt me to the bottom of my soul. Many days after school, I cried my way home. Many nights I went to bed praying to God to let me wake up black. It was one wish I ever wanted in all my life; to wake up black. It never happened, of course, and my mother would tell me to stop wasting time and energy regretting things that could not be helped (21).

In her presidential campaigns in 2005, Sirleaf had to clearly remind Liberians that she was seventy five percent Liberian and only twenty five percent German because of her mother. Even in prison at Shefflin, a soldier who doubted her roots had to ask her to say some Gola words. Though Sirleaf did not know the language well, she was able to utter a few words. Racism can cause trauma if not handled wisely. The Browns family has to endure this discrimination because Mabel Brown was an Englishwoman. Her three generations of women; from Lola Freedom to Nabumbo Promise to Ayosa Ataraxis, live in stigma of racial slurs. The reference made to them as Brown girls never being to any good by the townspeople is a clear indication of social rift between the townspeople and the Brown's family.

Lola Freedom also knocked down her son Maxwell Truth while Rosette and Nabumbo drowned the almost lifeless body of the boy in a well. Lola believed in relieving of the dying pain and held that such should be assisted to die quickly. Lola had been rocking in her chair with a bottle cognac

in her laps when her stream of thought was interrupted by Maxwell Truth. She knocks him down by a side table of a heavy teakwood into unconsciousness. Later when she learns that the girls have drowned their brother, she calls the police requesting them to arrest the girls for murder but they turn down her request claiming the girls were minors. In frustration, she opts to dump them in an orphanage at the age of six. She claims to have nothing to do with them. When she picks them six years later from the orphanage, she takes them straight to the convent where they spent the next six years. Nabumbo is also a traumatized mother who has been running away from her daughter and herself for long. It is said of Nabumbo:

Anybody could tell you that her mama came and went like blackjack needles blowing where the breeze decided. She loved fiercely, but only just briefly, and then the effort of it tired her, and she forgot to love at all. She laughed effusively, but then, somewhere in the shade of herself, icicles tapered from above, waiting to decapitate you (151).

Jennifer Muchiri in her PhD Thesis *The Female Autobiographical Voice in Independent Kenya* published at the University of Nairobi observes that:

People afflicted by traumatic memory due to certain crises in their lives are beset with memories that keep interrupting a present moment and insist on being present. These memories may come to the surface of consciousness in bits and fragments, time and again despite the passing of years. Such memories are often embroiled with difficulties such as sexual assault, imprisonment, disability and chronic illnesses, among others, which may be expressed only in the halting fragments of traumatic memory (45).

The memory of what Nabumbo and Rosette did to Maxwell haunts Nabumbo as well and hates her mother for it. Her relationship with her sister is severed too as they stop talking to each other. She falls inside too for that reason. Jentrix the apothecary pleads with Ayosa to bear her mother's challenges and be a little kinder. She says her mother is just so broken up and she is all but rubble

inside. When Ayosa is born, Jentrix rescues her after her mother throws her away in the water. Ayosa was meant to die.

Lola dedicates her life to the service of the townspeople as a flying doctor. Unfortunately when her daughters realize that she has not been in communication with them for some time and decide to check on her, they find her long dead in her chair. Lola Freedom succumbs to depression as a result of her troubled life. All she has done to the townspeople appears to have not given her peace within. Her attempt to seek refuge in alcoholism neither settles her. Things she lost haunts her. The death of her son Maxwell Truth and her mother Mabel Brown in which she is directly involved had lived to haunt her. Arguably, this stresses the fact that we cannot influence the world positively if that positivity is not within us. The family is a foundation where love and peace is nurtured before it blossoms to the outside world. Any other assumption may only turn out to be a mirage as just justified by the Browns family.

Mbiu Dash's mother is an example of a woman who exemplifies desirable qualities of motherhood. She puts her life on the line by sacrificing her life for the sake of her daughter. As a mother, she cannot wait to see her daughter starve when the government fails to pay them salaries. She decides to steal from a bank. She confronts two security guards with her AK-47 killing them on the spot but in the altercation police pursues and shoots at her severally. Mbiu says:

You want to know about my mama? Heh! Let me just tell you! My mama, she looked like a grater when they were done with her. Full of holes. Then the radioman refused to call her name out on the death news. He found her in-descent (86).

Mbiu describes this sad day as her best day of her life because her mama went away laughing. She just held her and laughed until all the laughter inside her was finished. She was 'happy' to die in embrace of her daughter. Mbiu survives the incidence but is left with memories and longings for

the mother. Being the only child, Mbiu has resorted to live with pigeons and her dog Bwana Matambara. She hates remission of family life and motherhood when Ms Temperance's poem that talks about a relationship between two daughters and their mother is aired on radio. She asks Ayosa what she expects now that she lives with pigeons. Mbiu's longing is captured by Brig Wilmah in her poem, *Memories and Longings* from Anthology of poems; *Womanic Voices: Memories and Longings*:

The sun that rose and set
That blurred my happy flickers
Mother, I couldn't know for real
Even strong love has time to walk away!
Something so holding like a mother's love
Times once make it a mere shadow!
You passed out of no wills, mama
Just as you was to obey nature
Leaving me unsheltered in these cold winds
Stresses of the robbed love of this bogged earth
Had me power to resent it
How come would you die, dear love?

Mama it is time enough without pure love

The holding pure voice love!

You left this pain of your womb to waggle alone

Did you really go to a better place?

A place of soft sunrise and human stare

Like those soft days singing sweet songs of motherhood?

For you never let me lonely but cared for me

Gave me protection all I needed

Thrilling as I fell in temptations

You held on dear queen

So you deserved my soft call of motherhood bedecking

How did I go wrong fate that you had to be washed away?

Sometimes people see me crying

They don't know and I don't tell them

But then they all have time to feel it accordingly

Without memories of motherhood attention,

Children become shadows of real life,

‘Cause mothers’ warnings are supremacy of parenthood.

Like Ayosa, Mbiu is a representation of children in single parenthood; a girl who has gone through trauma of seeing her mother die of bullet wounds in her embrace. However, her relationship with her mother was affectionate for her mother was killed out of love for her. This is typical sacrificial nature of mothers. While growing up to become a woman, Mbiu would ultimately know that mother’s love for their children is unquestionable and such trauma should not be passed on from one generation to another. There are numerous societal impediments that drag mothers into trauma that later on become cyclic. In her poem, *TheHardWay*, Brig Wilmah illustrates elements that conspire to frustrate motherhood. She recommends that motherhood needs a new veil of liberation from retrogressive patriarchal norms:

The Hard Way

I know it is never easy for you

Trying hard to mother the world

This world, which sets on bothering you

A world confidently principled by tradition!

You are the mother’s stigma of life

Receivers of world turns and thorns

All the tastes of the world's androcentrism

Setting men as centres of the universe!

Traditions set your aberrations

From appellations and sexual innuendoes

These religions want you veiled low

Doing gender to die born- to – serve patriarchal

This way is really hard

Being born to hold on anyway!

Have never been a way to brighter day

There is need for new veil for motherhood.

The new veil of motherhood should empower them to rise above patriarchy. Even though commendable strides have been made to liberate women, there is still a lot to be done. Women access to employment opportunities, representation in governance, leadership and decision making; and gender based violence are sticky issues that continue to raise concerns. In these spheres, women have been appreciated less, a condition that trickles down into families. When these frustrations permeate families, children are consequently affected. The shooting of Dickson Were sets the stage for trauma in the Brown's family. It was unprecedented occurrence because the children came to Mabel's gate uninvited to pour pig blood and Mabel shot at them out of

frustration. The Mapeli townspeople appear to have low regard about women and what they can do as portrayed by their children's actions. Those who live by the sword, die by the sword. Mabel is also shot dead by her daughter Lola and the trauma continues down the family.

Nature has also been shown to contribute to trauma in motherhood. It is as if in silent, it follows what happens in the Brown's family. The songs of the crickets and the laughter of jolly annas appear to trace the tribulations of the Browns. Despite Ayosa's efforts to silence crickets by beating at the tall grass, they only grew more agitated, their cries swelling into obscenity. They sang:

You stupid girl with

The face of hyena,

Your mama is a slut (154)

Ayosa is disappointed with this song, and shrieks that her mother is not a slut. She covers her ears and runs until the cricket song is far off, the horrible words muffled. Nabumbo's carefree lifestyle is something that Ayosa has to bear with pain as a daughter. Even though Ayosa knew that the crickets were right to refer to her mother as a slut because that is the life she lived, that reminder caused her terrible pain. Similarly, the birds, *Jollyannas* contribute to trauma. The shrieks of the crazy-birds are described as sorrowful:

She was thinking also of what happened after the drowning. How their mother sobbed inconsolably all night. How they laughed at her because her cries sounded like the shrieks of the crazy-birds out in the yard (106).

Cleonora Hudson-Wheems in her text, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* observes that a White mainstream feminist would not take the position of needing and depending on male companionship for wholeness. On the other hand, an African womanist can admit to such a need

and desire. Without it, she is incomplete, as is suggested in Janie's mental despair and physical immobility (overburdened, she retires to bed) from being without her ultimate male counterpart. Janie demonstrates her internal love for her companion, even after his death, as his spirit continues to motivate her:

Then Tea Cake came prancing around her where she was and the song of the sigh flew out of the window and lit in the top of pine trees; Tea Cake, with the sun for a shawl. Of course, he wasn't dead. He could never be dead until she herself had finished feeling and thinking. The kiss of his memory made pictures of love and light against the wall. Here was peace. She pulled in her horizon like a great fish-net. Pulled it from around the waist of the world and draped it over shoulder. So much of life is in meshes. She called in her soul to come and see (286).

Though liberal feminism advocates for freedom of choice, there is need for the society to come up with psychosocial support mechanisms to support mothers especially in single parenthood because these feminists do not focus on what happens beyond the public life; that is their private lives. Such mothers suffer silently eventually degenerating into depression. There is need to initiate legislative agenda to take care of this vulnerable group of mothers rather than just paying lip service in political campaigns. Once passed into law, the document should be anchored in the constitution.

2.3 Collectiveness in Motherhood

Johnson Chelsea et al in their MS Magazine article: *It Takes a Village: Celebrating Collective Mothering* gives their insight into this important element of motherhood. She observes :

“There is a lovely Yoruba proverb: ‘It takes a village to raise a child’” (28). In fact, communal parenting is a common and important practice across many communities of color and working-class families. Korean language speakers even use the phrase *uriomma* – meaning ‘we mom,’ or

‘our mom’ instead of ‘my mom’- reflecting a cultural norm where women parent beyond the bounds of a nuclear, biological family.

Feminists have long emphasized the benefit of collective mothering, also known as community mothering. Yet at every point in America’s patriarchal, capitalist, racialized history, women have been challenged by dominant cultural norms that emphasize individualized and biological mothering. Inflexible beliefs about appropriate parenting styles are limited, and have devastating consequences.

Many feminist sociologists have pushed back against narrow understandings of parenting. Sharon Hays argues that pressures for mothers to “do it all” through intensive mothering styles alienates and emotionally depletes women. Patricia Hill Collins describes how blood mothers, ‘others mothers,’ grandmothers and community mothers have collectively cared for Black children since slavery, playing integral roles in Black community survival.”

The element of collectiveness dominates the novel *Things They Lost*. In this text, a child is not necessarily raised by his or her mother but by women around him or her collectively. In African setting, a child belongs to the community rather than an individual. Other than the biological parents, extended family members such as uncles, aunts and grandparents had a very important role to play in upbringing of a child. For instance, sensitive issues to do with sexuality among the Luhya tribe of western Kenya were usually broached by grandparents to their grandchildren. Girl children slept in their grandmothers’ houses where grandmothers inculcated desirable values in them while warning them of dangers they may encounter as they grow into womanhood. Parents found it, and even today find it, difficult to discuss issues to do with sexuality with their children.

Therefore, grandmothers were trusted women to carry out this mandate in which many succeeded.

The same applies to grandfathers with their grandsons.

Nelson Mandela in his autobiography *Long Walk to Freedom* observes:

My mother presided over three huts at Qunu which I remember, were always filled with babies and children of my relations. In fact, I hardly recall any occasion as a child when I was alone. In African culture, the sons and daughters of one's aunts or uncles are considered brothers and sisters, not cousins. We do not make distinctions among relations practiced by whites. We have no half- brothers or half- sisters. My mother's sister is my mother; my uncle's son is my brother; and my brother's child is my son, my daughter (2).

Mandela brings out the element of collectiveness in African culture. Mothers take care of not only their children but of her relations too. Mandela's inability to recall any occasion when he was alone in the family is an indication that this was a norm not only among the Xhosas of South Africa but also in many African societies. In fact he criticizes distinctions made and practiced by whites that draw unnecessary boundaries amongst people who are related. In *Things They Lost*, the Englishwoman, Mabel Brown, and her generations find themselves trapped in these conflicting cultures; an African culture that is accommodative and the white culture that is restrictive. This demonstrates why men or rather husbands are excluded from the four generations of women in the text. From Mabel Brown to Ayosa Brown, men are relegated to the periphery; an aspect that limits the size and interactions in the family. The Browns treat the townspeople suspiciously and try not to engage them in their family affairs. However, the townspeople with all their reservations prove to be helpful to the family. Women characters: Jentrix, Sindano and Mbiu play the role of surrogates in Brown's family in the text.

When Ayosa was born, Jentrix says that she begged her to stay; some disgraceful kind of begging. She is the one who fished her out of water when Nabumbo threw her away, wiped her, rocked her

humming softly and checked for jaundice. She prayed that the child stays. It is strange that a biological mother would opt to terminate the life of her newly born baby after carrying her in her womb for nine months. Whereas safe delivery is marked with joy for many mothers, Nabumbo takes it as unnecessary burden that deserves to be offloaded at once. Just like her mother Lola Freedom who grew cold towards her two daughters and even caused the death of her son Maxwell Truth, Nabumbo also adopts a detached demeanor towards her daughter Ayosa. In African societies, collective mothering is a norm rather than an exception. What Jentrix, the apothecary, does is typical of motherhood in Africa where concerns for children transcends biological parents.

When Rosette and Nabumbo are accused of murdering their mother Lola Freedom, Jentrix plays the role of a mother. She vehemently reprimands the locals who had gathered to witness the girls being convicted of murder. She demands that the locals stop branding the girls as wicked for truth would set them free. She cooks and serves them during those trying times. Jentrix holds no grudge against the Browns despite their prejudice for she had squatted on their land for over twenty years. When Ayosa visits the Sister-Maker of Ramani, her mother is taken care of by Jentrix the apothecary. “Nabumbo Promise smiled, her eyes soft and moist. She said, Jentrix has been caring for me. She is the closest thing to a mother I ever had” (351).

She cares about Ayosa in absence of her mother. Jentrix too, despite being a grandmother to Temerity, carries the responsibilities of a mother when her son’s marriage comes to an end. She lives with Temerity, sending her on errands and teaching her how to identify and make traditional medicine.

Take your filthy hands away from her mouth! You want to be useful? Go to portmanteau and fetch me a few sprigs of chickweed and lungwort. That ought to make the swelling go down. Don’t you know what chickweed and lungwort look like?

Jentrix the apothecary let out an exasperated sigh. Temerity, fetch them for me! (269-270).

Jentrix treats Temerity like her own daughter. The same treatment she extends to Ayosa Brown. Sindano, the owner of *Mutheu Must Go Café* is a mother figure to Ayosa. When Ayosa walks into her café, she serves her tea and tells her about the origin of the name of her café which sounded a bit strange to him. She also tells her about her encounters with wraiths disguised as suitors. She explains to her why she has lost interest in marriage after ten suitors who proposed to her died. She observes that wraiths have ill intentions of destroying life and thus they are on the prowl to lure people into harm. She warns Ayosa to be on watch out because wraiths are bitter and envious with humans for they lack flesh and soul; to feel pain and joy like humans. For that reason, they are bent on executing revenge on humans. Sindano gives Ayosa advices that her mother Nabumbo does not. She is an ideal example of a mother who takes her time to advise her daughter about her society. Ironically, her biological mother, Nabumbo knows the dangers that loom large in Mapeli but she keeps running away from Ayosa for long only to appear during Christmas season. She keeps promising Ayosa when she reappears that she was done with leaving only to disappear again thereafter. The bond between she and her daughter is severed that Ayosa has nothing commendable to talk about her. Does she deserve to be Ayosa's mother? Yes, she does. Does she appreciate motherhood? Yes she does. When she learns of Ayosa meeting Sindano, she is angered and warns her against townspeople whom she regards as less forthright.

Nabumbo does not realize that Sindano comes in to fill in the space left by her perpetual absence. It is Sindano who directs Ayosa and Mbiu to Sister-Maker of Ramani. The Sister-Maker is intended to turn the two girls into sisters before they travel to Mombasa to start a new life. This arrangement reveals Ayosa's search for identity and belonging. Though she has a mother, Ayosa feels deserted. She is yearning for commitment in relationships. Being a mother is nothing if the title does not go

in tandem with commitment. The Sister- Maker is motherly and humble and advises the girls on importance of humbleness. She affirms that gifts are not achievements and thus nobody should gloat about them (325). Humans do nothing to deserve them. She has lived long and learnt that certain things don't matter. Sister-Maker of Ramani cooks soup for Ayosa and Mbiu and urges them to drink in order preserve energy for they had to travel long to their sister-making ceremony. What the Sister-Maker of Ramani does exemplifies true spirit of African motherhood. Regardless of blood relations, her work is to bring together women; to unite and give them new beginnings. Her presence is a testament to fragmented social fabric in the society. It has become a problem not only in Kenya but in Africa as seen that before then she had turned two Malagasy girls into sisters. She offers Ayosa and Mbiu free life lessons that Nabumbo cannot as a mother. Sister-Maker plays the coveted role of the grandmother in traditional African society that is receding with each passing day and however wishes to enjoy the old ways has to travel long distances to enjoy them. The beautiful old pillars that held African families together are crumbling down as we try to embrace the Western ways of life.

Mbiu dash, despite being a young, watches over Ayosa in absence of her mother. She plays a motherly role of caring for her by standing at the window watching over her. Mbiu also saves Ayosa from wraiths twice. With her cat Bwana Matambara, they always appear to be at the right place and time when Ayosa needs their help. If not for her intervention, Ayosa would have died at the river where she had been dumped by a wraith that had disguised as her mother Nabumbo. Though young, Mbiu Dash embodies characteristics of a mother who cares for children that are not necessarily hers.

In a nutshell, it is evident that motherhood transcends biological relations. Jentrix the apothecary, Sindano, Mbiu Dash and Sister – Maker of Ramani are epitome of collectiveness in motherhood.

More importantly is the role that these women play in alleviating intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the four generations of women that make them stand out. In their various capacities, they try to provide a solution or help to the Browns despite the Browns' condescending attitude towards them. Jentrix is particularly helpful in trying to reconcile Ayosa and her mother Nabumbo by reminding Ayosa that Nabumbo is just rubble inside and thus she needs to understand her. On the other hand, Nabumbo admits that Jentrix is the closest thing to a mother she ever had. All these efforts confirm that women in this text don't just let the Browns slide into trauma but do their best to try and save them.

CHAPTER THREE

AGENTS OF MOTHERHOOD

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the aspect of agency in motherhood in the text. Study of agency is critical because it gives us an insight into what is going on in the Browns family. Without agency, then little is known about trauma in the Brown's family because in *Things They Lost*, we come across mothers who have made a decision to keep their troubles to themselves. They go through a lot but they do not show it, instead they try to divert their attention by pursuing other issues that would presumably insulate them from the harsh realities. Unfortunately, that does not happen. With passing of time, these women are left exposed and have nowhere to run to or hide. In the four

generations of women under study in this text, none comes out to admit that she is overwhelmed. We learn more about their tribulations through other characters especially child characters. Magic realism which is widely regarded as an element of style rather than a thematic concern also features in this chapter to shed light on horrendous secrets of the Brown's family. It is through Ayosa's magical abilities to retell the past that we experience the magnitude of generational trauma in the Brown's family. Magical realism is central to study of the intergenerational trauma in this text that I decided to treat as a topical issue rather than a stylistic device.

3.2 Agents of Motherhood

Perhaps an interesting question is: who speaks on motherhood? The motif of motherhood with close reference to intergenerational trauma is largely explored from the lens of Ayosa Ataraxis Brown. Though the text is narrated from the third person point of view, Ayosa with the innocence of a child takes us through the trauma of motherhood in the four generations of women. Jennifer Muchiri in her thesis, *The Child Narrator in George Lamming's In The Castle Of My Skin* observes,

That at the end of the study is Lamming's view that a child's perspective is the most viable in capturing the effects of colonialism on the Caribbean individual. The study finds out that Lamming uses the child narrator to truthfully present the state of affairs in colonial Barbados, and the effects of colonialism on the Caribbean society (104).

In the same way, Okwiri Oduor manages to use Ayosa to give a truthful revelation about the secrets of the Browns family. With Ayosa's magical ability to recall history, we are able to dig deeper into horrendous secrets of the Brown's family. Nabumbo never knew that Ayosa could retell Maxwell's death. She is shocked that Ayosa knows so much as if she had firsthand experience. She thereafter, for the first time comes to know about the death of her grandmother

Mabel Brown that she was murdered by her daughter Lola Freedom who shot her in the head. Lola had kept it a secret by insisting that Mabel Brown blew her head right off with a musket; describing how the crazy-birds tore her apart and ate her, the bat-eared foxes fighting over what was left. Even after Rosette and Nabumbo tumbling on bones that were of their deceased grandmother, Lola is still unable to tell them about the sad reality. Nabumbo also learns from Ayosa about the death of Dickson Were who was shot by her grandmother Mabel and his lifeless body hidden in the attic of the house. For that long, people of Mapeli had sought for the boy who had been declared missing without success. In shock, Nabumbo discovers that truly Ayosa has magical powers when the remains of Dickson are found in the attic. She develops guilt before her daughter and from time to time she sinks to the land down under.

Her mama did not turn away from the wall. She did not stir. In a moment of utter panic, Ayosa wondered if perhaps her mama had left after all. Perhaps the woman before her was only a wraith. She moved closer to her, took ahold of the woman's wrist, and almost wept with relief when she found that the bone within it bulged so far out you could use it as a knocker for an oak door. A solid wrist. The woman was her mama. Sitting motionless. There, but not *there*. Eyes looking but not seeing (75).

Ayosa also gives revelation about plight of motherhood when she tells Jentrix the apothecary what she remembered about her from the Yonder Days before she turned into a girl. Her story underscores the need to economically empower women for self-sustenance and to protect them from physical and mental abuse. If it were not for Ayosa, perhaps this sad reality would not have been unraveled for Jentrix herself felt uncomfortable with the narration. Ayosa reveals that she saw Jentrix too in the Yonder Days. She saw the first time she went there, dressed all in rags, with bruises over her body. She then asked Lola if she needed a washerwoman and Lola replied that her girls washed quite well and thanked her. Ayosa reveals that Jentrix fell on her knees and begged saying she heard that Lola was a kind and gracious woman. She pleaded that for the love of great

Earth Mother, she should not turn her out. She should not send her back to the horrors she had just fled from.

Mothers have suffered and at times silently. Intergenerational trauma sets in when no one comes in to break the vicious circle. Jentrix would have broken down if she did not get the job and this would have a negative impact on the family.

Through Mbiu Dash, another child narrator, we learn about the death of her mother. Mbiu's mother as well, shows mental anguish mothers go through and their sacrificial nature. Mbiu's mother resorts to robbery in order to provide for her daughter. She ignores the risk involved and ultimately pays the price when she dies of bullet wounds. Mbiu says that her mother had been working as a doctor. Then came a time when there was no pay for eight months. Everyone was striking including nurses, teachers and bus conductors. But her mother was not one to beg anyone for anything so she drew her gun and went out fighting. Mbiu says that the day her mother was killed was the best day of her life because her mama went away laughing. She just held her and laughed until all the laughter inside her was finished. Mbiu says that her mother's body looked like a grater; full of holes by time the police were done with her. Mbiu's mother is symbolic of many mothers who suffer in silence; mothers who would never go begging for assistance but do anything else to provide for their children. Ayosa admires the courage of Mbiu's mother and says she wished she had such a mother who could rob banks (86). Mbiu's mother and Nabumbo suffer the same fate; women pushed to the walls by societal expectations. Whereas Mbiu's mother confronts her challenge of lack, Nabumbo runs away from her problems. Mbiu's mother dies fighting to maintain her status quo as a responsible mother while Nabumbo dies trying to strike reconciliation with her daughter Ayosa. These are two women traumatized by socioeconomic setbacks of their time. Though they appear not ready to seek help, the truth is they are overwhelmed.

Sindano, the owner of *MutheuMustGocafé* is another character that speaks on motherhood through the challenges that she undergoes. Though unmarried and childless, Sindano depicts hopelessness in motherhood. She is a representation of failed hope and aspirations. However, the author uses her as a symbol of resilience in an otherwise troubled motherhood. Sindano, just like Jennifer, plays the role of a surrogate mother to Ayosa. The absence of Nabumbo makes it possible for her to interact with Ayosa at her café. Sindano has gone through a lot as a woman. She has lost all her ten suitors who tragically killed themselves; only to realize later that they were wraiths meant to harm her. The townspeople have avoided her café because of her relationships woes but she keeps on opening it and cooking food. They perceive her as a murderer who should be shunned by everyone. When Ayosa visits her, she feels happy to host her and serves her tea. She goes ahead to narrate to her about her encounters with wraiths and warns her to be careful. Sindano does not bow to trauma. Even though she claims to have lost interest in marriage, she remains strong in the face of all adversaries. The author implies that mothers have ability to withstand trauma if they accept their social challenges. Sindano does not give up on her daily engagements despite having no one to work for.

Sister-Maker of Ramani plays a role in trying to cut short the intergenerational trauma that was eating into the Browns. It worth to note that Ayosa having realized that her family was crumbling due to many ills that had taken place in it, she decided to break the jinx in the family by initiating a new relationship outside the family. Interestingly, her mother Nabumbo had also asked her earlier to accept her plea for a sisterly relationship; an opinion that had not materialized by the time Ayosa and Mbiu visited Sister-Maker of Ramani. However, the cries of her mother, “*Please – please – please – I – need – you,*” still reverberated in her ears even as she prepared for a union ritual with

Mbiu. When Mbiu claims that her mother was in-descent, Sister-Maker responds by saying that we are all in-descent:

“Close your eyes,” the Sister-Maker said.

And they closed their eyes.

Ayosa tumbled and fell. She leapt to her feet, so fast and so sudden that her head spun. She tumbled. Fell back down in a faint. There was darkness everywhere. And she was raging, crawling, kicking, tearing against this darkness, until it turned to light again. And she saw that she was no longer a girl—that she was only a speck of a thing now, squatting in the corner of a beetle – shaped room. She held herself tight, felt her heart of hearts throb somewhere in her middle. The beetle-shaped room darted through the air, and she, encapsulated within it, toppled over (337).

And she found her. Mbiu, her *dear* Mbiu! She threw her arms around her, crying with anguish and relief. Now there were two girls – two sisters – crouched together. Knees up. Heads tucked in the crannies of each other’s necks. And at their feet was the cat Bwana Matambara. Honeybees fluttered about them. Chickens clucked. The jolly annas said, Jolly anna ha-ha-ha (p337).

After turning the two girls into sisters, the Sister-Maker showed them the way that would bring them back home. She had accomplished her business and Ayosa was free to start a new life with Mbiu away from the Browns home. Whereas Nabumbo and Rosette sisterly relations had finally broken and were no longer an entity or Brown girls, a new formation of Mbiu-Ayosa had just begun. With Sister-Maker of Ramani as a surrogate mother, a new motherhood is envisaged where children can adopt new mothers away from their biological mothers. If that can help alleviate trauma in families, then a break-away from blood relationships is a commendable alternative.

Ms. Temperance, the poet, is another character that we do not interact with directly in the text but she brings out trauma in Browns family through her work of poetry that she keeps airing on radio. Other than her poems being loved by the public, Ayosa finds them very relevant in her life experiences. At one point during her presentation of one of her poems, we are told that Ayosa held

her breath in anticipation. It appeared as if she was preparing to be addressed by Ms. Temperance about the subject she was aware of. Indeed Ms. Temperance did exactly that when she recited a poem that mirrored Lola Freedom's alcoholism and her teetering on a ledge with her two frost-chewed babies who are Nabumbo and Rosette. Ms. Temperance describes like-hate relationship that exists between Lola and her girls and their eventual separation when the two girls are dumped at an orphanage and later on at the convent. Ms. Temperance description of the babies as snake-eyed is meant to elicit fear in their mother Lola. This is actually a confirmation that motherhood in this case is a cause of trauma but not happiness as ought to be. Lola is said to despise her two girls most of the time as described in the poem. This reminds me of the incidence surrounding Maxwell's death; the death of an innocent child who was seeking her mother's attention only for the mother to knock her down. Nabumbo and Rosette had learnt to stay from their temperamental mother whom they knew very well that she was traumatic. To further reveal the differences between daughter- mother relationship which reflects Ayosa and her mother Nabumbo which becomes a source of trauma, especially to Ayosa, Ms. Temperance makes a revelation of a girl who fed her mother on a feline's meat. The girl serves her mother with a skinned cat in her soup for supper and watches her as she eats the soup lying to her that it was a cockerel she caught for her in the yard. She later goes down the creek and counts stars thinking how lonesome girls have the undulating sky all to themselves. In this poem, Ms. Temperance depicts the life of Ayosa, the lonesome girl. The poet implies that the girl's aim was to kill the mother by feeding her with a feline's meat so that she can die and leave her alone. In this case, Ayosa's differences with her mother again are brought to the fore. Motherhood is again put to test. Ayosa appears to admire Mbiu's freedom given that her mother had died. To Ayosa it appears that it is beautiful not to have a mother at all than having one who is never there for you. At the end of this poem Ayosa looked

at Hurulaini, her dog, with tears standing in her eyes and said, “Ms. Temperance knows me. She knows me. How does she know me?” (247).

Through Ms. Temperance, Okwiri Oduor also reflects on her troubled childhood with her mother who she once fought. She implies that there cannot be happiness if it was not inculcated in children from birth. She compares tranquility of the mind in a relationship with Mbiu and her dog Bwana Matambara. Despite the fact that the dog is not human, their relationship is undoubtedly strong. That is why even at the time when Ayosa and Mbiu were made sisters by Sister-Maker of Ramani, Bwana Matambara was right there at their feet. Later we see a similar relationship between Ayosa and Hurulaini. Therefore, Okwiri asserts that relationships are made but not inherited. Human relations should transcend blood ties and incorporate truth and empathy for one another. Relations of entitlement are built on quicksand that cannot stand the test of time and may eventually yield to trauma. Nabumbo keeps lying to Ayosa that she is done with leaving only to disappear shortly thereafter. Ayosa hates lies and stereotypes that are unfounded. Having read Pippi Longstocking books in the library, Ayosa realizes how lies can hurt individuals. In the stories, Pippi Longstocking’s father who was the king of all Negroes made her princess of all the Negroes. Pippi was very proud of this fact. One time, Pippi was heard talking to the children next door – Tommy and Anika – telling them that in Kenya, there was not a single person who could tell the truth. She said that if she ever were caught lying, then it was only because of this – that she had spent too much time in Kenya. After reading this, Ayosa wrote a vexed letter to the author Astrid Lindgren saying how wrong her assessment was, and that all the people she knew would never lie. She says that Kenyans told you the truth even when you ought not to hear it. If anything, that was the problem with Kenyans. They did not know how to hold back with the truth. They brutalized you with the truth. Astrid Lindgren never responded to Ayosa (27).

In her last poem, Ms. Temperance narrates critically about the Browns. She disapproves the kind of life that the Browns have lived by comparing them to antics of maimed beasts. However, the truth is, the Browns family disintegrates due to lack of truth and psychosocial support systems that were characteristic of African traditional societies.

It therefore important to note that Ayosa Ataraxis Brown, Jentrix the apothecary, Sindano the owner of *MutheuMustGoCafé*, Mbiu Dash, Sister-Maker of Ramani and Ms. Temperance play an important role of agency of motherhood in this text. They speak about the challenges mothers face through observations, interactions and reactions. Without them, then we would know very little about the trauma that runs in the Browns family. Their contribution towards helping the family overcome the challenges cannot be underestimated. They go out of their way to do all they can but unfortunately the trauma is so deep that their effort is too little and too late. The destiny of the Browns had already been etched in stone.

3.3 Magic Realism as a Voice of Agency

Magic Realism is a style of literary fiction and art that paints a realistic view of the world while also adding magical elements, often blurring the lines between fantasy and reality. Magical realism often refers to literature in particular, with magical or supernatural phenomena presented in an otherwise real-world or mundane setting, commonly found in novels and dramatic performances. Despite including certain magical elements, it is generally considered to be a different genre from fantasy because magical realism uses a substantial amount of realistic detail and employs magical elements to make a point about reality, while fantasy stories are often separated from reality. Magical realism is often seen as an amalgamation of real and magical elements that produces a more inclusive writing form than either literary realism or fantasy.

In 1955, literary critic Angel Flores coined the term *magical realism* as opposed to *magical realism* in English in an essay, stating that it combines elements of magic realism and marvelous realism. He named Argentine author Jorge Luis Borges the first magical realist, based on his previously-published collection of short stories *Historia Universal dela Infamia (A Universal History of Infamy)*.

While Latin American authors made magical realism what it is today, authors had previously written stories about mundane situations with fantastical elements before magical realism was a recognized literary genre. For example, Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis* – a novel with themes that today's critics would consider to be magical realism – was published in 1915, a decade before Roh wrote about magic realism and well before the genre emerged in Latin American literature.

Jon Evans in his article *Magic Realism: not fantasy. Sorry* tries to distinguish between fantasy and magic realism. He observes that though both are fiction, there is difference between the two in a matter of degree. Fantasy magic is systematic: there are rules if implicit, dictating who can perform it, and what it can do, and how. Distinctions are drawn between magicians and muggles, enchanted items and normal kitchenware. Magic is extraordinary, supernatural, paranormal- anything but quotidian – and staggering implications of its existence are explored and illustrated. Magic realism embodies wild and unpredictable power.

Things They Lost embodies characteristics of Magical Realism. The text has unpredictable elements that do not occur in our real world. However, they are presented as normal within the novel. The line between fantasy and reality in the text is blurred and has elements that do not exist in the real world.

Things They Lost is magical with mystery *Fatumas*, wraiths and *Jinamizis*. In the text, the *Fatumas* that were fished from the sea many years back are said to live in the attic of Mabel's mansion. These are two mysterious creatures that are half human and half wisp of smoke that can only be seen by Ayosa. These mysterious creatures have feelings just like humans but lack human body which has flesh. These *Fatumas* are said to have found shelter through an old hag called Nyang'au who had found work in Mabel's household as a cook but had no idea about cooking the cuisine that his name was famed across the entire province. So Nyang'au had stuffed the *Fatumas* inside a coffee tin and kept it on the mantelpiece, and for thirty –two years, had made them cook the cuisine in his name. When Nyang'au was taken ill and died, the *Fatumas* found themselves unencumbered. They longed to return to the vast sea but did not know how to get there. In desperation, they climbed up to the attic and hid. That is where, decades later, the little Ayosa discovered them (10).

Since Ayosa discovered them, the *Fatumas* became magical mothers to Ayosa. When she cried in her infancy, Nabumbo would take her to the attic and leave her there to weep herself hoarse. However, the *Fatumas* would not just ignore her. They would sing *lalakitoto* to her in their soft voices and Ayosa would calm down. Seeing this happen, Nabumbo believed that spirits of her dead mother Lola dwelt in the attic that soothed the baby. In this context, I can already witness a traumatized mother throwing away her baby without care whereas *Fatumas* assuming her role. That is why Ayosa's bond with them grew strong to an extent that she was able to learn their faces.

And me? Ayosa thought. What is the closest thing to a mother that I got to have? The *Fatumas* and their grief? The jollyannas and their cackling? The manor that Mabel Brown had then filled with sadness and waiting and the bones of fleeing boys? She thought, No, no, none of that (351).

When Nabumbo flees from home as she used to do from time to time, Ayosa is left with the *Fatumas* in the house. They keep her company and show grief when they hear news of death announced on radio. We learn that the *Fatumas* would throw themselves down, wailing in grief. This reaction would violently shake the whole house. It is interesting that these *Fatumas* do not hurt Ayosa or place any unnecessary demands on her. They only keenly follow news and react accordingly. Something strange about the two *Fatumas* is that they avoided being seen by the townspeople. If that opportunity came, they turned into smoke and disappeared. The expression of pain by the *Fatumas* when death announcements were made, characterize pain in motherhood in real world. While this happens in unreal world, it is interesting that the same does not happen in Mabel's family. In fact what we witness is some family members killing others purposefully; and trauma having taken control in the family.

Unlike the *Fatumas*, the wraiths that prowl Mapeli town are agents of destruction. With innocence of a child, Ayosa is twice lured out of her home by wraiths and taken down the river with intention of harming her. Were it not for Mbiu Dash's prompt actions, they would have killed her. The wraith that disguises itself as the milkman, almost convinces Ayosa out of her home but when Ayosa, having discovered that wraiths do not have a body or flesh as human do, she tries to touch it in order to confirm that it is human only for it to disappear like smoke. It takes the effort of Sindano who has had an experience with the wraiths to inform Ayosa how to identify a wraith. For instance, Ayosa's conversation with a wraith in the name of Bessie is quite intriguing:

Sindano told me all about that. She told me that it was you, Bessie. You're the one that tried to do it. Ten times. Came pretending to be a man that wanted to marry her.

Bessie laughed. Lord, he said, that woman, she was desperate! Almost desperate as we are. Desperate to be loved. That's nothing like desperate to snatch a person's body. Don't dare to compare her to yourselves! (290).

It is evident that Sindano has been tested ten times by wraiths disguised as suitors. Having escaped alive in all those ten instances can be termed as mere good luck. Hence one may ask: Why did Nabumbo expose her child Ayosa to such an environment? Suppose she was hurt or killed by these prowling wraiths, would she have felt bad? The answer can either be *yes* or *no*? *Yes* because she would rejoice that she would no longer be pestered about her escapades. The answer can also be *No* because she was running away since she was a traumatized mother. She could not stand Ayosa's assessment of her; a woman who was all rubble inside. Despite this, Ayosa was her daughter and she indeed loved her. Nabumbo was simply under attack from generational trauma.

Okwiri uses magical realism to offer an implicit critique of society; to express her distaste for threats to motherhood. As much as the *Fatumas* are portrayed as agents of positivity in fantastical realms, the wraiths are symbolic of destructive elements to motherhood; elements that are either driven by envy or jealousy, and are determined to destroy the unsuspecting young innocent lives. Sindano warns Ayosa about these wraiths having encountered them severally in her life as an adult.

The *Jinamizi* which translates to 'nightmare' is another manifestation of tragic magic in motherhood. When *Jinamizi* attacks Ayosa, it traps her senses and makes her experience bad dreams. An attack by *Jinamizis* was never a good experience for Ayosa. It is shown that they brought memories that were heavy as boulders – she fought them, scratching, kicking, biting but they subdued her. The absence of Nabumbo in the life of her daughter Ataraxis Brown, leaves her exposed to these magical world that in general sense, is meant destroy her.

And Ayosa roused. She saw that the *Jinamizi* was gone. She saw that she was no longer in the valley, no longer surrounded by the Sisters of the Broken Heart. She saw that two faces stared down at her. Sindano's one, dewy with sweat, Mbiu's one, sticky with jiggery and crinkly with worry (314).

Ayosa's portrayal of *Jinamizis* experience is traumatic. Other than worrying about her mother Nabumbo who keeps away from her, Ayosa has to contend with nightmares of finding herself in a valley surrounded with Sisters of the Broken Heart. Indeed as the name suggests, the sisters that Ayosa meets in the other world are not messengers of hope and peace but lamentations and trauma. All they can do is to infuse in her trauma and make her view the real world as a continuation of theirs. In absence of Nabumbo, which was more of a norm than an exception, the collective motherhood which comes into play cannot actually help Ayosa in this case. Sindano, Jentrix the apothecary and Mbiu can only sympathize with Ayosa because that was a strange experience to them. Could the situation have been different if Nabumbo was ever present? Is there a difference between what Ayosa suffers from Nabumbo's when she falls in the land down under? Perhaps things would have been different if Nabumbo was available in the life of her daughter Ayosa. It is common knowledge that nightmares are triggered by a number of factors including: stress or anxiety. Sometimes the ordinary stresses of daily life such as a problem at home, school or workplace trigger nightmares. Similarly, a major change such as a move or death of a loved one can have the same effect. What Ayosa was going through was a beginning of trauma that Nabumbo was already wallowing in. It was just a matter of time that she would start falling in the land down under just like her mother Nabumbo.

Thus Okwiri implies that trauma that had affected the three generations of women before Ayosa was catching up with her very fast. Unless something was done, the intergenerational trauma affecting the family would consume the entire family. Arguably, this is the reason why Ayosa decides to forge sisterly relationship with her friend Mbiu so that she can break this vicious cycle of trauma.

The jollyannas and their cackling in the text are symbolic of mockery on motherhood. We note that these birds are described as being everywhere as if monitoring the conduct of the Browns. They watch atrocities that happen in Mabel's home and all they can do is to deride these women.

As aforementioned, Ayosa's ability to retell history as it happened is magical. Ayosa reveals a lot about the Brown's family even before she is conceived and born. Magical realism in this text enhances the issue of generational trauma as revealed by Ayosa. I realize that what happens in Nabumbo's life did not just begin in her adult life. Her life of stumbling inside herself – going into the land down under had a long history in her life.

She'd forgotten that her mama got like this. That sometimes she stumbled inside herself - went into the land down under. It had first happened when her mama was nineteen years old. Back then, Ayosa was not a girl, was only a thing wriggling by her mama's side. She had seen it all transpire. Nabumbo had contracted sepsis from a bone fracture and then lay in comatose for a week. She was locked inside herself, where she wondered about, and discovered that there was another life unfolding in there. Another world. Her mama had an outside and inside life. In the outside life, she was Nabumbo Promise Brown. Daughter of Lola Freedom. Sister of Rosette Brown. Granddaughter of Mabel Brown. But in the inside life, she was none of those things. She was Another Person. She lived in a tree hollow, inside a red city. She was a beggar and a thief. She robbed and plundered and murdered (50-51).

In addition, Ayosa's retelling the death of Maxwell is another pointer to generational trauma in the novel. Lola Freedom is another victim of trauma. She resorts to alcoholism and violence as a cover up for her inadequacies. As a mother, knocking down her son Maxwell is not only tragic but also a proof of piled up trauma in life she had lived. Having shot and killed her mother Mabel, Maxwell's death is just an additional case of brutality to already psychologically suffering mother. Sadly, this trauma is passed on to her daughter Nabumbo who finds herself entangled in the death of Maxwell Truth; and the vicious cycle continues.

Ayosa had known all this. Okwiri reminds us about the known and the unknown in Mabel Brown's family tree. In the outside life, all is well and traceable but in the inside life, there is a lot of tribulations that the author opts to expose through magic realism.

CHAPTER FOUR

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

4.1 Introduction

Style in literature is the literary element that describes the ways that the author uses words; that is the author's word choice, sentence structure, figurative language, and sentence arrangement- all working together to establish mood, images and meaning in the text. Style is what sets one author from others by creating a *voice* that the audiences hear when they read.

Okwiri Oduor uses language creatively at an intersection of the spirit world and human one. *Things They Lost* is all about Ayosa, the leading character, and three generations of women that come before her. The three generations of women are: her great grandmother Mabel Brown, grandmother Lola Freedom and mother Nabumbo Promise. These four generations of women find themselves trapped in trauma that manifest itself as intergenerational since it appears to affect one generation after the other. This intergenerational trauma is largely revealed through Ayosa's magical ability to retell history as it happened; exposing the horrendous secrets of the Brown's family. Ayosa is portrayed as a wondering spirit; bustling with joy and exuberance but seized with longing for her mother Nabumbo who often flee from her.

Oduor creates a social setting that incorporates the ghostly *Fatumas*, the *Jolly-Annas*; cruel birds that covers Ayosa's solitude with spiteful laughter and appear to stalk her everywhere she goes, and the milkman whom at one point a wraith had disguised as. The author blends all these with human characters to bring out the issue of intergenerational trauma in the text by using various elements of style.

In my study, I focus on symbolism, poetry, epistolary, satire and lexical borrowing as elements of style employed by the author to entrench the issue of intergenerational trauma in the text.

4.2 Interpretation of Symbolism

Symbolism refers to use of symbols to represent ideas or qualities. The presence of Mabel Brown, the birds – Jolly-Annas and the title of the text *Things They Lost* are symbolically used to enhance the issue of intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the text. All these elements coalesce into a common front that brings to the fore the struggles of the Browns within and outside the family and how they consequently find themselves enmeshed in intergenerational trauma. Okwiri Oduor uses Mabel Brown, a white settler, to criticize colonial experience in Kenya and Africa in general. When Mabel visits this otherwise remote part of this country as a missionary, she finds it habitable and decides to settle down. She builds herself a manor after annexing the locals' land and introducing them to a new religion which is Christianity. The Mapeli townspeople are said to observe the Epitaph Day to commemorate their dead ones. They attend mass and thereafter continue to celebrate the commemoration by drinking alcohol and dancing to African *Lingala* music. Religion, in this case, is used as a tool to suppress the townspeople from realizing the ills meted on them by the white settlers.

Mabel Brown is an epitome of colonial oppressor on African land. She sets the stage for all challenges that the natives of Mapeli come to encounter later on. In fact, adoption of *Mapeli* as the town's name is a clear indicator of annexation of the town by Mabel Brown. Mabel has no respect for the townspeople and the environment she finds herself in. She shoots wild animals mercilessly by her musket. To her, it is a mere hunting expedition; a game she enjoys. She goes a notch higher when she shoots a native boy, Dickson Were, for allegedly pouring pig's blood at her gate. This blatant killing sets the stage for intergenerational trauma that is witnessed throughout the four generations of women in this text.

Whereas Lola Freedom presents herself as a saviour by dedicating her life as a flying doctor in service of the townspeople and even building a convent for nuns to moralize the society, there are horrendous secrets that are weighing down the Browns family. Even Lola herself is not spared for she had killed her mother Mabel by shooting her in the head. Though Nabumbo tries to avoid spilling human blood in her adulthood, she goes on to exploit the natives through her photography business. She gets rich by photographing the natives. All ills that take place in Browns family are guarded jealously. However, the author reminds us that human body is weak and in fullness of time, truth always comes to the fore. The oppression meted on the natives of Mapeli comes to haunt the Brown's family later on as it edges towards its disintegration. The last of four generations of women, Ayosa Ataraxis Brown, lays bare the truth about the misdeeds of the Brown's family through her magical abilities to retell events that took place in the family in the past.

Christianity, a religion that was brought by Mabel and buttressed by her daughter Lola, fails to rescue the Browns from disintegration. It fails to reach out to the family in the midst of its tribulations. In fact the Brown's family is somehow assisted by some of the very natives that the family looked down upon. Jentrix, the apothecary takes care of Nabumbo when she falls inside

herself and also vehemently defends Nabumbo and Rosette against accusation that they had murdered their mother Lola Freedom. Sindano acts as a surrogate mother to Ayosa. She welcomes Ayosa to her café, serves her tea and warns her about wraiths that are on the prowl in Mapeli. These two women parallel the colonial sympathizers during the colonial regime in Kenya.

The cruel birds, Jolly-Annas, symbolize mockery of the Brown's family. It is interesting to note that these birds are omnipresent in Browns lives. When Mabel shoots Dickson, they screech; when Lola shoots Mabel and buries her in a shallow grave in the gardens, they cackle; when Nabumbo and her twin sister Rosette drown Maxwell's body in a well, they screech;

On their second day at home, they sat out in the garden and watched the crazy-birds squealing and tearing at each other with their beaks. Screaming Jolly anna ha-ha-ha; mocking Nabumbo Promise and Rosette for their pathetic little lives. For the unspeakable evil inside them that had caused them to drown Maxwell Truth. For the dull silent years spent at the orphanage (126).

Even when Lola lies about the death of Mabel to her daughters Nabumbo and Rosette, Jolly-Annas are mentioned in the cooked up story. "Their mother had told them the story of their grandmother's blowing her head right off with a musket. How the crazy-birds tore her apart and ate her, and the bat-eared foxes fought over what was left (127)."

Additionally, when the bones of the late Mabel are discovered in the rosebushes, the Jolly-Annas are there to witness. "Nabumbo Promise turned away from the crazy-birds and the chickens and the fox. It's not a rock. It's a bone," Nabumbo Promise said" (127).

Nothing can be hidden under the sun. No secret. Whereas the Brown's family is shrouded in secrecy, the Jolly-Annas are aware of their evils. The birds are agents of perpetual truth; that either concealed or revealed, will always come into the public domain. The society is sickened by evil; and it will always mock its perpetrators. Throughout the four generations of women, the crazy-

birds are constant reminder that the evils committed by the Browns would ultimately lead to their ruin. The evils become the source of intergenerational trauma that runs through the four generations of women.

The title *Things They Lost* is symbolic in two ways. Firstly, the author uses the title as a reflection of her childhood. Having been raised by very strict parents who perceived a girl child to be so vulnerable, Oduor laments about her interrupted childhood. She was denied opportunities to socialize and express herself. Everything she did was censored within the confines of morality including her early writings. She recalls, with a tinge of regret, her altercation with her mother that led her to burn all her manuscripts. Oduor condemns autocratic parenting that leaves children, more so the girl child, with little room to manage their own lives. The rebellion we witness in the novel between Nabumbo and her mother Lola, and Ayosa and her mother Nabumbo- are as a result of contained anger for the lost childhood. Lola dumps Nabumbo and her sister Rosette in an orphanage for six years after accusing them of killing their younger brother Maxwell Truth. She later takes them to a convent for other six years. At this point, Nabumbo defies and runs away from the convent to search for her own identity. Unfortunately the world she plunges into is so uncompromising. She is so detached from the rigors of the outside world that she keeps falling inside herself. She flees from her daughter Ayosa from time to time not that she wishes to do so but because she never had a solid childhood herself. She was never mothered with love and as a result she is unable to offer such to Ayosa.

Ayosa is mothered by the ghostly *Fatumas* when Nabumbo runs away. When she comes home, the two fights often that leaves Nabumbo with numerous marks on her body. The bond between mother and child is lost. It takes Jentrix the apothecary and Sindano to provide motherhood to

Ayosa. Jentrix advises Ayosa to understand her mother; that she is all rubble inside. Unfortunately, this rebellion runs through all the four generations of women.

Secondly, the title *Things They Lost* is symbolic of the colonial experience in Kenya and Africa in general. More importantly, is the question of land. Africans lost their land to Europeans who came to Africa as missionaries and later settled after grabbing land that belonged to Africans for ages. Land meant a lot to natives; as it still does today. It was a source of their livelihood thus taking it away was akin to threatening their survival.

In *Things They Lost*, Mabel Brown who arrives in Mapeli as a missionary, annexes the land belonging to Mapeli people when she decides to settle down among the locals. We witness natives like Jentrix living as squatters on land that belonged to their people and has to beg for odd jobs at Lola's home for sustenance. In addition, the squatters have to pay rent. These create a rift between Mabel Brown and the natives that leads to death of a native boy Dickson Were. The boy, among others, was protesting the presence and brutality of Mabel in their midst. They poured pig's blood at her gate and she retaliated by reaching for her musket and firing at them. The fear of being discovered as a murderer and possible retaliation from the natives traumatized Mabel. Hence the killing of Dickson sets in motion trauma that is witnessed in the four generations of women. The death of Mabel and Maxwell are other incidences that further fuel the intergenerational trauma.

The author also bemoans the wanton killing of wild game by the white settlers. Whereas Mabel takes it as a game, the natives perceive it as destruction of their fauna. The loss of wild game is irreplaceable and the practice should not be tolerated:

Mabel Town had belonged to the Englishwoman, but Mapeli Town was theirs. They said *Mapeli* with such resolute pride, and no longer thought of the Englishwoman- the muskets she fired at the backs of fleeing children, the wildlife that she hauled

from her hunting expeditions, the affairs that she had with her gardeners and cooks, and drivers, the rents that she charged townspeople for land that was more than theirs (6).

The townspeople had lost their voice and could only watch as the Englishwoman reigned supreme.

It is also evident that the author laments on the loss of moral fabric in the society. She accuses Mabel for having affairs with gardeners, cooks and drivers. Such indiscriminate sexual intimacies are not tolerated in African societies that are largely controlled by taboos. From a wider perspective, the author is simply accusing the colonialists for interfering with traditional African moral fabric and their people's morality. Sex was meant to be sacred but not to be dished out anyhow. These affairs lower Mabel's self-esteem and sinks her deeper into trauma for she learns to trust her musket than any human.

4.3 Expression of Trauma through Poetry

A number of novelists use poetry at the beginning of their works. For instance, *A Raisin in the Sun* beginning with poem *Harlem* is one of the greatest examples of beautiful poetry in the narrative. The composition is vibrant and engrossing. It shows how important dreams are in a person's life by illustrating what happens when they are disregarded. This style, when embedded correctly, brings a story to life by capturing the reader's attention. When we write long fiction, like Okwiri Oduor does in *Things They Lost*, and become engrossed in our stories – plot and characterization – we sometimes overlook the nuances. These small details are important since they can elevate our writing beyond the mundane and into extraordinary.

Okwiri Oduor unlike Lorraine Hansberry in *A Raisin in the Sun*, uses her own poems sparingly across her novel *Things They Lost*. She uses a character, a poet Ms Temperance, to artistically

communicate her powerful emotions. In this text, poetry is highly elevated that the author says that one time when Ms Temperance did not read a poetry piece to the people because she was ill, they stormed out of their houses and threw a Molotov cocktail into the radio station. They could not go a day without her poetry (24).

The Epitaph Day is marked as an important day in Mapeli Town when the townspeople remember their dead. Ms Temperance had a poem for this day. She wrote:

*Do you remember those crisp mornings waiting
the world
to end waiting for the second coming of trains
and tenacity and Auma of the thistles who cut her
arm off to feed the greedy baby doll? Do you
remember how blue tasted bent over the creek that
swallowed
Auma of the thistles who fed her toes to the
starving porcelain child? And red when we lay our
heads
down as the day grew tart? The boy drowned
yesterday is waiting at the station with lilies in his*

arms, saying, What in the world took you so long?(24)

In this poem, the author remembers the sacrifices made by the townspeople who passed on. These people made sacrifices by welcoming the missionaries into Mapeli, only later for the very missionaries to turn against them by annexing their land, pushing them to pay taxes, destroying their flora and fauna and even killing them. Temperance uses Auma of the thistles to appreciate the traditional ways of life where herbs provided cure. She illustrates how the locals made huge sacrifices to provide for the whites who are described as greedy and dolls. They are dolls in a manner that they relied on the locals to provide them and their children with all they needed. Their children are described as porcelain children since they appear vulnerable to harsh conditions of life of Mapeli. However, more importantly is the author's emotional portrayal of trauma that is evident in the text. It is a flash forward of Maxwell's death who was drowned by her sisters Nabumbo and Rosette. This death could have been averted but because of generational trauma that was running down in the family, it was bound to happen. In commemoration of the Epitaph Day, the townspeople look forward to a reunion with their dead someday. Though practically it is taking long, in faith they believe it would happen.

In another poem, Ms. Temperance recites a poem about the red finch that chose to turn into a wandering plant. This poem interests Ayosa that she writes the words down and keeps reciting to herself, over and over again:

*The red finch sick to its stomach with vertigo gave
up flying and perched itself on a branch and wanted
to be bird no more so it turned its claws to*

fibrous roots and its blood to sticky sap and its
folded plumage to the wildflowers of spiderwort
crawling and
trailing and climbing wooded shambles stopping every
now and then to
peer at the sun above and wonder, where was the
tortoise going with its stuttering unsteady feet, and
would it
perhaps walk much faster if unburdened of its heavy
brick house? (76)

This poem is a reflection of women in the text *Things They Lost*. The red finch is symbolic of women who later come to realize that you cannot run away from your challenges because soon or later, you will realize that they do not just vanish away. The sudden spinning sensation that attacks the finch is as a result of anxiety and flight exhaustion. It thus yearns for change which perhaps can only happen if it transforms into a wandering plant.

Mabel's generation is a generation of women on the move; comparatively flying like the red finch. Indeed, it is this behaviour witnessed in Mabel's family that causes the intergenerational trauma in the text. Three generations of women: Mabel, Lola and Nabumbo – are said to leave their

families for one reason or another. This absence causes devastating psychological pain to their children. Ayosa, being able to retell the past reveals:

Now Ayosa thought of how familiar this type of sitting was. This type of waiting. She had memories from the Yonder Days – memories of mama leaving daughter, and daughter sitting still with hands between knees, watching furtively, waiting until mama returned. Like, Mabel Brown off on a hunting trip, while at home, her daughter, Lola Freedom swung on a tire in the yard, waiting, just waiting. Later, Lola Freedom gallivanting through the Rift Valley in her little piston-powered airplane – a Cessna C-165 – while at home, her daughter Nabumbo Promise was on her own, huddling on the creaky steps, waiting. And now, Nabumbo Promise was doing all the leaving, and Ayosa all the sitting and waiting (107).

That was how it was. Mamas left. Daughters waited. Was that why mamas birthed daughters – so there would always be someone in the world devastated with desire for them? Someone in the world saying, Dear Lord, I would trade you my eyesight for my mama. Make me blind, but bring her back to me” (77).

In this poem, Ms. Temperance expresses the vanity of running away from difficulties that people go through since that does not solve anything. In fact, that only exacerbates the situation. The poem is a reminder on the beauty of self- discovery and exploit of the hidden potentialities to better themselves. Temperance observes that beauty and calmness are achieved when one is settled in mind and socially connected to people close to them. We achieve happiness, just like the climbing plant, when we unburden ourselves of our problems and seek solutions. Positivity is important. Intergenerational trauma witnessed in *Things They Lost* is, to a large extent, a result of run- away parents that Ayosa, the fourth generation of the women, ought to end.

Again, Ms. Temperance writes another poem that Ayosa feels that she is writing for her:

My mother's child is a stranger whose neck I used to kiss

*back when we were a pair of black cats prowling
in our mother's night terrors causing her to shriek
in her sleep causing her to bend shirt hangers
trying to fish us out. We came twisted round each
other like tapeworms and my mother used that
same shirt hanger to pick us apart all the while
wondering why bad luck only doubled when you
prayed it away. Teeth black with old blood eyes
yellow with bilirubin of rage. At our christening
we received my mother's Shirley Temple dolls.
we mutilated them with scalpels. Filled their
mouths with feces. And my mother wept. She
wondered, what did she do to deserve no ordinary
daughters? And why couldn't we just be the type of
darlings to sit on the mantelpiece so guests could
pet us when they came round for crumpets?(90-91)*

This poem brings to the fore strained relationship between a mother and her daughters. When Ayosa says that sometimes she feels as though Ms. Temperance is telling a story that she knows

very well, I definitely know that this poem captures the relationship between twin sisters Nabumbo and Rosette, and their mother Lola Freedom. From birth, Nabumbo and Rosette love each other until their involvement in death of their brother Maxwell Truth pulls them apart. The poem reminds me about Lola's family before trauma set in and the girls became strangers to one another. The kisses and care that were in plenty and the dolls that their mother bought them was a testament of love that the girls had for one another and a mother for her children. However, beneath Lola's love for her children, there was anxiety and apprehension that loomed large. This is so simply because Lola was born in a family beset with trauma. The two girls are metaphorically referred to as black cats that prowled their mother's nights causing her to shriek. Their black teeth with old blood eyes yellow bilirubin rage create image of monsters ready to attack their mother. All this is mere hallucination of a disturbed mother. Eventually, when the girls mutilate Lola's old Shirley Temple dolls, her fears are confirmed that her girls were actually a curse in her life. She wonders why she did not deserve ordinary daughters. The truth of the matter is, children are destructive hence it was wrong for Lola to sound such judgemental about her children. Lola's attitude towards her girls continues the intergenerational trauma witnessed in the four generations of women in *Things They Lost*. Lola killed her mother Mabel and we can see the guilt affecting her relationship with her daughters too. The doubt and fear of her daughters is evident; and this comes to affect her children too later in life.

Ms. Temperance once again recites another poem about the drunk woman with her two babies:

The drunk woman teetering on a ledge with two

frost- chewed

babies in her arms wondered which country those

babies would

drift to if she surrendered them to the wind. Yesterday,

The babies were bean seeds budging and splitting in

the soil. Cotyledons and hypocotyls

elongating.

Bean sprouts. Now turned into blue-faced babies.

Snake- eyed

babies. Squishy-boned babies. She loved them

sometimes,

and despised them most times. Sallow-lipped babies.

The drunk woman staggering at the edge of here and

not- here, taught those babies how to pirouette with

shadows

and how to stitch their tongues down to their teeth

and how

to straddle the monsoon like a fisherman in a dhow (152)

In this poem, Ms. Temperance focuses on alcoholism and escapism as behavioural traits exhibited by Lola Freedom. She portrays a drunken woman whom motherhood is a burden and thinks of what would become of her children were she to abandon them. Indeed, the woman that Temperance talks about in her poem is Lola Freedom and the two children referred to are Nabumbo and Rosette. In the text, Lola is said to be an alcoholic who never missed a bottle of cognac in her laps when she was at home. She drinks heavily in order to forget her dark past characterized by killing of her mother. The description of a drunken woman teetering on a ledge is symbolic of a woman walking into self- destruction. Lola opts to escape from the reality by wallowing into alcoholism. However, this does not help her either as her action in this state only causes her more pain. This is shown when in anger she knocks down her son Maxwell Truth prompting her twin daughters to drag the boy's almost lifeless body and dumping it into a well. Ms. Temperance describes the babies as snake-eyed and squishy-boned to illustrate their mother's fearful and resentful attitude towards them. Even though Lola sometimes loved her two girls, we learn from the poem that she despised them most of the times. Her physical absence from the lives of her children is illustrated by her teaching the babies to pirouette with shadows. Lola did not have time for her children even when she was at home. She preferred to be alone; rocking in her chair.

Later, we witness the same with Nabumbo when she grows up. It is as if Lola's life was being replicated by Nabumbo. She runs away from Ayosa most of the time. Their time together is characterized by fights and fear especially when Nabumbo realized that Ayosa had mysterious ability to retell events that happened in the family way back even before she was born. Similarly, Nabumbo's decision to sink into alcoholism is nothing new in the family. She was just doing what Lola had done till she met her death. All these reinforce the element of intergenerational trauma that is passed from mother to the girl child in the text. Despite the efforts made by women in the

text to break the cycle of trauma that runs in the family, no woman succeeds. We witness Lola's efforts to enforce puritanism in the lives of her twin daughters by insisting that they seek repentance for both committed and perceived sins crumble. Her decision to dump her girls at the convent neither yields any desirable outcome for Nabumbo runs away to secure her freedom in the outside world. Thus the chain of trauma continues.

*I think of the girl with the ants in her socks
who gave her mama French toast for breakfast
and coconut rice for lunch and a skinned cat in her
soup for supper. The girl watched her mama eat
the soup watched her pick the bones clean saying
mama it's a cockerel that I caught for you in the
yard. Cooked it special in the lard. And after her
mama chewed on those feline bones, this
girl that I knew went down to the creek and
counted the stars and thought, How lucky is it that
skunks and butterfly cods and lonesome girls
have the great undulating sky all to themselves?*

In this poem Ms. Temperance brings out the strained relationships between mothers and their girl children in the text. She shows how hatred can drive children to do the unthinkable to their mothers;

as in this case, feed a mother on a feline. Though cat meat is a delicacy in northern Vietnam, Thai Binh Province and often listed as little tiger meat on restaurant menus; in Africa as in many parts of the world, cat's meat is considered unfit for human consumption. Cats are said to be primary hosts to the parasite causing toxoplasmosis; a fatal disease to immunosuppressed HIV infected patients and threat of serious deformities in infants. Cat meat also threatens transmission of bacterial infections such as *Clostridium botulinum*.

When the girl in the poem serves her mother with cat meat in her soup, I take it as a deliberate attempt to harm her mother. This is evident when the girl's mother had chewed the feline's bones, the girl went down the creek and counted the stars and thought how skunks, butterfly cods and lonesome girls had the great undulating sky all to themselves. This implies that the girl yearned for solitary lifestyle. She felt burdened by presence of her mother in her life that is why she went ahead and lied to her that she was serving her a cockerel that she had caught in the yard when truth is it was a cat's meat. She wanted her dead so that she can live on her own.

Ayosa is such a character who wishes her mother death. She admires Mbiu's mother who was shot dead fighting for her daughter's wellbeing. According to Ayosa, a mother should be felt; physically, socially and emotionally. A mother who delegates her nature ordained duties to *Fatumas* is unfit for motherhood crown. It is better when she is dead and forgotten. Ayosa yearns for genuine love that she can only see in Mbiu's eyes. She disregards her mother's promise for change and reaches out to Mbiu for sisterhood. Even during transformation from a girl into a girl sister to Mbiu, Ayosa can still hear: *Please- please- please- I need – you* call from her mother (336). This comes at the height of generational trauma that leads to drowning of Nabumbo. "And then she saw Nabumbo Promise Brown, arms and legs out- stretched, eyes and mouth open wide, and she was drifting away" (356).

Hail Mary full of grit, the Lord is not with you on

Account he's too busy holding court with less

Dowdy girls, their White Diamond perfumes

And netted hats and butterscotch skin

Entrapping him in their honeypots. Still, dear

Girl, you are blessed among them all. You're

An old woman with milk teeth in her mouth.

Old woman with tender youthful flesh. Old

Woman with with breasts not yet budded. Old

woman whose moon has yet to rise inside her.

Griot basket-weaver soothsayer memory- keeper.

Sweet Virgin whose wrists smell of saffron.

Sweet Virgin haunted by sleepless spirits.

Sweet Virgin with cobwebs hanging inside

Her eyes holes. Our lady of the stray limping

Maimed dirty beasts. Our Lady who is that

stray limping maimed beast herself. Our Lady

*of peeling laughter. Our Lady of gawking
wonder. Our Lady of aching solitude. Our
Lady of impertinence and talking back and
talking smack. Our Lady of catching fireflies
in lard jars. Our Lady of lucid fever dreams
and curled-up toes and singing folk songs that
the wind whispered in her ear – glory, glory,
Aminata of the creek returned to heaven on a
termite wing.*

In this poem, Oduor examines the role of religion in motherhood. This poem being her last in this text, the author reminisces about the mission and vision of Mabel Brown, the pioneer of Christianity in Mapeli. Religion, by then, was intended to emancipate people of Mapeli from perceived traditional backwardness characterized by beliefs hinged on *Fatumas*, wraiths, *Jinamizis* and traditional medicinal herbs. Mabel was the carrier of this light to moralize this society from paganism. The author brings out irony in the text by focusing on lives of the Browns. From the beginning, Mabel whose primary obligation was to convert souls for Jesus Christ, abandons the call and decides to settle in Mapeli. Unlike the Biblical Mary Magdalene, mother of Jesus, who was full of grace and gave birth to a child that brought salvation to humankind, Mabel runs away from the call in order to satisfy her thirst for material wealth. This is basically why Ms. Temperance figuratively refers to her as, *Hailed Maryfullofgrit*, and adds that *the Lord is not with you*. Mabel's life

in Mapeli is riddled with accusations of grabbing the natives' land and imposing tax on them, murder of human and wild game, and her condescending attitude towards the townspeople. Mabel's actions in Mapeli set in motion the intergenerational trauma we witness in the text. One can only assume the truth but they cannot run away from it. Mabel lives in guilt and fear of the townspeople. She knows that they hate her and would hurt her given opportunity. The anxiety and restlessness that grips her after the murder of the native boy Dickson Were not only affects her but her daughter Lola too. That is why Lola finds it easy to murder her later.

Mabel is blessed with two granddaughters whom Ms. Temperance refers to as dowdy girls; unfashionable and unstylish in appearance. The girls also end up being swallowed in intergenerational trauma that runs down in the family. Of the two girls, Nabumbo is the most affected as she is said to be all rubble inside. Ms. Temperance describes Mabel as sweet virgin haunted by sleepless spirits. She calls her sweet virgin with cobwebs hanging inside her eye holes; a lady of the stray limping maimed dirty beasts. The poet simply mocks the element of purity in the Brown's family. The initial mission of salvation was adulterated by greed. The moral compass that was to guide the Browns lost meaning.

Ms. Temperance subtly condemns religion as institution that should be a refuge for traumatized mothers. Despite the fact that Christianity was initiated by Mabel in Mapeli, the same religion abandons her and her generations into ruin. The church has been taken hostage by self-interest seekers like Dorcas Munyonyi, the Handmaid of the Lord, who treat the church like personal property. Our Lady of Lourdes Church, where Father Jude Thaddeus ministers, serves the town people. Father Jude observes that for one to be regarded faithful; they should work hard, obey their superiors, stay humble and consecrate each moment of their service to the Lord. He further quotes

the Good Book that says: “We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it” (111).

However, one important thing that the religion disregards is the emotional well-being of the congregants that serve the church. Nabumbo and her daughter are not helped in any way by the church even though Nabumbo had high regards for it. Even after the church failed to instill morals in her when she was dumped at the convent, Nabumbo still felt it had ability to solemnize herself and daughter into sisterhood. In so doing, the church would have breathed some life into her troubled relationships. This did not materialize. In other words, religion has failed as an institution. Religion should not only concentrate on what the believers should do but also on what it can do for them. Motherhood is challenging especially in cases where a mother is a single parent as illustrated in the Brown’s family. If the church had come in strongly to offer psychosocial support to Mabel, perhaps the cyclic trauma in the family would have been averted. Indeed, Nabumbo died craving for unity and peace within that had proved elusive for her mother Lola and grandmother Mabel.

4.4 Use of Epistolary in revelation of Trauma

Epistolary refers to any correspondence or communication written in the form of a letter or series of letters. The word *epistolary* is derived from a Greek word *epistole* meaning message, letter or command. In this project, I am focusing on Ayosa’s letter and how it reveals intergenerational trauma in motherhood in the text.

Ayosa, the last of the four generations of women, is depicted as a child that is quite concerned about the happenings in her family. Coupled with her magical ability to retell the past as it

happened, Ayosa takes a lot of interest by noting down daily events whenever necessary. All the time, she carries a notebook with her. At times, she wrote letters to her mama.

Dear Nabumbo Promise Brown,

*I wonder how many girls wandered off to God-knows-
where following wraiths that sang their mama's foxy songs.
Me, my wraith dressed herself in your body, she wore your
scars like they were moonstones. She said, Buttercup, let's
go away together. As though that were something you could
ever say to me. As though your solitude isn't more precious
to you than gold or any daughter. Still here I am,
Mama. I didn't follow the wraith and didn't close up shop.
If you forgive me for ripping your hair out, I will forgive
you for always saying you were Done Leaving when you
were not.*

In this letter Ayosa expresses her loneliness in absence of her mother Nabumbo. She tells her mother the dangers that she faces alone in a town inhabited by wraiths that are able to imitate Nabumbo's foxy songs. These wraiths are also able to dress in Nabumbo's body, wearing her scars as if she was the one.

Figuratively, the wraiths represent the dangers in the society that a twelve-year old Ataraxis Brown faces in Mapeli. It is unimaginable that such a girl can be left without anyone to take care of her. The wraith that disguises as the milkman almost lures her into his trap. These wraiths can take form of child molesters, traffickers and killers that have no feelings for what mothers go through. In this letter, Ayosa assures her mother that she is well and she has not succumbed to tricks by the wraiths. Ayosa tells her frustrations about her mother who always lied to her that she was done leaving, only to leave shortly thereafter. She wonders how many girls in her society go through what she was going through. To convince her mother to stay, Ayosa promises to forgive her mother for lying to her if she forgives her for ripping her hair out.

As a child, Ayosa sees her mother as absentee mother who enjoyed staying away from her daughter. She does not understand that Nabumbo was depressed. She was an emotional wreck trying to find elusive peace in the outside world. It is only Jentrix the apothecary who understood what Nabumbo went through and thus advised Ayosa to understand her. She was all rubble inside.

Marianne Hirsch's seminal study *The Mother/Daughter Plot* (1989) demonstrates that the literary representation of mothers is complex and fraught with contradiction. Mother-daughter relations, Hirsch finds, are particularly ambivalent, as daughters (and writers) negotiate their way through 'the fluctuations of symbiosis and separation' (20) in their relationships with their mothers, in a quest for their own sense of self. Mothers are overwhelmingly objects of others' discourses rather than subjects of their own.

From this letter, I learn that Ayosa is already nursing bitterness. Her troubled relationship with her mother is already signaling her into intergenerational trauma that is already firmly established in her family. So the question is: Who will end the intergenerational trauma in the Browns family?

Ayosa is breaking off from the Browns after being initiated into sisterhood with her friend Mbiu by Sister- Maker of Ramani. This is an effort to have a new beginning; a beginning that is marked by forging a new relationship and relocating to Mombasa. Despite pleas from Nabumbo to Ayosa not to leave her, we realize that it is too late. For her to break the intergenerational trauma in her family, Ayosa has decided to distance herself from the Browns, the *Fatumas*, wraiths, Mabel's manor house, *Jinamizis*, *jolly-annas* and Mapeli town.

4.5 Satire in Religion

OxfordAdvancedLearner'sDictionaryTenthEdition defines satire as a way of criticizing a person, an idea or an institution in which you use humour to show their faults or weaknesses. In *ThingsTheyLost*, Oduor examines the role of religion in helping to address some issues affecting the society. Lola Freedomfeels that her two daughters have to strictly observe Christian teachings; Catholicism by insisting they have to confess all their sins committed in action or thought. She appears to embrace the faithful confession:

I confess to Almighty God, and to you my brothers and sisters, that I have sinned through my own faults, in my thoughts and in my words, in what I have done and in what I have failed to do, and I ask Blessed Mary ever virgin, all the angels and saints, and you, my brothers and sisters, to pray for me to the Lord our God (45).

Lola even goes ahead to build a convent for nuns and later sends her two daughters- Nabumbo and Rosette – there after drowning theirbrother Maxwell in a well.All these efforts are meant inculcate Christian moral values into the girls and consequently have a morally upright family. However, revelation made by Ayosa about the death of Mabel Brown leaves us doubting whether religion is meant to promote morals or serve cosmetic purpose to mask evil- doers. Lola kills her mother Mabel by shooting her in the head and buries her in a shallow grave in her garden. What follows when the bones of Mabel are found in the rosebushes is astonishing:

Now it was a few days after they had found their grandmother in the rosebushes. Their mother had gotten her bones cremated. Now she was holding a funeral service for her. The girls went with Lola Freedom to Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church. The service was not really a service at all, just the priest standing over Mabel Brown's copper urn, saying, Eternal rest grant unto her, oh Lord, and perpetual light shine. Lola Freedom had bolted the church doors from the inside. She would not let any of the townspeople come in to pay their respects. A private service, she called it (p127).

It is evident that Lola feels the guilt for having killed her mother and later pretending to hold a funeral service for her. She fears facing the townspeople who would readily offer their sympathies. In this case, the church is being used a cover up for ills done by people in the society. If she killed her and buried her in rosebushes in privacy, there was no need to hold a funeral service in public later on. In addition, her decision to cremate Mabel's remains is also suspect. Obviously the skull had bullet holes that she had inflicted on her mother's head and thus that could raise eyebrows from curious townspeople who would want to know more about the cause of Mabel's death. Indeed religion in this context is being abused to sanitize evil-doers in the eyes of public; a tendency that should not be encouraged.

Similarly Lola's expectation of raising morally upright girls is self-defeating. How can she expect pure girls when she herself is an epitome of impurity? That is impossible because her imperfections later come to affect her family when Ayosa reveals that she is the one who murdered her mother. Intergenerational trauma that was hatched by Mabel now continues through Lola down the family tree.

Nabumbo is also said to invoke the name of God falsely. She uses the name God to try and cover up her lies. Instead of admitting her weakness, she finds it easy to hide in the name. Jentrix the apothecary and we as readers understand that Nabumbo is a broken woman inside but for Ayosa it is different altogether. She is a mother who is running away from her daughter for no reason.

Ayosa said nothing, because what could she say? She had heard her mama speak such words before. Tell you what, I'm never leaving you again. Or, May the good Lord strike me down if I dare walk away from you. It happened each time her mama returned. Her mama was always contrite. But she did it over and over (40)

On the other hand, religion should also come down to its people. It should listen and provide servant leadership to the society. A virtuous society translates to a strong church in terms of adhering to desired morals and vice versa. What was happening in Mabel's family would have, to a large extent, been averted if the church had come in to offer help. The church would have addressed the unfriendly atmosphere between Mabel and the townspeople. Mabel had been left on her own in the midst of hostile natives. Whereas some would blame her for killing a native boy Dickson, others would defend her by saying she did it in self-defense. She wanted to scare away the boys who were pouring pig blood at her gate. As a woman, she felt vulnerable and the only companion she felt would offer her support was her musket which she fired at the boys. Lola Freedom also faces similar predicament like her mother Mabel. She dies alone in her house:

All the way home, Ayosa thought of her mama's dead mother. The thin-lipped woman. Lola Freedom. Lying face down, mouth agape, as though she were screaming into the earth's crust. Screaming not from anguish but from bitterness. Lola Freedom was sick lying face down and wanted to be turned over (40).

It is clear that Lola felt neglected to the point of death. The church through its network of members should have come to the rescue of this woman. The loneliness she went through contributed to the trauma that she was already struggling with. The text reveals that the church has been taken hostage by sycophants who present themselves as the righteous and who readily judge others. Dorcas Munyonyi, the Handmaid of the Lord, is an example of such people whose intentions are to be seen by the general society as pious when they actually harbor hatred in their hearts. Her loathsome

attitude towards the Browns shows how personal feelings can supersede common good. The Browns needed a refuge in church and elsewhere. The family was hurtling down the abyss of destruction due to trauma. All they needed was accommodation and psychosocial support for them to battle the challenges they were facing. Nabumbo's imagination about sexual affair between Father Thaddeus and Dorcas is a pointer to moral decay in places worship today. When the church losses the moral compass, it becomes difficult to instill the same values among its congregants.

4.5 Effectiveness of Lexical Borrowing

Lexical borrowing is basically the adoption of individual words or even large sets of vocabulary items from another language or dialect. This can also include roots and affixes, sounds, collocations and grammatical processes. In *Things They Lost*, Oduor employs lexical borrowing out of need to paint an East African socio-cultural environment. She borrows a number of words, phrases, sentences and even interjections from Luhya and Kiswahili languages. I am also aware of use of words and phrases from other languages such as French and Italian. For instance, a word like *Foiegras* which is a French word for the liver of a duck or goose fattened by gavage is a popular and well known delicacy in French cuisine. The word *truffle* which is also refers to a delicacy was first mentioned and appears in the inscriptions of the neo-Sumerians regarding their Amorite enemies eating habits during the *Third Dynasty of Ur, 20th century BCE*. The word grotto comes from Italian word *grotta*, Vulgar Latin *grupta*, and Latin *crypta* (a crypt). It is also related by a historical accident to the word *grotesque* (a French word).

For the sake of my research, I confine lexical borrowing to Luhya and Swahili languages.

“They beat those drums and sang a dirge.

Luwere – luwera – luwera” (199)

This translates to:

It is finished. It is finished. It is finished.

Oduor picks only one line of this Luhya dirge that goes:

Luwere – luwere – luwere (chorus)

Luwere – luwere

luwere khulangwa

Luwere

Luwere Nyasaye akhulinde.

Translation:

It is finished. It is finished. It is finished.

It is finished. It is finished.

It is finished to be called.....

It is finished

It is finished may the Lord protect you.

In the blank space, the name of the deceased is mentioned. This song is mostly sung to remind the mourners that it is over with the deceased and they surrender the dead to the Lord. The song contributes to sombre mood in the text as the townspeople observe the Epitaph Day. It also acts as

a premonition for what Nabumbo and Rosette are going to encounter as they rush to check on their mother who is already dead. This contributes to trauma in the family as the girls are later accused for killing their mother. Even though they are later vindicated, they suffer irreparable mental anguish.

Sindano is a word borrowed from Swahili language meaning *needle*. The word is given to a character as a name and Sindano has the privilege to sing a song that details her mother's choice of the name.

Ngamia ni rahisi sana

Kuingia tundu la sindano

Kuliko mtu mwenye mali

Kuingia mbinguni kwa Baba (23)

Translation:

It is very easy for a camel

To go through a needle's eye

Than a rich person

To enter our Father's heaven

This is a Christian religious song that criticizes the rich for not helping the poor. One of the Ten Commandments in the Bible states that: one should love his or her neighbour the way they love themselves. In this case, the rich are expected to share their wealth with the poor which is not the

case mostly. Oduor uses the lexical items in African sociocultural environment to condemn the messengers of Christianity in the continent for entrenching double standards. Mabel and her lover arrived in Mapeli as conveyors of Christianity gospel. There were custodians of their religious values. However, Mabel abandons the missionary work and settles in Mapeli. What follows is complete contradiction of their Christian teachings as she grabs land belonging to the natives and subjects them taxation, kills the native boy Were, blatantly kills the wild game in the name of hunting expeditions and above all her condescending attitude towards the townspeople that yields hostility between them. Oduor views religion as a veil used by the whites to penetrate Africa and destabilize them. Whereas religion warned about dangers of accumulating wealth in relation to the kingdom of heaven, Mabel went about grabbing the natives land leaving them as squatters. However, they do not enjoy the benefits of their actions when the natives discover that they have been shortchanged and start fighting for their land. Intergenerational trauma sets in as Mabel and her subsequent three generations struggle to adjust their lives in efforts to find peace within and without. The teachings of the faith they prophesied come to haunt them as the family disintegrates under their watch while religion fail to offer them refuge.

“*Mako!* The townspeople murmured to themselves, their mouths wide with dismay” (3). *Mako!* is an interjection borrowed from Luhya language used to express surprise or shock.

“*Akh!* they said” (2)..*Akh!*is another interjection borrowed from Luhya language used to express sympathy.

“*Abane!* I forgot again!”(2) *Abane!* is an interjection borrowed from Luhya language used to express remorse.

The author uses these interjections to show the social setting of the novel. These interjections illustrate the communal living where issues were shared and solved by the community. These traditional values were helpful in a way that one's troubles were community's concern. Perhaps this explains why cases of trauma were comparatively lower than what we are witnessing today. Individualism, as in the case of Mabel and family, provides no exit for trauma as victims try to contain their issues and the end results are mostly devastating. Therefore, the author can also be said to have used the interjections to juxtapose communal lifestyle and individualism; and in so doing bring out the beauty of African sociocultural values.

She wondered why the *Jinamizi* never brought her happy memories. Was it because joy got passed down through generations, in songs and legends and tales, while pain got stuffed away, buried in unmarked graves? (228).

Jinamizi is a Swahili word meaning *nightmare*. From time to time, we learn that Ayosa was attacked by *Jinamizi* and would slip into a troubled world where sufferings were a norm. The author uses the word as style to enhance magic realism in the text. Indeed the use of *Jinamizi* also reveals the intergenerational trauma that is affecting Brown's family. A stark reminder that intergenerational trauma in Mabel's family is real and Ayosa, who is her great granddaughter, is not spared either.

"Come, *kipusa*, dance *chakacha* with us" (114). *Kipusa* and *chakacha* are Swahili words. The former translates to 'a beautiful girl' in English whereas the latter means a traditional Swahili style of music and dance that was originally associated with weddings and performed and watched by women. The *Fatumas* in the attic of Mabel's house teaches Ayosa how to dance *chakacha*. The author uses the words to enhance magic realism in the text and to illustrate the effects of trauma in families. In absence of Nabumbo who deliberately kept away from her daughter due to trauma, the *Fatumas* took over responsibilities of teaching her how to dance and generally keep her

company. Perhaps this is a reminder to motherhood that if you do not take up responsibility to inculcate desirable values in your children, the world would certainly do so in its own design.

To sum up, Okwiri Oduor has been able to aptly capture the issue of intergenerational trauma by effectively using lexical borrowing to set and maintain a pensive mood while at the same time providing comic relief. Indeed humorous content like an invitation to *chakacha* and an interjection *mako!* are necessary in downplaying the serious tension in the text by giving the reader something to smile about after the horrendous encounters of the Browns family.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Things They Lost is a surreal and captivating text that brings out the wickedness of the society in a family that is trying to establish itself. Tinged with prejudice of race, the four generations of the Browns find themselves fighting for their lives within and without in a society that silently hates them. Intergenerational trauma sets in when Mabel kills fleeing boy Dickson Were for their heinous act of spilling pig blood at her gate. Those who live by the sword, die by the sword is justified as the four generations of women do not find peace. Any attempt to try and find it ends up in nothingness. Having discovered that her mother-daughter relationship is broken beyond repair, Nabumbo tries to initiate sisterly relationship with her daughter which does not come to fruition. In fact, Ayosa considers Mbiu Dash for sisterhood.

The motif of motherhood is artistically redefined in this novel to explore intergenerational trauma in families that are especially led by mothers. When things go astray in such families, the society is quick to point a finger at the mother as the cause of fragmentation. Little do they know that when mothers are overwhelmed, they do also need to be mothered just like children. Ayosa takes time to confirm Jentrix's words that she should not blame her mother Nabumbo for she is a broken woman; just a rubble inside. It is not by design that she behaves the way she does but by impulse of what she has gone through in life. It is too late when Ayosa tells Nabumbo that she is the one who needs to be mothered. Motherhood calls for psycho-social support from families and society at large. African governments should initiate legislative agenda to protect mothers who are going through such emotional challenges in their families other than just paying lip service. This is because cases of homicide involving family members are on the rise in African families, thus there is dire need

to pay closer attention to these special mothers in order to avert intergenerational trauma as witnessed in this text *Things They Lost*.

Trauma has a ripple effect. It is likely to affect others who are close to the victim especially family members. It distorts the attitude and world view of those close to the victim to develop a skewed perception towards life. The elements of rejection, anxiety, hate, denial, secrecy and flight experienced by the Browns – conspire to wreck their family relationships. What started as a mere expression of anger to scare away the native boys by Mabel Brown ended in shooting of one of the boys. The anxiety and fear that followed were overwhelming. Mabel became the epicentre of the trauma that we witness in the three generations of mothers that come thereafter. The contribution of the three generations of mothers is an escalation of the existing trauma in the family by creating more traumatic experiences. Therefore, if not controlled trauma has devastating effects. Thus it is important for victims of trauma to open up on their situations and seek help from society.

Lastly, children are innocent victims of circumstances. As much as it is difficult to conceal what happens in families from them, exposing them to adults struggle only serve to destroy their tranquil mind. The young Browns find themselves in a distressed family. Whereas the traumatic mothers try to entrench puritanical values in them; values that they do not subscribe to themselves, they fail to hide their own shortcomings from them. As a result what we witness is rebellion of these children from the prescribed ways and eventually drifting into the conundrum of trauma. In most cases, children consciously or subconsciously assume what they see or exposed to rather than what they are told. The efforts of Lola Freedom to ensure Nabumbo and Rosette serve the church as nuns do not fully come to fruition as Nabumbo runs away from the convent in search of elusive peace and freedom outside. Similarly the efforts of Nabumbo to keep Ayosa away from townspeople do not bear fruits as Ayosa breaks the barrier by walking away from their home to

Sindano's café and later to Sister-Maker of Ramani in search of knowledge of her own. Nabumbo fails to understand that her daughter Ayosa was not different from her. She kept running away from her and Ayosa was learning very fast from her behaviour. She as well wanted to learn what the world could offer her.

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