
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*: Trauma voices of the marginalized

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| ABSTRACT

This study examines how Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* (2007) portrays the psychological and social impact of trauma on marginalized individuals. It explores the broader societal structures that perpetuate marginalization and investigates the transformative effects of trauma on individual and collective identities. Using Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, it allows us to explore how it represents the psychological impacts of social marginalization and trauma on its characters' identities. The study analyzes the interconnected stories of three marginalized characters, Turad, Tawfiq, and Nasser, each struggling with profound trauma and social exclusion. While there is a significant amount of research on trauma in general, there is a lack of studies focusing on how trauma specifically impacts characters who face societal exclusion. Through close analysis, The study reveals how societal judgments, rooted in factors such as foundling status, disability, race, and ethnicity, dehumanize these individuals, rendering them invisible and abnormal. These judgments not only shape their societal roles but also lead to internalized trauma and diminished self-worth. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the enduring psychological effects of social exclusion and raises awareness of the pervasive cruelty of marginalization.

| KEYWORDS

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1. Introduction

Saudi novels address complex societal problems and their impact on the human soul. Far beyond mere entertainment, Saudi novels act as a parallel text to reality, reflecting, interrogating, and questioning societal norms and challenges. They offer a platform for critiquing societal flaws while supporting positive aspects, functioning as a form of social expression. Characters in these novels engage with events and issues, becoming conduits for exploring social, philosophical, and ideological questions. This makes the social novel an essential link between literature and society, exemplifying its role in mirroring and shaping cultural discourse.

Yousef Al-Mohaimeed(1964), a prominent contemporary Saudi writer, has gained international recognition, with many of his works being translated into languages such as English, Russian, Italian, Spanish, and German. By addressing bold themes and challenging societal taboos, Al-Mohaimeed has captured the attention of Western audiences, resulting in the widespread translation of his works. His novel, *Fikhākh al-Rā'iha* (2003)(*Wolves of the Crescent Moon*), translated into English in 2007 by Anthony Calderbank, stands out as a groundbreaking exploration of societal marginalization. Banned in Saudi Arabia for its bold critique of sensitive issues, the novel delves into harrowing aspects of Saudi society that are seldom discussed openly. Some critics mostly view the works of Saudi authors, including Al-Mohaimeed, as acts of rebellion against conservative cultural norms. *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* tells the interconnected stories of three marginalized characters, Turad, Tawfiq, and Nasser, each grappling with profound trauma and social exclusion. Marked by physical loss and emotional devastation, these characters endure poverty, abuse, harassment, and even sexual violence. Despite their attempts to find meaning or purpose, oppressive societal forces render them isolated and dehumanized.

The following review explores various perspectives on discussing some studies on *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, highlighting the role of novels in addressing social issues and interpreting marginalization. Although there are significant studies on trauma, there is a lack of research specifically focusing on how trauma influences marginalized or excluded characters. This paper fills

that gap by applying a trauma-based framework to analyze the psychological consequences of marginalized characters in the novel. The significance of this study is to explore the psychological effects of marginalization and exclusion on individuals. The study contributes to highlighting the lasting impact of being ignored or treated unfairly by society and raises awareness about the importance of empathy and inclusion.

2. Literature Review

This section brings together scholarly perspectives on marginalization, focusing on its definitions, causes, and manifestations in both global and Saudi contexts. It also examines existing research on Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, exploring how it engages with social exclusion and trauma themes. By linking these studies to the broader context of societal marginalization, this review lays the groundwork for a deeper investigation of the novel's portrayal of marginalized characters and the psychological effects of their experiences.

Several critical studies focused on the concept of marginality and its causes in literature as the concept of marginality has become increasingly crucial. Varghese and Kumar (2022) defined marginalized people or communities as those occupying lower positions in the hierarchy of economic, social, or cultural resources, which leads to fewer opportunities and reduces their chances of a dignified life. This exclusion extends across personal, geographical, political, and cultural dimensions. Additionally, scholars note that racism, based on skin colour or religious beliefs, fosters marginalization. Dennis (2004) stated that the marginalized are both 'outsiders as insiders' and 'insiders as outsiders', emphasizing how marginalized people, such as Black individuals, contribute to the functioning of society and are part of the community. However, they are denied recognition and opportunities, thus excluded from full participation. Similarly, Gillies (2006) stated the impact of class on the experiences of marginalized individuals, highlighting how their stereotypes are shaped by social norms. He argued that poor people often feel ashamed because they are viewed by others as uneducated and incapable. Class is often treated as a personal issue rather than the result of larger social and economic structures, but the effects of class inequality continue to shape people's lives and opportunities. Gurung and Kollmair (2005) argued that marginalization extends beyond individual experiences and is fundamentally tied to broader structural and societal factors such as demography, religion, culture, social structure, economics, and politics. That leads them to be marginalized individuals who face limited access to essential resources such as employment and education, which affects their psychology and can lead to criminal behaviour or depression.

In examining the role of authors in addressing societal issues through their writings, particularly in Saudi Arabia, Hasan Al-Nimi (2009) highlights the transformation of Saudi novels, particularly post-9/11, which marked a significant shift in themes and narratives. He stressed the importance of analyzing novels within their historical contexts. He examined how novels have developed their discourse over time, culminating in a stage marked by major aesthetic and thematic transformations. He pointed out that the role of authors like Ghazi Al-Gosaibi and Turki Al-Hamed in their works paved the way for a new generation of writers who introduced unprecedented boldness in addressing sensitive societal and taboo issues.

In Saudi Arabia, marginalisation has impacted various groups in recent decades, including racial minorities, individuals with disabilities, the economically disadvantaged, foundlings, and foreign labourers. Alhazza (2014), analysing capitalist structures like Saudi Arabia, argued that social marginalisation is often a byproduct of global capitalism, intensifying urban marginality and creating new forms of exclusion. He concludes that economic conditions are not the sole contributors to exclusion; other societal factors also play significant roles. Hence, Alhazza examined the causes and forms of social marginalisation in Saudi Arabia, identifying factors such as gender, class, status, sectarianism, and nationality. Despite their differences, these causes share common experiences of isolation and alienation.

Other studies explored the social novel's critique of marginalization, exemplified by Yousef Al-Mohaimeed's *Fikhākh al-Rā'iḥa* (*Wolves of the Crescent Moon*). Al-Sharqi (2017) argued that binary oppositions serve as a key structural device, highlighting themes such as reality vs dream, nature vs culture, past vs present, and dominance vs marginalization. Through these binaries, she concludes that Al-Mohaimeed critiques the social and economic disparities in Saudi Arabia, illustrating the impact of modernization on marginalized groups. Algahtani (2017) advocated that post-9/11 contexts played a significant role in the development of the novel, making it a vehicle for recording the social and cultural changes of that period. Algahtani explained that critics, whether Arab or non-Arab, respond to novels like *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* based on the concept of interpretive communities. These communities share common perspectives, themes, and methods of analysis, shaped by their cultural backgrounds, experiences, and intellectual frameworks.

While there is a significant amount of research on trauma in general, there is a lack of studies focusing on how trauma specifically impacts characters who are marginalized or excluded from mainstream society. These characters might experience trauma in unique ways due to their social, cultural, or economic status. This study aims to explore how Al-Mohaimeed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* portrays the psychological and social impact of trauma on marginalized individuals. It examines how the characters' experiences of rejection, stigmatization, and injustice shape their identities and behaviours within a changing society.

3. Methodology

This study employs literary trauma theory to explore how trauma affects individuals not simply through specific traumatic events but through the lasting, haunting aftermath of these experiences. Applying Caruth's theory allows us to explore how *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* represents the psychological impacts of social marginalization and trauma on its characters' identities. In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth defines literary trauma as

The story of a wound that cries out; that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our every action and our language (1995, p. 4).

This concept highlights the difficulty of expressing and articulating trauma, as such experiences disturb one's consciousness so profoundly that they shatter the mind's ability to fully comprehend or linguistically encode them. Traumatic experiences have the power to affect others who share a similar history, race, or religion, creating a post-traumatic culture. According to Ronald Granofsky, a "traumatic novel" is one that uses literary symbolism to explore individual experiences of collective trauma, whether related to actual historical events, disturbing trends in the present, or imagined horrors of the future (2012, p. 5). Thus, a traumatic novel not only reflects past suffering but also raises troubling questions about the present and the ambiguous future of traumatized characters.

Traumatic narratives can reform and convey the experiences of trauma survivors, even for readers who are removed from those specific events. Such narratives help shape the cultural identity of marginalised groups who experience trauma through shared histories. It enables us to have a deeper understanding of the psychological and emotional experiences of the marginalised characters. This research will examine how the novel critiques broader societal structures that perpetuate marginalisation and explores the transformative impact of trauma on individual and collective identities.

4. Discussion

Al-Mohaimeed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon* gives voice to marginalized individuals burdened by grief and pain, with stories overlooked or misunderstood in mainstream discourse. The novel centres on Turad, Nassir, and Tawfiq, three men whose lives are shaped by trauma and social exclusion. Their meeting in Riyadh, a rapidly modernizing city, reveals the enduring impact of systemic inequality, reflecting their identities and psyches. Al-Mohaimeed introduces Turad, a Bedouin man whose name reflects his marginalized status, devoid of significant meaning and shaped by societal norms. This detail highlights the differences in naming practices between the Bedouin and the Hader; while the Hader favour common Islamic names, the Bedouin tend to select names that appear more exotic (Al Fahad, 2015, p.274). Turad's life is marked by hardship and suffering, unfolding through fragmented flashbacks. This narrative technique mirrors the enduring impact of trauma, which continuously shapes his identity and memory. As Cathy Caruth explains, trauma is stored in the mind like an unchanging recording, replaying itself incessantly without resolution.

Turad's trauma began during his youth when, as a Bedouin bandit, he and his companion, Nahar, were captured. The captors buried them up to their necks in the desert, and then they are attacked by a wolf. Turad helplessly watched as the wolf devoured Nahar in a scene that Al-Mohaimeed vividly describes: "The moment the wolf devoured Nahar's mouth and lips, and snatched the tip of his tongue, the sacred screaming stopped." (2007, p.129). The wolf then attacked Turad, tearing off his ear. This moment of extreme physical and psychological violence left Turad deeply scarred. Caruth's concept of the 'double paradox' of trauma, being close to death yet remaining alive, captures Turad's mental state after surviving this distress. Horvitz characterises such events as acts of "somasochistic violence against a designated victim," shedding light on the profound trauma endured by the victim (2000, p.11).

Following this traumatic event, Turad fled his village in search of a new beginning in Riyadh, hoping to escape the shame imposed by his tribe due to his disfigurement. However, life in the city only deepened his sense of alienation. His Bedouin identity and physical appearance became subjects of ridicule, with people comparing him to Van Gogh and mocking him: "One of them shouted, 'Hey, guys, his ear's cut off!' They roared with laughter." (2007, p.24). Despite working hard as a teaboy, Turad faced constant verbal abuse and anger from others, unsure of why he was treated with such hostility. His Bedouin heritage, poverty, and physical disfigurement isolate him, intensifying his feelings of rejection.

On the other hand, Nassir has his own journey that begins with his birth, marked by rejection and neglect. Found abandoned in a box beside a mosque and losing an eye early in life, Nassir grows up surrounded by suffering and silence. His trauma manifests in his inability to express his feelings, as his story is pieced together by Turad, who uncovers Nassir's secret through his documents. Cathy Caruth defines literary trauma as an *emotional wound that needs to be heard or understood. It conveys a reality that cannot be easily expressed or explained. Instead, trauma reveals itself indirectly, often through fragmented memories, silence, or artistic expression.* Nassir poignantly reflects: "It's not that when I was born, I was thrown into a banana crate... It's not enough that I was deprived of my dream and ambition to become a soldier" (2007, p.112). As a child, he faces tireless societal pressure, bullying at school, and the instability of moving between homes. After being adopted, he is returned to the orphanage when his

foster mother becomes pregnant, reinforcing his feelings of worthlessness. Nassir's experiences of abandonment, societal rejection, and the denial of his aspiration to become a soldier embody a profound integration of trauma.

Additionally compounding his trauma is the sexual abuse he suffers at the hands of a housekeeper, a harrowing experience he keeps private even though they discovered and nothing happened, just "terminate Lumbai's contract" (2007,p.87) because no one defends him. Laurence Kirmayer emphasises that memory of traumatic events is influenced by social and cultural contexts, which can pressure individuals to remain silent about their pain (1996, p.191). Nasir's silence shows how, in his culture, people often avoid talking about their personal pain, especially when that pain is tied to shame or social judgment. Nassir's trauma extends beyond individual pain to encompass societal wounds. Despite committing no crime, he is viewed as inferior and his existence is marked by systemic exclusion. Nasir's story shows that trauma affects both the individual and their place in society. His experiences of being neglected and rejected by the community leave deep emotional wounds.

The third character, Tawfiq, embodies a profound personal struggle rooted in societal rejection and dehumanization. His journey from Sudan to Riyadh is marked by pain and exploitation. As a young boy, Tawfiq was unknowingly and forcibly castrated, a traumatic event that he only fully comprehends later in life. This act of dehumanization, which stripped him of his masculinity, shapes his identity and sense of self. Tawfiq narrates his story to Turad, who shares similar traumatic experiences, saying: "You've lost your ear, man, but the real problem is when someone loses his life and his future, his happiness and his stability" (2007,p.70).Tawfiq's castration allows him to work in palaces as a slave, where he is treated as an instrument, often serving as a driver or guard and moving between households. This reflects how his personal trauma extends into social trauma, society sees him not as a human being but as a tool to fulfill its needs.

In addition, Tawfiq's experience reflects a broader cultural trauma shared by his Sudanese community. The African slave trade, which brought children and young women from Sudan and Ethiopia to Hejaz, represents a collective historical event that inflicted deep scars on his community. Children were often sold or given as tribute, a system of exploitation that shaped lives and identities across generations. Although slavery was abolished in Saudi Arabia by King Faisal's royal decree, Tawfiq's struggles did not end. After leaving the palace, he felt worthless and incapable of finding a meaningful life, "What freedom could I enjoy after my whole life had gone by without a career or a wife and children to keep me company in my loneliness and isolation?" (2007, p,121). His unresolved personal trauma remains in a timeless, wordless state, continuously inflicting pain on his psyche and reinforcing his social marginalization. Overall, Mohaimeed critiques the social and cultural structures that perpetuate exclusion, exposing how societal stigmas and historical injustices shape individual identities and exacerbate suffering. The trauma experienced by the characters shapes their lives and creates obstacles, leaving them unequal to others in opportunities and social standing.

5. Conclusion

This study has explored the psychological and social impacts of trauma on marginalized individuals as portrayed in Al-mohaimeed's *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*. Through his characters, the novel delves into the interplay between personal and societal trauma, highlighting how social structures confine individuals to restricted and transient roles. The analysis shows that these limits affect how people are seen and treated, causing them to carry hidden trauma and lose confidence in themselves. The characters live in a community that pushes them aside for reasons they cannot control. Taken away from their hopes and happiness, they struggle to survive in a society that hardly notices their pain. Through his story, Al-Mohaimeed speaks for these silenced people, showing their suffering and calling for others to recognize it.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the enduring psychological effects of social exclusion and raises awareness of the pervasive cruelty of marginalization. However, the study is limited to a single novel, *Wolves of the Crescent Moon*, and cannot generalize its findings to all marginalized groups. Additionally, the findings may not fully account for future developments or shifts within Saudi Arabia or the global sociopolitical landscape. To address these limitations, this study recommends expanding the analysis to include other Saudi and Middle Eastern novels that explore themes of marginalization and trauma. Such broader investigations would offer a more comprehensive understanding of the relationship between literature, trauma, and social exclusion.

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