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**Representations of Racism in Children of Blood and Bone by Tomi Adeyemi**

**A B S T R A C T**

This paper explores different aspects of racism within the context of the novel Children of Blood and Bone (2018) by Tomi Adeyemi, utilizing Critical Race Theory or CRT as an analytical tool. The novel is written within the genre of Young Adult Fiction which tackles the problems of young adults. Although the events of the novel take place in a fantastical setting, they capture reality and depict the lives of black African Americans. Black African Americans in the novel are represented by the oppressed minority who are the diviners. Critical Race Theory recognizes that the legacy of slavery and the racial subordination of black Americans are not only socially inherent within the non-black society but they are still covert in the legal and caste system. The novel is analyzed according to the five tenets of Critical Race Theory which can be listed as follows: Race is a social construct, Racism is ordinary, Intersectionality, Interests convergence, and Counter-Storytelling. These five basic tenets will be examined thoroughly in the paper in relation to the events of the novel.

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**تمثيلات العنصرية في رواية اطفال الدم والعظم لتومي اديمي**

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**الخلاصة:**

تستكشف هذه الورقة جوانب مختلفة من العنصرية في سياق رواية اطفال الدم و العظم (2018) تأليف تومي اوديمي، باستخدام نظرية العرق النقدية أو CRT كأداة تحليلية. الرواية مكتوبة ضمن النوع الأدبي لأدب اليافعين الذي يتناول مشاكل الشباب. على الرغم من أن أحداث الرواية تحدث في بيئة خيالية، إلا أنها تصور الواقع وتصور حياة الأمريكيين الأفارقة السود. يمثل الأمريكيون الأفارقة السود في الرواية الأقلية المضطهدة وهم ال Diviners. تدرك نظرية العرق النقدية أن العبودية والتبعية العرقية للأمريكيين السود ليست فقط متوارثة اجتماعيًا داخل المجتمع غير الأسود ولكنها لا تزال مخفية في النظام القانوني والطبقي.

وقائع المؤتمر العلمي السابع تحت شعار (العلوم الانسانية بين التحديات الراهنة والافاق المستقبلية) الذي اقامته كلية الآداب في جامعة

واسط بتاريخ 2023/7/1

يتم تحليل الرواية وفقاً للمبادئ الخمسة لنظرية العرق النقدية والتي يمكن سردها على النحو التالي: العرق هو بناء اجتماعي ، والعنصرية شيء مألوف ، والتقاطعية ، وتقارب المصالح ، و سرد القصص المضادة. سيتم دراسة هذه المبادئ الأساسية الخمسة بدقة في الورقة فيما يتعلق بأحداث الرواية. الكلمات المفتاحية: رواية اليافعين، العنصرية، نظرية العرق النقدية، تومي اديمي

*Children of Blood and Bone* is written by the American novelist Tomi Adeyemi. The novel was published in 2018. Adeyemi was born in August 1, 1993.<sup>i</sup> She obtained her bachelor degree in English literature from Harvard University. In addition to being a writer, Tomi Adeyemi is also a creative writing coach.<sup>ii</sup> (*Children of Blood and Bone* is Adeyemi's first published novel, which reached No.1 on the New York Times bestseller list. <sup>iii</sup> Her other notable works are *Children of Virtue and Vengeance* (2019), and *Awaken the Magic* (2020). <sup>iv</sup> The fantasy world of *Children of Blood and Bones* revolves around the protagonist Zélie, a diviner who endeavors to bring back magic to the kingdom of Orisha, opposing the ruling class represented by king Saran and his guards who treat diviners as second-class citizens. What distinguishes diviners from other people is that they have white hair and darker skin in comparison to the Kosidans, the ruling class. Because of their difference, they are being called names, prejudiced, and discriminated against by society.

To briefly recap the story, the problems of Orisha began on the day of the Raid, which took place eleven years before the beginning of *Children of Blood and Bone*. In the Raid, King Saran viciously killed every diviner and maji over the age of thirteen because they possess magical powers. King Saran did that thinking it would help him achieve peace because previously the magi of fire murdered many noble families. King Saran killed Zélie's mother 11 years ago during the Raid. That day, king Saran was able to block the connection between the gods and the maji so they could not draw their powers from the gods. Since then, the diviners have been oppressed, as king Saran keeps them subordinated.

Diviners are people who can do magic, but their powers are inactive. Once their powers are triggered, they turn to maji. At the beginning of the novel, Zélie who is a divîner fights Yemi in a sparring battle on the order of Mama Agba, their mentor. The fight is interrupted by the arrival of the guards who demand tax from Mama Agba. Later, the story shifts to the second narrator, princess Amari, the king's daughter. The guards deliver a scroll that could restore magic to the

diviners and help them become Maji. The king tests the maji power of one of the servants who is a diviner and happens to be a close friend of his daughter Amari. Once it is confirmed that the scroll has some sort of power related to the restoration of magic, the king kills the servant on the spot which affects Amari so much that she later decides to steal the scroll and leave the palace.

The king sends a search party led by his son Inan, the prince of Orisha, to look for his daughter and retrieve the scroll. Amari is lost and on her way, she meets up with Zélie and Tzain who manage to help her escape after a huge quarrel with the guards. The king gets furious and orders his son Inan to burn Zélie's village to the ground. Inan reluctantly does and later he lives haunted by the people he murdered. He is torn between his loyalty to his father, king Saran and his true identity, a maji in disguise, while his sister Amari joins Zélie and Tzain in fighting against her father's oppression.

The novel is analyzed from the lens of Critical Race Theory or CRT. CRT was originated in the mid-1970s. It was emerged originally in the legal academy and then spread to other fields of scholarship.<sup>v</sup> The term was coined by professor Crenshaw, a law professor at Columbia Law School who is considered the founder of CRT and who paved the path for the rest of scholars who came later.<sup>vi</sup> (Fortin, 2021, P.3). The theory advocates the idea that race is essentially a social construct and not a scientific category and that racism is not only something related to the individual's prejudice but also something implanted in the legal systems and policies.<sup>vii</sup> (Sawchuk, 2021, P.2) So, CRT believes that racism is systemic in the institutions which are covertly biased and operate to preserve the dominance of white people in society.<sup>viii</sup>

Critical Race Theory has five tenets. They are

- 1- Race as a social construct.
- 2- Racism is an ordinary experience for most people of color.
- 3- intersectionality
- 4- Interest-convergence principle
- 5- Counter-storytelling <sup>ix</sup> x. (Cabrera, 2018, P.211)

### 1- The Social Construction of Race.

The first tenet of CRT is that the concept of race is created by society and perpetuated by the legal, political, and economic institutions to benefit the dominant culture.<sup>xi</sup> (Ricucci, 2022, P.1). Moreover, race is not a biological or even scientific category. Genetic studies in the late 20th century denied the notion that humans are divided into categories based on the inherited physical and behavioral distinctions.<sup>xii</sup> (Salentin, 2023, P.2) According to CRT, racism is the result of complex and subtle social and institutional dynamics, rather than explicit and intentional prejudices of people. <sup>xiii</sup> Professor Matsuda stated that CRT uses history and social reality to explain how racism operates in American law and culture.<sup>xiv</sup> (Fortin, 2021, P.2) Kimberle Crenshaw, a preeminent CRT scholar stated that "Critical race theory is a practice. It's an approach to grappling with a history of white supremacy that rejects the belief that what's in the past is in the past".<sup>xv</sup> (Karimi, 2021, P.2)

In *Children of Blood and Bone*, diviners have existed all along in Orisha, just like black people were there ever since the dawn of time. So, this section aims to uncover how these people are given a category that is associated with inferiority. It also examines the methods that the ruling class used to construct a category that strips diviners of their rights and places them at the bottom tier, which are instances of prejudice, dehumanization, and segregation.

Diviners are exploited for labor and economic gain. Zélie's father is threatened by the guards that they would throw Zélie in the stocks if he does not pay tax. The ones who could not pay tax are thrown into the stocks and forced to work for the king until their debt is paid, but as taxes increase every month, they are forced to work for the king for the rest of their lives. King Saran does that on purpose to increase the number of the diviners who are thrown into slavery. By doing so, he believes that he will keep them under control.

The novel is a criticism not only of society and stereotypes, but of history as well, specifically the history of slavery. Slavery is still a subject of interest in contemporary literature. Although *Children of Blood and Bone* is a fantasy novel, it captures reality and depicts real life events of African –American people. Zélie states "The labor is only supposed to last until the original debt is worked off, but when the taxes keep rising, so does the debt. Starved, beaten, and worse, the diviners are transported like cattle. Forced to work until our bodies break" (P. 35).

The idea of the stocks in *Children of blood and Bone* embodies slavery in America. This goes back to the 17th and 18th centuries. People were taken from Africa and forced into slavery in America. Later, enslaved people tried to revolt. Those who supported slavery highlighted this revolt as a proof that the black people are savages, therefore, slavery is the only way to discipline them.<sup>xvi</sup> (Onion, 2009, P.6). CRT acknowledges that the legacy of slavery, segregation, and the racial subordination are still there and continue to permeate every facet of the contemporary worlds.<sup>xvii</sup> (Masiga, 2022, P.1)

In *Children of Blood and Bone*, King Saran puts restrictions on the diviners fearing that they would revolt or worse restore magic and take over the kingdom of Orisha. This parallels with history. As mentioned above, white people feared the revolting of black citizens which is why slavery and subordination were used as a deterrent.

In the stocks diviners are dehumanized. They get lashed if they do not do their work right. Zélie says “I jump as a stocker’s cane strikes down in front of me. It cuts through the flesh of a young divîner, leaving blood stains on the last clean clothes the boy will ever wear” (P.60). This negatively affected the diviners by placing them at a lower tier. The prejudice against them allows them to be seen as less than humans, therefore, this prejudice permeated in every aspect of the kingdom of Orisha, implanting negative stereotypes about them. The negative impact of the stocks on the diviners parallels with how negative stereotypical aspects of race were constructed back in history and continuously perpetuated and embedded in the legal and caste system in the contemporary world.

The construction of the battling arena represents another form of dehumanization. Diviners are exploited for the sake of entertainment. The arena strengthens the idea that the lives of the diviners have no value. The noble elite kosidans fill the bleachers to watch stockers (people who were put into slavery) fight each other to death in a battle which they supposed to be for their freedom. A stocker girl explains to Zélie “We compete in it. The stockers say if we win, they’ll pay off all our debts” (P.208).

King Saran is fearful of the diviners, therefore, he has designed a system that prevents diviners and kosidáns from getting married or have any kind of relationship. “It’s against the law for maji and kosidán to so much as kiss after the Raid”, says Zélie (P.58).

Because of the caste system in Orisha, characters make assumptions about one another. The caste system created disharmony and made a deep gap between the diviners and Kosidans . Zélie and her brother Tzain have made many assumptions about Amari just because of the fact that she is a royal Kosidán. Zélie makes harsh remarks about Amari, criticizing her behavior and her background. Although Amari has proven her loyalty to the diviners, Zélie is still suspicious of her. This shows how the caste system had an evident influence on the characters. Zélie contemplates, “Knowing her family, I'm surprised she didn't slit our throats in our sleep” (p.125).

The novel tackles residential segregation, which refers to the separation of two or more social groups within a geographic area.<sup>xviii</sup> “Though the space between Lagos’s walls is long and wide, my people congregate along the city’s fringe in slums. It’s the only place they’d allow diviners to live” Zélie states (P. 56). The diviners are restricted with their residence in Logos, the dystopian capital of Orisha. They are not allowed to inhabit certain areas which are only for the Kosidans. The diviners live in the slums, which are characterized by poor living conditions. This is how king Saran forces them into poverty so they would not be able to revolt considering they are weakened and limited with supplies.

Diviners are constantly treated with degradation by the ruling class, and the law enforcements, like paying taxes for merely breathing, and being exposed to different forms of exploitation, while Kosidans are privileged and esteemed. This policy led the citizens of Orisha to consciously and unconsciously reject the physical traits of the diviners and consider them inferior. Zélie comments on this point stating: “The people of Orisha try to chase out of their features, outlawing our lineage as if white hair and dead magic were a societal stain”(P.34). This led to construct a caste system based on false standards and negative stereotypes developed initially by the legal system and the ruling class, and consequently, establishing a category. According to CRT, this is how the concept of race was established. King Saran succeeded in doing this as it benefits the ruling class.

## 2- Racism is ordinary

Racism is an ordinary experience for most people of color.<sup>xix</sup> Because racism is so normalized, it seems natural to people preventing them from recognizing that something is wrong.<sup>xx</sup> CTR studies racism and the unconscious and it also analyzes the experiences that lead

to internalized racism.<sup>xxi</sup> (Kempf, 2022, P.48) Internalized racism is to consciously or unconsciously accept the socially constructed racial subordination, beliefs and stereotypes. To believe that people of color are beneath white people. <sup>xxii</sup> (Stern, 2019, P.1)

The novel depicts racism as an ordinary thing in the kingdom of Orisha and shows the effect of normalizing racism which is left on the characters. As a test to determine whether she is ready for graduation, Zélie is asked by her mentor Mama Agba to face Yemi in a sparring battle. A diviner verses kosidán. The scene of the battle between Zélie and her wealthy kosidán opponent Yemi shows how their background and physical characteristics like hair and skin color ignited hatred in them and set them apart as enemies. They are resentful toward each other. Yemi was banished from her village for being an illegitimate child and although she lives with the diviners at this point, this superiority is still within her. She looks down on them. Yemi treats Zélie as if she is nothing in spite of the fact that she herself was dehumanized and treated as nothing.

For Yemi, racism is normal for society has taught her that diviners are beneath her .In the case of Zélie, she sees herself subconsciously as an inferior. Zélie is envious of Yemi and this is very evident in the way she describes her opponent because this is what being racially subordinated led her to believe. Zélie is mesmerized seeing Yemi which shows her internalized racism. “I can’t bring myself to move. This close to Yemi, the only thing I see is her luscious black hair, her coconut-brown skin, so much lighter than my own. Her complexion carries the soft brown of Orishans who’ve never spent a day laboring in the sun”( p. 15).

Another scene of internalized racism marks the encounter between the protagonist Zélie and Inan, the prince of Orisha. Inan descends from hybrid ancestors. His powers are suddenly activated after touching the scroll. He is slowly turning to be a maji. Zélie notices the white streaks in his hair and she makes fun of him. If king Saran knew that his son is a maji, he would execute him right away. Zélie assures him that no one has to know about it but instead of calling him a maji, she says no one has to know that he is a maggot. The word maggot is mainly used by the nobles. They use it to curse the diviners. Throughout the novel, Zélie is called maggot by the guards and even by her opponent Yemi in the previous scene. By calling Inan a maggot, Zélie applies the same tool that her opponents use to degrade her. She thinks that she would degrade him but she failed by making herself a victim to what the royal class constructed. "I'll make you a deal. I walk toward the prince. Leave me alone and I'll keep your little secret. No one has to

know you're a dirty little maggot”(p. 122). By normalizing racism, black people learn to look at themselves as inferiors. They come to internalize racism within themselves and apply the same oppressive rules as pointers for them.

### 3 - Intersectionality

Intersectionality is one of the basic tenets of CRT. It is defined as the overlapping between race and other categories like gender, class, disability, and sexual orientation.<sup>xxiii</sup> (Monson, 2021, P.7) The concept was introduced by professor Crenshaw who argued that by treating black women as purely women or purely black, people ignore specific challenges that face black women as a group.<sup>xxiv</sup> (Coaston, 2019, P.1) When it comes to race and gender, intersectionality acknowledges that identities like “woman” and “black” do not exist independently of each other, but they create a higher form of oppression.<sup>xxv</sup> Kevin Hylton comments “Although the starting point for Critical Race Theory is ‘race ’and racism there is no intention to lose sight of the complexities of the intersection of ‘race ’with other identities”.<sup>xxvi</sup> (Hylton, 2012, P.6)

Intersectionality examines how the combination of different categories influence the individual’s life leaving him/her exposed to double-layered oppression. CRT acknowledges that what created intersectional individuals is the fact that race is divided along lines of class, religion, sexuality, status, and national origin. CRT also seeks to understand where intersectional individuals belong or whether it is best to establish a specific category for them.<sup>xxvii</sup> (Delgado, 1984, P. 59)

Intersectionality is manifested in the novel in the case of Inan who is the king’s older son, the prince of Orisha, who is soon to be the king. Inan and his sister Amari grew up in the same environment. Both of them have a slightly darker skin compared to the rest of the nobles who shared the palace. Yet, everyone overlooks Inan’s differences and he is not treated as an outsider. His mother is proud of him and loves him greatly. Throughout the novel none of the characters mentions Inan’s skin color, unlike his sister, Amari, who is rejected by her mother and forced to wear powder to conceal her darker skin: “I wipe my tears, no doubt smearing the paints and powders Mother forced onto my face” (p.52).



Adeyemi is points out to the dilemma of black women in contemporary world. Black females are struggling to live up to beauty standards. For years, cultural norms have racialized beauty standards. Society tells people which skin complexion, feature, hair textures, and body type is considered attractive. Discrimination is not limited to those of color but gender as well. According to Crenshaw, different forms of discrimination compound each other.<sup>xxviii</sup> (Ellingwood, 2021, p.3)

A whole chapter in the novel is dedicated to Amari and her struggles as a dark skinned kosidan. Few years back in the history of Orisha, their kosidan ancestors married diviners, hoping they would alter their bloodline and possess the magical powers of the diviners. This process does not work for most of them. Instead some kosidans have only inherited bodily characteristics like a lighter hair or a slightly darker skin which is not accepted for the noble class. To avoid criticism and embarrassment, the nobles force their females to dye their hair and put powder to cover their dark skin which they are ashamed of. The nobles or the dominant race in the Orisha have used to associate light skin with royalty as in the contemporary world of the Afro-American people. Because of their gender, this is only applied to female characters, “Have I mentioned how regal you look today? ... Though mother says “regal,” the word “lighter” hides behind her lips” (P.43) Amari states.

Gender discrimination is inherent even within the diviners’ community as in the case of Zélie and her brother Tzain. According to Zélie’s narration, Tzain is given privilege by society because firstly, he is a Kosidan which means he has copper skin and black hair. Secondly, he is a strong man and got skills in agbön (a kind of sports). This is where race and gender overlap. Zélie’s feeling of inferiority is derived from being a diviner and a female. She is suffering because of another category that does not coincide with society’s best standards. She suffers from double discrimination being a female and black:

“Strong and handsome kosidan that he is, Tzain doesn’t understand why I need Mama Agba’s training. Boys in Ilorin try to be his friends, girls try to steal his heart. Even the guards flock his way, singing praises of his agbön skills. *He does not understand what it’s like to be me, to walk around in a diviner’s skin*”. (Italics added, P.55)

The women in the palace apply vinegar on their skin hoping it would help lighten it but they keep it for too long that it becomes caustic. Even during the time, they have lunched the room reeks of the smell of vinegar.

“I try to swallow the lump in my throat, but the very act almost makes me choke. In that moment, the smell of vinegar becomes so strong I can already feel the searing on my skin” (P.44). This shows how far these women can go to live up to the standards of beauty. The royal class women are falling prey to the standards they established in the first place. This corresponds to the dilemma of women in real life. They are willing to do painful treatments to be what society considers beautiful.

The intersection between race and gender is very evident in the novel, whether in Amari’s case or in Zélie’s. Both female characters are struggling with bearing an additional burden compared to their brothers because of the dimension of gender.

#### 4- Interest Convergence

Derrick Bell is one of the American legal scholars who founded Critical Race Theory. He coined the tenet “Interest convergence” which emphasizes the idea that the dominant group will support and advocate for equality for the subordinated one only when their interests align.<sup>xxix</sup> (Shih, 2017, P.2)

Marian Lynn and Adrienne Dixon believe that:

Interest convergence is about alignment, not altruism. We cannot expect those who control the society to make altruistic or benevolent moves toward racial justice. Instead, civil rights activists must look for ways to align the interests of the dominant group with those of racially oppressed and marginalized groups”.<sup>xxx</sup> (Lynn, 2013, P.38)

In the light of this, the behavior of Amari is considered as an instance of interest convergence. Princess Amari is the king’s daughter. King Saran killed Binta, who is a diviner servant and Amari’s closest friend because of the awakening of her powers after touching the scroll. Later, princess Amari decides to steal the scroll and run away. After stealing the scroll and escaping of the palace, she meets Zélie and Tzain who help her evade the guards. Amari decides to stay with

them and help them in their journey to restore magic and support them to take down king Saran, her father, and ultimately achieve justice.

Amari has three motives which drives her to join her enemies. Firstly, she stole the scroll to get revenge from her father for killing her friend. Binta was Amari's servant and her only close friend in the palace. At the same time, for king Saran, the loss of the scroll is very threatening to his position as the king of Orisha due to the fact that the scroll has the ability of awakening the magical powers of the diviners and ultimately turning them into maji which endangers his rule. Secondly, by running away, Amari believes that she would have a better future. For years she has been trapped in the palace, dreaming of the outside world, making plans with Binta. So, running away was the fulfillment of Binta's dream as well. "My pulse quickens as I imagine visiting the world beyond the palace walls" (P.40), Amari states.

Lastly, Amari has got nowhere to go, and in addition to her lack of experience and surviving skills, she is chased by the guards. So, it is in her best interests to stay with Zélie and Tzain who can provide her with shelter and food, not to mention that they know every inch of the woods, unlike her who has just recently stepped outside the palace gates.

Though Amari later develops a great friendship with Tzain and Zélie, her initial motive to steal the scroll was not for the sake of saving the diviners, but to serve her best interests which parallels with the notion of interests convergence in CRT. Amari recognizes that her father is a tyrant all along, but she has never rebelled against his injustice. She would have stayed within the walls of the palace and did not have the courage to do something as bold as stealing the scroll, if it was not for the death of Binta. Once, she has kept sitting on the fence, while her father oppressed the diviners and exploited them with labor and tax. "Perhaps if Binta was still at the palace, I would risk crawling back with my tail between my legs. But even she's gone" (P.200). Amari's confession strengthens what is mentioned previously about her motives. She wants to change her mind for a moment, but she realizes that she has got no one to go back to and as a result, dismisses the whole idea. This is a proof that saving the diviners was none of her intention which emphasizes the point of interest convergence. Tzain has asked Zélie to treat Amari with compassion because she is on their side, but, Zélie replies: "I'm supposed to feel bad because her father killed the one maji servant she liked? Where's her outrage been all these years? Where

was she after the Raid?" (p.128). Zélie seems fully conscious of Amari's real motives of joining and supporting them.

## 5- Counter-storytelling

Counter-storytelling is defined as the means to magnify the stories of the marginalized characters to raise awareness about the struggles of the disadvantaged communities in an attempt to counter the dominant culture. For an instance, the white community is the dominant culture in media and art.<sup>xxx</sup> (Castelli, P.2) Laura B. Kelly argues that "Counter-stories are a tool used by minoritized communities to tell stories that reflect their experiences and knowledge. Counter-stories challenge the stock stories and grand narratives accepted by the majority". Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, as well, are of the opinion "how any event can be retold differently and that oppositional storytelling can alter how we construct legal reality".<sup>xxxii</sup> (Delgado, 2013, P.61)

This explains why the author Adeyemi did not include white characters in her novel. The novel revolves around people of color. The lighter their complexion, the more they are privileged by society. The characters' complexion varies from copper to black. The copper skinned are the kosidans and the dark ones are the diviners.

So, counter- storytelling is to tell the stories of those whose stories are untold. In *Children of Blood and Bone* each character has a certain experience that goes hand in hand with counter narrative. The multiple perspectives adopted in the novel allow the reader to see racism in various shapes considering they take place in different environments. Readers get to see structural and institutional racism through the events narrated by Zélie, racism within the same racial group as in the case of princess Amari and the royal kosidans who share the palace, and finally Inan who has issues regarding his identity as a maji which can be classified as internalized racism.

Through the character of princess Amari, the writer sheds light on a very important topic which is "colorism." According to *Oxford dictionary*. colorism is a "prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group." (p.292) Amari is the noble class princess who is discriminated against by her mother and the other royals for having a darker skin than the rest of them. "Mother places a cold hand on

my shoulder, fingers light against my dark copper skin”(p.43) The author Adeyemi does not present all the members of the royal class as privileged as in majoritarian stories (narratives of dominance) Instead, she included Amari to tell the story of those who are given less privilege than their peers for having a darker skin although they belong to the same race which is considered privileged in the case of princess Amari. Also to emphasize the idea that racism is everywhere and that does not exclude the discrimination against members who belong to the same race. Racism is an experience that happens to all people of color, and not limited to the black community.

Secondly, Zélie is the first narrator and the representative of the black community in the novel. Throughout the novel, Zélie goes through a lot of experiences to represent perfectly the struggles of a disadvantaged black individual. For example, she gets harassed by the guards and this remains with her until the end of the novel. “The wretched face of the guard fills my mind as the ghost of his grip burns my thigh” (P.30). She experiences racism and discrimination from the other citizens of Orisha, “I have no need to push others out of my way—one look at my white hair, and people avoid me like I’m an infectious plague” (P.29) Moreover, she experiences self-loathing for being treated constantly as an inferior “I dig my fingers through my hair, accidentally ripping a few strands from my scalp. Part of me considers cutting all of it off” (P.34). Zélie’s story is counter narrative. It is to magnify the stories of those who are given less space to tell their experiences. Adeyemi does that by presenting all of her characters as people of color who suffer the atrocities of different kinds of racism.

In the novel *Children of Blood and Bone*, there is an excessive description of skin color even to minor characters like servants who do not have a big role in the actions of the novel. Whenever a new character is introduced, the first thing readers are provided with is the skin color with no or less regard to the facial features and physical appearance. If a reader imagines the scene in their head, it will only demonstrate colored figures with blank faces.

The author reminds her readers about the skin color of her characters to remove the assumptions of whiteness in literary texts. People usually assume the character is white unless there is a mention of the skin color. Adeyemi in an interview with *Stylist* stated that she does it on purpose. She attempts to make up for the lack of black characters in literary works by

reminding her readers of how black her characters are. She says “we’re reworking 2,000 years of literature that, at least in the Western world, has been just about white people and I will whitewash my characters if I’m not constantly reminded about their dark skin”.<sup>xxxiii</sup> (Akpan, 2018, P.4)

In conclusion, by applying the tenets of Critical race theory on *Children of Blood and Bone* by Tomi Adeyemi, the study tries to interpret racism and the concept of race and their origin by tracing back how race was originally constructed through the events of the novel which are as closer to reality as possible, considering the novel is written by a person of color. The tenets of critical race theory seek to uncover both covert and overt racism. They emphasize the idea that racism is no mere an individual’s bias, but it is much more than that. Racism permeates many aspects of the world but it is subtle because of normalization.

#### Notes

<sup>i</sup> <https://www.readingzone.com/authors/tomi-adeyemi/>

<sup>ii</sup> ] <https://us.macmillan.com/author/tomiadeyemi>

<sup>iii</sup> ] <https://www.forbes.com/profile/tomi-adeyemi/?sh=1d5830206297>

<sup>iv</sup> <https://us.macmillan.com/author/tomiadeyemi>

<sup>v</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory>

<sup>vi</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory.html>

<sup>vii</sup> <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-why-is-it-under-attack/2021/05>

<sup>viii</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory-08f5d0a0489c7d6eab7d9a238365d2c1>

<sup>ix</sup> <https://www.kindacademy.org/product-page/critical-race-theory-explainer-poster>

<sup>x</sup>

[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328161970\\_Where\\_is\\_the\\_Racial\\_Theory\\_in\\_Critical\\_Race\\_Theory\\_A\\_constructive\\_criticism\\_of\\_the\\_Crits](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/328161970_Where_is_the_Racial_Theory_in_Critical_Race_Theory_A_constructive_criticism_of_the_Crits)

<sup>xi</sup> <https://www.cambridge.org/core/elements/abs/critical-race-theory/F09ECE8A7C0A75F6DBEC76D050DD3B6B>

- xii <https://www.britannica.com/topic/critical-race-theory/Basic-tenets-of-critical-race-theory>
- xiii <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/critical-race-theory-a-brief-history/>
- xiv <https://www.nytimes.com/article/what-is-critical-race-theory.html>
- xv <https://amp.cnn.com/cnn/2020/10/01/us/critical-race-theory-explainer-trnd/index.html>
- xvi <https://www.history.com/.amp/topics/black-history/slavery>
- xvii <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/02/what-is-critical-race-theory/>
- xviii <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0116.xml>
- xix <https://www.kindacademy.org/amp/what-is-critical-race-theory-and-should-we-be-teaching-about-it-in-schools-crt-explained>
- xx <http://www.ariseducation.org/the-need-for-critical-race-theory>
- xxi <https://jcri.ca/index.php/CRI/article/download/15401/10508>
- xxii <https://spssi.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/josi.12350>
- xxiii <https://sutherlandinstitute.org/the-core-concepts-of-critical-race-theory>
- xxiv <https://www.vox.com/platform/amp/the-highlight/2019/5/20/18542843/intersectionality-conservatism-law-race-gender-discrimination>
- xxv <https://www.ywboston.org/2017/03/what-is-intersectionality-and-what-does-it-have-to-do-with-me/>
- xxvi <https://cers.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2013/05/talk-the-talk-walk-the-walk.pdf>
- xxvii [Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Critical Race Theory An Introduction, P. 59 ]
- xxviii <https://news.columbia.edu/news/what-critical-race-theory-and-why-everyone-talking-about-it-0>
- xxix <https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2017/04/19/523563345/a-theory-to-better-understand-diversity-and-who-really-benefits>
- xxx [Marvin Lynn and Adrienne D. Dixon, Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education, P.38]
- xxxi <https://noiseproject.org/introduction-to-critical-race-theory-and-counter-storytelling/>
- xxxii [Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, Critical Race Theory The Cutting Edge P.61]
- xxxiii <https://www.stylist.co.uk/books/tomi-adeyemi-children-of-blood-and-bone-black-woman-representation/259223>

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