



The Psychic Crypt in the Blue between Sky and Water

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Abstract: *Palestine-Israel conflict broke out immediately post the partition of Palestine by United Nations in 1948 to fulfil the longstanding demand of Zionist leaders for a separate nation for Jewish community. The Zionist forces expelled native Palestinians from their residential areas during the mayhem of 1948 and transformed their identity to that of refugees within their own homeland. The conflict has had physical as well as psychological ramifications on the displaced native Palestinians and this psychological trauma of the Palestinians is transmitted passively across the generations as well. The research paper shall explore the novel The Blue between Sky and Water and trace the portrayal of intergenerational trauma of the Palestinians through its character.*

Keywords: *Displacement, Psyche, Transmitted, Trauma, Wound.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Intergenerational Trauma:

The word trauma though originally denoted physical wound on human body, however, the term contemporarily signifies the state of disequilibrium of human psyche brought about by an encounter of an individual or a collectivity to atrocious event which is beyond normal human adoption and has the capability to overwhelm the survivor. Cathy Caruth opines that trauma is a pathology of history which comes to fore through peculiar phenomena such as nightmares, dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks etc. Judith Herman asserts that traumatic event overwhelms conventional human reaction. The symptoms of trauma according to Kai Erikson are “restlessness and agitation...numbness and bleakness...depression, feeling of helplessness, and a general closing of the spirit, as the mind tries to insulate itself from further harm. Above all, trauma involves continuous reliving of some wounding experience” (183-184).

The pathology of trauma has the capability to disrupt the normal course of life on an individual level, as well as can damage a community collectively in emotional, physical, psychological and social dimensions. Trauma can passively haunt the later generations as



“the legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations”(Schwab 1). Gabriele Schwab narrates the example of Austerlitz experience of holocaust survivors’ in her work *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* wherein she affirms that the traumatic memories are communicable.

Memories are passed on from generation to generation, most immediately through stories told or written, but more subliminally through a parent’s moods or modes of being that create a particular economy and aesthetics of care. Formed during the earliest phases of life, the latter are often remembered not as thoughts or words or stories but existentially as moods or even somatically in the form of embodied psychic life. Often it is through the transgenerational transmission of body memories and forms of somatic psychic life that trauma is unconsciously received and remembered (Schwab 51).

Gabriele Schwab asserts that inherited trauma is the “unfinished business, of previous generation” (49). The traumatic symptoms in the later generation are not a consequence of “their own individual experience” but they arise from “a parent’s, relative’s, or community’s psychic conflicts, traumata, or secrets”. The “psychic substance” inherited from the primary survivor imposes the symptoms of the trauma on later generation. The pathology of trauma transmitted from an earlier generation to later generations operates with same magnitude and intensity later on as well. When trauma remains uncured, unrecovered and unassimilated it has the tendency to ascend across generations and hence trauma must be “worked through” and “integrated” by the survivor to avoid its transmission across generations (49).

Ilany Koganl describes “Primitive identification” and “Deposited representation” as two mechanisms through which the trauma can transmit across the generation. Describing the “Primitive identification”, Ilany Koganl asserts

“Primitive identification” refers to the child’s unconscious introjection and assimilation of the damaged parent’s self-images through interactions with that parent. This process is an attempt to heal the parent and help him recover. This identification leads to a loss of the child’s separate sense of self and to an inability to differentiate between the self and the damaged parent....It is this type of identification that is at the core of the offspring’s inability to achieve self-differentiation and build a life of his or her own (qtd. in Fromm 6,7).

The “deposited representation” has been discussed by Ilany Koganl as

a concept that emphasizes the role of the parent, who unconsciously, and sometimes even consciously, forces aspects of himself on to the child. By doing so, the parent affects the child’s sense of identity and gives the child certain specific tasks to perform. In these cases, the children become the reservoirs for deposited images connected to the trauma, which often initiate unconscious fantasies linked to it (7).

Schwab writes on the phenomena of intergenerational trauma in her work *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma* by referring to the findings of Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok that they created a discourse on “Cryptonymy” which “refers to operations in language that emerge as manifestations of a psychic crypt, often in form of fragmentations, distortions, gaps, or ellipses” (45). Abraham and Torok have argued that the suspension and burial of violent, tragic and disgraceful histories of the traumatic events in the



memory of the trauma survivors leads to creation of the “psychic crypt” on survivor. The psychic crypt according to them is an outcome of the “failed mourning” of the survivor;

a burial place inside the self for a love object that is lost but kept inside the self like a living corpse. The crypt is a melancholic, funereal architectonic in inner space, built after traumatic loss.... The crypt contains the secrets and silences formed in trauma. Accordingly, the secret conceals a trauma whose very occurrence and devastating emotional consequences become entombed and consigned to internal silence by the sufferers (Schwab 45).

The psychic crypt concealing the secrets and ghosts of the horrific traumatic events is the source of transmission of the trauma across generations.

Should the child have parents ‘with secrets’... he will receive from them a gap in the unconscious, an unknown, unrecognized knowledge.... The buried speech of the parent becomes a dead gap, without a burial place, in the child. This unknown phantom comes back from the unconscious to haunt and lead to phobias, madness and obsessions. Its effects can persist through several generations and determine the fate of an entire family line (Rashkin 39).

Ann Whitehead in her work *Trauma Fiction* affirms that trauma is transmitted across generations through the psychic crypt, that is without “ever having been spoken” and the affected later generations carry the transmitted unfinished business of previous generations as “a silent presence or ‘phantom’” (14). The “phantom” affects and transforms the psyche of the later generation and as a consequence the “psyche becomes ‘crypt’, a container that houses the seemingly unthinkable and unrepresentable residue of the past” (Whitehead 14).

Manifestations of Intergenerational Trauma in Susan Abulhawa’s Narrative:

The *Blue between Sky and Water* chronicles the historical expulsion of native Palestinians from their territory by the Zionist military force which occurred immediately after the resolution for partition of Palestine was passed in United Nations general assembly in 1948. The atrocious historical event popularly referred as Nakba by the Arab world had trauma-genic consequences on the displaced Palestinians as not only were they exposed to ruthless violence, deaths but it also transformed their political status into that of refugees in their own nation. Mamdouh in the narrative is a primary victim of the brutal traumatic event and his trauma remains suspended within his memories which later infects his granddaughter Nur through the phenomena of “Primitive identification” and “Deposited representation” (qtd. in Fromm 6,7).

The narrative chronicles the trauma of Mamdouh stating that he took along a photograph as was fleeing his homeland along with other displaced Palestinians during catastrophe of 1948. The snap evoked the images of the past on Mamdouh and he tried to “touch the past, to compel the clock to reverse its course” (32). Mamdouh eventually settled in North Carolina after a gap of few years of Naqba and he survived only by his granddaughter Nur as his wife dies of cancer and he loses his only son to an accident.

Mamdouh’s trauma of the Naqba and that of enforced displacement is inherited by Nur through Primitive identification because he narrates the stories of his past to Nur. He recounts the details of his native place. He informs her about the mayhem of 1948 which eternally transformed him into a survivor of a traumatic catastrophe. Mamdouh through the photograph carried along by him during the chaos of 1948 acquaints his granddaughter to the family members of Palestine which were living as refugees with in their own homeland. Nur



primitively identifies with the suffering of his grandfather as she begins to dream about the children of her Palestinian family in the landscape of his grandfather's village although she had never been to that village neither had she met those children.

The trauma of Mamdouh transmitted through "deposited representation" on the psyche of Nur can be understood in the terms that the memories of the terrifying past of Mamdouh were consciously etched on Nur's mind as she was told by her grandfather to make stories of their conversation. Nur obliged to her grandfather's wish and framed the stories of her conversation with Mamdouh under the title "*Jiddo and Me*" (74). Mamdouh also wanted her granddaughter to imbibe the aboriginal identity in a non-native territory and therefore taught her Arabic language. These actions of Mamdouh consciously or unconsciously deposited his trauma on the memory of Nur.

Nur's grandfather died after a span of few months and she goes through horrible experiences in the foster care. She remains silent because she feels betrayed and vulnerable. Her trauma is manifested through her peculiar reactions in situations of stress and discomfort. She studies psychology in the college with the purpose to help traumatized recover. Despite having the access to resources she cannot fit herself into the society of United States and eventually shifts to Gaza in search of her lost family and permanently settles there.

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