Affective Inheritance: Traumatic Memory in Nigeria-Biafra War Novels (Critical Introduction) and *Circumtrauma* (Poetry Collection)

by

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Abstract

This dissertation represents the culmination of five years of study on the Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970). *Circumtrauma* is a creative dissertation that explores, through poetry, how narratives of the war are held together by an underlying emotional valence which characterizes and transforms how we relate with others. My dissertation employs the cut-up poetry technique and a structure influenced by the binary arrangement of the Ifá divination system. I study the War not only in terms of the three years of protracted violence that consumed the country, but also as an ongoing process that fractured Nigeria's social, political, and cultural life. This doctoral project is broken into two sections, a proem on the basic structural technique employed in the writing process, and *Circumtrauma,* the book-length collection of poems developed from cut-ups of four Nigeria-Biafra War novels: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Flora Nwapa's *Never Again*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, and Kole Omotoso's *The Combat*. This doctoral project draws on Indigenous African aesthetics, conceptual poetry and critical theories that grow from both my research and my experience as a creative writer. The disciplines and the conceptual, creative and critical approaches that characterize my poetics include African literary studies, trauma theory, memory studies, affect studies, postcolonial literature and literary studies, and Indigenous African ways of thinking about violence and community. These disciplines also allow me to develop a methodology that complements my artistic practice. I mobilize this disciplinary scope to ultimately propose a more attentive investigation of post-war negative emotions. My dissertation draws on select war novels to develop a singular argument for attention to the war's emotional legacy in contemporary social relations among Nigerians. *Circumtrauma* is framed by an introductory essay that examines the material context of the war and relates it to the production of Nigerian-Biafra War literature and its ongoing capacity to affect social relations. This dissertation concludes with a Coda that reflects on my project as

research creation and a brief biographical sketch. Overall, my doctoral project makes a compelling case, through conceptual poetry, for focusing on the affective dimensions of the war and the potential that invigorates the social relations of ordinary lives in its aftermath.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Comfort Olajumoke Verissimo. No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Dedication

For Eledua, promise fulfilled.

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Affective Inheritance: Traumatic Memory in Nigeria-Biafra War Novels

Historically, Nigeria is a complex country. She is made up of around 200 ethnic groups, with Yorùbá, Igbo, and Hausa constituting the majority. The Nigeria-Biafra War (1967-1970) has been the country's defining event, exemplifying the difficulties inherent in the transition from colonial to postcolonial rule. The War was an attempt by Biafra, a region in the southeast of Nigeria whose population is mostly Igbo, to secede from the rest of the country. The War itself is hardly commemorated in Nigeria's public space nor taught intentionally in schools (Lodge 1; Palmer 11-12). Nevertheless, despite the effort to repress the War's memory, the War is so prominent in Nigerian cultural works and research on the country that it is regarded as the source of every act of private and public violence in the state.[1] The specifics of each individual experience and the emotions felt also seem to shape how the War is remembered and inform metanarratives about the War that emerge as "collected memories."[2] I use collected memories here not in the collective singular but in the individual plural, which allows for "individualistic principles, or what Jeffrey Olick describes as "the aggregated individual memories of members of a group" (338). According to Olick, the main idea is that "individuals are central: only individuals remember, though they may do so alone or together, and any publicly available commemorative symbols are interpretable only to the degree to which they elicit a reaction in some group of individuals" (338).

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[1] See "Scholarly Trends, Issues and Themes: Introduction" in Falola and Ezekwem.

[2] Olick identifies a tension in Halbwach's seminal work on "collective memory." Olick claims that Halbwach was unable to resolve the two versions of the shared and remembered past: The Individual aggregated memories (what Olick refers to as "collected memory") and the public manifestations of social memory (what Olick calls "collective memory"). (338)

Circumtrauma is a creative dissertation that explores, through poetry, how narratives of the War are held together by an underlying emotional valence which characterizes and transforms how we relate with others. My dissertation engages the cut-up poetry technique and a structure influenced by the binary arrangement of the Ifá divination system. The cut-up poetry is generated by cutting pieces, single, or a few words of a pre-existing linear page and re-arranging them into a new text. This poetic technique was popularised by William S. Burroughs, Brion Gysin, and other members of the Dada movement. To add layers of craft and intention to a method that ultimately emerged by chance, I combine cut-up poetry with The Ifá divination system in *Circumtrauma*. The Ifá divination system is practiced by the Yorùbá people of southwestern Nigeria and African diaspora in the Caribbean and Americas. The system comprises a corpus of literary texts coded in the binary-based tetragram and octagram system (2^4 = 16; 2^8 =256 – 16 books and 256 chapters). Ifá is the knowledge base of the Yorùbá, and it is designed to house the religious, historical, cultural, medicinal, and scientific knowledge of the people.

I study the War not only in terms of the three years of protracted violence that consumed the country, but also as an ongoing process that fractured Nigeria's social, political, and cultural life. This doctoral project is broken into two sections, a proem on the basic structural technique of the poetry collection and *Circumtrauma,* the book-length collection of poems developed from cut ups of four war novels, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Flora Nwapa's *Never Again*, Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*, and Kole Omotoso's *The Combat*. I draw on Indigenous African aesthetics, conceptual poetry, and critical theories that grow from both my research and my experience as a creative writer. The fields, concepts, and approaches that characterize my poetics include African literary studies, trauma theory, memory studies, affect studies, postcolonial literature and literary studies, and Indigenous African ways of thinking

about violence and community. These fields and theories also allow me to develop a methodology that complements my artistic practice and enables me to ultimately propose a more attentive investigation of post-war negative emotions. My dissertation draws on select war novels to develop a singular argument for attention to the War's emotional legacy in contemporary social relations among Nigerians. Significantly, in the case where memory is in contestation—and in place of forgetting or erasure—conceptualisation becomes a way to "ensure that all events of the past are potentially present at any moment, the linearity of experience notwithstanding" (Brashers 152). Normally, with the novel form, memory is viewed as a representation of the writer or artist, but cut-up poetry reveals the underlying negative thoughts and perspectives hidden in narratives imagined from memory of which the writer or artist may be only partly conscious. *Circumtrauma* is an affective poetry collection that draws readers in to see the negative emotions of and consequent affective responses to the War.

Circumtrauma is an attempt to characterize the accumulation of precipitating, recurring, and ongoing emotions present in Nigerian cultural production to evoke the multiplicity of affects surrounding traumatic memories and experiences. It is a cathartic expulsion of emotion that reflects an inherited and transmitted memory, constantly divided between historical, individual, and official interpretations of events. I arrived at the concept and creative technique employed in *Circumtrauma* by applying the principles and insights of affect and trauma theories, to the work of interpreting war literature. I would, therefore, like to establish that my creative practice has always been upheld by an interest in what we remember, especially in the context of traumatic experiences. In my previous creative works, I have explored memory,[3] especially how it manifests into a pervasive, lingering feeling of loss and familiarity. The intriguing aspect of this

[3] I explored memory in my previously published creative works, *I am memory* (Dada Books, 2008); *The Birth of Illusion* (Fullpoint, 2015*)*, and *A Small Silence* (Cassava Republic, 2019).

remembering is how literary and cultural productions seem to elicit a recognition mechanism. *Circumtrauma*, through the cut-up technique, traces the ways war narratives embody the past, as well as the ways in which conversations on the traumatic event in narratives hold up and mirror the past to traumatized victims, such that they produce a strong mechanism for recognition at every encounter. My project establishes the importance of further research into unanswered questions about the role of emotions in preserving the War's memory. In the following section, I provide the material context that informed the novels that I use for creating *Circumtrauma.*

A Lingering Trauma: The Nigeria-Biafra War

The novels I work with to create *Circumtrauma* are all post-war texts that, in different ways, represent the complex emotions which divided the nation during the civil conflict, emotions that I see continuing to circulate the War's trauma in contemporary Nigeria. The Nigeria-Biafra War lasted from 1967 to 1970. Often regarded as Africa's first Civil War, the start of the War is usually traced to a massacre of "mostly Igbo" people in the Hausa-dominated Northern region following a series of coups that descended into horrendous violence. In the absence of a controlling narrative or mediation of these violences from the government and amid increasing fear for the safety of the Igbo, Chukwuemeka "Emeka" Ojukwu emerged as the Igbo leader. Alleging ethnic discrimination, he announced that all Igbo people in the North should return home to the southeast of Nigeria, the indigenous homeland of the Igbo (De St. Jorre 67-88). The emotions that were formed in the War also have deep roots in Nigeria's history and the amalgamation of its British colonial masters.[4] As many scholars have noted, the fractured foundations left by British colonialism, which forcefully united the country's varied ethnic and

[4] See Falola and Heaton for the history of colonial Nigeria.

religious groups, laid the foundation for conflict and strife. Some of the British legacies include the country's amalgamation in 1914, a poorly drafted constitution, and the formation of an indirect rule system that favoured the North with political authority and economic prosperity.

Political upheaval erupted in numerous regions following Nigeria's independence in 1960, and by 1965, the country was plagued by political insecurity, dysfunctional government, and corruption (Falola and Heaton 2008, 200-223). It is worth noting that religious divisions and economic inequalities generated by ethnic resource sharing, which grew more prominent with the discovery of oil in Nigeria, have continued to fracture Nigerian society, making it vulnerable to recurrent conflicts. Hence, while some historians have referred to the War as a "Brother's War" to reflect the forced brotherhood involved in the founding of Nigeria, which brought together over 200 various ethnic groups, this description, while correct, glosses over the Nigerian nation's peculiar pre- and post- independence social dynamics. Acknowledging these legacies exposes Nigeria's precarious political climate and the consequent political complexities that characterized the civil war period. The Nigeria-Biafra War, given its complexities, also lacks clear and distinguishable phases, since political alliances shifted and some Biafrans found themselves on the federal side and vice versa. Nonetheless, historical accounts of the War portray it as a conflict between southeastern Nigeria (Biafra) and the rest of Nigeria. While this portrayal is accurate for organizing facts and data, it is not fully representative of the complexities of the conflict because it fails to reflect the minorities who were caught on both sides of the conflict, nor does it reflect the pre-war subtleties that already generated discontent amongst all other ethnic groups.

The instability that followed the independence included two coups d'etat. The first coup d'état, led by five junior southern Nigerian officers, claimed to end the country's failed leadership. It took place on January 15, 1966, and led to the death of key political figures, whom

scholars have identified as mostly from the North. A few unfavourable policies made by the new government, headed by Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi, an Igbo, unsettled the North and entrenched the idea that the coup was a plot for Igbo domination.[5] Gradually, tensions exploded into extreme violence in the North, leading to murders that became a massacre of "mostly Igbo."[6] This violence caused several southeasterners to flee the North for the East. On July 28, 1966, two hundred days after Aguiyi-Ironsi became the head of state, an even bloodier countercoup led by northern military officers caused his death.[7]

The Northern Army leaders appointed thirty-one-year-old General Yakubu Gowon to rule. Gowon met with opposition from Lieutenant Colonel Ojukwu, the Igbo military governor of the Eastern Region who had reservations about the countercoup and the emergence of Gowon, a junior officer, as head of state. The massacres of thousands from the Eastern Region between May and September, and the allegation that the Army was involved in the killing of some 80,000-100,000 Igbo, concerned Ojukwu. Following a series of meetings in Aburi, Ghana on January 4 and 5, 1967 and the irreconcilable difference between the federal government and the Eastern Region, a secession became imminent (Uzoigwe 169-221). On May 27, 1967, under the threat of secession, Gowon established a state of emergency, empowered the Supreme Military Council by promulgating Decree 8, and created twelve new states to replace the old structure of three regions. The states were created to reflect the desire of Nigerians for regional autonomy.

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[5] The northerners were not the only ones who felt threatened. Before the degeneration into violence and clamour for secession in the North, Ironsi's government was welcomed by minorities who had always felt a sense of distrust for the major ethnic groups in the state. On Feb 23, 1966, just as Ironsi was settling down to power, Isaac Adaka Boro, a former policeman from one of the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria, led a revolt that lasted for twelve days. During the revolt, he declared "The Niger Delta Republic." Boro was arrested and tried for treason but was released by General Gowon. Boro died fighting on the federal side during the Civil War.

[6] My use of quotation marks here indicates that this is the narrative in circulation. Although the Igbo dominate the Southeast/South, it is recorded that several other non-Igbo, mostly minorities in the south-south (who were later drawn into what would become Biafra), were also killed during the protest.

[7] See: De St. Jorre, *Nigerian Civil War*; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria*; and Uzoigwe, *Visions of Nationhood*.

Three of the newly created states that replaced the Eastern Region claimed to be part of the territory of Biafra, weakening the fragile support of the minorities for the secession of Biafra (Diejomaoh 334).[8] Importantly, the invasion of these newly created states changed the rationale for the War from self-determination to an economic one, and the conflict between the two parties shifted to resource control of the oil fields in the southern part of Biafra at Port Harcourt and Bonny (Kirk-Greene, 6). During the War, Ojukwu's control of the territorial waters made it increasingly clear that the War was economic,[9] and it was also evident that oil was critical to the conflict.[10] In response to rumours and reports of partial payment of royalties from oil companies to Ojukwu and the intention to divert major oil company revenues to the southeast (Diejomaoh 334), the Eastern Region declared itself the Republic of Biafra on May 30, 1967. In turn, the federal government announced a blockade on the region and followed with a "police action" on July 7, 1967 (Kirk-Greene 7; De St. Jorre 125). Heavy fighting took place during the following weeks as both sides focused on capturing the oil-rich states in the Niger Delta, which were located in the south-south region of Biafra. By the time the Nigerian troops captured Bonny Island in the Niger Delta, and gained control of Shell BP facilities in later July 1967, there was hope that the two parties would settle their differences early.[11]

However, on August 9, 1967, Biafra invaded and occupied the Midwest, a strategic location between Biafra and the federal side. This occupation brought the previously neutral

[8] During the War, oil-rich minorities living in Biafra, such as Ibibio, Ogoni, Annang, Efik, Ogoja, became pawns in the hands of the federal government and the Biafrans. The Igbo Biafrans abused minorities in the refugee camps within their region, undermining their will for secession and autonomy.

[9] For a discussion of the effects of the War on the Nigerian economy, see Uche, "Money Matters"; Nafziger, "Economic Impact" and *Economics of Political Instability*; Awolowo, "Financing of the Nigerian Civil War"; and Ogbudinkpa, *Economics of the Nigerian Civil War*.

[10] See Omaka, "Nigerian Civil War"; Chibuike Uche, "Oil, British Interests"; Ike and Oronto, *Where Vultures Feast*; and Undiyaundeye, "Oil and the Nigerian Civil War" for an insightful analysis of this subject.

[11] See Obasanjo, *My Command*.

region into the war.[12] This brief control of the Midwest led to the fear that Igbo would dominate the minorities, resulting in hostilities against them. Several Midwestern cities, including Warri and Benin, witnessed the killing of the remaining Igbo in the area by non-Igbo and federal soldiers.[13] The most calamitous massacre occurred on October 7, 1967, in Asaba, a small town between the Eastern and Midwestern regions. Eight hundred men and boys were lined up in the small town and shot by the federal Army.[14] The Midwestern invasion of the federal government lasted only two months. Bird and Ottanelli argue the killings constituted "a pivotal event that contributed to prolonging a war that claimed well over a million lives" (xvii).

The invasion of the Midwest was crucial to the war's subsequent development. It had immense "political, military, economic and psychological repercussions," as it turned the Midwesterners from sympathetic onlookers to "implacable deeply committed enemies" who felt dragged into a War in which they had no business (De St. Jorre 165, 172). The invasion transformed the perception of the War as a conflict between Northern and Eastern Nigeria into a War of unity, which demanded commitment from the rest of Nigeria. From this point forward, the federal government intensified its economic and food blockade by making it a state policy, thus preventing food from being transported into Biafra. Consequently, starvation and disease ravaged the seceding state. Instead of calling a truce, Ojukwu turned the blockade into an

[12] The region remained neutral because the Midwest military administrator, David Ejoor, feared that it would become a battlefront. He wanted to be an unbiased observer and attempted to reconcile the federal and Biafran governments.

[13] Most people took to declaring their ethnic identity on the front of their shops and houses so that they would not be mistaken for Igbo.

[14] In their book, *The Asaba Massacre*, Bird and Ottanelli focus on the aftermath of this massacre. Explaining the circumstances that led to the killing, de St. Jorre writes that enraged soldiers were triggered by an Igbo who shot at a federal officer's chest when the prisoners were rounded up. A furious federal Soldier gathered all the men and boys in the city and "machine-gunned them to death," after which they were buried in a mass grave (165).

opportunity for international publicity to circulate genocide propaganda materials on Biafra (De St. Jorre 241-242, 251).

Federal troops entered Owerri, the capital of Biafra, on January 9, 1970. Ojukwu fled to the Ivory Coast and handed power to his second in command, General Phillip Effiong. Effiong signed the document for the Nigeria-Biafra War to end on January 15, 1970. After Effiong's surrender, Gowon guaranteed all parties involved that tribunals and proscriptions would not be conducted after the war. He pardoned former Biafrans, and "reintegrated" the Igbo back into Nigeria as citizens through the policy of reintegration and rehabilitation built on three Rs: reconstruction, rehabilitation, and reconciliation (Osaghae 69). The question of whether there was reintegration remains unanswered, especially given the lack of attention paid to those "persecuted" groups whose conflux of negative emotions[15] arose both before and after the War. In addition to the emotions that led to the War, which I argue continue to sustain the trauma of the War, the nation's sphere is complex in terms of political and social identity formation processes, oscillating between remaining as a country and carrying on the dividing wounds of the War.

Nigeria's Literary Periods and the Rise of the War Novel

I find it useful to briefly call attention to literary development in Nigeria before the War, as a way to illustrate ways in which the War, together with the nature of Nigerian politics, "embodied the contradictions of the pre-war era" (Amuta 88) as is reflected and performed in Nigeria's literary production. Several scholars have made attempts to categorize Nigeria's

[15] See Ahmed "The Organisation of Hate" in *The Cultural Politics* and Demertzis' *The Political Sociology*, as they both identify that patriotism can be fuelled by hate and resentment.

literary/cultural production.[16] For my research, I employ Chidi Amuta's categorisation, which traces the transition of Nigeria's literary production into three periods based on three distinct events. Amuta describes the first phase of Nigerian literature as one characterised by *animistic realism.*[17] This period, which I have identified as 1900-1950, was characterised "by conscious stylisation, exaggeration, and temporal and spatial illogicality" (90), and with a dominance of demons, ghomids and other forms of inhuman creatures as characters. The second phase was brought about with the end of World War II. This period saw the emergence of the Onitsha Market Literature (popular in the 1950s and 1960s), where the publication of pamphlets bore "testimony to the labour pains of a cultural milieu in transition" (90). At about this time, with the establishment of the University College, a new class of writers developed with the intention to reclaim the identity and humanity of writers in the face of colonialists. The literatures from this period retained what Amuta described as an "advanced animism" (91). The third phase (1960-2019), which was shaped by the political turbulence of the 1960s, saw writers interrogating their socio-historical realities. This third phase is considered significant, as it "marks a noticeable movement from literature informed by ethnic consciousness to a greater national consciousness" (93). These phases identified by Amuta bear a close resemblance to the schema presented by Frantz Fanon on the literary development of colonised people in *The Wretched of the Earth.* Fanon identifies the first phase of colonised literary development as the period of assimilating the "culture of the occupying power" and imitating the literary tradition of the colonialists. The second phase is the "national phase," in which writers show concern for identity and struggle for

[16] See, for example, Darah, "Literary Development"; Adesanmi and Dunton, "Introduction."

[17] See Harry Garuba's, "Explorations in Animist Materials," for an elaborate argument on animist modes of representation in Nigerian literature, especially his exploration of the concepts "animist materialism" and "animist unconscious."

independence from the colonial powers. While the second focused on the social injustices and problems of the nascent Nigerian nation, the third phase, which is the "fighting stage," is the period in which a national literature is birthed, as the writer realises that "the truths of a nation are in the first place its realities" (178-82). This was the literary context in Nigeria before the War.

Funso Aiyejina acknowledges that the War is a "crystallizing experience" for its "significance in making every Nigerian take a public stand on the prevailing issue" (113). This experience, as Aiyejina explains, has modified Nigerian poetry. Although Aiyejina's referent is poetry, it can also be applied to other post-war cultural forms influenced by the Nigeria-Biafra War. In fact, there was an abundance of mostly realist-naturalist portrayals of the War in the 1970s, 1980s and the 1990s (Riemenschneider 56), focusing on themes such as ethno-nationalization, historicity and implications of the War, literary aesthetics, and gender,[18] with the likes of Chidi Amuta and C. W. McLuckie creating checklists of the War's literatures. Hence, instead of concentrating on tradition as a "force strong enough to make people comply with the social and cultural expectations of their society" (Aiyejina 213), writers increasingly focused on externalities, specifically, on social inequality and injustice (Amuta, "Literature of the Civil War" 88).

Employing Benedict Anderson's metaphor of "nation-ness" and nationalism as cultural artifact (13), one can see the significance of paying attention to the "profound emotional legitimacy" literary artifacts can command (14). Anderson considers the nation as limited, sovereign, and a community. In his interpretation, the nation is anchored in cultural representations and what constitutes the national identity as a political community. I find a

[18] See, for example, Emenyonu, "Post-War Writing"; Nwosu, "Muse of History."

connection between Anderson's description of a nation and cultural production in Nigeria to be a material venue for creating an "imagined community," where readership is "conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship" (16). [19] The connection Anderson makes is especially relevant in Nigeria, where military intervention further problematized nationhood and had implications for traumatic memorialization of the War.

The military emerged more powerful and dominant from the civil war than it had been before (Falola and Heaton 180). While there was initially a proliferation of literature exploring the event,[20] the work of "remembering" was viewed as contemptuous behaviour, deemed capable of instigating the hostilities that created the War. At the end of the War, the production of any cultural artifacts that invoked any form of recollection was discouraged, and this included books, films, visual arts, and theatre performances. Thus, as "witness literature" (Feuser 121), early post-war literary production combined the unresolved grief of the War with the traumatic experiences of the military dictatorship because these two events occurred simultaneously.[21] In post-war Nigeria, the repression of memory and prolonged grief was translated into a literary production system that served to generate counter-memories, counter-hegemonic narratives, and hegemonic master narratives. As Falola and Heaton show, "severe ethnic and regional fissures continued to exist, preventing the establishment of a strong identity and inhibiting the development of a stable, democratically elected federal government" (181). Therefore, assessing the events of the War without relating them to the post-independence coup d'états that scholars

[19] My reference to literary/cultural production considers the process of interpretation, meaning making, and production, all of which influence and shape cultural, individual, political, and social identities through shared knowledge.

[20] See, for example, Osofisan.

[21] See Astrid Erll, "Literature" on how literature sustains "sites of memory" and even becomes placeholders for collective remembering.

claim culminated in the War[22] and the post-war coups that shaped the complexities surrounding the memory of the War would be a grievous omission. The military government's repression of memory and injustice was a double assault on public memory. **"**Prior to the War," as Charles R. Larson wrote in 1972 for the *New York Times*, "the flowing of West African literary expression was almost totally dominated by Nigerian artists." However, the War changed things considerably. As Larson adds, two of Nigeria's famous novelists at the time—Chinua Achebe and Cyprian Ekwensi—were "effectively silenced" as their skills had been offered to the Biafran cause during the War ("What was Marginal"). At the time Larson wrote his article, neither author had published a second novel. Nevertheless, following the re-emergence of cultural production between 1970 and 1983, there was a synthesis of the unresolved grief of the War and the traumatic experiences of the years of military rule.

The Nigerian novel developed alongside the country and underwent aesthetic transformation as Nigeria changed over time. Although other forms of cultural production existed, novels occupied a more dominant position and generated immense attention in scholarship. Oladele Taiwo, while explaining that the Nigerian novelist represents the link between indigenous culture and modern experience, traces the rise of the novel in Nigeria to the twentieth-century British colonization of the country. Taiwo's point can be further elaborated with Akporobaro's explanation of this link between indigenous and modern as having implications for the structure of the late twentieth-century Nigerian novel and its aesthetics. As Akporobaro explains, the basis of "realism" depicted in the novels of this period, evolves, as the novelists witness the nation's economic, social and moral change, by making "an insistent evocation of the cultural forms of the African world" (iv).

[22] See De St. Jorre, *Nigerian Civil War*; Falola and Heaton, *A History of Nigeria.*

It is also important to mention that while the novel form was an instrument of protest in several parts of colonised Africa, especially in the French colonial territories, there was a comparative lack of bitterness against colonial power in Nigeria (Taiwo 4-5). The novels that, therefore, emerged from Nigeria, beginning from the first time the genre appeared in 1952,[23] paid attention to recreating the traditional way and their interactions with external influence. These novels' portrayal of social and cultural realities meant that they were also attentive to social criticism and captured the diverse nature of the ethnic groups in the country by employing heterogeneous characters (12, 34). The consensus among Nigerian novelists is that the novel is viewed as an act of witnessing Nigeria's uncertainties.

As Wendy Griswold explains, her use of "witness literature" to describe the ideology behind the continuing attention that is paid to socio-political discourse comes from her interviews with novelists who shared the view that Nigeria was in transition towards a better future (11). These writers all consider themselves as storytellers who are "bearing witness to the Nigerian condition" (11). The result of this dedication to write stories that bear witness to social problems also implies "turning things around with the power of . . . testimony" (270). Although this witness culture was not founded based on formal principles, critics like Oladele Taiwo and Ernest Emenyonu agree about the commitment that many Nigerian novelists have to documenting the nation's condition. These writers focused on "varying degrees of realism and different shades of attitudes, its triumph and failure" (Grisworld 11), in the Nigerian state.

[23] Griswold describes her use of "Nigerian novel" to mean a novel that is written in English and is accessible to literate Nigerians (33). It is for this reason that Amos Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* emerges as the first Nigerian novel in 1952. Nevertheless, it is significant to mention that a great number of novels appeared before Tutuola's, but they were focused on particular ethnic groups. For example, before the incursion of the British, there was a thriving literary culture in the North, with the Arabic form of writing Hausa, called *Ajami.* Also, in 1929, the first Yorùbá novel was published, after it appeared as a serial in the newspaper (33, 34).

According to Oladele Taiwo, the older novelists paid attention to creating a connection between indigenous culture and modern experience, based on their individual perspective and ethnic background (34). These novels typically examined the tension between the past and the present, in a way that implies criticism (34). The narrative technique employed a model of social criticism through a realist style that constantly satirized the past or anticipated the future as better. This kind of representation can be understood in terms of a commitment towards creating an enabling future and helping Nigeria out of its predicaments, which in a way makes the idea of being Nigerian less complex.

Similarly, early civil war narratives "tended to reflect a Nigerian national consciousness, but through a single ethnic national framework" (Omotoso, "Nigerian Federation" 146). As far as Omotoso's interpretation is concerned, the Nigerian novel is one that is shaping the national consciousness and is drawing sustenance from it by selecting themes that matter to Nigerians, by being structured around emotional constructs that will generate an instinctive response from Nigerians. As a result, while Western education deprived the Nigerian of his Indigenous literatures, she remains invested in emotional associations with the structures because they make up the unconscious cultural collective.

Phases of the Nigeria-Biafra War Literature

I consider it important to situate the development of the war novel in phases to capture the unique characteristics of the War's different periods. I place literary/cultural production on the War in two temporal phases: post-war (1970–1983) and post-post-war (1983 to the present). I see the continuing transformation of the War in the emotional landscape responding to dictatorial rule as altering how traumatic memory is represented in Nigerian novels.

The post-war phase (1970–83) encompasses the three political/military regimes that followed the end of the War in 1970. The literature of this period played a key role in laying a protest tradition in the cultural output of Nigeria, especially in showing the interconnectedness of Nigeria's War memory with military rule. The general atmosphere of silence and the literature produced during this period can be described as an intellectual intervention, an attempt by different writers and scholars to document and analyze the event, especially with the military continuing in government after the War. Both sides, federal and seceding region, expressed anger, pain and fear in the early part of the post-war period, with Biafran literature written with a conscious decision to preserve the War memory conveying a resentment of the government's treatment of individuals and their ethnic groups.

In general, post-war writings reflected how Nigeria's intellectuals dealt with the trauma of war. Elechi Amadi wrote, *Sunset at Biafra* (1973) about his experience during the War in federal prison, and Wole Soyinka recorded his experiences as a political prisoner in *The Man Died: Prison Notes* (1972). Soyinka's other works, *A Shuttle in the Crypt* (1972), a collection of poems; *Madmen and Specialist* (1971), a play; and *Season of Anomy* (1974), a novel, are also written in the context of the events surrounding the War. Fiction published in the first five years after the War—like Flora Nwapa's *Never Again* (1975, 1992), Kole Omotoso's, *The Combat* (1972), John Munonye's *A Wreath for the Maidens* (1973), S.O. Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1971), and Wole Soyinka's *Season of Anomy* (1974)—was a means to preserve the memory of the War, to appeal for moral responsibility among all citizens, and to shape the historic experience of generations of Nigerians. The remaining half of the decade witnessed a review of the War's post-traumatic aftermath, seeing the publication of books such as Chukwuemeka Ike's *Sunset at Dawn* (1976), Eddie Iroh's *Toads of War* (1976), Isidore Okpewho's *The Last Duty*

(1976), and Cyprian Ekwensi's *Divided We Stand* (1980), examining the need for a memorial or assessing the collective disillusionment and discontent of national unity.

Poetry also appeared to have played an important role during the War. According to Afam Ebeogu, poetry was a means of dealing with the feelings that violence caused (36). Although much of this war poetry was oral and performed as songs, it reflected the moods of the moment (37-38). To borrow Pol Ndu's words, the anthologies published after the War were "an essential experiment and experience" that "attempt[ed] to explore the ambivalences of an awakening creative spirit caught in the trauma of social catastrophe" (i). Ndu's statement demonstrates the nuanced rhetoric of a form of Nigerianness that is deployed in poetry, a contemplative strategy of ethnic identity, with profoundly imperfect pride based upon the negative emotions that were yet to be negotiated. Published war poetry includes Chinua Achebe's *Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems* (1973), Pol Ndu's *Songs for Seers* (1974), Wonodi Okogbule's *Dust of Exile* (1971), J.P Clark-Bekederemo's *Casualties: Poems* (1970), Soyinka's *Idanre, & Other Poems* (1967) and *Poems from Prison* (1969), and Ken Saro-Wiwa's "Silence," published in the *Black Orpheus* (1968), and *Songs in a Time of War* (1985). Many of these works evoke the disillusionment and dominant mood that emerged from the conflict, exploring the various themes of the enemy within, betrayal, and superior morality.

In the post-post-war phase (1984-2020), [24] literary production became even more socially critical and questioned the political corruption of the nation's elites. This particular phase saw some of the darkest periods of oppression in Nigeria, and so discouraged literature that questioned authority or the past of the leaders. There were intense human rights abuses under the military regimes of Muhammad Buhari (1983-1985), Ibrahim Babangida (1985–1993) and later

[24] While it can be argued that the post-post war phase is ongoing, the sources I have used for research have influenced this periodization.

on the villainous Sani Abacha (1993–1998), whose death led to the formation of civilian rule in Nigeria (1993 to present). Some of the writers in this period opposed the military dictatorship, writing literature that agitated against the regime. Although production was not as prolific as during the post-war era, there was a continued stream of war literature in the form of both witness accounts and postmemory narratives that re-examined memories of the War. Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo's *Roses and Bullets* (2011), Chris Abani's *Song for Night* (2007), Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), Chinelo Okparanta's *Under the Udala Tree* (2015), and Uzodinma Iweala's *Beasts of No Nation* (2006), continue to reflect how the War refuses to be relegated to the past.

Scholar Akachi T. Ezeigbo pointed out that "two-thirds of those who have recorded their experiences of the Nigerian Civil War are male" ("Politics of Remembrance" 223). While Ezeigbo's assertion that women were affected by the violence of the War, and that their perspectives on the War can offer an understanding of the gendered dichotomies is an attempt to incorporate women into the War, her discussions are very relevant to considering the significant differences in how Nigerians relate to each other. Ezeigbo's statement points to the many grievances that are entangled in silenced stories, especially in the face of a society emerging from the trauma of military dictatorship. As Gloria Chuku explains "Often, women are peripheralized or represented as passive spectators and victims of armed conflicts while men's heroism is highlighted" (10). Therefore, while the War greatly affected the sensibilities of all of those who were connected with it, it is important to note that a gendered response is valuable and may offer a different perspective on the trauma of war.

Reading a War: Four Novels as a Conceptual Framework

There is little question that the war novel is an over-privileged genre. It delves into the contestation of moral and ethical propriety that moves beyond sticking to historical facts, making it easier for the war novel to circulate as a cultural object. As a genre, the novel form is "omnipresent in both high art and mass culture," which confers on its representation "both a certain transparency and a definite complexity" (Hirsch 14). The novel is also the first genre in Nigeria to chronicle the disillusionment of war in a way that has yet to be captured in other literary forms. According to Griswold, since the publication of Sebastian Mezu's *Behind the Rising Sun* (1971), which is the first novel on the War, "[s]ubsequent War novels […] record the disillusion without offering a replacement" (229). Nigerian war novels record anxieties, with unresolved emotions carried over into subsequent acts of remembering.

My preference for the novel stems from its importance as the main vehicle (perhaps even *the* canonical genre) for literary mediation of the War. The four novels that I have selected as representative of the genre for this project capture gender, ethnicity, periodization, and experiences of the War**.** These four novels—Nwapa's *Never Again*, Omotoso's *The Combat*, Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun*—were all published between 1972 and 2006. These writers also cut across the positions of witnesses to the War and a post-memory generation. The four texts taken together can be considered connecting points from the memories and mental and psychical wounds that followed the War, as represented in the first post-war novels, to the sober reflections of the post-post-war works that came much later (Taiwo 212). All of the writers studied in this project also play a significant role in the development of a new literary tradition in Nigerian literature. Nwapa belongs to the first-generation of Nigerian novelists and is the foremother of African women's writing. *Never Again* is one of the attempts by survivors to fictionalize the war. Omotoso's *The Combat* is the first work published by a

witness who was not a war participant; he is also from the Yorùbá ethnic group that fought on the Federal side. Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* captures the experiences of the minority ethnic groups that were made to fight alongside Biafra. He is known as a leading voice of the minority, and his writing advocated strongly against the oppression of minority ethnic groups of the Niger-Delta, especially the Ogoni. Adichie is considered a prominent voice of the postmemory[25] generation and *Half of a Yellow Sun,* which has also been made into a film, has played a significant role in reviving debates on the War in recent times. Like Nwapa, she is also Igbo, which is the dominant ethnic group in the Biafran state.

Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* provides a fictional and symbolic insight into the pre- and post-war struggles of a young nation. The novel, which is divided into two sections, opens in Nsukka and alternates between the early and late 1960s, evoking pre- and post-war dynamics. The story is narrated through the eyes of the houseboy Ugwu, who recounts the lives of Olanna, and her finance, Odenigbo (his Master), who are both members of the academic community at the University of Nsukka. The meta-fictional element of the novel—for example, Richard's and the "foreign" community's life—adds complexity to its representation of the War's intricacies and everyday nature. Through Ugwu's character and his transition from a naïve village boy into the violent maturity of a war soldier, we learn about the simmering fear and anger of his Master and his friends on the nature and eventuality of war and the implications of the traumatic event.

Nwapa's *Never Again* explores class differences, anxieties, and patriotism in a divided state. In the novel, Kate (married to Chudi) is a strong-willed upper-middle-class citizen who flees from Enugu, Onitsha, Port Harcourt, and then Elele following the outbreak of the War in

[25] Here, I am referring to Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory," which describes the relationship of later generations to cultural, personal, and collective trauma "remembered" through mediated experiences like images, stories, music, and other cultural forms.

1967, to seek safety for her family of five children and a housemaid. With these cities falling into the hands of "vandals," who are believed to possess superior ammunition, a constant evacuation of residents occurs, leaving a trail of refugees across Biafra. The depressing sight of people trickling in and out of the land terrifies Kate, even as they arrive in Ugwuta, which is to be a hideout for her and her family. However, just as they arrive in the village, rumours of a possible invasion create tension, fear, and suspicion among the people so that anyone with a contrary view quickly earns the name "saboteur." Ugwuta eventually falls into the hands of federal troops, resulting in the devastating death of young and old until the Biafran soldiers recapture the town. Still, Kate's main interest is her survival and that of her family, and she remains skeptical of Biafra's success despite her husband's blind acceptance of a "victory" promoted in the media. Kate, the narrator, appears to be the only one who has not consumed the propaganda, which is intended to change the thought processes of Biafrans towards the Nigerian state.

Omotoso's *The Combat* is a war allegory, raising questions on the ethical issues of rights and wrongs, and how resentments are formed between classes. By incorporating both narration and the symbolic structure of its allegorical inquiry, *The Combat* represents experiences and comments on the complexities of the Nigeria-Biafra War at the same time. The plot revolves around two former housemates who get into a battle about a son they believe they fathered years ago through their "incestual" sexual exploitations of their mother, Moni (a street hawker now known as Dee Madam). The paternity battle escalates into a protracted judicial battle against Dee Madam's wishes, which allegorizes the Nigerian pre-war and war context.

Saro-Wiwa's novel examines the position of minority ethnic groups and their scarcely documented traumatic experiences. *Sozaboy* describes the implications of the War for ordinary people through Mene, who captures the mutual hatred that consumes the two sides of the War. Mene is an apprentice driver who joins the Army to be seen as a village hero and prove his

masculinity to his would-be-wife, Agnes. The novel also captures the lack of agency of the minorities, who Arua Omaka describes as the "forgotten victims" caught in the fray of the two sides during the War. In Saro-Wiwa's novel, the trauma of the War breaks Mene, turning him from an enthusiastic village boy, unsure of how he feels about the war, to a regret-filled ex-soldier whose new reality places him in a position of always fleeing and turning towards reflexivity to understand the war. Mene's reflexivity is our entry into understanding how shame is generated in the War from the position of the minorities.

In these four novels, the writers attempt to sustain the realities of the War. They create narratives that dig up the distrust embodied in the fibres of social relations that guide individual and collective memory of the war. These narratives are informed by discursive practices that have functioned to inflect divisions between Nigerians that have turned on ethnic and class differences. At its core is the premise that war trauma is an experience that generates subjects and compels particular affects that frame (or come to shape) the country's forms of relation, rather than only an event that wounds people. My project aims to depict the ways affects like hate, shame, and fear are reproduced, by conceptualizing the social relations they produce through a juxtaposition of cut-ups that tease out the emotions these war novels represent as social and political struggles. My working hypothesis is that such a focus on affect enables us to understand why Nigerian society remains caught in a condition of recirculating war trauma to harden its social divisions.

Writing Practice as Research: Elliptical Imaginings

In the creation of my creative works, I, like most writers, engage questioning, curiosity, and analysis. For example, in "Rememory," Toni Morrison writes about her "effort to substitute and rely on memory rather than history" as she distrusted recorded history to give her insight into

the "cultural specificity" she wanted (323). This is an attempt to re-invent histories that are not representative of her own specific experience, such that memory is reinvented into what she describes as *rememory.* As she explains of her novel *Beloved,* "Rememory as in recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past. And it was the struggle, the pitched battle between remembering and forgetting, that became the device of the narrative" (324). The concept finds meaning as a device in *Beloved,* which is structured around trying to remember what is not known and, at times, to forget what is known as a form of self-preservation. In essence what Morrison attempts to do is engage the work of "history versus memory, and memory versus memorylessness" (324). Morrison's concept of "rememory" captures the idea of how a writer's involvement in knowledge dissemination occasionally necessitates open negotiations with knowledge that may take an unexpected, or even controversial, turn.

I am inspired by Morrison's engagement with memory, particularly the idea of it as "insistent" yet becoming "the mutation of fact into fiction then folklore and then into nothing" (324). Although the cultural context from which Morrison's thought emerges and her creative method for writing is different from mine, I also pitch my writing practice in that space of "nothing."[26] What is inferred when nothing is expected in a narrative? In what way can *nothing* become a place for inquiry, especially in the context of trauma, in which an absence of a story also infers an expectation that the untold aspect will be recounted as emotions. This point is significant for contention of narratives surrounding traumatic events and how this becomes historical disputations between victims and perpetrators, as in the case of the Nigeria-Biafra War.

[26] My engagement with "nothing" in terms of absence here should not be mistaken for the philosophical subject explored by existentialists like Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre. I'm more intrigued by the concept of absent stories—silences, unfinished/untold stories—that remain in our minds.

In essence, what is considered history itself is based on the deliberate omission of a particular component of a historical occurrence. My writing practice, therefore, works to find ways to express "the locus of impossible speech" (3), to borrow Sadiya Hartman's words. My argument is that every story, memory, or history captures absences—as silences—that seek to be filled.

The memory of the Nigeria-Biafra War is contested in the face of an absent report and diverse personal narratives of survivors whose experiences are tied to social economy and ethnicity. The resulting narrative of the War is both a wilful attempt to forget and, in some cases, a silencing of what is remembered. Then there is also the unwilful remembering by those who want to ensure the War is never forgotten. In a case like this, narratives will always be told, but with intentional silences. The question is what inhabits these silences? The resulting tension that emerges is laced with emotions, as I argue. In the desire to have something tangible to hold on to as memory, the remembering lingers as a conflux of unexplored emotions—the "unsaid" that becomes constantly altered in the telling, or that becomes one of those stories better told with silence. James Baldwin refers to this as questions that have been overshadowed by answers (18-19).

In his non-fiction essay, "Punctuation," American poet Wayne Koestenbaum illuminates the functionality of punctuation for the reader and writer alike. He writes that, "My happiest moments as a writer and reader occur in the space around the period. Retroactive fixity suddenly enshrouds the sentence, as we look back on it; we can understand what it tried to mean, what it failed to say. We can forgive its incoherences" (1). I view the ellipsis as a place of contemplation, much as Koestenbaum does the period. But even more, my relationship with and approach to the ellipsis is as a mode of inquiry for my creative process. The ellipsis, in my opinion, is a hermeneutics of suspicion for generating modes of curiosity. By this, I mean that the ellipsis as an inquiry offers qualities for a suspicious reading and writing practice, "a muted

affective state—a curiously non-emotional emotion of morally inflected mistrust," which also allows for the deployment of innovation that generates a focus on depth rather than surface and interpretation rather than analysis (Felski). The ellipsis investigates what the imagination can provide and also seeks to understand the entanglement of memory and emotions. Emotions can become narratable, and memory—wherever it is investigated or evoked—is affected by the emotions in which the narrator is immersed. For me, the elliptical construction serves as a method of imagining content and form in a way that does not regard the past as fixed, but as a discursive manifestation of our ongoing realities. Generally, I would say there are a lot of stories out there, and I know this because our sense of who we are and how we live in the world is also shaped by our lives, which are unfinished in their appearance. Part of the complexity I am attempting to address in this dissertation is the way the War has produced so many stories/narratives that the resulting collective memory is both fractious and factioning. I spend a lot of time thinking about what is left out of the stories we share—the significance of these omissions—and how this affects how we remember the past, what we remember of the past, and what we choose to remember, to gain clarity in what becomes marginal experiences. In the context of the War, there are a number of "oppressed" or "ethnic" minorities, yet the multiplicity of their experiences of the War are reduced, largely, to the binary of Nigeria vs Biafra, which means the diversity and multiplicity of their experiences gets reduced to "marginal" as a singular category.

Within the framework of this research, where my interest is in traumatic memories, the ellipsis is a place for addressing the debate about trauma's unrepresentability while also emphasizing my Yorùbá philosophy of the critical role stories have in navigating traumatic experiences. I think of my creative process in terms of the elliptical. If the gaps are unfilled, in what way can I make them talk? And what does the gap have to say? I articulate this process of

evoking the power of the omitted as "elliptical imaginings" of antecedent narratives, and it is reflected in re-imagining a new representation for the war novels I study and bring into my creative process in this dissertation.

I refer to elliptical imaginings as the process of inventing stories that assist us in making sense of the disconnection and connection of experiences, both our own and those of others. I characterize elliptical imaginings as a way to witness those stories that plague our silence and demand to be told, those memories that create a lump in our throat, the sighing that takes the place of a story, or the memories we suppress for fear of being misunderstood and judged by another. I'm constantly reminded of those moments of punctuation that cause us to reconsider assumptions about our experiences.

So far, I have tried to highlight the sense of the elliptical construction in my writing practice as a space where I am constantly negotiating what is, or can be omitted, the type of the omission, and the effect that omitting one item has on the elliptical prospects of others. I use my creative work to imagine and re-imagine the omissions in our every day—those stories we carry as emotions are what I will describe as the *weight of an ellipsis.*

When an unfinished story is captured around the best organizing principle, it finds purpose. The idea in my writing in *Circumtrauma* isn't only to use the ellipsis, which guides my writing practice, to look at untold stories, as a writer would typically do; I also look at the ellipsis's contradiction, which is how I learn that the presence of an ellipsis also implies an alteration of meanings. The exploration of the elliptical—the omitted narrative—coincides with representations of the anxieties of ordinary lives in their entanglement with the post-war issues that I examine in this project. The structure of my creative writing project is influenced by this sense of imagining the elliptical, which results in my use of the cut-up poetry technique and Ifá divination poetry. William Burroughs, one of the seminal figures of the beat generation, believed

the cut-up technique "brought writing closer to life" (Robinson 10). Using the cut-up technique and Ifá divination poetry, the authorial voice is distanced in order to address the conditional status of narrative and identity. The rearranging and juxtaposition of lines from the four war novels I have chosen to work with in poetry assumes, imagines, senses, performs, and asserts not a fixed reality, but some possibilities of what has come into view, in an attempt to become attentive to what a particular experience might offer.

My research into the War, as well as the observed affective component with which people continue to live, has led me to believe that poetry is a better genre for executing my findings. It is the one genre that provides room for an elliptical imagining of structure/form, even when detached from its original language. Poetry can connect profoundly with bodily experience due to its persistent physicality, sensibility to change and time, and capacity to transmit affect. Therefore, I see *Circumtrauma* as able to theorize, through cut-up, how the configured forms of shared trauma transmitted through narratives of the War become, in everyday life, a generator of negative emotions that are transmitted in the society across generations.

Critiquing and Creating Untold Stories of War

Generally, I am interested in the ways narratives shape memories of historical events, especially what and how people remember. My approach to war narratives, in this affective form, is in their ability to linger. My research revolves around the process by which narratives alter individual and collective memory.[27] To clarify, in this project, I use the term "narrative" to mean the story's manifestation, which is essentially how an experience is portrayed and how the

[27] As you will notice, I prefer to use the word "narrative" rather than "story," except when I am particular about genre. For me, narratives comprise stories. Stories are common, and do not reflect the complexity and richness of an experience holistically.

delivery of that experience is structured and sequenced. Beyond simply narrating the story, I deem a narrative to be an approach that transmits knowledge about an event. This means that I consider a narrative to be able to communicate diverse stories from which a central perspective evolves to represent an event. My argument is that this "central perspective" of varied stories is embroiled in emotion, and that all the stories that arise attempt to elaborate an emotional framework into a group narrative, which is buried in the writing. The complexity of the War is such that new novels from the likes of Uwem Akpan (*New York My Village*) argue for the pain of not knowing how to narrate the trauma of minorities caught between the Federal side and the Biafran state. He writes about the "inherited pain of war" (403) carried by his people. I draw your attention to his word, *pain*, and its affective dimension not only as an emotion but also an experience.

In his study of attitudes and responses to post-war writing in Nigeria, Obi Nwakanma writes that following the War, the writing that emerged "reflect[ed] the range of emotions of the new nation and the character of its location within late modernity" (3). Nwakanma is saying that these narratives are doing more than representing the events of the war. Poetry as a genre, has always attempted to show what, in my writing practice, I describe as the "absent" yet seen part of the war, which is transmitted as emotions and carried around as a form of memory.

In *Casualties*, one of the more significant poetry volumes on the Nigeria-Biafra War, J. P. Clark explores the 1966 coup d'etat and subsequent events that precipitated the War. Clark's poems reflect his emotional response to the event and are a representation of the state's collective anxiety as a symptom of the war's trauma. He describes the poems in his book as an attempt to focus on the "unspeakable events that all but tore Nigeria apart" (54), bringing together fragments of individual and collective memory. Significantly, by evoking the emotions associated with the War, his poems investigate its transformative effects on ordering and

organizing social relations. Likewise, Gabriel Okara, in *The Fisherman's Invocation,* considers the War beyond the physical casualties at the warfront and focuses on the event's psychological effect in its aftermath. He compares the negative emotions that emerge from the War to a cancerous growth, "like mushroom through yielding soil/but it's an alien growth/a cancer that destroys its host" (52). For Odia Ofeimun, hate becomes a threat to national welfare. In "Exodus ''67," one of the poems in *The Poet Lied*, Ofeimun writes: "behold these senseless abattoirs/and this seed about to be earthed:/what unhealthy hate convulses us all" (23). Indeed, these poets' reflections reveal emotional charges that create a "re-feeling" of the War's violence, moulding social and individual reality. Yet, how do these poems, written in the typical lyrical style, offer alternative stories, and ask new questions? They tend to evoke a sense of return to the trauma, while leaving out the ways in which emotions inscribed in the narration may reframe social relations in the future.

My objective in this dissertation is to create poetry that attempts to redirect the reader to the disruptive potentials registered in war narratives that persist in the lives of ordinary people. Through cut-up poetry, *Circumtrauma* attempts to evoke the range of emotions represented in the war novels I've selected by employing a creative process to not only re-encounter the traumatic event, but to highlight the complexity of memory and representational crises that situate stories about War as ones that leaks into the future. In this way, my creative project concurrently reflects the emotional legacy, valences, currencies that shapes the memory of the War.

My use of this form of conceptual poetry, therefore, is deliberate to guarantee that each poem in the collection evokes in the reader's mind a feeling of the War's complexities. The resulting intertextuality in these poems not only disrupts the archive by adapting these novels into my poetry, it also hints at the intricate interrelationships that can exist between literary texts (in this case, these war novels and my poetry), and that awareness of such an interrelationship is

necessary for the recognition and interpretation of each text's signification. Furthermore, there is the way in which the violence embedded in the narratives emerges from the page, as if it were a foreshadowing of the future, with acknowledgement of the War's surrounding emotions. As Eva Illouz writes, "Emotion is *not* action per se, but it is the inner energy that propels us toward an act, what gives a particular "mood" or "coloration" to an "act" (2). For Illouz, emotions precipitate the act, because as she writes, emotion "always concerns the self and the relationship of the self to culturally situated others". Hence, "[e]motion can thus be defined as the 'energy-laden' side of action, where that energy is understood to simultaneously implicate cognition, affect, evaluation, motivation, and the body" (2). Using the structure of the Ifá corpus along with the cut-up poetry form, I generate poetry that, identify and also demonstrate the emotional realities that make it clear that Nigeria is a country burdened by anxieties from unresolved emotions in its narratives.

As my poetry demonstrates, emotions are a form of embodied "memory" that re-emerges anytime there is a re-experiencing of the War, including when it is represented in narratives. There is also the proclivity for emotions to embody what we consider to be history, to echo Elfriede Hermann's claim in his analysis of the cultural productions of the Banabans of Fiji. Hermann argues that "emotions—in conjunction with experiences—are involved in culturally specific representations of the past, in the structuring of consciousness of history and in historicity *per se*" (276). Similarly, Richard Reid highlights the importance of studying emotions in order to understand momentous events. He writes that "in Nigeria … the government sought to marginalize the past and place emphasis on what was still to come. The past was pretty depressing and in short did little for national morale" (126). For Reid, African societies with their histories of endemic violence will benefit from this kind of scholarly work, particularly since, as he writes, "the study of emotions [is] in its infancy" (113). My emphasis on emotional

realities as represented and transmitted in war novels reflects this invitation to consider *emotional content and significance* in structuring interactions in the present and to see beyond the past in Nigeria. Even so, I wrestled with the methodological implications of such an undertaking before settling for cut-up poetry and Ifá divination system as the best form of investigating my project.

My dissertation considers the specificity of the Nigerian context, in which the emotions of the war's trauma narratives are "effectuated and received," while being "open to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance that these contexts invite or necessitate" (Craps *Postcolonial Witnessing* 43). I employ the fictional texts I have chosen in order to interpose the Western and postcolonial theories in trauma studies and frame a metamodel for a book-length collection of poems using the cut-up technique. In the execution of the poetry collection, I argue that determining and identifying the existing but unexplored emotions expressed in these four literary works necessitates an artistic inquiry as a necessary component in my scholarly investigation. As Mary Frances suggests, "Any re-arrangement of objects, images or text insists that we tell ourselves alternative stories, that we ask new questions" (15). She describes the potentials of mixing words and images as disruptive and a "powerful way of hearing voices through censorship, confronting us with hidden meaning and promoting new connections without speaking explicitly" (15). This technique is particularly appropriate for investigating the emotions in and lingering on from the War, considering the conflicting nature of the War's historiography.

There is some degree of public cohesion among Nigeria's various ethnic groups: the simmering discontent over how each ethnic group "feels." The narratives that have been communicated and known in both public and domestic spaces appear to create structures of exclusion, injustice, and inequality on a broader scale. As Demertzis identifies, "emotions are

culturally mediated [,] . . elicited and experienced relationally and situationally [,] . . [and] expressed according to structures of feeling which make for its valence, arousal, and potency" (5). The ways in which emotions upset social relations is reflected when a war experience is circulated in public discussions, in published form, or when issues of public office veer towards subjects of marginalization and representation. Since the end of the War, for example, new groups throughout Nigeria have continued to form and dominate news stories in their agitation for secession in response to the perceived marginalization of their groups. These groups harbour animosity toward the "state," which in this context sometimes means some other members of the country. As I gained knowledge about the War primarily through literature, I developed an interest in the interfaces between emotions and narrative, particularly how emotions can become what is remembered about the war experience and how emotions surrounding the War characterize the ways in which Nigerians relate with one another. As Vera Nünning explains, "in order to comprehend the relation between narrative and emotions, it is important to remember that one's emotions are shaped by the way the 'eliciting situation' is construed" (31).

The four sections of *Circumtrauma*, both in the length of the poems and the number in each section, are inspired by the first four permutations that emerge from the Ifá divination system. Ifá divination is a complex system and the major source of knowledge for Yorùbá religion, culture and society, housing the people's knowledge, cosmology and belief. In Odeyemi's words, Ifá comprises different essences that include the spiritual, the religious, the divine, the worship and sacrificial, the medicinal, the historic, the scientific and the cultural (qtd. in Oyebisi 23). Given these essences, it is understandable that approaches to or applications of Ifá vary from individual to individual. For my research, I employ the scientific and cultural essence of Ifá, specifically the logic, philosophy, and computation underlying its foundational structure, which is intrinsic to the divination system. The system has 16 basic figures from which

240 minor combinations are created. This system holds a corpus of literary texts coded in the binary-based tetragram and octagram system ($2^4 = 16$; $2^8 = 256$ – 16 books and 256 chapters). The Ifá literary corpus is a combination of 256 parts with over 1,700 verses, and with further permutations formed from the binary system, it can yield over 400,000 micro stories.

So, each section of *Circumtrauma* has sixteen poems (doubled to signify the binary system that influences their structure). My representation of the divination for my work is mostly an attempt to depict the futility of representing trauma, such that I begin the four sections in this collection with markings that represent the traditional binary figures that emerge in the divination process.[28] Each of the binary figures were translated into decimal numbers, and this helps to generate the number of lines for each of the poems. The possibilities that emerge in generating cut-up poetry intersect with ways in which the binary nature of the divination system is infinite, and I see this as a way to represent how trauma can linger, manifest, and continue manifesting as different forms of violence.

The first section, for example "2^," establishes the first 16 binary systems from which other permutations emerge. For section two "0000," section three "1111," and section four "1001," I create cut-up poetry that captures only the first sixteen permutations, although this can extend further. The idea of these poems is not to focus on themes as would apply to most poetry collections; rather, the intention is to see how trauma can manifest and evoke emotions in different ways in the juxtaposition of these lines drawn from the four war novels on which I focus. In section one, for instance, the juxtaposition of these novels presents a trauma that crosses borders to create pain, fear, and shame:

[28] I elaborate on this in the proem section, which introduces the techniques involved in the divination process.

"our body is the fluent suffering of those who die lonely overseas

our body is lying somewhere
our body is: a lonely home an insanity
our body is a lake

The example above illustrates what *Circumtrauma* attempts to do: move to speak the silence and absences that present the condition of trauma as a continuous process of integrating the past into the present. The central idea is to bring these four war novels together and demonstrate the resemblances and differences in the emotional hauntings represented in them. This process could be regarded as a method for "reach[ing] for a larger idea outside of the text" (Place and Fitterman 11), or for creating a new poem that can produce the conflated emotions expressed in war texts even without a "thinkership"[29] that comes with generating poetry influenced by history, witnessing, or memory. To arrive at the emotions and hauntings earlier mentioned, I demonstrate how absence (and loss) in war narratives are central to identity formation in the work of remembering. For example, in *Circumtrauma*, the cut-up poetry technique reveals the interstices between memory, trauma, and melancholic affect to characterise how war narratives frequently serve as a fertile ground for creating new literary forms.

War novels retain an open-ended melancholic engagement with the past and demonstrate an attempt to register absence through different modes of productivity. In a bid to demonstrate melancholy's polyvalent nature and how it manifests itself in war novels, building upon the distinction between mourning and melancholia as distinct reactions to loss, the productivities of both processes help to assess and think about the complex ways that emotions emerge from loss in the four war novels employed in this dissertation. Freud, while examining the psychological

[29] Place and Fitterman uses the term "thinkership" to describe the move away from the affective, the emotive and the vulnerable, which comes with reading a work but knowing the idea behind the work and reflecting on it.

processes of "mourning" and "melancholia" in his 1917 essay "Mourning and Melancholia," emphasizes an object-relations theory useful for examining interiority and affect in trauma. For Freud, mourning is "the reaction to the loss of a loved person . . . some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on" (243). He explains that in mourning, the ego undergoes the process of suffering as the libido is withdrawn slowly from the loved object, which is subjected to material reality until the ego regains its freedom. In the case of the *unheimlich* (the displacement), the melancholic, following loss, does not transfer the libido to another object but withdraws it into the ego. Identifying with the abandoned object, the ego withdraws to itself, and this process transforms the object loss drawn from consciousness into an ego loss, creating a split in the ego. Freud explains that in melancholia (which can be identified as incomplete mourning), there is "a lowering of self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-reviling and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment" (244). For Freud, the fixing of libidinal energy—or cathexes—on some idea, person, or object makes the process of mourning difficult and painful. Hence, as a reaction to loss, Freud argues that mourning can be overcome. However, in the process of melancholia, the suffering is unending because the lost object does not physically detach itself, producing what Freud later describes as the super-ego. Although an unconscious act, melancholia is regarded as a pathological condition that creates a loss of value in the self and can lead to suicidal tendencies. Mourning, however, is seen as healthy since it is a conscious process towards healing. [30]

In recent theories, melancholia is considered a critical force in relation to memory, postcoloniality, and trauma. Lucy Brisley writes about melancholia being deployed as a "socio-

[30] It is worth noting that Freud was clear he did not regard melancholia as pathology or mourning as healthy, rather society did.

political mechanism for protest and remembrance" (100), and Meghan Tinsley describes how "melancholic sites of memory . . . resist closure and instead compel spectators to bear witness to the past," which inevitably results in a "selective construction of memory alongside processes of erasure" (3-4). Nonetheless, despite assertions of eurocentrism, affect theory (particularly melancholia) works well in a non-European context, especially when applied by scholars who have studied it in an African or postcolonial setting. Paul Gilroy and Demir Danyela examine the ways refusing to let go of the traumatic past obstructs the working-through of violence, yet prevents historical amnesia, which advertently becomes a consciousness that provides some miraculous return to life. The scholar Ndigirigi Gichingiri, in examining Ngugi wa Thiong'o's memoirs, draws attention to the critical role of literary productions in substituting grief for grievance (93). In a way, this constant return to the melancholic engagement with the past can also be linked to Freud's theory of the uncanny, and to Jacques Derrida's *hauntologie*, which has been widely explored in postcolonial studies.

The study of the tension and process(es) of the withdrawal of libido in melancholy provides a first step towards understanding how the temporality of loss becomes a way to evaluate the constant engagement with the War in Nigeria's cultural production. My own impression is that emphasizing unrepresentability, which has remained a central concept in trauma studies,[31] narrows the focus to the sacralized object or event, rather than attending to how it is memorialized and passed down through the generations. Also, with scholars like Amy Hungerford, Greg Forter, and Naomi Mandel arguing for the variability of trauma's representation in their works, one of my interests in this dissertation is the extent to which

[31] See, for example, Felman and Laub, *Testimony*; and Caruth, "Recapturing the Past."

melancholia is a dominant affect in war scholarship because it permeates negative emotions as relational processes. This inquiry influences my thinking about *circumtrauma.*

The poems that begin the first chapter of *Circumtrauma* capture 0000, the poems that say nothing. These poems interrogate the process of mourning and melancholia and the silenced narratives that become embodied as negative emotions. The binary notation for the first sign is 0000, which in decimal notation is 0. To represent this sense of negativity, which is also a silence and the enormity of what can lie in the unspoken, I use the marks || || || || across the page. The idea behind this poem is best captured in Vanessa Place and Robert Fitterman's meditation on conceptual writing and its engagement with the failings of language. To represent silence in the signs of the binary marks as words is to imagine the unsaid—in the past, in the present, and in the future—as living and embodied in the totality of always being in the experience. In the imagination, the unsaid carried into emotions is a total experience—it is felt, it is a transcript of the absent history. Yet, as Place and Fitterman write in the context of conceptual poetry, "when the word is the wound (the site of failure), there are two extreme forms of mimetic redress: isolate and seal the word/wound (pure conceptualism), or open and widen the word/wound (impure conceptualism and the baroque). The first is the response of the silenced subject, the second, the screaming subject" (56). I think about the "screaming subject" in this case as the generation-after. The idea that trauma can also travel across generations is revealed in a new light in the juxtaposition of the words of novelists from different generations in my poetry in *Circumtrauma*.

Marianne Hirsch's examination of the transmissibility of trauma from survivors across generations through her concept of "postmemory" has been very influential for me. Hirsch reflects on photographs from her childhood as representative of "the timeless presence of the past," requesting "a narrative, for a listener, for a survivor's tale" ("Family Pictures" 5). Rather

than positing a direct recall of trauma, or latent return as Caruth does, Hirsch examines trauma as a mediated experience. Explaining the concept of postmemory, she writes that it "is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by *deep personal connection"* (22). She adds that "[p]ostmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation*"* (22). Therefore, while survivors may suffer the trauma of the event immediately as well as its latent return, for their children it may manifest inexplicably as absence and silence. My claim is that the emotion carried in the event is transmitted such that it takes the place of narrative, especially when narrative is considered contentious.

My dissertation synthesises five years of research on the Nigeria-Biafra War. The inclusion of the "proem" section of the project is meant to break down the Ifá Divination Process, which may not be readily available to Western audiences. I conclude my project with a Coda that situates my work in the field of research creation and, in the typical fashion of creative research dissertations in North America, I also provide a biographical sketch. Along with the biographical sketch I offer a works consulted list of war histories, scholarships, critical theories and approaches, all of which influenced my research. The findings of my research are demonstrated in the form, craft, and techniques I employ in *Circumtrauma.* Since I take seriously that research work can entail a "reciprocal relationship between research and creative practice," *Circumtrauama* also operates as a paradigm of research-led practice in the field of creative writing studies, in which the "scholarly research can lead to creative work" (Smith and Dean 1).[32]

[32] Smith and Dean write that "In creative writing, for example, research-led practice is mainly conceptual and tends to be driven by critical and cultural theory" (8).

My overall objective is that this dissertation, in executing the affective tendencies of the War through poetry, generates new questions on the role of emotions in and after the War. Even more, I demonstrate the need for newer ways of investigating the War so that *Circumtrauma* contributes knowledge to creative practice in Africa and in Canadian African studies. This dissertation is key for scholars of Nigeria-Biafra War studies and African Literature for two reasons. First, *Circumtrauma* poses a challenge to readers who may not think to consider how placing words from different texts in relation to others can create a new piece that is a form of contemplation and analysis. Second, my work lays out a methodology and a poetics through which to grapple with the postwar realities that register in the unexpressed emotions of untold stories.

Circumtrauma

Proem: Technique and Process

This proem discusses the technique and process employed in creating *Circumtrauma,* a creative project that originated as a theoretical insight and creative response to connecting academic and creative research. *Circumtrauma* is a poetry collection of conceptual poetry, combining the systematized element of the Ifá Divination system, an Indigenous form of inquiry and diagnosis with cut-up poetry techniques to respond to the Nigeria-Biafra War critically and to foster meaningful engagement with and understanding of the War.

Ifá divination system is a geomancy method common to all the Yorùbá peoples.[33] Geomancy is a divination practice that interprets ground markings or patterns on a surface, and it is found in different cultures. The Ifá system is considered to be the encyclopedia of the Yorùbá knowledge system, science, and philosophy. Although Ifá is frequently promoted as, and traced to, divinities, its structure and form demonstrate that it is a deliberate process of inquiry that existed over 2000 years ago.[34] Adélékè Adéẹ̀kọ́ argues that "[t]he foundational role of the inscription system in Ifá divination distinguishes it as a 'literate' learned means of inquiry—Ifá is commonly called alákọ̀wé, the scribe or literate one and not a seance or other kind of intuitive, magical, or 'gifted' fortune telling" (287).

Ifá is considered a philosophy and Ọ̀rúnmìlà, the Ifá originator a philosopher. In fact, as Olúwolé Tẹ́wọ́gboyè Òkéwándé explains, "[t]he gamut of Ifá relates to the past (the memory), the present (contemporary), and the future (the unborn)" (153). O. Morakinyọ notes this foregrounds an argument of an encompassing and phenomenological infinite knowledge that means "the belief and perspective of mind which holds that the perceptible presence of an object

[33] The Yorùbá are a West African ethnic group mostly found in parts of Benin, Nigeria, and Togo.
[34] See, for example: Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition*; Adéẹ̀kọ́, "'Writing' and 'Reference'"; Òkéwándé, *Decolonising*; Bascom, *Ifá Divination*.

as well as its substance are incapable of being fully or completely known or recognized" (qtd in Òkéwándé 153).[35] The act of divination is, as F. O. Alamu et. al mention, "an act of seeking knowledge of future or hidden things" (524). In essence, it is an Indigenous form of inquiry. These forms of inquiry may involve techniques that could be psychological or natural. My project focuses on the systemic yet significant part of Ifá in this chapter.

My interest in Ifá is in its application of systematized rules in its process. Largely, the structure of *Circumtrauma* is influenced by the mathematical permutation that frames the Ifá divination. The poems in *Circumtrauma* are created using cut-ups, which involves "the creation of new texts by cutting up at least two existing texts and recombining the fragments, at random" to generate new meaning (Robinson 1). Robinson writes that, "of all modes of experimental writing, with perhaps the exception of the Joycean stream of consciousness approach, the cut-up—the literal cutting and splicing of existing texts to create a new text—was perhaps the most important literary innovation of the twentieth century" (6). By writing poetry solely within the affective world created by Omotoso's *The Combat* (1972), Nwapa's *Never Again* (1983), Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy* (1994) and Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), I can exploit the registration of affect to create a distinct literary metalanguage in which unspoken emotions emerge in a way that captures the temporal multidimensionality of the War, while also conveying new and distinct meanings. I employ the structure on which the Ifá knowledge system is based as an aesthetic device for "rethinking" the Nigeria-Biafra War as a place from which questions can emerge for our understanding of the present.

Circumtrauma, in its combination of an Indigenous aesthetic form and cut-up poetry, "re-educate[s] readers to read and draw meaning from the composite texts, irrespective of their

[35] This is established, even in the process of the infinite nature of the binary form used in the divination, as I explain later in this proem. I will also discuss how this insight applies to the structure I develop for *Circumtrauma.*

awareness of their original sources" (Robinson 55). As Robinson notes, cut-up texts are "designed to reflect the less conscious functions of memory," and this creates an opportunity to read into the unacknowledged grievances layered into the texts that I cut-up for this project. Ultimately the use of cut-up offers a new way of reading the War and understanding externalized emotions and embodied collective memory associated with social and political memory. It, therefore, provides scholars of Nigeria-Biafra War studies, of violence and trauma, and of Nigerian literature a new way to read the War.

Even though I am employing only an aspect of the Ifá system for my creative project, I will provide an overview of the procedure, the instruments of divination, and how they are employed in producing mathematical permutations for diagnosis and predictions. In the following sections I will explain the Ifá Divination Process in relation to other geomantic systems. I will then discuss the instruments of Ifá divination, their function and process, to arrive at the systematized system, which is the component from the divination process that inspires my work. Finally, I will explain how I apply the system to the structure of my work.

Ifá Divination: A Geomantic System of Divination

Different cultures all over the world practice divination and have used geomancy for sacred and religious practices. According to Melvin-Koushki, "the Latin term geomancy translates from *geomantia,* which translates from the Arabic, *ilm al-raml*, the science of sand" (788). In most civilizations, geomancy follows a set formula that includes castings and the application of sixteen figures, which may be followed by a ritualized procedure. My interest in this project is not in the ritual aspect of the geomancy divination process, as I mentioned earlier, but the mathematical logic of it.

The Chinese divination system of I Ching, the Arabic method of sketching (introduced to Europe in the medieval era through Arabic texts), and the Indian practice of the Ramal Shastra are all geomantic divination systems. The geomatic figures in each of these divination systems are labelled and intended to generate meanings that capture the context of the intellectual milieu from which they developed. A single random figure's value can be used to make predictions. However, the practice typically employs a more complex technique that entails the building of a chart comprised of fifteen or sixteen positions for arranging the figures. All these divination systems rely on sixteen figures, derived from combining two values (odd and even) into groups of four. This connects mathematical forms such as arithmetic, number theory, and even algebra to this type of divinatory technique. Among the different divination systems that use the geomancy technique, the Ifá divination process is the only one attached to a body of verses that embody the knowledge system of the Yorùbá people and from which predictions are made to a client. Ifá is considered to have all answers; hence its priests undergo long years of training. Oyebola writes that, "The preinitiation training of the Ifá priest takes between ten to twenty years, depending on the age when training started, the speed of learning of the trainee and the eagerness of the master to impart knowledge to the trainee" (94).

The Instrument of the Ifá Divination

There are four major divination tools that the Ifá priests uses:

a) Divination tray (*Opon Ifá*)

b) The powder for divination (*iyerosun*)

c) The sixteen sacred palm nuts (*ikin*)

d) The divination chain (*Opele*)

I draw the description of these tools used in the Ifá divination process from explanations offered by Abimbola, Oyebola, and Bascom. I have in certain instances borrowed from the organizational structure Oyebola employs to discuss the Ifá Divination Process in order to make it easier for my non-Yorùbá audience. The divination tray is a solid structure, mostly spherical, and in a few instances square. The powder for divination is usually spread on the divination tray. For my project, I will focus mainly on the sixteen sacred palm nuts and the divination chain, to illustrate how I created the structure for *Circumtrauma.*

The Sixteen Sacred Palm Nuts (*Ikin*)

There are two important instruments for divination that can result in the same interpretation: the first and the oldest is the *Ikin* (sixteen palm nuts from a specific palm-tree with four eyelets), and it is considered a sacred power.[36] The second is the *Opele*, or divination chain. Both the sacred palm nuts and the divination chain can be seen as tools for decoding the philosophy and knowledge system of the Yorùbá people. We can think of them as ancient computers of Yorùbá origin in which the historical and social data of the people is encoded systematically.

The *Ikin* is used by most priests on special occasions. When divining using sacred palm nuts, the divining powder is placed on the surface of the divining tray in preparation for drawing marks with fingers in the powder. All sixteen palm nuts are held inside the Ifá priest's left palm, while the priest attempts to collect them all at once with the other palm (usually the right palm). Suppose one nut remains inside the priest's hand after his first attempt; in that case, he will make

[36] More information on why the sacred palm nuts is considered the most important instrument of Ifá can be found in Abimbola, *Ifá: An Exposition*.

two upright markings on the yellow divination powder evenly dispersed on the divination board that appear like Arabic “eleven” (II) in Roman Figure (11). If two nuts remain after this second effort, he makes one vertical mark (I) just below the previous two marks. As a result, we have the following pattern:

||

|

The priest collects the nuts and, depending on whether two or more nuts remain in his palm, he creates one or two of the marks illustrated above. He repeats the process until he has made the marks four times in two rows, beginning on the priest’s right, and then moving to the priest’s left. He must keep gathering the nuts until he has created four vertical marks on the right side first, followed by four patterns on the left side. If he has more than two nuts in his palm or has none remaining, he will leave no mark. Most of the diviners attribute the reason for making two markings for one nut and one for two nuts to an instruction they received from Ifá. When the scooping is successfully done eight times, and the diviners make four marks on the right and four patterns on the left, the result is thought to be the signature of an *Odu*. *Odu* is a subcategory of Ifá divination poetry and the system’s defining trait. I borrow from this trait to develop the structure of *Circumtrauma.*

As previously explained, unlike other geomantic methods, Ifá Divination System is accompanied by poetry, which encodes history, culture, and even medicinal cures. This poetry is organized logically using the *Odu* system. Alamu, et al write that “Ifá is coded within 256 *Odu*s or Corpus,” with each *Odu* representing a cryptic category that is also divisible into 256 sub-categories. These 256 *Odu*s “come with 1680 sacred verses that are presented in parable format,” all of which total 430, 080 messages for mankind (525). Some scholars, like Falola and Bascom, have argued that the number of messages is infinite, and that no Ifá priest knows all the sacred

verses. According to these two scholars, the *Odu* system can generate a multibillion series of interpretations and probabilities. This is a valid argument as we will see, based on the binary nature of the *Odu* system.

In the 256 *Odu*s[37] of the Ifá Divination System, there are Sixteen principals, and 240 minors. The signatures generated in this manner are read from right to left. For instance, if the Ifá priest continues to have two nuts inside his hand each time, he makes his vertical marks to the right and left; he will make one mark on the right four times and one mark on the left four times. As a result, *Eji Ogbe*'s signature will appear twice (*Ogbe Meji* or *Eji Ogbe*). On the right is *Ogbe*, and on the left is *Ogbe*. This is the most significant of the 256 *Odu* in the Ifá system of divination.[38] The *Eji Ogbe*'s signature is as follows.

|	|
|	|
|	|
|	|

In the event that the Ifá priest has one nut left in his palm after gathering the nuts eight times in a row, he will make two marks for each of the eight times: four times on the right and four times on the left. The signature *Odu* that emerges from this process is *Oyeku Meji*, which means *Oyeku* twice. This is *Oyeku* on the right as well as on the left:

||	||
||	||
||	||
||	||

[37] See Appendix for the geometrical interpretation of the 256 *odu* as developed by Dr. Will Coleman, Oscar Daniel and Brad Ost.

[38] *Eji Ogbe* is considered as the most important because it is the first odu of the 256.

The naming method is as follows: all *Odu* signatures that are identical on the right and left have the word *Meji or eji* (which means two or doubles). All of the *Odu*s that comprise the description *Meji* (two) are referred to as the basic *Odu*, and there are sixteen of them, as previously indicated. The signature on the right serves as the basis for the *Odu*'s sixteen basic names. Thus, there are sixteen basic names (legs) from which the remaining 256 are derived. The sixteen basic patterns on the right are then coupled with the sixteen basic patterns on the left to pr*Odu*ce the 256 derived patterns or names that we refer to as *Odu* below*:*

Table 1: *Meji Odu* (Double Principals)

1. Ogbe Meji	5. Irosun Meji	9. Ogunda Meji	13. Otura Meji
2. Oyeku Meji	6. Owonrin Meji	10. Osa Meji	14. Irete Meji
3. Iwori Meji	7. Obara Meji	11. Ika Meji	15. Ose Meji
4. Odi Meji	8. Okanran Meji	12. Oturupon Meji	16. Ofun Meji

To obtain marks for the "*Meji*" *Odu*, the marks in Table 2 below are made into identical rows (*Eji Ogbe*, *Oyeku Meji*, etc.). The sixteen main *Odu*s, made from the sixteen palm nuts, are shown in Table 2 below.[39]

The sixteen palm nuts are used to make the vertical marks for the sixteen basic *Odu*s, as shown below:

Table 2: The sixteen Basic *Odu*s

[39] Table 1 is based on the table in the Appendix. It is possible to find variations in the order of the principals in some books or by some practitioners. The order is based on lineage. See Appendix for the complete 256 *Odu* with their marks.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Ogbe	Oyeku	Iwori	Odi	Irosun	Owanrin	Obara	Okanran
| | | |	|| || || ||	|| | | ||	| || || |	| || || ||	|| || | |	| || || ||	|| || || |
9	**10**	**11**	**12**	**13**	**14**	**15**	**16**
Ogunda	Osa	Ika	Oturupon	Otura	Irete	Ose	Ofun
| | | ||	|| | | |	|| | || ||	|| | | ||	| || | |	| | || |	| || | ||	|| | || |

A simple way to understand this sequence is to think of the entire corpus of *Odu* verses as long complex poems organized into sixteen books. The first book comprises all of the *Odu* called *Meji* (Twos), which means the right and left leg are identical (Table 1). Once this is established, the rest of the *Odu* follows a simple formula which I will explain, and which I borrow from in structuring *Circumtrauma.* The formula is straightforward: the books are numbered from 1 to 16. Each of these novels is followed by fifteen minor works.[40] The fifteen books of *Odu* run through all the possibilities of a single leg, except the senior verses. This means that if the first book of *Odu* doubles the sixteen basic *Odu*, the second book of *Odu* includes *Ogbe* combined with the

[40] I explain how I use this formula later in "The Poetics of *Circumtrauma*."

remaining fifteen legs. The two *Odu* are read in reverse order (left to right). Each book begins with the book's principal *Odu* on the right, then the *Odu* flips. For example, the first chapter of book two is titled *Ogbe Oyeku*, whereas the second chapter is titled *Oyeku Oyeku*. The second book continues in this vein, progressing chronologically through the *Odu* in the following order: *Ogbe Oyeku*, *Oyeku Ogbe*, *Ogbe Iwori*, etc.[41] The permutations of the sixteen principal *Odu*s produce the 240 minor *Odu*s. Significantly, as Oyebola explains, even when the signatures mirror themselves, they are different *Odu* nonetheless (100). Therefore, an *Ogbe Oyeku* is not the same thing as *Oyeku Ogbe*.

The Divination Chain (*Opele*)

The *Opele* (divining chain) is another instrument used by Ifá Priests for divination. Although it is different from the sixteen sacred palm nuts, they arrive at the same *Odu* signature. In fact, the *Opele* is the one mostly used in daily divination (Bascom 29). Most Ifá priests consider it easier for the divination process. The *Opele* is made from the seeds of *Schrebera golungensis* (Bascom 46). The divining chain is comprised of eight half nuts with convex/concave sides linked by a strand of chain and connected at the end by a cowrie, beads, or tassel. The concave side is rough, while the convex is smooth. The seed sections are of equal length, such that when the chain is held in the middle the two sides hang down an equal distance on both sides with four half nuts of the pod on each side (Bascom 68-76). Each arm is differentiated with the cowries or beads tied to the end of the arms, so that the diviner does not misread—for example, mistaking *Odi Iwori* for *Iwori Odi*. The priest holding the chain at the centre swings it gently, and lays it on the cloth with the U-shape facing him. The priest tosses the

[41] The graph in the Appendix illustrates this well.

chain away from himself with his right hand (even if he is left-handed), in a way that lets the two open ends fall nearest to the diviner with the two sides lying parallel and hanging down four-by-four. The chain is cast on a divining tray.

Each half seed can fall with either the concave inner surface (representing 1) or the convex outer surface (representing 0), facing up. The priest throws the divination chain twice, ensuring that the buttons or cowries tied to it allow him to differentiate the right half (odd – 0) and the left half (even – 1), so that he does not misread the figure, and also to make a complete *Odu* of eight marks. Typically, an odd number of cowries (one or three) denotes the right half, while an even number (two or four) represents the left half. A good throw by the priest usually ends in the seeds falling freely to either the concave or convex position. The probability of each of the figures appearing is equal (1 in 256) (Bascom 30). These figures are read as patterns, which I explain further below. Once the priest reads the cast, he recalls the poem associated with the *Odu* sign, from which new revelations are made to the client. Whereas the sacred palm nuts require a priest to "manipulate" the nuts eight times while simultaneously putting marks on the divining board to receive the *Odu*'s signature, the Ifá Priest only needs to cast the chain on the ground once and then read the presented signature (Oyebola 100).

The *Opele* like the sacred palm nuts has sixteen basic forms. It takes two values, which in the Ifá system is explained in terms of yes or no, true, or false and in numeric representation corresponds to binary 1 and 0. The "1," as in the case of the divination chain is considered as even (which means Yes or Positive), while 0 is odd (which means No or Negative).[42] The concave is coded as zero (0) and the convex side is coded as one (1). The priest must learn how

[42] This is a conceptual focus of the Yorùbá worldview of complementarity (two truths—that reality is a union of opposite). This complementarity is interpreted as *ibi, ire* (good and evil). The mathematical forecast of *ibi* and *ire* in the Ifá divination is represented using "odd" and "even" counts or the exponential power of 2 (Oyebisi 39).

the right side of the chain can permutate into sixteen ways, by studying the convex and concave sides. For example, if all the nuts on the right side of the divining chain facing upward are concave, the signature is *Ogbe*, and when they present the convex side, they are *Oyeku*. In a case where the two sides are concave, they are *Eji Ogbe* (Two *Ogbe*). These different combinations can also generate the 240 minor *Odu* as the sacred palm nuts do.

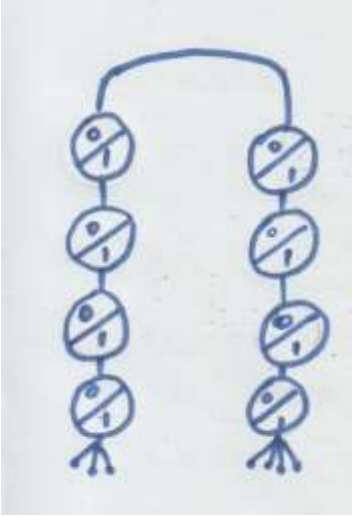

Figure 1: My hand-drawn image of *Opele* (with the two values)

***Odu*s and Relationship to the Binary Code**

Now, this is where the binary sequence comes in. Ifá Divination consists of lines, symbols, tetragrams and octagrams. As Oyebisi writes, "the structure of the Ifá divination system can be represented as 4X2 entangled-bit matrix, comprising four rows and two columns, where the two columns are the two legs of *Odu* Ifá" (41). Each leg can have $2^4 = 16$ possible outcomes. In fact, a combination of the right and left legs in a mathematical combination, $2^4 \text{ X } 2^4 = 2^8 = 256$ possible outcomes.

A	B
0/1	0/1

0/1 0/1

0/1 0/1

0/1 0/1

Following that the concave is (1) and the convex side is (0), the *Eji Ogbe* signature,which is eight concave surfaces, will be represented as 0000 0000. The *Oyeku*, which is eight convex sides will be written as 11111111 (Oyebola 100). Oyebola, quoting Oluwunmi Longe, created this file to illustrate the *Opele* system [Table 3]. The original table has three rows, but I have added one, which converts the binary numbers into decimals numerals with which I work.

Table 3: The Binary Structure of the Ifá Divination and Decimal conversions

Rank or Seniority	Name of *Odu*	Divination code or signature	Decimal
1	Eji Ogbe	0000 0000	0
2	Oyeku-Meji	1111 1111	15
3	Iwori-Meji	1001 1001	9
4	Odi-Meji	0110 0110	6
5	Irosun-Meji	0011 0011	3
6	Owonrin-Meji	1001 1100	12
7	Obara-Meji	0111 0111	7
8	Okaran-Meji	1110 1110	14
9	Ogunda-Meji	0001 0001	1
10	Osa-Meji	1000 1000	8
11	Ika-Meji	1011 1011	11

12	Oturupon-Meji	1101 1101	13
13	Otura-Meji	0100 0100	4
14	Irete-Meji	0010 0010	2
15	Ose-Meji	0101 0101	5
16	Ofun-Meji	1010 1010	10

As shown above, the *Odu* system employs a binary code, comparable to a bit in computing. Several scholars have argued that there is a connection between Ifá and the computer. Oluwunmi Longe, first Nigerian professor of computer science, explains that divination is usually performed in two four-bit halves, similar to the four-bit code known as hexadecimal code used in computer applications. He describes this as Ifá-Hex code, which is different from the standard hex code. A bit is the name for a binary digit, and it is the basic unit of information in computing. A bit can take on only one of two values (either 0 or 1, yes or no, on or off, negative or positive, and so forth). To store data and execute instructions, bits are organized into bytes. A group of eight bits is commonly referred to as a byte, while a group of four bits is referred to as a nibble. This means that 1 byte has 8 bits (Oyebola 100).

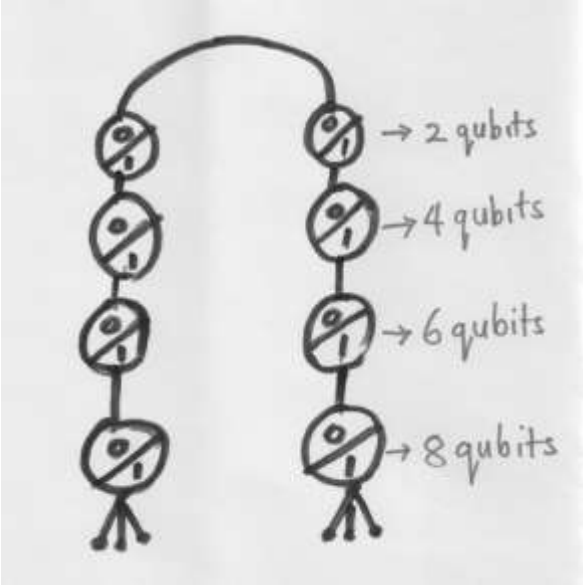

Figure 2 : My hand-drawn image of *Opele* (4X2 *Opele* Chain)[43]

As explained earlier, when the *Opele* is thrown, its half-pods may fall showing either the concave or convex side (1 or 0). Now the right- and left-hand sides of the *Opele* are considered separately (4 bits). According to J. D. Clark, "on each side, we have pods each of which can fall in two positions; that is, there are four alternatives (00, 01, 10, 11), which are arranged in four sets, to give sixteen possible outcomes." [see Figure 2]. These outcomes are arranged in a definite order.[44]

This means that in the Ifá *Odu* system:

1 nut = 2 mark (II) = odd (or negative) = binary 1

2 nuts = 1 mark (I) = even (or positive) = binary 0

The divinatory process is, therefore, based on the principle of binary arithmetic, where if two dissimilar terms (0, 00 or 1, 11 in Ifá) are arranged a fixed number of times (n), the total (s) is given by the formula: $S = 2^n$. Since Ifá units are mixed 8 times (i.e., n = 8), the total number of

[43] A qubit can hold up to two bits of data (0 and 1).
[44] In the Appendix ,I have included a graph of 256 *Odu* created by the Atlanta University Center Woodruff Library.

arrangements possible is 256 (i.e., S = 256). In the Yorùbá language each one of these 256 arrangements has a specific name (Òkéwándé 157).

Combining Cut-up Poetry Technique and the *Odu* System

In the 1950s, William S. Burroughs and Brion Gysin developed the classic cut-up technique, which consisted of juxtaposing lines from two columns of texts drawn from scrapbooks, newspapers, etc., while rapidly scanning by eye to pick up new phrases and contrasts, thereby enabling the poet to create new texts by altering the texts' original meaning. My approach is somewhat different. As someone who has predominantly written and published lyrical poetry in the past, my technique is somewhat more methodical. I was aware that my first limitation would be my ability to manipulate the arrangement, so I cut up all the novels page by page and then single lines from each page, mixing them in a large box to create a tool for examining the concept of a conflux of emotions. Although the method for selecting the strip of paper was arbitrary, I allowed myself some latitude for editing and rearranging a few of the words once they were arranged on paper. In some instances, I allowed unintelligibility to capture the fragmentation of narrating trauma as an emotional conflux, rather than silence or an extreme response that impedes narratability. And in these instances, I suggest slight incomprehensibility but continued narration. This conforms to the compositional structure of the Ifá Divination, which contains multiple narratives regardless of the complexities involved in doing so. Besides the mathematical structure, the Ifá corpus also has a story structure.[45]

I paid attention to the Ifá process. As I have explained, following an acknowledgement of divinities, the priest throws the *Opele* on the ground and calls out the *Odu* principals he has seen.

[45] See Wande Abimbola's *Ifá: An Exposition.* For a literary execution of this form in contemporary poetics, see Chris Abani, *Santificum.*

The answer to the client's problems is found by reciting the verses connected to this *Odu*. As he recites the number of poems he can recall from the *Odu*, his clients listen patiently, waiting for him to tell a story similar to the one they have brought as a problem. The client asks for clarification, and the Ifá priest interprets and tells him what he needs to do (Abimbola 10). These verses have been the focus of most literary scholarship, either exploring the meanings of the divination stories or the structures. Understandably, as Adéẹ̀kọ́ explains, "Ifá's divination procedures are retrieval mechanisms that access the corpus of primordial knowledge stored in (and as) divination stories" (285). These stories remain the fascinations of those who are interested in the literary component of the divination process. Scholars like Adéẹ̀kọ́, Abimbola, and Bascom have paid close attention to the set structure of these story units. The process begins with a priest who recites a narrative whose central motif addresses a situation similar in some respect to the predicament that the client seeks to resolve. All the stories pose a problem and a protagonist, usually in the form of an original client believed to be the person for whom the indicated story and inscription were first devised. The stories also construct at least one antagonist, a set of resolutions or an escalation, and the reaction of the entity who first addressed the problem (289).

While the idea that new narratives may emerge from the cut-up seemed useful for thinking about the new meanings that I may encounter in the poems created, I knew that it came with limitations. Yet, the chance of futurity that makes the permutation and a connection to a form structured around set patterns useful for this research-practice led me to explore this new path. To generate the randomness of creating figures without an *Opele*, I decided on using the four war novels I selected to represent the number of bytes I wish to consider. Unlike the randomness of the *Opele* used for generating *Odu*, the cut-ups are "curated" into poems that follow the binary sequence of a pre-determined 256 *Odu*. In fact, unlike the *Opele*, which keep

generating random figures, I vary my technique for randomness. I make slight edits, by deletion or re-arrangement in some instances or simply leave the linguistic fragment which emerges to become a way of engaging with the unrecognized emotions in the original novels. Most of the techniques I use shift between those applied by John Giorno, Brion Gysin, William Burroughs and several others who have crafted literary precedents of these techniques.[46] Brion Gysin's permutational technique, for instance, involved rearranging the words of a single phrase in every possible arrangement or permutation. [47] This could be achieved by systematically moving the first word to the end of the row and moving each subsequent word one place to the left; hence A B C D E becomes first B C D E A, then C D E A B, and continuing until all of the variations have been exhausted. From a five-word phrase, a total of 119 new phrases, plus the original, could be created (Robinson 30).

The Poetic structure of *Circumtrauma*

In my work, I have taken out religious rites, which are essential to the Ifá Divination process but would complicate my research goal and do not seem necessary to the approach I employ. With regards to the elements explained above, the poetry collection *Circumtrauma* is divided into four sections. These four sections are representative of the first four books of the entire corpus of *Odu*: 2^ (*Meji*), 0000 (*Ogbe*), 1111(*Oyeku*), 1001 (*Iwori*). To represent these basic *Odu* patterns in a poetic structure, I first converted the markings into binary sequence, and then converted them into decimal numbers [see Table 3]. This process meant that the number of lines for each poem in the section is based on these decimal conversions. In my poetry, to

[46] The poem's structure is based on the first four permutations: the basic sixteen *odu* and the first 16 signs from the first three permutations, resulting in four sections of *Circumtrauma*.
[47] See Edward Robinson's *Shift Linguals* for an in-depth history of cut-ups and an analysis of the different techniques applied by writers.

represent the doubles, I write two poems for each principal *Odu*, and the line of each poem is determined by the binary numbers and nature of the figures that can be formed by the *Opele*. So, there are lines of 0, 15, 9, 6, 14, 7, 12, 3, 8, 1, 4, 2, 11, 13, 10 and 5 that form the structure of my poems. In all the sections of *Circumtrauma* "2^", the principals are in doubles (representing the *Meji Odu*s) and the poems are written on left and right, to symbolise the reverse order in which the books are read. The first section in *Circumtrauma*, for example, represents the sixteen Major *Odu*, which are considered doubles. This first section establishes the double nature (binary sequence) of the randomness.

For example, *Oyeku* is represented with the marks:

II II

II II

II II

II II

As a binary number, *Oyeku* is 1111, and as decimal number it is 15. This decimal conversion becomes the number of lines of verse that represent the *Oyeku* marks. In this first section of *Circumtrauma*, then, I develop 15 lines of cut-up poems twice to create the *Oyeku Odu* in poetic verse. Each of the poems in this section follows the same pattern of binary conversion into decimals. The objective is to create a poetic interpretation of the permutations of the *Odu*s, to emphasise the ways in which emotions remain present even when unacknowledged in these war narratives. These emotions affect the reader and become a form through which identity is created.

The first attempt at organizing *Circumtrauma* was to propose to break the whole collection into sixteen sections representing the sixteen basic *Odu*, with the minor *Odu* as the main poems. The numbers in the diagram represent the decimal conversion from binary

sequence, which becomes the number of cut-up lines that I develop for each poem [see Table 4]. I extrapolated four sections of the *Odu* system to create this structure, which becomes representative of the four novels as four bits.

Table 4: *Circumtrauma's* structure/form as a table diagram

	Book Sections																
Principal Odu	***Meji 2^***	0 -- 0	15 -- 15	9 -- 9	6 -- 6	3 -- 3	12 -- 12	7 -- 7	14 -- 14	1 -- 1	8 -- 8	11 -- 11	13 -- 13	4 -- 4	2 -- 2	5 -- 5	10 -- 10
Minor Odu	***Ogbe 0000***	0 -- 15	15 -- 0	0 -- 9	9 -- 0	0 -- 6	6 -- 0	0 -- 14	14 -- 0	0 -- 7	7 -- 0	0 -- 12	12 -- 0	0 -- 3	3 -- 0	0 -- 8	8 -- 0
Minor Odu	***Oyeku 1111***	0 -- 15	15 -- 0	0 -- 9	9 -- 0	0 -- 6	6 -- 0	0 -- 3	3 -- 0	0 -- 12	12 -- 0	0 -- 7	7 -- 0	0 -- 14	14 -- 0	0 -- 1	1 -- 0
Minor Odu	***Iwori 1001***	9 -- 6	6 -- 9	9 -- 3	3 -- 9	9 -- 12	12 -- 9	9 -- 7	7 -- 9	9 -- 14	14 -- 9	9 -- 1	1 -- 9	9 -- 8	8 -- 9	9 -- 11	11 -- 9

Initially, my objective was to create a poetry collection that could capture the 256 permutations. After developing several pages of poetry, it did not take me long to realize that this was not only a futile effort, but it also lacked meaning and connection to the project itself. The impossibility of exploring the 256 permutations became a revelation from which *Circumtrauma* itself found even deeper meaning. The 4 sections fit into the narrative of the 2-byte structure of the Ifá divination poetry, but more importantly, they also reveal the complexities and intensities of emotions in the context of the War that the project seeks to demonstrate. *Circumtrauma* demonstrates the significance of emotions as carriers of how people remember, which means that there can be no reconciliation until attention is paid to how narratives embody how people feel about the War and those feelings are identified, analysed, and studied. Essentially, the

combination of this systematized and yet random poetic method appeared to offer a way to execute a poetry collection that would be more than representation, even in its attempt to do the work of representing the unspeakability of trauma.

Due to their randomness, the "future" that emerges from these poems can be enlightening for understanding what emotion can do. "Iwori," for example, the nine-line poem in the final section, illuminates the anxieties of the past. There is a story lurking and a story being told that together attempt to elicit emotions associated with the death of a traumatized individual.

In conclusion, the poems in *Circumtrauma* can be read as a commentary on the complex emotions that continue to produce violence in contemporary Nigeria, which is reflected in post-war literature. *Circumtrauma* is also a legitimate use of language to express the frequently inexpressible process of grief that generations and communities in Nigeria continue to go through. Significantly, the use of conceptual poetry is a way to demonstrate how meaning is derived from my creative relationship with the primary text of my research, as it allows me to re/consider the resulting affect of war narratives and how they function to re-imagine social interactions. In another sense, *Circumtrauma* implicitly calls into question the War's multidimensionality reflected in the different perspectives and distinctiveness of the individual war narratives captured by the four authors I use for the cut-up poems. Consequently, *Circumtrauma* is also about the ways in which war violence gets normalized in framing interactions, such that it fragments ordinary lives; it is about the ways in which the words we read/use in our stories encapsulate emotions that take on new meanings in new contexts and become the memory of the future. My collection demonstrates how much the stories we tell, share, and carry about the War, regenerate trauma in new ways, ensuring that there are always unattended emotions from which social interactions are conditioned into unending questioning. The solution is to pay attention to the emotions transmitted in narratives

and their circulation, to track and re-imagine them as a beginning to the beginning of what could be a meaningful reconciliation.

Circumtrauma (Collection of Poems)

2^

0000-b
0000

|| || || ||
nothing

|| || || ||
nothing

|| || || ||
nothing

1111-a
1111

our body is a people: before and after *january 15, 1966*

our body is the fluent suffering of those who die lonely overseas
our body is lying somewhere
our body is: a lonely home an insanity
our body is a lake
our body is a flag lying somewhere,
our body is a room of suffering a place for vandals to die
but the dead no longer suffer but the dead have not apologized

but the dead have refuge but the dead no longer suffer

our body is the dead: women, children, and men without a name
our body is a country running without a head
their blood is crying to remember
our blood is crying to survive
our body is without a name
our body is a forest of threat/s it is a history of blood
our body is without a name

1111-b
1111

our body is without a name
our body is a forest of threat/s it is a history of blood

our blood is crying to survive
their blood is crying to remember

our body is a country running without a head
our body is the dead: women, children, and men without a name

but the dead have refuge but the dead no longer suffer
but the dead no longer suffer but the dead have not apologized

our body is a room of suffering a place for vandals to die
our body is a flag lying somewhere,
our body is a lake

our body is: a lonely home an insanity
our body is lying somewhere
our body is the fluent suffering of those who die lonely overseas
our body is a people: before and after *january 15, 1966*

1001-a
1001

after War
a mother and her family of four
arrives in an airport taxi: a body of feudal songs

broken people in dirty wrappers
a fluent suffering body

we are of same material
our body also collects feudal songs
before and after War our body collects feudal songs

we know no sleep we collect only fear.

1001-b
1001

we know no sleep we collect only fear.
before and after War our body collects feudal songs
our body also collects feudal songs
we are of same material

a fluent suffering body
broken people in dirty wrappers
arrives in an airport taxi: a body of feudal songs
a mother and her family of four
after War

0110-a
0110

a rickety train pulled up
heads disappeared
our brothers left
for a god-forsaken place
our brothers returned
with a gunshot in the head

0110-b
0110

with a gunshot in the head
our brothers returned

for a god-forsaken place
our brothers left

heads disappeared
a rickety train pulled up

0011-a
0011

the sea cracked opened
and pushed out the past
to the end of the world

0011-b
0011

the world news:
we watched a rocket
in awkward silence

1100-a
1100

miles away.
he
called
i said:
please let’s not fight
he stopped
realised what had happened

separated. i told
our friends,
i said please let’s not fight
i stopped
miles away. i realised what had happened.

1100-b
1100

miles away. i realised what had happened.
i stopped
i said please let’s not fight
our friends,
separated. i told
realised what had happened
he stopped
please let’s not fight
i said:
he
called
miles away.

0111-a
0111

everything was happening
when we were about to leave

flies
a chirping bird
stampede

we didn’t know
we were vandals.

0111-b
0111

we were vandals.
we didn’t know

stampede

a chirping bird
flies
when we were about to leave
everything was happening

1110-a
1110

we thought we had rest—we thought we had victory
we thought we had a planned ~~(full)~~ combat
to fight vandals of all kinds

no surrender, no surrender, no surrender to our enemy

they said we fought well
they slaughtered and we slaughtered
and they slaughtered
and we started to suffer from the slaughtered
and we fought hands together no surrender

later when our/their troops ran looking for citizens to kill
we hear: everyone is the enemy
everyone had victory

victory murmurs doubt

1110-b
1110

doubt is also peace
victory murmurs doubt

everyone had victory
we hear: everyone is the enemy
later when our/their troops ran looking for citizens to kill
and we fought hands together no surrender
and we started to suffer from the slaughtered
and they slaughtered
they slaughtered and we slaughtered
they said we fought well
no surrender, no surrender, no surrender to our enemy
to fight vandals of all kinds
we thought we had a planned ~~(full)~~ combat

we thought we had rest—we thought we had victory

0001-a
0001

Black. wearing black. Is wearing black. establishment is wearing black. the establishment is wearing black

0001-b
0001

the establishment is wearing black. establishment is wearing black. is wearing black. wearing black. black

1000-a
1000

the road was on fire
we did not stop for children

we have what to kill him
yes, all of us
not guns—

quietly, as he finished talking
laughed and hailed his friends
we started a song: to win the War

1000-b
1000

remember all the things we were speaking
everybody is the same
lusting after peace

i think of my mother red-eyed, wounded
hundred steps away from the centre

i begin to think
something would happen
perhaps. something would happen.

1011-a
1011

may we always remember to hear stories
of the laughing daughters who give flowers in a War

may we always remember crowded roads without room
may we understand anger of the gaunt and withdrawn ones
may we remember children with eyes like candlelit houses
the darkness that dabbed the country
the blackened vehicles and men in them
the silence of maxim guns, rapid fire riffles
the sons who leave with nothing

may the enemy know we are *not* six miles away
may we know the enemy is *not* six miles away

1011-b
1011

may we know the enemy is *not* six miles away
may the enemy know we are *not* six miles away
may we always remember to hear stories
of the laughing daughters who give flowers in a War

may we always remember crowded roads without room
may we understand anger of the gaunt and withdrawn ones
may we remember children with eyes like candlelit houses
the darkness that dabbed the country

the sons who leave with nothing
the silence of maxim guns, rapid fire riffles
the blackened vehicles and men in them
the silence of maxim guns, rapid fire riffles

1101-a
1101

do paramount thoughts take place only in the west?

“like angry people are african/s—
those people will do anything—”

have the hunger shamed people
learnt hate is not a choice but a doing

like how to get ammunition to kill so many at a time
to hear shooting and turn away

like do not hear one another—tribal Wars

like there is no room for smiling
when there is looted peace

we felt that way—
we felt our heart was not beating

but book people institute protest for property but not the home

1101-b
1101

mother died years ago she refused to come with us
now our house is the weight of empty
people have fled

our heart is beating saboteurs
the night is an army of fear

people are giving a lot of trouble
but god forbid that we should run

god we know a place can fall, do we have to run.
we will come back shamed

nothing one could do other than wait and hope
we are not safe do we have to run.

what kind of thing is this, enough is enough
can we nurse hate in front of the house?

11
0100-a
0100

what kind of thing is this?
nobody is sure of anything
there was something wrong
another story under the moon

0100-b
0100

we were friends in the making
knacking tory under the moon[48]
when the plane landed
he refused to come with me

[48] Nigerian pidgin, that means telling stories under the moon

0010-a

she spoke as she had never spoken.
she was all arms and ammunition.

0010-b

every side of the story is a bridge
it is also a grave

0101-a
0101

about two months before the city actually fell
he watched his baby eat until oil grease was left on the plate
he dabbed at his nose. darkness descended on him, as he listened
to the gossips next door. he dropped the knife on the carpeted floor:
the river crossed to the farm and time occupied the town.

0101-b
0101

harrison put the potato to boil after he gave her a bath
our fear increased that we may be attacked at night
they enter into the houses at night and fuck the women by force
nothing is done tonight. this very night. this night
we arranged three benches on the veranda for hope.

1010-a
1010

blood like plastic flowers decorate the front of our house/s.
the government is silent there is plenty trouble
home is madness we have/had to run.

blood like plastic flowers decorate the front of our house/s.
we go abroad for peace
abroad *is* refuge
but we are the intruder

we are shamed silently
where do we derive peace?

we cannot *byforce*[49] anybody to like us

1010-b
1010

the War may have ended
but every life is still riddled with bullet holes,
some large, others small some missing

truth is like missing bullets
the government
holds the gun
come to us
with a big lie
and talk between sobs sometimes.

we listen, we know the country is a battlefield teaching faith.

[49] Pidgin English, which means influencing people by power or force to do something.

0000

10101010-a

i said nothing
|| || || ||

i said nothing
|| || || ||

i said nothing
|| || || ||

10101010-b

morning post
back to back
biafra to continue
at the centre
back
perhaps
to collect
trembling
saboteurs
an invading army
fighting
vandals

they will die to the last man

an invading army
we will starve to death.

01010101-a

there was no fighting
two men stood at the centre
waiting to be shot

the original son
with patches of night under the armpits
wanted to cross the enemy lines
to get the foto[50]
of his dead parents
he started to look at the pictures
determined
all set for battle
he talked to his mother
he talked to his father

there was silence
there was hate.

01010101-b

i said nothing
|| || || ||

i said nothing
|| || || ||

i said nothing
|| || || ||

[50] Photo in pidgin English. Saro Wiwa's novel is written in what he describes as "rotten English" and when they are used in the cut-up poem I leave them as it is.

10000010-a

refugees
|| || || ||

refugees
|| || || ||

refugees
|| || || ||

10000010-b
he had talked to my father
luckily, he was calm
his name is isaac
his friend is dead

he was talking like planes landing and taking off
i smelt the harsh pain on his breath

he will not marry me
with that superior smile of people who were born
to hold arms and ammunitions to fight—

01000001-a

we all deserved to be shot
bodies everywhere
surrender and die

the pistol is the hand the stage
the grip the fingers

the threat of peace

tattered looking and hungry people
see themselves as ready food.

you people forget

01000001-b

refugees
|| || || ||

refugees
|| || || ||

refugees
|| || || ||

00101000-a

astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence
|| || || ||
astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence
|| || || ||
astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence
|| || || ||

00101000-b

street. sand. salt. a drink.
hurricane-smoke come to an agreement
nobody should be a stretch of silence

slack mouth clutch at mortality
anti-aircraft somebody

words comforted not for long

00010100-a
the awning of the veranda feed them questions
of bodies dumped outside the city walls
they listened to members of the ‘War cabinet’
say; god was on the side of guns, guns – and arm
as clumps of dry air was eating her mouth

they told us run to the barracks we did not.

00010100-a

astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence
|| || || ||
astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence
|| || || ||
astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence astrecthofsilence
|| || || ||

00001010-a

sorrow
|| || || ||
sorrow
|| || || ||
sorrow
|| || || ||

00001010-a

the more we kill the more
many would die quick quick
in the not too distant future

00000101-a

why is the world
we live in
like an automatic pistol

00000101-a

sorrow
|| || || ||
sorrow
|| || || ||
sorrow
|| || || ||

10100000-a

frightened
|| || || ||
frightened
|| || || ||
frightened
|| || || ||

10100000-b

her arms wrapped around herself
she sat on the dining table like a statue

they made her feel inconsequential
holy and desecrated and abused

though there was no air-raid
there was a massacre

she was begging them not to father
that her children were the message

the house became empty
virtually empty

his “work harder”
sounded like massacres.

01010000-a
in front of the embassy
she had a dream but did not remember
what it was
her friend was working feverishly
in new york
the weather conditions organized
the people into refugees in the school hall

please feel at home
although everything is in fragments

please feel at home
don’t remember you are starving

tears filled her eyes as she turned to go

01010000-b

frightened
|| || || ||
frightened
|| || || ||
frightened
|| || || ||

00101010-a

fight
|| || || ||
fight
|| || || ||
fight
|| || || ||

00101010-b

they said self-sufficiency is dying
they asked us to leave

for theirs is the kingdom of heaven
their god is very powerful

we have just run from the hole
we crossed the river to the farm
our way home is middle-aged

00010101-a

all of them attacking us
shouting “fire” if we leave

silence thickened our saliva
we cannot defend our children
when trouble come

uncertainty is a bomb
we do not want to die like chickens.

00010101-b

fight
|| || || ||
fight
|| || || ||
fight
|| || || ||

10101000-a

run empty handed
|| || || ||
run empty handed
|| || || ||
run empty handed
|| || || ||

10101000-b

they talked about care for the tribe
as if there was something else they knew
that we did not

like a stranger
we went in search of accommodation
they fought us every night.

for many nights when they came
they stole everything in the house
but we did not know why

after these encounters
if they were coming
we don’t run, we do not fight again

we are a minority group
we don’t forgive they killed our people.

01010100-a

the drums cleared their throats
after all, we go to War fronts to die

moist bodies close the darkness
astringent scent of *politicians* drew near

the War had changed everyone
maybe there might be an exception

stretched legs occupied benches
eat body parts like they did in congo

i believe we are not going to run
even if anything happens. don't worry

don’t worry about all these things
they have not left though they are packing

we would take hardship and go out
in the streets singing the last hymn of peace

01010100-b

run empty handed
|| || || ||
run empty handed
|| || || ||
run empty handed
|| || || ||

00000010-a

surrender
|| || || ||
surrender
|| || || ||
surrender
|| || || ||

00000010-b

why don’t you do something/ why don’t you do something/ why don’t you do something/ why don’t you

000000001-a

you left us nothing. you left us nothing. you left us. nothing. you left. you left us nothing.

000000001-b

surrender
|| || || ||
surrender
|| || || ||
surrender
|| || || ||

1111

11010111-a

we are an angry body
collector of corpses clutching a spoon smeared with blood

old, young, men and women turning into angry artillery soldiers
a city of moving corpses

silence is furtive freedom
hate is fear in a tent
we are a body sprawled in groan
we are moving corpses: women and children and men

home is a collector of weeping
morning is for blood debt
night is reserved for thinking
our world is smeared in blood

we are bones and
we tell them we want out
we are angry. we tell them we want out we tell them we are out.

11010111-a

bia nwanyi![51]
woman, every day you find angry black scorpions
among your friends

woman, no time for work. no time for peace.
no time to be happy.
no time, except for hate

woman,
you can't keep imagining happy in your country
we can see you are not happy at all.

[51] "Come woman" in Igbo language.

11101011-a

go fight let the young people die
abandon the oppressed
know if you kill them they will return

i don't think anybody can help
the oppressed
but know if you kill them, they will return

don't you see? all that
that there was always oppression
if you kill them twenty one times they will return
fodder for the evening news unreal
here and go fight for the oppressed

11101011-b

they are: a people dedicated to the cause
of resentment

resigned
disappointed
low voices
worry from the confrontation
the implications
of being alone with their body
their broken body

01111101-a

our fears are old
and languid
our fears are old pawns
in their hands
our fears
run a few errands
for some of us
to die awake

When it is time
for us to die
we clean off mud
silently and sorrowfully
take our bullets of suffering
without being seen

01111101-b
a pregnant women set a church on fire
we pick up hope to see if
death and life
lap all the time
but raw pain
won’t send hate away

10111110-a

slowly
wait and plan
plan and control
every day
plan and wait and control
everyday to move vandals

10111110-b

we were all brothers
massacred
albeit on a very small scale

we are all mental children

superior
the guests held their noses
heads against the table
eyes turn away
driven into the evening
of our pain

fear anything
with the photo
of tattered battle dress

01011111-a

you must come with us
trusting
redemptive anticipation of God's help

you must come with us
along another footpath
trusting
a philandering peace
trusting us not to fight
or sin against the scriptures
trusting
that
with a wounded shoulder
you will not leave
the town
angry.

01011111-b
the world news:
we watched a rocket
in awkward silence

10101111-a

we are not going to run
at the slightest hint of criticism
even with the sun sweating

10101111-b

gossip time is precious
but we did not understand one another's language
and everyone left the town at first concern
even the cemetery was empty of bodies
but I'll rather die here

I feel like dying
exhausted from fear
it is cold bitterness
to live the miserable life of old clothes

I know the gramophone pain
of a street that frightened the dark
where the band, their singers sang contempt
in a voice strong and never defeated

I shall go out and practice
how to die without bitterness

11110101-a

He knew us
He knew us and more
He said we were cowards

i. Cowards will be interpreted
by each moment

ii. Cowards murdered Enugu, murdered Onitsha,
You murdered villages—
And without ammunition

iii. Cowards receive visitors
Who uprooted and destroyed us all
Left us no food to eat
And deserted years before
While we await evacuation

iv. Your people. All your people
Are evil. Cowards.

11110101-b

one morning
he said my son
the War
the farm
the ammunition
is inside me

my memory
is
a
little
boy
a stranger is looking through
me.

11101010-a

a young man came up to our house
rich and influential
said to my mother
the door for the returned is a road
to be forgotten

i have returned tarnished
exhausted
ran over like a bush rat that leapt
from a tree

in the civil service
the civilians
never had a chance

11101010-b

my husband said
that they count the dead
cemetery target people's beds to look

Rain would have destroyed us all
water entered my nose
When we got flowers into these

But let me tell you, you can't
All your people.
were in tears
but did not break

They did not send us rain.
But rain would have destroyed us all

01111111-a

Everybody is afraid
Things continue as before
But we are not going to run
We stay and die
Cutting their hand or their legs

Maybe
We are going to run
For there is always hope
Peace is staged
in Western Europe and America

put it down in anger
run along I'll bury love

defend kinsmen
defend our fatherland
carrying a heavy load on the head

01111111-b

returning defenders arms in the air
armed soldier.
soldier combing—

arms in the air
infiltrators

the past will not believe
all we have left are numbers

10111111-a

the enemy is time
since she was a child

from the earliest days
time rose and fell
gathering standstorm
gathering standstorm in the distance

because nothing is forgotten

10111111-b

we have nothing for you
to defend

our youths.
mustn't cry with blood as tears from the eyes

we had left
as a spirit person
there is nothing at all to alarm anybody

can we be ourselves
accommodate the swell of our fears

in an unhappy harbour
throw out lucky soldiers

love your sons
protect your people

until the rebellion
do not voice a defeat

11111101-a

hate is important too
for corpses walking
moving with men
for sons
meeting skeletons
to battle love
for men combing
the smoke for rooms

the dying trying to tell
of home of sons of women
of doors
and a body

buried in prayers and a hymn.

men wept. men wept?
men wept—

11111101-b

we have arms superior weapons, come to us, we have plastered blood in villages
we have arms and soldiers in big black boot saying—your children are safe

yourchildrenaresafe *is*
the erasing of memory

this saying—your children are safe by the army
is erasing (our) memory

send us to see whether villages are dancing to the gun
and we will rest hate
we will cut tomorrow up, for
bloodblood
blood can set us free
blood is the government of our fatherland/blood is the property we hold for money
blood

is erasing (our) memory

11111110-a

all had been taken from the fatherland
red-stained flies buzzed everywhere
things packed for children were behind

god ended her she was at peace
bury her bury her past
bury the past
for a long time

intruder deserter
enemy friend
cursing and smiling at each other
killing though the cruel War was over

hate is a heavy load
all had been taken
but we carry resentment along

11111110-b

War is a question of practice
the mercenary is there
the soldier is there
the children, women…
all there to wash away stream of blood

rocket shall come like rainstorms
every man and woman
will practice fleeing

and manoeuvre in private
how to go out without hating

love is ~~not~~ important to writers
when there is an important fight
love is only an art
where we can become frantic
about practice

01010111-a

moving town
an embassy gate that won't open
broken women statue
dead people: a small crowd made of cement
shit in a trouser
a broken car
a body by the bush
packed and forgotten children's things
blood-stained rag wound
dead young soldier
Warm body of a child turning cold
friends left behind
no farm to run to
broken trees crying
our yesterday returned

01010111-b

memory is hungry.

10101011-a

how do you feel?
a fierce emboldening rage
rage erected like a hut

renewed sorrow
tied down
resentment
held down
ashes
an illiterate rage
like clustered water droplets
travel to know what in the past
choked our memory of the century

how do you feel?
splattered with holes
a pistol in the world

10101011-b

a modest life without blood. a life without blood

11010101-a

they wept
shoulders touching each night

they reviewed their situation
frustration everywhere
we did this
we did this to ourselves

why stay and die
as criminals
in this stream of blood

we are all casualties
they are muscles and no brain
no readiness to apologize

we all are people
with nowhere else to go
like last of the verse hymn

11010101-b

big mama was going
with us
tears filled her eyes as she turned to go
she remembered his running headless body clearly
in front of the embassy
our fear as large as the sky
when the British voice on radio said it was tribal War
but that's not we remember

11101010-a

a shot was heard
you cut his hand
run empty handed

Wares behind
his hand will appear again
holding an automatic pistol

what did he do? i ask you
you remember nothing

11101010-b

we are exhausted
tomorrow is independence
suffering independence

in these uncertainties
young men buying guns
to attack and kill one another
calling for a crude revenge

with unfinished knowledge
brain like cement
they disappear down the road
to get rid of the vandals

it is worrying
that casualties
of the massacres
ask for independence

1001

01101001-a

what were they searching for
her face slick
perhaps worth it to let her be a saucer
flying
with loud gasps choking
from dirt of freedom and oppression
the weary bustle of
pleasing and angering
her friends at the same time

01101001-b

there was no danger to convince him
to question to answer
to think
about secession
about a new country
expecting peace

10010110-a

are you ready for trouble?
you have spoken
enough
asking for help from
the heads supplying
pain and blood

10010110-b

we have lost our freedom
nothing private any more
the house is standing
on forcible dissolutions

their apology
is a bucket of ash

our people count shattered nerves
all our friends are already dead
we have enemies and no freedom.

01001011-a

anything that comes
chopping small small people
massacres all conversations
        where we talk about tomorrow

stilted
        silence in the middle of a conversation
tell me how people count hollowness

an interest bordered
        with a gun fight

01001011-b

I dreamt they came
dead
daughters, sons, fathers, mothers

10000111-a

who goes to another man
to pull out their penis
and insert it into a book

10000111-b

My father told me about a War
The setbacks
Losing the War
Doubt
Fears

Friends and brothers against
The judgement

I remember my life of sorrow
I don’t remember my dreams of freedom
They are not identical

11100001-a

the arrival of violent words
on the streets
aging peace of
an angry place
hard-soft like cartilage
killing us
blame sidestep responsibility
without telling the house the everyday

11100001-b

the allywas cold
the plan did not ask
I am not leaving dead
What a waste of time
He commanded the limp

I kept on
an option of disbelief
slightest provocation
of a War report
of a loss
every night
unlocking time

110110010-a

who is going to resist them?
much bitterness

quick quick
quick slow belly slow
refugee camp bitterness
painfully ridiculous

idiot smile bitterness
we were defeated
bitterness
set up and work them
believe us believe them
the courageous ones who leave

110110010-b

fire razed down books
cement figure clapped hands
huge dark shadows
raising children
opening a
history of silence
to speak
be open
to trouble everywhere

011011011-a

remember
the first sign
of goodbye

tiptoed across
unfolded
and folded

we are lost
so much now
it will not happen again

011011011-b

pause
something calcified
how can
the world not end?
damn saboteurs
causing panic
to fight again

10010111-a

Strong campaign
Of evils
Lead us to other beginnings

Forced very far away
Hurried back
Peace isn't there
Peace isn't home

10010111-b

disgrace spread like wildfire
mingling the outside
into insane nights
meeting empty mornings

our new peace left for a place
about to fall

Don't you see us evacuating?

11010110-a

My ancestors don’t forgive
Their stories
Of how
        they were killing them
Like ants
Hide their cruel remain
A cruel remain of life
        a meaningless ragged bazaar
To hide anybody with stories
That we are all alive

11010110-b

They are here
Clawing one another
Vehement about it
I did not know
There was nothing
We could do about it

Heavy lips labour
Saying our world
Will soon end

All this hunting
Running
Can make you lame

There are there
They are here

11010110-a

I am going to forbid
the land of my birth
where people are running from
because
they wished
the whole War thing over
the ground yelled and yelled
shouted at the legs
on the ground
huts turned completely bushes
radio walking
up and down
trigger calamity
this country is the problem

11010110-b

We have come for combing
They come every night
Fuck the women but force
I want to protect her from harm
From hunger all her life
I have no other choice
I must die
I am not man
If I have to die, why not now?

01000011-a

I cannot understand at all
the huge problem of water
when the crisis came
we were all there
        waiting and waiting
For our country the vandal
        To arrive
It left us nothing
So many of us are gone

01000011-b

We never dream of driving a silver cloud

10000011-a

a missing heading

10000011-b

I have no alternative
Cursing
Grumble
Cursing
Remain behind them

False tooth
False smile
False friends
give you trouble

11000001-a

All was not well
There was no evil he did not excel
Every member of the family
Hijacked the road
Stowed the ash
Demonstrated how to make soap

A hundred steps
Something was wrong somewhere
They had no notion of what we had gone through

11000001-b

two friends
returned
holding hands
for a fraction of a second
there was a distance
as the mercenaries
came out for cover
in a rumpled black dress

11000010-a

grief made her helpless
brought the urge
to stretch
her pain
to worry about time

she did not trust her friends
they know her stories of guns
hours to have target shooting

11000010-b

he broke the silence:
why is she here
with forgotten lines
of a shot bomber
and his stories

nothing is happening
over time and space
a single act could reverberate
austere emptiness
tomorrow wants to sleep

11001011-a

We began to run
My father and mother
They could have made it
I cannot forget

I heard my name
I refused to save her people
Their reaction
Rants and impassioned articles
A brave man cannot die for an enemy

11001011-b

The trouble in the country
cost blood
this our father's house
is a quiet pool of blood
rumpled skin spurts of—
seceded dreams

it was the way
it should be
to keep guard
to remember
selfishness had liberated them

11000111-a

they were merciful
but we have not come here
to answer questions

enjoying the suspense
and dreams of blurred territory
your emotional problems
threatened
once in a while
and opened fire on us

how can it end
how can it end when—

11000111-b

They are different
They are different
They are different
They are different
They are different
They are different
They are different
That is the problem.

Coda: The Affective Reckoning of Inherited Narratives

Many years ago, when I freelanced for a newspaper in Lagos, Nigeria, a co-worker told me that the first thing he learned about the War was that he was Igbo and different from the rest of Nigeria. Nigeria, he explained, is anti-Igbo and he said that, as an Igbo person, he needed to trust only his kinsmen. I have heard similar narratives of discontent from other ethnic groups in the country, all indicating suspicion of others who are not from their group. In these instances, I contemplated how the war memory was tied to the group of emotions present in inherited narratives and how this shaped our interactions with others. My impression was that, despite efforts to keep Nigeria as a nation, structures of exclusion, bias, and discrimination on a national scale are produced and sustained by a simmering discontent and the negative emotions that persist in domestic narratives about the War. For example, since the end of the War, new secessionist movements from throughout Nigeria have continued to form and dominate news stories in their agitation for secession. These groups harbour animosity toward the state for their perceived marginalization, which in this context sometimes mean other members of the country not from their ethnic group. This is what led me to question how emotions carried in their war memory animate suspicion outside their group.

However, I did not begin to examine the War's affective nature objectively until 2012. That was when Chinua Achebe, regarded as postcolonial Africa's most influential writer, published a war memoir, *There Was a Country*. On reading the book, I observed that Achebe represented the War as an emotional burden that gave an individual sense of grief, anger, and resentment a collective and national dimension. I wrote a blog post and argued against the memoir's ethnocentric nature. The post elicited strong ethnic dissension and abusive language in the comments section. Members of pro-secessionist groups thought my questions about Achebe's work threatened their advocacy for secession. In general, I noticed in the comments, feelings of

victimhood and resentment against the state for its silence on perceived political inequalities and the War's socio-economic injustices. It was evident that these emotions reflected a carryover of transmitted "unsayables," which require attentiveness to marginalized stories and an understanding of the silence that inhabits the memory. I became interested in the interfaces between emotions and narratives as I learned about the War primarily through literature, particularly how emotions sustain war memory, how what is felt becomes what is remembered about the war experience, and how this characterizes social relations with Nigerians.

I bring up these two incidents because narratives can evoke emotions that influence how we remember traumatic events and, consequently, how we view other people. While the specific emotions expressed by individuals or groups are rarely identified, they are present in our memories. At first, my approach to researching this phenomenon was to use the typical academic approach of critical analysis through an academic paper, which would mean identifying specific emotions in different cultural texts on the War and exploring them as singular events to argue for their existence. This approach, while needed, would be better as a sequel project, perhaps for a second monograph. It became evident from my research that the approach for this project needed to first establish that the multiplicity of emotions generates anxiety among individuals in Nigeria through a different form of analysis. The analytical approach I choose allows me to investigate the complexities of the War and the formation of anxieties.

My project, therefore, employs conceptual poetry as an analytical tool, a form of inquiry from which "the future leaks out," to quote William S. Burroughs who popularized cut-up as a poetic technique (qtd in Robinson 43). My project illuminates the present while confronting the future by attending to a cluster of emotions transmitted as memory through narratives. This futurity may not be acknowledged immediately because although the past is always looming, there is no open acknowledgement of how it is shaping the present and the future. *Circumtrauma*

is, therefore, a theoretical counterargument to the perplexing repression of the War's aftermath. It is a process dedicated to reviewing, memorialising, and, most importantly, confronting emotions that emerge from the traumatic past. My project looks at silences in memory and the present as spaces that help us figure out who we were in the past and who we will be in the future.

The method I have employed in this dissertation is both personal and academic, drawing on my artistic practice while also reflecting on modes of representing traumatic memory, affect, postcoloniality, and my Indigenous African way of thinking about violence and community. I have attempted to present, how, for most Nigerians—both in the country and in diaspora—the subjectivities of trauma and history's circularities share boundaries that can be easily missed when the affective is ignored. The ensuring silence from this neglect often results in various forms of violence that defy meaning, in the present and in the future, both within and outside the country. This project synthesizes the diverse emotions that linger in the War's aftermath by employing cut-up poetry and the Ifá system to carry an affect from narratives to the reader. *Circumtrauma* is, therefore, a "method and an approach and a practice and a site of debate and a vast experiment in what counts as knowledge in the academy today" (Loveless xix). Structurally, I am well-aware that my approach of "genre-bending" the typical academic dissertation poses a challenge to the rigidity of traditional scholarship, which requires "at the doctoral level . . . 'new knowledge' that is vetted and disseminable and therefore able to further discourse in a field (or fields)" (12). While it is not the main focus of this project, I hope this project joins other research-creation scholars in "the insertion of voices and practices into the academic everyday that work to trouble disciplinary relays of knowledge/power, allowing for more creative, sensually attuned modes of inhabiting the university as a vibrant location of pedagogical mattering" (3). The idea here is that my project undertakes a dialogic shift from how

the War is being studied primarily as a histographical object, to one that creates space for a research-creational approach that communicates the affective characteristics of the research in the most powerful way.

It is important to state, however, that my project does not detract from the critical work being done on the War but "asks us to attend to how we habitually justify our research through disciplinary stories, those that we tell and those that we have been told along the way. It also…asks us to attend to the forms of those stories" (Loveless 41). As I have been describing it, my point is that the scholarship on the War has not taken cognizance of the significance and work of emotions in remembering and in transmitting memory. Therefore, my use of conceptual poetry and the Ifa system in this project presents how poetry as a research method "challenges the fact-fiction dichotomy and offers a form for the evocative presentation of data (Leavy 85). Essentially, my project not only intervenes in the dominance of the novel form on representations of the War but also advocates for expanding how the War is being studied. Furthermore, it generates questions about ongoing acts of violence and their connections to wartime memories.

This project does not stand alone in its approach. My creative research project aligns with the kind of work of poets like Jordan Abel, Kaie Kellough, Teresa Hak Kyung Cha, and Claudine Rankine, as well as several others, to re/imagine what text can do. In their works, these writers integrate cross-genres, like media stories, critical theory and literary criticism insights, while still capturing the central core of what it means to produce academic work. In *Injun* (2016), for example, Abel conceptualizes ninety-one pulp Western novels written between the mid-nineteenth and mid-twentieth centuries into poetry to examine how these works and their language normalize racist power relations. Similarly, in Rankine's *Citizen* (2014), experience and research feed the creative process and deepen knowledge rather than simply entertaining.

These artists and scholars commit their art as academic inquiry and public scholarship, using it as a transdisciplinary tool to think differently about text/art as not only an object of literary criticism, but as an "innovative form of cultural analysis that troubles the book, the written essay, or the thesis, as the only valid means to express ideas [and] concepts" (Loveless 7). These works belong to what Monica Prendergast describes as "literature-voiced poetry" in her categorizing forms of poetic inquiry (qtd in Leavy 89). In this light, my project aligns with these "family resemblances" of works being done in research-creation through the transdisciplinary engagement of varying concepts and theories that the reader can embody in their engagement with the text. Significantly, these kinds of poetic works, as Patricia Leavy notes, encourage "a multiplicity of meaning" (86).

In the case of my work on Nigerian-Biafran War narratives, the novel serves as a source for revisiting emotions that exist but are not acknowledged. For example, the stories I shared in the first two paragraphs of this Coda elicit emotions that are future-oriented even while focused on events in the past. In particular, I find the circulation of emotions between these narratives revealing, as they capture how different stories about the War create a form of circularity of emotions that is conjectural in nature, producing different meanings for different people. Even more, despite the disparities in how the War is seen, emotions exist to shape the nation and the social relations of the people in the country. For this reason, I knew traditional research would not effectively merge the different emotions and manifestations of traumatic experiences in the present while capturing its futurity.

In my approach to this project, I have tried to join the conversation of research-creation scholars arguing for the dissemination of knowledge beyond the academic monograph. But, to paraphrase the same question that Loveless asks, what if the research requires a different method or mode of examination? (41) For me, the questions also become: What if research requires a

reimagining, rethinking, and re-seeing both for the reader and the researcher? How can we understand the affective valences present in the War's histography and counter-narratives if we do not acknowledge that negative emotions sustain the War's memory and shape social relations among Nigerians?

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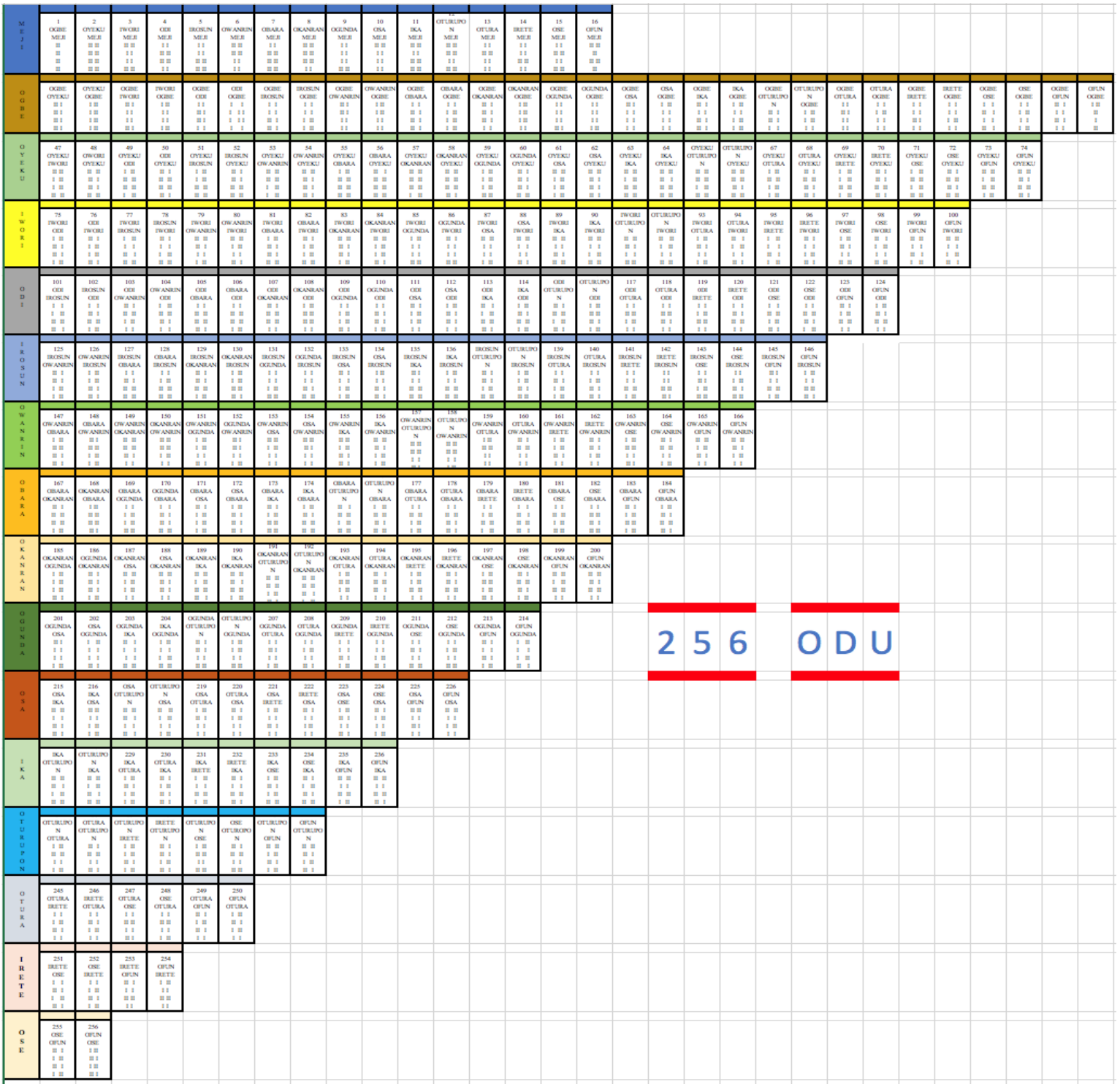
Appendix: The 256 *Odu*



Biographical Sketch

Jumoke Verissimo is the author of two poetry collections, *The Birth of Illusion* (Fullpoint Publications, 2013) and *I Am Memory* (Dada Books, 2008). Her debut novel, *A Small Silence* (Cassava Republic, 2019), was awarded the Aidoo-Synder Fiction Prize and was on the Royal Society of Literature Ondaatje Prize Nominee Shortlist (2020). Her most recent publication is a collection of poetry on police brutality, *Sòròsókè: An EndSARS Anthology* (Noirledge, 2022), which she co-edited with James Yeku, PhD. Her poems are widely anthologized and are in translation in several word languages like Italian, Macedonian, French. *Grandma and the Moon's Hidden Secret* (Cassava Republic, 2022) is her first children's book, which she also translated into Yorùbá .