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Prof. Dr Hamdi Hameed Al-Douri

College of Education, Al-Kitab University, Kirkuk.

Shaymaa Saber Abdul-Aziz

College of Education for Women, Tikrit University.

* Corresponding author: E-mail :
Shaymaa.saber728@st.tu.edu.iq

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E-mail t-jtuh@tu.edu.iq

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Reflections of Postcolonial Trauma in Lisa Ko's The Leavers

A B S T R A C T

The term "trauma" is used to describe ambiguous and long-term harms. The study of psychological trauma has led to the creative representation of literary trauma. Even though the cultural trauma theory is increasingly criticized as being unsuitable for the research agenda of postcolonial studies, the diversity and expanding number of responses to it in postcolonial criticism show the theory's continued appeal. The key question in the discussion of trauma theory and postcolonial literary studies is still whether trauma theory can be successfully "postcolonized" in the sense of being usefully combined with postcolonial theory. Maybe this is one of the unique abilities of literary criticism: to develop the capacity to recognize connections that we were previously unaware of. The search shows the significance of finding closure to transcend past ordeals. The search is an analytical study of Lisa Ko's novel *Leavers*. It gives a brief background to the novel and the novelist which displays in what way the novel tackles postcolonial trauma. The main two characters who suffer trauma show the possibility of trauma recovery by achieving their closures. The novel succeeds in depicting trauma and achieving recovery through the main character's pursuit to find his closure. The study also demonstrates that despite the multiplicity of traumatic causatives, victims have significant symptoms, and their lives and destiny are contingent on their abilities to achieve closure.

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انعكاسات صدمة ما بعد الاستعمار في رواية ليزا كو (المغادرون)

أ.د. حمدي حميد الدوري / جامعة الكتاب ، كركوك ، العراق

شيماء صابر عبد العزيز / جامعة تكريت، كلية التربية للبنات

الخلاصة:

يستخدم مصطلح "الصدمة" لوصف الأضرار الغامضة وطويلة الأجل. أدت دراسة الصدمات النفسية إلى التمثيل الإبداعي للصدمة الأدبية. على الرغم من أن نظرية الصدمة الثقافية تتعرض لانتقادات متزايدة باعتبارها غير مناسبة لدراسات ما بعد الاستعمار ، إلا أن تنوع وتزايد عدد الردود عليها في نقد ما بعد الاستعمار يُظهر جاذبية النظرية المستمرة. السؤال الرئيسي في مناقشة نظرية الصدمة والدراسات الأدبية لما بعد الاستعمار لا يزال يبحث ما إذا كانت نظرية الصدمة يمكن أن تكون ناجحة مع نظرية "بعد الاستعمار" بمعنى أن تكون مدمجة بشكل مفيد مع نظرية ما بعد الاستعمار. ربما تكون هذه إحدى القدرات الفريدة للنقد الأدبي: تطوير القدرة على التعرف على الروابط التي لم نكن ندركها في السابق. يُظهر البحث أهمية إيجاد الاغلاق لتجاوز المحن الماضية .

البحث عبارة عن دراسة تحليلية لرواية (المغادرون) للكاتبة ليزا كو . إنه يعطي خلفية موجزة عن الرواية والروائي الذي يعرض الطريقة التي تعالج بها الرواية صدمة ما بعد الاستعمار. تظهر الشخصيتان الرئيسيتان اللتان تعانيان من الصدمة إمكانية التعافي من الصدمة من خلال تحقيق إغلاقهما. تتجج الرواية في تمثيل الصدمة وتحقيق التعافي من خلال سعي الشخصية الرئيسية لإيجاد الاغلاق. توضح الدراسة أيضًا أنه على الرغم من تعدد أسباب الصدمة ، فإن الضحايا لديهم أعراض واضحة ، وتتوقف حياتهم ومصيرهم على قدرتهم على تحقيق الاغلاق .

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة ، الإغلاق ، ما بعد الاستعمار ، الهوية المزدوجة ، ليزا كو.

1.1 Introduction

Listening to the trauma of the others can contribute to cross-cultural solidarity and to the creation of new forms of community. With respect to the study of trauma in postcolonial literature, the question of context becomes, when we consider how trauma embodies existential experiences of atrocity and survival, of coping in the aftermath of personal and social disintegration, while disclosing the limits of narrative, reference, and representation. Giving the individual the opportunity to find a suitable closure to assimilate his past trauma is as important as giving the silenced experience voice.

In the *APA Dictionary of Psychology*, closure is defined as the act, attainment, or sensation of completion or resolution of something. In psychotherapy, for example, a client achieves closure by acknowledging that he

or she has resolved a specific psychological issue or interpersonal problem (VandenBos, 2016, p. 169). The term “closure” is defined as the act or the sensation of completion or resolution of something. It is also defined as the satisfying sense of finality. Since the tragic events of September 11, 2001, the concept of closure has garnered considerable attention. It is becoming more widely recognized in popular psychology, after traumatic experiences (Melnick & Roos, 2008, p. 91). The need for closure is frequently motivated by the desire to gain knowledge behind the occurrence of such a disturbing life experience.

Postcolonial trauma represents the experience of the adventure of separation. It focuses on the ignored or marginalized non-Western traumatic events and histories. In his *Black Skin, White Masks*, the postcolonial psychiatrist Frantz Fanon asserts that inferiority complex and other forms of psychosis are become evident following a traumatic experience (Fanon, 1967, p. 54). He asserts the importance to free the individual of a minority from his/her inferiority complex in an attempt to get rid of despair and inaction; and motivates him to restore his self-respect (Ward, 20015, p. 2). Postcolonial and migration narrative is considered a trauma narrative that conflates both individual and collective trauma. For those who have experienced postcolonial trauma, failing to take individual trauma into account or acknowledging its cultural component could have disastrous results (Zapata, 2021, p. 6).

The Leavers novel is not a study of postcolonialism or trauma separately; it is a re-examination of central aspects of both through examining closely the problematics of narrating the adversity of being the Other. The novel discusses the conflicts of the Chinese characters who are obliged by hard circumstances to live in a completely different culture, which is America. It traces which traumatic symptoms and postcolonial inner conflicts that the characters have. Also, it shows the character’s pursuing to find a proper closure to their past traumas.

Postcolonial trauma discusses the symptoms of “Otherness” that represents which amount the individual from the other culture is close to the Eurocentric paradigm; the civilized, intelligent gentleman. It enforces the other culture people to search for all the opportunities to wear the European or American “Uniform” to be “appropriate” (Khair, 2009, p. 4). Otherness has a formative and deformative role in shaping the individual’s psyche and intellect. Rooting into a culture and

routing out of a culture is an outcome of diasporic people's efforts in adhering their roots in a specific place, and following the unlimited routes which are increased as a result of continuing moving (Sarwal, 2017, p. 1-2).

Hukou is the Chinese household registration that is considered as one of the most hideous unjust laws that remain a stigma in the history of China (Fan, 2008, p. 40). It states that residents of rural areas were given agricultural *hukou*, while those of urban areas were given non-agricultural *hukou*. People with urban *hukou* are eligible for state welfare, benefits, and endowments that, while in contrast, citizens with rural *hukou* received little state assistance aside from the right to farm during both the pre-reform and reform periods (Fan, 2008, p. 41). Wherefore, Chinese immigration patterns to the United States have been increased. The potential of immigrant children to integrate into the new society confronted one of two proceedings: assimilation into the host society by taking on its values, behaviours, and aspirations, or deviation by exhibiting forms of attachment by practicing traditions their parent's country (Tsolidis, 2014, p. 19).

1.2 The Hypotheses of the Study

1. Investigating how *The Leavers* is a postcolonial trauma fiction.
2. Investigating the integration between postcolonial trauma and closure and how the traumatized characters' pursuit to achieve closure is the journey towards healing. Closure is an attempt to re-secure the self and ensure continuity.

1.3 The Objectives of the Study

1. Knowing how *The Leavers* is a Postcolonial trauma through tracing the language representations of trauma narrative.
2. Knowing how giving the silenced experience voice, and pursuing facts can create a proper closure and change the traumatized person's life.

1.4 The Thesis Statement

The current study concentrates on the impact of postcolonial trauma in shaping both individual and collective identity and memory. Also, it concentrates on the importance of language representations of trauma narratives that could transcend the boundaries of language. In addition, the study discusses closure feeling of the characters in the novel and examines the importance of finding a suitable closure to transcend multi-cultural-identity confusion, gain knowledge and then achieve healing.

1.5 The Questions of the Study

1. Do the personal experiences and cultural background affect the novelist: Lisa Ko in writing her postcolonial trauma fiction?
2. How do the author employ different literary tools of representation? Do these tools portray post-colonial trauma successfully?
3. Does the novel succeed in depicting "Closure" as the proper solution for traumatized individuals to transcend their cultural wounds and past ordeals?

1.6 The Methodology of the Study

The methodological framework that shapes the study will be postcolonial trauma theory and the significance of acquiring closure to transcend past traumas. The analysis will follow Cathy Caruth's and Dominick LaCapra's approaches to trauma. The scope of the study covers the novel *The Leavers* by Lisa Ko.

1.7 Literature Review

Other studies are concerned with examining Lisa Ko's novel *The Leavers* as a postcolonial novel, for instance, the article "Identity Negotiation of Chinese American's Twoness in Lisa Ko's *The Leavers*: A Postcolonial Approach" by Eka Nurcahyania and Muhammad Sulthon Kamila, where the searchers negotiate the twoness of the main character "Deming" as Chinese American through applying Bhabha's postcolonialism theory, Said's orientalism, and Dubois' concept of twoness.

In *Reframing Citizenship: Narratives of Undocumented Immigrants* by Micaella Baltazar Libunao, the thesis investigates the questions of citizenship and belonging to a specific nation through the undocumented immigrants within the Asian American population.

In the work "Inability to Trust People in the Novel *The Leavers* by Lisa Ko", Ardi Oromahi and Kurnia Ningsih apply a psychoanalytic approach in interpreting the novel, using the concepts of neurosis by Sigmund Freud and psychosocial development by Erik Erikson. This study aims to expose the issue of the inability to trust people that an Asian immigrant child, who was separated multiple times from his family, suffers from.

2. The Analysis of Lisa Ko's *The Leavers*

The Leavers is a novel published in 2017, written by Lisa Ko, an American citizen. She is ethnically Chinese, as her parents were born in the Philippines and migrated to the United States before her birth (Ko, personal communication, September 5, 2017). Ko's inspiration to write this novel was drawn in part from a true incident. The New York Times article *Mentally Ill and in Immigration Limbo* was written by Nina Bernstein; published in 2009. It's about Xiu Ping Jiang, a mentally disabled Chinese woman who spent more than a year and a half in an immigration detention facility in America. She was arrested and imprisoned as an illegal resident and remained separated from her children (Bernstein, 2009, p. 1). *The Leavers* criticizes the United States' "best" mentality and American immigration policy.

The Leavers narrates the story of an undocumented immigrant woman named Polly Gu and her 11-year-old son, Deming. One day she goes to her work but never returns home. Deming is soon adopted by a white couple who give him the new name Daniel. The sudden disappearance of the mother for unknown reasons led to a traumatic infection. There is a shift in the event to ten years later to show what character Daniel Wilkinson is (who is Deming himself). He abandons everything and travels to China in search of his mother to accomplish his closure.

Questioning identity is thrown in front of the reader to discuss an important human issue, which is the conflict experienced by minorities among the different-cultural majority. Themes of belonging, migration, racism, cultural insensitivity, double identity and family are explored in Ko's novel, which is set in both New York and China and told from Polly and Daniel's perspectives. It is a trauma fiction by which the author aims to criticize political and economic policies that the Asian race suffers from in both homeland and exile. It discusses human fragility when individuals collide with life-threatening hardships and struggle to survive the crisis.

The narration of the novel begins on the day before the disappearance of Polly, Deming's mother. Deming lives with his mother and her friend Leon, Leon's sister Vivian and her son Michael in Chinatown, the Bronx where he used to see "Asian" faces, speak Chinese (Fuzhounese and Cantonese accents), eat Chinese traditional food. For Deming, life was almost perfect until the sudden disappearance of his mother.

The novel is written with nonlinear structure. The reader can extrapolate the psychological disorder of Deming and Polly only by reading all of the novel to be able to integrate what had happened and what consequences those events have. Polly raised Deming until he completed his first year. She sent Deming to China until the date of school. Deming is like other kids who don't know their parents only through the telephone (33). After the grandfather's death, Deming returned to his mother.

In narrating the circumstances of the characters in their homeland China, Ko wants to send a message to the majority that those minorities are not existing in a vacuum. They were born from the womb of suffering. They have their own roots, truths, hopes, dreams, desires and their own ties and detachments that all contributed to creating what they are now. This suffering is a source of pride for them, not shame, so all these details make the majority know the value of this minority.

A white American couple Kay and Peter Wilkinson are Deming's new foster parents. "I already have a family", but Deming's objections weren't heard. According to Herbert and David Spiegel, the core of traumatic stress is helplessness, which he defines as a loss of control over one's body (Spiegel & Spiegel, 2004, p. 14). Deming feels completely helpless.

The mental impact of such terrifying experiences can occasionally take the shape of loss of control over aspects of one's mind, identity, memory, and awareness, while physical control is returned (Spiegel & Spiegel, 2004, p. 14). Deming doesn't own himself anymore. He loses his mother, family, city, and school friends, and the most stringent is losing his language, roots and "identity". When an immigrant realizes that his customs, heritage, and language are shared by people from the same background, the individual can feel a sense of belonging, demonstrating the significance of communal identity to an individual identity (Nurcahyania & Kamila, 2021, p. 95). That was exactly what Deming used to do in the Bronx, where everything around him is Chinese. The foster family change his name from Deming Guo to Daniel Wilkinson and strictly prohibit him from talking in Fuzhounese (his mother language). Language, according to Frantz Fanon (1967), is "assuming a culture and bearing the weight of a civilization" (p. 8).

In Ridgeborough, where he lives now, everything is different. All faces are white. Kay buys him new clothes and “the most expensive pair of Nikes on the shelf” (57), to be fit to appear as an American student, but Deming asks her “Why am I here?” (57). It is suitable to adapt Fanon’s termination “terrified consciousness” (Courtman, 2015, p. 39). Peter and Kay are aware that the barrier between them and the boy is “cultural”. In an attempt to make his existence here “familiar”, they introduce him to the Elaine family as they adopted a Chinese girl “Angel”. Angel was brought from China to the United States for adoption. She is his first friend here.

At school, Roland Fuentes, a Mexican-American boy, and Deming become friends as they both struggle to fit in at their new, predominantly white school. Their friendship reflects Cathy Caruth’s opinion concerning the wounds’ voice. Their wounds have voices that bear witness to a truth that they themselves cannot fully know (Caruth, 1996, p. 3).

In Ridgeborough, where the majority is white, Deming is treated racially at school. It is Cody who says “What are you looking at? Chinese retard” (64); putting him on the shelf of “the Other”; which makes him “be too visible and invisible at the same time” (62). He feels strange, inferior and belonging to elsewhere not here. According to Fanon, an inferiority complex connected with the colour of the skin is found only among those who form a minority within a group of another colour (Fanon 58).

The author refers to the boy as “Deming” in spite that he is renamed “Daniel”, a reference to his disability to assimilate into this community. Deming suffers non-closure feelings that put him in a shut-in circle of thinking. He couldn’t accept that he is separated from his realm. “There was always the possibility that one afternoon there would be his mother or Leon or even Vivian in the cafeteria, ready to pick him up and bring him home... [there] would be Mama, her face a warm light, apologizing for taking so long” (67); but nobody came.

Deming creates a new sort of attachment. He starts listening to music. He takes the music player with him everywhere. He listens to music even when he is among his friends. The twelve-year-old boy “translated the lines into Fuzhounese... with a soundtrack, made him an action hero instead of an abandoned boy” (72).

Ten years later, Deming is introduced as “Daniel”. He is twenty-two years old now. He seems that he assimilated into his current life and society. His interest in music evolved to establishing --with Roland-- a music band named “Psychic Hearts” (17). He is a guitar player and songs writer. In fact, Daniel is not that young, successful player. He suffers from different psychological problems. He has the “tendency to relive the past” (LaCapra, personal communication, p. 1). He leaves Ridgeborough to live in Roland’s very small apartment only because its location is in the Bronx, where he used to live with his absent family.

He ignores his classes, (116), plays online poker, (116-17). He used to lose everything: his study, money and Angel’s ten thousand dollars. He borrows money for gambling, in an amount to be drawn in debts. He drinks a lot throughout shows which affects his performance negatively. In *Encyclopedia of Trauma*, edited by Charles Figley (2012), one reason behind alcohol use disorder or alcohol misuse can be caused by a traumatic experience (p. 19).

He doesn’t have the ability to confront others: “All week he’d been waiting for someone to tell Roland to shut up” (28). He feels suspicious towards his relationships with others, such as not being able to feel close to them and not being able to “trust their intentions” (Figley, 2012, p. 141), because all the people he trusted have abandoned him. He feels suspicious of Roland's popularity and feels that others find him "invisible" (28). He suffers from “lowered self-confidence” (Figley, 2012, p. 166). He suffers difficulty in managing his problems and taking decisions. He decides to do something then he does something different. Roland is conscious enough to know Daniel, his childhood friend, “will change [his] mind again” (249).

He is indulged in the repetition of the past; always asking himself why his mother had left. In an interview, Dominick LaCapra discusses the process of acting out and working through trauma symptoms. He asserts that the "repetition-compulsion" is a form of "acting out" the traumatic experience. He explains that: “acting-out, on the repetition-compulsion, to see it as a way of preventing closure, harmonization, any facile notion of cure” (LaCapra, personal communication, p. 3). His actions and behaviours represent the LaCapran concept of “acting out” his traumatic experience. They bear witness to his overwhelming past. He is paralyzed by his traumatic memory. Traumatic memory, according to Leys, is a type of

memory which unconsciously repeats the past (Leys, 200, p. 105). He lacks facts and an appropriate closure to settle his life, as "he'd never had the chance to ask her why she returned to China... or to understand why he ended up in Ridgeborough" (107).

Traumatized people have conflicting drives to reject their losses (Plnuka, 2018, p. 22). But Daniel is in a continuous state of loss. He lost his mother, family, his parents' trust, his partnership with Roland, Angel's friendship and his money. Loss becomes a habit, "He felt a savage euphoria. The night had confirmed his failures... each loss felt like shucking off another weight and removing an uncomfortable article of clothing" (167). He suffers "Identity Confusion", fluctuating between his desires and the parents' desires; his real identity and the identity the parents want him to show. He is defeated by his double consciousness and double identity.

Finally, he calls his "estranged mother", for the first time after ten years of absence (181). The next station in Daniel's life is Fuzhou, in China (278). Everything is written in Chinese, that's why he couldn't read them. He wants to talk with his mother face-to-face hoping he will be able to know what he wants (283). It's a state of trauma that needs to know the unknown. Non-closure feelings enhanced his traumatization.

Daniel becomes more comfortable being in China. He feels here that he is the "Self" not the "Other", the native, not the stranger (290). Polly is in Beijing to attend English Educators Conference (292). When he enters the hall, he recognizes one face among the women on the stage belonging to his mother. "Her eyes widened. They stared at each other" (298). "Hi—Mama." He feels embarrassed by this word. He wants to apologize because he became older and she couldn't recognize him (297).

Lisa Ko introduces the character of Polly as selfish and hateful by presenting the character of Deming who suffers the sudden disappearance of his mother; struggles with his double identity; and experiences the bitterness of non-closure feelings, the unclosed relationship that requires knowing facts to move forward in his life.

Ko chooses to tell Deming's story herself (the use of third person narration) because he is silenced because of his traumatic experience, that's why he needs someone to speak on his behalf; to bear witness to his overwhelming experience. The third-person narration also reflects the empathetic response of the author, who is aware of such individuals who suffer postcolonial trauma. She wants to explore everything about him, and attempts to motivate him and "the other" silenced individuals to speak "the unspeakable". Later on, through narration, the author gives Polly the opportunity to explain and justify her disappearance by giving the narration her own voice, the first-person narration. It gives the reader the opportunity to know facts and events that are impossible to be known without hearing Polly's testimony.

Polly's first testimony is when her son Deming returns to her, to Fuzhou, China. Commensurate with Cathy Caruth's opinion concerning denying past heinous experiences is that "The act of refusal, here, is therefore not a denial of a knowledge of the past, but rather a way of gaining access to a knowledge that has not yet attained the form of "narrative memory" (Caruth, 1995, p. 155). Polly had a traumatic memory that was repressed and silenced for years. She denied her son's existence, her loss and Ardsleyville. After her reunion with her son Deming, her traumatic memory develops to be a narrative memory. She acquires the ability to reveal because this is the only way to justify her disappearance and acknowledge him with abstract facts.

Polly's memory fluctuated to return to her past life. She was living with her father in Minjiang, a poor village in a poor province. Her mother died of cancer when she was six-month-old. She couldn't remember her or even have a picture, only had an old, worn out, blue jacket and a grey comb. When her father was out, she used to comb her hair with that comb and put on the jacket "that smelled weakly of leaves and scalp" (126). She used to be silenced as her father's opinion concerning women "shouldn't talk at all". So, "[she]'d grown up eating [her] words" (127).

Ko criticizes the political systems that seize individual and community rights. She reflects a growing body of traumatized people's experiences. The unfair *hukou* system misappropriates the villagers' right to a comfortable life, marginalizes them, and put them in a place of second-class citizens. When she was seventeen, Peilan

went to Fuzhou for work. She was pregnant. She couldn't tell her father about her pregnancy because his belief was "any problem happened to the woman was her fault" (138). She was suppressed collective historical traditions that repressed her as a "woman" and as a "rural *hukou*" citizen, the repulsive history of colonization (Courtman, 2015, p. 44).

America was her only option. She borrowed fifty thousand dollars from a money shark, travelled to America, where "Peilan" became "Polly". She gave birth to her child "I was in love! I'd look down at you and get goo-goo-eyed and think, *This is a human being I made*" (151). She wasn't in alienation anymore. Ten years later, when she was at work, the police entered the salon and arrested all the immigrants without legal documents (231). Polly couldn't fix her relationship with Deming without telling him about Ardsleyville. She couldn't confront her secrets and tell her husband about Deming or Ardsleyville, because that means "destroying the illusion [they] built for [them]selves" (240).

Polly knew from Leon that Deming had been adopted and he is in safe hands. She tried so hard to believe him because acting as though her son had completely vanished was the only way to continue. She denied all bitter truths. "A woman could come from nowhere and become a new person" (124), this reflects the consequences of postcolonialism, the dis-belonging. She married later. She couldn't tell her husband about her son as feared another departure, then she would have to give up being her "new" self anymore. She pretended to live a different life, in a state of denial and reality avoidance. Robert Scaer in his book *The Body Bears the Burden* classifies denial as an adaptive mechanism of post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms (Scaer, 2014, p. 67). Judith Herman in *Trauma and Recovery* states that the central dialectic of psychological trauma is the conflict between the desire to deny terrible events and the desire to proclaim them aloud (Herman, 1997, p. 1). Polly created a fake closure by pretending her son did not exist at all to go on life, denying his existence is a denial of her loss.

Roth Leys (2000) indicates that flashbacks, nightmares, and other recollections, emotional numbing, depression, guilt, autonomic arousal, violent outbursts, or a propensity for hypervigilance are all considered to be post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms of a fundamental mental dissociation (p. 2). When they are at the hotel, Polly checks the curtains shut, "I can't have any lights on when I

sleep ... I have nightmares" (305) about "The walls of the Hole [the detention camp], the weight of the handcuffs around [her] wrists and ankles" (323). As well as she takes her medication to help her sleep, she feels okay. In Ardsleyville, the detention camp, lights were turned on all the time, dogs barked in the middle of the night, and nobody can sleep. She couldn't tell him about Ardsleyville, but he needs his closure, he insists "I want to know the truth ... Please, I deserve to know" (306).

Freud emphasizes the significance of the memory of trauma. This memory behaves as a strange creature that occasionally intrudes on the traumatized person's thoughts and behaviour (Freud & Breuer, 1895/2004, p. 9). The meeting between Polly and Daniel stimulates her buried memories, that were dormant in the subconscious. She reveals the secret of being arrested and imprisoned for fourteen months in Ardsleyville camp. "The hours in between lying down and getting up were a nightmare" (308). The worst thing for her was that Deming would think she abandoned him (308). "De-ming, de-ming—your name hammered a drumbeat between my eyes" (310). They called the prison the "Hole".

Caruth argues that:

... the barrier of consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time. What causes trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a threat to the body's spatial integrity, but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time" (Caruth, 1993, p. 25).

She lost her ability to perceive time and space. Two uniformed men guided her off the plane. She asked "Where are we?", one of the officers answered "Fuzhou. Changle." She was deported to China. She discovered that fourteen months has passed!

Six months later, Leon found her. He informed her that Deming was adopted by a white, American family. She entered an uncontrolled outburst of anger and frustration, blaming Leon for her loss. It was difficult to comprehend her loss in and how he was given over to another family like a "stray dog" (324).

The meeting between Daniel and Polly induces significant changes in both characters' lives. Each finally achieves his own closure that spent ten years of

his/her life eager to gain. Daniel starts teaching in the World Top, with a good salary. He is named Deming by his friends, and still feels that he is him. But Ko still calls him "Daniel" throughout the text for a purpose. Three months passed since he came to China (329). He starts paying his debt to Angel. His Mandarin and Fuzhounese accent are slipped back into native-speaker, and his friends no longer laugh.

Daniel had never experienced this comfort of belonging before, but he still feels different, and “still stood out” (331). There is something that shows he is not from here (331). Then, Daniel returns to America. Four months after Daniel’s departure, Polly moves to Hong Kong. She leaves everything, Fuzhou, her husband Yong, her job, apartment, and everything she knew. She is able to start again.

Daniel returns to playing on his guitar. On Wednesday and Friday afternoons, he teaches an after-school music class at a community centre in Chinatown. Both of them achieve his/her own closure. Polly achieves her closure through revealing and giving the silenced experience “voice”. Daniel achieves his own closure through finding his mother, knowing the reason behind her disappearance, and then assimilating to his current “American” identity.

Multicultural contexts must be understood in the context of postcolonialism, a history that is still largely ignored and only comes to light when there is a need for nostalgia (Zapata, 2021, p. 60). Daniel’s mind makes comparisons between Fuzhou and New York all the time but still feels comfortable here. His multicultural context privileges his American identity upon his Chinese identity, in spite that he doesn’t aware about that. Daniel gains the desired facts, “I learned so much when I was there ... She had wanted me” (348). He was completely convinced that Polly still loved him and she had never left of her own free will. He forgives all the days that had passed without her, erasing all his doubts and accusations towards her.

3. Conclusion

One can conclude that Lisa Ko’s *The Leavers* is a postcolonial trauma fiction that discusses the consequences of trauma in multicultural contexts. It investigates the outcomes of the clash between two different cultures and the resulting double identity. It is a novel of loss that tackles the fragility of the human psyche. It

reflects the frustration, disappointment and disturbance of people who have double identity.

Being a daughter for Philippine parents who was born and raised in America, Lisa Ko has a sense of double identity and a sense of sympathy towards Asian race. She absorbs the experience of her Asian ethnicity and tries to verbalize her ethnicity's traumatized memory. Through her lines, she discusses a collective trauma through the individual psychological traumas of Polly and Daniel. Trauma has unlimited faces, different characteristics, and different wounds. The reader can trace the opinions of Cathy Caruth and Dominick LaCapra concerning trauma theory. Her

successful depiction to trauma with characters whose struggle is not only a mourning of loss but also a struggle to survive, gives a glimpse of hope to traumatized people, and a sense of finality to the infinite suffering. She questions the meaning of life through the pursuit of truth. Polly and Daniel are traumatized characters who develop a behaviour of acting out into working through, through Daniel's pursuit to have knowledge. They achieve their own closures and become able to start a new life and ensure continuity. Ko succeeds on keeping the reader's eyes on the wounds of the Asian migrants and the tragedy that they are enforced to live. She necessitates and encourages her people and others traumatized people to seek their life's meaning instead of mourning life's hardships. Polly is always able to start despite all the traumas she has faced.

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