



Traumatic Narrative in Kite Runner

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How to cite this paper: Hao, R. (2024) Traumatic Narrative in Kite Runner. *Open Access Library Journal*, 11: e12032. <https://doi.org/10.4236/oalib.1112032>

Received: July 30, 2024

Accepted: August 20, 2024

Published: August 23, 2024

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Abstract

The word “trauma” originates from ancient Greek, meaning failure, wound, or injury. It encompasses both physical and psychological dimensions, with psychological trauma studied since the 18th century. Freud highlighted its subconscious effects, and major research began post-World War I, identifying PTSD. Literature has long addressed trauma, with works like Homer’s “Iliad” and modern novels such as Hemingway’s and Morrison’s exploring it. In *Kite Runner*, there are several layers of traumatic narrative. Personal trauma includes lack of friendship, kinship, and the pain of displacement. Ethnic and war traumas are also significant, reflecting historical conflicts and their lasting impact on individuals and nations.

Subject Areas

Social Sciences & Humanities

Keywords

Traumatic Narrative, Kite Runner, Afghanistan, Amir

1. Introduction

Khaled Hosseini is the author of “The Kite Runner”. Born in Kabul, Afghanistan, in 1965, he moved to the United States in 1980 after his family sought asylum due to political turmoil in Afghanistan. Hosseini’s background and personal experiences heavily influence his writing, providing an authentic and poignant perspective on Afghan culture and history. “The Kite Runner” was published in 2003 and is Khaled Hosseini’s debut novel. The creation of the novel was inspired by Hosseini’s return visit to Afghanistan in 2001 after a 27-year absence. This visit deeply affected him and prompted him to write a story that would shed light on the country’s rich culture, complex history, and the devastating impact of decades of conflict. The novel is set against the backdrop of various

historical events, including the fall of Afghanistan's monarchy, the Soviet military intervention, the rise of the Taliban, and the post-Taliban reconstruction (Aubry, 2009) [1].

The concept of trauma, originating from ancient Greece, has evolved from its initial meaning of physical injury to encompass both physical and psychological dimensions. While the study of psychological trauma began in the early 18th century, it gained significant attention after World War I with the recognition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an intense, often delayed, and uncontrollable experience (1995) [2]. Psychological trauma can result from various disasters, including natural, accidental, and man-made events (Herman, 1992) [3].

Literature has long addressed trauma, even before the term was formally conceptualized. Works such as Homer's "Iliad", Qu Yuan's "Li Sao", and more contemporary novels by Hemingway, Vonnegut, and Morrison explore traumatic experiences. In Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner", personal trauma is examined through the characters' experiences of friendship, kinship, and displacement. The novel also highlights ethnic conflicts within Afghanistan and the impact of war on the nation and its people.

The narrative delves into the complexities of psychological trauma, illustrating how unassimilated traumatic events haunt individuals over time. "The Kite Runner" provides a profound exploration of trauma's enduring effects on personal and national levels, emphasizing the pervasive and lasting influence of such experiences.

2. Personal Trauma in Kite Runner

The personal trauma in the novel can be divided into three categories, which is trauma of lack of friendship, trauma of lack of kinship, and the pain of going abroad. These three kinds of trauma, from friendship and family to the love of nation, constitute the traumatic theme of the novel.

2.1. Trauma of Lack of Friendship

The first layer is the trauma of missing friendships.

2.1.1. Trauma of Hassan

As Amir's servant, Hassan grew up with Amir as his only playmate. In the novel, Amir does not regard him as a real friend and in Amir's opinion, the relationship between Hassan and Hassan is just like that between Ali and Baba. Although Ali is very close to him, Baba himself never admits that Ali is his friend. Because of the identity as a servant, Hassan was often bullied and could not make real friends. He was always discriminated against and bullied, which is usually about Assef, the son of an Afghan man and a German woman. He always made fun of Hassan, and in the annual kite chasing competition, Hassan chased the last dropped kite for Amir, but on the way to the falling kite, he was surrounded by Assef, who raped Hassan. The bullying experience in childhood is

undoubtedly a fatal trauma to Hassan's body and mind, because he is unable to make friends with her peers and is always bullied, which is the trauma caused by the lack of friendship. Amir's trauma is originated in his witness of Hassan's rape. "I opened my mouth, almost said something. Almost. The rest of my life might have turned out differently if I had. But I didn't. I just watched. Paralyzed." (Hosseini, 2003) [4]. The severity of the trauma was aggravated by Amir's remorse about what was left undone.

2.1.2. Trauma of Amir

The fact that Amir didn't do anything when he was supposed to do torments him and leaves him infinite guilt. He didn't rescue his best friend, but just watching all this, which makes the scene a traumatic memory. Amir was attempting to erase this memory about Hassan and kites out of his mind. He thought that to live in another country thousands of miles away might help this. Yet the truth that the very image of kites ignited his past memory has proved the distance to be useless to get rid of that memory.

Trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way it's very unassimilated nature—the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on. Thus, the power of trauma doesn't simply rely on the sudden shock when the traumatic experience occurs, but rather the subsequent lurking and lasting influence on the traumatized. For Amir, he thought everything would pass away if he avoided things and people related to that event. Yet the power of trauma exhibits itself by stalking him ages. The memory that generates a long time ago frequently returns to haunt him, with even increasingly empowering effect.

2.2. Trauma of Lack of Kinship

The second layer is the trauma of lack of kinship. Amir and Hassan are both traumatized by the loss of kinship. Amir, his mother died after his birth, and he has been fed by the nursing mother. Lack of biological mother's care and guidance, the only way he knows about his mother is through his father's friend Rahim Khan, and read various books left by his mother when he is free. In addition to the lack of maternal love, Amir feels that his father, Baba is also relatively indifferent to him. In the novel, Baba mentions several times to his friend Rahim Khan that if he hadn't seen his wife give birth to Amir, he would wonder if Amir was his son. His father's indifference makes Amir work harder to win his father's favor. He would be jealous, when Baba talks to Hassan and smiles to Hassan, that's why he always lies to say that Hassan is not feeling well, and he can enjoy his father's company alone.

It is the lack of paternal love which made him only want to win the final kite chasing competition, but ignore Hassan, which is also one part led Hassan be bullied. The trauma caused by the lack of kinship made Amir forget Hassan's favor for him, but only to see the weakness of Hassan, which is to rob Baba's love. Hassan's lack of maternal love is not only the absence of his mother, but

also of his mother's identity. Hassan's mother, Ali's kinsman, disappeared a few days after giving birth to Asan, and her identity would be mocked by those neighbors. In the first part of the novel, a young boy made fun of Hassan's mother and insulted Hassan with vicious language, which made Hassan cry. For him, it was not only the insult from others, but also the lack of maternal love which made him traumatic.

2.3. Trauma of Going Broad

Finally, the pain of going broad. The main focus is Baba and the father of Amir's wife, Taheri. Because of the endless war, Baba with Amir had to leave Kabul, the capital of Afghanistan and finally settled down in the San Francisco Bay Area of the United States. When they live in America, Baba's state was far less important than he was in Afghanistan. He was unwilling to give up his native language to learn English, which means that his English is very poor.

He is also reluctant to integrate into American society, he spent his spare time chatting with fellow citizens at second-hand markets organized by Afghans. He often thought back to happy days in Afghanistan. All above shows that Baba is unwilling to leave the motherland and integrate into the American society, which is Baba's nostalgia for his homeland and the helplessness of being away from home. The same is true of Amir's wife's father, Taheri, who had been a respected general in Afghanistan, but after coming to the United States, he did not want to pursue a career in another country at all (Bloom, 2009) [5]. He prefers to dress up every day and turn to collect money in a second-hand market, rather than giving up his nostalgia for his country. The trauma of leaving the country is reflected in two fathers.

3. Tribe Trauma in Kite Runner

The novel focuses on the two parts of Islam, the Pashtuns and the Hazara, and also mentioned the Tajiks, represented by Farid, the driver. Ethnic trauma can be divided into two main categories. One is the conflict within the ethnic group, and the other is the conflict between ethnic groups. In the novel, there is a coup d'état at the end of the kite-chasing festival, which Tarsi is overthrown by the Prime minister and his cousin Daoud. The reign began from the Durani Dynasty, founded by Ahmad, the head of the Durani tribe of the Pashtun ethnic group. Although the Pashtuns have a high status in Afghanistan, there are still gangs within the country, most typically the Durrani and Ghirzai tribes. Durrani and Gilzai have been fighting with each other since the beginning of the dynasty. Through the history of dynastic changes in Afghanistan, although central rule has largely been in the hands of the Durani tribe, the leaders of the Gilzai tribe have not been subject to central administration. The coup d'état in the novel is actually a dispute among the Pashtuns. Although they are all Pashtuns, the pro-Soviet left wing represented by Daoud is too radical, which leads to the turmoil of the national regime.

The conflict between ethnic groups mainly focuses on the Pashtuns and the Hazaras. The rivalry between the two tribes is largely due to their different Islamic beliefs. The main difference between Sunnis and Shiites is the disagreement over who should succeed the Prophet Muhammad. Muslims who believe that Abu Bakr should have been the Prophet's successor have come to be known as Sunni Muslims. Those who believe Ali should have been the Prophet's successor are now known as Shi'a Muslims. It was only later that these terms came into use. Sunni means "one who follows the Sunnah" (what the Prophet said, did, agreed to or condemned). Shi'a is a contraction of the phrase "Shiat Ali", meaning "partisans of Ali". Sunni and Shia Muslims share the most fundamental Islamic beliefs and articles of faith and are the two main sub-groups in Islam. They do differ, however, and that separation stemmed initially, not from spiritual distinctions, but political ones. Over the centuries, these political differences have spawned a number of varying practices and positions which have come to carry spiritual significance. While, Sunni takes most part of population in Afghanistan, and they think they're superior than Shi'a. In short, Sunnis want the successor to be a meritocracy. The Shiites believe that only the descendants of Muhammad are allowed. The two groups thus began a thousand years of conflict and confrontation. In the novel, the Pashtuns represented by Amir and his father believe in Sunni, while the Hazaras represented by Hassan and Ali believe in Shia. There are many conflicts between the two groups involved in the novel. For example, in the early chapters of the novel Assef mocks Ali's appearance as Babalu with his big nose, and Assef repeatedly mocks Hassan for being a Hazara. When the war broke out, the Pashtun regime, represented by the Taliban, opened the door to unfair treatment of the Hazaras, not allowing them to live in my father's former house, and shot Hassan and his wife for any excuse. The sexual assault of Hassan's son, Sohrab, by elements led by Assef, all this injustice appears to be the trauma of personal conflict, but it is the trauma of thousands of years of conflict between races. The conflicts within the race and between races constitute the ethnic trauma in the novel.

4. Country Trauma in Kite Runner

The novel depicts the coup and the war in Afghanistan from the perspective of Amir, who fled to the United States with Baba. The novel depicts both the Soviet Union and the Taliban. Afghanistan had been occupied by different ethnic groups. Afghanistan is a landlocked country in central and western Asia. It borders Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan to the north, Iran to the west, Pakistan to the south and east, and a narrow strip of land protruding from the northeast to China. It can be said that Afghanistan is the most convenient land transportation channel between Central Asia and South Asia, East Asia and West Asia, and Afghanistan is also the only way of China's ancient Silk Road. Afghanistan is the so-called "graveyard of empires" not only because of its unique geographical location, but also because of the special essence of its mul-

ti-ethnic country, which has been constituted by wars and conflicts since ancient times. Afghan has been ruled by different countries. The first foreign invaders were the Persian Empire in Iran and the Maurya Dynasty in India to the south. And because the Mauryan Dynasty believed in Buddhism in Afghanistan, and had a great appreciation of Buddhism, the European Greek Alexander came to Afghanistan to Hellenize.

While Buddhist believers did not agree the Greek beliefs, a special Buddhist art arose, which is Gandhara plastic arts. One of the most famous is the Giant Buddha Cave Temple in Bamiyan, Afghanistan. In China, it was the chaotic era of the Eastern Han Dynasty that these grottoes were introduced into China along with Buddhism, such as Kizil Grottoes, Dunhuang Grottoes, Yungang Grottoes Temple and so on. And then the Arab Empire came in the west and soon after that, the Sui and Tang empires rose in the East, and the Tang wiped out the Western Turkic army and went all the way into Iran and became the An-xi capital of the Tang and the Longyou Road, and finally the Mongol army of the eastern Mongol kingdom Genghis Khan arrived. Later, the local Afghan tribes, the Pashtuns, established their own Afghan kingdom under the efforts of their chief, Ahmed. Etymologically, the word Afghanistan is the place of the Pashtuns. At that time, the main ethnic groups in Afghanistan were the local Pashtuns, the Iranian Tagi, the Turkic Uzbeks, and the Turkmen. Mongolian Hazara, Indian Baloch and so on. The imperialist invasion made Afghanistan even more fragmented. From the beginning, British invasion, to the emergence of its Peshawar problem. In the novel, as the author turns his perspective back to the war in Afghanistan, the trauma of war of a country is gradually presented to the readers. The ruins of the war, the suffering of the people, Hassan and his family have been destroyed by the war. The trauma of war on a country cannot be described in words, and the images presented in the work are only one little part of the truth.

5. Conclusions

“The Kite Runner” explores these themes through the experiences of its characters. Amir’s trauma stems from witnessing Hassan’s rape, compounded by guilt and remorse. The lack of kinship affects both Amir and Hassan, influencing their actions and relationships. The trauma of displacement is seen in characters like Baba and General Taheri, who struggle with nostalgia and integration into new societies.

The novel also highlights ethnic and war-related traumas. It depicts internal and external ethnic conflicts, primarily between the Pashtuns and Hazaras, rooted in historical and religious differences. The broader trauma of war is illustrated through Afghanistan’s turbulent history, foreign invasions, and the resultant societal fragmentation.

In summary, “The Kite Runner” intricately portrays various forms of trauma, offering a profound reflection on personal, ethnic, and national suffering.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to my tutor Dr. Niu Hongying's teaching and guidance. I am so glad that I am one of her students.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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