

Impact of Psychological Trauma and Honour killing as a memoir depiction in Souad's Burned Alive

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Abstract

Studies on Honour killing have relevance over boundaries. Honor killing is a practice in which women, and in some circumstances men, are slain in order to prevent or restore behaviour that is thought to tarnish men's or families' reputations. Issues related to honor cover a range of violent acts, such as beatings, kidnappings, forced marriages, rape and other forms of social violence. As a kind of gender-based violence, honour killing affirms that women are the carriers of men's or familial honour that seems to be justified in the notion of 'honour'. Souad's *Burned Alive* is a genuine account of an honour killing written by the victim herself. She was set on fire by her brother –in-law for having pre –marital sexual relation with the man she loved was the 'crime'. Souad survived miraculously from the brutality though 70% of her body got burnt, she was rescued by the women of her village. Souad started a new life in Europe with the European aid worker who loved and care her which she needed to get heal from her past. From the subjective position of the victim this paper tries to explore the psychological and trauma related repercussions of this inhuman practice. This article attempts to exhibit how the victim is affected psychologically and undergoes traumatic events which create conflicts in the victim's unconscious mind.

Key words: trauma, inhuman, social violence, repercussion, psychological, honour killing
 Introduction

Honour killing is a sensitive issue throughout the world because it is closely associated with religion. Honour killing is an ongoing practice which is present in every nook and corner of the world. Honour remains in the behavior of particular group and for men it is an ability to preserve and for women honour stands on their moral behavior, chastity and virginity. Women have major influence on determining family honour. The simple behavioural traits of women may stain or pony up the reputation of their family in the society. Honour killing or shame killing refers to murder of a female member who have violated certain codes or conventions of a particular community or religious groups. Honour killing includes certain reasons due to forced marriage, being in relation with member from other community, having sex before marriage and divorce. The methods of oppression vary depending upon the location their regional culture and socio- economic status. Honour killing is purely cultural practice in the name of religion, caste and community. In the autobiographical work Souad's *Burned Alive*, the story reflects authors

own experience in a powerless world and the harsh realities of third world countries. The book deals with the traumatic experiences that she has faced at the age of eighteen. Souad reconstruct her past with traumatic narratives in her memoir. Trauma narratives are considered as therapeutic method, when a survivor recites his/her trauma which “empower survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma” (Brison 40). Souad’s narrative is found with lot of broken images, fragmented memoirs, inhuman action, violence, trauma which made her to travel to Europe.

Souad calmly offers a shocking account of his past life, without tears or fear, which forever remains a burden on his heart. The memoir begins with the author’s terrible story starts at her age of eighteen. “My memory went up in the smoke the day the flames engulfed me but I have tried to reconstruct what happened” (Souad 13). She is trying to reconstruct her past through fragmented images and the second chapter *Memory* becomes prevalent in trauma narrative. Traumatic memories are difficult to retrieve and have the tendency to distort while narration. In the beginning of the memoir she says about her second life started in Europe at the end 1970. The second chapter of her memoir gives an account of her childhood, aversion towards girl child and the community’s treatment of girls. She also adds gender discrimination in her house how women are treated by men in her house. She as a victim reverberate her horrifying past which left an in-depth wound in her psyche. She as a girl child witness the death of new born baby killed by her mother herself because of the aversion towards girl child. One such incident stuck in her memory and creates a traumatic depression. Souad also has nightmare of her mother holding knife in her hand threatening to kill her. Fear is another element which remains as a main effect in traumatic life. The victim was not able to mingle with the society she avoids to go to restaurant or to swimming pool because of her appearance cause by burns in her body. Souad lost her skin and in the bereavement in which “such losses are easily recognized because the absence of what was physically present signal a loss has take place” (Figley 42). Her skin reflects her strength and weakness which reflects her anger, frustration, social withdrawal and anxiety over the outer world.

The Burned Alive memoir can be seen as a powerful glimpse into the despair of girls scarred by the misfortune of being born into oppressive families in East Midland. The book divided into five parts and describes different stages of her life in East midland and Europe. In her memoir, she drew a distinction between the countries of the Middle East and Europe, as frenzied honor killing was common and normal in the East Midlands. She experienced the atrocity of honour killing because of her premarital sexual relationship with an aid worker. Her brother in law Hussein attempted to burn her alive thinking that she has spoiled the reputation of their family. She escaped accidentally with the help of social worker called Jacqueline and she took her to Swiss. Even though she survived she underwent twenty-four operations and innumerable excruciatingly painful recovery procedures. In western country she underwent culture shocks in western where female were given full freedom to enjoy their life. She found female nurses were speaking with men; they wear makeup, and wore short dresses. Her second phase of life was happy with her three children and husband. Souad

was seen as a strong independent woman who manages to survive from her past life which seems to be painful.

Despite the book's melancholic quality Souad expresses her ill-treatment life from her childhood, and her testimony left her psychologically vulnerable life in Europe. Souad is obsessed by dreams, flashbacks, and nightmares recalling the traumatic event. According to the critic Shay,

Traumatic memory is not narrative rather, it is experience that occurs, either as full sensory replay of traumatic events in dreams or flashbacks, with all things seen, heard, smelled and felt intact, or as disconnected fragments. These fragments may be implacable rage, terror, uncontrollable, crying or disconnects body states and sensation (qtd. in Brinson 43).

Souad as an honour killing survivor she faced many psychological depressions because of her illicit relationship. Her burns are painful and the injury affected layers of her skin which creates a traumatic life. Her love for Faiez, premarital sex and subsequent pregnancy was the reason for being a honour victim. She felt ashamed about herself and she thought herself as a dirty girl that she had dishonoured the virtues of her family. Though she was illiterate she was not able to justify herself and she surrendered herself in the hands of death. This autobiography perfectly portrays Souad's intimate encounters not as his own moral failure, but as a by-product of her insight of "woman" as servant and "man" as master who can secure his freedom. Souad's life is a journey from nothingness to something to everything. Throughout this process, her feelings of humiliation and inferiority for conceiving and giving birth to her son Marouan dwindle as she finally accepts him wholeheartedly. Ultimately her sense of connection and comfort with femininity is a very moving experience for the reader. While reading the book, one recognizes that an illicit sexual relationship is not presented as a theological issue, but as a sociological and psychological one.

Souad's experienced a gender discrimination, physical violence and emotional abuses in her first phase of her life that leads her to traumatic disorder. In the second chapter she recounts an incident that her father abuses her physically. Her terrific past and her emotional imbalance have deep connections with her memories. In a course of her life she accidentally saw a picture of a dead girl who had been strangled with a telephone cord which kindles the event in her childhood her elder sister was brutally murdered by her brother Assad. Even small incidents cause a negative impact on one's psyche. The readers can view Souad in an integrationist approach as she converts herself from Europeanizing from the relics of her own native culture. Her life in Europe was peaceful and happy but the recollection of past made her suffer psychologically. Her horrific past and her emotional imbalance have deep connection with her past life. Her past life threatens her as a nightmare that irritates her and made her sick psychologically. Nightmare can be seen as recreating imagery or replaying images of traumatic experience which leads to progression of anxiety and fear. Even though she limits herself from society she felt herself low and invaluable. Souad as a mouthpiece of honour killing victim she faced real life experiences of horrific act. She could not come out of

her past that remains in her as a continual fear and shock throughout her life even she had escaped from the brutal society.

Trauma also has connection with brain where the effect of trauma will endure brain and that effect on brain leads to depression. This trauma made her to take sleeping pills as an attempt of suicide. A sense of shame also follows her that lead to self assessment considering her as a faulty woman. Her self assessment made her to accept her mother's decision when she gave Souad a glass of poison. She accepted with a shock and later blames herself for her act of surrendering herself to a man. Her scars and wounds made her to assess her and create a sense of hatred towards her life and behaviour. She also blames herself by saying "I would endure the fate of all women who sully the honour of men" (Souad 169). Self blaming leads her unable to recover from the traumatic experience. The psychological pressure she undergoes was very high. Her child Marouan is a reminder of her past, her son automatically becomes a call of her past deeds. She avoids caring him and she send Marouan to her foster parents to look after him. Her surrounding is the best relief from her past and depression. When she starts a new life in Europe she had a different state of mind which made her to relieve herself from the trauma and loneliness.

Souad's whole life represents every girl's freedom that everyone needs to enjoy as an individual. Souad was lucky enough that she had escaped from the brutality of her society but there are many victims outside who were affected and victimized to honour killing. A reader can analyze and understand the depth of the cruelty in her memoir through the sufferings of her life from childhood. Violence, trauma, psychological depression and memory are interrelated elements that overlap through different broken images. Souad's experience is a firsthand which was neither narrated as someone's story nor as a second hand witness. Her psychological depression gets healed only by her beautiful family members. After travelling to Europe she created an identity and managed to survive with all her pains physically and mentally. She expressed the madness of honour and killing family members as a law of land. She as a victim and survivor mentioned that "in my Village I am officially dead, I have been forgotten for a long time, but if I were to go back today they would try will to kill me a second time for the honour of my family. It's a law of the land" (Souad 111). Her memories limit herself from society and consider as something low and invaluable. Simply condemning the crime and raising protest for name sake will not reduce such brutal acts. Appropriate measures need to be taken to deal with the abolition of crime against women. Souad courageously raised veil against the 1970s Muslim society. She was able to recover from her physical wound but she finds hard to overcome her past memories and fragmented image which causes psychological pressure. At the end of her memoir she signed as somewhere in Europe says

I have my life for the first time by forcing out my memory the things that were buried deepest. It was more challenging than a public testimony, and more painful than answering the children's questions. I hope that this book will travel in the world, that the men will not burn it (Souad 333).

The memoir deals with all memories of miseries, pain and sufferings which become the

mouthpiece of many victims of honour killing. Souad succeeds in narrating the depth and terror behind the brutal act. Her narrative forces each reader to embody Souad's wounded soul and makes them think about what they would do if the same thing happened in their lives. Souad was able to recover from the flashbacks, nightmares which recall traumatic events only because of her two daughters and husband in Europe. Even she started to have nightmare about her husband who stand in front of her by holding hands of another woman. Such nightmares are the impression of her past experience she had in her childhood. As Judith Herman, an American psychiatrist frames trauma as “ a threat to life or bodily integrity, or a close encounter with violence and death” (qtd. in Horvitz 6). The behaviour of her father and brother and the men was praised even they commits mistakes, man was given full power to rule the girls of their family.

Conclusion

Honour killing are rarely reported crimes even though still those are happening in large numbers. The executioner of honour killing against was man by all means. In *Burned alive* Souad as a girl child suffered a lot in all ways and she was punished by male members of her family for silly mistakes. Physical assault has been considered as their culture so that beating women has become a normal activity. Souad narrates all her sufferings in her memoir expressing her pain of her past life with her parents. Mostly girl children are treated as a slave rather than human beings in her society. In Palestine the domestic violence against women becomes a never ending situation. Witnessing terrific events from her childhood she was not able to come out the past memory which causes traumatic problems. Efforts need to be taken to save the life of victims and need legal system to sort out physical as well as psychological abuses against women. Honour killing is a brutal practice mostly culture, religion, community and purity of women are intertwined elements which serve as the catalyst for these kinds of practices. A victim's emotional imbalance leads to psychological trauma.

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