

A Psychoanalytic Reading of Trauma and Repression in The Consequences of Love

MA student: Naeema Zuber Mohammed, Department of English, College of
Education, University of Salahaddin, Erbil-Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Naimabarzani123@gmail.com

Supervised by: Assist. Prof. Dr. Shireen Sadallah Rashid, Department of
English, College of Education, University of Salahaddin, Erbil-Kurdistan
Region, Iraq

shireen.rashid@su.edu.krd

قراءة تحليلية نفسية للصدمة والكبت في رواية عواقب الحب

نعيمة زبير محمد، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة صلاح الدين،

بإشراف أ.م.ب. د شيرين سعدالله رشيد، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية، جامعة صلاح الدين

Abstract

This paper presents a psychoanalytic reading of Sulaiman Addonia's *The Consequences of Love* (2008), focusing on the factors resulting in the trauma experienced by the protagonist, Naser. The study examines how the trauma and systemic repression experienced in Islamic societies affect the pursuit of love. Through close textual analysis, this study explores how Naser's early experiences of war in Eritrea, displacement to Sudan and Jeddah, separation from his mother and sexual exploitation contribute towards his trauma. The study has drawn from different psychological theories, namely Freud's structural model of the psyche, Bowlby's attachment theory, Winnicott's concept of the holding environment, and contemporary trauma theory to analyse the authoritarian social structure and the conquest of love by Naser. The ever-present religious policing and public punishment lead to hypervigilance and constant fear in Naser, transforming the external repression into internal. Naser's relationship with Fiore has also been explored from an attachment perspective, revealing the conflict which forbidden love brings. The study also exposes the profound psychological consequences of living under systemic repression and the infiltration of surveillance into the personal lives of the people.

Keywords: Psychoanalysis, Trauma, Repression, Displacement, Attachment, Surveillance

1. Introduction

Sulaiman Addonia's debut novel, *The Consequences of Love* (2008), is inspired by the author's personal observation of life in Saudi Arabia while growing up in Jeddah. The novel unfolds the exploration of a love affair in an oppressed society which is constantly plagued by moral surveillance and systemic repression. In *The Consequences of Love*, it can be seen that falling in love is not only a crime, but the lovers are liable to get whipped on the streets or be stoned to death. Addonia presents a compelling narrative design where the mental state of the protagonists is shaped with trauma, loss and an internalised sense of fear. From a psychoanalytic perspective, the protagonist Naser has suffered from abandonment from an early age. When the Eritrean War erupted, his mother sent the children with their uncle to Jeddah. His life in Jeddah is also not smooth, as after a few years, Naser was abandoned by his uncle in the streets, leading to him getting sexually exploited while just trying to earn an honest living. Thus, his experience with war, displacement and prolonged exposure to instability shaped his sense of identity. Naser's trauma is therefore not a singular event but a continuous battle shaped by the circumstances around him. Continuous exposure to trauma can lead to memories getting disorganised and fragmented. As per Schore (2002, p. 10), certain personality patterns associated with the trauma determine the ability of an individual to cope and their condition. It is important to not only understand the nature of the trauma but also what the person experiences afterwards. Naser is depicted as being old enough

to remember his life in Eritrea before the war. He remembers the warmth and generosity of the women, memories which get tangled with his thoughts of his lost mother. Traumatic experiences which people go through are imprinted as sensations or feeling states; these memories consist of images, sensations, affective and behavioral states, which oftentimes do not change with time (Van der Kolk, 1998). Addonia has shown the hypocrisy of such a repressive society through the character of Naser, as when he takes the job at a cafe, he learns that he has to provide sexual favours to older male clients. The strict regulations force the men to meet their sexual needs with young boys, as the women are under the veil. Young, vulnerable immigrants such as Naser are often the victims of such sexual exploitation. The plot revolves around Naser's love affair with a veiled woman; his life in Jeddah has been marked with instability ever since he was separated from his mother. His trauma and yearning for closeness and affection draw him towards Fiore and this forbidden relationship. The novel thus provides fertile ground for a psychoanalytic investigation into how authoritarian regimes infiltrate people's personal lives. Therefore, by examining the trauma and repression that Naser experiences, the deeper psychological problems experienced by Naser can be identified. The trauma and repression are coupled with frustration and loneliness that Naser experiences while living in a patriarchal society. Through different social situations, Addonia successfully shows that when morality is regulated by the state, corruption and hypocrisy grows. This paper aims to analyse *The Consequences of Love* through a psychoanalytic framework in order to understand the impact of repression on Naser.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive design for carrying out a close textual analysis to investigate the trauma and repression Naser experiences in Addonia's *The Consequences of Love*. A secondary qualitative approach is of particular importance in this study, as it helps in focusing on the narrative context and depth of the characters. The study has also drawn from key psychoanalytical concepts such as Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Bowlby's attachment theory, Winnicott's theory of the holding environment, and other contemporary trauma theories. Secondary scholarly sources on trauma and psychoanalysis have been used within the study to gain a deeper understanding of the authoritarian regime of Saudi Arabia and how it shapes the individual identity of the protagonists.

3. Aim of the Study

This study aims to examine Sulaiman Addonia's *The Consequences of Love* through a psychoanalytic lens to understand how the trauma and repression experienced by Naser influence his psychological development. The paper explores the early life experiences of Naser, growing up in a war-torn country, moving to refugee camps in Saudi Arabia and suffering displacement and abandonment. Additionally, the study also investigates the role of moral surveillance and authoritarian control over the conflict experienced by Naser. The study also applies different psychoanalytical concepts to learn more about the desire, sexuality and conflict experienced by the protagonist, living under a repressive social regime.

4. Discussion: Psychoanalytical Perspective on Trauma and Repression

4.1 Trauma and the Mental Impact of Displacement

In the novel *The Consequences of Love*, the displacement which Naser experiences at the beginning is not merely physical but also psychological. Naser mentions that when his uncle brought him and his brother to Jeddah, they had already been living in Sudanese refugee camps for five months. His migration to Saudi Arabia from Sudan is also marked by economic and legal precarity, as the thought of becoming rich and being able to send money back to his mother became the incentive to move. Saudi Arabia, at this point in history, followed a kafeel system, where a Saudi man was able to sponsor the stay of a refugee in the kingdom in exchange for annual payments. However, this practice also gave the kafeels full control over the lives of the people he sponsors. The kafeel uses Naser's financial vulnerability, of not being able to pay the three thousand riyals and sexually abuses him. "Put it this way, you have something that could be worth the three thousand riyals." I closed my eyes again and prayed that my mother would come and take me with her. But she couldn't get up this time. I heard her say something and I murmured, "It's OK, Mother. I forgive you." "Naser?" The kafeel called me over to him. (Addonia, 2009, p. 23) In his subconscious mind, Naser is always chasing his mother, even when he is getting abused by the kafeel, he imagines his mother's face for safety and comfort. The image of his mother becomes a strong psychological coping mechanism for young Naser when he experiences fear, instability and overwhelming emotions. The incident with the kafeel continues to haunt Naser as he experiences recurring nightmares. Naser is seen waking up crying for his mother in the middle of the night (Addonia, 2009, p. 44). Her memory functions as an internalised protective presence that protects Naser from the trauma he experiences.

From a psychological perspective, the attachment theory developed by John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth can be used to understand Naser dealing with trauma. Bowlby believed that the need for love and the relationship between a mother and child is a primal feeling. Naser's mother's image continues to be embedded in his unconscious mind as a source of safety. Separation from their mothers at an early age, therefore, has a detrimental effect on the child's growth (van der Horst et al. 2024, p. 666). Whenever the external world becomes unbearable for Naser, he seeks refuge in the familiarity of his mother's image to regulate his mental and emotional state. Furthermore, the complete absence of the mother figure in his life turns her into an idealised sacred figure, providing him security with just her presence. According to contemporary trauma theory, trauma can be categorised into two parts: single-event trauma and complex trauma. Complex trauma is essentially something that is formed over multiple incidents and exposure to danger, violence and abuse (Bailey, 2019, p.11). The traumatic experiences of displacement, poverty, social marginalisation and sexual abuse that Naser experiences during his life in Jeddah thus become synonymous with complex trauma. As a refugee, survival becomes a priority for Naser due to the lack of security in his life. He goes to work at his friend Jasim's cafe, which leads to more trauma. Jasim forces Naser to sleep with one of his regular customers, named Rashid. When Jasim tries to convince Naser to sell his body, Naser is seen holding a portrait of his mother; the maternal image of his mother is a recurring theme within the novel, and the overreliance on it is symbolic of unresolved attachment trauma. Jasim picks up on this and uses it against him by saying: *Think how much your mother had to go through to send you away from the war to safety. And now you want to go back to the war zone, to death. I am sure she misses you, if she is still alive. (Addonia, 2009, p. 51)* The loneliness and loss of his mother shape Naser's response to trauma, and even though he initially tries to fight Jasim, he eventually gives in and meets Rashid's sexual needs. Naser is again seen using his mother's memory as a shield to protect himself from trauma. He imagines his mother, Semira and their sex worker friends at Lover's Hill, who had to sacrifice their bodies to hungry men (Addonia, 2009, p. 53). Naser's forced separation from his mother at an early age has severe psychological implications, leading to his yearning for intimacy. Winnicott's theory on the holding environment states that a child requires safe emotional and physical conditions to develop securely. The mother must be involved in the growing stage of the child; when these conditions are not met, the absence is internalised by the infant and identified with being nothing (Hanning, 2021, p.117). The lack of a holding environment for Naser thus leads to a fragmented sense of self. The displacement he experiences also leads to dissociative tendencies. Throughout the novel, Naser is seen to retreat into his memory and indulge in daydreaming, as it's safer than the real world. Disassociation serves as a coping mechanism for Naser, leading to more emotional isolation and complications.

4.2 Repression, Surveillance, and Internal Psychological Regulation

In *The Consequences of Love*, repression operates not only as a social mechanism imposed by the Saudi government but as an internalised psychological condition that influences Naser's thoughts and actions. Under the patriarchal social order, the religious police operated in the interest of men in society. When Naser's kafeel's wife's servants reported sexual harassment, she was beaten with her two children and sent back to the Philippines (Addonia, 2009, p. 67). The punishment square is mentioned within the novel as a space where bodies are publicly executed. Its purpose is to incite fear among the people and prevent them from committing crimes. The imam and the religious police of Saudi Arabia have full control over the autonomy of women in the city. While the man is allowed to seek forgiveness by praying to Allah during the time of his punishment, the woman will suffer a greater pain of being shamed forever. An unmarried woman caught in a love affair will not be touched by any man; she is destined to live a lonely life of loneliness and rejection (Addonia, 2009, p. 150). *I caught a glimpse of two religious policemen reflected in the window... I hurried to recover my place and sat facing the mall entrance (Addonia, 2009, p. 179). "Sweetheart, you should know by now. The religious policemen are around, so I need to walk behind you. You think I like this? When we get to the Corniche, we can walk side by side. Now, go, go, I will follow you." (Addonia, 2009, p. 180).* Naser's fear of exposure in his relationship with Fiore by the religious police shows how surveillance penetrates the personal lives of people. Naser is constantly aware that they can be arrested at any moment and suffers from anxiety of being seen together by the police. Repression shifts from being an external prohibition to psychological regulation as Naser is aware that getting caught will lead to consequences for both him and his lover. Moralization is the defense which is used by the Islamic state to justify the need for religious police. It is the superego of the state that gives them to moral authority to pass punitive judgment on others. The hijab can also be seen as a strong superego or parental agency, as it embodies patriarchy within the society. From a psychoanalytical lens, this practice can be

seen as identifying and reinforcing women as mothers. The challenges which Muslim women face both within and outside their communities further prevent them from voicing their opinions and beliefs publicly (Moghadam, 2022, p. 24). According to Freud, the superego is a kind of socio-cultural and parental authority, as the superego is constantly judging the ego against an ego ideal, which is impossible to maintain (Malherbe, 2024, p.1211). The omnipresence of moral policing results in self-surveillance and hypervigilance due to fear of getting caught. *The Pink Shoes were all I could see of her that made her stand out in AlNuzla. And every time I saw them, I noticed a new detail. They were pointy shoes, with the tips slightly curling upwards. There was a light pattern of small glittering silver-coloured pearls embroidered on the sides (Addonia, 2009, p. 79)* For the lovers, secrecy becomes a survival strategy; Naser and Fiore are forced to meet in hidden spaces and rely on code languages and physical discretion. Fiore comes up with the idea of the pink shoes so that Naser can identify her among the crowd. The constant repression which Fiore has experienced in her life makes her defiant and rebel against the social order. The acts of wearing the pink shoe or inviting Naser to come to her house, despite the social expectations placed on her is symbolic of her unwillingness to submit herself to society. As desire cannot be experienced publicly, Fiore devises a plan to invite Naser to her house in secrecy, making him wear a hijab. *Fiore had her back to me when she removed her head cover. I held my breath... She stood up, and let her abaya slide over her shoulders and drop at her feet in the sand. I stopped walking. My heart was beating so fast. "Ya Allah, ya great Creator," I mumbled to myself (Addonia, 2009, p.187)* The above lines show the defiance of Naser and Fiore to the Islamic social order; their internalised psychological regulation. They used the hijab, which is a tool of repression and traditionalism, to fool the patriarchal social order and meet in private. Addonia, through the character of Naser, has shown how authoritarian regimes maintain their control over the people by making repression evolve into psychological regulation. The religious institution extend their power beyond the public domains and into the lives of the people.

4.3 Desire, Sexuality, and Conflict

In *The Consequences of Love*, desire originates not as a simple expression of attraction but is shaped by fear, prohibition, and internalised conflict. His relationship with Fiore is developed in an environment which is highly regulated. Naser's desire for Fiore is a product of his trauma, displacement and repression, which he experiences in the Saudi society. The abandonment he experienced from his family, his longing for his mother, made him seek a love that is forbidden. His desires for Fiore are therefore both erotic but also helps with his psychic restoration. Fiore, being part Eritrean, also contributed to the familiarity, the novel states her being the daughter of a second-generation Eritrean man. Naser's attraction to Fiore in most of the novel can be seen to be internal; his desires unfold through anticipation and fantasies, including her. As desire could not be expressed freely in the Saudi society, Naser internalised it. This can be understood through Freud's model of conflict between the id, or the instinctual desire, and the superego, which is the internalised authority. Freud defines the id as the unconscious part of the mind that influences the urges, needs and gratification of people. Ego, on the other hand, is the realistic part of the mind that is molded by the external world. The superego is tied to the moral and ethical parts of a person, influencing their lives (Ajvazi, 2021, p.1). In the present context, Naser's longing for physical intimacy with Fiore is in direct tension with the moral and religious system of the state. *I stepped aside to let them pass and walked back to my spot under the palm tree. I looked around to ensure I wasn't being watched (Addonia, 2009, p.61).* This is further amplified by the environment in which the relationship grows; the gender norms and religious codes constantly influence Naser's behaviour. The above lines show that even when the religious police are not around, Naser behaves as if he is being watched out of fear. When Naser desires Fiore or misses seeing her on the street, he touches her notes in his pockets to feel her presence (Addonia, 2009, p.115). *"All I want is a small touch, all you need to do is walk out of here and bump into me by mistake. We are human, we all make mistakes. I want to smell you and touch you. I want to hear your voice. I want to know that you're real." (Addonia, 2009, p.175).* The above lines show the desperation in Naser's voice, the fear and repression prevent the lovers from meeting, and therefore, a simple touch becomes their way of meeting their needs. Fiore also functions as an object of idealisation, as Naser's obsession with her exceeds physical attraction. It can be argued that Naser's early experience with loss, grief, displacement and abandonment influences his attachment with Fiore as he is willing to sacrifice everything in his life to spend it with her. She provides him with the validation and recognition that he desperately sought in this alien landscape. Melanie Klein's object-relations theory is insightful in this context; she bases her theory on Freud's view of instincts as a motivational force in object relations. Klein claims that the idealisation of the object is a defensive strategy adopted to keep the good object protected from the persecutory object (Bacal, 2025, p.76). In the context of Naser, losing Fiore

would not just be a loss of a romantic partner, but also a loss of the abandonment that he faced in his earlier life. The erotic desire of Naser is thus tied to unresolved attachment trauma from his childhood. The conflict in Naser originates as he oscillates between hope and restraint. The loss and fear of the relationship exist at every step, and thus, even when they are close, Naser is aware of its impermanence. Sexuality within the novel is not just a physical fulfilment; the desires of Naser expose his vulnerability and eventually lead to his doom. The novel ends with Naser being caught by the religious police, which he feared from the start and through the conflict, Addonia has showcased how repression does not extinguish the desire, instead makes it psychologically charged.

5. Conclusion

As concluding remarks for the present research, the study explores *The Consequences of Love* with a psychoanalytic context to show how trauma and repression shape the life of the protagonist Naser. The findings of the study have shown that Naser's early experience with war, abandonment, and displacement has a direct relationship with his fragmented sense of self. Throughout the novel, there has been a recurring image of Naser relying on the image he has created of his mother in his mind. This is reflective of the lack of a secure holding environment during his formative years. The novel illustrates how authoritarian repression extends beyond legal enforcement and into the minds of the people. The strict gender laws of the Saudi society, the presence of the religious police and public punishments instill fear among people. Within this environment, the love which Naser has for Fiore becomes conflictual instead of being liberating. Addonia also portrays love not simply as romance, but as resistance within a repressive regime. The use of the different psychoanalytical theories helps in making the study profound and a detailed exploration of the fragile pursuit of intimacy.

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