



Exploring Trauma-Generated Dissociation in the personality of the protagonist of Hassan Blasim's  
The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes

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## Abstract

The current research deals with the conceptualization of trauma-generated dissociation in the personality of the protagonist of Hassan Blasim's *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes*. The research adheres to the theory of trauma and dissociation of Sigmund Freud, Pierre Janet, and Cathy Caruth. It employs some of their psychological notions including identity fragmentation, pathogenetic reminiscences, traumatic neurosis, vehement emotions, speechless terror, latency period, and incubation to the personality of the protagonist of the story.

The impact of war on the human psyche is a permanent theme in the story of Blasim. The study shows that the protagonist, Carlos Fuentes, is permanently affected by the traumas of war and violence experienced in Iraq. Such traumatic occasions lead the protagonist to experience deep dissociative manners, resulting in vehement emotions, identity fragmentation, and traumatic neurosis.

The research sums up that the tragic death of Salim is the eventual consequence of the war's destructive effect on his personality. The paper highlights the lasting and debilitating influence of war on the human mind and the importance of understanding the psychological complexities of trauma-induced dissociation. Salim's failure to reconcile his split sense of self and the devastating emotional turmoil resulted from his wartime experiences ultimately prove too much for him to tolerate, leading to his downfall.

Key words: *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes* , Trauma, dissociation, , traumatic neurosis.



## Methodology

To employ the conceptualization of trauma-generated dissociation to the protagonist's personality of Hassan Blasim's *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes*, the study adopts a qualitative analytical design depending on the psychological theories of Pierre Janet, Sigmund Freud and Cathy Caruth.

## Limitation

The scope of investigation of traumatized cases in the current study will only focus on the representation of psychologically traumatized protagonist of Hassan Blasim's *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes*.

## Data Collection

The main source of the study is Hassan Blasim's short story entitled *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes* published in his book *The Corpse Exhibition and Other Stories of Iraq* which is translated by Jonathan Wright in 2014. The study also examines the works of Janet, Freud and Caruth, relating the theory of trauma and dissociation to provide a suitable theoretical framework.

## 1-Introduction

### 2-1: Overall View about The Story

*The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes* is one of fourteen short stories that comprise Hassan Blasim's collection *The Corpse Exhibition*. In this story, Blasim depicts the psychological impacts of war on individuals. The narrative traces the story of Salim, an Iraqi refugee who assumes a new identity in Holland to escape the previous persecution in Iraq. The story describes how Salim confronts challenges in coping with his new life under the new identity of *Carlos Fuentes*. Although the story does not describe the circumstances that lead Salim to quit Baghdad, it shows clearly the ways Salim follows in adapting to his new life. Salim tried to get over his previous traumas by forging new identities that are solely lives in the present, yet the past haunts him in the form of nightmares and disjointed hallucinations. In a scene of magical realism, the story ends with his death when the new identity of Carlos Fuentes kills the old traumatic identity of Salim.

## 1-2-Theory Framework

The trauma theory was initiated in the work of Freud, especially his works "*Hysteria*" and "*Beyond The Pleasure Principle*" in 1895 and 1920 respectively. Epistemologically speaking, the term "trauma", originated from the Greek word for "wound" referring to physical injuries, has evolved by Freud to include psychological wounds and mental afflictions (Caruth, 1996, p.3). Freud argues that "the splitting of the contents of consciousness is the consequence of a voluntary act on the part of the patient; that is to say, it is instituted by an effort of will, the motive of which is discernible" (Freud, 1963, p. 69). He focuses on the notion of the latency period between traumatic events and their pathological effects.

Dealing with trauma as a major subject in her studies, Cathy Caruth(1996) accepts the definition of trauma as "an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, the uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p.11). She argues that trauma is "not locatable in the simple violent or original event in the individual's past", instead, trauma is identified in "the way it is precisely not known in the first instance-returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth, 1995, p.174). Caruth also defines trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours" (1995, p.4).

Generally speaking, trauma can be seen as the return of repressed feelings and memories in the person's deep unconsciousness through dreams, hallucinations, and nightmares. The trauma here depends on the reaction to these traumatic events and individuals, then suffers from fragmentation. These effects become causes of future disorders that in turn, lead to Hysteria caused by the memories of the traumatic event (Breuer and Freud, 1955, p.7). Recollecting such events, the traumatic individual suffers "pathogenic reminiscences" (Breuer and Freud 1955, p.40). After they are repressed in the unconscious, reminiscences cause disorder and struggle that split off the ego and appear in the form of dreams and nightmares (Freud 1920, p.8).

Because of the conflict inside the ego, the traumatic person suffers from "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (Freud 1920, p.35) which is known as "traumatic neurosis" caused by the sudden "fright" that destroys the internal defense system. Freud states "we describe as

traumatic any excitation from outside which is powerful enough to break through the protective shield [...] with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli" (Freud, 1920, p.33). Therefore, trauma can be seen as an external factor that strikes the unready psychic system and an internal reaction of defense against external stimuli.

Based on Freud's theory of trauma, Richard Kluft(1992) focuses on the process of dissociation as a defense mechanism where "an overwhelmed individual cannot escape what assails him or her by taking meaningful action or successful flight, and escapes instead by altering his or her internal organization" (p. 143). That is to say, the victims choose dissociation when they feel overcome and incapable of physically escaping from what is worrying them; they choose dissociation as a technique to mentally escape. They alter their internal thoughts and feelings instead of taking action or fleeing and are overcome by unbearable circumstances that led them to fragmentation.

Dealing with the treatment of patients' post-traumatic stress, Pierre Janet thinks that "certain happenings would leave indelible and distressing memories-memories to which the sufferer was continually returning, and by which he was tormented by day and by night" (1919, p.589). Janet believes that the traumatic memories are frozen into the mind of the traumatic victim and they are fixed throughout the passage of time. Such memories became hindrances that kept people from coping normally with their lives and this is what Janet called "vehement emotions" which cause a reduction of the individual's integrative capacity (Janet, 1894, p.501). Vehement emotions are a key component of traumatic experiences because they produce their disintegrating effects in terms of intensity, duration, and repetition.

According to Janet, the vehement emotions of victims have a dissolvent effect on voluntary decisions, sensitive feelings, awareness of emotions, and memories. Thus, it has a great impact on the mental activity in general (1928, p. 463–464). If the defense mechanism of the personality fails to handle the traumatic event, it leads to 'vehement emotions', allowing experiences, such as terror, horror, and dread, to rise instead. Hence, personality dissociation appears as the individual's inability to defend against the inherent vehement emotions, and the inability to cope with the traumatic experiences. (Janet, 1898, p. 142).

Based on a research by Bessel van der Kolk (1996), traumatic event affects memory and the brain to the extent that it activates a strong emotional response, making it very difficult for the brain to talk or think about the traumatic event(p.168). This results in speechless terror. As a result, the way of storing the memory in the brain and the



mechanism of recalling them are different from the normal way of storing other memories. While normal memories can be easily recalled, traumatic recalls remain detached from this conscious storytelling due to the way they are stored in the brain during the severe emotional experiences. Thus, the traumatic memories become "unspeakable."

Barry Cohen (1996) proposes some aspects of experiencing trauma, including the "sudden discontinuity in physical and psychological experience"(p.527) where the victims defend themselves against the traumatic event. By disconnecting any prior positive bond with the traumatic event, the victim alters his awareness to escape suffering. The perpetrator is removed from their mind, and the victim converts into an object rather than holding his identity as a person. One of these aspects is that the victim lives in a state of disparity and despair known as speechless terror. Cohen also indicates Spiegel's argument that the victim lives in two dissimilar incompatible worlds: the past, the world of the trauma, and the present, the world of the "ordinary" life where the traumatic realm stands for the real internal world, which is surreal and timeless one (pp.527-528).

Ruth Leys(2000), depending on the Freudian theory of trauma, contemplates that the traumatic experience in which an individual immerses is so profound that it blocks the cognitive knowledge of the event (p.9). An individual can be overwhelmed to such an extent that they are incompetent to uphold the detached, observational view typically associated with cognitive understanding.

One of the main aspects of trauma is remembering the repressed feelings. According to Freud(1920), not all the nasty repressed feelings can be recalled, especially the main parts of it. He also theorizes that the self never recalls the actual occasion but only the "reproductions" of the traumatic experience which arises in dreams (p.19). Thus, the traumatized person is forced to "repeat the repressed material as a contemporary event instead of remembering it as something that belongs to the past" (Freud, 1920, p.19). Compulsion of repeating the reminiscences of the tragic event with hopes of controlling the unpleasant experience constitutes a landmark of the traumatic neurosis (Freud,1920, p.19). This happens throughout dreams in order to control the stimulus retrospectively, by developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis" (Freud,1920, p.37).

In the theory of trauma, Freud also incorporated two important notions: neurosis and incubation. According to him, the series of great psychical and motor symptoms that



appear after the traumatic accident are called "traumatic neurosis" which are incomprehensible. Whereas the "incubation period" is referred to as the time that passed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms (Freud,1920, p.84; p.p.67-68). Although the traumatized individual is apparently unharmed at the time of the traumatic accidents, they are fully unconscious in the course of the accident itself (Freud,1920, p. 68). The traumatic event disturbs the normal capacity of the human being to resist such abnormal situations and the result is an unequal encounter between the event and the reaction. Therefore, the events lead to a "fragile and fraudulent" traumatized person (Fassin and Rechtman,2009, p. 87).

### 3-Discussion and Analysis

The present study focuses on critically reviewing and analyzing the traumatic experiences in the personality of the protagonist of Hassan Blasim's *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes*. It examines the traumatic symptoms, such as lost identity, flashbacks, nightmares, and fear, throughout the notions of identity fragmentation, pathogenetic reminiscences, traumatic neurosis, vehement emotions, speechless terror, latency period, and neurosis, and incubation.

At the start of the story, Salim Abdul Husain was disgusted and bored because of the miserable situation of the country, especially his job of clearing up the aftermath of explosions in Baghdad. The scene shows the shattered human bodies after each explosion and the way of scavenging items from victims of bombings without empathy and ethical regard for the suffering of victims. This horrific situation in Salim's depressed daily life is a great triggering source of his later psychological trauma and disorder. The study suggests that this experience leads to his trauma which, later on, affected his future personality and left him a traumatized individual who employed dissociation until committing suicide.

Under such an intense strain of a traumatic event, Salim's personality failed to cope with the overpowering emotions and experiences that threaten to consume him. He flees the country and tries to change everything related to his past including his name from Salim Abdul Husain to Carlos Fuentes.(Blasim, 2014, p.188).(add form American...)

Fuentes works hard to learn Dutch as part of his defense mechanism to escape the traumatic situation, promising that he would never speak Arabic, nor does he mix with Arabs and Iraqis(Blasim, 2014, p.189). Coping with life after the traumatic events is



not an easy pace; Kluft(1992) thinks that "dissociation pragmatically as a defense in which an overwhelmed individual cannot escape [what] assails him or her by taking meaningful action or successful flight, and escapes instead by altering his or her internal organization"(p.143). The mechanism that Fuentes follow is called dissociation, which is a process that happens when someone cannot integrate certain experience into his or her personality. Trauma-related dissociation seems to be a form of mental escape when physical escape is not possible. In this way, the person gives up part of his or her personality so that the rest will be able to go on living. The traumatized person splits part of their personality off from the rest of the personality and then in the second step they try somehow to evacuate it into the other person. So the person will disconnected from reality, body or even the identity.

Pierre Janet highlights the role of dissociation in traumatically induced disorders. His theory, in relation to trauma and dissociation, suggests that the alter personalities of the traumatized individual with Multiple Personality Disorder (MPD) are the most complex among all the dissociated states. In addition, there can be clashes between the alter personalities and the central personality because each of them has their sense of identity (American Psychiatric Association, 1980, p.257). Employing this theory to the character to Fuentes, it appears that a simple man, with an Arabic name Salim Abdul Hussein, has a simple education and work, quickly transforms into a new personality including the behavior, the language, the race and the trends ascending to a European level of life previously unimaginable. He tries to erase his past and uproot his origins. His cousin urges him to change his name telling him that "a brown name—a Cuban or Argentine name would suit your complexion" (Blasim, 2014, p.188 ). Fuentes also abandons and denies his job as a sanitation worker in Baghdad claiming that he was working a translator for the US Army. Nevertheless, even within the depths of his nightmares, his previous traumatic life and his old identity continue to haunt him because he suffers permanently from the traumatic experience to the extents that the unforgettable tragic events haunting him like ghosts, and he suffers from phobias and agonies related to that traumatic experience, although he forgets some of these details (Blasim, 2014, p.205).

F. W. Putnam(1985) argues that the process of dissociation "produces an alteration in the person's consciousness. During this process, thoughts, feelings, and memories are not integrated into the individual's awareness or memory in the normal way" (p.66) Fuentes, suffers a disintegration or division in his personality, emotions and norms.



Trauma is the root cause of his disintegration. He adopts new personality in order to disconnect with emotional pain of the trauma. He tried to live the feeling that put him emotionally disconnected from his old personality and the world around him.

Although Fuentes tries to cope with the new life in Holland, comparing everything to his past life and his old miseries was a real trigger that nourishes his memories unconsciously with stress and anxiety. However, the process of dissociation "went on as he plans it. Every day he is making progress in burying his identity and his past"(Blasim, 2014, p.189). He scorns all people who do not adopt his new thoughts. Salim reaches the climax of his dissociation when he tries to integrate "his mind and spirit into Dutch society...[ throughout] ...a good-hearted Dutch girlfriend who loved and respected him"(Blasim, 2014, p.190). After that, Fuentes gets the Dutch citizenship and feels "that his skin and blood had changed forever and that his lungs were now breathing real life"(Blasim, 2014, p.190). However, such coping with the new life and the experience of dissociation was not real because the effect of trauma appear suddenly when the problem of nightmares happened. Such unexpected suffering is expressed clearly when the writer proposes that "old ages do not wear out; it's only man that wears out. The wind did not blow fair for Fuentes"(Blasim, 2014, p.191).

The miserable dreams, which come from his unconsciousness, reflect the traumatic events that are kept unspoken and latent. Fuentes is not satisfied with the explanation which he reads in Erich Fromm's *Unforgotten Language* because he does not want to leave the fantasy of his new life that dissociate him from the old traumatic one. Fuentes's experienced traumatic events result in repressed emotions that float up later in a form of nightmares and hallucinations influencing his behavior and responses to stress. This is similar to what Freud theorized about repressed desires from the latency period affecting a persona.

Employing Freudian trauma theory to analyze Fuentes's story and eventual fate, the study deeply explicates the psychological disintegration and hysteria caused by severe trauma. The severe trauma, according to Freud, especially from wars, causes a profound fragmentation of the psyche. Fuentes's lifeline from war-torn Baghdad to a safe life in Holland is spoiled by the haunting obscurities of his traumatic past. His exposure to unyielding violence and the carnages of war in Iraq initiates this fragmentation, which will be his bedrock of future psychological turmoil. Such trauma breaches the "protective shield" of the Fuentes's psyche, leaving him vulnerable and fragmented. Escaping the physical dangers of Iraq, Fuentes's unconscious remains





imprisoned in the traumatic experiences he witnessed and suffered. Freud and Breuer describe this as "pathogenic reminiscences," where the suppressed reminiscences of trauma continue to interrupt the individual's psyche. Filled with violence and death, Fuentes's nightmares are manifestations of these memories. They reflect the persistent impact of the war experiences on his psychological and mental state, leading to hysteria—a state Freud links to the reappearance of repressed traumatic memories. Salim's condition deteriorates into the development of dual personalities—Salim and Fuentes. Freud's theory proposes that the ego, under the strain of unresolved trauma, may split as a defense mechanism against the irresistible stimuli. This interior conflict within Salim generates "Fuentes" a detached persona who embodies his endeavor to cope with Salim's traumatic past. The creation of Fuentes can be seen as Salim's unconscious attempt to defend his core identity from the traumatic stimuli by assigning the resultant behaviors and traumatic experiences to an another personality.

Dreams become the arena of conflict inside the personality of Salim. Freud argues that dreams and nightmares are vital expressions of the unconscious mind. Salim's dreams reflects how his fragmented psyche struggles for rationality. In his dreams, Salim assumes the persona of Fuentes, who enacts violence upon Salim. This act in the dream symbolically signifies the internal clash between his attempt to overwhelm the traumatic past and the unpleasant reappearance of that trauma. The nightmare where Fuentes tries to kill Salim indicates the tragic culmination of this internal battle.

The internal conflict between Salim and Fuentes symbolizes the struggle between the past and present realities. Fuentes lives in the present, where he seems to live a normal life, but his internal realm is subjugated to the traumatic past. This double existence exacerbates his psychological suffering, as the traumatic past frequently interrupts his present, ordinary life. Salim's decision to alter his identity to Fuentes and move to Holland signifies an attempt to escape his past. However, Freud's concept of the return of the repressed suggests that Salim's traumatic memories would certainly reappear. The nightmares and disturbing thoughts were evidences of this reoccurrence.

Freud uses the term "traumatic neurosis" to describe the condition resulting from an "extensive breach in the protective shield" against external stimuli. The emergence of Fuentes and his sudden nightmares signify that his psyche has suffered such a breach. The relentless invasion of traumatic reminiscences into his conscious life, alongside with his helplessness to reunite his dual identities, crushes his mental defenses. This





extensive breach brings the ultimate destruction of Salim's psychic system, culminating in his tragic death of the unresolved trauma. Fuentes suffers from fragmentation ego which leads to future disorder and hysteria caused from memories of the violence and war time in Baghdad. He suffers from, what Breuer and Freud call, "pathogenic reminiscences" which split off the ego and appear in the form of dreams and nightmares.

Employing Pierre Janet's theory of trauma, the paper explores Salim's experiences that lead to a deep fragmentation of his identity and the appearance of dissociative symptoms. Janet theorizes that dissociation happens when an individual, overcome by traumatic happenings, cannot physically escape or take meaningful action. Unable to physically flee the horrors he experienced, Salim's psyche resorted to dissociation, splitting his identity to cope with the intolerable circumstances. Subsequently, this failure led to vehement emotions such as terror, horror, and dread which all prevent the integration of traumatic events into the individual's typical psychological functioning.

Janet claims that trauma leads to an integrative failure, where the victim cannot blend their experiences and emotions into a rational sense of self. Salim's creation of the alternate personality, Fuentes, is a symbol of this failure because he signifies an endeavor to compartmentalize the traumatic reminiscences and emotions that Salim cannot resolve with his conscious identity. This dissociation allows Salim to mentally escape his past, but it also indicates a profound disruption in his psychological integrity because the traumatic memories are often "frozen" and continue to haunt the victim.

Despite Fuentes efforts to engage himself in Dutch culture and language, the vehemence of his past emotions disturb his mental state. The failure of integrating his traumatic memories into a coherent and stable self-concept causes a continuous state of mental and emotional confusion.

The strong emotions related to Fuentes's traumatic past, including guilt, fear, and shame, have a dissolving influence on his voluntary decisions and sense of self. His failure to express these feelings, described as "speechless terror," is obvious in his dreams when he cannot communicate with Dutch and is forced to confront his Iraqi identity. The last dream where he meets his former self, Salim Abdul Husain, encapsulates the identity struggle. The nightmare with the violent imagery indicates the unresolved vehement emotions that finally lead to his psychological collapse and tragic death.



Fuentes's psychological trauma and dissociation can be scrutinized throughout the notions of "incubation period," unconsciousness during the traumatic occasion, and the consequential fragile and fraudulent personality. According to Freud, the "incubation period" is the period between the traumatic occasion and the initial appearance of symptoms. In Fuentes's situation, this time extends from his time living and working in Baghdad to his new life in Amsterdam until the invasion of dreams after some years. During this period, Fuentes was functioning normally on the surface. He manages to integrate into Dutch society, conceals his identity and overcomes his past. Nevertheless, the traumatic experiences he suffered while living in the war zone in Iraq incubate within him, waiting to resurface like the volcano.

Fuentes's symptoms arise later, mainly through his unpleasant nightmares and compulsive behaviors. This delayed response mirrors Freud's concept of the incubation period, in which the traumatized person initially appears unaffected but later experiences significant psychological disorders. Fuentes's helplessness to speak Dutch in his nightmares, the disdainful reactions of the children to his new identity, planting a car bomb in the center of Amsterdam, and his nightmarish confrontations with his past self are indicative of these delayed symptoms.

Freud theorizes that the individual is completely unconscious during the traumatic occasion itself, so they cannot consider the event in real time. The frequent exposure to violence and murder likely overcame Fuentes's capacity to process these experiences when they occurred. As a defense mechanism, this unconsciousness protected him from instant psychological collapse by storing the trauma in his psyche.

Freud theorizes that during the traumatic event itself, the individual is fully unconscious, meaning they cannot process the event in real-time. Salim's unconscious reaction can be understood in the context of his work in Iraq. The repeated exposure to death and destruction likely overwhelmed his capacity to process these experiences as they happened. This unconsciousness is a defense mechanism, protecting him from immediate psychological collapse but storing the trauma in his psyche. When Fuentes settles in a safe environment, symptoms of trauma emerge in a form of dreams and obsessive behaviors where his mind attempts to make sense of trauma that was not handle at the time. The struggle takes place inside Fuentes's personality because of the unequal conflict between the overwhelming events and his psychological reaction. Fuentes's efforts to resist trauma throughout assimilating into the Dutch society are "fragile" and eventually unsuccessful.



Salim's defense mechanism of adopting a new personality is against the unsettled trauma rather than a true transformation. This new mechanism is built on a fragile foundation. The obsessive behaviors and disorder of life reveal inherent fragility and fraudulence of Fuentes's new identity. The tragic suicide of Fuentes represents the "fraudulent" attempt to escape trauma, and his "fragile" psychological state. However, the news of the Dutch newspapers, the photo capturing his dead body, the glowing ring in his hand, and moving his body to the cemetery of Najaf all symbolize the persistent and unsettled nature of his trauma.

Based on Bessel van der Kolk's concept of "speechless terror", (1996), before the nightmares broke up, Fuentes was living in a speechless terror where the traumatic events affect the memory and the brain to the extent that they activate a strong emotional response, making it very difficult for the brain to talk or think about the traumatic event. Since Fuentes did not speak about the details of the events that had caused his trauma during the story, traumatic memories became "unspeakable." Caruth (1995) asserts the unspeakability of trauma that the literary language, which mimics the structure of trauma through its experimental forms, can potentially transmit trauma (p.4). Based on these theories, Fuentes's "unforgotten language" that appears in his dreams symbolizes the transition of the trauma from the unspeakability to the reality; these dreams bring Fuentes back to a realm which is the source of his trauma. As a result, he performs some rituals and followed specific manners to uproot the cause of his trauma, such as stopping eating root vegetables because he thinks that this kind of food stirs up the bad dreams related to the past. Additionally, he chews the food like a camel because "he had read that chewing it well helps to get rid of nightmares" (Blasim, 2014, p.193).

According to Freud, nightmares happen because they represent the old oppressed desires. In this vein, Fuentes wants to control these dreams which belong to the old language that is why he "promised himself he would not speak Arabic from then on, or mix with Arabs or Iraqis, whatever happened in life"(Blasim, 2014, p.189) as a way of dissociation from the traumatic events. He thinks that "dreams must learn the new language of the country so that they could incorporate new images and ideas"(Blasim, 2014, p.193). However, his attempt of controlling, modifying and integrating the dreams with the salubrious rules of life in Holland falls apart because the nightmares come from his old language.



One of the activities that Fuentes does in order to prevent the bad dreams is giving up "sleeping naked and touching his wife's naked skin [because] ... nakedness attracts the sleeper to the zone of childhood; that is what he read too"(Blasim, 2014, p.p.193-194). He wants to quit every zone related to roots or beginnings as childhood is full of repressed desires that cause bad dreams. He wants to sweep all the rubbish of the unconscious throughout following dissociation from his past.

Pierre Janet suggests that the traumatic memories has great effect on the mind because they persist as "fixed ideas", which can grow further subconsciously, and such vehement emotions "manifest themselves at times in dreams, flashbacks, and other dissociative episodes"(Van der Hart,1996, p.408). Dealing with the identity crisis and split personality, the story portrayed a caricature of the fragile refugee archetype embodied by Salim Abdul Hussein. Within his unlimited imagination about the European life, he finds himself later on immersed in an identity struggle within a complex and unfamiliar environment, entirely alien to him. Although "Fuentes felt that his skin and blood had changed forever and that his lungs were now breathing real life"( Blasim, 2014, p.191), the dissociated personality ultimately leads him to strong emotional disorder and madness because of consequence of the shock of transitioning from one world into another. Fuentes's nightmares spark the past traumatic experience and his "fixed ideas," leading to clashes between the alter personalities and the central personality, which causes Fuentes tragic death. Salim suffers from such traumatic disorder caused by a split identity and lack of security.

The repressed traumatic events that start appearing in Fuentes's dreams lead him to vehement emotions. They cause different experiences such as terror, horror and dread to rise because the defense of his mechanism has failed to cope with the traumatic events stored in his unconscious. Pierre Janet points out that the vehement emotions have a dissolvent effect on voluntary decisions, feelings, memories and it has a great effect on mental activities. As such, trauma-generated dissociation is founded chiefly because of an integrative failure or deficit, and the victim may follow some ways to quit the subsequences of the traumatic events. (Janet, 1889, p. 142). Consequently, Fuentes engages in insane actions such as changing his food habits and clothing and his wife notices his strange behavior (Blasim, 2014, p.193). He tries to activate his defense mechanism to the highest level throughout abnormal activities. He begins performing mysterious secret rituals such as "dying his hair and his toe nails green, and sleep on his stomach obscure words"( Blasim, 2014, p.194). However, all these



activities that he performs to dissociate from the old traumatic situation do not work and he could not sweep all the rubbish of the unconscious (Blasim, 2014, p.p.194-5).

The nightmares reflect anxieties about Fuentes's newfound homeland and his former one. Within the framework of the split personality and mind disorder, the writer presents different sleep scenes of his protagonist sometimes in translucent orange pajamas, other times in a thick woolen coat beside his naked wife, reflecting the conflict between his eastern conservative personality and the naked European personality. Once in full military dress with a plastic toy gun by his side, believing it would fend off the nightmares (Blasim, 2014, p.p.193-194). Wearing military clothes brings back the violence of his old life. The woolen clothes provide a sense of psychological shields that Fuentes uses to overcome trauma consequences. However, trauma according to Freud, In one of his dreams, Fuentes found himself losing the ability to speak Dutch, forced to speak with his boss in the Iraqi dialect, which causes him "great concern and a horrible pain in his head. He would wake up soaked in sweat, then burst into tears" (Blasim, 2014, p.191).

Dreaming of blowing up a car in the middle of Amsterdam—a city he adores to the point of worship! This love is an evident in his quick mastery of Dutch, his refusal to rely on social assistance and his obedience to follow the laws of Holland (Blasim, 2014, p.190). This love, which stands as a core of his new identity opposed involving in something as horrific as a bombing, even in a dream. The influence of such nightmares, caused by the traumatic events, led him, in reality, to his insane end.

The final terrifying nightmare that leads to Fuentes's death, is the most symbolic of the split personality and identity disorder. It portrays the protagonist's torment and his crushing between two identities. Fuentes's dream vividly illustrates the protagonist's struggle with personality disorder and identity crisis, and the effect of the traumatized experience of his past. In the dream, Fuentes, armed with a rifle, was shooting inhabitants in an old building in Baghdad, which symbolizes his attempt to sever ties with his past traumatic experience with violence. Marked by a previous fire, the building represents a history marred by trauma and suffering. The climax of the nightmare, where he faces his old personality—Salim Abdul Hussein—explains the internal conflict of his identity crisis. This chance meeting with his naked, blood-stained self proposes a raw and unfiltered confrontation with his real nature, naked of all pretenses. The quivering hand with which Fuentes aims at Salim symbolizes his instability and hesitation, highlighting the fragility of his sense of self. As Fuentes





sprays Salim with bullets, Salim jumps from the window without being hit. Fuentes ends as a crushed corpse on the pavement signifies the protagonist's failed effort to reconcile his dual identities. The way of jumping out the window suggests a desperate escape from the internal conflict, but his tragic death signifies the futility of such an attempt.

The ring, which Salim had once robbed from a victim killed in an explosion in Baghdad, glowed red like a "sun in hell," (Blasim, 2014, p.196) functions as a strong sign of the protagonist's persistent connection to his past and his unsettled traumatic events. Focusing on the ring, the author emphasizes the inescapable nature of Salim's past, despite his efforts to eradicate it throughout dissociation. The author seeks to highlight the notion that avoiding the past, as an obsession, requires the annihilation of its bearer; otherwise, it is a futile endeavor as long as the past remains alive. As a result, Salim's dissociation mechanism has failed to overcome his traumatic experience. The emotional end of the story, where Fuentes is posthumously uncovered of his adopted identity and return to his native land, strengthens the unavoidable connection to one's past. Burying Fuentes's body in Najaf cemetery, signifies the ultimate reconciliation of his fragmented personality, albeit through death, cementing the story's haunting exploration of trauma and dissociation. In addition, the violent imagery and the symbolic elements within the nightmares strongly convey the depth of the protagonist's psychological turmoil. The aftermath of the trauma and misfortune continue after his death when the Dutch newspaper wrote that an "Iraqi man had committed suicide at night" (Blasim, 2014, p.196). In addition, his body is moved to Iraq in order to be buried there. Salim's disastrous end highlights the dissolvent effect of vehement emotion on all the Iraqi people's violation capacity and their emotional sensitivity of recalling traumatic memories.

## 4-Conclusion

Hassan Blasim's *The Nightmares of Carlos Fuentes* vividly depicts the traumatic experiences faced by Iraqi people after the American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. It emphasizes the themes of psychological suffering, persecution, diaspora, and Dissociation. It portrays how occupation, civil war and political turmoil can create traumatized individual.

Salim's story is an emotional portrayal of how a profound trauma can disturb and fragment an individual's identity and life. Throughout the lenses of Freud, Caruth and



Janet, the research locates complex interaction of repressed reminiscences, dissociation, and the protagonist's struggle to regain control, ultimately leading to his disastrous demise.

The study finds out that the response to the traumatic events haunts the ego of the protagonist. Fuentes tries to change everything related to his past in the incubation period. He stays in a latency period and speechless situation for months before the traumatic reminiscences burst up in the form of dreams, bad behavior and hallucination.

Fuentes's reactive behavior of dissociation leads him to identity fragmentation and life disorder because Fuentes suffers from, to use Freud's term, pathogenic reminiscences. The breakdown of his internal defense system leads him to traumatic neurosis, according to Freud's theory.

The study concludes that the traumatized memories, according to Cathy Caurth, become the vehement emotions that hinder Fuentes from coping with his new life in Holland and lead his dissociation to fail. Fuentes becomes an object in Holland rather than holding his own personal identity. He lives in two separate worlds: the past which is the world of trauma and the present which is the world of escape.

It also appears that Fuentes, based on Cathy Caurth's theory, experiences intrusive phenomena through nightmares. Because of that, the response to the catastrophic events of war and daily explosions in Baghdad at the time happen later on in a form of hallucination in Fuentes's personality. For this reason, the protagonist was unspeakable, to quote Caruth's term. Based on Freud's theory of recollecting traumatic events, Fuentes never recalls the actual nasty repressed feelings, but he only recalls the reproductions of the traumatic experiences which arise during his nightmare.

The study finds out that the vehement emotion and traumatic latent memories lead the protagonist to a fragile and fraudulent sort of life which leads him to commit suicide at the end of the story.

The research shows that the emergence of a traumatic loss signifies the resurrection of history in consciousness. In Blasim's narrative, no matter how hard the traumatized individual tries to suppress the memories, the unconscious past resurfaces and impacts the present. Therefore, it is impossible to completely overcome the trauma of war even through dissociation techniques.

## 5-References





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