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RESEARCH PAPER

Filling the Void: Transgenerational Haunting and the Burden of Replacement in Vijay's *The Far Field*

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ABSTRACT

The dominant focus on Euro-American perspectives has overshadowed the global resonance of trauma studies, particularly conflict-ridden regions like Kashmir. This study seeks to redress this imbalance by examining the experiences of trauma among Kashmiris, who have faced continuous political turbulence and militarization since the partition of the Indian subcontinent. Vijay's The Far Field (2019) serves as a critical narrative, illustrating the perilous temporal connections between past and present. In this study, The Replacement Child perspective provided by Schwab (2010) has been used to trace the legacy of transgenerational trauma in Vijay's narrative. The spectral haunting that the replacement child must deal with has been investigated by the researcher. Furthermore, Derrida's concept of "supplementarity" has been used to elucidate the phenomenon. The focus of this study is to unravel the spatio-temporal aspects and the extent of this transference in the offspring of the perpetrators. Future studies must investigate the ways in which the Replacement Child trope functions in other postcolonial works in order to uncover the psychological underpinnings of transgenerational trauma.

KEYWORDS Transgenerational Haunting, Supplementarity, Replacement Child, Chronotope

Introduction

The mother-child dyad, the most fundamental of all interpersonal relationships, is well known for its capacity to elicit an expression of emotional ecstasy that is only equaled by the accompanying resonances of guilt and rage (Mathieson, 1990). Many psychologists think that the bond between a mother's caring and an infant's need is so strong that it makes it difficult to distinguish between the two, yet horrors and tragedies are hidden within the personal web (Mathieson, 1990). The concept of the replacement child and the theme of transgenerational transmission are deeply woven into Madhuri Vijay's text *The Far Field* (2019), offering an enticing view through which to examine the long-lasting effects of loss, grief, and unresolved trauma on and across familial relationships. This study aims to investigate how the protagonist's experiences as a replacement child speak to larger concerns of emotional inheritance and inter/transgenerational trauma. The concept of the "replacement child" has been explored in various literary works, shedding light on the complex emotional and psychological experiences of individuals who are born to fill the void left by a deceased or absent sibling (Nijhawan, 2020). In the context of the Kashmiri region, where the landscape has been shaped by decades of armed conflict, the narrative of the "half mother" who has lost her son has emerged as a poignant and powerful portrayal of the trauma and resilience of women in the region (Hanif & Ahmed, 2020). Since the 1920s, there has been a struggle in Jammu and Kashmir, and with time, both its character and its actors have changed (Suri and Chandran, 2008). But an armed rebellion broke out in 1989, signaling a major uptick in activity. A strong yearning for independence from Indian rule propelled the rebellion, which saw many young Kashmiris pick up guns. In response, the Indian government sent out nearly 5,000,000 troops in an enormous military presence in an attempt to put an end to the insurgency (Kapur and Narang, 2001). As a result of this militarization, the area was subjected to severe security measures, such as the implementation of laws like the Public Safety Act and the Armed

Forces Special Powers Act, which caused widespread terror, violence, and relocation of civilians. Forced disappearances and other violations of international treaties on human rights have been linked to both militants and security personnel (United Nations Convention Against Torture, Article 2). The armed forces are the main perpetrators of forced disappearances in Jammu and Kashmir; they frequently use this method to intimidate the local populace or force suspected terrorists to surrender (Amnesty International India, 1999). Furthermore, militants who participate in inter-group confrontations and retaliatory killings—including those who have surrendered—also contribute to these disappearances (Human Rights Watch Asia, 1996). Beyond the missing people themselves, the families of those who vanish, especially women and children, are also affected by the terrible fallout from these disappearances. This study focuses in particular on a subset of people called "half mothers" who have gone through the intense emotional pain of losing a child. Romeo Vitelli emphasizes that these kinds of losses can result in a variety of physiological and psychological problems, such as anxiety and sadness (Vitelli, 2013).

Contemporary narratives about Kashmir are replete with fundamental themes of violence, trauma, and loss (Daimari & Biswas, 2023). The lives of Kashmiri people are intricately linked to state and non-state actors, militancy, and international politics due to the ongoing war between two competing states that has existed since the Indian subcontinent was divided. Considering this, the subject of missing people or bodies that disappeared has become a prominent literary device in Kashmiri stories. Works like *The Half-Mother* (2014) by Shahnaz Bashir and *The Far Field* (2019) by Madhuri Vijay centre on the forced disappearances of Muslim males from Kashmir. A new poetics of resistance has been developed by a number of literary critics and academics who have addressed the misery of the Kashmiri people and added to the expanding body of writing on the region (Rizwan 2013; Kaul 2011, 2012). While they denounce human rights abuses and other types of violence encountered by common Kashmiris, these scholars have examined how the 1990s saw the widespread militarisation of Kashmir and the anguish that half-mothers and half-widows endured in literature.

The portrayal of traumatized "half-mothers" and "half-widows" in Shahnaz Bashir's *The Half Mother* (2014), for example, has been examined in the new essay *'Half Widows and Half Mothers': Traumatic Voices of Women from the Literary Narratives of Jammu and Kashmir* (2020) by S. Hanif and M. L. Ahmed. Furthermore, *Resisting Disappearance* (2019) by Ather Zia is a noteworthy contribution to the body of knowledge on the difficulties faced by mothers and "half-widows" after their husbands or sons vanish. Zia's emphasis on women provides a "gendered understanding... wherein women utilise a repertoire of cultural cliches to make visible the 'disappearance' of their sons and husbands, which is enforced by the state" (Soibam, 2021). Important concerns concerning the "disappeared" and the necessity of viewing trauma via the prism of vanished corpses are also brought up by this focus.

Literature Review

Individuals might not impart their experiences to others directly, but adults can transfer their own traumatized self-images into a child's self-representation through a process called depositing, as Volkan (1987) explains. In contrast to identification, which is the process by which a child actively absorbs other people's object pictures, depositing entails adults actively projecting their own self-images onto a child's evolving self-representation. Depositors look for release from their own inner turmoil and fears by projecting their painful experiences onto another individual. As this is going on, children are internalizing these deposited images and using them as reservoirs to shape their sense of self and identity (Volkan, 1987). Depositing is similar to projective identification (Klein, 1946); the "replacement child" phenomenon is one example of this (Cain & Cain, 1964; Poznanski, 1972; Volkan & Ast, 1997). In this case, a woman projects her internalized

image of a dead child onto her next child, who is frequently born after the death of the first child. With no direct interaction with the departed brother, the replacement child becomes the archive for this picture, given chores by the mother to preserve the memory of the lost child. For the replacement child, internalizing this imprinted picture becomes a crucial undertaking that could influence how they see themselves and inspire them to pursue particular goals in life. An unintegrated self-representation, however, could arise from a failure to integrate this image (Volkan, 2017).

Pincus (1976) explores the deep impact that previous family relationships have on people's reactions to bereavement. She draws attention to the consequences of unresolved or delayed grieving, which can eventually become a problem for the entire family. When grief is suppressed, a generational pattern takes shape that feeds a dysfunctional grieving cycle that is inherited by family members. This pattern prevents family dynamics from naturally evolving, which causes resistance to dealing with changes and losses that are unavoidable. Healthy relationship development may be impeded by family ties becoming stagnant, with emotional links either shifting to replacements or remaining with the departed. On the other hand, families that deal with loss in an honest and accepting manner make the transitions easier and create a climate where change is welcomed as a necessary part of life (Lieberman, 1979).

One of the most common characteristics of replacement children is the phenomena of implicitly competing with a departed sibling, which frequently acts as a channel for the passing on of parental stress to future generations (Schwab, 2010). Numerous children born in the wake of wars and genocides represent the fate of replacement children collectively, signifying not just the death of a single person but also the number of lives lost (Schwab, 2010). For example, offspring of Holocaust survivors bear the responsibility of millions of deaths they did not personally see, and they suffer from the lingering impacts of trauma from their parents (Schwab, 2010). The psychological terrain of replacement children is shaped by these impacts, which can take many different forms, including sadness, anxiety, hypervigilance, or emotional numbness (Schwab, 2010). Vamik Volkan's theory of "deposit representations" clarifies this process even further by emphasizing how bereaved parents impose their own distorted grieving onto their growing child's identity (Schwab, 2010). Therefore, the lasting impact of intergenerational trauma is woven into the complex psychological composition of replacement children (Schwab, 2010).

Parents are usually the children's first line of defense against trauma, but parents who have experienced trauma themselves may unintentionally pass on their pain to their children. This is what Masud Khan calls "cumulative trauma" (Khan, 2013). Anisfeld, a replacement kid himself, describes how his father's unresolved Holocaust trauma materialized in periodic absences that sent him back to painful memories. Anisfeld's mental condition was shaped by these fugue states, which constituted a palpable aspect of his reality (Anisfeld, 2011). Based on research by Teréz Virag, *Children of the Holocaust and their Children's Children*, replacement children frequently grow to unconsciously identify with departed family members (Virag, 1984). They struggle with twisted grief in an attempt to bring their deceased loved ones back to life. As a result, kids struggle with identity issues and contend with a pseudo-identity that their parents' unresolved grief has forced upon them.

According to Andrea Sabbadini, a replacement child is frequently viewed less as a unique person and more as a container for memories. Replacement children often react with survivor guilt, believing that their own survival is a result of the death of someone else (Sabbadini, 2001). According to James Herzog, repairing transgenerational trauma requires mourning. Survivors and their descendants can remember without reliving once the grieving process is over, which frees them up to concentrate on the duty of simply existing (Herzog, 1982). On the other hand, the silence around painful pasts obstructs appropriate grieving, leaving hidden family secrets and unconscious legacies to plague

future generations. (Abraham & Torok, 1994) In his autobiography, Phillipe Gimbert (2008) discusses the heavy burden offenders' children bear—both the guilt associated with carrying on their parents' notorious heritage and the agony suffered by the victims and their offspring. Furthermore, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1957), one of Freud's works, provides an interesting viewpoint on this relationship. He defines melancholy as the inability to let the deceased rest and proposes that mourning is complete when the bereaved can focus their love on a "new object." The character of this change, nevertheless, differs greatly. Some people may choose to ignore their loss and find something new to be affectionate about, but others face and grieve their loss and eventually rediscover their ability to love in a completely new way. In contrast to Freud, Abraham and Torok distinguish a loss that is denied—in which the lost love object is kept in a crypt inside the self like a living corpse—from a loss that is lived and in which the lost object is granted what they call a "proper burial." The pain of loss can elicit denial; flight from reality; misplaced, repressed, or transformed rage; or manic defense. For Freud, mourning is deemed "proper" only when, after the withdrawal from the world in grief, a space of attachment is gradually reopened to the world and others, including new loved ones. But the fate of replacement children indicates that proper mourning might require something more: it must prepare the path for a new attachment to another that does not unconsciously remain bound to the lost object.

Material and Methods

This study is qualitative in nature and makes use of textual analysis. In this study, The Replacement Child perspective provided by Schwab in her work *Haunting Legacies* (Schwab, 2010, p. 118) has been used to trace the legacy of transgenerational trauma in Vijay's novel *The Far Field* (2019). The spectral haunting that the replacement child must deal with has been examined by the researchers as they attempt to unravel the phenomenon of Replacement Child in the text.

Derrida's concept of "supplementarity" (as cited in Schwab, 2010, p.122) which he provided in his work *Of Grammatology* has been used to further elucidate the replacement child phenomenon. The focus of this study is on analyzing the temporal and spatial aspects of the replacement child phenomena, using it as a chronotope. Discourse analysis has been done on the fantasy aspects associated with the phenomenon as well as identity issues, which are the primary cause of transference. Finally, by conducting a detailed analysis of the Replacement Child in Madhuri Vijay's work *The Far Field* (2019), the researchers investigate the extent of this transference in the offspring of the perpetrators.

Results and Discussion

Transgenerational Haunting & Replacement Child Phenomenon in Vijay's *The Far Field*

Regarding the replacement child, Vijay offers a completely different viewpoint in *The Far Field* (2019). The protagonist of the story, Shalini, an Indian, travels to Kashmir after her mother passes away in order to learn the mysteries she left behind. Shalini's inability to grieve her mother's passing sets the stage for the trip. When she gets to the Kashmir Valley in Kishtwar, she stays with Zoya and Abdul Latif, a Kashmiri couple who lost their only son, Ishfaaq, to militancy eight years ago. Shalini's brief stay with them demonstrates to us the depth of the therapeutic relationship she builds with Zoya, in which they avoided grieving the loss of their loved ones by projecting it onto one another. As a result, Schwab's Replacement Child phenomenon, which she describes in her book *Haunting Legacies (*2010, p.118), allows us to observe transference in them. In order to delve deeper into the complexity of the therapeutic relationship that Shalini and Zoya created, the researchers have examined Shalini's relationship with the couple using Shwab's framework for this transgenerational trauma. Because of her mother's absence,

Shalini projected her fantasies of maternal love onto Zoya, and Zoya, a mother who finds it difficult to come to terms with the loss of her only child, projected her fantasies onto Shalini. Using Shalini as a metaphor for a replacement child who is utilized to fill the vacuum left by Ishfaaq's absence, the researchers investigate the replacement child haunting in the text. Shalini's character serves as a metaphor for the generational transfer of societal trauma, which is supported by Schwab's replacement child theory. The term "replacement children" describes the common reaction to the tragic loss of a child, which is particularly noticeable during or following horrific historical periods like the Holocaust or other genocidal wars (Schwab, 2010, p.120). Schwab illustrates the signs of a replacement child with references to Art Spiegelman's well-known graphic novel, *Maus*. Spiegelman is a replacement child himself, having grown up believing he was in competition with his "ghost-brother," Richieu. He is described as "one of the best-known replacement children born after the Shoah to Jewish parents" (Schwab, 2010, p.120). The most prevalent symptoms of a replacement child are found in the brief exchange she quotes from *Maus*. These include the brother's status as a "ghost-brother," his parents' inability to accept their child's passing, and their failure to properly grieve the child because they could not accept his death (Schwab, 2010, p.121). Continuing her argument, Schwab explains how the so-called replacement children are affected by the parents' incapacity to grieve for their departed child: "It is a prevalent form in which parental trauma is transmitted to the next generation and often to generations across" (Schwab, 2010, p.121). Spiegelman's parents in *Maus* maintain him alive as a sentimental, "almost hallucinatory presence that denies his actual death" (Schwab, 2010, p.121) because they cannot accept that their firstborn is truly dead. Spiegelman is haunted by his ghost-brother, who they had produced in a crypt where their deceased child was transformed.

In *The Far Field* (2019), Zoya and Abdul Latif struggle with their inability to grieve properly after their son Ishfaaq went missing. Though they are reluctant to talk about him openly, Ishfaaq remains a part of their life because of their incredulity at his death. Ishfaaq becomes even more significant because of their stillness, which makes him appear like a haunting force that looms over the living. “There was a fundamental stillness to them both” (Vijay, 2019, p.74). For Shalini, this silent competition with the memory of a dead kid leaves a gap that is difficult for her to understand at first. Shalini's perspective of her surroundings is influenced by the atmosphere of unsaid longing and unresolved anguish that is created by the quiet around Ishfaaq's absence. She struggles with this quiet awareness, trying to make sense of the spectral presence lurking in the background of (her) family's past. Vijay’s work has this kind of parental trauma as a recurring motif, one that is passed down through unspoken feelings and implicit understanding. It emphasizes the long-lasting effects of unresolved grief on succeeding generations, sustaining a cycle of silent suffering that goes beyond personal experiences and across generational boundaries. There’s a deep resonance of this silent legacy in Shalini's as a replacement child, which shapes her perception of who she is and where she fits into (her) family's past.

There are strong similarities between the psychological phenomenon of replacement child and Jacques Derrida's idea of “supplementarity”, which is covered in *Of Grammatology* (Schwab, 2010, p.122). When it comes to Ishfaaq's parents, their inability to accept their son's death keeps them imprisoned in an unending state of grief. Rather than face the fact that Ishfaaq is dead, they preserve his memory, turning him into a sentimental, almost surreal figure who refuses to die. Shalini feels like she is only meant to be a support system for the original child in this situation. She turns into a metaphorical replacement for Ishfaaq, filling in for their son's actual, palpable absence. Shalini, like a sign that has to make up for the absence of the item itself, is the surrogate child, responsible for occupying the space left by Ishfaaq's return. This dynamic highlight the intricacies of mourning and the inclination of people to find comfort in symbolic representations when confronted with significant loss. Because Ishfaaq's parents are unable to accept the truth of his death, a cycle of grieving is perpetuated in which Shalini is forced to act as a stand-in for their unfulfilled desire for their son. Derrida writes:

However, the supplements are supplements. It just serves to replace. It steps in or implies itself there; if it fills, it does so by occupying a space. It is by the preceding default of a presence that it represents and creates an image. The supplement is a vicarious and compensatory adjunct, a subaltern instance that replaces the main one. It doesn't just bring positivity to a presence as a replacement; rather, it creates no alleviation and is given a specific place in the structure by the symbol of emptiness (Derrida as cited in Schwab, 2010, p.123).

Derrida's theory of supplementarity sheds important light on the replacement child's rhetorical and psychological roles in this situation (Schwab, 2010, p.122) Shalini, occupying a psychological position marked by supplementarity, is unable to create a sense of identity or belonging. The contradictions between Abdul Latif and Zoya's idealised visions and the stories they tell further muddle the lines that support this supplementarity.

Shalini, as the replacement child, represents a chronotope that functions simultaneously in space and time. In terms of space, she "re-places" herself, assuming Ishfaaq's role and occupying the space left by his absence. But this void indicates more than just a geographical absence—rather, it symbolises the absence of time—more precisely, the time of death (Schwab, 2010, p.134). Shalini is given the impossible task of erasing everything that came before her, so reversing the passage of time and death. Shalini's position as the replacement child essentially captures the intricate relationship that exists between identity, time, and space. She struggles to meet expectations and find a real replacement for an unfulfilled vacuum. She struggles to find place in the family leaving in her a sense of dislocation—"I'm nobody" (Vijay, 2019, p.90). The enormous psychological and existential repercussions of supplementarity within the family dynamic are shown by this existential battle when Shalini "wondered briefly, with a thrill, if anyone who didn't know us might think I was her daughter" (Vijay, 2019, p.103).

The idea of the replacement child as a chronotope, in Schwab's opinion, highlights the importance of location and time in comprehending trauma. Schwab refers to replacement children as existing in "the nothing" of trauma, a state of liminality marked by a sense of nonexistence. Frequently, these surrogate children are unaware of the child they are supposed to take the place of, having no idea of its existence. Their purpose is to occupy the area that tragedy has left empty.

That name again. Only then, slowly, did it began to dawn on me who this Ishfaaq might be. Who he must be. I'd seen no sign of him in the house where I'd lived for nearly a fortnight, had never heard his name mentioned, but the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. The sadness that seemed to blow over Abdul Latief and Zoya from time to time, for no apparent reason" (Vijay, 2019, p.88).

The feeling of absence endures even when replacement children are given stories or pictures of the departed child (Schwab, 2010, p.143). For Shalini, Ishfaaq continues to live only in the hereafter, plaguing the living from a place where there is nothing tangible. No matter how much Zoya and Abdul Latif try to honour or remember him, he is stuck in an eternal state of not- being, a mere phantom. "I closed my eyes and imagined hands pulling at a boy's school uniform, a door slamming, tires screeching, an eerie, ringing silence afterward" (Vijay, 2019, p.103). The intricate interactions between space, memory, and absence in the life of Shalini as a replacement child can be seen at work in Vijay's text. Shalini's current situation, which is neither place nor time, reflects the severe effects of trauma, profoundly influencing her experiences and identity. "All I wanted was to go back to my green room, crawl under the sheets, and fall asleep. And, when I woke, I wanted to eat breakfast with Zoya and walk with her through the streets of Kishtwar to the office. I wanted to sit by her side on our wooden bench in the sun and listen to her talk. I wanted to pass the evening in this very same hall, while Zoya knitted and Abdul Latief watched TV, until it was time to sleep again" (Vijay, 2019, p.138).

The representation of the dead child often fills a gap in the discourse, a symbolic "no-place." This absence is frequently created by parents' silence or by shattered, warped stories that are characterized by avoidance or denial (Derrida as cited in Schwab, 2010, p.134). Zoya's use of present tense while talking about Ishfaaq to Shalini "This is Ishfaaq's favorite dish. He used to wait all year for Ramadan, just so he could eat this after fasting" (Vijay, 2019, p.90) shows her denial despite being aware of the fact that it has been eight years since Ishfaaq has been abducted and he might be dead. Zoya's silence and wrapped up stories show her avoidance of the truth resulting in her creating a phantom figure of Ishfaaq that haunts her. For Zoya, making a feast and cooking Ishfaaq's favorite foods is like ritualistic actions meant to feed the ghostly presence of Ishfaaq's corpse and pave the way for his possible reunion with the family. In Shalini's life, this ritual made Ishfaaq a ghost brother who, despite his overpowering presence, could never become real (Schwab, 2010, p.122). And, through their therapeutic relationship, Zoya's trauma gets transmitted to Shalini leaving in her a sense to fill the void. When Zoya told Shalini about Ishfaaq's disappearance, Shalini "found that she couldn't speak" (Vijay, 2019, p.103). Trauma transference occurs in Shalini in the form of silence—a traumatic event shatters our ability to speak. In order to do that Shalini tries to play the role of a figure from their fantasy. Replacement children have experienced the horror of the Holocaust through multiple generations and are plagued by the thought of a death, or even millions of deaths, that they were not there at (Schwab, 2010, p.141). The past looms large in Shalini's life, always hovering over her present and causing her discomfort. Despite not having experienced the trauma of losing a child, Ishfaaq's disappearance has left a lasting impression on her mind, influencing her worries in ways she is not always able to articulate. According to Schwab (2010) this is the core of transgenerational transference: the lingering sadness of a loss that was not experienced directly but was inherited and passed on like a sorrowful legacy. Shalini feels a wave of panic when Amina remarks nonchalantly that Aaqib Riyaz's small boy walks alone to school. She asked him right away, "He goes by himself? "Aren't you worried?" (Vijay, 2019, p.165). isn't only a watchful observer's concern; it's also a reflex that arises from deeper, unsaid anxieties. Not only does her pulse race at the prospect of a young boy in peril, but it also twitches at the vague memories of Ishfaaq's departure. She can't quite explain the horror the youngster wandering by himself incites, but it comes over her like a knock at the door of the past. Shalini has never lost a child, but the fear has been instilled in her by the silence of those who have, by half-trusted stories, and by unsaid feelings. Shalini experiences an unidentified fear stemming from the disappearance of Zoya's son, Ishfaaq. As though any child in her circle is always in danger of being stolen by an unseen power, just as Ishfaaq was, she transfers that anxiety onto the defenceless boy who is walking the half-hour to school. Shalini is concerned about more than just a youngster she hardly knows right now. She is reliving a trauma that she has never personally experienced by mentally going over the indescribable pain of losing a mother. Shalini's natural reaction is to defend Aaqib when danger suddenly arises on the streets he walks, as though doing so might somehow help her escape the hold of her ingrained anxieties.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Shalini epitomizes the metaphorical role of the "replacement child," embodying the profound challenges in the process of mourning and the complex inheritance of trauma among Kashmiris. As a transgenerational recipient, she is haunted by deaths she did not directly witness, experiencing these losses indirectly through her therapeutic bond with Zoya. This second-hand exposure manifests in various emotional states—ranging from grief and anxiety to hypervigilance and numbness, and even emotional unavailability or uncontrolled rage. Volkan's concept of "deposit representations" is crucial in understanding this phenomenon. These representations, deposited into the child's developing psyche by their traumatized parents, reveal how Shalini carries the burden of unprocessed grief and distorted mourning from previous generations. Such cumulative trauma is not merely an abstract inheritance but a tangible

legacy that shapes her emotional and psychological landscape. Through Shalini's narrative, we observe the pervasive and enduring impact of transgenerational trauma, highlighting the intricate ways in which the unresolved sorrows of one generation are passed down and embodied in the next.

Recommendations

This study underscores the importance of addressing and acknowledging these deep-seated wounds to break the cycle of inherited grief and facilitate genuine healing. The manifestations of intergenerational trauma can be further studied in the literary narratives of other marginalized oppressed communities, for example, the African-American literature, Palestinian literature, to name a few.

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