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WRITING AS A CATHARSIS: CONTEXTUALIZING AMINATTA FORNA'S TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE IN *THE DEVIL THAT DANCED ON THE WATER: A DAUGHTER'S QUEST* AND *THE MEMORY OF LOVE*

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Abstract: This study deals with trauma purging in Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* and *The Devil That Danced on the Water*: *A Daughter's Quest*. It purports to explore how the Sierra Leonean writer transforms personal and collective suffering into artistic creation. Conducted through the prism of the Psychobiographical approach and the stylistic criticism, it examines the interplay between life experience and the aesthetic representation. A peruse of the works under consideration inscribes Forna's trauma within the socio-political context of Sierra Leonne in the 1970's. The analysis particularly focusses the narrative architecture that conveys trauma through structure, perspective and setting. The major findings evidence how art becomes a platform of remembrance and self-construction since they reveal the power of literature in bridging emotion and history, turning pain into resilience, positioning literature as a tool for the preservation of collective memory.

Keywords: Post-War Sierra Leone, trauma, catharsis, self-reconstruction, psychobiographical approach, resilience and collective memory.

L'ÉCRITURE COMME CATHARSIS: REMISE EN CONTEXTE DE L'EXPÉRIENCE TRAUMATIQUE D'AMINATTA FORNA DANS *THE DEVIL THAT DANCED ON THE WATER: A DAUGHTER'S QUEST* ET *THE MEMORY OF LOVE*

Résumé : Cette étude traite de l'épuration du trauma dans *The Memory of Love* et *The Devil That Danced on the Water: A Daughter's Quest* d'Aminatta Forna. Elle s'intéresse à la manière dont l'écrivaine Sierra-léonaise transforme la souffrance infligée par les blessures intérieures personnelles et collectives en création artistique. Conduite sous

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le prisme de l'approche Psychobiographie et le 'stylistic criticism', elle examine l'interaction entre l'expérience de vie et la représentation esthétique. Une exploitation approfondie des œuvres analysées situe le trauma de Forna dans le contexte socio-historique de la Sierra Leone des années 1970. L'analyse se focalise particulièrement l'architecture narrative qui transmet le trauma à travers la structure la perspective et le cadre spatio-temporel du texte. Il en résulte que *The Memory of Love* et *The Devil That Danced on the Water: A Daughter's Quest* d'Aminatta Forna révèlent le pouvoir de la littérature de relier émotions et histoire, transformant la douleur en résilience, positionnant ainsi l'écriture comme une plateforme de ré-visitation et conservation de la mémoire collective mais surtout de la reconstruction de soi.

Mots-clés : Sierra Léone post-conflit, trauma , catharsis, reconstruction de soi, approche Psychobiographique , résilience et mémoire collective.

Introduction

African Post-colonial countries have been confronted to socio-political upheavals, particularly civil wars which have left, through history, indelible marks of trauma on individuals, communities, and national psyches. This persistent reality compels some African writers to challenge the complexities of pain, loss, and memory, not only by a simple depiction of events but, most importantly, by using significant aesthetic means susceptible to convey unspeakable dimensions. In this regard, Preeti Asatin and Dr. Soumya Tiwar accordingly write:

> "Trauma-focused narratives often serve as testimonies, exposing historical injustices and personal hardships. These narratives can also function as healing mechanisms, assisting both writers and readers in processing and interpreting traumatic occurrences. Through the exploration of trauma in literature, authors can create a space for collective healing and understanding. This shared experience can foster a sense of community and solidarity among readers who may have encountered similar experiences." [Preeti Asatin and Dr. Soumya Tiwar, 2025:39]

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Put in the civil-war-trauma context, this assertion suggests that writers, through essential aesthetic choices, create in their narratives some important spaces to reconstruct historical events, injustices, personal and communities' sufferings, and invite readers to get involved into psychological comprehension of trauma as a contribution to communal healing. This research work is an in-depth analysis of Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love* and *The Devil That Danced on the Water*: *A Daughter's Quest*, focusing on the aesthetics of trauma with reference to Sierra Leone's civil conflict. It aims at showing how Aminatta Forna depicts traumatic experiences as a way to convey the profound psychological and historical impacts of civil war. Hence, this study explores the motivations behind her stylistic decisions and narrative strategies in shaping the reader's understanding of resilience, memory, and human condition.

In this perspective, the central question of this research work can be stated as follow: How does Aminatta Forna use her writing style, in both *The Devil that Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love*, to show the complex and painful impacts of trauma from civil war? It can be hypothesized that Aminatta Forna narrates issues of trauma in her books through literary mechanisms, devices, and aesthetic elements. Yet, she uses different narrative

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techniques like multiple perspectives, memory flashbacks, and symbolic spaces to show how trauma affects both individuals and societies.

Before scrutinizing the subject matter, it would be prominent to deal with conceptual analysis of 'catharsis' and 'trauma' to facilitate the reader's understanding of the topic. Trauma, to start with, derives from the Ancient Greek 'traûma (τραῦμα)', carrying connotations of 'wound' or 'injury.' It first entered English in the late 1600s to describe physical wounds, and by the late 19th century it expanded to mean psychological injury or emotional shock. In the literary context, by reading Bombay, Matheson and Anisman (2009:8), one understands that trauma can manifest through intrusive memories, dissociation, emotional numbness, and a disrupted sense of self, often defying conventional linguistic and cognitive processing. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology* (2009: 552) defines 'trauma' as "*any event which inflicts physical damage on the body or severe shock on the mind or both*". In the same connection, the *Concise Dictionary of Psychology* (200:133) furthers that a trauma is "*a physical or psychological shock resulting from an injury of violent incident*". Trauma is therefore, an emotional wound leading to psychological injury, that is to say, an event that causes a great distress. Therefore, the 'aesthetics of trauma' emerges as a field of study which "examines how literary depictions reflect the psychological, social, and cultural impacts of traumatic events (Asatin and Tiwar, 2025:39)." A. D. Makosso (2020:165) even furthers that the notion 'trauma' is "*an emotional shock, that is to say, an extremely distressing experience that causes emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects*."

As for 'catharsis', it is an interdisciplinary concept with deep roots in philosophy, literature, and psychology. Indeed, deriving from the Ancient Greek word 'katharsis (κάθαρσις)', meaning purification or cleansing, 'catharsis' originally referred to medical purging, later expanded to emotional and spiritual release in literature and psychology. This concept has psychological connotations for it refers to the process of releasing repressed emotions. Freud and Breuer, for example, saw it as a therapeutic act expressing hidden feelings to relieve inner tension. In the literary context, 'catharsis', would be better understood through the Greek philosopher, Aristotle's *Poetics*. Though Aristotle's 'catharsis' mostly appears in drama, it can be generalized to other literary works when a narrative creates feelings of pity and fear leading readers or viewers to a powerful emotional climax, enabling them to process complex feelings and then let these feelings go as they feel relieved at the end. The current study helps buttress the forgoing since in Forna's *The Memory of Love* and *The Devil That Danced on the Water*: *A Daughter's Quest the* pain of Post-War Sierra Leone and personal loss resonates with readers, offering both sorrow and a form of emotional clarity and relief. Studying the catharsis of trauma in both a memoir and a novel, offers a unique and intertextual analysis of two different fictional settings. In effect, the memoir shares the author's direct, personal experiences and memories, presenting an authentic look at trauma. The novel, however, as a work of fiction, provides many characters' viewpoints and deeper psychological feelings, constructing symbolic representations of trauma. In the same stance, Anthony Oha et al. suitably opine:

> "Fiction is an imaginative recreation of real-life experiences. This means that the subject matters in every fiction must reflect the experiences of the society from which it emanated. […] The novel is a product of society and tries to direct the society by using the aesthetic medium." [Anthony Oha et al. 2008:4, 36]

This assertion indicates how the novel is a powerful medium to reflect the psychological and historical impact on the society from which it emerges. This means that when a novel explores trauma, it uses its artistic style, not just to tell a story about suffering, but to enable readers understand and engage with those difficult realities, showing how this literary genre is a direct mirror that talks to readers.

As far as the review of the related literature is concerned, it is essential to note that the bibliographical analysis through internet shows a few documentations about this topic. While several studies have been orientated to issues of trauma, few of them tackled the catharsis of trauma in both books under consideration. For instance, Ernest Cole (2014) states that Forna's work investigates the historical and political landscape of Sierra Leone and traces the growth and development of the nation from the pre-colonial to post-colonial independence era. In fact, according to her, Forna engages the legacies of colonialism, post-independence betrayal and disillusionment, political instability, violence and oppression, leading to the civil wars of the 1990s. Then, Irene Perez Fernandez (2017) notes, in her study, that the novel *The Memory of Love* encourages the reader who has not experienced first-hard such distressing events to recognize the emotional spaces of others. He adds that Forna's novel emphasizes the fact that emotions, such as identity and spaces, are malleable and in the process of being created and recreated. They are neither static nor fixed positions from where to stand.

Additionally, Charles Mwangi Njanjo (2017) scrutinizes Forna's work and its implication in trauma, in terms of space. He affirms that, in post-colonial societies, space defines limits and freedoms. For him, physical space such as borders, prisons or homes can reflect both oppression and the possibility of freedom. For example, Forna's father is physically confined when he is imprisoned, this symbolizes the restrictions imposed on those who challenge power. He scans space in a psychological dimension and confirms it through Aminatta Forna's personal journey to uncover the truth about her father's execution, reclaiming a space of understanding, a space of memory that was denied to her. In a related development, Merve Sarikaya-Sen (2018) establishes the correlations between poetics of western trauma and Sierra Leonean modes of healing in Aminatta Forna's *The Memory of Love*. According to him, Sierra Leoneans are left with no other choice than to remember and deal with their traumatic memories. He thinks that there are different strategies of coping with traumatic experiences employed by Sierra Leoneans such as maintaining an intact sense of purpose, controlling their traumatic memories and establishing lose contact with the social environment. Furthermore, Makosso et al. (2023), in their paper, highlight how Aminatta Forna intertwines personal trauma with historical events, showing how survivors cope with past atrocities. The study positions the novel as a powerful testimony of post-war psychological scars, emphasizing the role of literature in preserving memory and understanding trauma.

This research is conducted through the prism of the Psychobiographical approach and the stylistic criticism. Since it purports to analyse trauma, particularly in the context of civil war. The first approach proves helpful for it enables the reader to probe into the author's life through the lens of psychological theories for the sake of illuminating their literary output. It bridges psychology to an author's biography and allows the reader understand how an author's personal experience shapes the themes, narrative structures, and aesthetic choices used to represent traumatic events in the work, as the Ghanaian critic Kofi Agyekum accordingly puts:

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> "Psychoanalytic critics analyse a work of literature from the point of the author's mind, personality, mental and emotional characteristics. […] They employ symbolism to identify, explain and interpret the meaning of some psychological state of minds of writers and characters they create." [Kofi Agyekum, 2013:30]

This statement supports the idea that literature can reflect unconscious psychological processes. It suggests that the authors' inner psychological world profoundly influences what and especially how they write. Applying this approach on Forna's books is useful because they both deal with civil war trauma, trying to inspect how Forna's own mind and experiences shape her stories and characters, revealing deeper meanings behind their portrayal of trauma.

The stylistic criticism, on the other hand, helps to identify the aesthetic strategies the author employs, such as imagery, symbolism, fragmented narration, and shifts in perspective, to represent emotional and psychological distress. In this regard, Katie Wales (2001:437) renders: "the study of style in language, especially in literary works. It involves the analysis of various elements such ass tone, diction, and syntax to understand how they contribute to the meaning and effect of a text." In fact, this approach helps uncover how Forna's specific linguistic choices reflect and intensify the traumatic experience of her characters, and how the narrative structure, imagery, and voice participate in the construction of meaning. Since this research work is essentially centred on Aminatta Forna's 'Forna's traumatic experience and literary investigation by scrutinizing how her writing functions as a cathartic and investigative process across her memoir and novel, two main points are considered in its completion. Prior to scrutinizing some aspects related to the poetics of setting in which the authoress explores the temporal shifts and the use of space, it is worth focussing on the 'Narrative Architecture' of both novels, especially with specific narrative techniques like plot, character development, disrupted chronologies that reflect trauma's non-linearity, tackling both the use of focalization.

1. Narrative Architecture

Narratives about trauma are often distinguished not only by their thematic depth, but also by the formal structures through which pain, loss and memory are expressed. In literature, structure becomes a vessel for psychological and emotional realities, especially when dealing with historical or personal trauma. So, narrative architecture refers to the structural choices such as time shifts, focalisation, perspective, and voice that support the storytelling process. In the context of trauma, such structures are never neutral; they often reflect the emotional and psychological ruptures caused by violence, grief and historical injustice. Lacapra Dominick (2002:2) argues: "*literature, because of its supple and intricate relation to reference, has been the privileged domain, or "safe haven" for trauma's rehearsal and performance transmission*." Lacapra's clear line is that literature serves as a powerful tool or space where traumatic experiences can be safely explored or expressed without direct confrontation. Aminatta Forna writes the two books using distinct genres, but both are deeply connected by themes of trauma, truth, memory and the impact of war. Hence, the gist of this point is to examine how the structure of narratives can reflect psychological trauma and collective memory, significantly shape the meaning by making the reader likely to experience the same atmosphere. It additionally seeks to understand how Forna's stylistic and structural strategies serve both as a tool of storytelling and a method of healing. Since this point splits into three main sections. It first looks at the plot and characterisation, showing how the narration of events and the actions by certain characters reveal the marks of trauma. It then

considers how Forna deliberately adopts a non-linear narrative structure to reflect the fundamental dislocation of traumatic experience and to reconstruct both individual and collective memory through literary form. Finally, it analyses focalisation to show how multiple narrative perspectives create a mosaic through which trauma is refracted and collectively reconstructed.

1.1 Plot and Characterization

Plot and characterization are key narrative techniques that help readers understand the story and its themes. The plot builds the sequence of events, guiding the progression of the narrative while characterization develops the personalities and motivations of the characters. They both allow the text to explore and show trauma and memory clearly. In this context, Abrams (1999:224) writes: "*plot is the structure of events in a narrative work, as these actions are ordered and rendered toward achieving particular emotional and artistic effects*." On the other hand, Kenney (2013:167) adds that "plot is some of incidents or events which are shown in a story that is not simple because the author arranges those incidents (events) based on cause-and-effect relation." When reading these two critics, one tends to understand that the plot refers to the deliberate arrangement of events in a narrative, structured through cause and effect. It serves to engage the audience emotionally, to convey meaning and reflect key themes. Furthermore, W.A. Jones (2013:247) defines characterization as "*the depiction of a clear picture of someone featured in a story*". A position almost shared by Abrams and Baldic (2013:247) when they aver: "*characterization is the presence of character in fictional story or in drama through direct or indirect presentation and invite the readers to interpret the character's qualities through their word and action*." From the ongoing, one understands that characterization refers to all dimensions which represents characters in a given literary work.

Broadly speaking, there are two methods the author uses characterization: the direct or expository method (showing technique) and the indirect or dramatic method (telling technique). Ika Astia (2018:9) explains that in direct method, the characters of the story are left to reveal themselves to the reader directly with the description of their nature, qualities, characteristics, behaviour or even physical features which are not complicated. The Indonesian literary scholar, Nurgiyantoro (2013:279) comes to argue that "*in direct (expository) method the depiction of character of the story is presented by giving the description or completion directly*." In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, for instance, Aminatta Forna explicitly describes her father's personality, values and moral integrity. She tells the reader directly who Mohamed Forna was, his courage, his opposition to corruption and his role as a political figure. This can be exemplified through this passage: "*soon afterwards, our father ended up being the only person in his entire family to go to school just because his mother had died*." (p.21)

This method enables the reader to delve into what constitutes Forna's father. Additionally, in *The Memory of Love*, Forna also uses the direct method to introduce characters such as Adrian, Kai and Elias. She often describes their professions, psychological states, and relationships without ambiguity, offering the reader frank insight into their roles and development. For instance, the reader discovers the following description: "*in the atmosphere of the room the memories of a man float and form. The man in the bed is telling a story. His name is Elias Cole*" (p.1). This helps the reader to immediately understand, through descriptions made by the authoress, the emotional and psychological burdens the character carries in a post-war setting.

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As far as the dramatic characterization is concerned, the authoress shows characters through actions, letting the reader deduce their traits. To start with *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, it depicts actions directly related to characters' behaviours, disclosing their inner selves and interactions with their neighbours. Indeed, Forna's restless itinerancy across Sierra Leone not for revisiting archives and testimonies but also interviewing survivors and witnesses of those civil war atrocities, has enabled her to create characters whose memory is replete with confusion, fear or grief. Yet, just like a Psychologist, Forna create a platform where these emotions emerge through actions and encounters. This method invites readers to suppose hidden motives, unspoken emotions, and the weight of trauma, as Ika Astia renders:

> "In this method the author does not describe explicitly the characteristics, qualities and behaviour of character of the story. The author lets the character show themselves to the reader through various activities which is verbal through their word and non-verbal through their action." [Ika Astia, 2018:9]

Hence, Forna uses indirect characterization to depict the psychological depth of her characters through their behaviour and silences rather than through open description. For example, *The Devil That Danced on the Water* reads: "*in January of the new millennium I finally made good my resolution and travelled back to Sierra Leone. It was impossible to fly direct to Sierra Leone any longer*." (p.274). Similarly, in *The Memory of Love*, Kai's trauma is not always explicitly narrated but shown through his behaviour, insomnia, avoidance and emotional distance. It can be read through this passage: "*Kai closes his eyes and opens them. He breathes in, let's all the sounds behind him fall away, all except the voices of the team and the sound of the instruments*." (*The Memory of Love*, p.95). With this regard, Nuriadi (2013:66) contends: "in indirect (dramatic) method the author merely presents his character talking and acting like the display in the drama and leaves the reader to infer what motive and disposition lay behind what they say and do." By showing rather than telling, Forna allows readers to piece together the psychological depth of her characters. The plot in each book turns around memories, silence, war and the consequences of political oppression, with characters often carrying psychological wounds. Through a combination of personal and historical storytelling, Forna constructs plots that reveal the long-lasting consequences of trauma and the difficult connection between individuals and their nations. According to classical narrative theory, a plot is typically composed of five key stages: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and resolution (or denouement).

The narrative opens with exposition, where essential background information is introduced. This stage situates the characters, setting and initial circumstances, allowing the reader to grasp the context in which the story progresses. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, the exposition presents Forna's childhood in Sierra Leone, her father Mohamed Forna and the political atmosphere under Siaka Steven's regime (*The Devil That Danced on the Water*, pp.3-21). This opening stage lays the foundation for understanding the personal and national trauma that unfolds. In *The Memory of Love*, the exposition introduces the post-civil war setting in Sierra Leone and central characters like Elias, Kai and Adrian, grounding the narrative in a context of psychological and national healing (pp.1-51). Here, Kenneth Chestek (2007:148) writes about exposition. Usually, the story begins with everything in stasis; calm prevails, things are at an even keel. The fact section of a brief should also begin with an introduction, in which the factual setting is revealed. Helpful background details that

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explain the protagonist's character can be included here as well. In fact, exposition introduces the story's setting, characters and background in a moment of calm, helping readers understand the context before the conflict begins.

Subsequently, the rising action develops the central conflict through events that create tension and complexity. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, the rising action includes Forna's investigations, testimonies about her father's imprisonment, and the growing exposure of political injustice (*The Devil That Danced on the Water*, pp.111- 316). In *The Memory of Love*, however, the rising action is reflected in the interpersonal relationships and the unveiling of the characters' buried pasts, particularly how trauma has shaped their identities (pp.98- 110). Following this line of reasoning, James Marsh (2021:03) defines the rising action as "*the part of the dramatic action that has to do with the complication of the action. Begins with the inciting moment, gains interest or power as the opposing groups/ ideas come into conflict and proceeds to the climax*." Marsh tries to explain that the rising action is the section of the plot where tension builds. It starts with an inciting event and develops through complications as conflicts between opposing forces intensify, leading to the climax.

However, the climax represents the emotional and narrative peak. In the memoir, the climax occurs when Forna uncovers the full extent of the regime's betrayal and the manipulation behind her father's execution. (p.372). In the novel, the climax unfolds through personal revelations, when characters confront their deepest emotional wounds and the truth of their pasts, such as Elias' hidden story or Kai's internal turmoil (p.136). Here, Chestek (2008:149) avers that climax

> "occurs when the protagonist is at the height of peril. Things are out of kilter, making the reader uncomfortable and aching for things to get better, to return to a condition of stasis. The reader's attention is at its peak. 'How will the conflict be resolved? How does the story come out?"

In essence, when reading Chestek, one understands that climax is the moment of greatest tension and uncertainty in a story. Consequently, the falling action explores the consequences of the climax and the characters' responses to them. It often shows how they begin to process their experiences. S.H. Hodgson (2001:129) defines it as "the decline following a play's crisis or turning point; toward a tragic catastrophe". In The Devil That Danced on the Water, the falling action includes Forna's personal processing of the truth and the emotional aftermath of confronting national injustice (p.351). In The Memory *of Love*, in contrast, the falling action is observed through the emotional shifts and personal choices made by the protagonists after painful revelations (p.422). According to Yanni (2004:434), as cited in Febby et al. (2022), a falling action occurs "*when the plot's complications are worked out and resolved*", meaning that the dispute will be resolved at the end of the conflict. Bull (2008:159), as cited in Febby et al., specifies that falling action is "*a descent from one level to another*", suggesting that it is a result of falling activity.

Finally, the resolution brings closure, it says how the story ends, showing either healing, acceptance or the long-term effects of past experiences. In the memoir, the closure is found in Forna's act of writing (p.403), which serves as both testimony and healing, presenting a form of catharsis just as we see Ugwu in *Half of a Yellow Sun* writing *The World Was Silent When We Died* and ultimately dedicating it to his boss and mentor "For Master, my good man". Here, Kirszner and Mendell (2000:68) claim that "*the ending is the ultimate*

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step of the story, the resolution or similarly with finishing – pulls the action to a conclusion and accounts for all untied threads." In this quotation, one understands that the ending is the section of the storyline that explains the final act of the movie or novel, and provides a resolution for the issue (Febby et al., 2022:369). Besides her artistically well-crafted utilization of plot and characterization, Forna uses non-linear chronology in order to reveal how memory disrupts linear time and continues to shape the characters' present realities.

1.2 Non-Linear Chronologies and the Past's Persistence

Non-linear chronologies refer to narratives that shift between past and present rather than following a straight timeline. The past's persistence, however, suggests that past events, especially traumatic ones, continue to affect and haunt characters in the present. Dr. Z. Justin (2018:367) asserts: "*the non-linear narratives start from the middle of the story and go back and forth using different mechanics of flashbacks and flash-forwards*". In the same vein, he adds that the contemporary novelists use non-linear narratives to intensify the emotion and infuse curiosity in the readers' mind. Forna's narratives are deeply rooted in the exploration of memory, trauma and the enduring impact of historical events. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love*, Forna employs non-linear storytelling, to reflect the psychological fragmentation caused by trauma and the complexity of remembering painful pasts. As an illustration, in *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, Forna moves between past and present to show how personal memories and history connect. Similarly, in *The Memory of Love*, the story shifts across different time periods and perspectives to illustrate how past trauma continues to affect the present. This non-linear structure allows Forna to mix up the boundaries between past and present. Alice Munro (1966: online) brings more evidence:

> "A story is not like a road to follow… it's more like a house. You go inside and stay there for a while, wandering back and forth and settling where you like… you can go back again and again, and like the house, the story always contains more than you saw the last time."

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Alice Munro associates a story to a house, suggesting that narratives are spaces to explore rather than paths to follow. This assertion resonates with Forna's use of non-linear storytelling, inviting readers to navigate through time, memory and perspective, uncovering deeper meanings. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, Forna alternates between past and present for the sake of investigating the mysterious circumstances surrounding her father's arrest and death. Rather than following a linear trajectory, she presents memories as they return to her, unexpected, fragmented and emotionally charged. This narrative structure reflects how traumatic memories tend to reappear in disjointed parts rather than as a continuous and orderly story. For example, she writes:

> "There are those times when people hide something, or put some precious object away for safe-keeping or perhaps for discretion's sake, and then forget where they have hidden it. Sometimes people forget about whatever it was entirely; then you hear how their children or grandchildren unearth the same item years on: a note folded into the pages of a book, a photograph tucked behind a mirror, a heart-shaped stone in a jar full of odds and ends. Memory, I discovered, works the same way." (*The Devil That Danced on the Water*, p.333)

Form this quotation, one easily infers that memory doesn't follow a clear order. Like hidden objects found years later, memories can disappear and suddenly return. This reflects how Forna tells her story by jumping between past and present, revealing truths little by little, just like forgotten things that are later found. In effect, this plot line helps the reader delve into Forna's story as it moves back and forth between her life as a child and her investigation as an adult. For example, she writes, "*I am ten years old, it is 30 July 1974.*" (p.103) This shows how she suddenly leaves the present to talk about the past. There is no clear transition; she just jumps into a memory. Later, near the end of the book, she says, "*I remember her now, as I write, the little girl who once was me*" (p.403). This mixes the present "*as I write*) and the past "*the little girl*". Even at the end, the story still moves between times. This shows how memory and the present are always connected in her writing. Likewise, in *The Memory of Love*, Forna includes past experiences into present realities, showing how unresolved trauma continues to influence characters' thoughts, relationships, and sense of identity. For instance, Adrian, a British psychologist in the present; Elias Cole, a professor reflecting on the pre-war era, and Kai, a surgeon living in the aftermath of war, their narratives do not unfold in chronological order (pp.1;96.); memories don't come in order. They are brought back by certain events, feelings, or people. This shows that trauma can break the normal flow of time. Because of that, the characters have to piece together who they are and what happened from memories that come in bits and not in order.

However, the persistence of the past refers to the way traumatic experiences do not remain confined to the moment of their occurrence, but continue to disrupt the present. In effect, survivors of civil wars often vary the psychological scars of violence, torture, displacement, and even loss. This is due to the fact that unlike ordinary memories, traumatic ones repeatedly emerge in form of intrusive thoughts, flashbacks or compulsive repetition. Cathy Caruth (online) describes this as 'the belatedness' of trauma meaning the idea that the past continues to haunt and shape survivors' lives even years later. This is true for most of characters in Forna's narratives since they re-experience past horrors through recurrent memories and behaviours, as exemplified through Elias Cole's epitomizing testimony:

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> "And this, the truth now, is what I was thinking. [...] I am remembering entering through the open door into the darkened recesses of the house. *I am remembering* standing alone in that wide, open closed bedroom door. *I am remembering* the coarse humour and laugh of space listening to a sound. A sound coming from somewhere behind the truck driver. And *I am remembering* the heat rising in my face. [...]And when I heard it for the first time that day it sounded nothing like Vanessa. And I knew. I knew what Vanessa had been doing to me and I was angry. I heard the visceral reality, wild, abandoned, unheeding and unmistakable. That is what I remember as I lie with Saffia. Despite myself, the memory arouses me. But Saffia does not feign her pleasure. The anger returns, it rises and keeps me going. I become frenzied." (*The Memory of Love*, p.290)

Yet, this repetition of "*I am remembering*" (four times) shows how the past continues to live vividly in the narrator's mind. It doesn't fade, it returns in details, sounds, and emotions. The use of present continuous (I am remembering), which the novelist advertently uses though syntactically wrong, emphasizes that the past is not over; it is still active in the character's present consciousness. With this regard, Forna employs non-linear chronologies to better portray these flashbacks, allowing readers to experience the emotional and political consequences of Sierra Leone's history alongside the characters. In this perspective, Roger Luckhurst (2008: online) reports: "*trauma disrupts narrative coherence; it fragments time,*

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making storytelling an act of reconstruction". Undoubtedly, Forna's use of timelines in her works is not random but reconstructive, making sense of a broken history. In short, the use of non-linear chronologies and the persistence of the past in Forna's works emphasizes the enduring nature of trauma and its impact on memory and identity. In addition to this, focalisation further deepens the notions about how Forna makes trauma viewed from various perspectives.

1.3 Focalisation as a Mosaic of Trauma

Focalisation is the narrative perspective that shapes how a story is told and what the reader knows. It reveals characters' personal experiences and viewpoints. In trauma narratives, shifting focalisation creates a mosaic of perspectives, showing how memory and emotions differ among characters. Aminatta Forna adopts multiple narrative perspectives to explore trauma from different angles showing how trauma causes emotional confusion, creates silences in narration, and leaves long-term psychological effects on characters. In her memoir *The Devil That Danced on The Water*, she employs varied focalisation techniques to reflect how trauma is difficult to grasp. Instead of narrating her father's story from a single angle, she pieces it together from multiple perspectives: her own point of view as a daughter and investigator, enriched by testimonies and voices of those who lived through the events. The use of first-person focalisation allows the reader to trace the trauma through Forna's inner journey, showing how the absence of her father becomes a wound shaping her identity at the deepest level. The following passage brings evidence: "*when I was ten, after my father was taken away, I began to suffer from migraines that remained undiagnosed for years*." (p.15) This focalisation is said to be an internal homodiegetic focalisation where the narrator is also a character who is involved in the story, presenting events through a subjective lens. Dr. Fouad Boulkroun (2021:212) explains Genette's theory to make things clear: A homodiegetic narrative is one in which the narrator is internal to the story, recounting events from their own point of view. It means that a text is said to be homodiegetic if there is some use of first-person pronouns in action sections. Forna also includes, in her memoir, another angle of vision which takes form through the use of the personal pronoun 'we'. This narrator expands the narrative beyond the personal, evoking a collective voice that includes her family, community, or fellow citizens. We read it in the following passage: "*Day after day we did the rounds with Mum while she pleaded for our father's life*." (p.396) In fact, this quotation illustrates a plural homodiegetic focalisation 'we', in which the narrator is part of the events, but speaks for the group, producing a collective perspective that stresses family solidarity and shared trauma. In *The Memory of Love*, Forna constructs a complex narrative architecture where focalisation, particularly internal focalisation serves to reveal the lasting psychological impact of trauma, showing how it influences characters' thoughts, emotions, and understanding of past events. In fact, the novel begins with external focalisation, presented through an impersonal third-person narrator who introduces Elias Cole. This narrator offers a detached view of Elias lying in the hospital, setting the stage for his memories to surface. The novel reads:

> "On the iron- framed bed a single, scant sheet has moulded itself into the form of the human beneath. On top of the bedside cabinet, a small pile of spiral-bound notebooks sits alongside a vase of flowers, bright-coloured and plastic. The notebooks are worn from handling, the leaves rippled with the damp. In the atmosphere of the room the

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memories of a man float and form. The man in the bed is telling a story. His name is Elias Cole. Adrian listens. He is new here." (*The Memory of Love*, p.7)

Indeed, this perspective establishes emotional distance and introduces Elias as a subject whose trauma will later unfold more intimately through internal focalisation. However, as Elias begins recounting his past, using the first-person voice, the narration shifts to an internal homodiegetic focalisation, allowing readers direct access to his personal thoughts and emotional struggles. We can read it in this passage: "*I heard a song, one morning as I walked by college. It came to me across the radio playing in a taxi I passed*." (p.1) As said earlier, internal homodiegetic focalisation occurs when the narrator is also a character within the story and offers a subjective point of view. In this mode, the reader gains access to the narrator's internal thoughts, emotions and memories, allowing for a more intimate understanding of their psychological state.

Internal focalisation however, is referred to as a narrative technique presenting event through the perspective, thoughts and emotions of a character in the narrative. Put in another way, focalisation effectively scans his memory to the extent that at a certain level of the narratology, the author creates a limited but intimate view of the fictional universe. For, in so doing, the writer enables the reader access directly to the character's innermost and feel what the latter perceives. The case of Adrian in *The Memory of Love* helps buttress this view since the narrative enters his mind, revealing his private thoughts, uncertainties, and emotional struggles as he navigates the unfamiliar landscapes of post-war Sierra Leone.

As a result, internal focalisation creates a sense of emotional closeness and exposes the limits of empathy. The gist of this first point has been to unveil how focalisation helps to show the emotional and psychological effects of trauma. Through different points of view, the reader sees how each character experiences pain, memory, and silence in their own way, which deepens the understanding of trauma in the two narratives. In addition to her thought-provoking focalisation, the novelist critically employs the poetics of setting to further craft the expression of trauma and memory in the two narratives.

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2. The Poetics of Setting

In literature, the poetics of setting refers to how a writer uses time, place, and social environment to create meaning, mood, character, and theme. It goes beyond setting as a simple backdrop. It explores and influences the comprehension of the narration. In this perspective, Darmayanti Eka et al. (2024: 35) assert: "*setting is one of the elements of fiction that reveals about when and where an event took place*." Kenney (1966: 38) adds that "*setting is referred to the point in time and space in which events or the plot occur that also help the process of character development*." These above quotations highlight the importance of setting in fiction as it enables the reader understand the social, historical and emotional context in which the story develops. The rationale behind this point is to analyse how Aminatta Forna uses setting not only to situate her narratives geographically, but also to express psychological trauma, historical wounds and emotional tension in *The Devil that Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love*. A peruse of the both narratives shows that trauma is expressed through settings like the hospital or the city show pain, memory, and hope, turning spaces into emotional symbols of the past, revealing the deep impact of war and personal loss. These settings are carefully crafted to evoke significant places and precise time that reflect traumatic events. The analysis here focuses firstly on spatial anatomy, highlighting how spaces in both books become an active agent in shaping individuals and collective

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memory. It secondly scans the environmental atmosphere, underlining how Forna expresses the persistent effects of dictatorship, war and loss. It ends examining the temporal and historical anchoring, to evoke memory, trauma and emotional repression.

2.1 Spatial Anatomy

'Spatial Anatomy' refers to the way space is structured, described and used within a narrative. It looks at how different places, rooms, cities, landscapes are organised and how characters move through them. This concept helps to reveal relationships between characters and their environment, showing how space shapes their experiences, emotions and memories. In this perspective, Charles Mwangi (2017:09) argues:

> "Space is one term whose definition is not easy. It can be conceptualized in different forms and manifestations. One can perceive space as the physically existing environment in which characters live and move. Secondly, space can be seen as the immediate surroundings of actual events, the various locations shown by the narrative discourse or by the image. Thirdly, space may be viewed as the general socio-historico-geographical environment in which the action of a narrative takes place. Fourth, it is equally viable to perceive space as the enclosure mapped by the actions and thoughts of the characters. Lastly, space includes the expanse and limits completed by the reader's imaginations subject to their knowledge, experience and other dispositions."

In fact, Charles Mwangi wants to show through this quotation that setting or space is not just physical but also psychological because some spaces in Forna's works are viewed as elements of trauma. In fact, in postcolonial narratives, the land itself becomes a witness to violence and suffering. Here, writers use setting as a poetic means to reflect unresolved trauma. Space in Aminatta Forna's *The Devil that Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love* is not only a physical backdrop, but a thematic structure deeply rooted in the characters' experiences and psychological states. The spatial anatomy reveals trauma, repression, political tension and the process of memory recovery, through the way cities, homes, prisons, hospitals, and even landscapes are described. In *The Devil that Danced on the Water*, to start with, the story is inscribed into the 'national landscape' since Sierra Leone and especially, Freetown with its government buildings streets, and rivers are significant metaphorical landmarks. Indeed, Freetown is a city of silences and erasures where Aminatta Forna returns to uncover the truth about her father. Once familiar, Freetown is now fragmented and becomes a symbol of loss and historical distortion. This spatial shift shows Forna's emotional disorientation, illustrating how trauma changes perception. It can be exemplified through the following passage: "*Freetown was full of living ghosts: amputees, deranged rebels. And then there was me: I was beginning to feel like a revenant*." (p.302) Indeed, this quotation captures the deep emotional and psychological scars left by the war. The metaphor of '*living ghosts*' suggests that the people of Freetown, though alive, are haunted by trauma, loss and memories of violence. The narrator's feeling of being a '*revenant*', a returned spirit, reflects a sense of alienation, as if they no longer fully belong to the world they once knew. As it can be seen, Sierra Leone's urban spaces like university offices, streets and homes, are depicted as fragmented setting, echoing the fractured memories of war survivors. Furthermore, it is observed in Forna's memoir that the family house becomes a site of silence and secrets. Settings such as family compounds, Childhood homes and prisons are described with intimate detail. These domestic spaces become repositories of memory, where personal and political histories collide. As an illustration, when the authoress revisits her childhood home,

she experiences a sense of haunted belonging, where the past echoes through every corner, as evidenced in the following passage:

> "I watched: I still remember the layout of the house perfectly. The bedrooms' upstairs all looked out onto a veranda, exactly the same as the one below, which curved around the back of the house. The dynamite had been thrown up onto the balcony." (p.275)

This textual snippet highlights how the family house becomes a powerful symbol of memory, silence and unresolved trauma. The narrator's recollection of its layout reveals how deeply the past is imprinted in her mind. Additionally, spatial settings are charged with emotional and historical trauma in Forna's memoir. It presents the prison as a particularly oppressive space, marked by state control and psychological tension, as she confesses: "*I discovered later that the cells at Pademba Road were cold*." (p.325) Here, the adjective '*cold*' suggests not just a physical discomfort, but an emotional exposure of prisoners' unhealthy conditions. By selecting and examining these traumatic settings, Forna uses places to show how memory is connected to space. The way she describes them helps her revive the past. In *The Memory of Love*, spatial anatomy refers to social, emotional and psychological states. In fact, Freetown is differently explored by Elias Cole, Adrian and Kai, based on their trauma and personal history. Freetown is not idealised as fully healed, but it is portrayed as a city where traces of hope, emotional recovery, and human connection begin to re-emerge after the civil war. Adrian, through love, learns to inhabit the city and he becomes familiarised with the spaces that surrounds him. By contrast to Adrian, Kai stands for hope and his emotional space is that of healing. Kai stays in Freetown, opening up the prospect of a new emotional belonging to the country. Furthermore, the hospital becomes a place where physical healing and mental collapse coexist. That is to say, even though the hospital is supposed to be a place of recovery, it is also where the emotional and psychological trauma of characters like Kai or Adrian becomes visible. Bodies are treated, but minds carry scars. This can be illustrated through the following passage:

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> "To Adrian, Kai's anger is understandable. If Adrian had never come here, these events would never have taken place. Mamakay would be alive. It is the logic of grief. Equally, thinks Adrian, if he had taken her away from here, back to England she would be alive, too [...] I was sent as a part of a medical team. I came back to help. That's the sum of it." (*The Memory of Love*. 422)

This textual snippet illustrates how the hospital, rather than being solely a site of healing, becomes emotionally charged with grief and regret. It is both literal and symbolic—a place of healing, but also of lingering wounds. Hence, the hospital becomes a metaphor for Sierra Leone itself, scarred yet striving for recovery. Yet, Adrian reflects on the death of Mamakay, linking it to his presence and actions as a medical professional, as the narrator keep on:

> "Now Adrian looks back on the past it seems disordered, a tangle of days, weeks and months. Looking forward, he sees nothing, only the narrow walls of the tunnel of his existence and the thought that he will never see Mamakay again. The thought is too enormous for his mind to hold on to. He lets it go. He should go home, but he doesn't want to. He doesn't want to be alone. Being with Kai is as close as he can get to Mamakay, even though Kai is angry." (*The Memory of Love*. 422)

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From the forgoing, one easily infers that spatial and temporal settings in both novels are palimpsest of trauma and resilience since haunted by the past—war ruins intrude into present-day. They represent collective memory, showing how spaces carry the possibility of love or renewal and resilience.

2.2 Environmental Atmosphere

Environmental atmosphere, in literature, discusses physical surroundings with emotional, social and psychological tone. In both *The Devil that Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love*, Aminatta Forna creates an atmosphere that feels haunted, melancholic and emotionally tense, shaped by war, silence and psychological scars. Her settings are not neutral; they reflect the inner confusion of the characters. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, Forna describes Freetown as a city marked by loss, where the past looks like ghosts in the streets. It is portrayed as a place of haunted memories and broken dreams, creating an atmosphere of unease and fear. The following passage illustrates this Idea: "*fear of crime was now so acute in Freetown that every household slept with the windows locked*" (p.335), showing the tense and oppressive atmosphere of Freetown, marked by fear and discomfort. Moreover, the prison is an oppressive and violent space, symbolizing suffering and loss of happiness. The prison represents both physical and psychological confinement, where fear and pain dominate, reinforcing an atmosphere of terror. Here, the memoir renders: "*I ran across Memuna. Now, I really was afraid. I didn't want to be arrested and taken away to prison*." (p.392) In fact, the narrator's fear of being arrested and "taken away to prison" reflects deep anxiety and psychological terror, showing how prison represents a threatening and oppressive environment. The river, however, symbolises an ambiguous place, both a source of life and death. It reflects the melancholy or nostalgia. The atmosphere is dark, filled with danger and mystery as the following illustration brings evidence: "*it was as though the river were a lost child looking for its mother and as soon as the two found each other, the child grew quiet*." (p.179) Indeed, the river is portrayed as a space of quiet melancholy and emotional weight becoming a metaphor for disorientation and longing.

In *The Memory of Love*, Freetown appears as a city caught between hope and trauma. It is a space of recovery but also of silent memories that stay in the streets, giving the city a form of haunted atmosphere. The following passage clearly exemplifies through Kai's accounts: "*the city was burning. He felt the heat of the fires on his naked skin, the broken glass in the soles of his feet. The rebels were in retreat. He climbed up into the back and cradled Balia in his arms*." (p.433) The quotation captures the city as a space of trauma through the imagery of fire, chaos, and fear, but also of resilience, as Kai overcomes terror to save Balia. Freetown becomes a place where suffering and survival coexist. The hospital is portrayed as a place of both healing and emotional stress. While bodies recover, the minds of patients and caregivers reveal deep psychological wounds, making the atmosphere tense and fragile, as exemplified below:

> "Adrian spends more and more time at the mental hospital helping lleana restore lost records, those burned or otherwise destroyed during the invasion. In this he is helped by Salia, who keeps the names and history of every patient who has passed through the hospital logged in his memory. Adrian interviews patients one after another. Hours spent listening to delusions, fears, anxieties, dysfunction and dreams, confirming a diagnosis where possible, classifying them accordingly." (p.254)

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It shows that the hospital is a place of healing, where Adrian helps patients. But at the same time, it is a place of sadness and stress for him, because he always hopes to find Agnes but never succeeds. In summary, the environmental atmosphere shapes how characters feel and act towards their surroundings. And from this space, the story moves into a specific time and history that further deepens the meaning of their experiences.

2.3 Temporal and Historical Anchoring

Temporal and historical anchoring illustrates the way a narrative situates its events within specific moments in time and historical context. Aminatta Forna's *The Devil That Danced on the Water* and *The Memory of Love* are deeply rooted in the historical and temporal landscapes of postcolonial Sierra Leone. The two works are connected by their commitment to revealing how the traumatic history of a nation shapes individual and collective experiences. This section aims to analyse how temporal and historical elements are employed by Forna to expose trauma, create narrative depth and engage with the socio-political realities of Sierra Leone. In *The Devil That Danced on the Water*, Forna begins with a deeply personal journey, her return to Sierra Leone to uncover the truth about her father's imprisonment and execution. Meanwhile, this personal story bursts out into public fair, intertwined with the political of the country. Let it be reminded that *The Devil That Danced on the Water* is rooted in Sierra Leone's post-independence time sequence marked by political turmoil, military coups and erosion of democratic institutions which dramatically shaped the personal and collective trauma. As an illustration Forna explores this collective trauma through the prism of her family experience. In this connection, she fictionalizes key historical moments such as the 1967 coup and the rise of Siaka Steven, situation her personal loss within a broader national tragedy, as evidenced in the following passage:

> "In February 1967 a date of elections for the elections was announced. They were to be held in March, just one month away. Everyone in the country had been waiting and preparing for this moment. The APC planned to challenge virtually every seat, with the exception of some of those in the southern Mende heartlands, where they reckoned they could not possibly win they mobilised a formidable campaign." (*The Devil That Danced on the Water*, p.77)

Here, the phrase "*in February 1967…*" serves as a strong historical anchor, situating the narrative within an anxious socio-political climate that deeply influences the events and the author's personal story. The announcement of elections and the anticipation surrounding them mark a crucial turning point in Sierra Leone's history, highlighting the fragile state of its democracy. In addition, Forna navigates different time periods, moving between her childhood memories in Scotland and Sierra Leone in 1970s (p.164), her adult investigation in the late 1990s (p.112), and flashbacks to the early 1970, when her father was arrested in 1974, and his execution in 1975. These events help trace the impact of political trauma on her personal life. In her memoir, Forna reconstructs time through memory and testimony, often relying on fragmented recollections and incomplete narratives when she writes:

> "More than a decade ago, when the civil war raged across the border in Liberia, Sierra Leoneans consoled themselves, saying such barbarism could never occur among our people. I had been among those who believed that anarchy and evil had no place in the

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> society I knew. Where respect for elders was profound, the authority of the family entrenched. […].” (*The Devil That Danced on the Water*, p.351)

Here, the narrative reflects a strong sense of temporal and historical anchoring through the reference to the Liberian civil war. This moment situates the characters within a precise historical timeline, highlighting the regional instability that preceded the Sierra Leonean conflict. In fact, Forna's aesthetic of trauma resists sensationalism, it instead unveils violence through quiet reflection and ordinary moments. Moreover, Forna's novel alternates between the experiences of multiple characters across different time periods. The character Elias Cole represents the past; he recounts events from the 1960s and 1970s during his hospitalisation. In the 1960s, Sierra Leone gained independence from British colonial rule (1961), but the decade that followed was marked by rising political tension, authoritarianism, and corruption. It was a period when hopes for progress were slowly overshadowed by political instability and the quiet emergence of state repression. Elias Cole indirectly reflects on his nostalgic storytelling. The following quotation tells: “*the 1960s had not reached us here. Well, that's not quite true [...]. In that respect you could say I was a traditionalist, like a Dean*.” (*The Devil That Danced on the Water*, p.110) In fact, Elias's words suggest a refusal to acknowledge the political unrest of the 1960s. His statement highlights some people reluctance about issues of national interest for the sake of protecting their inner peace. This colludes with Aminatta Forna's overriding concern of condemning selective memory as one of hindrances to the manifestation of the truth. As the narrative unfolds, Forna epitomises the death of Julius, a close friend of Elias. His assassination symbolizes the cruelty and anxiety impacting Sierra Leoneans in the 1070's. Indeed, political violence creates an atmosphere of tension and trauma which dramatically affects personal lives, as Elias explains:

> “then it was 1970. The 1960s were over. I watched Saffia struggle for survival. Following Julius's death there were practical matters that needed to be considered.” The independence which had so struck me at our first meeting had proved to be an illusion, of course. An illusion sustained and perpetuated by Julius, who had spoiled his wife. And also I suppose by the three of us, Kekura, Yansaneh and I, in our own way. For hadn't we revered her? Did we not outdo ourselves to perform for her amusement? See ourselves as her guardians? We had taken Julius's duties as our own. But now Julius was gone. Kekura fled. And Yansaneh broken. I alone was left.” (*The Memory of Love*. p.266)

Narrations such ‘*I watched Saffia struggle for survival*’ and ‘*We had taken Julius's duties as our own. But now Julius was gone*’ highlight the harsh reality Saffia faces after Julius's death in 1970, reflecting the difficult socio-political climate of Sierra Leone. All things considered, this study highlights how love, sometimes distant or painful, remains powerful in shaping one's identity, choices, and healing. Accordingly, Irene Perez says “*The Memory of Love spans three decades and the narrative continues to be an exercise in genealogical 'rememory', as it invests in Sierra Leone's collective memory*.” (2017:212). This means that the texts under consideration reflect both private feelings and Sierra Leone's shared history, showing how love and memory last through personal and national suffering.

Conclusion

The gist of this study has been to explore ways in which writing functions as a form of catharsis for trauma survivors, focusing on Aminatta Forna's memoir *The Devil That Danced on the Water* and her novel *The Memory of Love*. A peruse of these selected narrative through the lens of the Psychobiographical approach has firstly evidenced that Aminatta Forna's personal life and Sierra Leone's violent history strongly shape her writing. Secondly, both books are direct responses to private and collective wounds, serving as tools of testimony, investigation, and catharsis. *The Devil that Danced on the Water* introduces mystery, danger and contradiction, it is symbolic and poetic, referring to the mysterious and painful events in the author's past, especially related to her father's disappearance and the political violence in Sierra Leone. In *The Memory of Love*, however, Aminatta Forna epitomizes Sierra Leone's socio-political upheavals and revisits the homicide of her father, using personal testimony and historical investigation as a way to release grief and reclaim the truth. She contextualizes the persistent effects of the civil war through timelines, multiple voices, and symbolic settings, showing how characters struggle and cope with traumatic memory, guilt for a healing. Yet, the novel evidences how past experiences of love, be they familial or compassionate, remain traumatic since they still affect and shape living persons. This novel suggests that love leaves emotional and ineradicable traces, even after loss, trauma or separation. Together, the two works illustrate how writing transforms private pain into narrative expression, offering both personal relief and collective remembrance. By linking her family tragedy with the broader socio-political backdrop of Sierra Leone, Forna turns literature into a pathway to catharsis, a means of preserving memory, exposing injustice, and working through trauma. Hence, Art transforms private into narrative expression, offering both personal relief and collective remembrance.

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