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**“Homeless at the Seashore”: Trauma in Refugee Narrative, *Sea Prayer*,  
by Khaled Hosseini\***

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**Abstract**

Trauma theory provides an insight into modern literary works particularly to those, which are written upon prevailing chaos in the world. As Cathy Caruth underlines in her *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), trauma theory discusses the disturbed psyche and the factors lie beneath. Caruth has introduced literary trauma theory and three aspects of personal trauma that are “repetitious, timeless and unspeakable” (p. 8), which are found interwoven in Khaled Hosseini’s refugee narrative, his illustrated novella *Sea Prayer* (2018). The novella depicts the perennial problems faced through war, violence and refugee life. Hosseini urges the readers to reflect on the personal and collective plight that refugees suffered when they set out for better life opportunities. The novella is about a traumatic experience, and Caruth’s concepts on literary trauma theory provide a useful frame to deal with traumatic memory and its repercussions. Thus, the study seeks to display the glimpses of personal and collective trauma and traumatic memory in the related theory. The article designed in the descriptive methodology draws reader’s attention to displacement and nostalgia since the novella unfolds the dire dimension of human civilization sided with inhumane occurrences particularly in the Mediterranean region. It intends to reach at the conclusion that Hosseini’s refugee narrative highlights the traumatic existence and the plight of the refugees who are torn between nostalgia and traumatic memory.

**Key words:** Trauma, nostalgia, displacement, refugee narrative, *Sea Prayer*

“I am tired of humanizing myself” (Baha’ Ebdeir, cited in Bakara, 2020, p. 289)

**Introduction**

Recent developments in global sociopolitical perspectives have resulted in newer forms of troubles. Nations, which have formerly enjoyed relative security within their borders, are now dragged in multilayered hardships and compelled with working out solutions against new

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scenarios of diversified ends. In this respect, Büyükgözü (2023) states that “[t]he global policies and conflicts that arose at the start of the 20th century have provoked global refugee crises for more than a century and made the belonging crisis and adaptation issues controversial” (p. 16). The worldwide crisis worsened the conditions that led to the displacement of oppressed masses of crowds who became undefended against heart-breaking conditions. Recent transnational developments increase the frequency of enforced migrations to take up sea and land journeys.

Global societies have witnessed the prevailing refugee crisis in the Middle East in Syria on an unprecedented scale. Syria has gone through a drastic economic situation together with the regime's hostile attitude, mainly focusing on the urban region's protestations. Through a sectarian civil war with the inclusion of radical religious groups, Syria experienced a large wave of displacements in modern history, affecting 13 million people in total and 6.6 million refugees (Kadavan, 2021, p. 3), the most significant portion of which headed towards Turkish borders, land, and sea. Hence, the representation of refugees in literary texts has triggered a literary urgency, leading to abundant literary works depicting refugee lives.

The dominant term, refugee, uses refugee narrative/literature to verbalize refugee experiences. Kadavan states that “[t]here is no clear and official definition of the term refugee literature” (2021, p. 4). Yet, it can be moderately defined as texts of refugees, economic migrants, and stateless individuals. In this definition, we encounter creative diversity of refugee narrative as a subgenre of novel that has grown over the recent decades through chaotic internationalism and forced migration in parallel with global politics.

The association of refugee literature and postcolonial studies can be cited as a natural outcome in literary history (Gallien, 2018, p. 722). The representation of the forcibly displaced masses sparks off a new subaltern who goes beyond postcolonial discourse, which utilizes terms like asylum seekers, unprivileged, uninvited, unwelcome, and discriminated migrants from home states in massive civilian protests accompanied by state oppression. In the definition of the genre Bağlama states:

Literary works, which can be classified as part of refugee literature, mostly provide realistic snapshots of the nature of the refugee crisis and thematise the process of victimization and dehumanization experienced by internally displaced persons, refugees and asylum seekers fleeing the civil war in Syria or elsewhere in the world. (2020, p. 632)

Refugee narratives strikingly illustrate hazardous journeys launched by such displaced people in search of shelter in lands with xenophobic attitudes. Further, they also criticize the unstable policies of the nations that give rise to testimonial literature of traumatic experiences. As has been observed in numerous incidents, refugees undergo large-scale medical, psychological, and traumatic disasters even after they manage to reach their

destinations. Some examples of refugee literature can be cited as: *The Amazing Adventures of Kavalier and Clay* (2000) by Michael Chabon, *Call Me American* (2018) by Abdi Nor Iftin, *Sweetness in the Belly* (2005) by Camilla Gibb, *Exist West* (2017) by Mohsin Hamid, *Enrique's Journey* (2006) by Sonia Nazario and *A Land of Permanent Goodbyes* (2018) by Atia Abawi.

Refugees are compelled to launch horrendous journeys from their homeland to various destinations, which are reported to include around 130 different nations so far. The land and sea journeys of refugees across mainly European destinations, labeled as "journeys of nonarrivals," make up the core content of the genre. The destinations of "[n]onarrivals depict the uncertainty, hopelessness, and insecurity" (Kadavan, 2021, p. 6) the journey of which realized in primitive vehicles and boats.

With its epistolary style, *Sea Prayer* (henceforth this edition will be referred to as SP) (2018) by Khaled Hosseini, the acclaimed Afghan-American author, recounts the tale of a Syrian father obliged to take a sea voyage in the Mediterranean for a safe port away from the homeland. The narrator-father attends to his sleeping son, Marvan, recollecting the 'good old days' memories and particular sceneries of the Syrian city of Homs, the hometown, and the forthcoming hazards of sailing in a small boat. He refers to the bright and joyful summer days when he was a child by recalling the grandparents' house in Syria in the line "[t]he stirring of olive trees in the breeze, the bleating of his grandmother's goat, the clanking of her cooking pots" (SP, p. 5). Hosseini designed the novella as a tribute to the large masses of immigrants with families who have been forcibly separated from home due to civil war and destitution. As a goodwill ambassador to the United Nations since 2006, Hosseini hopes to raise awareness in large masses regarding refugees "from a perspective of humanitarianism" (He, 2021, p.74).

The novella, *Sea Prayer*, is classified as a refugee narrative, handling the issue of home, displacement, and the doomed travels of the displaced people from the Syrian territory. Hosseini makes use of the wide scope of the pictorial illustrations of the renowned artist Dan Williams (Babu, 2021, p. 46). The novella is in epistolary form "[f]rom a father to his son on their journey to find a safe shelter" (Babu, 2021, p. 46), the first part of which is composed of retrospective narrations of the city of Homs in the prewar period. In the further pages, we are drawn into traumatic sufferings and the laments of the city inhabitants. It depicts the emotional and tragic experiences of the inhabitants of the city of Homs in Syria in the aftermath of the Syrian Civil War in the region (Kadavan, 2021, p. 8). Bringing out the heart-breaking demise of Alan Kurdi, who "[w]as washed away dead" (Kadavan, 2021, p. 7) onto the shores of Turkish southern land in September 2015, Hosseini strikingly depicts in drawings the multifaceted interpretations of the Syrian refugee crisis, their homelessness, and hazardous journeys to escape the oppression, grimness, traumatic and xenophobic demeanor against them (Kadavan, 2021, p. 1). The refugee narrative illustrates both traumatic memories confined in nostalgia and the hope aligned with futuristic prayer for the war-torn refugees.

## Trauma

Trauma studies incorporate versatile fields of science such as psychology, sociology, and relevant sciences. It is defined as the “emotional response” someone develops for a pressing and “terrible event” (Oulwan, 2021, p. 31). Such emotional reaction does not only contain the repercussions in relation to a hurt personality but also the reaction that pertains the background of a wound, which proclaims a genuine and individual traumatic event. It is also defined as a menace and danger to life or corporal composure and a hazardous confrontation with violence and death. Basing the main concepts on Freudian psychoanalysis and as the forerunner of literary trauma Cathy Caruth (1996) introduces three significant traits of personal trauma: “repetitious, timeless, and unspeakable” (p. 8). She underlines that trauma is recurring since it is in flashbacks and reoccurs in the mind of a person. It is timeless because it makes a person dependent on his past. Regardless of the location, personal trauma reappears to dwell in the mind and occurs repeatedly in the form of flashbacks mingled with both past and present. The next notion encloses linguistics capital and consciousness that renders the trauma unspeakable impairing both language and consciousness (Caruth, 1996, p. 11).

Caruth contends that “[a] traumatic event could lead to the disclosure of a human voice crying out from the wound: a voice that witnesses a truth” (1996, p. 3). In other words, “[a]n incident in the perimeter of a trauma is likely to occur in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor” (1996, p. 4). Such an event remains at the heart of the cognitive process of “repetitive seeing of the story of the accident” (Caruth, 1996, p. 92). Hence, in this occasion, the traumatic event “[e]xemplifies an infraction in mind instigating inciting an awareness of the threat to life” that consequently composes post-traumatic symptoms (Caruth, 1996, p. 62). Thus, from this perspective, the traumatic incident manufactures potent impressions of the past that the person cannot get rid of. Such impact cannot be restricted to past traumatic events but recurs in the aftermath. It is not limited to an incident of the past; it is a daily-experienced reality. Caruth stipulates that such a chaotic condition is a display of a dominant experience of immediate or disastrous incidents in which the repercussions come to the surface in an uncontrolled appearance of hallucinations (1996, p. 11).

Traumatic memory haunts the minds on two levels: personal and collective. Chaotic events expose specific individuals or exclusive groups of people to certain results with haunting dimensions. On a collective level, such events as wars, civil wars, natural disasters, or enforced displacements affect the whole social structure. Traumatic disorders come about in the form of panic attacks, flashbacks, and nightmares triggered by the past incidents. Hence, Syrians suffer from collective post-war syndromes that occur in traumatic aftermaths collectively and individually.

## **Displacement and Nostalgia**

The plight of the refugees is composed of displacement, the definition of which contains the cases and incidents in which the affected people are obligated to depart from the original location, homes, and towns to get exposed to ensuing results in distressing dimensions to attain possible safety. As can be seen from the definition, displacement is in-betweenness and multiple experiences that compel the victim to be tied to history, collective and individual memory; as it is imbued with nostalgia, one cannot help remembering. In this perspective, the displaced person is dominated by the burden of absence in life and memory.

Edward Said underlines geographical displacement as an enforced departure and being exiled from the place in a “continuous state of unwilling dislocation” (1999, p. 34). According to Homi Bhabha (1994), displacement could be seen as a social experience that connects the discourse of past and present. Yet, such an experience remains at the rim of an in-between reality (p. 19); through the social-cultural lens, the refugee is rated as a figure in the limbo of a significant historical and postcolonial migration that is both transitional and transnational. In this global and transnational world, the refugee is left at the epicenter of a border problem. Bhabha contends that a future life of ambivalence threatens experience in target destinations as nostalgia about the homeland continues under all conditions (1994, p. 21).

The term nostalgia has been broadly defined beyond the borders and inclusion of homesickness, which may create a dichotomy in the mind as it is designated in the perspectives of returning to the long-yearned locations. Hence, definitions include “wistful longing for something one has known in the past” (Hornby, 1978, p. 582). Nostalgia is associated with a yearning to return to one's home, family and friends. Therefore, it encapsulates a sentimental yearning for the happiness of a former place or time (Sedikidies et al. 2002, p. 305) and a bittersweet longing for past things, persons, or situations. Nostalgia has been deemed to include the mixture of ever-present heartache for the past and, at the same time, somehow sufferance for sentimental pain as well as enhanced self-continuity maintained by remembering an occurrence triggered through prototypic traits of nostalgia. Maintenance of the self is also designed with the influence of alerted nostalgia on meaning in life, sustained spirituality, and, in turn, existentially empowered meaning in life. In this broad definition lies the agent of suppressing the undesired effect of disappointment and enhanced well-being by decreasing the negative repercussions of limited time horizons and strengthening authenticity. That is to say, nostalgia is sided with pleasant, reflective, and bittersweet memories.

As an essential element of traumatic memory, nostalgia is affiliated with old times and prevalent childhood in addition to yearning for pleasurable memories. From this perspective, it is necessary to distinguish between nostalgia and homesickness, as both are handled in literary texts imbued with trauma. Homesickness is related to one's place of origin whereas nostalgia carries an effect on a wide array of belongings and objects and on diversified

individuals, events, and locations. Homesickness studies are based on the psychological problems that can surface in times of oppression and anxiety, especially when a person is in transition. Nostalgia passes over social groups and periods and at this moment is attained over and beyond the cultures and amidst proper adults, children, and senior individuals. In this way, Sedikides et al. (2008) define nostalgia as “a sentimental longing for one's past” (p. 305) whether “a negative, ambivalent, or positive emotion” (p. 305). Nostalgia takes place due to undesired and low moods, and, in some cases, it is evaluated as sentimental, desired, positive, and relevant. Its emotional key passes through primary psychological functions, which manufacture “[r]elaxing effects, increase self-esteem, foster social connectedness, and alleviate existential threats” (Sedikides et al., 2008, p. 305).

Said (1999) adds, “[n]ostalgia, homesickness, and belonging are trapped in the base of memories by places” (p. 35) where the person lives and writes about. In Said's statements, we observe the discourses and dichotomy of past and present, which further reiterates that nostalgia both allures physical detachment and generates the causes that tie a person to the homeland, which is rated as transformative, positivistic through “[t]he dialectics of memory and displacement” (1999, p. 35).

Salmose (2018) suggests that “[n]ostalgia fluctuates between two opposing clusters of happiness and sadness, with either sphere dominant in different cases; inconsistent with a uniformly positive view” (p. 336), he advocates that it encompasses the everlasting sadness and melancholy of life and can be profound and deep-rooted in the conflicts of clashing desires (p. 337). Thus, in the definition of dichotomy, duality and hybridity are the standard terms to denote the conflicts and their repercussions between old and new and conflicting wants originating from loss and change. Svetlana Boym states that “[n]ostalgia is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed” (2001, p. 45). Thus, the impact of nostalgia is double the exposure between home and abroad, past and present, dream, and reality.

### **Trauma and Nostalgia in *Sea Prayer***

Influenced by the heart-piercing image of the demised Syrian refugee boy Alan Kurdi, Hosseini is self-tasked to verbalize the pathos and tragedy of the international refugees, who have been exposed to pathetic conditions. Khaled Hosseini shapes the body of such tragedies in the pages of the refugee novella *Sea Prayer*. The cruelty of the Syrian war is seen as a manufacturer of refugees who had to escape into neighboring regions from sea and land. As an expectant outcome, such a big-scale displacement and plight has an ever-lasting blow upon the psyche and their abilities to deal with the trauma aftermath. Seen from this angle, Alan Kurdi has an unforgettable effect on the minds globally of the Middle Easterners fleeing war-torn territories and trying to find a haven somewhere away from home. Hosseini demonstrates the imprinted image of the Syrian war in the form of a letter by a displaced “[S]yrian father to his sleeping son, Marwan, during their painful waiting for dawn to break and a boat to arrive” (SP, p. 37).

The novella showcases refugee's traumatic present, and their potential fears of the future. Syrian refugees are described as individuals burdened with traumatic experiences beset with profundity of obligatory separation and destitution. To disseminate the pain and inhumanity of displacement to all corners of the world, Hosseini utilizes the novella as an embodiment of fear and uncertainty in a striking picture of the Marvan family. In this connection Oulwan states that “[t]he brutality of the Syrian war has a significant impact on Syrians’ present and future as scarring their psyche and their abilities to cope with or assimilate in their host countries” (2021, p. 40). It is seen that Syrian war acts as the impact of traumatic experience upon the individual psyche that is also applied to the collective emotional experience of cultural and ethnic groups. The uprooted refugees are exposed to “[d]isruptive traumatic experiences that impede their ability to organize in the external world and to perceive the psychological, sociological and cultural significance of new locations” (Balaev, 2018, p. 360). Such traumatic experience is reflected in the novella in the characterization of a displaced Syrian father who narrates the fear and uncertainty I their potential voyage in the Mediterranean.

*Sea Prayer* is a manifestation of compassion and emotions organically inherent in the family. The narrator-father, who is pathetically traumatized, is, thus, the embodiment of solid attachment and selfless devotion in the displaced family. He addresses his sleeping son in the deepness of love as his “precious cargo, Marwan, the most precious there ever was” and “pray[s] the sea knows this” (SP. p. 39). Marwan’s father is suppressed by the fears of taking him on a potentially deadly sea journey in the treacherous Mediterranean, the trauma of which impedes his narration and language skills. In connection with the feature of communicating the tragedy, Çameli (2023) states that “[t]he unpredictable way in which the reenactment of a traumatic moment in the past puts a traumatized person in a challenging situation to find the right words to explain the suffering” (p. 48). So, a traumatized person gets into a hardship to construct an effective way of narrating the traumatic memory in the already dire straits of the sea journey. The father is unable to verbalize the escape, having nothing to do but pray. All he can do is pray: “Pray God steers the vessel true when the shores slip out of eyesight and we are a flyspeck in the heaving waters, pitching and tilting, easily swallowed. I pray the sea knows this. Inshallah. How I pray the sea knows this” (SP, p. 39). The displaced Syrian father is defined,

... as an example of the Syrian refugees who are trapped in a loop of psychological impact created by traumatic conditions of enforced displacement. In this risky voyage, the narrator embodies the Syrian refugees' totality who have to flee their homes and take to the sea, delineating the collective experience. (Oulwan, 2021, p.41)

The collective experience includes another phase of trauma that is, being unwanted and unwelcome in one's country of destination. The universality of the “unwelcome” refugees is very effective when Hosseini includes other nationals such as Afghans, Somalis, Iraqis, and Syrians who are equally disillusioned out of fear and stress in the face of being rejected at the borders. In this case, as Hosseini underlines, refugees have no option but to “[t]ake misfortune elsewhere” (SP, p. 30). Hosseini emphatically illustrates that dispelled as refugees in the different yet similar risky voyages; they are confined in the vicious circle of continuous “search of home” on a night “on the cold and moonlit beach” where “crying babies” and worrying women’s “[t]ongues we don't speak” (SP, p. 30). Because of the picturizing traumatic slavery of the frustrated people, these people intend to unite in the trauma to alleviate its dehumanizing effects. This is why, as we see in *Sea Prayer*, they wait in silence with their eyes on the sea for the boat to arrive (SP, p. 30). They seem to be motionless in the face of traumatic blow to their life and honor.

The boat journey into the sea throws the refugees into a traumatic future that is based on the potential failure to be admitted in the target nations, if they can manage to land on. Yet, before arrival at the target countries’ gates, the refugees’ destination on the inflatable boats is not definite nor secure in the middle of the Mediterranean. There are many reports about the uninvited refugees who lost their lives being drowned or collected by the concerned nations into the refugee camps. Hosseini describes the traumatic condition of the refugees in the boats as being “in dread of” and “[i]mpatient for sunrise” (SP, p. 30) when the narrator addresses his sleeping son while waiting for the boats to arrive before dawn. Even though “the sunrise” is supposed to denote a hopeful turn of their fate and the nostalgic connotation to the prewar times, the narrator is certain that “the sunrise” would not cherish the “bittersweet” memories in this non-human atmosphere, as it is painted colored gray/dark in the illustrations of the pages. The illustrator makes a parallel perception between the resulting trauma and the memory that breeds trauma. The metaphor of “[t]he sunrise” (SP, p. 30) highlights the commonality of the plight and miseries of the refugees who are focused on the reconstitution of their broken lives in their destination as referred to as non-arrivals.

Traumatic nostalgia makes up a great portion of the novella, in which the narrator begins with the days in the form of nostalgia as if to increase the awareness of the good old days before the war. The narrator, who still has a national solid attachment to the hometown, sounds proud of the nostalgic past that could be rated equal to a proper country in the region. His melancholic nostalgic ties to Syria are underlined by Hosseini’s plot structure that is oriented into epistolary form, a very viable method in that it carries the notion of a trustable narrator. Father’s statements of nostalgic tone create the impression on the reader that prewar bittersweet life in Homs worsen his psyche since the impossibility of recapturing nostalgic life dominates in his thoughts and dreams no matter how much he tries to conceal this fact from



his son. Nostalgia is composed and blended with trauma since it has led to exilic displacement in the chronology of the story, ranging from protests to the bombs in the city square. In the formation of nostalgia, Hosseini pays attention to including the community spirit before the war, as is seen in the mention of the uncles and relatives in the narrator's recounting. The narrator mentions his brother and the villages' location where both "[s]pread the mattress on the roof of grandfathers' farmhouse outside of Homs" (SP, p. 2). This showcases bittersweet days in which city inhabitants, relatives, and beloveds lived in a community of relative peace. The narrator recalls that "[w]e woke in the mornings to the stirring of olive trees in the breeze, to the bleating of your grandmother's goats, the clanking of her cooking pots, the air cool, and the sun a pale rim of persimmon to the east" (SP, p. 5). In this sense, the narrator, who is on one hand fragmented in the wait for the boat, on the other hand sounds to preserve and transfer heritage of the former communal peace and prewar unity in the city to give bittersweet motivation to Marvan. By doing so, the father describes the prevalent societal and demographic structure of Homs in nostalgic tone. Yet, his trauma resonates in his words when he wishes his son also would have the same feeling mixed with nostalgia and peace in the prewar period:

I wish you remembered Homs as I do, Marvan. In its bustling Old City, a mosque for us Muslims, a church for our Christian neighbors, and a souk for us all to haggle over gold pendants and fresh produce and bridal dresses, I wish you remembered the crowded lanes smelling of fried kibbeh and the evening walks we took your mother around Clock Tower Square. (SP, pp. 11-13)

So, Marvan "[w]ouldn't have forgotten the farmhouse, the soot of its stonewalls, the creek where uncles and [his father] built a thousand boyhood dams" (SP, p. 9). The father-narrator deals with the diversity of the local population in Homs who lived in harmony and compliance with expected social norms until the civil war. He feels grief in that Marvan, by the age, is uninformed about the common ground of social content and mutuality. Further, the narrator describes the familial harmony and love to Marvan that "[I] have a sharply etched memory of your mother from that trip, showing you a herd of cows grazing in a field blown through with wildflowers" (SP, p. 8). In line with the definition of nostalgia in literature, the good-old days tend to turn into traumatic recollections as hybridity of feelings is authentically inherent in nostalgia.

Yet, nostalgia mingles with the present realities, and the tone turns into a darker description of the civil war, forming trauma that occurs in repeated forms in flashbacks whose weight can be seen in the lines that describe "[t]he skies spitting bombs" (SP, p. 19). We observe that his mind travels back and forth, where he remembers past Syria in a civil war with bombings and burials.

The novella is split into two halves between pre and post-war homeland, Homs, depicting the “[f]amilies walking in squares and stars in the sky, while the illustrations about the present are significantly darker with” (Oulwan, 2021, p. 45) the absence of gatherings as the dominant features. The line from the novella “[f]irst came the protest, then the Siege” (SP, p.17) contains flashbacks, not only located in the severity of the war but also mingling of the past and present that trigger traumatic memories as he grieves over the lost peace, destroyed markets and the city arena. In trauma, it is possible to witness sudden shifts of memories moving from bright to dark times, a technique also utilized in the color illustrations of the pages. The narrator’s flashbacks give the readers a picture of his past when he relayed the days in familial and collective well-being as in the lines “My dear Marvan, in the long summers of childhood ... farmhouse outside of Homs” (SP, p. 2). The formation of nostalgia in *Sea Prayer* is imbued with bittersweet memories of the past and the stark, deadening realities of the present. Therefore, Caruth’s notion of “[l]onging for the lost time protesting the sadism of the present” (1996, p. 83) is evident to the reader in the juxtaposing the contrast between pre-war and current Syria.

In the middle part of the novella, where Hosseini handles the days of oppression and the decision process to flee the country, we see the change in the colorization of the illustrations from bright to darker colors. The author makes use of the striking sadness of the father for his son in the emphasis on the traumatic references to the present-day brutality and destruction in the city. Such an effective technique is expected to raise awareness on a global scale about the catastrophic aftermath of the war. The plight of inhabitants in war-torn Homs shows the timelessness of the traumatic memory. The father speaks to Marvan, “You know a bomb crater ... A swimming hole” (SP, p. 24), in a statement that sets up the core of the refugee narrative since it indicates the enforcement of the people to reside in missiles and bombs. Hosseini employs the narrator’s “repetitive seeing” (Caruth, 1996, p. 83) remembrances of peaceful vs. brutal, pre vs. post-war Syria to expose the reader to the fear of living in a permanent state of “in-betweenness”: past and present. The description of collective trauma by way of personal traumatic memory can be a viable approach to imprint acceptable universalism in the awareness of what is experienced. In this regard, Hosseini’s technique of forming a transition from past to present seems to deepen the influence of the tragedy in the refugee narrative. Having said this, the father’s failure to keep the promise to his son for a better future and to sustain the trust resonates with the personal trauma that the father is exposed to:

Hold my hand. Nothing bad will happen. These are only words. A father’s tricks. It slays your father, your faith in him. Because all I can think tonight is how deep the sea, and how vast, how indifferent. How powerless I am to protect you from it. (SP, pp. 33-35)

So, in the quotation Hosseini refers to and utilizes the so-called family's solidarity in the face of impending dangers for stressing how hopelessly the refugees are trying to survive in traumatic conditions.

We encounter traces of collective trauma in *Sea Prayer*, which leads to the damage to the communal ties. Such ties set up the rules, morals, values, and virtues that sustain societies through creating feelings for each other. Yet, in the face of collective trauma, communal bonds are endangered, the examples of which are proven in the post-war Syrian condition, the bare fiber of society deteriorated at the level of trauma. Forced migration is known as the main result of the breakage of this bond turned into a case of “[t]he skies spitting bombs” (SP, p. 18). The collapse of the social bonds is further reinforced in the lines: “Your mother is here tonight, Marvan, with us, on this cold and moonlit beach ... All of us in search of home” (SP, p. 30), a statement that displays both social collapse and war-torn populace in tight spots in the middle of the Mediterranean. The narrator uses the pronouns “us” and “we” to denote the collective sufferings in the journeys that potentially end up in nonarrivals (Shoukat et al., 2021, p. 129). Hosseini pertains to the collective suffering saying “[w]e should take our misfortunes elsewhere” (SP, p. 30), and refers to the potential refusals of the refugees at the sea and land borders. Caruth notes that repetitive rejects deepen the trauma in the memories, resulting in distrust in the future and a mood of fear and regression. The narrator comes up with the only solution, and that is, “Pray God steers the vessel true when the shores slip out of eyeshot” (SP, p. 39), a wish full of fear and depression. Yet, in an attempt to save the lives, asylum seekers take the risks to travel across the sea and during the journey many lose their lives, turning the Mediterranean into a cemetery.

## **Conclusion**

Literary trauma studies underlie refugee narratives, an example of which is seen in Khaled Hosseini's novella *Sea Prayer*, which reflects the ruthless war and its aftermath in personal and collective sufferings. Theoretical basis in the perspective of Caruth incorporates timeless past, flashbacks, nostalgia, and hope for future. The illustrated pages of the text delve into the sad past, destruction, and collapse of society that eventually compel the refugees to travel in search of safe havens potentially defined as “nonarrival spots”. Thus, Hosseini discloses distrust and fear when the refugees are not admitted to secure territories and accordingly verbalizes the impediments that await in their journeys. For this purpose, literary trauma theory provides insight into refugee narratives under the prevailing transnational policies. Thus, examining *Sea Prayer* in the context of literary trauma theory sheds light on the war-torn societies' personal and collective plight of the affected populations. Hosseini acts as the mouthpiece for the predicament of refugees. His intention of raising the refugee issue proves that literature must be tasked to disseminate its responsibility to help construct an international community of a shared future for humanity. The causes of refugee problems may

be wide-arrayed, diverse, and challenging to manage; yet, the future of humanity is seen to be reflected as an issue of global concern in international organizations (He, 2021, p. 82) and refugee narratives are expected to render prevailing efficacy in the formation transnational policies.

### Disclosures

No potential conflict or interest was reported by the author.

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