

Struggle between Resilience Vs Trauma in the novel, *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes*

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Abstract

The paper deals with analyzing the traumatic experiences of characters in the novel. To substantiate the character's traumatic neuroses, Freud's trauma theory as explained in Beyond the pleasure principle is used. His ideas on the pleasure principle and reality principle brings about the psychoanalysis of each character in Abawi's novel. The research uses Sigmund Freud's Trauma Theory to study the victims of the cast off's in each country. Views from various psychologists are also taken into account for a complete study of the victim. It also studies the suffering of victim's with respect to hallucinations, nightmares thereby ending up in post- traumatic stress disorder. The need for survival among these refugees is also highlighted in this chapter.

Keywords: Pleasure Principle, PTSD, Dreams, Survival, resilient struggle

Trauma theory from its origin has been considered as a medical/clinical aspect that deals with the psychic of a person. It dates back to the years when the world was torn apart by the Second World War. The war was so horrifying that it altered the lives of many. An unexpected and sudden loss of loved ones and possessions made lives crucial. Pushed into

such a scandalous situation, the minds of the people were distressed and barren with no desire to live life. When such people were put into observation, psychiatrists came up with the concept of trauma which the psychoanalysts followed up, to propose the Trauma Theory.

Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder or PTSD, as we call it came into picture with the survivors of the holocaust. Men, women and children who survived the Vietnam war, when examined on account of exhibiting the same symptoms of trauma, drove the psychiatrists into another venture named Post - trauma. In the year 1980, PTSD was recognized by the American Psychological Association as one of the further dangers in medical history (Ringel 5). It doesn't stop with the accompaniment of stress but also with flashbacks. Post – traumatic flashbacks can be more distressing for the person. He/she suffers due to certain scenes that continuously flush through his/her mind. The causality of these flashbacks can be either because of the paralyzed state of mind which does nothing but revels in the past experiences or as a result of a stimuli like a similar event that took place in their lives. The stimuli can be as simple as even a sound of a bullet in war. Some connect flashbacks with dreams though there is an explicit difference between the time period. Flashbacks are unconscious scenes played back when a person is awake, whereas dreams are stories that have made a profound impact in the brain, be it traumatic or gay depending upon the person. High intensity of trauma makes up for a person to suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Lansky 55-61). Some scholars deviated from this experimentation of war veterans to refugees, who were again throttled by governmental violence.

Trauma Theory by Freud

Sigmund Freud, a great psychoanalyst in his book *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* jots down ideas that are completely contradictive to what the world believes in. He refuses to believe in what Science has so far considered as the truth. He focusses on two processes of the human psyche, the pleasure principle and the reality principle (Vygotsky and Luria 12). He says that mankind's ultimate aim is to revel in pleasure and to avoid the pain that passes through him/her. He denotes unpleasure or tension as the increase in level of excitation and pleasure as the stark opposite of it. The increase in level of excitation is usually that which causes harm to the being. But in man the default instinct has become the instinct of "compulsion to repeat" thereby pushing pleasure aside. Freud writes in his book about the psychological consequences that people might succumb to when they are subjected to war, unexpected accidents that evoke fear and shock in them. He terms it as "traumatic neuroses" (*Beyond 6*). To put it in simple words, Trauma is the psychological or psychic tension that a person suffers from. A person is likely to suffer from trauma because of the external factors that prowl around him. According to Freud, the membrane which protects the mind, if hit by a stimulus that he/she cannot endure might result in a treacherous effect on the mind. Freud specifies it into two, the first of which is fear and the other is that of a bodily scar which would remain as a constant reminder to the victim (*Beyond 6*). He distinguishes fear, fright and anxiety to take away the wrong notion that all three are the same. Talking broadly on it, he formulates that anxiety can never be a cause for traumatic neurosis. But taking into specification, refugees cannot be categorized into this generalized idea. They have already confronted the evil that had pushed them into state of survival and they always fear about the uncertainty of their future. Their thoughts are always focused on the next hour of their life; the food they might or might not get, employment that could raise their standards or even the fear of being the target. The question of acceptance and the dark experiences that awaits them

in the host country puffs up their anxiety level, which has high chances of leading to trauma. None can come to a conclusion that states the weakest of people at heart would be the victims of trauma and the strongest are out of the scenario. Only the stoics could take up pride from their escapance from trauma (Reddick 50).

Allan Hobson and Robert McCarley worked on the theory of Dreams and explained that dreams were merely the result of the last thought or the stored-up memory in a person's cognitive process before he/she goes to bed (Obringer 2). Psychiatrists and counsellors used dreams as their source to analyse the psyche of a person. Dreams can be considered as a solid and strong evidence to make up a person's cognitive report (Beyond 7). With the help of dreams, psychoanalysts found it easy to categorize people who have been undergoing traumatic neuroses. In a traumatized victim, it was never a dream, rather a nightmare. Nightmare as a generic term is something treacherous and absurd. For the victim, the stored-up memory is either the death of his /her loved ones, bombings, sexual assault, disasters or war. Hence the nightmare was always considered as a relive in the moment of the traumatic experience in an unconscious manner. Their ordinary routine gets affected. The hormones that enable a person to fall asleep secretes less due to the fear that consumes the person in his nightmare (Reddick 51). Freud also makes up an open and unclear statement about the awareness of those terrible dreams to the person returns to his morning energetic phase. There might be slight traces of life in death scenes but on an overview, most of the victims dismiss it voluntarily because of the pain it would cause them (Reddick 51). With a broader view on nightmares and how they function, the research tends to focus on the protagonist of the novel, Tareq whose mind is disturbed with nightmares of witnessing his mother dead. Under the jaws of danger and experiencing a maximal death rate in and around him in a daily

basis has taken up a part in his memory. This stored up memory is what induces a nightmare in him (11). Atia never explicitly talks about her characters being victims of trauma. But she leaves traces for the reader to understand the traumatic neuroses, each character faces. She portrays reality in her novel through the extensive research she did, by staying near Syria.

Tareq apart from exposed to nightmares also seems to hallucinate Salim in instances where he feels low and needs his brother's help. Throughout the novel. Salim stands as the motivation factor for Tareq. The failure to have true information about Salim's death and the absence of his body creates complexes in his mind that enables him to hallucinate Salim. Lack of information also makes him to deny the death of Salim. Freud encapsulates this as 'perpetual reoccurrence' where the mind has the compulsion to repeat experiences from the past. Tareq's mind is so filled with the past experiences that he had with his brother Salim. In Chapter 4, he ponders over the possibility of Salim to have escaped from the regime and chances where he would be affected by amnesia (28). The reader/psychoanalyst can estimate the traumatic height that he is subjected to when he/she is introduced to the chapter where Tareq hallucinates Salim. He has a conversation type of hallucination. Hallucinating him, he says, "I don't want to leave you,". In response to that, Tareq receives a motivation factor to hold onto from Salim in-order to leave Syria and live life. Tareq promises to the hallucinated Salim on taking care of the rest of the family members. Hallucinations in the protagonist's case takes up a dual role of giving more reminiscence to attach to the traumatic incident and also tries to soothe in Tareq whenever he loses himself. At an instance, Tareq notices the difference in him. He questions to himself on his mental state but never attempts to disattach himself with those hallucinations. He revels in the mirth of atleast being able to see the people whom he has lost.

As Baron quotes Brody in her chapter “low socioeconomic factors is a major risk factor for failure to adapt, cope, and achieve well-being in the new living environment” (qtd in Baron 246) economical stand make up for the worse situation of the victim. Loss of property, wealth and their home might induce trauma in the person (Baron 246). In the novel, Tareq’s family is also subjected to trauma triggered by low economic status. In their journey towards Raqqa, the soldier uses fear of death to seize the money from Fayed, Tareq’s father. Fayed in-order to safeguard his son hands over the money to the soldier. Fayed’s look at the soldier with that of a concern who was also affected by the war is sure to haunt him forever (37).

As the reader moves through the Chapter 12, Tareq is found separated from his father and Susan in-order to save money for all three of them to move to Turkey. His work does not go on smooth because of his master’s denial of just wages. He is cast out and considered as dirt because of his refugee status. This status was something that could be easily exploited. In another instance, money plays tricks on the refugees who hang in the thread of survival. Atia throws to the reader the exact event that happened way back in Syria. People had to pay loads of money to take them apart from the danger zone to a safer place. Life was priced. None in this world can fix a price for a life. This mean act of making thousands and thousands with lives is likely to make a scar in the person. For Tareq, whose mental health has already been impaired due to loss of loved ones is sure to be affected more, by the trauma that is already rooted in him. Fayed, Tareq’s father feels pain and guilt when he could not afford for the money the smugglers demanded. The lack of money to safeguard his children makes him feel that he had been stripped off his fatherly figure (136).

Adding onto this, there was trauma that the characters experienced in the novel. The corruption of the smugglers in helping the refugees sail across the boat made them sick. The life jackets given to the people were also fake. About the supply of lifejackets and its cheapness, Atia speaks in one of her interviews with *The Guardian Weekly*, “What was striking about the island were the lifejackets – thousands and thousands strewn everywhere in makeshift dumps. And most of them fake. You could count all the human lives. The little ones with Spider-Man figures and flowers. All those parents who took the risk. Seeing the graveyards, with their dirt mounds and little mounds. How people died in hope of trying to live” (Beaumont).

Trauma for a refugee begins with crucial decision he/ she makes between life and death. The decision to live takes him into displacement which accounts for the worse conditions of traumatic experiences that follow up and the death decision prolongs him with fear of losing his boat at any point of time. Atia herself being a refugee expresses a gratitude to her parents who have made the decision for her, “I was lucky that my parents made that hard decision. It wasn’t a decision about self, but to save the family” (Beaumont). In the novel, Fayed makes up the decision. The reader is sure to go on with Fayed’s justification to flee Syria on account of his utterance where he laments that there was no more life over there but only utter despair (133). If not for the wise decision of leaving, Fayed would have regretted later.

Susan, on account of the research conducted brings forth a result that even the doctors and helpers who assisted the trauma victims were likely to be affected by trauma (Susan 8). Alexia who Atia portrays as the helper in the novel is likely to show traumatic symptoms. Each time a boat arrives, there builds in her a fear of death. The load of suffering made her

weaker and weaker. The inner feeling of Alexia is quoted as “The joy of saving one was always overpowered with the grief of not being able to save another” (110). The character Alexia in the beginning shows explicit fugue states by letting down tears and pitying them but later she tries to smother in her emotions, “They need me, No time to let my emotions control me” (198). Just as Freud states, repressing hard memories does not give resistance to the victim rather increases trauma in him/her. Repression of these memories also work under the pleasure principle; with a notion to avoid sadness, the victim tries to do so. With a notion of pulling back people from entering this state of repression, Freud tells that psychoanalysts must first try to untie the memories concealed by victims. Her obsession with the coat reveals the need for love. The lifeless bodies that washed near the shore made her feel numb (110).

Post- Traumatic Stress Decline:

Freudian traumatic theory and further theories proposed by other psychoanalysts did not account for the Post-traumatic decline. Figley accounts that post -traumatic decline occurs due to the conflict that occurs in the psyche or the victim’s lack of resilience in coping with Trauma. He substantiates using Freud’s statement, “. . . I propose to leave the dark and dismal subject of the traumatic neuroses and pass on to. . . .” (Figley 14). Explanation of Freud’s statement would put into reason that trauma always causes exhaustion of the victim and no growth might be shown. But in contrast to this, Baron gives a number of formulae to over win the traumatic stress that a person faces (Baron 246).

Tareq, as the protagonist of the novel, is constantly subjected to witness deaths of a number of refugees which results in too much of excitation and a block in pleasure. Exposure

to death is also likely to cause grief in him, which Freud puts forward in his essay, "Mourning and Melancholia". Tareq does not mourn the death of the people whom he watches die rather he has an eye contact with them that haunts him every second of his journey. He is pushed into melancholy, which Freud states as "disconnection from oneself" (Isaken and Vejling 6-7). Each time he witnesses death, he is baffled and is seen numb which adds onto his complex neurotic pattern. His pleasure baffles out giving vent to psychic tensions, thereby with more chances of leading to post-traumatic stress disorder. In the novel, Atia uses Tareq to show the real plight of the refugees. At times the reader is bound to pity the protagonist for having been pushed into the state of hell. He remembers all those who are dead with some reason. The doll and people around remind him of the family and native that he has left beyond. Throughout the story we find similar utterances that denote the bygone-ness of his native country. He himself states, "Syria is gone". He also remembers the injustice done to women with the inhumane reason given by the rapist. The murder of a young man in Daesh rattles him the most, as he sees the man's mother wailing and begging for his son's life. Atia makes her character reach the utmost height of trauma when she makes him have an eye contact with death/destiny taking away the man who travelled with him in the dinghy. Warding off the memories would do good for a person but Tareq fails to forget all those deaths which might consequently result in post-traumatic stress disorder.

Freud in his essay gives an overview of the functioning of the death urges or drives in a person. The loss of his family was too much to take for him that he wished he could also die in the same place where his family was. Susan on calling her doll, Farrah which is her sister's name also reminds Tareq of the loss he had. Susan, who is very tender, does not understand the loss and tries to be as normal as before. All she knows is that, Farrah is not there with her

to play and therefore she substitutes the doll for Farrah. The doll might be the only reminiscent of Susan when she grows up. The death threat that occurs to Tareq on his accompaniment with Musa builds a scar in him. His brave confrontation with death is an attempt made by him to put an end to his mental torture therefore developing death urges. The repetitive blood brawls which Tareq witnesses prepares him for death. All these stay as fresh reminiscences in him. The incident where he loses Susan to some kidnapper also sends him death urges which also comprehends the unbearable tension in him. Tareq says “This is death. This is what it feels like to be dead. Just let me die right here” (244). The death instinct is very strong in him, that he also imagines his corpse lying on the ground.

Tareq though emotional and traumatic tries a lot to hide his feelings by using familial duty as his distraction. He adopts resilience in him consciously whereas deep down there lies a scar that cannot dry up. This behavior of Tareq can be more or less substantiated with the utterances recorded by Shar in his article on the predicaments faced by the refugee women. One of the confessions as recorded in Shar’s article shows that women had hid their laments which would be applicable to any refugee as such (Shar 57). Hiding emotions was the best way the refugees could build in resilience and get away from eyes that look down on them.

Conclusion:

Atia’s way of landing her protagonist in his destined place denotes that Atia wanted to give an optimistic and humanistic outlook to the readers. Her statement on the reason behind the framing of the novel is that, she wanted the teens and the adults to know about the crisis that was lingering around in a person’s life. But her desire seems to be far from just showcasing the predicaments they faced. Like all fairy tales, her story also ends in gay with Salim being more in flesh and body rather than the mere hallucination that Tareq suffered

from. Atia's novel stands away from the conventional books that end with the protagonist being pitied on. Though Tareq's life as a refugee is yet to begin, Atia through her positive ideas towards the end soothes the readers. Considering it in its alternate; with post-traumatic stress disorder one can also prove that Tareq is sure to carry on PTSD but still there are chances for him to stabilize and reintegrate himself with the family he owns.

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