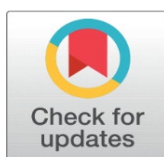


DISPLACEMENT, BETRAYAL AND HARROWING JOURNEY: A CRITICAL STUDY OF TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCES IN FABIO GEDA'S *IN THE SEA THERE ARE CROCODILES*

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Received January 2024

Accepted April 2024

Published June 2024

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DOI

[10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.1816](https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i6.2024.1816)

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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ABSTRACT

This study shall explore displacement, harrowing journeys, and traumatic experiences in the novel *In The Sea There are Crocodiles* (2010) by Fabio Geda. This paper shall examine the traumatic incidents faced by juvenile asylum applicants in the current situation and how a ten-year-old boy gets along to assert political asylum after enduring many trials and catastrophic events. Fabio Geda (1972) showcases images of perfidy, fright, gloominess, suspicion, and weariness in this novel. The unornamented fiction encapsulates the desire of a courageous boy who showcases resilience in such turbulent times. This paper shall explore how eviction from his homeland took him into and out of Iran, Turkey, and Greece, how he underwent the physical suffering of frontier checkpoints compressed into the bilge of forbidding profusion, and how the boy demonstrates an instance of courageousness, innocence, and faith. How a ten-year-old boy grapples with looking for himself and how he underwent traumatic situations throughout his harrowing journey. This paper explores how the hope of getting asylum makes him go through in the face of seemingly insuperable hurdles. This paper shall explore the difficulties faced by refugees in the present era due to current turmoil worldwide and the survival of the fittest test to survive an agonizing journey from Afghanistan to Italy. How war has displaced thousands of people across nations, and now they are struggling for asylum.

Keywords: Displacement, Harrowing Journey, Traumatic Experience, Homeland, Asylum Seeker

1. INTRODUCTION

The present paper focuses on a critical overview of Fabio Geda's novel *In The Sea There Are Crocodiles* (2010). This novel divulges the experiences of young asylum seekers in the current scenario. Enaiyatollah Akbari, the protagonist, discusses his harrowing expedition to find a safe refuge in this novel. He was a boy of 10 years of age when he left his beautiful homeland behind, a village called Nava in Ghazni province in Afghanistan. This Novel follows his breathtaking journey through many countries all alone. He escapes the political oppression and persecution from government forces in his native homeland, which makes his claim for refugee status. He could only get asylum when he fits the below definition of the 1951 Refugee Convention (Article 1), which states that refugees are people who have to depart from their homeland due to various reasons, including war, brutality, internal conflicts, and oppression. They cannot return

because of fear of persecution for reasons of religion, race, particular membership, or political opinion. For UNHCR, the expulsion of people from their country when forced upon them due to calamities of "persecution and war" renders them refugees. (What is a refugee?, UNHCR, Para. 1)

2. DISCUSSION

Enaiatollah Akbari's journey unfolds against the backdrop of the Hazara minority community in Afghanistan; his departure from his homeland is marked by leaving behind familiar comforts, like his small village, the fields, Buzal Bazi (a local game), cherished memories of games and friendship, and his family, to find safety in a strange and sometimes hostile country. His story is distinctive and usually horrifying to tell. However, his narrative takes a harrowing turn when his mother's departure leaves him feeling abandoned in a foreign land. When he opened his eyes one morning, he discovered his mother left him there. He called out to her, but she had gone, leaving him to fend for himself (Geda, 2010). Though initially feeling like a perfidy, this pivotal moment reveals itself as an act of excellent care and affection, thrusting Enaiatollah into the daunting task of surviving alone in unfamiliar settings. This is the most traumatic event for him. For the first time, he feels abandoned, away from his mother. Now, the terrible and dangerous time started for Enaiatollah. Fending for himself and being alive were his priorities. His mother's parting advice becomes his guiding principle as he navigates through perilous borders and harsh conditions. She has advised him while leaving Afghanistan and crossing the Pakistani border never to use drugs or weapons, cheat on anyone, or steal something. The narrative of his odyssey is punctuated by moments of despair; the journey includes horrors, dangerous borders, harsh weather, and sorrowful times. Intending to find a particular asylum, he traverses Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Greece, and Italy. Enaiatollah grapples with the collective trauma of his community's plight as he is stranded in Pakistan's Quetta; his family is in war-ravaged Afghanistan, which represents the community violence for which Erickson coined the term 'Collective Trauma.' His bad days showcase his trauma as he starts working to fend for himself and to find a place to sleep. He wants to erase those difficulties from his memory and never look back. However, amidst the turmoil, there are glimpses of hope and resilience as Enaiat presses on. Each step forward is a testament to his unwavering spirit and the enduring power of the human will to survive in this war-torn era.

This novel serves as a poignant reflection on the current refugee crisis, told from the perspective of a young protagonist whose life is upended by the horrors of ethnic conflict in his homeland in Afghanistan. The narrator talks about the traumatic journey that starts outright when he is forced to leave his homeland due to ethnic conflict. This text exhibits the agonizing narrative of a 10-year-old boy who went through personal trauma as well as collective trauma as he belongs to a war-torn community. Fabio Geda (2010) skillfully captures the boy's poignant nostalgia for the peaceful days before the onset of conflict, juxtaposed with the haunting memories of bombs, starvation, and bloodshed that now define his existence. Moreover, the ten-year-old boy talks about the scary memories which, in a later stage, cause nightmares in the form of hallucinations. Besides this, the novelist Fabio Geda (2010) displays the problematic expedition to shielded heavens with individuals displaced from their homeland and showcases the fearfulness of being unwelcome overseas. This novel demonstrates the cycle of traumatic experiences by employing the ten-year-old boy. By employing the trauma theory in this text, there is both personal and collective trauma. The treacherous journey to seek safety in foreign lands underscores the pervasive fear of rejection and unwelcome reception, adding another layer of complexity to the narrative. Contemporary fiction, exemplified by this novel, grapples with the profound existential questions of meaninglessness and identity crisis in a world scarred by traumatic events. The 20th century is considered to be the age of trauma, marked by various traumatized events such as the Holocaust, Colonialism, slavery, and world wars; all these events introduced Trauma into the culture.

Through Enaiat's story, Geda masterfully explores the profound and enduring effects of traumatic events on people, offering insights into the complexities of the human psyche. All experience trauma in this era of violence; it is reflected in every art form, especially the literature of the time. In the novel *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*, Geda vividly portrays the childhood trauma experienced by the protagonist; the National Institute of Mental Health defines child trauma as the traumatic event experienced by the child is "emotionally painful or distressful," that leads to mental and physical ailments among the traumatized individuals in belated forms (What is child Trauma, NCTSN, para. 1). The traumatic event includes a natural disaster, physical abuse or death of a parent. In the novel *In the Sea There are Crocodiles*, Fabio Geda (2010), through little boy Enaituollah, showcases the child's trauma when he left his mother and brothers behind. He went through a traumatized journey to reach a safer heaven. Trauma theory talks about the disturbed psyche and the causing factors. Geda's narrative delves into the depths of trauma theory, tracing its origins back to Sigmund Freud's

psychoanalytic model in the 1990s, when he had interactions with emotionally distressed or hysteric patients. Later, he gave the psychoanalytic model of trauma theory. Later came the seminal work in trauma by Cathy Caruth (1995), *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). She defines trauma as; “trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth, 1996, p. 11). In this book, Caruth eloquently introduced the Literary Trauma Theory and three aspects of personal trauma that are noticed in every traumatized individual, including repetitious, timeless, and unspeakable. She asserts that it is repetitious because it reoccurs in the mind of a traumatic person through flashbacks. The timeless aspect of trauma is evident as the protagonist is trapped in the past, struggling to navigate a devastated present and uncertain future (Caruth, 1996). Furthermore, the unspeakable language of trauma encapsulates the profound difficulty in articulating and conveying the depths of one’s traumatic experiences.

The traumatized individual also goes through Collective Trauma that Kia Erickson in his essay “Notes on Trauma and Community” (1991). Erickson elucidates the concept of collective trauma as a traumatic event to the substance of an individual –or, often now, to the matter of the mind – that leads to a wound or some other distraction. It is an assault from an external event that shatters the room a person as an individual inhabits and destroys the internal parts. (Erickson, 1991). Erickson argues that this form of trauma extends beyond individual experience to encompass societal upheaval and destruction, ultimately eroding the fabric of a community. Erickson identifies various factors that contribute to collective trauma in a community, including war, natural disasters, colonization, and sexual abuse. These events, much like the ethnic conflict and war on minorities in Ghazni, Afghanistan, shatter the cohesion of society, instilling fear, distrust, and depression on a collective level. The aftermath of the trauma leaves the present in disarray, and the uncertainty looms over the community’s future due to chaos and confusion. Erickson further talks about collective trauma as an injury to the primary substance of a community, which before the traumatic shock shares a healthy bond. The aftermath of this traumatic shock is not immediate but gradually affects the sense of belonging prevailing in a community. Those who exist after the shock do not feel the support, and the turbulent effects change the self, and the bond of community is shattered forever. (Erickson, 1991)

Enaitollah’s journey encapsulates the collective trauma experienced by many refugees, symbolizing the struggles and hardships of the significant community. He went through both personal and collective trauma as he did not understand people; he could not use their language, which caused many problems in his arduous journey and led to emotional trauma, which has become a central part of refugee literature. The loss of language, as highlighted by Stonebridge, amalgamates trauma and refugee literature in a speculation that circumscribes by what method refugees are traumatized by their inability and lack of capability to state and society’s refusal of their fundamental rights. Her foundation for this is al-Assad’s poem *Asylum*, particularly the verse “I am sewing my lips together/that which you are denying us /we should never have/to ask for/” (Isaksen & Vejling, 2018, p. 17). Hannah Arendt (1943), in his essay “We Refugees,” also talks about language loss. Ardent states that we lost our language, the naturalness of reactions, the simplicity of gestures, and the unaffected expression of feelings (Ardent, 1943). This loss of language is not new in the present era of turmoil and trauma. Loss of language is in itself a traumatic event. Vamik Volkan (1932), an American psychiatrist, talks about a well-known struggle among refugees that could be very traumatic: the experience of language acquisition in a foreign country. For adult refugees, the age factor could make the task worse, and they may certainly not be successful in acquiring a foreign tongue when deprived of the connection to language, which is the root cause of stress in the refugees and can eventually lead to increased traumatization.

The protagonist of this novel (Enaiat) symbolizes the entire refugee community. He represents the collective trauma experienced by his age group. He is not alone on the frightful expedition; many young adults his age and younger have to scavenge in the grime for food and gaze for a hopefully sheltered section to sleep for the night. Enaiat’s constant pursuit of asylum reflects the desperation and hopelessness felt by many refugees as they face harsh conditions and discrimination along the way. He always runs for the asylum, which is nowhere to the fore in the immediate future. His journey incorporates long working hours for low wages, which he uses to survive. His journey also reveals the survival of the fittest test, where only the most robust reach the safe zone. In any place he goes, Afghanistan is in his mind (the small village of Nava). He always talks about the treatment of Hazaras back in war-torn Nava, and he says that the Ghazni province is treated as incompetently as subalterns, as if they are living in a grave. He compares the conditions of his province with those of other countries living under the same circumstances. Harsh, painful situations forced him to flee the war due to outbreaks of strife. The prevailing situation in his homeland is such that you never know whether the announcement of your death precedes you or you will get back to your home first. So, he left his homeland and went in

search of an asylum. Refugees are considered to be illegals who are devoid of everything, including health facilities. They are considered to be meager enslaved people. Their human rights are violated everywhere as they are considered fundamental rights of every individual and are permanent. However, in the case of refugees, the conditions they face in their native lands, in concentration camps, and in resettled countries, their fundamental rights are violated everywhere, and their rights do not traverse with them. (Isaksen and Veijling, 2018)

The very same comes to this ten-year-old boy who cannot raise a question about this; the major issue with undocumented migrants is that they are deemed illegal even when it comes to health. Geda (2010) is always curious and searches for answers, while Enaiat, the storyteller, concentrates on reality and experiences. He says it is an experience that matters. Enaiat always wants to delve into the homeland; for him, only the events and experiences matter as they shape one's life, no matter with whom and where they occur. The catastrophic events of his homeland shape his uncertain future. The character of Enaiat employed in this novel is an amalgamation of various devastating events that happened in the past or are occurring now; it creates a blurred vision of the future for him. Enaiatollah is particular about not a single event, but as he runs, he is also not sure of the fourth dimension of time and space. For him, nothing in this era of violence and conflict is inevitable. As refugees have no landing place, where they reappear leads them into imperilment. To cross the frontier and marines as illegitimate persons is a threat in itself because everywhere, the refugee lands are considered to be illegal, without any fixed destination. In any community Enaiat and his friends go, they are frightened of Telisia or Sang Safid; whosoever has been there has become mentally ill. Enaiat and his friend, as illegal settlers, are afraid of being in Telisia or Sang Safid, "and if you do not know what they are, that is only because you have never been an Afghan refugee in Iran. After all, all the Afghan refugees in Iran know what Telisia and Sang Safid are. They're legendary. They're supposed to be temporary detention centers but more like concentration camps (Geda, 2010). They are frightened of concentration camps because they represent trauma in itself. These places are hopeless because they are not the places they can later call home. A man needs a tiny place, small as it may be, of which he can say: This is mine, here I live, here I belong to, here I find peace and rest. This is my native homeland, but refugees cannot claim it. So, what happens with Enaiat? He becomes uprooted and displaced. This era is seen as an era of forced migration, where people are driven from their homes and communities due to conflict and violence. Refugee identity is the major consequence of contemporary forced migration and is elucidated as a shape of recognition whose formation displacement plays an important role. Their identities are fluid; they cannot claim the land as their own, which is traumatic. Michelle Balaev (2008) talks about the role of place in portraying the traumatic effects on individuals through metaphoric and material means. He says: "Descriptions of the geographic of traumatic experience and remembrance situate the individual about a larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of the self" (Balaev, 2008, p. 149). Place plays a vital role in the trauma novel as it explores the effects of suffering on the individual and community regarding the character's relation to the place. Every traumatic event that happens in a community, be it a battlefield or any catastrophic incident, place remains in their psyche wherever they go. Viet Thanh Nguyen (1975), in his novel *The Sympathizer* (2015), showcases how the main protagonist is always in alignment with the place of the traumatic events. "The physical environment is often understood best as a symbol representing cultural values and perceptions invested in a place" (Walter, 1988, p. 85). While identification often seems pre-established and adherent, scholars of the contemporary era agree with the statement that identity is not fixed but a "construct of social, political and constitutional contexts." (Abdelal et al., 2006, p. 695). Hence, refugee is a construct; their lives are shaped by exile and displacement, brought to them by political and economic structures and policies. The most essential thing in Enaiat's life is their homeland, but the motherland does not return, and he becomes a victim. Their identity is in crisis; they cannot relate to anything, and their identity is in transit. Jopi Nyman (1966), in his book *Displacement, Memory and Travel in Contemporary Writing* (2017), provides insights into these themes, offering a deeper understanding of how displacement and travel intersect with memory and identity in contemporary literature. Nyman (2017) further asserts that refugees fleeing from their homeland suffer from trauma from others who became part of this group on a harrowing journey. Their identities are not fixed but fluid; they do not belong to one place or have no fixed classification. They are sometimes preoccupied with their homeland or what they left behind; they are suddenly confronted with threatening situations and experience liminal identity. Leaving their homes and belongings behind and settling in ghettos or temporary refugee camps is very traumatic.

This novel is enthralling; there is the emotional involvement of readers as well; sometimes, it breaks down the readers and occasionally lifts or elevates them. Loneliness, despair, and dejection overwhelm Enaiat because he has no one to talk to and is fearful; no one can assuage his fears. The contemplative thoughts of the traumatic past constantly overtake him. Recollections of gone time are repeatedly accomplished in the literary text that surfaces on a conscious

level. So, we can see his timeless relationship with the past. People in exile are permanently attached to their past, and past and present seem to mingle in their psyche, especially when the traumatic events flash in the beginning and middle of the text. Through the use of flashbacks, readers get to know about their fragmented past as these characters cannot make sense of self or an alignment with their present; their lives are entirely of chaos and confusion. Literary theorists have seen these Silences “as a sign of proof that supports the prelinguistic neural-hormonal theories, narrative ellipses must also be viewed as rhetorical strategies that convey the assorted meanings of trauma in fiction” (Baleav, 2008, p. 159). Trauma does not mainly talk about the horrible event that causes trauma in an individual but about the traumatic repercussions, with its belated symptoms known as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Time passed rapidly for Enaiat; adversity and suffering became part of his desperate life. The novelist also showcases the situation of refugees in this war-scarred world. They always live their life in gutters; sometimes, the journey is terrible and sometimes very long, never-ending, which causes piety among readers. This narrative talks in-depth about the psychological loss, homelessness, and the trauma of being an outsider in a foreign land. This novel also showcases their experiences of living in camps and asylum seekers. It is only hope that keeps them going; they get suffocated, are thirsty for days, and undergo unhygienic conditions, but hope holds their spirit high and assuages their fears. The fears he had always made him feel suffocated; he always wished for a short journey. They keep on thinking about why they cannot live everyday life and why the police forces are after their life. Repatriation is painful for them; they cannot return to their country. Freedom does not exist for them as humans. When Enaiat and his friends cross the sea, they wonder if there are Crocodiles in the sea. They could not drink water from it, so Turks and Greeks poisoned it to kill them. They always have thoughts of death while crossing the hazards of the sea. The title *In The Sea There are Crocodiles* is a metaphor for ten-year-old Enait's dangers when left alone to fend for himself. Crocodiles are in the form of war, betrayal, traffickers, dangerous borders, and darkness, which prevails everywhere for them. Darkness ate them up, leading to drowning.

This novel contains images of betrayal, fear, darkness, suspicion, and exhaustion. This novel also reflects how refugees are drowned while crossing dangerous seas to seek safe heaven /asylum. Sometimes, nature is against them by creating hurdles in their paths. The most catastrophic event for them was the drowning of Liaqat; it seemed to them that darkness had purported Liaqat, and there was no response. The fear of drowning was always there and was hard to discern. This novel reflects the harrowing journeys of refugees. Refugees are unexpected and unwelcome everywhere. Ardent says that refugees lost their homes, which means their familiarity with everyday life. They lost their occupation, which means the confidence to live in the world. As they are considered illegals, no one can claim them owed. After suffering for five years, Enaiatollah is granted asylum in Italy as a haven for him. Finally, he can call a place his home or first step towards getting it. While getting the asylum, he now suffers from trauma, with all the pain and distress resurfacing in his conscious mind. Night terrors afflict his nights as a tempestuous sea between Turkey and Greece, “and in those nightmares, I was running away from something and, in the running, I often fell out of bed, or else I would get up, tear off a blanket, wrap it around my shoulders, go downstairs, open the door of the yard and go to sleep in var, all without realizing it... I was a sleepwalker” (Geda, 2010, p. 207). In these nightmares, he is running away from obscured threats, searching for consolation from insensible wandering around; he finds himself sleepwalking as if suffering from somnambulism.

Refugees constitute a group of individuals that undergo enormous horrible happenings. In various cases, refugees are the subjects enduring constant terror as an element of their everyday existence, and the processes by which terror exercises in their lives are perpetrated by state or non-state actors. The experience of expulsion and forced migration are traumatic events in themselves. Refugees experience three distinct phases of trauma: The first is a pre-displacement stage when the home of the traumatized individual is assaulted. The second is the displacement stage, where the refugee leaves his homeland behind. The last stage is post-displacement, where refugees experience a sense of non-belonging. The book starts with Abandonment, which is in itself a traumatic event. A ten-year-old refugee boy is illegal in the west-penniless and homeless, unable to speak the local language. He makes his living by only working whatever he finds and in any situation. When a little boy like him complained about little things like electricity on hot summer days, Enaiat was working and walking lost in Iran. These are the people out there fighting for survival. It is euphoric when he gets asylum, but tragic, too.

3. CONCLUSION

The novel dramatically articulates the state of suffering that overwhelmed many of the displaced families. Fabio Geda (2010) discloses the political, social, and human realities that distinguish the existence of the people in exile at

pivotal times in their lives. This novel presents the details of Enaiat's hardship and struggle and how he went through traumatic events to get a safe asylum. This novel represents the refugees' suffering, humiliation, loss, deprivation, and injustice. The novelist showcases the personal and collective trauma suffered by refugees worldwide. These people are underprivileged of the life they deserve since they left their homeland and became uprooted and homeless. This novel by Fabio Geda represents all those in exile and those going through the harrowing journey to get a safer place or an asylum. This novel showcases the struggle of every refugee and a sincere portrayal of their traumatic experiences. All refugees went through hostility, indignity, and ravenousness to get a place to live. Under the burden of displacement and exile, they endure agony from estrangement and deprivation of identity and language, searching to find a haven where they can breathe without any fear.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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