

Citation: Abbas, R. T., Ali, I., & Rasheed, A. (2021). Challenges of English Curriculum Implementation at Higher Secondary Level in Pakistan. *Global Language Review*, VI(IV), 126-135. [https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021\(VI-IV\).12](https://doi.org/10.31703/glr.2021(VI-IV).12)



The Emergent Self: A Psychosocial Study of Identity, Memory, and Trauma in *The Kite Runner*

Rabea Tahir Abbas *

Imran Ali †

Aleena Rasheed ‡

Abstract

This study aims at examining the impact of trauma from a psycho-social perspective, with a specific focus on the issues of psychological violence leading to social oppression, identity formation, and disenfranchisement of characters in Khaled Hosseini's The Kite Runner. The purpose of the psychosocial approach is to "express the recognition that there is always a close, ongoing circular interaction between an individual's psychological state and his or her social environment" (Agger 2001: 307). Most of the research catering the "Afghan" problem has been from the political viewpoint, with little or no insight into psycho-social perspective dealing with identity, ethnicity, memory and gender. Since trauma is rooted in individual as well as collective forms of identity, it may affect the process of both collective and personal identity formation. This research will explore the common themes of trauma and suffering with respect to episodes of fear and violence in the book.

Key Words: Memory, Trauma, Psychological Violence, Identity

Introduction

The Kite Runner has a plot construction where the narrative is chronological, multi-generational, and layered with themes of memory, identity, violence, war, and suffering. The book portrays a relentless depiction of Afghan suffering amid the complex and convoluted relationship between a parent and the child. It also focuses on Hazaras in Afghan society. The faceless fears and the domesticated violence, the silence and the suffering of the Hazara gives an important insight into a greater trauma,

The second generations in the story are marginalized or treated as the 'other.' From the start, through the use of language and structure, Hosseini highlights the fragmented pieces of their personalities. Furthermore, it is the lack of support

and understanding of a parent that drives the characters to feel alienated in the world that surrounds them. This generation of a broken self-constitutes in them an ill-formed or incomplete identity which works on two levels; individual as well as communal. It is an episode in the past that directs the fear in the character's lives. It is the past memory deeply rooted in guilt and fear which makes them suffer through time. In the end, it is about facing their fears to earn redemption, the familial love, and support that transcends boundaries and makes them form a complete identity.

The Kite Runner is the story of Amir, a timid Pashtun who is driven by a proud father, greatly celebrated for his grandeur and personality. It is a

* Tutor/Instructor, Department of English, Virtual University of Pakistan, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Head of Department, Department of English, Virtual University of Pakistan, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: ranaimranali@vu.edu.pk

‡ Tutor/Instructor, Department of English, Virtual University of Pakistan, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

two-fold relationship that drives the actual story in the novel. It is the relationship between Amir and Baba and Amir and his father's Hazara servant, Hassan. Hassan's character is important in assessing the undertone of Afghanistan's ethnic problem, which is one of the many causes of unrest in the country. Hazaras are the social outcasts, the abject, defiled creatures, and the subaltern whose voice is better if never heard.

Literature Review

Understanding Fear, Trauma and Identity

Fear, defined by Oxford Dictionary, is "an unpleasant or unwelcoming emotion caused by either pain or a threat of danger or dread." In other words, it is a spontaneous response to threatening situations, either physical or emotional, and is accompanied by a sudden or abrupt change in behavior.

H.P. Lovecraft, in his famous essay *Supernatural Horror in Literature*, regards fear as the "oldest and most vulnerable human emotion" (11). In order to understand the concept of fear, it is viable to view it in terms of language and structure. Generally, fear is of two kinds, depending on the impact it causes on an individual. Positive fear causes excitement exhilaration and is a necessary element. Fears are necessary because they are the roots of so many of the strongest intellectual interests (Hall 242). Negative fear is more 'acute and paralyzing' (J.J 352), which often leads to serious psychological trauma. It investigates silence and subsequently leads to suppression and suffering.

Fear is the anticipation of pain, the revived traces of past suffering (Hall 149-50). Fear of pain and other bodily suffering is deeply studied in psychology. In the essay "the psychology of fear," J.J classifies three chief emotions which repel the object as pain, disgust, and fear (351). Since nature puts the emotion first and logic later, fear becomes that definite emotion that leads all other emotions. It can be detected in all varying modes of expression (351).

For an individual to feel fearful, it is necessary they have a past incidence to support the emotion. Hall notices that "fear has only one genetic proposition and that is experiencing" (150); thus, it is induced by both memory and recollection, working with past pains, returning more intensely with time.

It is important to assess the cycle of fear. At one end is the emotion of fear and at the other end is "trauma", which is defined as an unpleasant experience causing distress or mental suffering for an elongated period of time. Fear is the core emotion that leads to terror. Terror cannot be justified without the use of violence or (torture). Situations in which an individual experiences acts of violence or torture for a considerably long time lead to trauma, and trauma's basic component is a past fear.

Terror is coercive violence, the thing that terrifies; what produces extreme fear. Violence may occur without terror, but terror cannot occur without violence. The process of terror comprises of three elements; the act or threat of violence, the emotional effect it causes, and the social reaction to it (Walter 248). Terror is systematized when every individual in the community is affected by the process. It is instilled to achieve certain goals, but mainly to create fear.

The threat of violence is a psychological impact that stops people from doing what they like (Derriennic 363). In Afghanistan, the Taliban brought with them a new wave of terror. They infused it through language and declared a religious war. Opting for a stricter and daunting manner, the prescribed rules for everyone to follow, limiting the movement of certain sections of society. The Taliban declared a holy war which they regarded as a "just war." Predominated by violent structures, it was an end in itself, and the holy war soon turned into holy terror (Shahrani 716).

These are the laws that we will enforce, and you will obey: If you are not Muslim, do not pray where you can be seen by Muslims. If you do, you will be beaten and imprisoned. Women: You will not laugh in public; if you do, you will be beaten.

You will not paint your nails. If you do, you will lose a finger ([Hosseini 270](#)).

In his article, "Suffering and the origins of traumatic memory," Allan Young divides suffering into two kinds, where the first kind is associated with somatic pain where only a nervous system is required to anticipate the feeling. The second form of suffering, in general, has a more social and moral dimension to it. This form of suffering is greatly described under the following terms; psychological,

existential, and spiritual (245). Both forms of suffering would be considered and linked with the process of trauma, defined here as an "event that (irrevocably) disrupts individual's identity, assumptions and place in the world" (Bloom 12).

Trauma is an episode of violent calamity that (irrevocably) disrupts identity and order on both the personal and social levels. "It annihilates the sense of continuity in our lives and our self-narratives, bringing to the fore the contingency of our lives; it destroys the fundamental assumptions of our conceptual system" (Wangbo 1). To be traumatized means to experience a sudden, violent change that disrupts one's view of reality, and as well as their own self (Robins 2001).

The event that triggers trauma is known as "traumatic memory," which shifts the focus from physical injury to mental suffering. It emerged in the late nineteenth century with the clinical research of Charcot, Janet, and Freud and the discovery of a "pathogenic secret" defined as an act of self-deception where a person hides the memory of a disturbing event even from his/herself (Young 247).

Psychic trauma occurs when a sudden, unexpected, and overwhelming, intense emotional blow or series of blows assaults the person from the outside. Traumatic events are external, but they incorporate into the mind (Terr 8). Clinicians believe that trauma itself does not damage. Rather, it is an individual's inability to assess the symptoms and to cope with the threat (Van der Kik 393). "Every patient conceals a narrative, his pathogenic secret otherwise known as a trauma story" (Young 227).

Trauma victims often resort to silence, both in terms of not wording their traumatic experience as well as not raising voices against it. Bloom suggests that "speechless terror" is the nonverbal experience of a traumatic event, which even on re-experience brings non-verbalized memories (Bloom 6).

In order to deal with trauma, it is important to put it into a meaningful narrative, and to put it into proper context, it is equally important for the traumatic being to undo the process of injury and memories of the event. Communal support is a necessary element for traumatized beings to successfully process and channel their grief. This is a similar aspect in Hosseini's fiction, where his

characters' suffering is two-fold. They suffer on both cultural and individual levels.

The study of identity has become a crucial subject of research in the last two decades. Michelle Balaev, in her "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," writes that a "central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity" (149). It is important to understand that identity formation is a process of "being" or "becoming" (Jenkins 5). Erik Erikson's concept of "ego identity," also known as a conscious sense of self, suggests that identity is a "continuous process." One's personal identity gives her or him an integrated and cohesive sense of self that endures and continues to grow as one age. This personal identity is shaped by social interactions and experiences as well as psychological factors that influence behavior and help guide one's actions. The assertion that identity is a synthesis of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements is true, but it is also a suggestive approach to classify identity in terms of social, cultural, and historical contexts. The analysis of the two aforementioned books will view identity in the light of not only the cultural and historical contexts but also view the psychological aspects which form identity.

Mita Banerjee, in her "Arab Americans in Literature and the Media", views the *Kite Runner* as a novel of privilege and power and the abuse of power that comes with such advantage. She incorporates the idea of what contemporary U.S whiteness studies have termed as "race traitor" and explains it in the light of Amir's trauma. "The inability to engage in race treason is the core of Amir's trauma," and later, towards the end, Amir acts against his own privilege to fight and rescue Hassan's son; it is an act he should have committed twenty-six years ago in that dark alley in the winter of 1975.

The Kite Runner is the story of Amir, a timid Pashtun who is driven by a proud father, greatly celebrated for his grandeur and personality. It is a two-fold relationship that drives the actual story in the novel. It is the relationship between Amir and Baba and Amir and his father's Hazara servant, Hassan. Hassan's character is important in assessing the undertone of Afghanistan's ethnic problem, which is one of the many causes of unrest in the

country. Hazaras are the social outcasts, the abject, defiled creatures, and the subaltern whose voice is better if never heard.

The Kite Runner and the Expression of Self

This discussion intersects on the aspects of trauma and identity formation marked by violence, voicelessness, and ethnic demarcations. Amir's fragmentation of the self results from the kind of relationship he has with his father; disoriented and disjointed because of the differences in their personalities. The story is told from Amir's perspective, in first-person narration, and spans over the course of twenty-six years.

Intertwined with his narrative is the story of a Hazara servant, Hassan, and it is the torture of Hassan's sacrifice that haunts Amir in the latter half of the book and brings him back towards the end in the hope of seeking redemption. The violence is phantasmagorical in this book; it is only directly focused on Hazaras, the ethnic minority of Afghanistan,

It is his father's ignorance and betrayal that make Amir suffer in the first half of the narrative. It is his memory of his inability to "racial treason" that makes him suffer in the latter half of the book. And it is his acceptance and articulation of his trauma that finally frees him of his suffering towards the end of the book. Closely conjoined to Amir's story is that of Hassan, his Hazara servant/friend, the "Afghanistan" to him, the remainder of his past sins (22).

Trauma and Voicelessness

We will first shed light on Hassan's suffering, an aspect of being Hazara, his voicelessness, and communal demarcation that, although it makes him a sufferer, does not make him a victim. It is nonetheless the acceptance of his position in society, his unrequited loyalty towards a master, his acceptance of his identity as a Hazara that saves him from the tragic trauma that engulfs Amir throughout the narrative.

Noelle-Neumann's theory of communication, "spiral of silence," has been applied here in order to understand the Hazara aspect. Furthermore concepts like "abject", "social alienation" have been borrowed

in this discussion to broaden the understanding and to construct Hassan's identity. The Spiral of Silence is apt in apprehending the voicelessness of a minority group; Neumann notes that it is the fear of isolation or separation that tends to keep the minority group from voicing their opinions (Neumann 1997: 145). "This fear is due to a desire to evade negative social sanctions that tend to leave the person socially ostracized" (Neuwirth; Frederick; Mayo 450-51).

A minority group is defined as "any group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics, are singled out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination" ([Wirth 347](#)).

It is an established fact that history is a discourse of power. In a multi-ethnic Afghanistan, power has long been in possession of the Pashtun, for they have ruled the country since its conception in 1747. It is from the start till now that the Hazara population has become a victim of social exterminations, genocide, ethnic cleansing, ground confiscation, rape, or are driven away from their lands. A culture of violence against the Hazaras still prevails and is important because it keeps the population terrorized and in constant fear. This fear is the reason that keeps them at the periphery, deduced to a nonexistent, abject state. They have been exploited for centuries, and violence has been inflicted on them throughout generations.

For years, all I knew about Hazaras was that they looked a little like Chinese people. School textbooks barely mentioned them and referred to their ancestry only in passing. And then, one day, I found my mother's book in my father's study; I was stunned to find an entire chapter on Hazara history, an entire chapter dedicated to Hazara people! In it, I read that my people, the Pashtuns, had persecuted and oppressed Hazaras; it said the Hazaras had tried to rise against the Pashtuns in the nineteenth century, but the Pashtuns had 'quelled them with unspeakable violence. (8)

Hassan's silence pervades the narrative. It is not necessarily his fear of isolation that stops him from voicing his opinion but rather the social construct, his acceptance of the path the community paves for him. "It made me kind of sad. Sad for who Hassan

was, where he lived. For how he'd accepted the fact that he'd grow old in that mud shack in the yard, the way his father had." (51)

[Erikson, in his 1968](#) essay titled "Identity: Youth and crisis," regards identity formation as a process located in the core of individual as well as communal culture. In Afghanistan, the identity formation, specifically of a Hazara, is ascribed in the communal culture. So when the Pashtuns disregard the Hazaras and call them outsiders, it is definite construction of their identity as abject beings. Hassan's identity is inscribed the moment he is conceived in his mother's unwelcoming womb (24). He is a Hazara boy, a "good for nothing" Hazara; he would grow illiterate like his father has, like other Hazaras have been (51).

It is Hassan's position in society that renders him to accept silence as a way of life. He, like his father, never "retaliates against any of his tormentors" (9). He is true to his nature, "incapable of hurting anyone," Even in that dark alley in the winter of 1975, he accepts his fate. An abject Hazara, loyal as a dog (63), and he is an outcast anyway, an outsider in his own land, "he didn't struggle, didn't even whimper. He moved his head slightly, and I caught a glimpse of his face. Saw the resignation in it. It was a look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb" (66).

Clinical research suggests that male rape victims experience significant physical and psychological trauma from the assault ([Goyer; Eddleman 1984](#)). However, when the victim belongs to a socially detested class in a country where there is no justice system to differentiate sin from a brutal act against an innocent being to an act of vengeful injustice committed to showing dominance. The chain of events then circulates in a swift motion where the victim keeps on getting victimized, and the powerful perpetrator roams freely, and the space between the two is what constitutes silence. It is the same cycle of silence and suffering which transfers along with generations, sometimes trans-generationally, in the case of Ali and Hassan, where the former is dishonored by his master in the "single worst way an Afghan man can be dishonored" (197). and the latter is betrayed by the one man he has shared abreast with, taken his first step with. And intergenerationally in the case of Hassan and Sohrab,

where the single, most detestable, vindictive act is committed against a Hazara to reduce him to an object, and a generation later is committed again to show continued hatred and dominance.

"Betrayal Blindness" triggers amnesia. It is a theory devised by Jennifer J. Freyd, who argues that amnesia is an adaptive strategy to block all knowledge of abuse (69). American Psychological Association's report suggests amnesia as a chosen practice among the victims of male rape.

Traumas are most likely forgotten when a victim feels betrayed by a person of trust. This betrayal trauma results in a "betrayal blindness," a lack of conscious awareness or memory of the betrayal. The closer the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator, the more the victim feels betrayed, and the more likely memories of the trauma will be repressed (Diamond 410).

Forgiveness and forgetfulness are not devices of choice but mere devices of control, but for Hassan, these are the chosen devices of survival and selflessness. In the dark alley, in the winter of 1975, a sin is committed, and Hassan feels betrayed, but it is his ingrained knowledge that it doesn't matter. After all, he is just a Hazara. (66)

Trauma and Identity

I became what I am today at the age of twelve, on a frigid overcast day in the winter of 1975 (1). I remember the precise moment, crouching behind a crumbling mud wall, peeking into the alley near the frozen creek. That was a long time ago, but it's wrong what they say about the past. I've learned about how you can bury it. Because the past claws its way out. Looking back now, I realize I have been peeking into that deserted alley for the last twenty-six years (1).

It is all a recollection of the past events that have etched themselves onto his memory, tormenting him for the last twenty-six years.

Erik Erikson's model of psychosocial identity development presents eight different stages across the human life span. Each stage is different and presents the individual with a conflict. When it is resolved successfully, it serves as a turning point in development as the person acquires the psychosocial quality associated with that particular stage. If the

conflict is not resolved at a specific stage, it creates a void, and the person may not develop the essential skill needed for a strong sense of self and identity. From the beginning of the novel, one sees Amir craving his father's attention. Being born in a male dominated household and having fed from the same breast as Hassan, produces a sense of brotherhood between the two, "a kinship that not even time could break" (10). But communal pressure never allows a Hazara and a Pashtun to be equal, and that becomes Amir's dilemma. He is torn in confusion between his own choices and those that are imposed on him by his ethnicity, class, and the fact that he is an elite Pashtun.

Apart from this, Amir's childhood is one long struggle of gaining affection from his father. He is different, a timid boy unable to stand against the world. This is Erikson's terminology forms the basis of a torn self, an incomplete identity, which is the direct result of the failure of development in the early stages of life, leading to confusion and feelings of guilt and shame. Erikson regards the fifth stage of development as the most important. It is the stage where the formation of personal identity becomes critical. A particular requirement for this stage is encouragement and a feeling of independence and control. Amir suffers from structural trauma. It comprises of both an event that triggers his basic belief system and the anxiety-producing condition of possibility that his father sees in Hassan what he cannot see in his own son. That perhaps Hassan is reflected more in Baba than he himself could ever have been (313). Freyd notes that "trauma is caused by a threat to a necessary attachment." Amir longs for this attachment, but Baba remains oblivious regarding it. Instead, silence pervades between the two. Amir looks for instances to make his father feel proud of himself, he writes a story, and Hassan commends him, making the latter feel a sense of pride in his accomplishments. With the same humility, he shows it to his father, who barely feigns an interest, leaving Amir tormented and betrayed, "most days I worship Baba with an intensity approaching the religions. But right then, I wished I could open my veins and drain his cursed blood from my body" (27).

Erikson believes that those who remain unsure turn out to be insecure. Development at this stage

involves committing to a particular identity. When this process is controlled in terms of exploration it produces "role confusion". Instead of feeling a sense of personal cohesiveness, one feels disappointed and confused about their place in life, much like Amir, whose narrative in the first half of the book is overshadowed with references to Baba and Hassan. Everything he views, even his own actions, are done in the light of his relation to either of the two. This shows his inability to access things himself. He feels deluded, scarred, fragmented in his own body. It is because he is torn in two halves. One half retains him to be himself, and the other makes him stand against Hassan for Baba's attention.

"Hassan and I were skimming stones and Hassan made his stone skip eight times. The most I managed was five. Baba was there, watching and he patted Hassan on the back. Even put his arm around his shoulder" (12). It is the effect of these little episodes with Hassan where it is always him vs Hassan for Baba's affection. His father is always comparing his abilities to those of the Hazara servant's; regardless, he never compliments Amir on the things he is good at; rather, he always eager to map his traits on his son, confining and molding his personality to his own standards, "I see him playing around in the street with the neighborhood boys. They push him around, take his toys from him, give him a shove here, a whack there, and he never fights back. It's always Hassan who steps in and fends them off" (19-20). It is a series of disappointing events that distances Amir from Baba, and it is his knowledge of failing his father that torments him in the darkest hours of his life. "After everything he'd built, planned, fought for, fretted over, dreamed of, this was the culmination of his life; one disappointing son and two suitcases" (108).

An important aspect of Amir's trauma is his inability to voice it. Michelle Balaev asserts that "trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity" (149). Unlike Hassan, who, with his inability to voice his suffering, does not become a victim, Amir does. He never raises his voice against his father. He hates him at the moment but commends his father's straightforwardness and shrewdness. One of the underlying reasons for his silence; he is afraid of his father (14).

These underlying fragments conjoin to form an inconsistent identity, a debilitated personality, and an inability to form a shrewd and confident self, leading to insecurity to choose right from wrong, instability of action, vulnerability, and dependence. So when Hassan is being sexually assaulted at the hands of three Pashtun boys, Amir plays the role of a mere "bystander," a role that torments him. More importantly, his lack of empathy is deeply rooted in fear.

His inability to act in the moment results in a memory pointer or a traumatic memory that once triggered brings back the fear and memory associated with the original event, leaving Amir tied up in guilt, regret and shame all over again. "Little shapes formed behind my eyelids, like hands playing shadows on the wall. They twisted, merged, and formed a single image: Hassan's brown corduroy pants discarded on a pile of old bricks in the alley" (74).

It is his inability to let out his "pathogenic secret" out in the open which constitutes a prolonged trauma.

Ethnicity and Identity

Mita Banerjee's concept of "racial treason" has been applied to Amir's identity which, just like Hassan's, was socially imposed on him by the communal factors; class, race, ethnicity etc.

"Race Traitor", according to contemporary U.S whiteness studies, is defined as "someone who is nominally classified as white, but who defies the rules of whiteness so flagrantly as to jeopardize his or her ability to draw upon the privilege of white skin" (Lopez 189). "It acts as a manual for 'unlearning' and 'performatively' abandoning the social privilege that comes with being white". Acting non-white becomes an act of racial solidarity.

In the U.S, unlike Afghanistan, the Pashtun identity forms an insignificant group. It brings in Amir, a realization of being an ethnically marked subject in contrast to his life in Afghanistan, where he was ethnically unmarked. It acts as an insight into understanding Hassan's position in the past of his Afghanistan. "I wondered what it must be like to live with such ingrained sense of one's place in the hierarchy" (37). This demarcation of race is devastating for both the dominant and the

subordinate. Amir's ultimate act of betrayal does not just stem from his inability to help his brother while the latter is being assaulted. Rather, it is an aspect of racial demarcation that stops him from committing an act of treason against his own roots.

Amir's narrative is also the "unlearning" of his opacity in ethnic terms, an understanding which begins only after he moves out of Afghanistan and into the U.S. The previously transparent Pashtun becomes a racially marked ethnic American the moment he crosses the border.

Amir's enigma, his act of betrayal, is not only rooted in the fabrics of fear and his tormented self but also in his inability to separate history from friendship. This constitutes a direct impact of racism on those who perpetrate it. But Amir's life is engraved with confusion. He is torn between his communal duty and his ethical morality. "History isn't easy to overcome. Neither is religion (...), but we were kids who had learned to crawl together, and no history, ethnicity, society or religion was ever going to change that either" (22).

It is the stories that Amir grows up with. Stories that are in opposition to each other. And he has been aware of the opposition. He himself is tormented by his ability to practice them. "But he isn't my friend! I almost blurted. He's my servant! Had I really thought of that? Of course I hadn't. I hadn't. I treated Hassan well. Just like a friend, even better, more like a brother" (36). It is this curse of mastery whose power he cannot handle which leads to the formation of a confused self.

Hassan, on the other hand, is more focused on performing his social role. He maintains a relationship of trust, of loyalty, and of respect all at the same time. Amir, aware of Hassan's devotion, is also puzzled by his unfailing loyalty, his selflessness, his sincerity, "he was so goddamn pure" (51). Indeed Hassan merely plays the role that society has entrusted him with, more like what he is inscribed to do. But his servitude, it extends far beyond his love for Amir, for his friendship, "under the same roof, we spoke our first words. Mine was Baba. His was Amir, my name" (10).

For Hassan, it is true that Amir held all the keys. Keys to the secret world which he knew he cannot never enter. For him, Amir is all knowledgeable, "the

learned one". "I saw a dream, I was hoping you could tell me what it means" (52-53) Regardless, he has accepted who he was. He has accepted his role in society, "it was Hassan's knowledge of Amir's mastery and the latter's abuse of this mastery that saved him from becoming a victim" (Banerji 2008). While Amir, oblivious of his privilege always suffered in his own abuse of power.

In 1975, Amir wins the kite flying tournament and Hassan runs the last kite for him. It is during the last hours of the tournament that Amir goes looking for Hassan, whom he hasn't seen returning for over an hour. He reaches the end of the dark alley, hides himself behind the wall and stands there watching, an event that deeply imprints itself onto his memory, "fear creeping into Hassan's eyes (...) it was the look I had seen before. It was the look of the lamb" (63, 66).

Amir's inability to race treason in the moment, to side with a Hazara and abandon his social privilege as ethnically unmarked subject, is undeniably his trauma. "Hassan was the price I had to pay, the lamb I had to slay, to win Baba. Was it a fair price? The answer floated to my conscious mind before I could thwart it: He was just a Hazara, wasn't he?" (68).

Conclusion

In *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter explains, "Every society has to insist on repression in order to function without excessive disruption; therefore, the only vocabulary in which to express resistance to that insistence will involve that which is socially characterized as evil or guilt" (210) Had Amir stepped up in the alley, he would have abandoned his own social privilege and fulfilled his duty as a friend. He would have disrupted his social significance, his privilege of being socially transparent. Him helping Hassan would have been like challenging the centuries old alternative historical discourse. He would have been marked, fallen from his stature of being ethnically unmarked. He would have also triggered opposition, he was a Pashtun and Hassan, well he was just a Hazara. In the end he avoided disruption, he chose guilt.

The first time that Amir felt betrayed. He felt a lack of sense of belonging. Belonging, as Miller

(2003) suggests, "Is a crucial aspect of being. It is fundamental to who and what we are." (217). It creates an identification of one's social and material surroundings. Confusion at this stage leads to identity crisis, "sometimes I too wondered if I really was Baba's son" (101).

Weeks (1990) says, "identity is about belonging" (88). This lack of self-identification caused confusion and trauma in Amir's life. Misztal (2003) argues that without memory there can be no sense of identity. It is a person's ability to remember, which produces in them a sense of self which even when everything is lost still holds firm. The memories associated with families are particularly potent, for they construct a "specialized cycle of memory" (95).

However this cycle is easily disrupted by the advent of family secrets. Secret family memories or memories about secrets are incredibly complex, as they pose a high risk of explicitly bringing to the forefront, secrets about the "unspeakable truths" which depending on their intensity can, a) shatter the respectable image of the individual they concern to and b) create an impact on the reflexive construction of the self or identity. This form of re-evaluation can be both, positive or negative. In literary settings, this usually forms a negative impact.

In Amir's case, the knowledge brought about a shattered sense of self, a disrupted sense of belonging and a confused identity over to the surface once again. The disruption brought backtraces of the contrite past, which created both, a great difficulty of associating the new image of Baba to the one that was imprinted on his mind since so long (197) and to come in terms with the greater truth that confirmed Hassan's identity as his half-brother and which brought back the guilt and shame associated with the traumatic event (198), and a strong urge to free himself of the past suffering and trauma.

In literary framework, whoever narrates the story, shapes it. When the story is traumatic, it resists being told. This explains why it took Amir so long to finally come to terms with his trauma's resolution. He told the story of a fragmented self, through a fragmented narrative, juxtaposing individual sections of the text and creating meaning through them. This sort of fragmented narrative, as LaCapra

demonstrates, is the result of trauma. In narrating the trauma, the healing begins and the self starts to form.

In the *Kite Runner*, America becomes the space where the past and present is reconciled. America became Amir's escape from the past but every trauma leads to resolution and it was Rahim Kham who had said, "There is a way to be good again. A way to end the cycle. With a little boy. An orphan. Hassan's son.

Somewhere in Kabul" (198). In Afghanistan Amir is faced with the same situation and this time he had become a traitor. He abandoned his privilege and had fought for a little Hazara boy, his brother's son. He had performed the act, though twenty-six years late, he had finally freed himself of his guilt; his suffering; his trauma, and in his search he had identified himself.

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