

Childhood Trauma: An Analysis Of The Movie Capernaum

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ABSTRACT

Stories about childhood trauma are often communicated through many mediums. The movie Capernaum revolves around a twelve-year-old Lebanese boy, who sues his own parents because they gave birth to him despite knowing about the miserable life he's going to lead. The movie dives into the life of Zain and his family. The children work odd jobs, Zain's sister becomes a victim of child marriage, Zain running away from home and stabbing someone, all accumulate to represent how it impacts the protagonist of the movie. This all lead to long – term psychological trauma and on existential crises in their life. At the age of playing and studying, Zain is in search of food and money to take care of his kindred. And he is willing to do any job for that matter. Although he is lonely, he is fighting for justice. The movie 'Capernaum' is a revolution. Zain is an illustration of many children who are suffering in many corners of the world. There are places like this, there are many lives like this. We are privileged by the fact that we are not born at that particular place. The movie conveys a message that, adults who can't raise the kids should not have any. Moreover, quoting Benyamin " The lives we do not experience are just stories for us..."

KEY WORDS : Childhood, Trauma, Child marriage, Parents, Poverty, Refugees

INTRODUCTION

It is really important to understand what trauma is in order to understand the effects of trauma. Trauma is a profound term that has been ongoing and has a stable position in human psychology. Psychological stress and its emotional impact have gained attention and has made their way into mass media and been popularized. Millions of people have experienced trauma in some way or another. Many causes can trigger trauma like natural disasters, epidemic diseases, catastrophic injuries, threat to one's personal lives, etc. Psychological trauma is a psychological reaction to traumatic or disturbing occurrences that arise irrespective of physical harm or injury. Trauma and its psychological effect are linked to the concrete meaning or impact of traumatic experiences, but it is also a separate and distinct part of trauma that goes further than external harm. The effects of trauma can be intense and extreme, and children are often those that are readily traumatized and can have a lasting impact. The traumatic experiences always remain in their unconscious mind and it impacts the entire person, the way they feel about themselves as well as others. As a result, parents play a critical role in a child's mental growth. The problem gets worse when the parents turn out to be the ones who violate them.

'Trauma theory' is a comparatively contemporary term that originated during the 1970s in the health care context, particularly in relation to studies of Vietnam veterans and other survivor groups, including survivors of the Holocaust, abused women and children, survivors of disasters, refugees and victims of physical and sexual harassment. And the hardest part is the victims, the children who make up the bulk.

A kind of painful traumatic experience is shown through the eyes of a young boy named Zain El Hajj living in a Beirut slum in *Capernaum* (original title "Capharnaum"), the 2018 Cannes Jury Prize winner movie. It is the story of a Lebanese child who runs away from his parents due to poverty and the Syrian refugee crisis in Lebanon. Directed by Nadine Labaki, the movie portrays the story of all those who are denied elementary rights, education, health and

most importantly love. Zain, cast by Syrian refugee Zain Al Rafeea, is the protagonist of the story. He sues his parents for giving him life in such a chaotic world and he makes sure that no one else lives the wretched and hostile life he has. He is actually suing the whole system. This echoes the outcry of all those who are marginalized by the system.

OBJECTIVE

This paper aims to examine the protagonist Zain El Hajj's experiences in the film and how they contribute to trauma. By venturing into the film's other aspects, this paper hopes to gain a better understanding of the harsh realities of children living in squalor in Lebanon, as well as the role of parents in raising and nurturing their children.

HYPOTHESIS

As the title implies, the goal of this research work is to examine Zain El Hajj's life in the Beirut slums through the context of trauma theory.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

On the context of trauma theory, the paper examines the life of a poverty-stricken child and the circumstances of the slums of Beirut in the movie *Capernaum*. Trauma is often the product of an excessive amount of stress that exceeds one's capacity to cope with the feelings involved in that experience or to integrate them. When a child is afraid for their own life or the life of someone they care for, they are easily traumatized. Because young children are so vulnerable, the consequences of exposure to violence and traumatization are complex. Several different problems should be addressed, including how the children will respond, how their parents may be influenced and the subtle and obscure effects on litigants.

Poverty in childhood is undoubtedly harmful and it affects every aspect of a child's life, from economic and material limitations to social and emotional restrictions and exclusions, as well as the personal and more hidden dimensions of poverty such as guilt, depression, and the fear of disparity and prejudice. Children living in deprived communities are more likely to encounter traumatic events, such as violence, parental neglect or assault, witnessing or becoming the victims.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Capernaum, directed by Nadine Labaki, is a 2018 Lebanese film about a twelve-year-old kid named Zain El Hajj who is suffering from poverty and parental abuse. When Zain attempts to sue his parents for giving birth to him, the narrative takes a significant turn. Sandra L Bloom's book "Trauma Theory Abbreviated" focuses on the effects of trauma on humans. It depicts the psychological effects of traumatic events in order to aid trauma patients in their recovery. The method in which these effects may manifest in children, as well as the consequences, are discussed.

Movie plot

Capernaum tells the story of a twelve-year-old boy Zain El Hajj who has been sentenced to five years in prison for stabbing someone and who sues his parents for giving birth to him. Zain and his family suffer from poverty. They live in the slums of Beirut, Lebanon. Due to negligence of his parents, Zain works temporary jobs to live and is not sent to School for education. Zain tries to save his younger sister Sahar from getting married off to their landlord Assad by concealing the fact she got her period. Zain intends to flee with Sahar, but their parents marry her off in exchange for two chickens. Zain runs away from home and seeks refuge in a park. He runs into Rahil, an Ethiopian migrant worker who works at the

park. She helps Zain and takes him in. Zain helps to look after her baby, Yonas. Rahil is arrested for being an illegal immigrant. Aspro, a human trafficker, is given Yonas. He also informs Zain that if he brings his identity documents, he may be able to get to Sweden. During his argument with his parents over not receiving his ID, he discovers that Sahar has died as a result of pregnancy complications. Zain is sentenced for stabbing Assad. He makes contact with the media in order to file a lawsuit against his parents for their negligence. Aspro is revealed by Zain, and Rahil and Yonas are reunited. The movie ends with Zain's photo being taken for ID card.

Analysis

Capernaum, the traumatic movie directed by Nadine Labaki takes place in Beirut's slums. The movie depicts the profound and heartbreaking portrayal of child abuse through 12-year-old Zain's eyes. The movie indicates reality that is known to many but chosen to ignore. Hatred of racial minorities, crime, war, etc. has evolved into a universalized paradigm of human misery and evil. Its nature has provided statistically unlimited possibilities. All the events faced by the poor have become traumatic. During these events, children are exposed to situations that tend to be traumatic. As children grow around these circumstances, they often turn to drugs and substances or even aggression to cope with their situation and to feel relief. The indication of this in the movie is depicted initially where Zain has stabbed someone and is standing in the courtroom.

How children are brought up and the situations in which they are living in make up the individual they are. In this movie, the Beirut slums are submerged in poverty. Children are seen playing with things that looks like gun but made with wood and plastic bottles. The terrorism and violence that they know is depicted through this. Poverty is the main problem that the protagonist faces and leads to the situation in which Zain sues his parents for giving birth to him.

Zain is seen in courtroom trying to sue his parents for giving birth to him. Child abuse and neglect is an aspect to consider in parenting patterns as a spectrum spanning from efficient and caring parenting to unhealthy parenting activities with maltreating behavior at the extreme inappropriate end of the scale. He lives with his parents and seven siblings. They live in a place where there is no proper room for them and no proper functions. Zain is not given a chance to go to school. He doesn't have any form of education. As a kid, he is used to get pills from pharmacies using fake prescriptions. They are soaked in clothes and given to Zain's brother in prison. It is then sold to drug addicts in prison. Zain wants to go to school when he sees other children being dropped off from school. He is also made to do labor to make ends meet. He does delivery work for their landlord Assad. His siblings also don't go to school. They sit on pavements and sell juice. Due to the negligent nature of Zain's parents and due to impoverishment, they are unkempt and has no proper hygiene. Zain is an innocent victim as he is an unfortunate situation being in a large family with small income and struggling to make ends meet.

Children working for many hours struggling to survive and being a provider for their family either receive a poor education or none at all, and as a result, they grow up without the requisite skills and education to be productive and efficient members of the society. Zain had spoken to his parents to admit him to school so that he could learn. His mother also insisted on agreeing to this not for the idea of getting an education but rather because she saw that the neighbors got many things from the kid's school. As the school will provide some amenities, Zain's mother wanted to send him. But this idea of sending him to school was received with

backlash from his father because they fear their landlord as they are staying there and because Zain keeps working for them. Because Zain's father doesn't want to come to a disagreement with their landlord, he shuts the idea down. This is an indication of how poverty changes the mentality of the poor due to the miserable situations they are in. Children who do not receive support and are constantly exposed to high levels of distress are disturbed and fearful, which obstructs normal brain growth.

Child marriage is another issue which is portrayed in this movie. It is a global problem along with poverty and gender inequality. With the belief that girls who have been sexually assaulted are unfit for marriage and bring disgrace to their families, some parents arrange child marriages in these situations in order to minimize or prevent these dangers. Consequently, economic war and migration are often associated with work loss and job security, putting many families in financial distress. Under these circumstances, some parents choose to marry their daughters' young in order to provide for them to meet their essential necessities. Many women who have been forced to live in harsh conditions in refugee camps and countries where war and internal instability have been victim to horrific crises. What happened to Zain's sister, Sahar, is a pervasive and vulnerable problem. Zain had tried to hide the evidence of Sahar getting her periods by washing her clothes and getting her sanitary napkins even though he is still a child. When their parents knew about this, Sahar is married off to Assad, their landlord for exchange of two chickens. Poverty pushes child marriage as the families feel that there would only be one less burden and that the girl child will have a better life.

Despite all his efforts, he unfortunately loses his sister, because she was not enough mature to conceive a baby. So, Zain runs away from home and this follows the misadventures of Zain as he finds a temporary safe heaven under the protective wings of Rahil, an Ethiopian refugee who illegally works at a fair and a mother of toddler Yonas. When Rahil's documents expire, she is arrested by Lebanese authorities. Zain is left to look after Yonas by himself. Zain says that life is like a nightmare for him and he feels that his life is filthier than the shoes on his feet, "fuck off you son of a bitch" and "piss off, you fucker" is by far the nicest thing he has heard. And he also says that all he wanted is to be a good man and wanted to be respected and loved. The movie ends with a smile of Zain, when he was asked to smile for his identity card photo.

The film is not all gloom and doom. It shows that children have enormous resilience even in the most desperate circumstances. And that survival is not just luck, but intelligence. Viewers can find a beautiful message on how kids' life will be affected if they do not have enough basic needs to lead their everyday life.

CONCLUSION

Capernaum showed the nature of society that many seem to have forgotten because of inability to absorb or appreciate the situations that they are shown. These genres of films inform the people of how vulnerable the poor are. This representation of the problems faced by the impoverished indicate how they need help and support. But unfortunately, through some instances there is an indication that compassion is limited. With Labaki itself being cast as a lawyer indicates her way of representation of what the upper class should do for protection of these children and their lives. The courtroom is used as a platform by her for Zain's parents as an opportunity to assert themselves. In the face of adversity, the parent's personal monologues demonstrate how difficult it is to make decisions for their children. Many people believe that children are blessings of god, and they continue to give birth to

many children besides all the poverty and lack of preparations. If parents can't raise children, they should not have any.

Children who have experienced extreme early childhood trauma are often seen as being matured for their age. This obscures the implication that they are now trying to survive and their innocence being stripped from them at a young age. The failure of parents to recognize and react appropriately to their children's emotional concerns results in childhood trauma. Children growing up under abusive parents deal with complexity regarding affection and love. Under the foundation of love, parents treat them horribly. Love for them becomes confusing. Sacrifice is what they have felt in the name of love which is not what love clearly is.

Zain's parents inform the judge overseeing his case that they are undocumented immigrants. And without papers they are jobless. The how will they feed children. It is true that the problem of war leads to homelessness and it further leads to destruction and poverty. But these are just excuse to neglect children. Sometimes compassion and empathy is all we need. Thus, children who can't trust the adults in their growing up, becomes adults who don't trust anyone, including themselves.

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