



FORCED TO FLEE: ANALYSING TRAUMATIC IMPACTS IN REFUGEE CHILDREN IN NADINE LABAKI'S CAPERNAUM

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ABSTRACT

The paper titled *Forced to Flee: Analysing the Traumatic Impacts in Refugee children in Nadine Labaki's Capernaum* traces the effects of trauma experienced by refugee children and probes how the fragmented childhood of refugee children manifests as psychological repercussion in adults. *Capernaum* (2018) is a Lebanese drama film directed by Nadine Labaki, which poignantly depicts the stark reality of countless refugees in the outskirts of Beirut. The film unfolds through the eyes of a twelve year old Syrian refugee boy named Zain ; who files a charge against his parents for unwittingly bringing him into the uncertain world of refugees. The paper examines traumatic reflections in the different characters of *Capernaum* to substantiate the implications of such traumatic experiences in refugee children through the lens of the theories of social trauma and childhood trauma. The root causes of the struggles of refugees are identified through the analysis of behavioural traits of the characters - Zain, Souad , Selim, Sahar and Rahil in the movie. Tracing through Andreas Hamburger's theory of social trauma, it is made clear that the socio-cultural environment in which they live shapes their identity and proves to be the prime cause of traumatic experiences. Trauma endured by them reflects the collective social trauma faced by the whole refugee population constituting Syrian and Ethiopian migrants in Lebanon. Kathleen Nader's theory of Childhood trauma is employed to explore the ways in which the self of a child is constructed with the influence of past events. Refugee children go through a range of experiences which includes abandonment, neglect and poverty in their formative years and it can cause serious psychological impacts upon them. Trauma in all senses affects the concept of the self that children develop and destabilizes them leading to post- traumatic stress disorders and chronic psychic illness. Even though the movie has a happy ending, questions regarding the future of the child remains, as the adverse conditions have vehemently changed his behavioural patterns and it can lead to psychological disturbances in their adult life. The study reiterates the need to recognize and consider childhood trauma as a significant cause behind altering the identity of an individual. The observations related to the traumatic experiences of refugees in childhood prove substantial in addressing the mental instabilities of migrants in their adulthood.

INTRODUCTION

Refugee crises are one of the haunting issues in the contemporary world. It is a despicable truth that past decade witnessed a sudden surge in the global refugee population, which is almost double the number of previous reports. According to the reports of UN High Commissioner for Refugees, there are around 70.8 million refugees who are displaced and relocated around the world (*Global Trends: Forced Displacement* in 2018). Religious and ethnic minorities become the scapegoat of the prevalent communal, political rivalry between the nations and a vast group of people are expelled from their homeland as the tragic outcome of the rivalry. The stateless people are undocumented and thus are denied basic rights and excluded from accessing the resources of the state. The majority of the refugee population are relocated to underdeveloped countries such as Turkey, Iran, Lebanon, Uganda (Simsek and Anik 288). Thus destabilization and insecurity in the host country is another grave threat, which can lead to their further displacement and mental health problems. Refugee crisis constitutes as a menace to the social, economic, emotional well being of the migrant population and the host society. Around 30-34% of the refugee population is comprised of children, signifying that the country losses more than a quarter of its future generation (*Global Trends: Forced Displacement* in 2020). Syria is one of the most affected countries and has witnessed a problematic rise in the refugees in the past decade. The number of Syrian refugees has doubled during the last 20 years and prevailing social and political unrest paves the way for the rise of about 25% of the global refugee population. Around 6.6 million Syrian refugees have sought asylum in the neighbouring countries of Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Egypt and Turkey (*Syria Refugee Crisis Explained*).

Capernaum (2018) is a Lebanese drama film directed by Nadine Labaki, which poignantly depicts the stark reality of countless refugees in the outskirts of Beirut. *Capernaum*, subtitled as ‘chaos’, signifies the Biblical landmark where Jesus performed numerous miracles. However, the movie is not a miracle story; here Nadine Labaki crafts the story to unveil the chaos entwined in Beirut and its reflections in the respective inhabitants. It is a stunning piece of art which has bagged numerous accolades including Cannes Jury Prize (2018), FICFA award for Best Foreign Film (2018), Golden Orange Award for Best Actor and Best Film (2018). The film has also garnered remarkable recognitions including Oscar and BAFTA nominations in 2019. This globally recognized movie stands out in its honest portrayal of the wretched condition of refugee children as it effectively employs a real life refugee child Zain El Hajj as the protagonist of the film. The film is narrated through the lens of Zain, and also includes many illegal migrants as actors. Their actual life experiences as undocumented migrants are summed up and crafted in its true shades. Undeniably, the film deserves appreciation for attempting a real and raw depiction of the plight of countless children, who are destined to live in an uncertain world, just like Zain. Nadine Labaki is a veteran actor, director and activist who has carved a niche in Lebanese film industry with her socio-politically relevant artistic inputs. She was born in 1974 and her early childhood was influenced by the impacts of Lebanese civil war. The ethnic, religious tensions between Shia Muslims and Christians which overruled the nation for a long time resulted in a violent outburst in 1975. Years of secluded life in a war torn environment made her a witness of the fatalities created by wars, attacks, ethnic cleansing and inevitably shaped her perception about the aftermath of its tragic outcomes. This incites her to be the voice of numerous voiceless people, who become the tragic victims of these brutalities.

Apart from *Capernaum*, the calamitous backdrop of Middle East recurs in some of her films. *Where Do We Go Now* (2010), Labaki’s second feature film, set in Lebanon, explores the turbulences and insecurities created by inter-religious conflicts that afflicts common people. She postulates a problematic aspect of such crises that these conflicts traverses the boundaries of the state and are universal. Her films depict the collective suffering endured by people. Nadine Labaki created history as the first female Arab director nominated for Oscar awards and has also been recognized as the recipient of Cannes Ecumenical Jury Award, Best Lebanese Director Award and many more (“*Nadine Labaki*”).

The movie, *Capernaum* delves deep into a multitude of issues such as poverty, malnourishment, parental neglect, human trafficking etc. Majority of the characters that the film engages with are undocumented migrants, who are deprived of human rights and resources. *Capernaum* seeks to analyze the shattered family relationships, insecure environment in the host country, denial of basic rights, consequences of early marriage etc. The socio-cultural discriminations they face are multifold, and it casts severe effects in their individual as well as social life. The film essentially captures the distressed, angry, apathetic behavior of most of the characters, and the

bitter reasons behind them. As these adversities become a part and parcel of their lives, trauma becomes a living reality for them. Trauma studies, which was previously considered as a psychoanalytic discipline, now holds immense significance in the field of humanitarian studies. As refugee predicaments become a global crisis, the study offers critical perspectives to analyze and decipher the root causes of the migrant issues and helps to probe into its after-effects. Trauma studies have been relevant in aptly examining how the characteristic traits of each individual have altered as a result of their traumatic experiences. The theory is definitely an aid to scrutinize the manifestations of these traumatic wounds on them and how the scars of such experiences destabilize an entire community.

Capernaum exhorts the essentiality of parental care, family bond, nourishment, security, education in a child's life and how the denial of all such basic needs hampers the development of the future generation. Children, being the most vulnerable section of refugee population, bear the brunt of all the adversities. Their existence is undermined and is forced to cope up with the disturbing reality of neglect, abuses, violence. Such traumatic wounds continue to affect them as haunting experiences. Undoubtedly, this impedes the social and emotional well being of the child and creates severe changes in their behavioural patterns.

The paper seeks to analyse traumatic reflections in the different characters of *Capernaum* and to substantiate the implications of traumatic experiences in refugee children through the lens of the theories of social trauma and childhood trauma. Social trauma entwines the clinical as well as social aspects of traumatic experiences. The theory propounds to the psychological as well as relational consequences of traumatic experiences when a social group becomes the victim of a planned persecution. The theory includes the traumatic effects generated by certain social occurrences (Hamburger 6). The first chapter explores the theory of social trauma by Andreas Hamburger and analyses how the entire refugee population in Lebanon is traumatized, by concentrating on the characteristic traits of Soud and Selim (Zain's parents), Sahar and Rahil in the film.

Chapter two focuses on the repercussions formed out of the traumatic encounters in refugee children, by analyzing the central character Zain, in the light of childhood trauma theory by Kathleen Nader. In *Understanding and Assessing Trauma in Children and Adolescents*, Kathleen Nader assesses the multitude of factors contributing post traumatic stress disorders in children such as parental disregard, lack of emotional support, and propounds that it affects the nature of development of a child and destroys their personal as well as social lives, making them as dysfunctional beings (Nader 12). Zain's development is used as an effective tool to analyse the dilemmas children have to encounter in their forthcoming life and how it becomes the underlying reasons behind crisis of adult immigrants.

Chapter 1

TRAUMA: A SOCIAL SUFFERING

From time immemorial history has witnessed instances of social oppressions and attempts at survival. Religious, ethnic, racial minorities, who are consistently the victims of brutality for centuries, endure exodus to a foreign land as a means of survival. Occurrences of war, terrorist attacks, genocide afflict grave injuries on the psyche of an individual and the tortures of the consequent trauma are often a matter of discussion and concern. Forced displacement from one's homeland coupled with the disturbances of assimilation to the host society inflicts collective suffering on the targeted social community and inflicts wounds on a large scale. Such traumatic episodes demand the need to broaden the concept of trauma from its usual concern of individual suffering to a larger context to analyze the social dimensions of refugee crises.

Notable psychoanalyst and traumatologist Andreas Hamburger explains in *Social Trauma- An interdisciplinary Textbook*, "To people, traumatic is what they experience as unsupportable, horrifying, or overwhelming. Trauma as an intuitively understood term is a social fact in itself, and it points to some underlying social experience which can be sociologically reflected"(4). The after affects of trauma are not enclosed within an individual, but rather manifests in different forms in society.

Lebanon is recognized as the country with the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world. According to the reports of UNHCR, the country hosts about 1.5 million Syrian refugees ("Lebanon"). The socio- cultural framework of Lebanon should be analyzed in association with diverse migrant groups from a

number of neighboring countries such as Syria, Palestine, Philippines, Iraq, Sudan etc. As the country is home to a vast number of defenseless groups, repercussions of the living experiences of trauma can be witnessed within the population. The renowned trauma theorist Andreas Hamburger, contributes substantial findings related to the presence and impacts of social trauma. Social trauma as a theory, identifies “the psychological and relational consequences of a traumatic experience in the frame of societal occurrences, where a social group is the target of a planned persecution” (6).

Capernaum presents a cross section of different strata of refugees in Lebanon who are forcefully displaced from different parts of the world and shares an equal measure of social suffering. The movie paints the predicaments of countless of undocumented, illegal migrants from the conflict affected areas of Syria, Ethiopia who are relocated to Lebanon. The movie provides instances that indicate the social, cultural disparity existing among the privileged urban inhabitants of Lebanon, and the disheveled migrants in ghettos who are forced to overlook many of the essential needs.

Capernaum unravels the story through the eyes of Zain, a twelve year old Syrian refugee boy, residing in the outskirts of Beirut. Soud and Selim Al Haj, introduced as Zain’s parents are in fact a miniscule representation of a large migrant population who seek sanctuary in a foreign land in the hope of a peaceful future. *Capernaum* doesn’t probe into the probable reasons behind their migrations from Syria, but explicitly presents the stark reality of the failure of the socio economic system which made them as refugees. They are undocumented migrants, who are stripped of their identity. The system they trusted hardly renders them any acceptance and the insecurities that prevail over their lives as illegal migrants aggravate their misery. They are unemployed, struggling to make both ends meet by resorting to tramadole(drug) sale. Portrayed as the epitome of aggressiveness and hostility, the characters address the underlying reasons behind their callousness, which stems from the persisting uncertainty. The hardships of being confined to a congested one room apartment along with the frustration of their utter helplessness to handle lots of malnourished, troublesome children inevitably make ‘the house a curse’ as Selim says. They are at an extreme disadvantage to meet the demands of the environment and to invest their time and care upon their family. They failed miserably in fulfilling the basic responsibilities to their children such as providing food, care, education etc, owing to their helplessness. The poverty stricken condition of the household forces them to marry off or ‘sell’ their daughters, when they reach puberty, to any stranger in exchange of a few eatables. They lack the social and financial support to save their daughter from death, as she is denied medical care. *Capernaum* poses the pertinent question as to whether parents are answerable for unwittingly bringing children to a world of uncertainties. Here, Soud and Selim represent a whole generation of parents who are responsible for the spoiled future of their children. Nadine Labaki explores the dire circumstances which shaped their identity.

The fate of refugee girls is quite different, and often more drastic, owing to the double marginalization they face. In addition to the social exclusion of being a refugee, they are subjected to extreme levels of gender discrimination within their family and society. They are exposed to physical and emotional abuses and are always made to exist at the mercy of others. Sahar, the daughter of Soud and Selim, is yet another hapless child who is destined to suffer in the chaotic world. The character arc of Sahar is unclear, as the movie doesn’t probe into her characteristics and inner conflicts. She is a meek and naïve thirteen year old girl who passively obeys everything asked of her. Zain and Sahar cherish a deep affectionate brother-sister bond and Zain’s love and care seems to be the only thing that offers her happiness. Soud, Sahar’s mother, failed to establish an amicable relationship with any of the children and the affects of parental neglect is evident in Sahar, as she becomes a socially withdrawn, helpless girl. Being a pre-teen girl who just entered into puberty, she is ignorant and confused about menstruation and the bodily changes. She was unable to seek help from her mother, as she might use this as a chance to marry her off. She is forced to live in fear and anxiety within the family. She is in fact, a helpless prey to the patriarchal society which debases women as mere commodity. She is forced to marry Assad, the neighboring shopkeeper, when she reached puberty. Adolescent girls are compelled to marry against their wishes as it benefits in feeding a mouth less in the family. According to the journal of Global Health Action, “Child marriage can be linked to a range of poor social and health outcomes for women and girls, including high risks of early pregnancy, mental health issues due to forced early sexual debut, and maternal death and disability, including post-pregnancy complications”(Riyadh and Sagbakken 1). Early marriage brings additional responsibilities of household chores, pregnancy, child bearing and it devastatingly alters the girls’ life. Sahar is beaten and tortured as she refused to be the bride of Assad. She went through a range of physical and mental tortures including separation from the family, abuses, violence, forced marriage and sex etc. The fact that forced

sex and pregnancy took away her life points to the implications of early marriage in girls. She is incapable of resisting the decisions of others as passive obedience is the only way to coexist in the family.

The movie also portrays the predicament of a single parent, Rahil Eresa who strives to make a living with her son. Being an illegal Ethiopian migrant, she lives under a fabricated identity as Tigest, faking documents. She is remarkably pleasant and compassionate, in contrast to other characters who reflect the chaos around them. Her life revolves around her one year old son, Yonas and the sole responsibility of raising her son amidst all the insecurities encumbers her to a great extent. Nadine Labaki presents a distinct portrayal of the family life of migrants, by illustrating the warmth and affection with which she cherishes with her son. This is in sharp contrast to the crippled family of Zain. Considering the fact that she is abandoned by her husband, she is exposed to higher risks of financial burden and isolation. In the article Social Determinants of Refugee Mental Health, Farah N Mawani comments: “Women without official migration status are especially vulnerable to homelessness. They often live in deep poverty with limited access to health care, social assistance and benefits.”(40). She lacks any post-migration support and her inability to maintain close ties with anyone, compelled her to trust the crook, Aspro for survival. The hostile society she lives in aggravates the situation causing her to go through a range of re-traumatizing experiences including separation from her child and imprisonment. Prolonged separation from the child creates severe stress and isolation within her and also influences the development of the child.

One of the pertinent issues the migrant population confronts is the loss of identity and the subsequent loss of sense of belongingness. Many of them are unregistered, making them unsupported by the provisions of the state. *Capernaum* illustrates the predicaments of existing without a legal status by portraying the stark reality of the characters- Soud, Selim, Zain, Sahar and Rahil, as all of them exist without any proof of their existence. “The hardships faced by refugees and asylum seekers are compounded in the absence of identity documents. Studies have also shown that undocumented refugees are less likely to report when they have been abused or exploited due to fear of being arrested or deported” (Refugees and Identity 6). Rahil faces the consequences and dilemmas of living under a fake identity. She was unable to reveal her personal details, needs and issues to any one she knows as it might lead to danger. The fear of being caught made her to hide her son, Yonas from anyone’s attention, and raise him ‘like a rat in the underground’.

All the characters – Soud, Selim, Rahil and Sahar face institutional discrimination in accessing public resources and benefits. Sahar is denied of any medical care as her parents were unable to produce any identity documents and she lost her life on the hospital floor. Indisputably, it creates far reaching effects on the deprived family such that their inability to save their daughter torments them greatly. Nadine Labaki condenses the mental agony of existing without legal recognition in Selim’s words, “We are parasites. You either accept life without paper or you jump out of the window”(*Capernaum* 1:41:10-18). The impacts of existing without legal status is multilayered, as it not only deprives one’s basic rights but also affects one’s self esteem.

Recuperation from the traumatic wounds of war, loss, genocide, partition etc suffers a severe blow when the host country, which they believed to be safe haven turns out to be a land of adversities. Exploitations and conflicts in the host society constitute a critical role in amplifying the social trauma of the migrant experience. Nadine Labaki makes subtle references to the impact of the range of adverse factors like sexual exploitation, human trafficking etc which are in fact re-traumatizing experiences that disrupts the well-being of the society. The movie raises significant concerns regarding human trafficking, which is indeed a problematic aspect of the ongoing refugee crisis. Human trafficking or modern day slavery, in its gruesome forms of bonded labor, sex trafficking of adults and children, debt bondage etc is a grave threat to the humanity. Refugees, who are segregated based on caste, race, religious, ethnic backgrounds are subjected to higher levels of exploitation and human rights violations and undoubtedly, it intensifies the trauma that is inflicted upon the hapless survivors. Aspro is symbolic of a large group of wicked people who tries to make use of the helplessness of the migrants. He is highly manipulative and deceitfully exploits the vulnerability of Rahil and Zain, as both were struggling to raise Yonas. He benefits from human trafficking across borders, which grants him financial gains. He offers international transit to Zain and Mayssoon(a refugee child living in streets) and tactically convinces Zain by promising foster parents to look after Yonas in a peaceful land. They distribute fake identity cards to the miserable refugees and by exercising control over all the unregistered immigrants, thereby exploiting their vulnerability and looting their inherent right to live. Nadine Labaki delineates how such inhumane acts cast a shadow upon the trafficked survivors by portraying the predicaments of the one year old, Yonas, who is shackled in a squalid room, separated from his mother and denied medical care along with other captured people.

Social trauma arises when violence is unleashed upon a large social group. Social mechanisms play a crucial role in determining its effects upon the afflicted population. The impacts of the trauma can be severe and varied such that the endangered society often reflects long term clinical symptoms or unconscious trans-generational traces (Hamburger 5). Trans-generational aspect of trauma is presented in a subtle manner such that the distressed attitude maintained by Zain throughout the story provides answers to the deep scars endured by his parents. It is amply evident that Zain, who is the constant victim to the turbulences of his parents, adopted the same strategy of apathy to cope up with the harsh reality. Many of the refugee children, who may have been born and brought up in the host society and who don't witness the gruesome experiences of war, terrorism, exodus etc ,bear the burden of the inherited traumatic memories of their parents.

The global crisis concerning the mass movement of displaced people across borders prompts the need to analyze the social dynamics of the traumatic experiences of the collective community. Even though government policies at different sectors possess the power to alter the lives of the migrants beneficially or drastically, the intervention of the state in the matters of migrants is mostly minimal, as they are often pictured as parasites looting the states' resources. There exists an unbridgeable gap between the social, financial, state support enjoyed by natives and the immigrants and subsequently, they are clearly stigmatized in host countries. Socioeconomic inequalities in refugees' countries of origin and settlement play a significant role in determining their post-migration mental health (Mawani, 30). Social frame of the host society fosters the repression towards the refugees. There exists a frantic rise of anxiety and depression across the migrant population twinned with helplessness of knowing that the system, which they ought to rely on will always turn a blind eye towards them. The visibility of these vulnerable groups in the social sphere is highly questionable, as their existence is often undermined and they remain endangered as socially excluded beings.

Social exclusion refers to the exclusion of groups and individuals from society, based on dimensions of diversity, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, social class, migration status, sexual orientation, etc. Immigrants are at risk of being excluded on the basis of all these factors, at an individual or systemic (institutional) level. Social exclusion can affect mental health by limiting opportunities for education, employment, housing, etc (Mawani, 31).

The traumatic experiences and conflicts of each character are multifaceted and unsettling. The film often juxtaposes the wide disparity existing between children from the urban households of Beirut, who are privileged to go to school and the deprived, migrant children who are forced to work on streets for their living. The psychological symptoms the main characters share including isolation, loss of identity, unemployment, abuses, exploitation etc reflects the cumulative sufferings of the whole migrant society in Lebanon.

The stories of Soud, Selim, Sahar and Rahil Eresa are fragmentary representations which deal with the heartrending reality of countless migrants. These two families, are situated miles apart and are diverse in their respective ethnic, religious backgrounds. *Capernaum* traces a striking parallel between them, by portraying how the impacts of traumatic residues they endure, are all the more the same. Individuals, as well as communities undergo a range of human rights violations such as subjugation of basic rights, sexual exploitation, human trafficking, homelessness etc. The individual distress they deal with makes is stark indication of the collective destabilized society. A 'culture of fear' can be seen to have developed among them. Hence the frequent occurrences of violence can invariably jeopardize not only the mental health of individuals but can also incite social suffering in hostile destinations. In *Psychosocial Consequences of War*, Irit Keynan comments: "In a certain sense, one can think of collective trauma as a kind of societal post traumatic stress disorder that strikes an entire community and affects all of its members" (173). The multitude of catastrophes people were exposed to, doubtlessly make trauma an unsettling phenomenon for the entire country. Mostly, host countries constitute a vast group of traumatized people, who are consistently experiencing conflicts within themselves and the society, thus making it difficult for the individual survivors to seek help from others. The collective trauma they endure coupled with the insufficiency of emotional support makes them immerse themselves into the deep quagmire of morass.

In *Psychoanalysis and Holocaust Testimony*, Andreas Hamburger explains that man made traumatizations such as wars, genocide, racial, ethnic persecutions affect great parts of population and the consequent post traumatic stress disorders are man-perpetuated. Social trauma does not limit itself as the consequence of a historical crime; instead it exists as a shared state of mind (Hamburger 82). In *Capernaum*, it can be observed there is hardly any person who speaks in a calm state of mind. Each character transfers his or her aggressiveness, helplessness, agitation to the person he converses. Adults unleash their agitation towards their children and neighbours and

this happens vice-versa and continues among themselves. As the national psyche of the Lebanon was irretrievably tainted by the scars of traumatic memories, the affected population was endangered to live under a constant threat of violence and insecurities. History shares several similar instances of social trauma, where a minority community falls victim to the persecution of the mighty. Holocaust was a notable incident in which studies confirms the persistence of collective trauma on the survivors. It can be observed as the traumatic reference of German national identity. (Hamburger 71). The excruciating memories of the traumatic incidents remains unhealed and latent over years and years in the psyche of the survivors and continues to be transmitted to next generation.

“Like individual trauma, collective trauma undermines society’s sense of stability and identity, and perpetuates feelings of endangerment, disorder, and profound fracture” (Keynan 173). The unprecedented happenings create disillusionment and leads to psychic disorders. The recurring disturbances can have a re-traumatizing effect, making them passive and helpless again and again. The repercussions of the unhealed trauma extend widely and lingers upon the national consciousness for a significant time, as a curse that intensifies disorder and social unrest.

Chapter 2

VOICELESS VICTIMS: TRAUMATIC REFLECTIONS IN CHILDREN

The renowned trauma theorist Cathy Caruth defines trauma in *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* as “a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” (61). Caruth further explains that trauma is “not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual’s past” but can be noted in “the way it is precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on”(4). Trauma “takes the form of belatedness” (7) and recurs at various incidents, leading to disturbances in an individual’s life. The unrepresented effects of traumatic memories can fragment the psyche of an individual and create a pathological effect. Analyzing its psychological, socio-cultural impacts, trauma studies explores the ways in which one’s identity and unconsciousness is tainted by extreme events (Mambrol).

Kathleen Nader, the notable child trauma theorist focuses on the varied types of childhood trauma ranging from natural disasters to chronic child abuses and uncovers its symptoms and repercussions in her seminal work *Understanding and Assessing Trauma in Youth and Adolescents*. Nader brings to light how such traumatic experiences constitute as a determinable factor in shaping a child’s personality. This chapter delineates traumatic impacts in refugee children through the lens of Nader’s theory.

Refugee children are engulfed in a large humanitarian crisis where the forceful dislocation and relocation torments them emotionally and socially. The psychological impacts on refugee children have to be discussed as the intensity of sufferings they undergo is immeasurable. Countless children are uprooted from their homeland and are always at high risk for violence and exploitation. An entire spectrum of basic needs such as love, care, education, shelter, food etc which are substantial to human survival are unavailable to them. The causes and impacts of these childhood traumas need to be analyzed, as it impairs self development of a child, making it difficult to reconnect to their previous life. *Capernaum* makes us understand the psychological functioning of trauma in refugee children’s lives, in particular, Zain’s life; who is destined to suffer a myriad of adversities.

The character Zain undoubtedly leaves a mark on us- a mark of perseverance and strength. His happiness at the end lingers with the audience for a long time. Zain is undoubtedly an extraordinary character who displays unconventional coping abilities and problem solving skills in bitter times. Twelve years of life as a refugee shaped his life drastically and grants him a surprising level of maturity that outweighs his age. He unabashedly fights anyone who is an obstacle to him. As the only son in the family, Zain shoulders the responsibility of taking care of his siblings. He is considered as the troublemaker in the family, as he reacts to anything that irks him, whether it be his sister’s marriage or some random people’s misbehaviour. He cherishes an affectionate bond with his sister, Sahar, and is willing to go to any extent to save her from all the evil eyes. Everything he does for his sister, whether it be stealing sanitary pads for her or stabbing the person behind her death; is ethical

to him. He is adamant in his words and deeds, neglecting all the consequences that befall him. He often uses foul words to refer to anybody who inflames him and the language used by him is of utmost importance as it condenses his frustration of living in a 'hell'. The indifferent attitude he displays often propounds to his inherent belief that nothing is going to be better or the sole way to live is to embrace the worst. *Capernaum* unveils a multitude of causes that fosters and retains an enraged, distressed attitude in Zain. Nadine Labaki poignantly presents the dire circumstances refugee children survive in, highlighting Zain and analyzes the vehement changes in their social behavior.

Culture and living environment play a crucial role in determining the psychological well being of a child. As Family plays an integral part in nurturing the self development of a child, it is an undeniable fact that refugee children, who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, are denied essential family values of care, affection, attachment etc. Uprooted from their homeland, migrant families go through a series of unfavorable conditions in becoming accustomed to a foreign land. *Capernaum* attempts an honest portrayal of deplorable living conditions of the refugees, by showcasing a congested, filthy household, which conforms to Zain's father, Salem's statement that "this house is a pigsty". On studying parent-child relationship, Kathleen Nader states that when catastrophic events threaten frequently, a parent might not be able to recognize or respond adequately to the child's needs and the child might not be able to adequately express needs or respond to the adult (Nader 206).

Parental neglect and disdain is revealed in its bitter forms as violence and curses overshadow the house, depriving all its homely feelings. Zain's parents- Souad and Selim Al Haj, neglects him completely, abandoned him to suffer alone the remains of the chaotic world. As the family grew bigger each year, adding further liability to the family, it became strenuous to cope with the troublesome attitude of Zain, which made them to renounce him completely. In a family where all the members are traumatized, it is observed that parent's own trauma or response to the young child's trauma has sometimes resulted in inadequate, withdrawn, overprotective, smothering, endangering, or constrictive caretaking (Nader 206). They fail to establish a rapport with their children and unabashedly torment them for all their misfortunes. Moreover, the perilous condition of his home denies him the basic needs of good food, education and care. Adolescent depression, for example, is influenced by family poverty and community violence.

Children are nested in their families and reside for the lion's share of their childhood within the family. Undeniably, "this house is a curse" (*Capernaum*) for all of its inhabitants and this distressful atmosphere coupled with neglect of parents initiates Zain to be a reserved, detached person. Refugee children in the locale of Beirut collectively share these experiences. The movie also highlights the predicaments of Yonas, the one year old boy who is abandoned by his mother and destined to live on streets. As Zain says to Yonas, "Your mother is worse than mine", he encapsulates the disturbing reality that his mother always turned a blind eye towards him; this sad truth in a way, incites him to foster Yonas in the best possible way he can. They were entrapped in similar situations that can alter their mental growth. When Yonas's mother, Rahil was imprisoned, they both were marooned in an unstable environment and compelled to live in streets. The adverse conditions Zain went through, made him more sensitive to changes around him and left drastic changes in his personality.

Zain is exposed to the risks of being separated from his family from an early age. It is only with Sahar and Rahil that he maintained a strong bond of affection and their companionship mitigates his mental strain. Seeing his younger sister Sahar sold off as a child bride, breaks his heart and motivates him to escape from the hellish home. Separation from Sahar was unbearable and reminders of the beautiful memories with her torment him terribly. However, when Rahil was arrested, he again lost his confidant and was isolated in an uncertain world. Frequent occurrence of re- traumatizing instances increases his pain and distress, making survival unbearable. The only job he is familiar with is selling juices and tramadole(drug). The deteriorating life of Zain and Yonas is vividly painted amidst the hustle and bustle of Beirut. Conflicts, abuses, violence and poverty they encounter in the street evoke feelings of severe mental pain and insecurity in him. He develops an instant connection with Rahil and she becomes his mother figure. In times of crisis, children may get attached to those with whom they endure a traumatic experience (Nader 205) and here, Zain could connect himself with Rahil as he understood that she too is equally distressed with her experiences. Rahil, is an Ethiopian refugee, who exists in a fake identity as Tigest, and lives under a constant threat of being arrested or deported. In a way, they both are companions struggling to survive. This temporary family of Zain, which is a perfect contrast to his home, provides evidences to illustrate how an amiable and peaceful atmosphere casts positive effects on a child. Rahil's care along with Yonas's brotherly attachment refreshes him and calms his furious behavior. However, he lost Rahil's home,

which he believed to be a safe haven and the series of losses caused a resurgence of his previous agitation. The sense of attachment he developed with them diminishes in no time and continues to be detached from everyone.

Some behaviors are common at specific phases of development and signal disturbances at other age levels. For example, when measuring dissociation, it is important to recognize that young children are often likely to exhibit forgetfulness, shifts in attention, and a variable sense of identity; that daydreaming may be a common behavior for youths; and that feeling unreal and detached from one's experience may be common for adolescents (Nader 142).

Zain is symbolic of a vast group of insecure generation of children who cry desperately to escape into a peaceful land where no one messes with their lives. *Capernaum* brings to light the plight of a number of children, who are trapped in similar situations. Mayssoon, a refugee girl whom Zain gets acquainted in street, is deceived by Aspro and lives in the hope of travelling to a beautiful land like Sweden or Turkey. In fact, the impoverishment and social exclusion in the host society they live made them to fall prey to the false promises of a crook like Aspro. Here, Nadine Labaki vividly pictures how the innocence and helplessness of the refugee children is exploited by the tricksters and make use of them through the horrendous act of human trafficking.

It is extensively studied that a large number of refugees are exposed to higher levels of Post Traumatic Stress Disorders even after years of migration. Depressive symptoms are also observed within them along with anxiety, mistrust or suspiciousness, social withdrawal and isolation. These psychological symptoms range from mild to extreme levels and it also manifests as temper outbursts. The never ending adversities often foster hostility within themselves exhibiting urges to harm someone, leading to annoyance and irritation (Nader 181)

The movie unfolds by portraying Zain along with a group of refugee children breaking the glass and destroying an old building. They hold sticks and act like fighting with guns and chants slogans of victory. They were immensely happy at the destruction activity they have engaged with and acts like adults celebrating victory in a war. These kind of war related games and activities speak volumes about their mental state, which is poisoned by the impacts of wars. In the work *Psychosocial Consequences of War*, the co-authors Daya Somasundaran and C.S. Jamunanantha states: "The symptoms of hostility such as anger, aggressiveness, cruelty, antisocial behavior, pervasiveness of war vocabulary and games indicative of brutalization in the war milieu are very disturbing recent developments. Thus school aged children who were born and grow up in a war milieu show the pervasive effects in their emotions, cognition and behavior" (235).

Children tend to imitate the happenings around them and regard war and victory as a heroic deed. Wars, attacks and destruction might be a familiar experience to them and influence them adversely. There are high chances of developing anti social behavior among children in war zones. They become frantic and agitated as possible. Zain's behavior is undeniably a reflection of the chaotic environment he resides.

Childhood traumas may disrupt youths' attachments and alter their interactional styles. Changes in interactional styles with peers, caretakers, and other adults sometimes follow, for example, post trauma increases irritability, impulsiveness, aggressive reactivity, fears, or reactivity to reminders. Because of their natures, ongoing traumas such as child abuse or prolonged hostage situations make or change attachments or attachment patterns (Nader 205).

The setbacks induced by violence and oppression are severely high in the development of a child and the society. Notable changes can be seen in the developmental trajectory of Zain by the end of the film. Zain maintained a high self esteem at the beginning, as he discards anything that is offered to him at free of cost. Poverty and malnourishment didn't prompt him to accept the gifts of the storekeeper Assad. He was convinced of the ulterior motives of Assad as his only intention was to possess Sahar, so he ousts all his gifts and offerings to her; though it may help their family to a great extent. He thankfully rejects when a random stranger offers him a juice, which he wished to get and he was unflinching to any of the donations, as even though he was worthy to receive it. However, prolonged experiences of adversities in streets twinned with the circumstances of utter helplessness fuels him to rely on any means for survival, regardless of its righteousness. He began stealing things from strangers, like a roller skater from a neighbouring kid, and it is designed as a vehicle to carry Yonas. He has neither felt sorry for the kid nor feel guilty for his action as the devastating conditions made him as an irritated, tough individual. It is studied that the inability to experience either shame or guilt can be linked to sociopathic and antisocial tendencies (Nader 372). The plight of living with daily difficulties in a disastrous area triggers

aggressive and anti social behavior in his personality. The pent-up emotions of his agonies, anger and grief undergo a violent outburst when he hears the sad demise of his sister. He lost his mind and was inflamed to take revenge, by stabbing her husband Assad at the spur of the moment. He was devoid of any tinge of guilt when he says “I stabbed a son of a bitch with a knife” in the court.

There are a multitude of pre- and post trauma factors that contribute traumatic reactions in children. This may include experiences of the child, his/her personal and family history and circumstances and environmental factors such as support systems and resources. Such factors transact in complex ways in a child’s behavior and disrupt their further development (Nader 409). Zain’s life is an amalgamation of a multitude of such traumatic events and the unhealed wounds of these adverse experiences alter his personality. He displays a psychological paralysis as he could not express himself fully, any emotions whether be pain or happiness. Zain is predominantly, numb to the turbulence around him. Neither could he cry aloud for his miseries nor he could rejoice heartily at his blessings. He is stagnant at the peak of distress throughout the twelve years of his life. His agitation is an angry shout out to the inhumane society which unleashes its savagery upon innocent children. The way in which refugee children are treated in their family and society contributes a significant role in the overall development of the child. Souad and Selim, are both the victims and perpetrators in a sense, as their helplessness articulates and aggravates the miseries of Zain. During imprisonment, when Zain hears that his mother is pregnant again and is going to name the coming child Sahar, he retaliates with a grim response that “my heart aches”. As he says, “Your words are stabbing in my heart”, he points to the impending reality that he could not withstand seeing the deplorable life of his brother or sister anymore. He could not digest the fact that his parents are ready to bring further more children into this catastrophic world, who would be just like Zain and Sahar. It is a bitter truth that the coming child or the future kids too are doomed to peril in an unjust society. Nadine Labaki highlights the complexities in the development of children from disadvantaged households and raises a thought provoking statement that parents are answerable for the ill-fate of the children. The irresponsibility and insensitivity of the parents exacerbate the traumatic wounds in them. The movie rages against the uncaring attitude of adults whose the behavior and decisions cast a shadow on the lives of children.

Physical abuse, younger age, more recent witnessing of violence, the mother’s increased distress, and the lack of perceived family support for the child have been associated with increased symptoms. Adolescents exposed to both community and domestic violence have coped better if they live in more stable and socially connected households (Nader 398).

As Zain says, “Life is dog’s shit, filthier than the shoes of my feet”(Capernaum), Nadine Labaki brings to light the harsh implications of the traumatic memories and how it drastically alters his outlook for life. His life seems like a curse and encounters a multitude of instances wishing if he wasn’t born. His words, “I was expected to be a good man, respected and loved; but God doesn’t want that. He wants us to be floormats, to be stepped on”, condense how the despicable circumstances of the migrants debilitate them to lead a good life. He represents a vast group of refugee children who lost trust and hope in a better future.

Traumatized children are engaged in a constant battle within themselves, struggling to figure out the chaos around them. For children, mere affects of negativity around them can be turned traumatic, owing to the primitive nature of mind. They tend to attach to dissociative strategies like rage, withdrawal, regression to cope up with the agonies in the world. They are compelled to rely upon any feasible means to survive, which can often lead to dangerous situations. Henry Krystal in Trauma and Affects comments:

In people who suffered severe traumatization in infancy and childhood, the mortal dread is linked with feelings of helplessness, immobility, and suffocation, which are considered to be reasons for the overwhelming nature of automatic anxiety, castration anxiety, fear of dismemberment, and losing one's mind (155).

Capernaum ends at the ‘happy new beginning’ of Zain, when he gets an identity card. He smiles with an overwhelming joy at the end as he is officially a legally recognized migrant and can enjoy the privileges of an individual from the point. However, the final frame of the movie depicting an aerial shot of the numerous slums of Beirut, speaks volumes about the fate of the countless refugee children in them. It poignantly presents the horrendous reality that the plight of the children is an unending episode, it continues to ravage threat upon their future life. Zain’s life might have changed in a better way, but there are high chances that the past traumatic memories persist in him and dispirit his further development. As Kathleen Nader says in Understanding and Assessing Trauma in Children and Adolescents, “A child’s personality is a collective of the physical, mental,

emotional, and social qualities that are reflected in his or her thoughts, feelings, attitudes, beliefs, behaviors, and patterns of reaction”(148). Children, during their formative years are heavily influenced by and are receptive to the changes happening around them. Their mental development continues in accordance with the positive and negative attributes of their surroundings. Refugee children, who are confined in a destabilized atmosphere, tend to develop negative shades in their behavior. The future of these innocent victims is deeply problematic, as the adverse conditions they went through inevitably left a mark on their personality. Mental health problems of refugees are an undeniably grave issue that hampers the well being of an entire community. They are socially excluded and seen as a grave threat to the socio economic development of the host society. The plight of living as a ‘parasite’ in a foreign land, deprived of any identity, cripples them and leads to long term psychological impacts. The root of many of the migrant issues, including identity crisis and loss of sense of belongingness can be traced back to the childhood experience of them. Many of the refugee children, who might have went through the crisis of wars, genocide, persecution and the subsequent exodus and relocation to a foreign land, are constrained to deal with the unsettling traumatic experiences during their entire life. The vestiges of the childhood trauma remain unhealed and infect the psyche of the individual.

Film is a powerful tool which can be effectively employed to reflect the world around us and to raise concerns and awareness regarding matters that require attention and public support. Traumatic experiences and its manifestations around us become subject to many of the films and it portrays the essentiality of emotional health for an individual. Refugee crisis and the subsequent mental health problems of children are brilliantly portrayed in another film, *First They Killed My Father* (2017), directed by Angelina Jolie. It’s a historical thriller which aptly deals with the brutality of Khmer Rouge in Cambodia from the perspective of an eleven year old girl Loung Ung and the movie took shape from Loung Ung’s memoir, who is a real survivor too. Ung, along with numerous children are forced to succumb to their rules and ideologies and the miseries they underwent in the refugee camp are indescribable. In the course of survival, Loung Ung has witnessed and learned many things that destroyed her innocence like firing a gun, driving a spear to a soldier’s chest, planting a land mine etc. She has managed to survive and reunite with her family yet a thought provoking question remains- will she be able to enjoy her life with all its innocence and happiness or how would be the aftermath of her life after enduring extreme situations. The traumatic memories of her days as a refugee is imprinted in her mind and may disrupt her mental development. But Loung may display high chances of recovery when compared to Zain, as she is granted with a strong familial bond that stands as a pillar of support.

The predicaments of refugee children are not confined to any specific group or geographical boundary. It traverses across borders affecting all irrespective of their social backgrounds, caste, race or gender. Both the characters, Zain and Loung Ung have gone through extreme situations that are unimaginable and it made them to survive by any means. Their individual turmoils stem from the social context in which they live in where their status as ethnic minorities enslaves them as voiceless victims. The trauma endured by them is severe and its implications are all the more same, such as social withdrawal, aggressiveness, distress etc. Such post traumatic stress reactions place heavy burden on people from all walks of life. As such social occurrences are universal, trauma remains as a shared identity. Recurring intrusions of traumatic experiences linger upon the affected individuals and can be regarded as a universal human experience.

CONCLUSION

The article undertook a study of traumatic reflections in the characters of the movie *Capernaum*, by analyzing their characteristic traits. This paper utilizes psychoanalytic and trauma theory of Andreas Hamburger, Kathleen Nader, Cathy Caruth and Henry Krystal. Theory of social trauma and childhood trauma is effectively employed to understand how refugee crisis cripples individuals as well as the society as a whole. The root causes of the struggles of refugees and the implications of such traumatic experiences among them are identified through the analysis of behavioral traits of the characters - Zain, Souad, Selim, Sahar and Rahil in the movie. The research explored how the fragmented childhood of refugee children manifests as psychological repercussion in adults.

Capernaum proves to be a significant piece of art in trauma studies which poignantly deals with the victims of wars, exodus and genocide. The first chapter of this paper dealt with the social trauma endured by the main characters, who are caught up in a chaotic environment. The refugee population is considered as a burden to the host society which denies them any identity or human rights. Upon an intricate examination of the lives of these

characters, it is made clear that the socio-cultural environment in which they live shapes their identity and proves to be the prime cause of traumatic experiences. The aggressiveness, social withdrawal, violence and anxiety they display stem from their helplessness to adapt to a foreign society which undermines them. Trauma endured by them reflects the collective social trauma faced by the whole refugee population constituting Syrian and Ethiopian migrants.

The second chapter examined the life of the central character, Zain to resemble the harsh implications of underprivileged backgrounds upon a child. He is subject to bite off more than he can chew to survive. It is deciphered that family and the socio-cultural environment constitute a significant role in moulding a child's behavior. Children, who grew up in a calamitous background tend to reflect the chaos around them and it drastically shape their personality. Numerous refugee children who are denied care and attention during their formative years, are destined to behave as angry, distressed individuals as adults.

Responses to trauma can be expressed in diverse ways, but the psychological impact it casts on the survivor is severe and continues to harm them if left unchecked. Trauma in all senses affects the concept of the self that children develop and destabilizes them leading to post-traumatic stress disorders and chronic psychic illness. It disrupts the peaceful co-existence of an entire community and prompts them to resort to maladaptive coping strategies. Knowingly or unknowingly they develop certain survival behaviors including using foul language, smuggling, aggressiveness, violence etc., which drastically shape their perception of life and made them to resort to anti-social activities in future.

Refugees are doomed to live in a Dickensian world where they toil all their life to survive. Human rights violations are a crucial issue they have to deal with in their day-to-day lives. They are prompted to live a 'bare life existence', where their existence itself is questioned. They are also treated as commodities for monetary benefits. *Capernaum* throws light upon the despicable ways in which refugees, the vulnerable group of a country fall prey to the violence and manipulation of powerful people and how the aftereffects of traumatic experiences damage their personality.

Trauma studies connect its primary concern of individual wounds to the collective suffering it renders to a large community. The thesis discussed the chaotic environment of Beirut in *Capernaum* to elucidate how the social environment can amplify the psychic wounds in the characters and raises its risk for the millions of displaced children who are deprived of their basic rights. The movie is not confined to the geographical boundary of Lebanon and it not only explores the dilemmas of Syrian refugees. It traverses across nations and covers the troubles and turbulences faced by refugee children, from Ethiopia, Palestine etc., who are also relocated to Beirut to seek safety. Moreover, trauma associated with refugee crises is not a singular phenomenon; the multitude of movies which engage with this pertinent issue indicate that trauma is a universal shared experience and its manifestations are uncontrollable.

Recuperation from trauma is of utmost importance in order to maintain a healthy and stable society. Contemporary trauma studies have become inclusive towards the suffering of minority groups as it is necessary to respond to the drastic events that often happen at geographical or political boundaries. As refugee crises escalate day-by-day, social support seems to be an essential condition that alleviates their miseries. Post-migration support in all aspects helps them to assimilate to a new culture and rebuild their lives accordingly. The alarming rate at which contemporary global refugee crises is developing underlines the need to develop more inclusive policies related to migration and resettlement.

Treating children is tantamount to treating developing minds. It is necessary to inculcate the feelings of love, care and safety within them. The study reinforces the observation that a stable and supportive family can help in alleviating the wounds of traumatic memories in children to a great extent. The healing process of such experiences is heavily dependent on the social support they receive during their formative years. It can be observed that the main ground for the identity crisis and feeling of loss of belongingness endured by refugees in their adulthood is their fragmented childhood. Repercussions of trauma dwell within them and influence their self development and relationships. As "trauma returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4), it is necessary to address its psychological ramifications at an early stage.

The study reiterates the need to recognize and consider childhood trauma as a significant cause behind altering the identity of an individual. The observations related to the traumatic experiences of refugees in childhood prove substantial in addressing the mental instabilities of migrants in their adulthood.

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