



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Section: *Literature, Linguistics & Criticism***"No Man Will Call Your House a Home"****Curse and reincarnation in Oyinkan Braithwaite's *Cursed Daughters***

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ABSTRACT

Oyinkan Braithwaite's *Cursed Daughters* (2025) occupies a powerful space where the supernatural meets everyday life, blending curse and reincarnation to explore the experiences of women in Nigerian society. Using Yoruba cosmological thought and womanist criticism as complementary frameworks, this study examines how Braithwaite uses these metaphysical elements not merely as plot devices but as narrative tools that expose the recurring cycles of female suffering, domestic confinement, and generational trauma. Through sustained close reading, the study argues that the cursed daughters are not simply victims of fate; they serve as voices through which the novel critiques patriarchal systems, cultural silence, and the inherited burdens women carry across generations. The analysis shows that the curse, though spiritually coherent within Yoruba cosmology, is rooted in a patriarchal structure that pits women against one another while men remain unaccountable and that reincarnation functions not as liberation but as evidence that inherited suffering persists until its social causes are confronted. The study concludes that *Cursed Daughters* operates simultaneously as a literary haunting and a social critique, using the supernatural as a language capable of voicing what patriarchal silence has long suppressed, and it offers one of the first sustained academic readings of the novel.

KEYWORDS: curse, generational trauma, reincarnation, womanism, Yoruba cosmology

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1. Introduction

Literature has long served as a mirror through which societies reflect their deepest anxieties, beliefs, and unresolved tensions. From the mythologies of Greece and Rome to Africa's oral traditions, storytelling has served not just as entertainment but as a way to preserve cultural memory, explore spiritual realities, and examine the social conditions shaping human life.

As Achebe (1975) influentially argued, the African writer cannot afford to be a mere decorator of words; literature must serve its society by telling the truth about the human condition. It is within this tradition of socially and spiritually engaged literature that the contemporary African novel finds its most compelling voice, particularly when it engages the intersection of the supernatural and the everyday.

The supernatural has occupied a central and enduring place in the African literary imagination. As Ben-Daniels (2022) demonstrates in her examination of the supernatural in African literature, both old and new, the supernatural is not a peripheral or decorative element in African writing but a constitutive feature that manifests within the political, socio-economic, and cultural systems represented in the literature. From the oral epics and folktales of precolonial Africa, where spirits, ancestors, and divine forces actively shaped human life, to the written traditions that developed in the twentieth century, African writers have continually used metaphysical and cosmological frameworks to express truths that realist narratives alone cannot capture.

As Quayson (1997) notes, this approach reflects a distinctly African epistemology, a way of understanding the world that rejects a strict divide between the material and the spiritual, the living and the dead. It is within this tradition that contemporary Nigerian fiction, especially Braithwaite's *Cursed Daughters*, should be understood.

The position of the woman is especially delicate in African literature. African women writers have examined how patriarchal structures and inherited suffering shape, limit, and occasionally destroy female identity in works such as Flora Nwapa's *Efuru* (1966) and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Purple Hibiscus* (2003). According to Boehmer (2005), women in African fiction often live on a "double margin," marginalized by both indigenous patriarchal traditions and colonial histories. Their suffering is often best expressed through the language of the supernatural. Female pain is identified, scrutinized, and contested through the literary grammar of curses, spirits, and cycles of return. Within African literature, the figure of the woman occupies a particularly fraught position. Nigerian literature has distinguished itself as one of the most vibrant traditions on the continent, reflecting a sustained engagement with questions of identity, power, gender, and spirituality. It is particularly notable for its rootedness in Yoruba cosmology, a belief system encompassing a complex understanding of the relationship between the living and the dead, the present and the ancestral past, the human and the divine (Awolalu, 1979). Central to Yoruba metaphysical thought is the concept of *Abiku*, the child born to die and return, trapped in a cycle of repeated birth, death, and reincarnation, a concept that has shaped the Nigerian literary imagination from J. P. Clark's poem "Abiku" (1965) to Wole Soyinka's "Abiku" (1967) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991). The *Abiku* tradition encodes within Nigerian literary culture an understanding of reincarnation not as spiritual liberation but as cyclical entrapment, providing an indispensable cultural context for understanding how reincarnation functions as both spiritual belief and narrative structure in *Cursed Daughters*.

Oyinkan Braithwaite, best known internationally for her debut novel *My Sister, the Serial Killer* (2018), has established herself as one of the most distinctive voices in contemporary Nigerian fiction. Her work is characterised by a sharp, darkly comic sensibility, a feminist consciousness, and a willingness to engage the uncomfortable intersections of gender, violence, and cultural expectation. In *Cursed Daughters* (2025), Braithwaite constructs a narrative world in which a generational curse condemns a lineage of women to domestic suffering, in which the dead return in new flesh, and in which the boundaries between spiritual belief and lived social reality are deliberately blurred. The novel draws deeply from Yoruba cosmological traditions and from a womanist attentiveness to the specific conditions of women's lives, producing a text that is at once a ghost story, a feminist critique, and a meditation on the inherited burdens that women carry across generations.

To pursue its argument, the study sets itself two related aims: to examine how the curse in the novel operates at once as a supernatural decree and a social construct that perpetuates female suffering, and to analyse reincarnation as a narrative and thematic structure that encodes the cyclical, inherited nature of that suffering. Methodologically, it proceeds through sustained close reading of *Cursed Daughters*, drawing on Yoruba cosmological thought, particularly the concept of *Abiku*, and on womanist criticism as complementary cultural frameworks, supported by relevant secondary scholarship. In doing so, the study offers one of the first sustained academic readings of a novel that has so far attracted only reviews and interviews, and it models a critical practice that reads contemporary African fiction through African intellectual traditions rather than through imported theoretical paradigms.

It is against this background that this study examines how Braithwaite uses curse and reincarnation in *Cursed Daughters* to tell a deeper story about the lives of women in Nigerian society. The study argues that the suffering of the women in the novel is not simply a matter of supernatural misfortune but a condition built, repeated, and passed down through generations by patriarchal structures that hide behind the language of fate and divine decree. What appears to be a curse from the gods is, on closer reading, a social condition that society has refused to question, and what appears to be reincarnation is the same pain returning in a new body because nothing has been done to stop it. *Cursed Daughters*, in this sense, is not just a story about the supernatural; it is a story about what happens when the truth about women's suffering is too uncomfortable to be told in ordinary language, and the supernatural becomes the only voice loud enough to speak it.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in two complementary frameworks: Yoruba cosmological thought and womanist criticism. Together they provide a culturally grounded and layered basis for reading the intersections of curse, reincarnation, and female suffering in *Cursed Daughters*. Yoruba cosmology supplies the metaphysical vocabulary for the novel's world of curses, ancestors, and returning souls, while womanism supplies the feminist and culturally specific lens through which that world is revealed as a critique of patriarchy. This section explains each framework in turn. The analysis that follows then puts them to work on the text.

2.1 Yoruba Cosmology

In Yoruba belief, the boundary between the living and the dead is not absolute but permeable. Ancestors remain active participants in the lives of their descendants, and the soul may return to the world of the living through reincarnation (Awolalu, 1979; Soyinka, 1976). Soyinka (1976), in his foundational *Myth, Literature and the African World*, argues that Yoruba metaphysics is structured around three domains, the worlds of the living, the dead, and the unborn, interconnected by what he calls the "fourth area of existence," the chthonic realm of transition. Existence, in this vision, is cyclical rather than linear, and death does not necessarily bring resolution.

Central to this cosmology is the concept of Abiku, the spirit child condemned to cycle repeatedly through birth and death. As Jeyifo (2004) observes, the Abiku figure encodes an understanding of existence in which suffering is not resolved by death but may be perpetuated across multiple lifetimes, a symbol of cycles that refuse to be broken and of pain that refuses to end. The Abiku is therefore not simply a supernatural curiosity but a way of thinking about repetition itself, about how the same fate can return again and again when its underlying causes are never addressed. Yoruba cosmology also invests the spoken word with real spiritual force. A curse is not an idle utterance but a binding act, and a curse spoken in a moment of profound injustice can, in this framework, bind a family across generations (Awolalu, 1979; Okpewho, 1983). For literary study, this cosmology is indispensable because it insists that the curse and the reincarnation in Braithwaite's novel are not mere superstitions or narrative gimmicks. They are coherent spiritual categories with their own internal logic, and reading them seriously is the first step toward reading the social realities they carry.

2.2 Womanism

If Yoruba cosmology grounds the novel's metaphysics, womanism supplies its feminist and culturally specific critique. In her seminal essay, Ogunyemi (1985) argues that African women writers are concerned not simply with gender equality in the abstract but with the specific, lived conditions of women's lives within particular African societies. Womanism attends to the communal, the cultural, and the concrete, insisting that a woman's suffering be read in its full context rather than dissolved into a universal story of gender.

This lens is sharpened by two related insights. Stratton (1994) argues that African women writers consistently use narrative to challenge and rewrite the cultural scripts that define and confine women, turning the very stories society tells about female fate into occasions for critique. Boehmer (2005) reminds us that women in African fiction are frequently doubly marginalized, pushed to the edges of society both by colonial histories and by indigenous patriarchal traditions, so that their suffering is produced not by a single force but by the intersection of several. Read together, these ideas allow this study to take the cultural specificity of the Falodun women's suffering seriously while insisting that it is structural and social rather than fated.

The two frameworks are complementary rather than opposed. Where Yoruba cosmology explains why the curse persists and why the dead return, womanism explains why those spiritual phenomena fall so heavily and so exclusively on women, and how the novel turns them into a critique of the patriarchal order. The productive relationship between the two is what allows the analysis that follows to read *Cursed Daughters* as

at once cosmologically meaningful and politically pointed.

3. Literature Review

This section reviews existing scholarly works and critical responses relevant to the central concerns of this study. It engages with literature on the supernatural in African fiction, on curse and reincarnation in Nigerian literature, and on the representation of women and domestic suffering in African women's writing. It also acknowledges the current state of criticism on *Cursed Daughters* itself. Rather than simply summarising what scholars and critics have said, the review brings their ideas into conversation with one another and with the arguments of this study.

3.1 Critical Responses to *Cursed Daughters*

Braithwaite's second novel was published by Doubleday in November 2025, and as a very recent text it has not yet attracted formal peer-reviewed academic scholarship. The critical responses available at the time of this study are largely literary reviews and author interviews rather than academic analyses. This absence is precisely what makes the present study necessary and timely; it positions itself as one of the first academic examinations of *Cursed Daughters*, and the available responses provide a useful starting point for understanding how the novel has been received.

Reviews have been largely positive and have consistently identified the same central concerns this study seeks to examine. Writing in the *Times Literary Supplement*, Silcox (2025) observes that Braithwaite's ambitions are considerable, braiding Yoruba folklore with Lagos social life, domestic drama with social critique, and ghostly prophecies with self-fulfilling ones. This recognition of the interweaving of Yoruba folklore and social critique directly supports this study's argument that the supernatural and the social are inseparable in Braithwaite's fictional world. Writing for *Afrocritik*, Adjarho (2025) offers one of the most perceptive responses, arguing that the central question Braithwaite intentionally refuses to resolve is whether the curse is real or whether belief and fear are the true architects of the Falodun women's misfortune. Adjarho further observes that the Falodun women are shaped and doomed by narratives passed down through generations, and that Braithwaite dramatises how such narratives can become self-fulfilling prophecies. This aligns closely with the present argument that the curse functions simultaneously as a supernatural reality and a social condition.

Braithwaite's own statements confirm this doubleness. In an interview with the *Chicago Review of Books*, she explains that as she wrote, the curse began to serve more than one purpose, functioning on one hand as a curse in its purest fantastical form and on the other as a metaphor for generational trauma and a study in the self-fulfilling prophecy (Braithwaite, 2025a). In a separate interview with NPR, she elaborates that the curse operates on multiple levels, including "the perspective of generational trauma and what that looks like passing on trauma from child to child" (Braithwaite, 2025b). These authorial statements confirm that the curse was consciously crafted to be at once spiritual and social, and they support reading it as both.

3.2 The Supernatural in African Literature

Ben-Daniels (2022), in her essay "Discussing the Subject Matter of the Supernatural in African Literature: Old and New," makes a particularly direct contribution to this conversation. Examining a body of texts that span precolonial settings and contemporary fiction, she argues that the supernatural is not a peripheral or decorative storytelling device in African writing but a constitutive feature of African literary discourse, one that operates across the political, socio-economic, and cultural domains of African life. Her insistence that this is true of both older and newer African writing provides an important foundation for this study: to read the supernatural in *Cursed Daughters* seriously is, in Ben-Daniels's terms, to read the social realities of women's lives seriously. Where she speaks generally about African literature old and new, this study takes her argument further by demonstrating specifically how the supernatural operates as a feminist tool in a contemporary female-authored Nigerian text.

The place of the supernatural in African literature has attracted significant additional attention. Soyinka (1976) argues that Yoruba metaphysics is structured around the interconnected worlds of the living, the dead, and the unborn, a vision particularly germane to *Cursed Daughters*, where the boundary between these realms is consistently rendered porous. Quayson (1997), in *Strategic Transformations in Nigerian Writing*, argues that African writers use moments where the physical and spiritual worlds overlap to challenge the reader's assumptions about what is normal and what is possible, which helps explain why the world of *Cursed Daughters* feels so unsettling: Braithwaite deliberately blurs the line between the real and the supernatural so that the reader cannot comfortably dismiss the suffering of her characters as mere superstition. Gikandi (2003), in his *Encyclopedia of African Literature*, similarly observes that African writers have consistently used

metaphysical and cosmological frameworks to engage with questions of identity, power, and social reality. This study agrees but goes further to argue that in *Cursed Daughters* the supernatural is not merely purposeful; it is urgent, because the condition of the women in the novel demands a language strong enough to carry the weight of their pain, and realism alone is not equal to that demand.

3.3 Curse and Reincarnation in Nigerian and African Literature

The themes of curse and reincarnation have a long and distinguished history in Nigerian and African literature, rooted in the cosmological traditions of the continent and particularly in the Yoruba concept of *Abiku*. Jeyifo (2004) has argued that the figure of the *Abiku*, the spirit child who is born, dies, and returns repeatedly, is one of the most powerful and enduring images in Nigerian literary culture, because it captures something essential about a society that keeps producing the same suffering because it has never addressed the root causes. This study extends Jeyifo's argument to suggest that in *Cursed Daughters* the women function as a kind of collective *Abiku*, not individual spirit children but a lineage of women condemned to repeat the same suffering because the patriarchal conditions that produce their pain have never been dismantled.

Soyinka (1976), writing about Yoruba tragedy, argues that Yoruba cosmology understands existence as fundamentally cyclical, structured by forces of repetition and return that operate both spiritually and socially. This insight helps explain why reincarnation in *Cursed Daughters* feels so inevitable: it is presented not as a miracle or exception but as the natural order of things in a world where nothing is ever truly resolved. It is worth noting that Soyinka writes primarily about male tragic figures, and part of what makes *Cursed Daughters* distinctive is that it places women at the center of the Yoruba tragic cycle, a move both culturally grounded and politically significant. Okpewho (1983), in *Myth in Africa*, has written about the role of the curse in African oral tradition, arguing that the curse functions as a form of social and moral regulation, enforcing community norms and punishing those who violate them. The present study departs from Okpewho's neutral reading to argue that in *Cursed Daughters* the curse is not a neutral moral tool but a weapon deployed against women specifically, a way of controlling female behaviour. That the original curse is issued by a first wife against a second wife means it is a weapon patriarchy has turned women against each other, a reading Okpewho's framework alone cannot produce.

3.4 Women, Domestic Space, and Suffering in African Women's Writing

The representation of women's suffering within the domestic space has been one of the central preoccupations of African women's writing since its emergence as a distinct tradition. Ogunyemi (1985) argues that African women writers are concerned not just with gender equality in the abstract but with the specific, lived conditions of women's lives in African societies. *Cursed Daughters* is a deeply womanist text in this sense: it does not simply argue that women deserve better in general terms; it shows, in precise and painful detail, what the domestic lives of these particular women look like, and it refuses to let the reader look away. Boehmer (2005) observes that women in African fiction frequently find themselves doubly marginalised, pushed to the edges of society both by colonial histories and by indigenous patriarchal traditions, a reminder that the suffering of women in African literature is produced not by a single force but by the intersection of several. Stratton (1994), in *Contemporary African Literature and the Politics of Gender*, argues that African women writers consistently use narrative to challenge the cultural scripts that define and confine women, rewriting the stories society tells about what women are and what they deserve. This is precisely what Braithwaite does in *Cursed Daughters*: she takes the cultural script of the curse and rewrites it as a social critique, showing that what looks like fate is actually a structure of power that can be named, examined, and resisted.

3.5 The Gap in the Literature

From this review, it is clear that while scholars have written extensively about the supernatural in African literature, about curse and reincarnation in Nigerian fiction, and about the representation of women in African women's writing, no academic study has yet been devoted specifically to Braithwaite's *Cursed Daughters*. The novel's recent publication means that it stands at the very edge of scholarly attention, with only reviews and author interviews available as direct critical responses. Furthermore, while existing studies on Braithwaite have focused on *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, the concerns and ambitions of *Cursed Daughters* are distinct and demand their own critical framework. This study fills that gap by bringing Yoruba cosmological thought into productive dialogue with womanist criticism to offer the first sustained academic reading of *Cursed Daughters* as a text in which the supernatural, the social, and the feminist converge to produce a powerful literary statement about the lives of women in Nigerian society.

4. Analysis

4.1 Synopsis of the Novel and Overview of the Analysis

Cursed Daughters (Braithwaite, 2025c) follows the Falodun family, a Lagos lineage of women living under a generational curse. The curse originates generations earlier in a confrontation between a first wife and a second wife, both wronged by the same man. Humiliated, the first wife pronounces that no man will ever call the second wife's house a home, and that her daughters, granddaughters, and great-granddaughters will suffer for the sake of men. The novel then traces the grip of that curse across the family's women, while the men of the family remain untouched by it.

The emotional centre of the novel is the bond between two women. Monife, a Falodun daughter, lives a life shadowed by grief and disappointment and dies young. Eniiyi, her niece, is born on the very day Monife is buried and grows into a striking resemblance of the dead woman. Eniiyi's mother, Ebun, who is Monife's sister, resists the family's insistence that Monife has returned in the newborn, while the grandmother and the family's spiritual adviser, Mama G, warn that the returned soul is in danger of repeating Monife's fate. Haunted by wordless dreams of Monife and by her growing resemblance to her, Eniiyi eventually turns to the study of genetics in an effort to understand the inheritance she cannot seem to escape. Much of the action unfolds within the ancestral Falodun house, a home that the patriarch built with one room for each daughter so that any daughter failed by a man would have somewhere to escape to. Throughout, Braithwaite keeps the reader suspended between two explanations for the women's suffering, a literal ancestral curse and a self-fulfilling social inheritance, and she never fully resolves the ambiguity. It is this refusal to resolve that gives the novel much of its haunting power.

Building on this synopsis, the section presents a sustained close reading of *Cursed Daughters* through the frameworks developed above. It moves from the curse as both spiritual verdict and social condition to the way that curse falls only on women, to the ancestral house that can never quite become a home, and then to reincarnation as the cycle of inherited suffering, before drawing these threads together to show how Braithwaite mobilizes curse and reincarnation as a feminist intervention.

4.2 The Curse as Both Spiritual Verdict and Social Condition

The curse in *Cursed Daughters* is introduced early, and its origins are worth examining carefully because they reveal how the novel understands the relationship between the supernatural and the social. The curse begins with a confrontation between two women, a first wife and a second wife, both failed by the same man. When they are discovered fighting, with "torn clothing revealing their nakedness and blood trickling down from various nail deep scratches," it is the first wife who delivers the curse

It will not be well with you. No man will call your house, home. And if they try, they will not have peace. Your daughters will pursue men, and lose their hold on them. Your granddaughters will love in vain. Your great-granddaughters will labour for acknowledgement, but they will fall short of other women. Your descendants will suffer for man's sake. Ko ni da fun e. (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 15)

What is striking about this moment is not simply that a curse is pronounced but who pronounces it, and why. The curse is not issued by a god, an elder, or a divine authority; it is issued by a woman who has been humiliated by her husband's infidelity and by the social structure that permitted him to take a second wife without consequence. From the very beginning, then, the curse is not purely supernatural. It is the product of a patriarchal system that pits women against each other while the man responsible quietly walks away. This is one of the novel's most devastating observations: the man causes the wound, but the women are left to bleed on each other.

Yoruba cosmology helps explain why such a curse carries so much weight. In Yoruba thought, as Awolalu (1979) explains, the spoken word possesses spiritual force, and a curse uttered in a moment of profound injustice can bind a family across generations. The curse is therefore entirely coherent within the world of the novel; it is not an empty threat but a real spiritual act. Yet the source of its power is a social wound, and reading it through womanism sharpens this point. Following Ogunyemi (1985), what looks on the surface like enmity between two women is better understood as the displaced cost of a single man's wrongdoing, a suffering that patriarchy has redirected from the guilty man onto the women he has failed. The curse is thus spiritual on the surface and social

at its root.

This double nature is something the novel's characters themselves struggle with. Monife responds to her mother's repeated attribution of their misfortunes to the curse with barely concealed fury: "The curse. The curse. Damn the curse" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 22). The suffering the Falodun women endure is, on closer inspection, the ordinary, everyday suffering of women under patriarchy, given the dramatic and binding language of the supernatural. As Stratton (1994) has argued, African women writers use narrative to rewrite the cultural scripts that confine women, and this is precisely what Braithwaite does: she takes the cultural script of the curse, the idea that these women are condemned by fate, and reveals it as a social construction, a story society tells in order to avoid accountability for what it has done to women.

4.3 A Curse That Falls Only on Women

The clearest evidence that the curse is social rather than divine is that it targets women exclusively. The men of the family are untouched. Monife's brother Tolu observes the curse from a comfortable distance: "He didn't have to worry about a curse, as it only applied to the women in their family. He could afford to treat love as though it were a game" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 40). This detail raises an uncomfortable question: what kind of divine decree targets only women and exempts men? The answer the novel quietly offers is that it is not divine at all. A system that consistently denies women agency, stability, and love does not require a supernatural explanation; it simply requires patriarchy.

Read through the framework of this study, the point becomes sharper still. Okpewho (1983) describes the curse in African oral tradition as a form of social and moral regulation, a means of enforcing community norms. But the curse in *Cursed Daughters* is not the neutral moral instrument Okpewho describes. It is a gendered weapon, a means of controlling and punishing women for existing in ways that unsettle patriarchal authority. Stratton's (1994) account of women writers rewriting cultural scripts is again useful here, because Braithwaite exposes the gendered selectivity of the curse precisely in order to discredit its claim to be divine. A decree that exempts men is not fate wearing a supernatural face; it is patriarchy wearing the mask of fate.

4.4 The House That Cannot Be a Home

One of the most consistent images in the novel is the Falodun home, which is presented throughout as a space that can never quite become a place of belonging. The house was designed from the beginning as a refuge for women failed by men. It was built, the novel tells us, with "exactly six rooms in the one storey home," one for each daughter, "so that whatever happened to them, they would have somewhere to escape to" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 20). A house conceived around the expectation of female failure is, from its foundation, a space of last resort rather than a space of love, and the women return to it not because it nurtures them but because it is the only place that will receive them. As Monife observes on returning, the home "beckoned" to her even as she recognised that "this was not the life she should be living" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 20).

Yoruba cosmology deepens the significance of this space. As Awolalu (1979) explains, the home is a spiritually charged site, anchored by ancestors, where the living and the dead coexist and the past presses constantly against the present. To curse a woman's house, in this framework, is to attack the very centre of her spiritual world. The Falodun house carries exactly this weight of ancestral history. It is described as "virtually a museum," filled with the belongings of generations of women who sought refuge there, from "the hair claw that may or may not have belonged to aunty Wemimo" to "the dusty bible owned by aunty Supo" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 20). The past does not stay in the past in this house; it accumulates and presses in and refuses to be cleared away.

The most powerful expression of this troubled domesticity comes in the scene where Monife's mother is discovered performing a spiritual ritual in her darkened bedroom, the "lights were off, curtains drawn," furniture pushed aside, and incense so thick it is described as fog (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 21). The mother, the most familiar figure of safety in the domestic world, has been rendered utterly strange by a grief and a longing the social world has given her no legitimate means to address. Crucially, the ritual is not irrational. Monife understands what it is for: her mother "used any free moment she had, trying to pull off in the spirit world, what she hadn't been able to achieve in the physical" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 22). The spiritual world becomes a space of agency for a woman stripped of agency in the social world. As Boehmer (2005) has observed, women in African fiction are frequently doubly marginalised, and it is at those margins, where neither the social world nor the spiritual world can fully

contain their pain, that the novel's deepest disquiet breaks through. Read through womanism (Ogunyemi, 1985), the home in *Cursed Daughters* is not a grand philosophical abstraction but the intimate, concrete, lived condition of these particular women: a place built to hold women the world has discarded.

4.5 Reincarnation and the Cycle of Inherited Suffering

If the curse establishes the pattern of female suffering, reincarnation is the structural device through which Braithwaite shows that the pattern does not end with death. The reincarnation plot centres on Eniiyi, who is born on the same day her aunt Monife is buried and who grows up bearing a striking resemblance to the dead woman. When Eniiyi's grandmother first sees the newborn, she gasps and declares, "Monife has come back to me. She has come again" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 16). Eniiyi's mother, Ebun, resists this interpretation, insisting that "she is not Monife. Monife is gone" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 16). But the novel refuses to let Ebun's rational resistance settle the question. As Eniiyi grows, the resemblance becomes impossible to dismiss: "Now that she was nearing Monife's age, she could no longer deny the resemblance between them, one that was clearly much stronger than a familial resemblance. It was like looking into a mirror" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 69).

This return is fully coherent within Yoruba cosmology. As Awolalu (1979) explains, the soul may return to the living world, and the boundary between the living, the dead, and the unborn is permeable rather than fixed. Eniiyi's existence is not a violation of the natural order but an expression of it. Yet Braithwaite keeps the interpretation deliberately unstable. Eniiyi is unsettled by recurring dreams in which Monife appears, wordlessly, by the ocean, and she asks her dead aunt why she is appearing, whether she has unfinished business, whether she is truly a reincarnation, and why she will not speak (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 69). These questions are never fully answered. As Braithwaite has explained, she wanted readers to oscillate between believing the curse was a myth and doubting that certainty (Braithwaite, 2025a). The line between genuine reincarnation and the psychological inheritance of unresolved trauma is kept permanently open.

Reading Eniiyi through the *Abiku* tradition clarifies what is at stake. Jeyifo (2004) has observed that the *Abiku* figure in Nigerian literature represents cycles that refuse to be broken and pain that refuses to end. Eniiyi's existence, in this light, is not a miracle but a warning: the suffering that shaped and shortened Monife's life has not been addressed, and unless something changes it will claim Eniiyi too. Mama G, the family's spiritual adviser, makes this danger explicit when she warns Ebun: "Sometimes, the people that come back, they do not stay for long. And sometimes, they go exactly the way they went the first time. You are a mother. You are her mother. You cannot hide from this Ebun. You must save this child from herself" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 90). What makes this warning so chilling is not its supernatural dimension but its social one. The danger Eniiyi faces is the same danger Monife faced, a world structured to deny women love, stability, and belonging. Soyinka (1976) has argued that Yoruba cosmology understands existence as cyclical, and in *Cursed Daughters* this cyclical vision is deployed not as spiritual fatalism but as social critique. The cycle can be broken, but only if the underlying conditions are confronted.

Eniiyi's decision to study genetics is significant in this context. She reflects that "her love of genetics had come from her obsession with the idea that there were things in her, which she had no control over. The idea that she was Monife, but also all the women who had come before Monife" (Braithwaite, 2025c, p. 89). By studying the science of inheritance, Eniiyi tries to understand, in rational and empirical terms, why she carries what she carries. Her science and the family's spirituality are asking the same question: how does suffering pass from one generation to the next, and what can be done to stop it? The novel does not privilege one answer over the other. Instead, it suggests that the scientific and the spiritual are both attempts to name the same reality of inherited pain and the same urgent need to break the cycle.

4.6 Curse and Reincarnation as a Feminist Intervention

Taken together, the curse and reincarnation work as an interlocking system in *Cursed Daughters* to produce what this study calls a feminist literary haunting. Each element alone is powerful; together, they create a world in which the reader can never fully separate what is spiritual from what is social, what is fated from what is constructed. Braithwaite has spoken about this intentionality clearly, noting that the curse in the novel "became a metaphor for generational trauma" and that she wanted readers to "oscillate between believing the curse was a myth and then doubting their certainty" (Braithwaite, 2025a). By keeping the reader permanently uncertain, Braithwaite ensures that neither explanation, spiritual nor social, can be used to dismiss the women's suffering. One cannot say "it is just a curse" and walk away from the social critique, nor say "it is just patriarchy" and walk away from the novel's insistence that something spiritual and ancestral is also at work in these women's lives.

This is, this study argues, the most important thing the novel does. It refuses the comfort of a single explanation. Yoruba cosmology gives the cultural framework to understand why these things are not strange at all within the world of the novel, why the dead return, why the curse persists, and why the house holds its women. Womanism insists that none of this can be understood apart from the patriarchal structures that produced it, sustain it, and that the novel is quietly but insistently calling to account. Ben-Daniels (2022) has argued that the supernatural in African literature serves as a vehicle for engaging the political, socio-economic, and cultural realities of African societies, for speaking truths that realist narrative alone cannot carry. In *Cursed Daughters*, the truth the supernatural makes speakable is this: the suffering of women is not fate, it is not divine decree, and it is not the natural order of things. It is a structure built by human hands, sustained by cultural silence, and passed down through generations of women who were given no language to name it, until now.

5. Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that in *Cursed Daughters*, Oyinkan Braithwaite uses curse and reincarnation as interlocking tools to expose the cyclical and inherited nature of female suffering in Nigerian society. The curse, far from being a purely supernatural decree, is shown to be rooted in a patriarchal system that turns women against each other while men walk away unaccountable, and it falls, tellingly, only on women. Reincarnation, rather than offering liberation, reveals that the same suffering returns in each new generation because the social conditions that produce it remain unchanged. And the ancestral house, which should be the most familiar and comforting of all environments, is shown to be a site of entrapment and inherited grief, a home built for women the world has already failed. Together, these elements make *Cursed Daughters* not just a compelling supernatural story but a powerful feminist intervention that insists on naming what has for too long remained unspeakable. By reading the novel through Yoruba cosmological thought and womanist criticism, this study has also modelled a critical practice that reads contemporary African fiction through African intellectual traditions rather than through imported frameworks, a practice that takes both the spiritual and the social realities of women's lives with full seriousness.

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