

OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 12

Special Issue: 1

Month: September

Year: 2024

P-ISSN: 2321-788X

E-ISSN: 2582-0397

Citation:

Pavithra

Bhuvaneshwari, A. P.

“Beyond the Scar:
Unspoken Pain of
Internal Trauma and
the Somali Diasporic
Experience in Nadifa
Mohamed’s *The Orchard
of Lost Souls*.” *Shanlax
International Journal
of Arts, Science and
Humanities*, vol. 12,
no. S1, 2024, pp. 13–17.

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/sijash.v12iS1-Sep.8323>

Beyond the Scar: Unspoken Pain of Internal Trauma and the Somali Diasporic Experience in Nadifa Mohamed’s *The Orchard of Lost Souls*

Dr. A. P. Pavithra Bhuvaneshwari

Assistant Professor, Department of English

St. Antony’s College of Arts and Sciences for Women, Thamaraipadi, Dindigul

Abstract

*This research study delves into the often-ignored anguish stemming from internal trauma as depicted in Nadifa Mohamed’s novel, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, particularly among Somali diasporic individuals. Through a thorough critical examination of the text, the research highlights the intricate relationships between trauma, identity, and a sense of belonging within the Somali diaspora. By analysing how internal trauma influences the lives of Mohamed’s characters, this work aims to illuminate the frequently marginalized experiences of Somali migrants and the remarkable resilience they exhibit in the face of adversity. The concept of “Beyond the Scar” encourages a deeper exploration that goes beyond surface-level interpretations of trauma, advocating for a more nuanced understanding of its complexities and consequences. This perspective underscores the importance of investigating the foundational elements that contribute to the experience of trauma, rather than simply recognizing its outward manifestations. The phrase “Unspoken Pain” emphasizes the often-ignored suffering linked to internal trauma, drawing attention to the silent battles that individuals face, which may not be readily articulated or acknowledged. Furthermore, the term “Internal Trauma and the Somali Diasporic Experience” situates this research within the specific literary context of Nadifa Mohamed’s work while also addressing the broader narrative of the Somali diaspora. This framework allows for a comprehensive understanding of the emotional and psychological challenges faced by Somali migrants, thereby enriching the discourse surrounding their experiences. By focusing on these hidden dimensions of suffering, the research aims to foster a more profound comprehension of the emotional terrain shaped by internal trauma within this community.*

Keywords: Victimization, Worthlessness, Purpose, Fruitful Life, Diaspora, Trauma, Experiences, Migrants, Scar, Pain, Psychological, Challenges

Existentialism conceptualizes human existence through a lens of distinctive attributes, including anxiety, dread, freedom, the awareness of mortality, and a heightened consciousness of being. This philosophical movement has its roots in various European countries, notably Denmark, France, Germany, and Italy. The emergence of existentialist thought can be attributed to significant historical events, such as the industrial revolution, the economic and physical devastation wrought by World War II, and the onset of the Cold War and the nuclear era. It was only after the Second World War that existentialism gained prominence in both philosophical

discourse and literary expression. The advancements brought about by the scientific and industrial revolutions in the nineteenth century contributed to a marked secularization of society. This transformation led to a rapid alteration of the traditional social framework, as individuals began to distance themselves from the long-standing beliefs and customs that had previously fostered a sense of connection to the universe.

As a result, many experienced a profound disconnection from their spiritual roots, leading to what can be described as a spiritual death. This disconnection has left individuals feeling ensnared in a complex web of existential dilemmas, grappling with the implications of their newfound freedom and the accompanying anxieties. The shift away from traditional values has not only altered personal identities but has also prompted a revaluation of one's place within the broader context of existence. Consequently, existentialism serves as a critical framework for understanding the human condition in a rapidly changing world, addressing the profound questions that arise from this existential crisis.

Nadifa Mohamed, a British-Somali author, intricately weaves the narratives of her homeland, Somalia, into her literary works. Through her storytelling, she compels a global audience to confront the dire circumstances faced by the Somali people. Central to her novels are themes such as civil conflict, displacement, poverty, psychological trauma, and existential dilemmas, which reflect the multifaceted struggles of her characters and their environment. In her acclaimed novel, *The Orchard of Lost Souls*, Mohamed adeptly employs existentialist theory to explore the profound notion that there can be meaning derived from seemingly meaningless experiences. "The city was a vast, rumbling beast that swallowed lives whole." (Mohamed 12)

The female protagonists in the narrative grapple with the brutal realities of their existence, leading them to perceive themselves as insignificant within a harsh world. This portrayal serves to highlight the psychological burdens that accompany their circumstances, emphasizing the depth of their suffering. Ultimately, the journey of these women transcends their initial despair as they embark on a quest for self-discovery and purpose. Through their struggles, they gradually come to recognize their inherent worth and potential, transforming their identities from those of perceived worthlessness to empowered individuals. This evolution not only underscores the resilience of the human spirit but also invites readers to reflect on the broader implications of identity and existence in the face of adversity.

Women frequently face a myriad of challenges throughout their lives, which can lead to a pervasive sense of meaninglessness, particularly when these struggles are encountered on a daily basis. This ongoing suffering often manifests as a profound emptiness, both internally and externally, highlighting the depth of their existential crisis. The experience of this emptiness serves as a stark reminder of the lack of purpose that can accompany their trials. In response to this sense of absurdity, many women actively seek to establish a sense of purpose that can provide meaning to their existence.

Their relentless pursuit of answers regarding their place in the universe reflects a deep-seated desire to transcend the challenges they face. Although defining a clear purpose is inherently difficult, the trials they endure often act as catalysts, compelling them to explore and articulate their goals. The pursuit of these goals not only shapes their life journey but also empowers them to overcome the barriers that stand in their way. By focusing on their objectives, women can dismantle the obstacles that impede their progress, ultimately leading to a more fulfilling and meaningful life. This transformative process underscores the resilience and determination that many women exhibit in their quest for purpose amidst adversity.

Deqo experiences a profound sense of worthlessness throughout her life, feeling isolated and burdened by her circumstances. Each stage of her existence is marked by an inability to alleviate

the trauma she carries. In social settings, she faces relentless criticism, mockery, and mistreatment from those around her, often being labeled derogatorily and ostracized. This constant barrage of negativity contributes to a life devoid of meaning, as she grapples with her solitude and the absence of supportive relationships. The weight of her suffering is compounded by her singular desire for a family, which serves as a beacon of hope amidst her despair. "Her eyes were like dark pools of water, reflecting the depths of her own sorrow." (Mohamed 75) The novelist poignantly illustrates Deqo's longing for connection, as she expresses a wish for additional names, symbolizing her yearning for identity and belonging. This desire underscores her struggle against the societal forces that seek to define her worth through derogatory labels and rejection. Despite the overwhelming challenges she faces, Deqo's determination to find purpose in her life sets her apart from others who may succumb to hopelessness. In a world that often seeks to diminish her existence, Deqo emerges as a resilient figure, striving to uncover the meaning of her life. Her journey reflects a profound quest for self-acceptance and the establishment of meaningful connections. While many may falter under similar pressures, Deqo's resolve to seek out her purpose highlights her unique character and the strength she possesses in the face of adversity. Ultimately, her story serves as a testament to the human spirit's capacity to endure and seek fulfilment, even in the most challenging of circumstances. "Deqo deeply wishes she had second and third name" ... (70)

Upon establishing her aspirations, she remains proactive, nurturing hopes for a fulfilling life accompanied by a family of her own. The presence of a strong desire within a woman serves as a driving force, preventing her from remaining passive. Instead, this yearning compels her to pursue the very goals she envisions for herself, illustrating the dynamic interplay between aspiration and action. The internal motivation she experiences ignites a profound longing for familial connections, suggesting that her ambitions extend beyond mere personal fulfilment. This desire acts as a catalyst, enabling her to work towards realizing her life's objectives. It is through this fervent aspiration that she finds the strength to navigate the complexities of her journey, reinforcing the notion that determination is essential for achieving one's dreams. The power of a resolute mindset cannot be underestimated, as it possesses the capacity to transform aspirations into reality. In this context, desire collaborates with various factors in her life, orchestrating a pathway toward the fulfilment of her needs and ambitions. Ultimately, it is this synergy between desire and determination that empowers individuals to manifest their visions and attain a meaningful existence. Daruwalla, in his poem, "The Unrest of Desire" says:

*"However, you bury the shadow in the heart,
Under slabs of concrete and coil of bones,
However, you wall the cave impulse at the mouth,
It will hammer at the sides and break free-
However, your burg the shadow in the heart". (6-10)*

The force of desire is so potent that, despite facing various challenges, it remains unyielding and often manifests in a manner akin to a superhero emerging to confront adversity. In the context of Deqo's existence, her aspiration to establish a family stands as the paramount objective, representing the ultimate dream she seeks to realize. Desire possesses an extraordinary strength that allows it to persist even in the face of significant barriers, revealing itself with a resilience reminiscent of a superhero. For Deqo, the longing to create a family encapsulates her deepest ambition, serving as the central focus of her life's aspirations. The intensity of desire is such that it can overcome obstacles, emerging triumphantly much like a superhero in times of struggle. In Deqo's narrative, her yearning for a family epitomizes her most cherished dream, highlighting the significance of this goal within her life's journey. "The scars on her body were nothing compared to the ones inside, the ones that no one could see." (Mohamed 127)

Kawsar's existence is marked by profound ineffectiveness, stemming from the significant losses and failures she has endured. The death of both her husband and daughter has rendered her life devoid of meaning, leading to a sense of absurdity and desolation. The author vividly illustrates Kawsar's plight, portraying her life as a barren landscape, stripped of vitality and hope. This narrative not only highlights her emotional turmoil but also emphasizes the psychological trauma she experiences as a result of her circumstances. The situation deteriorates further when Kawsar finds herself in the hands of law enforcement, where she suffers brutal treatment that culminates in a broken hip. This physical injury serves as a metaphor for her shattered spirit; upon realizing the extent of her condition, she descends into a state of despair, feeling utterly disconnected from her own identity.

The pain of her injury confines her to her bed, exacerbating her sense of isolation and helplessness, as she grapples with the reality of her new limitations. In this vulnerable state, Kawsar is attended to by a maid named Nurto, whose harsh demeanor adds to Kawsar's suffering. "She carried the weight of her past like a physical burden, one that slowed her steps and bent her back". (Mohamed 211) Nurto's scornful remarks, including the biting accusation of being "blameless and pointless," strike Kawsar deeply, further diminishing her already fragile sense of self-worth. The weight of these words leaves Kawsar devoid of joy, as she confronts the relentless decline of her circumstances, unable to find solace or hope in a world that seems increasingly hostile and indifferent.

Kawsar comes to a profound realization regarding the futility of her existence in the world. It becomes evident that when a resilient woman reaches a pivotal moment in her life, she often reflects on her past experiences and yearns for a fresh beginning. This moment of introspection prompts her to seek a deeper understanding of the purpose behind her existence. McKnight and Kashdan articulate that "Purpose serves as a central, self-organizing life aim that not only organizes and motivates goals but also manages behaviours and imparts a sense of meaning." This concept of purpose plays a crucial role in shaping life objectives and influencing daily choices by directing the allocation of limited personal resources.

In her quest for meaning, Kawsar redefines the purpose of her life, focusing on her aspiration to nurture a family. She comes to the realization that her true calling lies in the desire to raise a significant number of children. This newfound understanding is particularly poignant given her personal loss; having experienced the heartache of losing her own daughter, Kawsar feels a compelling urge to extend her maternal instincts to many others. Her journey reflects a transformation from a sense of loss to a commitment to fostering life and love in the lives of children who need a mother. Kawsar's evolution highlights the intricate relationship between personal experiences and the quest for purpose. By embracing her role as a potential mother to many, she not only seeks to fill the void left by her daughter's absence but also aims to create a legacy of care and nurturing. This shift in perspective underscores the importance of purpose in guiding individuals through life's challenges and transitions. Ultimately, Kawsar's story serves as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of redefining one's goals in the face of adversity.

Filsan's existence is marked by a profound sense of worthlessness, as she becomes a target of oppression from both her authorities and her father. In a society dominated by patriarchal values, her identity as a woman renders her particularly vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. The relentless aggression she faces from the patriarchal structure contributes to a life filled with bitterness and despair. General Haruun's attempts at sexual abuse exemplify the pervasive nature of such violence, while her father's cruelty intensifies her suffering, especially following her mother's departure with another man. This confluence of abuse and neglect leaves Filsan feeling isolated and devalued, leading her to perceive her life as insignificant and devoid of purpose. The emotional toll of her circumstances drives Filsan to confront the emptiness that envelops her existence. "The city was

a strange, unsettling place, full of unfamiliar sounds and smells that made her long for the comfort of home.” (Mohamed 45)

Recognizing the futility of her current situation, she resolves to establish a meaningful goal that could guide her toward a renewed life. This introspection prompts her to seek the underlying causes of her distress, ultimately revealing her profound sense of loss stemming from her mother’s absence. “She felt caught between two worlds, unable to fully belong in either.” (Mohamed 153)

The realization that she is motherless exacerbates her feelings of vulnerability, as she yearns for the nurturing and companionship that only a mother can provide. Filsan’s longing for maternal connection becomes a pivotal aspect of her quest for identity and purpose. By articulating a clear objective for her life, Filsan embarks on a transformative journey aimed at reclaiming her sense of worth. Her determination to seek out a maternal figure reflects her desire to transcend the limitations imposed by her past and the oppressive structures surrounding her. Filsan’s declaration of wanting a mother with whom she can share meaningful conversations signifies her yearning for emotional support and validation. “She was a stranger in a strange land, searching for a sense of belonging.” (Mohamed 23) Through this pursuit, she aspires to convert her previously meaningless existence into one filled with significance and fulfilment. Filsan’s resolve to define her purpose underscores her resilience and commitment to overcoming the adversities that have defined her life thus far. “Having a purpose in life is associated with better physical and mental health outcomes.” (McKnight and Kashdan 244)

In conclusion, the three characters Deqo, Kawsar, and Filsan successfully achieve their individual objectives. Their paths converge serendipitously, igniting a shared desire to alter their destinies. Each character possesses a distinct motivation, and through mutual support, they strive to fulfil their existential purposes. This collaboration enables them to transcend their suffering and evolve into more meaningful individuals. Deqo finds both a grandmother and a mother in Kawsar and Filsan, while Kawsar gains daughters in Deqo and Filsan, and Filsan discovers maternal support in Kawsar. “Human morality is rooted in our evolutionary history, shaped by natural selection.” (Morgan 23)

Together, they form a familial bond that empowers them to transform their previously aimless lives into something significant. The analysis underscores the transformative mental strength of women who have reshaped their fates. Despite facing various adversities, each character is determined to overcome their struggles. Rather than allowing their hardships to diminish them, these women cultivate resilience and courage. The challenges they encounter inflict profound damage, rendering them seemingly lost. However, they ultimately redefine their existence by establishing a clear purpose, emerging as liberated individuals. This narrative conveys a powerful message about the potential for human connection to foster growth and enable individuals to lead fulfilling lives.

References

1. Daruwalla, K.N. “*The Unrest of Desire.*” Archive, n.d., (link unavailable). Accessed 30 Oct. 2018.
2. Mohamed, Nadifa. *The Orchard of Lost Souls*. Simon & Schuster, 2013. Print.
3. McKnight, Patrick E., and Todd B. Kashdan. “*Purpose in Life as a Sustainable Health System that Creates and Maintains Well-Being: An Integrative, Testable Theory.*” Review of General Psychology, vol. 13, no. 3, 2009, pp. 242-251.
4. Morgan, John Henry. *Naturally Good: A Behavioral History of Moral Development from Charles Darwin to E.O. Wilson*. Cloverdale Corporation, 2005. Print.