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# Inscribed in Genes: A Study of Transgenerational, Postcolonial Trauma

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This paper explores whether insights from genetics and neuroscience will help unravel the nature of transgenerational trauma as articulated in the works of Jonathan Saffran Foer and Susan Abulhawa, two twenty first century American authors tracing their lineage back to Ukraine and Palestine respectively. Besides insights from genetics and neurosciences, the paper makes use of perspectives afforded by trauma studies and postcolonial theory to explore the operation and mechanism of transgenerational trauma.

**Keywords**: Genetics, Neuroscience, Transgenerational Trauma, Postcolonial Trauma, Trauma Studies

## Introduction

The history of the study on genes does not extend beyond the past century. As Sidhartha Mukherjee demonstrates in *Genes: An Intimate Story,* our understanding of genes, chromosomes and DNA owe to the mind-boggling advances in biology during the latter half of the twentieth century (2017). Almost coterminous were the fresh insights in our understanding of brain and its complex mechanisms and self-deluding machinations. As Carl Zimmer describes it in *Soul Made Flesh,* the elevation of the brain from its status as a 'bowl of curds' to the 'seat of human consciousness and memory" is something that happened in the span of the last two centuries (2005). However, neuroscience and genetics are still unfolding fields that hold immense

prospects and pose innumerable challenges for humans and our fellow species.

Though genetics and the scientific insights into hereditary proneness to diseases are of recent provenance, our proverbs and creative literature attest to humanity's long, though vague and at times fallacious, notions regarding heredity. The entire science or pseudoscience of eugenics was bound up with human hopes and fears concerning the transmission of desirable or undesirable family traits. A host of linguistic expressions like 'chip of the old block' (English), *Vithu guanam pathu gunam* (Roughly -The good seed yields ten-fold the good- Malayalam), *Man Yushabiha abaahu wama dalam*- ( Roughly—Blame not him who resembles his dad -Arabic), all attest to our awareness of the role of ancestry in determining the qualities of the progeny. Probably, the Arabic proverb *Alhisanu hisanun wal himaru himarun walau roobiyal himaru bainal hisani al himau himarun* (Roughly- A horse is a horse and a donkey is a donkey, even if you raise a donkey, among horses, the donkey will still be a donkey) summarizes the ancient awareness of the role of ancestry in determining the traits and qualities of the progeny.

**Ibsen, Rushdie and Pamuk**

Even before Gregor Mendel's discoveries on inheritance became widely circulated, writers had shed valuable insights on the role of inheritance in determining human character. Ibsen does this in *Ghosts* where we see Oswald Alwing making advances towards Regina Engstrand, not knowing that she is the fruit the parental sin committed by his father and should have been more appropriately christened Regina Alving. The progeny's incestuous temptations point to the inherent proclivity towards the forbidden, a common legacy of the homo sapiens, and in Oswald's case specifically traceable to his immediate sire. Twentieth century writers like Gabriel Garcia Marquez and Salman Rushdie use this theme by further complicating and convoluting it, utilizing insights afforded by modern genetics. The Buendia family in *One Hundred Years of Solitude* are victims of transgenerational trauma, triggered by the impetuous action of Jose Arcadio Buendia, who in a fit of rage, ends up killing his friend

Prudencio Aguilar and consummating his marriage with Ursula. What is remarkable in the novel is the biological inheritance he bequeaths upon his children. Using insights from genetics, one can aver that Buendias are victims of the epigenetic changes wrought upon the patriarch's cerebral and genetic architecture thanks to his hasty and ill-thought-out action. Consequently, they all turn out to be flawed individuals, ill-adapted to social and family life. Salman Rushdie's Aadam Azeez and his children present a more intriguing picture. Born of a passion mediated through a perforated sheet, the Heidelberg-trained doctor's progeny find themselves to be fractured and fragmented beings, teetering on the edge of sanity and dangerously 'vulnerable to women and history' not unlike their progenitor (1981, p.4).

**Epigenetics, Brain and Transgenerational Trauma in Susan Abulhawa**

The above analysis demonstrates how the genetic cargo, often carrying contraband goods thrust into the bargain as a result of some primordial crime committed by/upon one's ancestors, triggers a chain reaction across generations. Recent scientific advances in the field of epigenetics, neurology, and cognitive psychology have illuminated our understanding of human behaviour as something intimately bound up with biology. Though scientists still debate the extent of genetic determinism, there is little dispute about the role of biology in the social and cultural lives of individuals and collectivities. As we saw, creative writers were quick to seize upon this awareness to further explore the complex and elusive psychology of the human species spilling across generations.

Humans are complex machines whose activities are the result of both pre, past and post programming. As Steven Pinker argues, even at birth, we are not blank slates; but bearers of genetic information capable of filling many huge tomes or volumes of *Britanica Encyclopedia*, as Mukherjee explains (Pinker, 2002; Mukherjee, 2017). This information according to epigenetics is constantly subject to inscriptions, re-inscriptions, superscription and erasures. Though these changes may not fundamentally alter the structure of the genes,

they cause changes in their texture by altering their linings, or as some epigenticists describe it by attaching them with specific tags (Bosagna, 2016).

The most important human organ, thus subject to life-long epigenetic changes is the human brain. David Eagleman, in his study of the brain describes how brain is an ensemble of billions of interconnected neurons that constantly fire chemicals, and in the process, alters their wiring (2015). The proverbial truism among neuroscientists states: neurons that fire together wire together. This naturally implies brain wiring to be subject to lifelong alterations. Eagleman further expounds how brain undergoes a rapid succession of synaptic pruning during early childhood. It is this pruning that augments and diminishes brain's ability in various areas including receptivity to certain sounds and tonal variations. Most of us fail to distinguish between various Japanese sounds because of the pruning that leaves our brains incapable of distinguishing them. On the other hand, the specific linguistic milieu in which the Japanese children grow up is one that stimulates and strengthens these connections (Eagleman, 2015).

The implications of this for trauma studies and transgenerational trauma can hardly be gainsaid. As trauma theorists insist, trauma leaves its imprint on the brain. The scars wrought by traumatic experiences have the power to alter the synaptic connections of the brain and force the victim to look upon the world in an entirely new way. They begin to look upon the familiar world and even words through a radically altered lens. For the families of those who died in the 9/11 attacks, the word "aeroplane" has a stronger and tragic resonance than for the globe trotter whose business class travels are mostly congenial. This is not only true of events of global scale, but those of a mundane nature: the victim of a vicious dog attack will be dogged by dreadful images of a dog much different from that of a dog-owner who takes pride in parading her canine.

If the changes thus wrought on the brain chemistry and synaptic connections is transmissible across generations as some epigeneticists and trauma theorists argue (Hirsch, 2019; Wolynn, 2016)

the implications for victims of colonial and global violence are something we will have to analyze with a broader frame of reference that should include not only the direct victims of such events but also their descendants and dependents.

The novels of Abulhawa and Foer give ample hints of this kind of transgenerational trauma and its epigenetic transmission. All the three novels published by Abulhawa deal with the lives of displaced and dispossessed Palestinian families. Though, they all engage with transgenerational trauma in varying measures, this paper is pivoted on her first two novels, viz. *Mornings in Jenin* (2010) and *The Blue Between Sky and Water* (2015) with passing references to the third one. I propose to begin with the second novel, since its central narrative thread is itself built on the heredity theme, despite its crowded canvass being a rich collage of a host of vertiginous themes and motifs. As the title indicates colours form an important motif in the plot. However, it is not the "blue" between sky or water, but the "green" in one of her eyes that leads the protagonist Nur to her eventual recognition and reunion with her ancestral family. At the moment of reunion, the family is in Gaza, displaced as they are from their ancestral village Bait Dars, following the Israeli invasion.

Nur inherits her mismatched eye from her great paternal aunt Mariam, shot dead by an Israeli soldier during the family's eviction from their ancestral village. Nazmiyeh, the eldest of the Baraka siblings has a ready explanation for her younger sister's strange eye complexion. She explains: "Some Roman stud probably stuck his dick in our ancestral line a few hundred years ago and now it's poking out of my poor sister's eye" (Abulhawa, 2015, p.16). Decades later, Nur is born with the same kind of mismatched eyes. But by that time the destiny of the Barka family has been "inevitably dislocated, and some pieces" have "got lost on the other side of the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans" (p.80). It is out of such a piece that Nur is born, i.e., to Nazmiyeh's brother's son Mhammad and his Castilian wife. Nur's life in America is one of travails. The deaths of her father and then her grandfather cause her to be sent to one foster family after another, punctuated by intervals of return to her callous and indifferent mother and abusive stepfather. Her Castilian mother, prefers the new-born

twins to her elder daughter and is ashamed of the daughter's partial Arab lineage. She baptizes Nur and has her christened as Nubia.

This further shatters Nur's even otherwise battered sense of self. In fact, the whole novel is the chronicle of a broken people, who get broken again thanks to an inexorable fate. In Abulhawa's words it is the story of refugees being made refugees again (Abulhawa, 2010, p.84). For Abulhawa, who went through the same kind of experiences, this is a recurring theme in her novels. The narrative ark comes to a climax, with Nur's arrival in Gaza as a US trained health professional; there, through a coincidence, she is reunited with her paternal family. Though realistically portrayed, this reunion, aided by the striking resemblance her mismatched eyes bear with those of her grand-aunt, has a fairy tale quality. But unlike conventional fairy-tales with happy endings, this is one charged with suspense and foreboding. For Abulhawa, there is more to the genetic inheritance suggested by eye colour than biological legacy. As Nahar, the protagonist of *Against the Loveless World* (Abulhawa, 2020) makes it clear, for Palestinians fate itself seems to be 'inherited, like eye color'(p.118). In all her novels Abulhawa, like Nahar, harps on this theme of the inheritability of fate.

This belief in the transmissibility of traumatic fate is something Abulhawa shares with theorists like Marienne Hirsch and Mark Wolyn, as mentioned earlier. The novel presents further examples that buttress this interpretation. In keeping with the mildly magical realist tone the story assumes, the child Mariam is invested with the ability of clairvoyance. She is in the habit of communicating with spirits and conversing with an imaginary boy named Khalid whose hair is marked with a queer white streak. When Nur arrives in Palestine, several years after her grand aunt's death, her job as a paramedical professional is the care of a boy named Khaled, the grandson of Nazmiyeh with a rare white streak. Thus, through a magical realist stroke, the novelist choreographs the fulfilment of Mariam's prophesy while hinting at the genetic transmissibility of eye and even hair colour.

Nur's charge Khaled suffers from Locked-In Syndrome, the result of an Israeli bomb attack that occurs on the day he is to celebrate

his tenth birthday; in his words the day that marked the 'magical' 'double digit age.' Victims of Locked-In Syndrome retain cognitive ability but lose their motor abilities. It is through the voice of this character, rendered speechless, that the novel lends voice to the voiceless people of Gaza, in Nur's words, the world's 'largest open-air prison' (Abulhawa, 2015, p.8). Khaled's condition is a synecdoche for the Palestinian people, dispossessed, nullified and rendered voiceless. As the novel chronicles the lives of people in Gaza and their relatives scattered in Kuwait and America, we notice the profusion of vocabulary suggesting loss, emptiness, hollowness, brokenness and a sense of resolution and defiance that strives to battle against insurmountable obstacles. Nothing illustrates this sense of hollowness and emptiness than the underground tunnels and pathways that define and sustain the lives of the denizens of Gaza. They service the needs of cancer patients who wait their turn to sneak a passage through them for chemotherapy across the border in Egypt; digging and maintaining them provide jobs to young school children whose malnourished and undergrown bodies ideally suit the task, and operating them brings profits to the local mafia preying on the vulnerable cancer and kidney patients:

When the sky, land and sea were barricaded, we burrowed our bodies into the earth, like rodents, so we didn't die. The tunnels spread under our feet, like story lines that history wrote, erased, and rewrote. (Abulhawa, 2015, p.164)

The hollowed earth here and the rodents burrowing down it is a metaphor for the Palestinian people and their fate. As the character in *Against the Loveless World* puts it, for Palestinians, the ground beneath their feet is always shaky and shifting (Abulhawa, 2020, p.193); dispossessed and banished from their homeland they long for "an anchor and solid ground beneath" their feet (p.183). The absence of such an anchor pushes Abulhawa's characters into despair and defiance. All her protagonists are at one point or other forced to live underground, travel incognito or assume false identities. Amal, the protagonist of *Mornings in Jenin,* exemplifies this. Though born in the Jenin refugee camp to a once prosperous family rendered destitute and homeless by the occupation, her childhood is not one entirely

bereft of hope. She has a loving father, a protective brother and a mother full of energy and native charm. Her father calls her 'Amal' which means hope. He insists she is "Amal," with a long vowel which indicates "not just one hope" but "hopes, dreams, [in fact] lots of them." However, the familiar pattern of the Palestinian lives recurs in the novel, the refugees are made refugees again and again. By the time, Amal reaches the US after winning a scholarship, her mother has died in tragic circumstances, her father is missing, most probably killed in an Israeli bombing campaign, and her two brothers' fates remain unknown. Battered and shattered, by the constant buffetings of fate, Amal considers it expedient to blend into the American life, shedding her past and getting rid of her burdensome Arab identity:

> I was a woman of few words and no friends. I was Amy. A name drained of meaning. Amal, long or short vowel, emptied of hope. Only practical language could pass the lump in my throat, formed there from love that meanders in the soot of a story that was. And anyway, what words can redeem a future disinherited of its time?
>
> My life savoured of ash and I lived with the perpetual silence of a song that has no voice. In my bitterness and fear, I felt alone as loneliness dares to be. (Abulhawa, 2010, p.192)

The wilful clipping of her name and the forced indifference she assumes are the direct offshoots of the traumatic past indelibly etched in her brain and genes. Amal is here re-enacting the fate of her mother Dalia, the vivacious Bedouin woman, whose beauty had set aflame the loins of many a young man of Ein Hod. However, the family's eviction, the loss of the infant son Ismael and later her husband plunge Dalia into an emotional abyss. Symbolic of this is the loss of one of her jingling anklets during the exodus to Jenin. In that teeming slum, chock-a-block with refugee tents and tenements, Dalia is a ghostly shadow of her former self. She sinks into a slough of wordless desolation and has to be diapered, and tended like a helpless infant. The situation in which Amal finds herself, later in America has an eerie resemblance with Dalia's fate. She becomes wordless like her mother and insanity dogs her steps. It is not difficult to see the work of genetic and epigenetic factors in contributing to her condition and

this attests to Abulhawa's belief in fate's ability to seep and infiltrate across generations like 'eye color.' Amal's fear that she might infect her daughter with the same sense of gloom and doom is born of the stubborn conviction that fate is inheritable:

> God forgive me, the more she grew, the more I feared to be near her, to touch her. I was afraid to transmit my jaded frost to her, that my touch would be callused, the wrong complement to her soft, unconditional tenderness…
>
> …I imagined the endless kisses I craved to plant in her memories. I never did, and eventually she stopped coming to me, constructing walls of her own to keep me out as well…
>
> I had already been dismantled by the loss of everyone my heart had ever embraced and I would not allow the vulgar breath of my fate to spoil her promising life. (Abulhawa, 2010, p.193)

The words suggesting gloom and disillusionment that litter this passage define the emotional terrain determining the lives of the dispossessed. They pass on this vocabulary and their bruised legacy to their progeny. It is bequeathed as a sociobiological inheritance that cannot be gotten rid off; a tumorous lump that cannot be excised. The Palestinian writer, Mona Hajjar Halaby's statement *In My Mother's Footsteps* attest to this:

> Even though I wasn't born in Palestine, my mother fed me stories about her childhood and youth, and I grew up knowing that Palestine ran in my blood…I couldn't say it to her, but she had already transmitted her heartache to me from the moment I was born, in the way she occasionally left us for an invisible voyage, her body fastened to the sofa, her mind drifting to another land (2021, p.226).

Identical is the condition that Nur and Amal find themselves in. From the moment of their birth, they inherit the trauma transmitted by their parents via language and genes. Their vocabulary, and the synaptic connections that define and determine their neural mechanism are heavily inflected and infected by the profusion and pervasiveness of the experiences their parents and grandparents went through. The implications of this for the study of postcolonial societies and their continuing struggles are too many. But before examining that, I shall

briefly survey the treatment of the same theme in Jonathn Safran Foer.

**The Extremely Illuminated World of Intergenerational Trauma**

Like Abulhawa, Foer chronicles transgenerational trauma triggered by historical events. His first novel *Everything is Illuminated* (2002) chronicles the traumatic experiences of the Foer family forced to migrate from Ukraine in the aftermath of the Nazi occupation. The second *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005) traces the tragic loss the Schell family suffers following the 9/11 attack and through a series of analepses to the earlier tragedies during the Second World War. The family surname Schell serves to stress the hollowness of their lives punctuated by histories of loss, dislocation and migration. The Schell family are migrants from Germany, who are forced to flee their homeland following the Dresden bombings. The protagonist Oscar's grandpa, a young aspiring sculptor, loses his pregnant girlfriend Anna in the attack. The emotional devastation renders him speechless. In this, he bears comparison with Khaled in *Blue Between* who develops Locked-In Syndrome following the Israeli bombing. Though deprived of speech, Thomas Schell retains his cognitive ability and is able to communicate in writing, unlike Khaled who can't move a limb. In America, he meets Anna's sister, who has similarly fled the war-ravaged Germany and they decide to marry. However, the two carry within them seeds of irreparable loss and agree to subject themselves to a list of prohibitions to navigate their marital life filled with emotional landmines. This is the typical avoidance symptom seen in trauma victims.

These prescriptions include, demarcating certain places as nothing places and something places, strict instructions regarding the kind of song and music they would/ would not listen to, the kind of topics they would discuss etc. But the most important thing that the couple swear to is the decision not to have children. This is because they consider life to be "scarier than death" (2005, p.215). However, this self-imposed prohibition is broken and Anne gets pregnant. When Thomas Schell learns about it, he grows panicky, leaves his wife and flies back to Germany. The child is named Thomas Schell after the

father. Years later, Oscar is born to this Thomas Schell, who carries in him memories of ancestral trauma and abandonment. The novel provides several hints to suggest that Oscar too inherits these genes from his ancestors. Following the death of his father in the 9/11 attacks, these manifest in him as various symptoms including panic attacks, the urge to inflict self-harm (something he inherits from his grandpa who is similarly prone to self-harming) and avoidance behaviour. He develops a phobia for elevators, trains and Arabs. His precocious and fanatical veganism also owes to this condition. Like other members of the Schell family, he is haunted by a constant sense of absence and hollowness. This is aggravated by the haunting emptiness of his father's coffin. Thomas Schell's body is not recovered from the debris of the twin towers and the family is forced to bury an empty coffin, in a ceremony replete with usual rituals. The empty coffin becomes an absence that haunts Oscar. In fact, this emptiness and hollowness are embedded in his family's genetic make-up itself, a legacy they carry from the war-torn Germany. On one occasion, his grandmother remarks how her "life story was spaces" and how she had to hit the "space bar again and again and again" to recreate it (p.176).

The emptiness becomes so overpowering for Oscar that he gets his grandfather, now back in the US , to dig up the grave and fill the empty coffin with the letters purportedly written by the latter to his son. This burial of the letters also has a genetic component. Oscar's great grandfather was an avid reader who considered literature to be his only religion. However, he had the curious habit of burying the books once he read them. This shows how genetical predisposition plays a major role in Foer's works. In a sense, like Abulhawa, he seems to believe fate to be something inherited like 'eye colour.' The way Schells belonging to three generations are portrayed as shrugging their shoulders might seem a casual description at first hand, but Foer is too consummate a craftsman to make his characters shrug their shoulder or shift their feet without serving some artistic purpose and it is not difficult to see the genetical underpinnings in these habitual actions. The death of Oscar's dad in the twin tower attacks re-enacts the fate of many members of the Schell family during the

Dresden attack. This again is illustrative of Foer's belief in the inevitable inheritability of traumatic fate, like Abulhawa.

Foer's first novel *Everything is Illuminated* enacts the same theme. The novel chronicles the journey of a young third generation Jewish immigrant, named Jonathan Safran Foer, to the ancestral village in Ukraine from where his family flees following the Nazi invasion. Like *Incredibly,* this novel is a record of transgenerational trauma. Even before the Nazi invasion, Foer's family is prey to the slings of an outrageous fortune that leave them broken and vulnerable. Foer's fifth grandfather Kolker is married to an orphan girl, named Brod. She is the survivor of a cart accident and the foster daughter of a widower, who becomes her guardian following a lottery. She is raped on the day he dies and marries the man who murders the rapist, as an act of revenge. Her life with Kolker is not however a story of 'they lived happily ever after'. It starts off well; but an accident in the flour- mill, where he works, leaves Kolker permanently impaired. He lives the rest of his life with a saw-blade lodged in his skull that plays havoc with his temper. He becomes prone to tantrums and wife-beating. Upon the doctor's advice, the couple decide to sleep in a room partitioned by a pine-wood screen with a hole to communicate. The novelist hints how this hole becomes a genetic fixity in successive generations of the Foer children all of whom are haunted by absence and emptiness, a hollowness that obstructs their attempts to be whole/ wholesome. It is through the hole that the couple makes love with each other:

> They lived with the hole. The absence that defined it became a presence that defined them. Life was a small negative space cut out of the eternal solidity, and for the first time, it felt precious—not all like the words that had come to mean nothing,…(2002, p.135)

At the time of Caulker's death, Brod is sleeping from exhaustion after giving birth to her third son Yankel, named after her foster father. To keep alive the memories of her husband, she cuts 'around the hole' of the pine wood and puts the loop on her necklace:

> This new bead would remind her of the second man she had lost in her eighteen years, and of the hole that she was learning is not the exception in life, but the rule. The hole is no void; the void exists around it. (2002, p.157).

The void/ the absence, which is the rule of life, becomes a haunting presence in the family history as further events down the line force them to flee the country. It is during the time of Safran's grandfather, also named Safran, that these events unfold. This grandfather, in his youth is an exact replica of his great-great-great grandfather, the man who spends his life with a blade in his skull and makes love through a hole in the wall:

He was growing older, had begun to look like his great-great-great grandfather: the furrowed brow shadowing his delicate feminine eyes, the similar protrusion at the bridge of his nose, the way his lips met in a sideways U at one end and in a V at the other. Safety and profound sadness: he was growing into his place in the family; he looked unmistakably like his father's father's father's father's father and because of that, because his cleft chin spoke of the same mongrel gene-stew (stirred by the chefs of war, disease, opportunity, love, and false love), he was granted a place in a long line—certain assurances of being and permanence, but also a burdensome restriction of movement. He was not altogether free. (2002, p.127)

This passage provides clear hints about the genetic inheritance of the Foers. It is not only the shape of the eyes and nose they inherit, but also the sad, gloomy fate that comes along with the biological package. For Kolker, it is the blade lodged in his skull that proves to be his undoing and makes him a stranger to himself. His moods, the author notes, "were not him" (2002, p.136). In the case of Safran, it comes from sky and across land in the shape of the German air force and army. He along with his family flees Trachimbrod and seeks refuge in the United States. However, like all refugees displaced following colonial aggressions, the traumatic memories of the past continually haunt the family. The decision of Safran's grandson, again named Safran, to visit his ancestral town is prompted by this haunting. His return is both fulfilling and deeply disappointing. He comes across a

huge treasure trove of his ancestor's belongings, but at the same time he discovers that the town called Trachimbrod to have been razed and erased from the map. His situation parallels Ngugi wa Thiong'o's Kamau, who returns to his native village from the colonial prison to discover that the village he left behind has been completely transformed and his own wife has left him for another man. wa Thiong'o titles the story 'Return' to signify there is in fact no return for the colonized people to their pristine past. Colonialism has wreaked havoc with their lives, their physical and mental geography and their very genetic mechanism (wa Thiong'o ).

In Safran's case, the past holds both terror and fascination for him. But there is no fleeing from it, as the holes it inflicted on his self, have altered his genetic and cerebral geography. The case is not different with the other characters in the novels we examined. Oscar Schell tries his best to avoid the past; he even contemplates burying the old telephone, and other objects that cause him shame and remorse but still the past clings to him with ferocity. His fetishization of the objects his dad loved and used and the trip to the storage facility in New Jersey where his father kept his discarded stuff are part of this inability to shrug off and get rid of the vestiges of the past. Amal is similarly drawn to Palestine where her past lies buried. Even Nur and Sara, born in the United States, cannot get Palestine off their minds and feel the pull of the ancestral land too powerful to resist. Despite her mother's best attempts to guard Sara from the legacy of family trauma, it eventually consumes her and even an American passport proves powerless to plug the pores through which it seeps in. In short, the emotional architecture of trauma victims gets so warped that it takes generations for it to heal and repair.

**Conclusion: The Implications**

The above discussion illustrates the famous Faulknerian dictum that the "past is never dead [and i]t is not even past" (Faulkner, 1951, p.73). In the case of colonized and subjugated populations, this has serious and far-reaching implications. Trauma theorists explain how a traumatic event causes a decisive breach in the victim's psyche. Colonial trauma inflicted across generations has the same debilitating

impact on whole populations. Even familiar things and objects now acquire a new and often menacing meaning. After 9/11 the land phone becomes a menacing object for Oscar, just as locks and keys acquire a new meaning and aeroplanes and birds become triggers of panic attacks.

Abulhawa explains how an ordinary word like 'example' is invested with a sinister meaning for Palestinians under occupation when the Israeli soldiers pick up boys at random and seriously maim and torture them, as part of setting an 'example' to others; how a bunch of 'olives' grown in their ancestral orchard becomes objects they have to "steal" in order to rekindle the emotional attachment to their expropriated land and how a doll with a broken limb becomes dearer to children precisely because of its resemblance with their broken condition.

The language of people living under these conditions of material and emotional deprivation is saturated with a vocabulary of loss and mutilation. If epigeneticists have it right, this affects their genetic make-up, which is passed on to their children and thus to successive generations. Marienne Hirsch notes how these impacts last for at least three generations (2019). Hirsch's observation solely concerns the Holocaust victims and she is silent, like most other western trauma theorists about the Palestinian issue. For the Palestinians, the trauma is not a one-off event like the Holocaust, but something that has been continually unfolding for more than seven decades. If one generation's trauma can leave its imprint for three generations, how lasting will the impact of a trauma being telecast on live TV for more than half a century be? Rafeef Ziadah's line "Today my body is a TVd massacre that had to fit into soundbites and word limits" is an attempt at capturing the immensity of this historical experience that defies the journalistic prescriptions of word and space limit (2011).

It has been observed that marginalized and subjugated populations across the world lag behind in most human indices. They are under-achievers in education, academics and life-expectancy. They are also more prone to substance abuse, alcoholism and other vices that poverty and marginalization engender and foster. This is especially

the case of the doubly or triply marginalized sections within the subjugated populations, e.g., women, Dalits, minorities and indigenous Americans and Australians. Does altered and impeded brain chemistry passed through genes, language and the environment play a role in their stunted condition? Trauma can elicit varied responses from varied individuals and communities. It might trigger violent reactions, panic attacks, psychic epidemics or avoidance behaviour in individuals and whole populations. (Both Susan Abulhawa and Jonathan Safran Foer are fierce animal rights activists and the two central characters of Foer are portrayed to be practising vegetarianism or veganism. Is this avoidance engendered by trauma?). This kind of symptoms and reactions, need not often be harmless like vegetarianism, but might extend to harmful practices like substance abuse and proclivity to aggression directed towards self or others. What will be the consequence if such negative reactions spill over to whole groups and percolate across generations? Do the higher suicide rates and greater incidence of domestic abuse among indigenous populations and marginalized communities have anything to do with inheritance, both sociological, and biological? For Safran Foer the "cleft chin" in his lineage "spoke of [a]…mongrel gene-stew (stirred by the chefs of war, disease, opportunity, love, and false love)"; if so, can we say that the same chefs of war, conquest, disease, and opportunity be responsible for graver problems plaguing the postcolonial societies and even the metropolitan centres to where the chickens from colonies are increasingly flocking to roost? These questions will be of great interest and importance to future research scholars and policy-makers.

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