

**UNVEILING MINDSCAPES: A TRAUMATIC ANALYSIS OF
OMAR EL AKKAD'S *WHAT STRANGE PARADISE*.**

Dissertation

*Submitted to the University of Calicut in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the
award of Degree of Master of Arts in English Language and Literature*

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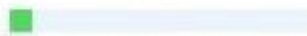
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I hereby declare that this dissertation entitled **Unveiling Mindscapes: A Traumatic Analysis of Omar El Akkad's *What Strange Paradise*** is a bonafide record of research done by **Asna T A** (Register Number AIAWMEG009), has not previously formed the basis for the award of any Degree, Diploma, Fellowship or other similar title.

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Chapter I

Introduction

While researching on the twenty- first century Canadian literature, it was found that there was a greater influence of the concept of immigration inherent in it. Among the wide spectrum of such Canadian fiction, *What Strange Paradise* written by Omar El Akkad was chosen for the study. Although there have been many studies regarding the major thematic elements present in the novel, like climatic conditions and changes, war, alienation, children, death and displacement; none of the studies have emphasized on the traumatic aspects in the novel. The goal of this project is to highlight the presence of traumatic elements and the evolution of Post- Traumatic Stress Disorder in several characters in the novel, along with highlighting the coping mechanisms, under the light of trauma theory.

To achieve this goal, the project is organized into five chapters. An introduction to the background of Canadian literature and Syrian civil war along with providing a brief account on Akkad is provided in the first chapter. The xenophobic elements and the effects of displacement are highlighted in the second chapter. The third chapter delves deep into the traumatic elements and the presence of PTSD in the characters in WSP in correspondence to trauma theory, along with laying out the coping mechanisms. The portrayal of grief, survival and resilience through the perspective of the children in the novel is projected out in the fourth chapter along with addressing its relevance in the present war- torn world. The concluding chapter proves the existence of psychological aspects in the novel and provides further scope for research.

Canadian literature finds its origins in English at different junctures in history, including the early seventeenth century with the Jacobean poetry, and the mid-

eighteenth century witnessing the emergence of epistolary fiction within the garrison community in Quebec. Following 1776, writers in the encampments of Upper Canada, began to delve into political verse satire, while newspapers and magazines emerged as platforms for political discourse and literary expression. During the nineteenth century, Canadian literature generally mirrored romantic and humanistic trends in Britain, with novels, dramas, and long poems following macabre traditions and historical romance, along with portraying sentimental trends. Autobiographies from the mid- nineteenth century offered insights into daily life, while travel writing, and short fiction emerged as new genres. Although folk songs and folktales persisted, native oral literature did not receive significant literary focus till the later nineteenth century.

Canadian literature encompasses a diverse array of multicultural communities, expressed through different indigenous languages. It also encompasses languages such as Canadian English and Canadian French. Influenced by a wide range of geographic and historical factors, Canadian writers reflect the nation's cultural richness and regional diversity. Traditionally categorized into French and English language literature, with roots in French and British literary traditions, Canadian literature initially featured narratives involving adventure and expedition, evolving to explore themes such as nature, frontier life, and Canada's global position. In recent decades, immigration has significantly influenced Canadian literature, with a growing emphasis on ethnic heterogeneity, making it greatly celebrated worldwide.

Akkad, a prominent figure in the current period of the Canadian literature, is a writer and news reporter, whose birthplace was Egypt. He was brought up in Qatar before immigrating to Canada during his teenage. Currently residing in USA, he began his journalism career at the beginning of the war and conflict, reporting from

various global hotspots, covering the NATO led war in Afghanistan, the Arab Spring revolution in Egypt, the military trials at Guantanamo Bay, the racial justice movement in Missouri and many other major events of historical and political significance. His investigative work earned him accolades such as the National Newspaper Award and the early career journalist honor, Goff Penny Award. His experiences with war can be clearly understood in his clear and powerful portrayal of war and its impact on the lives of people in his novels.

The writing of Akkad, spanning both fiction and non-fiction, has been featured in prestigious publications like The New York Times, The Guardian, and GQ. The first novel of Akkad, *American War*, achieved international success, winning multiple awards and recognitions. It includes the Oregon recognition for creative writing and the Northwest Literary Prize. It was hailed by renowned publications such as The New York Times and NPR. The BBC recognized it as one of the novels that had a significant impact on the world. The short story “Government Slots” by Akkad, was included in the anthology consisting of the finest Canadian narratives of 2020.

AW is the bold and influential debut novel of Akkad that envisions another civil war in America, a catastrophic epidemic. It portrays a family which is trapped amid all this chaos. The narrative probes on the dreadful consequences of war, addressing the possibility of America directing its most destructive policies and weapons inward. This novel just like WSP, also revolves around the themes of displacement and political issues regarding the policies of the United States along with portraying climatic changes. Akkad himself admits his depiction of such themes in his interview. According to him:

I wanted to tell a story about the universal nature of revenge, the way damage begets damage, and so it was necessary to tell the book from the point of view of the loser of a war. In the majority of its modern experiences with foreign conflict, the United States has seen the story told from the victor's standpoint. And this, I think, has allowed for a certain kind of obliviousness toward the other, the person who has to live on the receiving end of all those bombs and drones and "collateral damage." *American War* was my attempt to destroy that obliviousness. For me to do that, I needed to center the loser's perspective, and make sure the loser couldn't be dismissed as someone foreign, as someone far away. (Dalton)

The themes in the works of Akkad are mostly recurring in nature. His works often explore themes of conflict, identity, and the consequences of societal divisions. His writings frequently delve into the complexities of human nature, the impact of power struggles, and the resilience of the human spirit in challenging circumstances. Additionally, themes of justice, oppression, and the search for meaning are also prevalent in his narratives. The dominance of the theme of immigration that can be found recently in the Canadian literature, can easily be traced through the works of Akkad. He also gives utmost importance to climatic changes in which he portrays the darker side of the environment. The problems regarding displacement also possess a larger space in his fiction.

Myriam J. A. Chancy is one of the major contemporaries of Akkad. She is a Haitian- Canadian author and academic known for her novels and scholarly work. She often explores themes of identity, migration, and diaspora in her writing, like Akkad. Linda Rui Feng, another fellow writer of Akkad's time, is a Chinese- Canadian author known for her book, *Swimming Back to Trout River*. This novel narrates the tale of a

Chinese family's struggle during the Cultural Revolution and their subsequent immigration to the United States. It also explores themes of family, identity, and the immigrant experience.

WSP is a heart- touching novel by Akkad which was published in July 2021. The book received the prestigious 2021 Giller Prize and was the national bestseller. It was also longlisted as one among the works concerning the Dublin Literary Honor. The novel received wide recognition as it was able to connect with the emotions of the readers. Wendell Steavenson, an American author and journalist, writing for The New York Times, appreciated the book as: "This extraordinary book carries a message, not of a trite and cliched hope, but of a greater universal humanism, the terrifying idea that, ultimately, there are no special distinctions among us, that in fact we are all very much in the same boat." (Steavenson).

The Syrian Civil War forms the background of WSP as Amir loses his homeland and became subjected to frequent displacements due to it. The war began in 2011, resulting from the protests against the government of Bashar Al- Assad. It has since evolved into a complex conflict involving various factions, including the Islamic State (ISIS), Kurdish forces, and international powers. The war resulted in immense human suffering and displacement, with millions of Syrians affected. Akkad makes a reference to the political dilemma, war and chaos existed around the world leaving millions of people homeless and at the risk of death.

The Syrian displacement issue remains as a significant global affair in comparison with the refugee crises all over the world as in Sudan, Myanmar, Afghanistan and Central America. It is the greatest impact of the conflict in Syria, which is going on for a duration exceeding ten years, displacing more than fifteen and a half million people within or outside the country. Akkad approaches this issue from

his perspective of an experienced journalist and provides a space in literature to address the issues caused by war and the resultant refugee crisis. He portrays the different reactions against the predicament of the refugees ranging from sympathy to rage to flat out hostility towards them.

The life of Amir, who is a child from Syria, who survives a shipwreck along with other refugees is the focus in *WSP*. The story revolves around Amir's accidental journey in a ship that carries migrants. The ship sinks leaving Amir as the sole survivor, who ends up on an unknown island. He escapes and meets Vanna, a teenage girl living on the island, who helps him. Amir, as he was a migrant who landed illegally on the island, was followed by the soldiers. He was haunted by the fear of being caught. The novel portrays the growing connection between Amir and Vanna, as they develop a special bond surpassing the language barriers and fight against the challenges of being caught and trapped in the detention camp.

Vanna's tale of assisting Amir, her covert companion, in seeking safety and evading confinement in the detention camp on the island drew loose inspiration from J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. However, what El Akkad has distilled from this classic children's tale is a key concept of escapism thereby finding consolation in innocence-flying metaphorically- from the harsh realities of the world. There are potential thematic parallels that could be drawn from the life of Peter Pan as portrayed in the tale, like the themes of fantasy, escapism and longing for a better life. So, the novel can be considered as a modification or a different interpretation of Peter Pan's tale, as a narrative depicting a present-day child refugee.

Akkad has admitted that sometimes he becomes unable to transform or hide his anger such that it could be identified in his works. According to him, the ability to hide the personal feelings and frustration of the author seems to be a quality that he

wishes he should have possessed. Connecting this factor of depiction of anger by authors in their works, he appreciates the writers like James Baldwin, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson and Naguib Mahfouz, whom according to Akkad, are “horribly underrated”. According to him, “they have this talent for alchemy essentially taking anger and transforming it into something profound”. Meanwhile, Akkad locates himself in the places that he writes about and expresses his rage and frustration within the characters.

James Baldwin was a prominent African American writer and social critic known for his works that explored the issues of race, sexuality, and identity in America, making him a leading voice in the civil rights movement. *Go Tell It on the Mountain*, *The Fire Next Time*, and *Notes of a Native Son* are his notable works that continue to be influential in discussions about race and social justice. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson was an aboriginal author known for her contributions to indigenous literature that explores themes of decolonization, and resurgence. Naguib Mahfouz was an Egyptian writer whose works explore themes of existentialism, social justice and the complexities of human nature. Akkad was inspired by these writers and such themes can also be traced in his works.

Although displacement and refugee crisis form the centre of WSP. The portrayal of trauma, as a pervasive and complex phenomenon that impacts individuals, families and communities around the world, has profound and enduring effects, permeating every aspect of an individual’s life; shaping relationships, behaviors and mental health. Trauma in literature serves as a lens through which readers can gain insight into the realm of human experience, confronting difficult truths. Thus, tracing the traumatic elements and analyzing the presence of the PTSD traits in WSP helps the readers to confront the darker side of human lives. The

identification of the various coping mechanisms adopted by the characters enables the readers to have an enhanced comprehension of trauma, along with the lessons on survival and resilience.

Chapter II

Displacement and Xenophobia in *What Strange Paradise*.

Forced migration and displacement are complex phenomena that have significant humanitarian, social, and political implications. They refer to the movement of individuals or groups who are compelled to leave their homes or places of habitual residence due to various factors, often including conflict, persecution, violence, environmental disasters, or socio-economic hardships. The major consequences of displacement are humanitarian crises, psychological trauma, social disruption, economic strain and political tensions. Thus, addressing the underlying reasons responsible for forced migration, protecting the rights of displaced populations, and promoting sustainable solutions become essential for mitigating the aftermath of compulsive displacement and building more inclusive and resilient societies.

The compulsion of several external factors contributes to the forced movement of individuals or a community of people, which results ultimately in refugee crisis. The humanitarian crises caused by displacement call for international attention and assistance to address the immediate needs of displaced populations and work towards long-term solutions. However, it is still confusing on to what extent the issues of the refugees are being addressed. The different challenges posed by displacement that the refugees face include the need for shelter, food, healthcare, and protection.

Xenophobia is the irrational fear, hatred or preconception directed in opposition to individuals from different territories or cultural backgrounds. It can manifest as violence, discrimination or hostility towards individuals or groups considered as foreign. Xenophobia often stems from a combination of economic, social, and political factors, and it can be exacerbated by fear of cultural differences,

economic competition, or the perception of outsiders as a threat. The concept of displacement and xenophobia are interconnected such that they create a challenging environment for refugees as they are subjected to hostility and hatred in the host countries due to xenophobic sentiments.

The different aspects of migration that Akkad explores in WSP possess some autobiographical elements as well. As the author has also migrated to several places, it could be deduced that a partial influence of this frequent movement and his experiences could have been interwoven in this work. According to Akkad,

I am one of those people who doesn't have a very good answer to the question where are you from?! You know I was born in one place, I grew up in another, I am a citizen of a third country, now I live in a fourth and so, for people like me generally I think fiction storytelling in general feels like home because you can take the contours of this invented world and move it around to fit whatever your experience is. (Akkad)

Thus, the author finds his comfort and shelter in his home of literature. He never feels belonging to anywhere around the world other than the home of fiction. Thus, through the weapon of imagination he builds the world he wants.

In WSP, Akkad brings forth the economics of migration. It portrays how displacement ruins the lives of the refugees, forcing them to face extreme levels of suffering. This tale is crafted from a perspective that, as Akkad has elucidated, lacks a fixed location and is observed through the perspective of mobility. As he had articulated, the settings in his stories are the blends of numerous countries, customs and traditions that influenced his worldview. Thus, his storytelling technique becomes nomadic. This absence of a fixed setting and the continuous movement make this fiction captivating. Thus, it is not the account of a single place or a nation, but the tale

of the whole world thereby drawing the attention of the readers to the dreadful impacts of the global refugee crisis.

The novel begins with the depiction of a Syrian lad Amir, laying on the shore, which reminds the readers about the Syrian boy Alan Kurdi, who became the symbol of Syrian refugee crisis. The image of Alan's lifeless body washed up on a beach shocked the world when it circulated widely in the media. The heartbreaking photograph brought global attention to the refugee crisis, especially highlighting the dangers faced by refugees while fleeing and seeking safety in Europe. The tragedy sparked an international outcry for more humanitarian efforts to help refugees and better policies to address the crisis. The child lying on the shore thus can be considered as a symbolic reference to the humanitarian needs of the refugees.

The novel begins by mirroring the plight of the refugees and the adverse effects of the international refugee dilemma. The author paints a tragic scene that is highly sensitive:

The child lies on the shore. All around him the beach is littered with the wreckage of the boat and the wreckage of its passengers: shards of decking, knapsacks cleaved and gutted, bodies frozen in unnatural contortion.

Dispossessed of nightfall's temporary burial, the dead ferment indecency.

There's too much of spring in the day, too much light. Facedown, with his arms outstretched, the child appears from a distance as though playing at flight. And so too in the bodies that surround him, though distended with seawater and hardening, there flicker the remnants of some silent levitation, a severance from the laws of being. (Akkad 3)

The novel alternates between various time frames, literary styles, and perspectives, thereby offering a narrative that explores the troubles of refugees who, like Alan

Kurdi's family, pay smugglers and subject themselves to significant risks in search of refuge in Western countries.

Akkad makes use of his experiences as a journalist in reporting various global issues and wars to influence his writing. He uses intense and powerful techniques in the novel to demonstrate even ordinary details. When the nine-year-old Amir wakes up, "he doesn't register the dead, only their belongings: ball caps and cellphones and sticks of lip balm and forged identification cards tucked into the cheapest kind of waterproof container, tied-up party balloons. Bright-orange life vests, bloated as blisters, some wrapped around their owners, others unclaimed. A phrase book. A pair of socks." (6). These images portray the dreadful impacts of displacement.

The novel unfolds with a dual narrative structure. One timeline delves into the events leading up to a shipwreck, while the other follows Amir as he tries to escape capture by the authorities. This latter storyline is a gripping adventure, that makes the readers curious, which is narrated through the perspectives of various characters who encounter Amir: a dissatisfied fifteen-year-old girl risking her own freedom to help him, the administrator of the refugee camp, and a frustrated colonel leading the pursuit. His past tense narrative, centered around his experiences, resembles a play, primarily set on the sea voyage where tensions escalate among the passengers.

The migrants on the ship are driven by their fantasies and expectations regarding a greater quality of life in the Western world throughout their journey. Their ideas of the West are shaped by rumors, family stories, and media portrayals. Conversely, the islanders, content to embrace affluent tourists, show little interest in understanding the refugees arriving on their shores. Amir, as a child, is caught up in the complex conflicts of the adults around him, yet he holds onto the hope of finding a way out. The readers are compelled to root for his escape and survival amidst these

challenging circumstances.

The expectations of the refugees regarding the West as a world consisting of better living facilities is highlighted throughout the ‘before’ chapters in the novel, through the voice of Mohamed, who is the smuggler’s apprentice who tries to make profits from human suffering and the helplessness of the refugees. He often gives lectures to the passengers in the boat about the West, their world of fantasy, expectations and vain hopes. In a conversation between Mohamed and Maher, a passenger in the boat, Mohamed predicts that Maher “won’t make it” because he carries books with him. He tells that “You carry books around. You’ve got a storybook idea about how it’ll end up, you’ve got a storybook view of the world” (124), representing the idealized view of the refugees regarding the world.

El Akkad, with his omniscient third- person narrative, paints a precise and vivid picture, revealing his background as a former war zone reporter. Through Mohamed’s perspective, the harsh realities of refugee life along with the commercialization of migrants, are laid bare, which reduces them to mere “fuel” (179). He repeatedly warns them about the “real” West. He insists that to have any chance of acceptance, they must shed everything that seems foreign to Westerners. Despite this effort, Mohamed believes that Westerners would still hate migrants. Walid, a co- passenger, insults Mohamed and calls him a liar and a thief. Mohamed replies that “And when you finally get over there to the promised land, and you see how those dignified, civilized Westerners treat you- when you find out what they expect of you is to live your whole life like a dog under their dinner table—I’ll wait for you to come find me and apologize” (162).

Mohamed expresses his sentiments about the West in several instances throughout the novel, but the moment of greatest clarity likely comes following his

encounter with Umm Ibrahim, the expectant lady, who had been nurturing Amir with affection and kindness during their expedition. Fueled by anger, Mohamed directs his words to all the passengers, likely expressing his frustration and disillusionment with their hopes and sufferings:

The West you talk about doesn't exist. It's a fairy tale, a fantasy you sell yourself because the alternative is to admit that you're the least important character in your own story. You invent an entire world because your conscience demands it, you invent good people and bad people and you draw a neat line between them because your simplistic morality demands it. But the two kinds of people in this world aren't good and bad—they're engines and fuel. Go ahead, change your country, change your name, change your accent, pull the skin right off your bones, but in their eyes they will always be engines and you will always, always be fuel. (179)

These words of Mohamed were a heavy blow to the hopes of the migrants on the ship, but they did not believe him and still expected that they could raise their standards of living in a developed country.

Colonel Kethros is another significant persona of WSP, who represents the harmful administrative system and immigrant policies which adds to the pathetic state of the refugees. Kethros, in the story, is characterized by his open and critical remarks about the wider public. Initially, readers are presented with Kethros's remarks, taken out of context, which might lead to viewing him as an eccentric and judging him accordingly. However, subsequently in the narrative, a series of significant events unfold rapidly as additional migrant vessels arrive in succession. The impacts of migration and the mass population of the fugitives, who had been displaced frequently is hinted through the 'after' chapters in the Greek Isle. The conversations of several

characters in the novel hint that it was a recurring event there for the refugees to come illegally for a shelter.

Vanna's mother is the major representative of xenophobia in WSP. She demonstrates it through her distrust and fear of outsiders, particularly the refugees. Her attitude reflects broader societal prejudices and biases against marginalized groups, perpetuating stereotypes and negative impression regarding the migrants. She is the closest friend of Kethros, who is another major embodiment of xenophobia. They believe that the migrants are responsible for their ill fate and do not show any kindness or sympathy towards them. The way they treat the refugees shows how much they fear the possible domination of the refugees if they are allowed access to enter their island and live there peacefully.

The xenophobic sentiments of Vanna's mother, is evident through a particular instance in the novel in which a couple approaches Vanna's house as they were attempting to run off from being caught and trapped in the detention camp. Akkad narrates it as:

A couple, in their late teens, perhaps, walk cautiously toward the fallow harborberry grove to the west. The man carries a gym bag gutted open at the zipper line, its contents exposed--a few pieces of clothing, two apples and a soda can. The woman holds her phone to the sky, waving it here and there like a divining rod. They look emaciated, journey-worn. They move with slow, deliberate steps, monitoring their periphery as they go. They appear fearful and out of place, but Amir silently rejoices at the sight and sound of them. They speak his language; maybe they know the way home. As he considers whether to show himself and yell down to them, Amir is startled by another sound from the vicinity of the nearby house. He peers out the window to find a

woman standing at the edge of the home's stone courtyard, an old hunting rifle in her hand. She points it at the teenagers and issues a command in a language Amir can't decipher. Reflexively, they drop their luggage and raise their hands in the air. (64)

This shows the condition of displaced people and how they are being treated by the locals, here Vanna's mother. They move with constant fear of being caught and they consider themselves inferior to the locals there.

The anxiety and xenophobia among the locals by the constant arrival of the migrant ships can be traced through the instance in which a local woman approaches Kethros, seeking details regarding the boats that carried the migrants and expressing anxiety, saying, "It feels like it's every day now." (184) . Kethros observes the changing behavior of migrants nearing the shoreline, noticing an increase in vigilante boats that make it hard for migrants to distinguish between trustworthy and dangerous vessels. Several conclusions can be drawn from these events. Most of the locals in the community are not welcoming to migrants, but they hesitate to admit it openly. Some find solace when individuals like Kethros takes action against these innocents, and others harm them even more than Kethros.

El Akkad's critique of the West begins to emerge when it is coupled with the statements of Kethros. For instance, when he meets Nimra, who was a former French tutor, now working as a volunteer at the "hastily built migrant camp" (99) ; she describes the migrant camp as hell, an indication to which Kethros reacts, " If you do believe in hell, Nimra, then you must also believe no one ends up there who doesn't belong there " (116) . This seems to imply the views of the Westerners that the migrants are responsible for their pathetic condition and, consequently, worthy of degradation.

The dominance of xenophobic elements in the novel becomes evident through Kethros, who represents the local people who mistreat the migrants. He does not have any sympathy for the fate of the migrants. He is true to himself and to his xenophobia, racism and feeling of superiority. When Kethros threatens Madame El Ward for helping an “unregistered illegal” (116), she replies that the government had changed the law supporting migrants. Kethros shouts in rage, which becomes symbolic to the hatred towards the migrants:

Are you sure? Are you sure they haven't changed it back? Are you sure I couldn't make a single call to the ministry and have you thrown out of this place and replaced with one of my soldiers? Go join the Jesuits if you're looking for sainthood, but don't you dare get in the way of my work. That we are in a position to be fled to and not fled from is because we have systems, rules, proper ways of doing things. You want to see what it's like without systems? Hop on the next one of those boats that runs aground here and take it in the opposite direction. (116)

This also portrays the nature of laws and system, and how the rules and regulations add to the suffering of migrants.

The two kinds of reactions to the refugee crisis depicted in the novel showcases the types of people around the world who react differently to their issues. On one part, there are a few people like Vanna, Madame El Ward, the housekeeper and Nicholas; who sympathize with the condition of Amir and try to help him. On the other hand, there is much of the community like Colonel Kethros, his soldiers, the locals including Vanna's mother, and the tourists who are hostile towards the migrants and do not sympathize with them.

The political side implicated in the immigration predicament is reflected through the conversation of Kethros with Lina Eliades, a government official responsible for migrant tracking. As Kethros aligns with a nationalist on television on his views regarding asylum seekers, despite the representative making unrelated points, he tells Lina that “Your bosses are letting them colonize us” (153) , reflecting the fear of the westerners that the migrants would dominate them if allowed entrance. These instances exemplify the depth of hatred and contempt the westerners possess over the refugees. It becomes apparent that Kethros is not alone in his views, and he operates holding the implicit approval of a broader populace that is hesitant to admit their true feelings, often motivated by the apprehension of tarnishing their image or due to a misguided belief.

Thus, xenophobia combined with displacement presented in the narrative of WSP can serve as powerful allegories for real- world issues such as immigration, refugee crises, social inequality, political dilemmas and cultural clashes. The causes and effects of displacement that affect the lives of the migrants can be traced throughout the novel. The xenophobic sentiments result in the destruction of the migrants’ hopes of getting better standards of living. They are even denied the basic needs for human survival. By exploring these themes within a surreal or fantastical setting, the readers are provided with fresh perspectives and understandings on the intricacies of human disposition and society.

Chapter III

Psychological Trauma and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder as Portrayed in the Characters.

Psychological trauma delves into the profound impact that adverse experiences can have on an individual's mental and emotional well-being, influencing their thoughts, emotions, behaviors and relationships. Trauma refers to the emotional and psychological response to a distressing or disturbing event, often causing feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror. These events can range from accidents, abuse, neglect, natural disasters, to witnessing violence. It causes emotional distress, physical problems, behavioral changes, cognitive difficulties and relationship challenges that result in conflicts and social isolation.

Trauma theory emerged as a significant and interdisciplinary field within Western academia during the 1980s. Its growth was spurred by a convergence of psychological research, particularly within the domain of post-traumatic stress disorder; and scholarship in the humanities, including literature, history, sociology, and cultural studies. The 1980s witnessed a surge of interest in understanding the psychological effects of traumatic events, stimulated in part by the recognition of PTSD as a diagnostic category in the third edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1980, which provided a substructure for associating and studying the psychological impact of trauma.

Simultaneously, scholars in the humanities were exploring the representation and cultural significance of psychological distress in literature, art, and historical narratives. This interdisciplinary dialogue between psychology and the humanities

facilitated a thorough insight of trauma as a complex phenomenon with profound individual and societal implications. It has led to insights into the subjective experience of trauma, the dynamics of memory and forgetting, the passing down of trauma across generations, and the role of language and narrative in the processing of traumatic events. It contributed to a comprehensive understanding of the human response to adversity and suffering.

Psychoanalysis and trauma theory intersect in their exploration of how past experiences shape individual psychology and behavior. Psychoanalysis, pioneered by Sigmund Freud, emphasizes the role of unconscious processes and early childhood experiences in shaping personality and mental health. Trauma theory, on the other hand, focuses specifically on the impact of traumatic events on the psyche and the subsequent development of symptoms and coping mechanisms. Freud's concept of trauma, as outlined in his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* posits that traumatic events can disrupt the typical operation of the psyche, leading to symptoms such as anxiety, dissociation, and intrusive memories.

Trauma theory builds upon this foundation, offering insights into how traumatic experiences are processed and integrated into the individual's psychological framework. Scholars like Judith Herman have expanded upon Freud's ideas, exploring the complex interplay between trauma, memory, and identity. Bessel van der Kolk also holds a vital position in it. They have highlighted the role of social context, cultural factors, and personal interactions in moulding the experience and aftermath of trauma. Psychoanalysis and trauma theory, thus offer complementary perspectives on the nuanced interrelation between past experiences, unconscious processes, and psychological well-being.

The evolution of trauma in children is a major challenge and a matter of concern as it possess unique effects due to their developmental stage and reliance on caregivers. While the source of trauma remains the same, the common signs of trauma that can be witnessed in children includes behavioral changes like aggression, withdrawal or clinginess; emotional distress resulting in anxiety, fear, sadness, or mood swings; physical symptoms and cognitive problems. The impact of various distressing events that happened in children's lives can be mirrored through the development of trauma in them.

Trauma and PTSD comes intertwined in Akkad's narrative of the novel WSP. While trauma is the emotional reaction to an unpleasant or disturbing experience, PTSD is a disorder that affects one's mental stability, which usually arises subsequent to the occurrence or sight of a distressing event. The instances of both trauma and PTSD can be traced in this novel through which the past experiences of the characters are revealed. The horrors and impacts of the war which forces the people to migrate and seek refuge, being dependent and helpless, are revealed through the trauma and the PTSD inflected dreams of the characters.

While trauma is a broad term encompassing various distressing experiences, PTSD specifically involves a set of symptoms that persist for an extended period, following the occurrence of the distressing experience. Not all of those who undergoes trauma develops PTSD, but for those who do, it can significantly impact their productivity and quality of daily life. In the novel, Amir and Colonel Kethros are the major characters who depict the impacts of traumatization thereby presenting the ultimate symptoms of PTSD. This trauma and its aftereffects affect the mental and emotional well- being of the characters.

In WSP, trauma profoundly impacts the character of Amir, the young refugee

boy who becomes the focal point of the narrative. As a refugee fleeing conflict and brutality in his homeland, Amir experiences various traumatic events that shape his journey and psyche. His trauma is evident in several ways throughout the novel. Amir experiences the loss of family members and loved ones due to the conflict in his homeland, which contributes to his sense of displacement and isolation. He faces numerous dangers, including violence, exploitation, and the treacherous conditions of migration by sea. These experiences leave him vulnerable and perpetually on edge.

WSP highlights the element of trauma, particularly through the perspective of Amir. In the novel, trauma is illustrated as a pervasive aspect of Amir's journey as he flees his war-torn homeland and embarks on a perilous journey seeking safety and refuge. Throughout the novel, readers witness the traumatic experiences endured by refugees and the constant threat of danger. The refugees in the novel are forced to endure the harsh realities of life that force them to remain homeless and dependent. These traumatic events shape the characters' identities and behaviors, leaving lasting scars on their life and well-being.

Amir recounts the memories of his past, about the horrors of war and bombing that ultimately resulted in displacement which ruined his life and hopes. The narrative goes through the memories of Amir as he recounts them: "The week prior, not long after military planes had littered propaganda from the sky, little square papers that fell to the ground like dying birds, the barrel bombs had torn open one of the buildings nearby. In the evening the shells explode and overnight it rains and in the morning the children swim in the craters, Amir's father said. People live—what else is there to do?" (87). These memories of war seem to haunt Amir even when he tries to escape. This shows lasting effects of war, which ruin the lives of humanity, causing trauma, fear and anxiety in children.

El Akkad's portrayal of trauma in WSP underscores the stark realities faced by the refugees and the urgent need for compassion, understanding, and providing support to the innocent victims who experienced such profound suffering. The novel delves deeply into the anthropoid toll of displacement and showcases the remarkable strength of the human spirit when confronted with misfortunes. The trauma underwent by several characters in the novel results in both social and emotional failure among them making them weak in and out. However, trauma also serves as a booster at times that makes the characters brave enough to fight hard for the cause of survival.

Trauma can sometimes manifest as emotional numbness or detachment as a coping mechanism. Amir struggles to express or process his emotions which leads him to a sense of disconnection from himself and others. Like many survivors of trauma, Amir grapples with feelings of guilt for having survived while others did not. The internal conflicts add another layer to his emotional burden. Flashbacks or the triggered memories also resurface the traumatic experiences, causing Amir to relive the moments of intense fear and dreams. His journey highlights the complications of mental damage and its lasting impact on individuals.

PTSD is a mental issue brought on by a terrifying experience, either firsthand or by witnessing it. It may be aroused through flashbacks, nightmares, anxiety, and persistent thoughts about the event. Symptoms of arousal in PTSD may manifest as heightened startle response, hypervigilance, engaging in risky behaviors, sleep disturbances, difficulty concentrating, irritability and feelings of guilt or shame. In children, its symptoms might include reenacting traumatic events in play or experiencing frightening dreams. The intensity of these symptoms can fluctuate, often worsening during times of stress or when triggered by reminders of a traumatized experience.

PTSD inflicted dreams of Amir also depicts the impact war and refugee crisis possess within the daily lives of children. The young boy is haunted by the memories of his past and is constantly driven by the urge to survive. He is frightened of being caught so he tries to escape from the clutches of the soldiers. He knew that if he gets caught, he will have to live trapped in the detention centers established for the migrants that even deny the basic needs of the refugees. These migrant camps scare little Amir so that he becomes determined to escape from the hands of the authorities.

The implications of trauma and the development of PTSD in Amir can be traced through the instance in which Amir and Vanna try to escape from the island to the lighthouse: “She twists slightly in place and hears her spine and neck bones crackle. She eases away from where Amir lies, careful not to disturb him. In the night she thought she heard him moaning softly in his sleep, and when she tried to wrap her arm around him to comfort him, he let out a scream and wrestled her away. But the whole time, he never opened his eyes, never left sleep.” (165) . This shows the repercussion of trauma and the consequences of war and migration on the lives of children.

Colonel Kethros is a character in WSP who embodies the psychological toll of war and trauma, including symptoms associated with PTSD. As a military officer involved in conflict, Kethros witnesses and participates in traumatic events that profoundly affect his mental and social well-being. Several symptoms of PTSD including flashbacks, avoidance, hyperarousal, emotional numbness, survivor’s guilt and difficulty in sleeping are noticeable in Colonel Kethros. Akkad has portrayed Kethros as a strange character who suffers from trauma. In his words, “I have a very strange relationship with my characters generally which i almost certainly should be talking with my therapist rather than talking about in this interview but the most

honest characters in all my books are the villains because they at least are honest with themselves.” (Akkad) .

The intrusive memories or vivid flashbacks of traumatic events from his past, get experienced by Kethros causing him to re- experience the intense emotions associated with those experiences. He is always haunted by the instance of losing his leg. This is depicted within the book as:

In a way they all are. At times they carry out his orders silently and robotically. Other times, when he is in a good mood and behaves in a friendlier manner with them, they become too familiar, and soon start to bombard him with questions about his previous military experiences: what it was like to see the peace collapse, to work a slaughter field; whether he felt his lower leg come detached from his body in the moment the mine exploded; whether he ever killed. In times like these the colonel feels a great and sullen rage overtake him—not at the boys themselves, who behave the same way he did at their age, but at the fact that the end of his military career should have come to this: babysitting for little boys, running around from migrant ship to migrant ship, swatting at flies. (154)

This shows how much he is haunted by the mine explosion which culminated in the loss of his lower leg. The instance seems to haunt him and affect his daily life. It can be discerned that, there is this reference to the amputation of his leg, embedded in the text, which was an important event in his military career.

As WSP is in a way a reimagination of the tale of Peter Pan, Akkad himself has admitted that he created the character of Kethros as a representative of the antagonist in PP. While Amir represents the contemporary child refugee, instead of Peter Pan, Kethros represents Captain Hook, the antagonist of J. M. Barrie’s PP. “So

my Captain Hook character is this guy named Colonel Kethros, who is a soldier carrying ton of trauma from previous wars, physical and emotional. He is obsessed with chasing this kid Amir and sort of getting things right putting decorum back on the island.” (Akkad) . Thus, the sensory and affective trauma that Kethros faces is the impact of war.

Insomnia and recurring nightmares plague Kethros, disrupting his ability to get restful sleep and exacerbating his overall stress. He makes significant efforts to steer clear individuals, places, or situations that remind him of his traumatic experiences, isolating himself from others as a coping mechanism. He struggles to connect with his emotions and feels emotionally detached from others, as a strategy for protecting himself from further psychological pain. He also exhibits high levels of anxiety, hypervigilance, and exaggerated startle responses, constantly feeling on edge and unable to relax.

The dreams of Kethros, inflected by PTSD, turn to nightmares which haunt him repeatedly. As Insomnia and recurring nightmares serve as the major symptom of PTSD, it could be deduced from his bitter dreams that he is a victim of this psychological condition. These recurring dreams are portrayed as:

Sometimes the small details of the nightmare change. Sometimes the mother and the father are different, but the child is always the same. Young, of indeterminate gender, and blond, which none of the other children in this place are. Sometimes the father slices a mango with a paring knife, the juice running down his forearms. Sometimes he hums an old folk song. Sometimes he is dead. His corpse propped up against a bale of straw, his wife slowly moving an emery board against his broken fingernails. But the boy is always the same—serene, his blank gray eyes fixed to a spot down the road. The soldiers

are patrolling the country road, and to pass the time they dream up torture. It's a game they play, a piece of communal black humor without physics or metaphysics. The point is to use no violence, but be as cruel as possible. (157)

Thus, the Colonel is constantly haunted by the memories of his past and these nightmares disturb him causing insomnia and its further consequences. " Sometimes as in a dream about falling, Kethros wakes an instant before impact, drenched in sweat and grasping at nothing. " (158) . The effects of these evocative dreams are depicted here.

The strange attitude and behavior of Colonel Kethros always adds to his character. It can be assumed that his confrontation with the realities of his life and his leg accident had contributed much to the traumatic disorder he faces. He is always drawn back by the war- torn memories of his past and childhood. He compares the present condition of the island with the past. He can be perceived as a person who lives in the memories of his past which is beautiful as well as traumatic in unison:

When he was a child the shoreline was different, he's sure of it. He has a vivid memory of a comma-shaped spit that curled out a hundred feet into the water at low tide, the sand almost white, almost colorless. He remembers playing with the other boys, picking a spot about halfway down and building as big a dam of sand and rocks as they could while watching the tide coming, then seeing how long their construction would withstand the inevitable drowning. He remembers these moments and is certain they took place right here, right in this spot where now there's only a smatter of anemone pools and sharp black rocks. Soon the outcroppings give way to a public beach and this too he remembers as something different, a staging ground for evacuation drills in preparation for war or fire or natural disaster. He can't recall the specific

calamity from which he and his classmates were being trained to escape only the act of marching in line from the school grounds to this beach, and the sound of giggling and shouting and a high-pitched whistle, a teacher yelling, let's go, let's go. (185)

Thus, the Colonel's past mirrors the combination of both good and bad that has happened in his life which still becomes an inherent part of his life. His present character and behaviour is shaped by the experiences that he encountered in his past.

The administrative system that neglects the lives of the refugees who are displaced is portrayed mainly through the narration of Kethros. He becomes a representative of the severe administrative policies of the West that disregard humanity and their right to live. Kethros's lack of kindness and humanity even towards a small child becomes central to the plot of this book as it mirrors the severe immigrant policies of the West. He is strictly adhered to the rules and regulations of the administrative systems such that he fails to consider anyone besides the terms of rules. His psychological condition also contributes in shaping his character.

The pathetic conditions in the detention centers where the migrants live is apparent in the novel. Even though Kethros is aware of this he has little sympathy toward the plight of the refugees. He mostly keeps little connections with people which can be considered as an indication to his PTSD as such people isolate themselves from others as a coping mechanism. His adherence to rules makes him cruel. He tells Amir after catching him that: "I'm going to take you back to the camp, where you'll be fingerprinted and entered into the system" (231). This unveils the character of the Colonel.

The narration of the Colonel reveals the darker side of his character. He claims that being a peacekeeper was not the right decision that he had taken so that he diverted from it. He tells this to Madame El Ward as:

You know, back when I was a peacekeeper we had a problem,” he says. If I’m being honest, it was our fault. You see, when they tell you to keep the peace in a killing field, what they really mean is, Do nothing. And when you have soldiers with nothing to do, they tend to develop bad habits. So we had this problem with bribes. “I tried to put a stop to it, but my superiors told me, You have to let that sort of thing go, because you have no choice; there’s nothing quite as useless as a perfectionist in wartime. I think they were wrong; I think wartime is the only place for a perfectionist. But the problem is, at first people would pay a few dollars here and there just to get through a checkpoint with less hassle, and so it would get around that the going rate at that particular checkpoint was a few dollars. But then you have people who’ve got the means and who think if they just pay a little more than the going rate, they’ll definitely have no problems. When enough people do that, suddenly the higher amount becomes the new going rate. And so on and so on, until you have astronomical inflation. The soldiers begin to demand obscene amounts. It’s untenable. (115)

The portrayal of the Colonel in the novel thus underscores the long- lasting influence of psychological harm on people, even after the immediate danger has passed. His struggles with PTSD add depth to his character and shed light on the complex psychological consequences of baattles. People are not free from the horrors that the war possess, which affect the lives of people leaving them to face its unending impacts. This shows that violence would bring only more violence and war would

never bring peace. Even if the war ends, its lasting consequences will remain forever affecting the social, economic, physical and psychological balance among individuals.

The depiction of trauma and PTSD in WSP offers a clear understanding of the human mind and psychology in its rawest and vulnerable form. Trauma thus imposes lasting effects on the lives of people, especially children. The trauma resulting from war and migration is central to the plight and fate of the young refugee boy, Amir. Similarly, the PTSD inflected dreams of both Amir and Kethros can be considered as an impact of violence that they witnessed in their past. The ramification of trauma that affects the normal way of life of these characters enables the readers to connect with the influence of psychological aspects in literature for having a broadened perspective on human nature and emotions.

Thus, El Akkad uses literature to explore the intricacies of trauma, its effects on individuals and communities, and the process of healing and resilience. The depths of human mind is perceived through the medium of literature, thereby ensuring a broader understanding on the working of human mind and psychology. Trauma in literature serves as a lens through which readers can gain insight into the experience of mankind, confronting difficult truths and finding empathy and understanding. The personages struggle with the aftermath of their experiences, navigating feelings of fear, guilt, shame and disconnection from themselves and others. Through their struggles, readers witness the intense footprint of trauma on the psyche and the resilience that can emerge in the face of adversity.

Chapter IV

Grief, Survival and Resilience through the Lens of Children.

Grief is a comprehensive human experience, a complex weave of emotions woven in response to loss. It is an extreme and deeply personal journey, shaped by the unique contours of relationships and experiences, which consists of a complex array of thoughts, feelings, sensations, and behaviors. It encompasses sadness, anger, guilt, disbelief, numbness, and yearning, among other emotions. Grief reverberates through every aspect of an individual's life affecting the overall well-being. Although grief seems overwhelming at times, overcoming grief becomes necessary for the survival of an individual.

Depiction of grief in children is a different and complex attempt as it is influenced by factors such as age, developmental stage, personality, previous experiences with loss, and the circumstances surrounding the loss. However, their understanding of death and their ability to express and cope with grief may vary depending on their age and cognitive development. Understanding and supporting children through the grieving process requires patience, empathy, and sensitivity. By providing a safe and nurturing environment by encouraging children to articulate their emotions and offering them support and guidance, caregivers can help them navigate the complexities of grief and help to heal.

Survival and resilience are multifaceted constructs that encompass a spectrum of behaviors, attitudes, and coping strategies. At their core, they reflect the flexibility in overcoming setbacks, to withstand adversity with grace and fortitude, and to find meaning and purpose during hardships. While survival implies the mere act of staying alive, resilience involves the capacity to flourish even in the light of difficulties, to not only survive but to thrive. Resilience cannot be regarded as an inherent trait but rather

a dynamic process that can be cultivated and nurtured over time.

The portrayal of grief, survival and resilience in literature, through the perspective of children creates a unique narrative. Children's viewpoint in literature provides a distinctive perspective from which complex themes and events can be narrated as appealing to the readers. The innocence of children allows the readers to view the world unfiltered. Their comprehension of the universe is simple and immature so that it can lead to poignant moments of innocence and heartbreaking realizations as they encounter the unyielding truths of life. They may also question authority figures or societal norms in ways that adults might hesitate to do. This can lead to moments of rebellion or discovery as they navigate the complications of the world.

Omar El Akkad, being a part of the authors who utilize the voices of children in his works, highlights the innocence they possess. His former novel, *AW*, is a gripping and thought-provoking novel on the destructive consequences of warfare, power struggles, and the intricacies of human behavior, narrated through the lens of a young girl, Sarah Chestnut. Similarly, *WSP* also delves deep into the terrifying impacts of displacement and examines the predicament of refugees from the perspective of the young boy, Amir. Akkad uses the vulnerability of children to highlight the injustices around the world. He portrays children as forming close bonds with peers, relying on one other for companionship, which turns out to be a source of strength and comfort, especially in difficult times.

The unfolding of events in his works from the standpoint of little ones possess a unique advantage as the experiences of the refugees can be depicted in the most sensitive manner. Akkad, in his interview, speaks about employing the narratives of children in his works. According to him:

I am of the opinion that childhood is the time of our only honest interaction with the world before we develop the conceits of adulthood and before I mean we all live under capitalism, we all are required to do things and be doing things and there is an entire rule set of behavior that comes along with that. And in the time before that becomes accepted and the time before that works its way into a person's marrow I think is, is for me the clearest prison through which to pass a story. And you know again I write about stuff that I think is wrong with the world, for you know to be simplistic about it and juxtaposing that against the honesty of a childhood experience seems to be the sharpest way for me to show clearly how broken something is that we have all accepted is okay. (Akkad)

Thus, the author considers narratives through the viewpoint of children as the sincerest way of approaching the realities of the world. Through the innocent eyes of children, the readers can understand the story without prejudices.

Amir, the central character in WSP, offers a poignant portrayal of grief, survival and resilience as a child experiencing loss or trauma. His struggle to make sense of the world around him resonates deeply with the readers. Even in the bleakest of circumstances, he embodies hope and optimism. In spite of the unfavorable circumstances he faced, he believes in a better future, which serves as a powerful symbol of resilience. The injustice that he witnesses echoes with questions of morality and fairness. The hardships of the refugees contrast with the innocence of Amir, shedding light on global refugee crisis. From the frame of reference of Amir, readers gain insights into the themes of innocence, sense of curiosity, vulnerability and resilience, and the exploration of profound social and moral questions, thus adding

layers of depth and complexity to the narration.

The resultant distress caused by forced migration is portrayed through the story of Amir and his journey to the unknown island. Amir flees his homeland Syria, due to the ongoing conflict and violence that has engulfed the region. In the novel, he was compelled to depart from his native land, like the other natives of Syria during the Syrian Civil War, to escape the dangers of war and its long-lasting consequences. The destruction and violence caused by the war forced Amir and his family for displacement. The constant threat to life and safety due to the crossfire of bombings and airstrikes, made staying in Syria dangerous.

Amir's hope for a brighter tomorrow is projected throughout his journey. Leaving Syria thus becomes a desperate attempt to lead a peaceful life. Although Amir slipped into the boat of the refugees accidentally, it is through his innocent observations that the readers get the glimpses of the hardships of the refugees. The journey was perilous, but each one of the migrants in the boat was driven forward by the aim of finding a place where they could rebuild their life and escape the horrors of war. Thus, Amir's journey to the unnamed island becomes a manifestation of the courage, hope and resilience of the refugees who embark on dangerous journeys in search of refuge.

The boat Calypso, packed with people, sinks tragically, leaving its passengers lost at sea or strewn across the shore of an unnamed island struggling to manage the influx of undocumented migrants. Among the wreckage, the sole survivor is Amir, who wakes up frightened. Waking up on the beach, disoriented and alone, he was scared. There were dead bodies of the drowned that littered the beach. He flees from the strangers who were approaching him. There were the tourists in addition with the locals on the island, who were shouting in languages that were unfamiliar to Amir.

They were eager to watch the littered “foreign dead” (4) bodies which became a frequent sight for them. Here “The dead becomes the property of the living” (5).

The grief and the ill fate of the refugees including Amir is portrayed by Akkad in a highly emotional manner. Witnessing the washing dead bodies had become a usual routine to the inhabitants of the island:

No one can remember exactly when they first started washing up along the eastern coast. But in the last year it has happened with such frequency that many of the nations on whose tourists the island’s economy depends have issued travel advisories. The hotels and resorts, in turn, have offered discounts. Between them, the coast guard and the morgue keep a partial count of the dead, and as of this morning stands at 1,026 but this number is as much an abstraction as the dead themselves are to the people who live here, to whom all the shipwreck, all the bodies a single body. (4)

These lines indicate that it was frequent for the migrant boats to arrive there. The shocking reality of migration comes out when the readers come to know about the huge number of dead bodies that were casted ashore on the island.

Amir’s encounter with Vanna, a local teenage girl on the island, is the crux of the novel. Vanna’s parents have sought an alternative form of sanctuary from their previous lives in economically stable Northern Europe. Amir ran away from the shore to escape from the hands of military officers on the island and he ended up at Vanna’s home. He was scared at first, but Vanna made him comfortable. She extended a helping hand to Amir, offering him food, shelter, and protection. As she heard about the news of the shipwreck, Vanna realized that Amir was a survivor of the wreck. Recognizing the urgency of his situation, she took him to a nearby refugee camp, as an attempt to save him.

However, the refugee camp that Vanna and Amir visited, proved to be harsh and inhospitable. Madame El Ward, who was the officer of the camp that kept migrants, comforted him by speaking in his native language. Despite his desire to flee, El Ward advised Vanna that it would be best for Amir to join his fellow Syrians in a refugee community on the mainland and asked her to take Amir to a lighthouse at the north of the island where a ferryman arrives every Sunday to smuggle people off the island. Meanwhile Colonel Kethros, the soldier who was responsible for capturing illegal migrants, interrogated El Ward and expressed his disdain for the influx of migrants to the island. Being aware that a young boy made it through the shipwreck and is at large on the island, Kethros was determined to find him.

The pathetic circumstances of the evacuees in the refugee camps are brought out through the words of Madame El Ward, who felt pity for them. She tells Colonel Kethros:

I've got six hundred people in a camp made for three hundred, and all of them are owed a day's drinking water. Maybe you want to help with that instead? What possible good does it do to make them suffer like this? What purpose does it serve? Even ordinary criminals don't get treated this way. We have children who can't sleep through the night, we have people who don't talk anymore, who try to slit their wrists with canned-food lids. This place is hell.

(114)

While she has portrayed the sufferings of the fugitives in a heart-touching narrative, Colonel Kethros's reply to her was shocking. He replies: "Ordinary criminals commit ordinary crimes." (114) . The approach of the officers towards the refugees can be interpreted from his words. He represents the people who consider the refugees

inferior and do not even give them the dignity that a criminal gets. The shocking, darker side of humanity is being revealed through this instance.

The journey of Amir and Vanna towards the lighthouse was hard. They were being pursued by Colonel Kethros; who was obsessed with finding Amir. Amir was haunted by the constant fear of being captured. They had to steal clothes, take shelter in a cave, survive the scorching heat, hike through the grueling hot day and run through the woods. Even though they reached the lighthouse, Colonel Kethros, accompanied by his soldiers caught the children. Still, they managed to survive after a series of violence and conflicts. The children, after facing a lot of hardships, departed from the island with the ferryman. The resilience delineated by Amir and Vanna show here serves as the mirror to the condition of all the refugees in the world, who amidst all the adversities, move forward with hope and optimism.

Amir becomes the symbol of the grief- stricken refugees as his story revolves around almost all the struggles that the refugees encounter. The most confusing and touching part of the novel comes in the last segment, which leaves the readers in distress. In the concluding chapter, Omar El Akkad revisits the bright day of the Calypso's tragic sinking. A person wearing a safeguarding outfit discovers the lifeless body of a young boy among the wreckage. Upon closer inspection, the man notices that the boy is wearing a bell- shaped locket, a poignant identifier that confirms that the boy is Amir. This is a point at which the readers are left with a dilemma as the previous chapter had already depicted the image of Amir and Vanna escaping from the island with the ferryman. Multiple interpretations came to be ascribed to the particular climax of the novel.

In the closer analysis of the whole structure of the novel, it can be interpreted that the closing of the novel can be viewed as the author echoing his frustration on the

doomed fate of the refugees. Amir might have already died in the shipwreck along with the other refugees, which can be the reality. The story of Vanna and Amir that the author depicts in the ‘after’ chapters can be his imagination on how the refugees should be resilient and hopeful to survive in this world of chaos. The author depicts the strength of suppleness over grief and shows his readers that the urge for survival and resilience can change the deadly fate of the refugees, highlighting the elements of hope and optimism as the novel ends.

Survival and resilience thus come out as interconnected through the attitude exhibited by Amir. The struggles he faces from the beginning of his journey till the end bring out the power and positive impact of resilience on the life of an individual. It is his determination to live, that made Amir to go against the strict and inhuman immigrant policies. He was not willing to sacrifice his whole life in the refugee camp that denied even basic human needs. He aspired for an optimistic tomorrow and tried hard to survive. In this dangerous and uncertain journey, young Vanna assumes the position of a guardian and guide for Amir, despite her own tender age. Together, they handle the provocations and dangers of the island, forming a strong bond, surpassing the language barriers.

El Akkad thus brings out the need for optimism and hopefulness to surpass the grief-stricken state. Amir here wishes for an idealized world free of horror and violence:

Amir read, captivated – not by the plot or the impossible contraptions, but by the way Zaytoon and Zaytoona’s little town always seemed to reset at the beginning of every new story, as though none of the previous ones left a mark. He had never noticed this before but he noticed it now and, although he couldn’t articulate it, the thing that most amazed him was the sheer lightness

of such a repairable world. To live so lightly was the real adventure, the biggest adventure. (10)

Here Amir finds solace in *Zaytoon* and *Zaytoona*, his beloved comic book series, which portrays an idealized world, where any harm suffered by the characters is miraculously healed before their next escapade. This fantasy world contrasts sharply with Amir's reality- his Syrian home razed by bombs, leaving himself together with his family displaced as refugees. Amir later parallels the comic's world with his own situation alongside Vanna.

The desire for survival is inherent in every refugee. It is this desire that drives them forward to face all the adversities in their life. It prompts them to travel to places taking risks without considering the legal barriers and administrative policies. The final piece of advice that Amir's Quiet Uncle gives him also resonates with the intention of survival. He apprises Amir that, "Whatever happens, you have to promise me you'll do whatever you have to do. Whatever kind of person you need to be – quiet, loud, violent, invisible – you be that person. Promise me" (Akkad). Analyzing the novel, it becomes evident that it is this advice that most of the roles in this adventurous tale follow. They merely navigate survival in the best way possible.

Thus, Omar El Akkad brings out the grief- stricken lives of the refugees, their power of resilience to survive, facing the challenges; through the perspective of the little escapee boy from Syria, Amir. Amir becomes the representative of every refugee in the world by highlighting their determination to live. He survives the trauma of migration, surpasses the language barriers and overcomes the risk of death. WSP thus gives a strong solution to the global crisis of war and violence. He sticks to the might of resilience, perseverance and survival with hope and optimism.

The novel can be connected with the current issues in Palestine, Sudan, Yemen, Afghanistan and several other countries which face violence, displacement and humanitarian crises. The horrors and impacts of war have reduced them to refugees who became homeless and are haunted by the constant fear of death. What they wish for is not the paradise of Eden, but a paradise where basic human rights are fulfilled. Similarly, Amir yearns for a place where survival is not a constant battle against difficult circumstances, but instead an achievable reality in a captivating paradise.

In the presence of life's myriad challenges and adversities, the human spirit has a remarkable capacity to endure, adapt, and even thrive. Survival and resilience are not merely qualities that individuals possess but profound expressions of their innate resilience, the indomitable will to persevere and overcome obstacles, no matter how daunting they may seem. The adversity of trauma that arises here is shattered by the spark of resilience. While the path to resilience may be fraught with obstacles and setbacks, it is also marked by moments of growth, insight, and transformation.

Thus, the depiction of grief, survival and resilience through the perception of children offers a unique and complex experience for the readers. Both Vanna and Amir portray the darker side of humanity without the preconceptions and prejudices of adulthood. It is this innocence that prompts Vanna to help Amir without being concerned about the consequences. Amir especially reflects the condition of every refugee as they navigate across the globe. It is not only the cause of displacement. "What happens when home is forced away from you? What happens when the land becomes uninhabitable?" (Akkad). Amir thus attempts to overcome his grief through the potentiality of resilience.

Chapter V

Conclusion

Literature serves as a mirror reflecting the convolutions of the humankind, exploring timeless motifs like love, loss, identity, and the search for truth. Throughout history, it had a crucial role in molding cultures, ideologies, and societies. Through literature, individuals can transcend time and space, immersing themselves in worlds both familiar and fantastical, gaining insights into diverse perspectives and experiences. It acts as a medium that allows to comprehend empathy and understanding, fostering connections between individuals and communities. By engaging with characters and narratives, the readers are encouraged to walk in the shoes of others, to see the world through different eyes, and to contemplate the twists and turns of human experience.

Trauma, as a theme that recurs in literature, reflects human experience in its rawest and most vulnerable form. Authors use literature as a means to explore the entanglements of trauma, its effects on individuals and communities, and the process of healing and resilience. Trauma in literature serves as a medium to resonate the difficult truths, confronting the human condition. Literature thus fosters empathy and understanding, encouraging readers to work towards creating a more compassionate and supportive society. Thus, trauma becomes a powerful weapon to portray the darker side of humanity.

The portrayal of the characters who have experienced traumatic events forms the centre in the depiction of trauma. Through the struggles of these characters, the readers could witness the extreme sequels of suffering on the psyche and how they adopt defence mechanisms to cope with that. Literature delves into how trauma shapes identity and relationships. The characters are left with the questions of identity

and belonging as they confront a set of circumstances in which trauma has altered their identity and their position in the world. The effects of trauma become more intense and deeper in the context of the children.

Amir, in *WSP* is the embodiment of trauma and healing, who fights hard to survive amid all the challenges that life has thrown against him. Through Amir, Akkad vocalizes those who have been silenced and suppressed. Amir, as a young boy, went through many problems ranging from the loss of his home and family to risking his own life. He was forced to pass his remaining life in the detention camp made for the migrants where they are not even treated as human beings. Even access to drinking water was denied there. The author thus reflects the struggles of the asylum seekers and how they are treated in the camps where they expect a good life.

Survival for Amir was the only goal which prompted him to take any risks throughout his journey. With the help of Vanna, he faces all the challenges that confronted him. Amir becomes a symbol of survival and resilience, through whom the readers get insight about the living conditions of the refugees. The dreadful impacts of war and how the people are forced to flee from their homeland, can be traced through the life of Amir. The author indirectly reflects on the futility of war and shows that it would only result in more violence and hatred. The consequences of war are never ending such that it remains as a curse on the entire humanity.

The present global issue and condition of the war- torn world can be identified with the portrayal of the refugee displacement catastrophe in *WSP*. War and destruction serve as the major background of the story as it was the cause of Amir's journey and the resultant shipwreck. Amir flees Syria due to the civil war that costed the lives of many innocents and made many homeless. Amir and his family move to several places in search of refuge and the island also was their hope to get a better

living condition. The reality that killed Amir's expectation was the inhospitable detention camps that ill-treated the migrants as though they were responsible for their fate.

Displacement caused by war is the major cause of trauma that can be identified in Amir. The haunting dreams of Amir can be considered as the lasting impact that war creates in the life of children. The pain of homelessness and the frequent movements in search of shelter affects both the mental and physical well-being of an individual and its effects would be more intense in children. Amir represents every refugee child around the world, who is denied the beauty and grace of childhood and is instead destined to face the dark realities of the world.

The world that remains silent towards the problems of the migrants is portrayed through the xenophobic elements in the novel. The locals and the tourists had no sentiments towards the troubles of the refugees. In this world of selfish people; Vanna, along with Madame El Ward and several few characters were the only ones who showed kindness towards Amir. Similarly, the refugees around the world receive little kindness and almost no one is concerned about how their life would turn out. The most painful part is that the refugees are destined to suffer the consequences of problems that are unknown to them.

Trauma and PTSD are interconnected concepts that can be traced in WSP. Amir and Kethros are the major characters through whom the existence of these elements can be tracked. The various symptoms of trauma in association with PTSD were identified in the characters which proves the dominance of the psychological aspects in the novel. Under the light of trauma theory, the instances revealing the presence of psychological trauma and the occurrence of PTSD were brought out. The different sides of coping with distress and trauma are understood by the extreme

opposite reactions and behavior of Amir in contrast with Kethros. Their responses and healing mechanisms differ, which creates their character formation and identity.

The exploration of various coping mechanisms that the individuals utilize in reaction to trauma, from denial and avoidance to self- destructive behavior was identified through the nature of Kethros. The PTSD inflected dreams of Kethros highlights the impression of trauma and how he alienates himself from the people around him. The impact of war on the life of Kethros is also notable in the development of trauma. Through these portrayals, readers gain insight into the complexities of trauma recovery and the challenges of confronting painful truths. The depiction of trauma validates the experiences of individuals thereby echoing their silenced voices.

The portrayal of grief is a crucial role in the narrative as it offers a question to the readers whether the characters in the story, especially children would overcome it or not. Amir, although grief- stricken by the impacts of war and migration, still manages to survive through the power of survival and resilience. Amir was driven by the desire to live no matter how hard life had been to him. He promotes the need to stand strong amid the challenges that life gives so that it reverberates the author's message to every reader. Amir was not merely trying to exist, but he was trying hard to survive with resilience which makes his story unique and captivating.

To conclude, the analysis of the novel WSP under the light of trauma theory brings out the interconnection of psychological aspects in humanitarian studies. By illuminating the realities of trauma, literature fosters empathy and understanding among readers. Studying literature under the light of science helps in revealing human nature with the power of imagination. It illuminates the journey towards healing and resilience. Through literature, the readers gain insight into the profound impact of

trauma on individuals and the different methods through which storytelling serves as a vehicle for healing and transformation. It unveils the mindscape of the characters representing the humankind.

The scopes for research regarding the intellectual facets of WSP cannot be neglected. Although several analyses had been associated regarding the thematic contents and narrative techniques of the novel, none of the studies have emphasized on the psychological elements inherent in the novel. While this study focused on the traumatic elements and the presence of PTSD, further research can be carried out on the novel using the principles of psychoanalysis and personality development. Moreover, studies regarding language and language barriers can also be carried out in the text. A greater scope for climatic studies is also inherent in the works of Akkad, especially WSP. The novel deserves a significant position and it studied in relation with other Canadian fictions, tracing the dominance of the themes of war and immigration.

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