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Transgenerational Trauma and Postmemorial Atonement: A Case Study of Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*

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ABSTRACT

*This paper undertakes to explore the transmission of transgenerational trauma by means of postmemory in Uzma Aslam Khan's novel *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali* in light of contemporary trauma studies and postcolonial discourse. It draws upon Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory in 1) *The Generation of postmemory: writing and visual culture after the Holocaust* 2) *Family frames: Photography, narrative, and postmemory* and Gabriele Schwab's concept of transgenerational trauma in *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. This paper, by using the interpretive approach in textual analysis, seeks to follow the trails of trauma experienced by the second generation of political prisoners of Andaman Islands under the British colonial rule in the text. It investigates how transmission of trauma operates in the text through narratives, pictures, objects, places, scars, language, silence and inherited memories. While mapping the trauma pathways of different characters in the text, the present study also focuses on identifying indigenous ways through which transgenerational trauma functions within a postcolonial geography. The study calls attention to the multitude of effects of ancestral trauma on the post generations living in a colonial regime. While looking at the political background of the text, the present paper points out the possibility of constructive political activism within society with the production of postmemorial works of art. By using trauma theory and postmemory under the critical lens of postcolonial discourse, the paper deviates from conventional use of trauma studies which mostly focuses on psychoanalytical interpretations. This study is an attempt to incorporate a decolonized conception of trauma within contemporary Pakistani trauma paradigm.*

Keywords: *Transgenerational trauma, postmemory, colonialism, memory, history*

The ancestors
Fuel me
With rich stories
While I execute dreams
Unrealized and extinguished
“Ignite!”

(Shay, 2020)

Back in the summer of 2016, a Palestinian who was studying at the University of Pennsylvania on a scholarship program at the time shared a picture of a property ownership document on a social media website. It was a battered old manuscript with browning edges. The paper was an official claim of a house, once owned by the head of the Abu Rokba family, the great grandfather of the first author's friend. He was forcefully evacuated from his home as his property was coveted by illegal settlers on Palestinian land. The caption with that picture expressed how deeply unsettling it was for her to have traces from a past that could not be revisited yet the memory was extant. After seeing that picture, the first author was startled by the realization that a house never lived in can become the reminiscence of a traumatic past. The trauma of the pain of exile travelled down through three generations to make her establish a bond with that property. After so much time had passed, the pain of being evacuated from home was still alive which was being expressed through that picture. Watching that picture made the first author realize that trauma may not always vanish over time. It can linger on in subsequent generations, emerging through material and immaterial relics of the familial past.

Background of Intergenerational Trauma transfer:

The concept of transgenerational trauma was theorized in the West when the descendants of Holocaust survivors were diagnosed with clinical depression and clear indications of post-traumatic stress disorder. Angela Connolly outlines the various psychological research studies in her article which provide data for the presence of intergenerational trauma presence in the second generation of Holocaust victims. These studies focus on the “psychobiological condition” of the second generation of survivors (Connolly, 2011). It was studied that trauma can be transmitted from one generation to the next generations through a collective memory generated by different modes of communication between the said generations. This communication can be both direct first-hand interaction with the victims and indirect communication through their stories, photographs and other inherited objects from the ancestors. This transmission of trauma between generations has a huge impact in shaping the collective memory of the society as well. Peter A Levine describes an interesting lab experiment where a group of mice was exposed to the smell of cherry blossoms and immediately after received a shock of electric current. When the experiment was repeated many times the mice became conditioned to respond to the smell with an acute fear of shock. The experiment revealed that five subsequent generations were also conditioned to the smell even though they were never exposed to the current. This neurological experiment which was carried out in the late 1990s provided the foundation for studies of genetic transfer of memories among generations (Levine, 2015).

Concept of Postmemory:

Postmemory is the key concept generated by Marianne Hirsch in 1992. Hirsch refers to postmemory as “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right” (Hirsch, 2012, p. 5). Postmemory can be described as the interrelation of memories between two generations where the later generation only experienced trauma "by means of stories, images, and behaviours" (Hirsch, 2014). These stories, images and behaviours are tools of recollection because they bridge the gap between memory and postmemory. These instruments are the only means by which the past can hold onto the present otherwise it would fall off the edge of collective forgetfulness. Hirsch further explains the difference between postmemory and history when she points out the most significant feature of postmemory as that unlike history it has a profound personal association. At the foundation of postmemory lie individual memories of actual victims who could not shake their past away. They either purposefully transferred their stories to their children or they had no other choice and they transmitted their trauma unconsciously. Either way, the violent past of one generation finds a way to live through the next generations as long as it is not resolved by looking back to the past through the works of postmemory.

Western Colonialism and Eurocentric Trauma Discourse:

The postcolonial criticism challenges the western conception of trauma and offers a pluralistic approach to conceive traumatic experiences. Greg Forster contends that this modernist concept of trauma operates in “modern postcolonial reality” (Forster, 2014, p. 9). It offers healing from the colonial past. Trauma studies have been used for some time now in contemporary literary criticism but the approach towards this criticism only focuses on what Sonya Andermahr calls a “Eurocentric trauma paradigm” (Andermahr, 2016, p. 1)

If trauma is defined as the result of one catastrophic event, argues Stef Craps, then colonial violence is exempted from being a cause of trauma because it is not confined to one particular event rather it is an on-going process (Craps, 2013). Similarly, Waqar Azeem explored the limits of western theory when it comes to understanding the trauma of the war on terror a discusses the structural trauma which is embedded in social formations. (Azeem, 2020). Western colonialism caused numerous deformations in the personal, political and cultural structure of minority races over a long period. Thus the earlier models of event-based trauma theories expire and there is a need to look for a multifaceted trauma theory that includes these political and cultural aspects to understand the development and transmission of trauma among non-white minorities.

Postcolonial trauma, mediated through the work of postmemory, highlights the significance of new methods in which historical trauma can be exchanged between generations. The ultimate objective of challenging the Westcentric beliefs about trauma and its healing is to figure out substitute ways that cater to the historical origins of trauma among the marginalized non-western world. It is also ironic that the western ideology which is responsible for the colonial trauma of the third world imposes its metropolitan trauma discourse without historical consideration on native cultures

insisting upon its universal approach. By diverging from the western trauma discourse, this paper attempts to explore the postmemory mediums through which postcolonial trauma emerges, using cultural consciousness.

Trauma Transfer in Primary Text:

The miraculous true history of Nomi Ali is Uzma Aslam Khan's fifth novel. The text under study is important because it becomes a medium of transmission of forgotten history for Pakistani readers. Published in 2019, the novel revolves around the life of siblings Zee, Nomi and their friend Aye. Born and raised in a village on the Andaman Islands, these children grew up figuring out their lives burdened by the postmemory of their parent's trauma and the memories of their own traumatic experiences. The postmemory of these characters arises due to their parent's exile from their native lands for fighting against British imperialism and being thrown on the islands as a punishment. These children not only carry the burden of their own trauma but they are being used as vehicles to pass on the experiences of their ancestors onto the next generation. The text unfolds by describing the Japanese invasion of the Andaman Islands and their admission of defeat to the British Empire later. It simultaneously takes the reader onto a journey of two colonial powers attempting to control a foreign land. Both these colonizers use the terror regime to make the natives bow down in front of them. The timeline of the text is also very intriguing from a memorial context. There is no linear timeline of the events in the novel rather the plot unfolds with a certain fragmented concept of time. The same fragmentation can be seen in the memories of the characters. The novel deals with the lives of displaced people who in a variety of age, gender and race are all victims of colonial violence. There are indigenous tribes of the islands who are pushed back into the jungles because the colonial forces need the lands to operationalize their systems. The exiled political prisoners of the subcontinent's war of independence are confined to the islands as a means to curb the possible political upheaval in the subcontinent. The traces of trauma in the text build the map of a forgotten place in our history. The text portrays stories of prisoners in the starfish jail, of resistance reaching the islands from the outside world and of colonial torture simultaneously. The horrific details of colonial crimes in the penal colony of Andaman Islands create the space in the text where two generations are learning to survive; one with its silence and the other with its questions. This rapid action is paired with the attempts of postgeneration at understanding their chaotic surroundings for arriving at a better sense of their world. The elder generation suffers from the trauma of its exile while living with the colonial violence simultaneously. The terror of the colonial regime enforces the feeling of entrapment on the victims in the Andaman Islands. The generation after has seen the island as their home but that home does not provide protection. They are bound to the island but they are born with a sense of lost identity because of the displacement of their parents. These factors make their burden heavier. The children in the text are often wandering on the island, exploring it. It seems that they are trying to find answers to the questions that haunted their parents and which, now, haunt them too. The second generation of political prisoners' bear witness to a legacy of collective suffering. Confused about their origin and identity, they look for the answers as they deal with the transhistorical trauma which is an integral part of them now.

The flashbacks of trauma which the characters' experience makes them relive their colonial nightmare even after it is behind them. Because they do not deal with that

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trauma, and they try to shut it out by silence, the next generation is lost in the fog of collective trauma. Uzma Aslam Khan explains the importance of memory, history and healing in one of her interviews. She says

I'd emphasize that what happens when the body is written out of history and memory, generation after generation, can only be written, reclaimed and healed by the body. So I agree that a political solution is not enough. Healing requires more than that: it requires that the body be written back into history, story and collective memory. (Khan, *From The Ruins Of An Empire*, 2019)

The text is about writing a piece of land back in the collective memory of Pakistani society. The objects of postmemory in the text are the main source for tracing transgenerational trauma. There are photographs, letters, and telegrams, even a human skull of a native child as a sign of colonial victory, which are being discovered by the postgeneration in its search for answers. These props are used in a way to give a physical form to the struggle of the characters for their identity. They are the missing pieces of the jigsaw puzzle of postmemory which troubles the second generation. By contextualizing postmemory in postcolonial discourse, an interesting resemblance between postmemory and colonial horror in this text came up. Just as colonial power invades the boundaries of a foreign place and the effects of that invasion haunt many generations to come; postmemory invades the boundary of generational distance and haunts many generations which come after the catastrophe.

Transgenerational trauma is transmitted from ancestors to the next generations in the novel *Miraculous* by means of memory and postmemory of a violent colonial regime which unveils the mediation of a collective postcolonial traumatic experience.

Mediums of Trauma Transfer in the Text:

Every society is rooted within its specific rites and rituals, its unique way of living and every aspect of life in that society originates from that specific context. Trauma studies and the earlier misinformed universalism associated with its treatment ignored the very mediums of its transfer within generations. Every traumatized society operates its trauma differently and expresses it in its own unique manner within a particular sociocultural scenario. The text is set in pre-partition time of Indian subcontinent in the remote islands of Andaman, turned into a penal colony by the British colonizers. Aye, Nomi and Zee are the main characters belonging to post generations of prisoners who can be seen mediating intergenerational memory and trauma in their own ways. The population of the islands can be divided into three groups, the prisoners, the settlers and the native islanders. Postmemory is operating in all these groups but its reception is different which this chapter reveals later as it unfolds. Belonging to different cultures, exiled prisoners and their families are dealing with memory and trauma differently as compared to the native islanders whose treatment of traumatic experiences stems from their unique ways of life. Although the colonizing power has been trying hard to erase the identities of both the prisoners and the natives, the process of post memorial transference is playing its part in resisting the power of colonisation. To understand this process, the present study looks closely at the mediums through which postmemory is operational in the text.

Bones and Skull:

The first and most important medium of memory transfer between generations in the novel is a skull. The medium of the skull which is the physical manifestation of the ancestral presence among the living acts as a definitive tool in distinguishing how postcolonial trauma is conceived and processed differently, deviating from the routes of the Eurocentric trauma paradigm. Aye, the great-grandson of a Burmese convict who was among the first prisoners to be exiled on the islands is a helper to Mr. Howard, the English superintendent of the starfish jail. When he goes to help him in his study he comes across a skull. The text reveals that the skull belongs to a native family, but Mr. Howard has forcefully taken it. He is keeping the skull so that he can sell it to a visitor who wants to add it to his collection of valuables from the islands. When the victims come to the superintendent asking for it, they are dismissed by force. The native people have a special connection with the remains of their dead. The colonizers did not understand that. They are known for disrespecting the revered rituals which the natives held for centuries. As Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes of this colonial past,

It is a history that still offends the deepest sense of our humanity. Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are. (Smith, 2008, p. 2)

Similarly, in this text, the natives cannot even mourn the death of a loved one unless they have them in physical form. The colonizers deprived them of this basic human right, to be able to perform their funeral services as they see fit. Mourning is a vital part of processing trauma. It is also a way to preserve the memory of ancestors. Memorial preservation can connect the following generations to their ancestral roots via the process of postmemory. To deprive the colonized from honouring the remains of their ancestors is equivalent to erasing the history which they created. The concept of stripping the past away from the subject nation is a systematic form of political torture. That skull is the only hope for that family, the only connection to its past as per its cultural norms. The retrieval of that skull is a matter of life or death for the natives. Loka, the native man whose sister is the widow dying to get the skull of her husband back, strikes a deal with Aye. He will do one task, anything, in return for the skull. He tells Aye that his sister used to wear the skull of her husband around her neck to protect him from turning into a bad spirit in his afterlife according to the native belief system. Mr. Howard is not even interested in the skull as a cultural 'artefact', it was simply a means to make money for him and thus when the Scottish archaeologist could not take it at the last minute, he is stuck with the "blasted bones" but he will still not consider returning it to the family. Mr. Howard is glad that the family which kept asking him to return the skull is "spirited away" (Khan, 2019, p. 95). The choice of words deliberately points to the fact that the text is conscious of the colonial cruelty towards the cultural rituals which the empire thinks are beneath it. As an attempt of rebellion against his master, Aye steals the skull from Mr. Howard and hands it over to Loka.

The text mentions another native woman Minare, who has made a necklace out of the bones of her dead child and she wears it to feel the presence of her son. The in-depth description of burial rites portrays a strong sense of connection among the memory as well as the physical presence of the dead and the living of Andaman's

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society. Minare shaves her head and the head of her dead child; she paints the child's body with red and white clay and paints her own body in olive clay. After painting the body the child is then buried in the centre of her hut with a bowl of milk from Minare's own breast. After many months the body is dug out and she makes a string of bones to wear around her neck (Khan, 2019, p.311). The native tribal culture of the Andaman Islands focuses on the presence of physical remains of their dead as an integral part of the family fabric. The English translated version of Jaffer Thenaseri's account of his life spent on the islands highlights the ritual of funeral and mourning on the Andaman Islands. When the funeral services begin, the islanders put the body in a basket in a specific position where the knees are folded towards the chest, just like the position of a fetus in a mother's womb. They bury this basket in an offer to return the child of mother earth back to her. After several months the bones are dug out from the grave and the bones are given to descendants. The Andamanese hold these bones as dear to them as their own selves. Thenaseri says that the locals always keep the skulls of their ancestors close. If a visitor comes to the hut of a native, he is seated outside the cluster of huts in a clearing where they provide him with food. Once the food is consumed they invite him inside the hut and the first ritual of the meeting is mourning the dead so both the visitor and hosts "weep together" (Thenaseri, 2011, p. 31). This goal of mourning cannot be achieved if there is nobody present to be mourned. Khan writes that "only through ritual could continuity be maintained (Khan, 2019, p. 190). Sinikka Grant also talks about the separation of grievors from the remains of the dead in the context of mourning. She states that mourning in the absence of the body to be mourned fills the survivors with a deep "sense of uncertainty, a longing impossible to articulate and therefore impossible to let go of. Such longing, hold[s] survivors back in the past,..." (Grant, 2009, p. 7)

Cultural Appropriation and Colonial Trauma:

The act of snatching away the relics of the past is not a simple case for ethical misappropriation. These are deliberate attempts on account of the colonizer to obliterate the past to forcefully halt the postmemorial transfer between generations. The colonizers don't only destroy the history of the subject nation; they also seize the past through the objects which can transfer the act of rebellion against them. The museums in the western world are full of such examples of looted stuff from the colonized nations which the western world proudly displays often as a projection of its own power. The displacement of these objects is not highlighted by the museums, thus weakening the links of these objects with their historical relevance. Marianne Hirsch discusses these links in her book while describing her husband's collection of prized "African and Afro-Brazilian masks and sculptures" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 115). Hirsch reflects upon the roots of these objects, upon the motivation behind their dislocation trying to find the relationship they establish amid their original spaces and the spaces in which they are displayed. She admits the problems of moral appropriation but the only links that the relics forcefully removed from a Cultural relevance can represent are of cruelty and colonial attempts to erase history. These connections can only be rebuilt by the following generations with a conscious effort of retrieving the past. In the novel when Aye finds the skull while cleaning in Mr. Howard's office, he suddenly feels a connection with "few scrapes of a disappeared world" (Khan, 2019, p. 147).

Retrieving Lost Ancestral Connections:

Talking about lost connections, Erin L. Thompson criticises the western museums in his article for their display which is based on theft and in turn justifies colonialism. He calls out the custodians who take pride in the plaques describing the history of such artefacts which have been dislocated from their cultural relevance by force of the empire. He compares these plaques with “tombstones” as the curators like to call them because of the brief information they share about the history of any object on display (Thompson, 2020). Just like the minimum information provided by tombstones, these plaques do not mention the painful history of colonisation which caused the displacement of these artefacts. The analogy of a graveyard is perfect in the context of the novel which mentions the foreigners raiding the local burial sites on the islands for collecting bones (Khan, 2019, p. 78). There is one thing common among graveyards and museums, both places are custodians of ancestral memories and relics, trying to tell a story from the past. According to Thompson, in both places the movement of buried objects after the last date set on the tombstone is alarming. He shares the research of archaeologist Dan Hicks who is the curator of the Pitt Rivers Museum. Hicks choose to openly call out museums that have displayed objects looted by the British Navy in 1897, exploiting Nigerian culture during colonisation. The more than 10,000 artefacts are brass objects called “*sa-e-y-ama* means both “to cast a motif in metal” and “to remember” (Thompson, 2020, p. 2). This means these objects are a manifestation of memory itself. According to Thompson, the expedition led to acquiring these relics was instructed not only to snatch every valuable but also to destroy the settlements along its course. This fact thus facilitates the argument that colonial powers have an agenda to rob the subject nations of their past to control them. He laments the silence of the museum plaques regarding this robbed history. This display of ancient objects from remote geographies is also a political act of white superiority projection. The ‘primitive’ objects and subservient physiques represent a “tendency toward violence [which] could be controlled only through force” (Ibid, p.7). The colonial theft thus creates empty spaces within indigenous cultures which consequently demands postmemorial acts of creative imagination to rewrite the torn pages of history. Hicks contends that as long as these stolen objects are displayed in museums, they facilitate the colonial regimes by sending the message of colonial power to the onlookers (Hicks, 2020). The attempt to keep objects of important historical context away from the previously colonized nations is also a strategy. As long as these objects are away from the context, they cannot instigate rebellious sentiments against the colonial force. The remoteness of the objects from their place of origin acts as a shield for the empire, protecting it from the demand of perpetrator responsibility. The demand for apology from the colonial power suddenly gains momentum whenever such an object of historical value comes to light. A very recent example is the Algerian protest, demanding an official apology from France for its horrendous colonial atrocities. According to Aljazeera News, the diligence of Algerian historians made French government return the skulls of twenty-four Algerian freedom fighters on July 3rd. 2020 from the revolt of 1849 (Aljazeera, 2020). The Algerians are adamant to retrieve all archives of their history in French hands and they consider this return as only “half apology”. In an interview quoted by Independent magazine, Algerian President insisted that “There must be another step,” (Independent, 2020). According to the magazine, the return of these skulls also brought forward the demand of restitution for French nuclear tests in Algerian Sahara in 1960’s. This is

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precisely the reaction which colonial powers want to keep under control at all costs. It is evident that these skulls were kept in French custody in an attempt to break historical connections between post-war Algerian generations. France also had to avoid any accountability in these times of gradually awakening global consciousness towards colonial crimes. The public funeral rites held in Algeria were a sight full of charged emotion against imperial France. Thompson borrows the term "necrographies" from Hicks; according to him, the term signifies historical accounts of loss which can instigate the demand of restoration (Thompson, 2020, p. 12). In this context, *Miraculous* can be labelled as a 'fictional necrography' which connects the later generations to their past full of colonial horror in an attempt to break the collective forgetfulness surrounding this specific historical account. The novel introduces many readers to Bhagat Singh, an important name in the freedom fighter of Indian subcontinent against the Empire, and the woman who helped him escape, reviving a memory for the postgeneration where little is known about his name or his role in our liberation.

The skull in *Miraculous* is also a symbol of postmemorial connection between generations. As long as it is not retrieved from Mr. Howard's office, the skull would remain in the state of a "post mortem exile", a term used by Algerian minister Tayeb Zitouni, after Algeria received the remains of its heroes (Independent, 2020). After the retrieval of the skull from the superintendent's office, it becomes a symbol of resistance for both Aye and Loka. The skull in the novel is the medium for instigating new insurgencies against the empire like the rescue mission of prisoner 218 D, the very high security female political prisoner exiled to the Andaman Islands from Lahore.

Animistic Transference of Postmemory:

While the Western cosmopolitan trauma discourse primarily focuses on the physical, materialistic occurrences of trauma transfer, where the prime importance is given to photographs and objects passed down to descendants, postcolonial traumatic processes can also be traced through their relationship with animism. Deviating from those practices of western trauma studies, postcolonial trauma consciousness also takes into account the inanimate objects from the realm of nature, as well as from the supernatural world. Probing the text under animistic ideas of postcolonial trauma, it becomes evident that the island and all the natural elements surrounding it are actively involved in the harrowing experience of colonisation. All these elements are also involved in the process of trauma mediation by the postgeneration. Nomi is a child deprived of having direct ties to her own past so she perceives her inhabiting space with qualities attributed to living beings, enlivening it all in order to understand the trauma of her parents. She can hear the islands breathe if she listens carefully (Ibid, p.6). She is obsessed with bodies of water and constellations, often contemplating how all the water bodies travel to unite at the end. Her hope for creating a postmemorial position that brings peace can be clearly seen through her imagination of uniting water bodies. The trauma is fluid in nature just like the water bodies of Nomi's imagination. The intergenerational nature of trauma has caught the children in its tentacles. Nomi is aware of the presence of a past which she does not understand, but it has entangled her, forcing her to be involved in many criminal lines she could barely recognize. The "voice of sea" that she can hear also tells Nomi that her father died in its arms, this exemplifies Nomi's

strong bond with water where the consolation after her father's death does not come from a human connection but from an animistic connection. The instructions to keep storing all the stories that she receives in order to pass them onwards also comes from this animistic relationship where Nomi is combatting parental trauma by saving it as narrative (Ibid, p.362). With such a deep connection to the world of natural elements, how can the children separate their trauma from the "transformative potential of nonhuman matter" (Rajiva, 2020, p. 12). If hurtful histories of postcolonial world are to be explored, it is important to include the animistic association of traumatic experiences. The animistic response to trauma and its transfer has its roots in indigenous culture and specific histories of postcolonial localities which originate from ancestral, local sources of knowledge which is unfathomable to the western world. The winds, the water bodies, the island itself, the different forms of non-human life all has the ability to handle and respond to the trauma of colonisation. These elements are witness to trauma of first-generation and the characters feel that ancestral connections are being transferred through the inanimate environment around them.

Aye's knowledge of spirits called "Nats" inherited from his mother, helps him understand his feelings towards the colonial rule on the island. He associates the colonial power with bad spirits on the island. He has a connection with winds, he feels all the different kinds of winds that blow at different times and he has named them all according to their roles in the colony. This special connection to the island and the elemental forces that govern it is another important example of animistic postcolonial trauma in the novel. His ability to identify different winds that inhabit the islands is a part of his animistic relationship with the place which affects his comprehension of the past. He feels that lately, the new winds have destroyed everything. His confusion springs from his inability to decide where his loyalties lie, with his Master, the colonizer, or with his own people. His relationship with the island plays a deciding role in establishing his identity. When the "settler wind" blows it tells the colonizer to "leave, you are in my home" (Khan, 2019, p. 92). He feels that the "island stopped telling him things" unless he re-establishes his relationship with the island which according to Rajiva is important for mediating trauma because all the biomass surrounding the traumatic society constitutes an environment that "implicates, stains, and bleeds into and out of our supposedly discrete selves" (Rajiva, 2020, p. 21). When Aye raids the Swiftlet nests on the orders of Mr. Howard while climbing the caves and coming across different life forms in the deep jungle he used to recall the timeline of his family history on the islands.

The repetition of dates of a forgotten past, a past not taught at school. He recited them as a prayer When his great grandfather arrived: 1858 When the jail was built: 1906 When his father lost his mind: 1910 When Aye was born: 1924. (Khan, 2019, p. 73)

Postcolonial traumatic experiences are hard to be communicated and understood within the conventional logical structures of western trauma treatment. The urgency of mediating trauma in a world that is stranded in pragmatic assemblies of meaning, within which the traumatic past is often incoherent, leaves trauma subjects unable to recover. Animism provides that space where this healing can be processed for those who survive colonial trauma to return to their normal selves. Rajiva says that:

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If trauma, broadly speaking, deadens or dampens the subject's ability to access the world outside their own pain, the conventional structures of making sense of trauma – in social, legal, cultural, literary, and even interpersonal terms – offer little respite for the trauma subject, and are doubly effacing for postcolonial trauma in contexts that challenge the unspoken axioms of western trauma theory. The task is to live again, or to derive some measure of healing from trauma within structures of meaning larger than the single person traumatized. The world must be enlivened, but without dismissing or reducing the trauma victim's experience. (Rajiva, 2020, p. 21)

Animistic relation with trauma brings forth those mediums of transgenerational trauma transfer which cannot be accessed by a collection of empirical data like western psychiatrist collected data of the second generation of holocaust survivors. Having its roots in the specific cultural understanding of the environment, animistic postcolonial trauma treatment focuses on articulating the experience of a post colony through all elements of the environment whether human or non-human.

Photography as a Tool of Trauma Transfer:

Hirsch focuses on photography as a medium of postmemorial transfer. She uses a series of family photos to establish a generational connection within the family. Significantly, photographs are mentioned only thrice in *Miraculous*. The placement of photographs as a postmemory medium at the end of textual analysis is deliberate to highlight the unique characteristics of trauma transference across the digital divide. With postmemory's insistence on photography, the question arises how postmemory can be transferred within a postcolonial society where access to a camera in familial spaces is almost non-existent? Even in wider social spaces, lack of technological advance does not allow the privileged memory transfer through photographs. The colonizer has control over technology; does that mean the colonizer has control over memory transfer too? The technologically advanced Empire is able to produce images of the colonized subjects as it sees fit. Uzma Aslam Khan mentions these "projected images" in one of social media posts. She shares some pictures from her collected documents while she was writing the novel. There is a picture of comfort women brought in by the Japanese where smiling women are lined up to be photographed. *Miraculous*, drawing its inspiration from historical facts depicts a deplorable state of these comfort women brought to the islands under false promises. Khan points out "how a brown body is arranged there, a 'good' one, for the sake of making the image 'normal.'" (Khan, 2019). These planned images are a tool for the colonizer to present false evidence of a prosperous land which in reality is controlled by brutal force.

Aye has seen three photographs in Mr. Howard's office of a native boy who was forcefully taken and dressed in a sailor suit before being shipped to Calcutta for a governor general's wife. Aye contemplates that picture a lot and it feels that the face of the boy is old and his shoulders hunched like he is carrying a burden. Another picture hangs in his office is of three nude natives wearing necklaces and crowns made of shells, bones and feathers. Aye can feel their gaze which communicates with him. The picture tells him a story of cultural appropriation. But all Mr. Howard can see when he looks at the photograph is that native men are handsome as compared to native women who are ugly. There is a difference in the native

descendant's gaze, the gaze of the western colonizer and the photographed subjects' gaze at the camera. The subjects of the photograph are unsure about the medium which is representing them. Their gaze and awkward posture represent that bewilderment. The colonizer does not acknowledge this unfamiliarity and enjoys the picture for its exoticism. In her article 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory' Hirsch says that the act of looking at a picture is an "encounter between two presents," where the moment of one present which is frozen in time can be enlivened through the gaze of the witness generation (Hirsch, 2001, p. 17).

Hirsch contends that pictures can show the universality of human experience because of their "communicative abilities" (Hirsch, 1997, p. 49). While that may be true within a Eurocentric trauma model, that approach is not applicable while tracing traumatic histories in a postcolonial context. How can pictures show universality across a digital divide where the source of trauma and the power of its representation is in the hand of the colonizer? When Nomi tries to picture the journey of her family to the islands, she has no pictures to communicate with the past. She knows that the power of photography can help her imagine Zee, unlike the superior White nation. "the British had images of men they wanted remembered, and so did the Japanese. She did not have any of Zee" (Khan, 2019, p. 296). This unavailability of pictures does not halt the postmemorial transfer of trauma. It simply means that with fewer technological facilities, the trauma of colonized subject is being transferred in locally rooted mediums of mediation. So Nomi uses her imagination to create mental images which unlike literal images, have this space for postmemorial creation. These mental images are also being clicked by Prisoner 218 D in the text whose character indulges the readers in complex questions regarding the choice of medium, the choice of representation and sharing memories. She hopes for a day when that choice would be her own.

Her memory was selective that she knew but who controlled what her memory selected? Why were the images that returned too often of moments she did not wish to keep seeing____ at least not alone? (Ibid, p.324).

The question haunts her that who would share the memory with those who were left alone in dungeons to die by the colonizer? The process of selection of images, their projection and the gaze they receive in a postcolonial context is very political. When the generational ties have been cut by exile and solitary confinements, the projected images fail to represent and transfer trauma. When Nomi meets the photographers coming from the outside world to the islands after the war is over, she is disappointed to see that they are only interested in ruined buildings and do not pay attention to the people. This choice of subject by the chief western medium of postmemory, when applied in postcolonial settings without much context, cannot help in tracing traumatic legacies of the past. That is why postmemory practices need to trace new means of transference, which are grounded in socio-political perspectives acknowledging the postcolonial specifications of different geographies.

Conclusion

The textual analysis of *Miraculous* demonstrates all mediums through which postmemory is operating through the text. The transgenerational association is reliant on the process of postmemory for perceiving and working through the

Transgenerational Trauma and Postmemorial Atonement: A Case Study of Uzma Aslam Khan's *The Miraculous True History of Nomi Ali*

traumatic past. The shadows of colonisation are still present in our society so this study helps the present generation to understand the past to look forward to a better future. The study traces all prominent features of the theory of postmemory through the primary text while accommodating it in cultural specifications in the light of postcolonial criticism. It highlights the differences between Western trauma and the trauma of the third world.

Miraculous is a blend of memory, desire for freedom, and the power of telling the stories which were left untold. Khan knows the importance of aesthetic mediums in connecting a nation to its past. When "Art alone could answer the question[s]..." it has a certain witness responsibility to share those stories which have been forgotten but are still an important part of a collective identity (Khan, 2019, p. 164). Hamid and Khan in an article have also explored this potential of Pakistani art and literature as a witness to beauty and violence and its aesthetics in contemporary Pakistani fiction and art. They describe this combination as "a thematic binary of hope and resilience" (Hamid and Khan).

Just like Hirsch, they look at this binary as a medium of repair and transformation but only with a very conscious use of the specific cultural scenario. The victims of the cellular jails that this novel introduces to its readers deserve to be remembered for their sacrifices in the freedom from the British Empire. On the islands "their death, like their lives would only be witnessed by the clouds passing overhead. Only they could carry the truth to somewhere else if someone but cared to look up" (Ibid, p.177). Now that *Miraculous* has passed those stories onto us, we must never forget. The novel endeavours to comprehend the traces of pain coming to us through ancestral memories otherwise the state of collective political and historical unconsciousness would prevail. The text tries to bring back the stories of the dead because "What [is] left of the living with the death of the past" (Ibid, p.367). The Japanese art of mending broken objects by repairing them with silver or gold strands is mentioned in the text. We find it surprisingly similar to the work of postmemory in the context of this novel which mends the severed memory ties between generations. *Miraculous* ends with a beautiful account of fireflies that lighten up the dark. If these fireflies can be perceived as an analogy for memories, in the words of Khan,

[They] are the stars of the forest. They are the pathways through shadow to light and this movement this blinking and fading out, it lives in all things. It lives inside our body (Ibid, p.370).

This paper highlights the trauma inflicted past from a forgotten part of our history that keeps coming back to haunt the next generations. The study concludes that transgenerational trauma has seeped through time and ancestral trauma affects the coming generations in multiple ways in the selected text. The post generations need to work through the clingy past to heal from the wounds of colonial atrocities. In Pakistani literary research, the field of transgenerational trauma is yet to be explored to its full effect. For further research in the area of literary trauma studies, new areas can be opened up by using an interdisciplinary approach. Especially the genre of historical metafiction in literature can be explored to understand the traumatic past of our nation by pairing up historical archives with literary anthropology.

This paper establishes the distinct characteristics and mediums of postcolonial trauma as compared to Western trauma. The present study also stresses the contextualization of geo-cultural locales while distinguishing the theoretical problems arising out of using a cookie-cutter framework. Future studies can focus on tracing transgenerational trauma through different regional geographical models within Pakistan which can delimit the study more effectively. Comparative analysis can be done from these different regions than to comprehend the trends of intergenerational trauma transfer in different circumstances.

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