

## Into the Darkest Corner: The Importance of Addressing Factor-Based Particularity in Relation to Domestic Violence Experiences in Post-Modern Literary Theory

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### ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how a survivor of a violent marital relationship could awaken and take positive counteraction against her oppressive husband, rather than remaining entrapped in a state of 'learned helplessness'. The central contribution of this paper lies in highlighting particularity rather than sameness when investigating how oppression and male domination could function as factors that trigger positive counteraction and lead to the liberation of the silenced protagonist in Elizabeth Haynes' novel *Into the Darkest Corner*. The model highlighted for the purpose of examination is Catherine, the protagonist of Elizabeth Haynes' novel *Into the Darkest Corner*. The paper mainly focuses on addressing two questions 'What are the protagonist's violence experiences?' and 'What are the factors that served to reinforce and prolong the protagonist's oppressive marriage?'. The struggle of the protagonist to put an end to her abusive marriage, and how she managed to overpower her post-traumatic stress disorder experience constitute the focal point of this paper, and are explored from a feminist psychoanalytical perspective, a task that has not been addressed in the available literature on domestic violence in relation to feminist and psychoanalytic criticism up to date. In order to investigate these aspects in the novel, this paper draws on the views of post-modern feminist literary theory. This literary approach is crucial to highlighting the gender-based inequality imposed on the protagonist by her abusive husband throughout the novel. The analytical approach followed in this paper is that of thematic analysis. The paper mainly highlights the recurrent themes of physical violence and post-traumatic stress disorder. Then, the paper examines the content of the novel to support the argument about the association between post-traumatic stress disorder and liberation. Thus, three main issues are addressed: Domestic violence types and definitions, feminist theoretical views in relation to male domination, and notions of post-traumatic stress disorder in relation to liberation in feminist post-modern literary criticism. The main argument in this paper is that post-traumatic stress disorder is not an introductory psychological phase that paves the way for learned helplessness. Rather, it is a state imposed by male domination and control that could be challenged, controlled and directed to lead to liberation from male authority and oppression with the availability of proper assistance.

**Key words:** Domestic Violence, Feminist Criticism, Battered Woman Syndrome (BWS), Literary Trauma, PTSD.

### INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to investigate the forms of domestic violence that the protagonist of Elizabeth Haynes' novel *Into the Darkest Corner* (2012) experienced in the light of post-modern feminist literary theory. The 'particular' struggle of the protagonist to put an end to her abusive marriage, and how she managed to overcome her Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) experience by reclaiming her inner strength constitute the focal point of this paper, and are explored from a feminist psychoanalytic perspective, a task that has not been addressed in the available literature on domestic violence in relation to feminist and psychoanalytic criticism up to date. Thus, the literature covered in this paper involves post-modern feminist

views and criticism in relation to domestic violence against women (Marder, 2006; Allport, 2009; Mc-Cue, 2008; Finley, 2013), in addition to psychoanalytic views on Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (Marder, 2006; Allport, 2009), a medical condition from which the protagonist suffered as a result of her abusive marriage. Therefore, this paper is divided into eight sections. The initial section provides the abstract which is followed by an introduction to the content of the paper. In the third section, the methodological approach followed to investigate the domestic violence experience to which the protagonist was exposed will be discussed. In the fourth section, however, the paper provides a review of the literature, addressing the complexity of domestic violence, and showing the diversity of its patterns. Section five discusses the feminist

literary theoretical context through which the analysis of the novel is conducted. Then, the sixth section provides a brief summary of the novel, followed by an investigation of the protagonist's domestic violence experience in section seven. Finally, the eighth section concludes the paper presented. In the following section, the paper discusses the methodological approach followed to conduct this paper.

## METHODOLOGY

This paper relies primarily on secondary data. The data drawn upon is mainly derived from books and scholarly articles centred on the identification of violence, and books and articles that discuss domestic violence in relation to feminist literary theory and psychoanalysis. The literary work analysed through the lens of post-modern feminist literary criticism is *Into the Darkest Corner* by Elizabeth Haynes. The choice of feminist literary criticism as the theoretical context is due to the importance of highlighting women's challenge and rejection of men's gender-based alleged right to dominate and control them. With regard to the analytical approach followed throughout this paper to discuss the aspects of oppression in *Into the Darkest Corner*, it is that of descriptive thematic analysis. Thematic analysis, as a method of qualitative analysis, is an approach through which the researcher gives 'minimal attention to the structures selected by the narrator to tell her/his story, function or contextual details of the story' (Frost, 2011, p. 108). Rather, a researcher employing thematic analysis starts the analysis by reading the raw data he or she has in order to familiarize himself or herself with the content of the data (Frost, 2011; Atiyat, 2018). Secondly, the researcher codes the data at hand (Frost, 2011; Atiyat, 2018). That is, the researcher pinpoints the main ideas or thoughts that are discussed in each sequence of content words. Thirdly, the researcher builds 'a set of themes by looking for patterns and meaning produced in the data, labelling and grouping them in connection with the theoretical framework of the research' (Frost, 2011, p. 108). Finally, the researcher gathers the different narratives under each highlighted theme and compares between the different narratives categorized under each theme (Frost, 2011; Atiyat, 2018). In this paper, the raw material from the novel has been read in order to highlight the forms of violence and oppression that the protagonist experiences and fights against. Physical violence and sexual violence are mainly highlighted. Then, this paper provides comments on those forms showing how they reinforced male domination, and pinpointing their impact on the protagonist's journey towards liberation in the light of her ability to access power resources. After having explained the methodological approach, this paper will proceed to explore the literature on various forms of domestic violence.

## A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE.

### Definitions and Patterns

Domestic violence has become a recognizable issue in the West in the 1970s (Harne and Radford, 2008). Since then,

numerous attempts have been made by researchers and organizations to define the different types of domestic violence and investigate their impact on people's lives (Harne and Radford, 2008). During the early 1970s, western research on domestic violence focused mainly on addressing physical violence:

When violence between intimate partners emerged as a recognizable issue in our society in the mid-1970s., empirical knowledge of this social, psychological, and legal phenomenon was very limited. As advocates for women organized shelters across the nation to provide safety and assistance for abused women, clinical information emerged that described patterns of severe physical and emotional abuse. The victims were most notably described by Walker<sup>1</sup> (1979) and others as 'battered women,' and the male perpetrators were labelled 'batterers.' (Kelly and Johnson 2008, p. 476)

Yet, with time, other forms of domestic violence than battering were also explored in the literature on domestic violence. On the whole, domestic violence is a term that includes various forms of aggressive behaviour within the family such as wife abuse (Harne and Radford, 2008), child abuse<sup>2</sup> (Harne and Radford, 2008) and elder abuse<sup>3</sup> (Chalk and King, 1998). Wife abuse in particular might be carried out in a multitude of practices ranging from emotional, physical and sexual assault (Harne and Radford, 2008) to verbal (Harne and Radford, 2008) and financial aggression (Harne and Radford, 2008).

Many attempts on the part of western and non-western scholars and researchers investigating domestic violence have been directed towards clarifying its patterns. With regard to physical abuse, western and non-western scholars and researchers have identified domestic physically abusive behaviour as

The intentional use of physical force with the potential for causing death, disability, injury, or harm. Physical violence includes, but is not limited to: scratching, pushing, shoving, throwing, grabbing, biting, chocking, shaking, poking, hair-pulling, slapping, punching, hitting, burning, use of a weapon (gun, knife, or other object), and use of restraints or one's body, size, or strength against another person. Physical violence also includes coercing other people to commit any of the above acts. (Saltzman, Fanslow, McMahon et al., 1999, p. 11-12)

Verbal domestic violence may involve 'insults, criticism, ridicule, name calling, discounting, and discrediting' (Carlson, Worden, Van Ryn et al., 2003, p. 3). Emotional domestic violence has been defined as

The use of verbal and nonverbal acts which symbolically hurt the other or the use of threats to hurt the other. behaviors that can be used to terrorize the victim...that do not involve the use of physical force... the direct infliction of mental harm and threats or limits to the victim's well-being. and. an ongoing process in which one individual systematically diminishes and destroys the inner self of another. The essential ideas, feelings, perceptions, and personality characteristics of the victim are constantly belittled (Mouradian, 2000, p. n.p.).

The definition of emotional domestic violence stated above makes a clear distinction between verbal and emotional domestic violence. While behaviours included under these two patterns might intersect in terms of their ability to hurt a woman's feelings, emotional domestic violence might be carried out in a non-verbal manner.

Finally, financial domestic violence refers to a form of abuse that is directed towards exercising control over women by means of preventing them from accessing the financial resources they require in order to carry on with their daily lives (Pollet, 2011). In the remaining part of this section, the difference between various feminist views on domestic violence will be discussed.

In literary studies, domestic violence against women in its diverse forms is a complex issue that has been addressed within the context of literary trauma (Marder, 2006; Allport, 2009; Balaev, 2012; Balaev, 2014; Azmi, 2018). It is a context which primarily investigates domestic violence against women in relation to patriarchal values and power relations (Goldman, 1999; Ismael and Ismael, 2000; Senn, 2002; Berberoglu, 2005; Hanser, 2007; Mc-Cue, 2008; Inglis and Thorpe, 2012; Finley, 2013), highlighting the importance of the particularity of women's experiences (Goldman, 1999; Blakely, 2007). The particularity of abused women's gendered, violence-based experiences of domination and control in association with the emotional consequences of domestic violence (Schuller and Vidmar, 1992; Mangum, 1999; Goldman, 1999; Collins, 2000; Najavits, 2002; Briere and Jordan, 2004; Dressler, 2006; Erickson, 2007; Blakely, 2007; Kubany and Ralston, 2008; Ford, 2009; Allport, 2009; Froeschle, 2009; Dutton, Osthoff and Dichter, 2009; Wells, 2011; Zimbardo, Sword and Sword, 2012; Cunliffe, Johnson and Weiss, 2013) occupy a noteworthy segment of this paper. After having reviewed the literature on the various patterns of domestic violence that have been addressed in literary domestic violence studies, and after having reviewed the literature on the theoretical context through which these forms are explored in *Into the Darkest Corner*, the review of the literature on the literary theoretical context through which the forms of abuse addressed in the novel are discussed will be explored more thoroughly in the following section.

### Theoretical Context: Psychoanalytical and Feminist Views on Trauma in Domestic Violence

Rare is the phenomenon that legitimately is an object of study not only in the three traditional branches of the university (the natural sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities) but in medicine and law as well. Trauma<sup>4</sup>, it would seem, has something of a privileged and paradoxical relationship to interdisciplinary studies. Cutting-edge trauma research is currently being pursued in numerous fields across the university (including psychology, psychiatry, sociology, public health, history, and literature), yet none of these disciplines alone can explain or contain the phenomenon of trauma. (Marder, 2006, p. 1)

Researchers in English literary theory have repeatedly adjusted systems of knowledge which were proposed largely

outside the field of literary studies and imposed them 'upon literary texts for the purpose of discovering and developing new and unique understandings of those texts that a traditional literary critic might not be intellectually equipped to recognize' (Azmi, 2018, p. 58). Balaev (2014) traces the introduction of trauma studies into literary criticism, or, as labelled by Allport (2009) 'literary trauma' (Allport, 2009: 49), arguing that the 'field of trauma studies in literary criticism gained significant attention in 1996 with the publication of Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* and Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma*' (Balaev, 2014, p. 1). In this paper, the investigation of trauma resulting from the protagonist's domestic violence experience in Elizabeth Haynes' *Into the Darkest Corner*, and her liberation through focusing on her inner strength are conducted through a feminist post-modern perspective, and the protagonist's struggle is 'voiced<sup>5</sup>' within the context of power resources. With regard to feminist critics, they have centred their efforts on questioning and combating the sexist domination of men in the private as well as the public sphere (Allport, 2009). They mainly reject patriarchal<sup>6</sup> cultural beliefs that support inferiorizing and marginalizing women (Allport, 2009). In the context of domestic violence, as an aspect of domination and control over women, feminist theory 'provides the basis and justification for the existence of domestic violence throughout history. The theory posits that intimate partner violence grows out of inequality within marriage (and other intimate relationships modelled on marriage) and reinforces male power and female subordination within the home' (Mc-Cue, 2008, p. 15).

Yet, feminist theoretical views in relation to domestic violence are far from unified (Mc-Cue, 2008). Feminists investigating domestic violence against women have developed many theoretical perspectives, including radical feminist, Marxist feminist, and Arab feminist ones. During the second-wave of the feminist movement, extending from the 1960s to the 1980s, both radical feminists and Marxist feminists introduced theoretical frameworks through which they endeavoured to investigate the reasons behind women's oppression. Radical feminists had a pioneering role in drawing public attention to the severity of domestic violence against women. Radical feminists' focal point was to investigate this phenomenon in association with male-dominating patriarchal values (Hanser, 2007). Patriarchy is, from a radical feminist perspective, a social unit of power. The advocates of patriarchal values, radical feminists argue, utilize various forms of violence against women in order to reinforce men's power and social control (Hanser, 2007, p. 326). According 'to radical feminists, women, as women, regardless of class, race, ethnicity, and other differences, are vulnerable to rape, domestic violence, and homicide at the hands of their intimate partners' (Berberoglu, 2005, pp. 143-144).

However, radical feminist views in relation to domestic violence against women have been subjected to the criticism of feminist theoreticians such as liberal and Marxist feminists. The 'flaws that critics of Radical feminism discerned are fairly obvious. Critics alleged that the central idea of patriarchy as the root and cause of all things was overstated'

(Inglis and Thorpe, 2012, p. n.p.). Instead of restricting the causes of domestic violence against women to the power of patriarchal cultural ideologies, Marxist feminists proposed that 'women's subordination was the result of a system in which men held and controlled most private property in society' (Hanser, 2007, pp. 323). For Marxist feminists, patriarchy is not the sole source of women's oppression. Marxist feminists maintain that gender roles 'are built around the economic system whereby men are perceived as the breadwinners. When they feel they cannot be successful as providers, the result might be violence against women as a means of reasserting feelings of power and control' (Finley, 2013, p. 389). Finley elaborates saying that research 'does bear out that women are at highest risk for lethal abuse when they are employed and their abuser is unemployed, suggesting this situation is perceived as a threat to the man' (Finley, 2013, p. 389). Some researchers argue that concentrating on the individual *per se* has diverted the scope of the investigation of this phenomenon from the social interest in exploring and combating domestic violence against women to focusing on the individual, which in turn has resulted in an increase in the tendency to blame the victim instead of the perpetrator who has initiated the assault (Senn, 2002, p. 483).

A third aspect amongst the numerous value divisions found within feminist literary theory is that of postmodern feminism. The reason behind my choice of this theoretical context to write this paper is that it focuses highly on the notion of 'particularity' in association to male gendered domination: 'Even postmodern feminist scholars like Donna Haraway, who critique experience as a category of analysis, embrace the specificity of women's lives' (Goldman, 1999, p. 479). Despite the differences between radical, Marxist and postmodern feminist views, they all do not dismiss the impact of patriarchal ideology and male domination on women's oppression especially when investigating domestic violence.

With regard to the particularity of the gendered, violence-based experience of the protagonist, feminist researchers specializing in various fields of social sciences and literature have acknowledged the importance of addressing the psychological emotional aspect of any investigated phenomenon 'challenging objectivity, rejecting detachment, accepting contradictory readings, and recognizing the presence of emotion within the research process' (Blakely, 2007, p. 60). Therefore, being a feminist researcher, I acknowledged the importance of discussing the particular emotions experienced by the protagonist.

Abused women, research suggests, experience psychological consequences such as feelings of anxiety (Allport, 2009) and hyper-arousal (Allport, 2009). Scholars investigating the psychological consequences of wife abuse in the context of literary trauma have associated the abused women's anxiety, for instance, with the 'repetitive, arbitrary nature of chronic domestic violence' (Briere and Jordan, 2004, p. 1259) which makes these women feel constantly stressed as they anticipate possible attacks. They have also proposed that abused women's anxiety might be triggered by their concern over their 'economic future' (Froeschle, 2009, p. 182). Such scholars have added that constant stress caused by the

recurrence of wife abuse might lead to distress (Erickson, 2007), depression (Schneider, 2007), or denial (Erickson, 2007). Victims might deny that they have experienced wife abuse due to their fear of the perpetrators' potential reactions; for the latter might inflict harm on them and their children if the violence is exposed (Erickson, 2007). Walker (2009) investigates the behavioural and psychological characteristics of abused women under what she refers to as 'the battered woman syndrome'. Walker presents an extensive list of the symptoms exhibited by abused women diagnosed with 'the battered woman syndrome' which include the following:

1. Intrusive recollections of the trauma event (s).
2. Hyperarousal [*sic*] and high levels of anxiety.
3. Avoidance behavior and emotional numbing usually expressed as depression, dissociation, minimization, repression and denial.
4. Disrupted interpersonal relationships from batterer's power and control measures.
5. Body image distortion and/or somatic or physical complaints.
6. Sexual intimacy issues (Walker, 2009, p. 42).

According to Walker, intrusive recollections of the traumatic event or events refer to how battered women re-live their past violent experiences after the abusive incident has come to an end (Walker, 2009, p. 58) 'even after when they are safe from it actually recurring' (Walker, 2009, p. 59). As a result, these women become very nervous and worried that the abuse might happen again. Some women might cope with the abusive situation in which they find themselves by pretending the aggression was not serious (Walker, 2009, p. 42). Other responses related to battered woman syndrome occur as a result of women's being deprived of their freedom and forcing them to live in isolation (Walker, 2009, p. 65). In situations where a woman is 'treated as a possession, controlling when and if she saw family and friends, accompanying her to and from her job, restricting her time if she was allowed to go out by herself' (Walker, 2009, p. 65), such a woman becomes detached from the public realm, living entirely under the control of her abuser which renders her consistently vulnerable to the husband's violence.

In an effort to explore the psychological consequences of wife abuse, Walker (1978) proposed two theoretical frameworks: learned helplessness and the cycle of violence (Walker, 1978, pp. 129-130). According to Schuller and Vidmar (1992: 3), the theory of learned helplessness was first proposed by Seligman (1975) to clarify why laboratory animals that have been placed in shocking environments remain entrapped in them even when they are given the opportunity to escape. This theoretical outline was adapted by Walker (1978) to explain why so many battered women fail to leave their abusers (Wells, 2011, p. 3). Wells clarifies that women who have been exposed to wife abuse undergo a certain psychological experience that renders them attached to their abusers. This experience is referred to as 'learned helplessness'. Learned helplessness, as a psychological state, Wells explains, does not imply that the victims are actually helpless, but rather that they develop and internalize feelings of doubt about whether whatever actions they take in order to stop their partners' or husbands' violence

would work (Wells, 2011, p. 11). As for the second theoretical outline Walker utilized to rationalize women's responses to wife abuse, namely 'cycle of violence', Collins (2000) maintains that the theory was introduced to explain how the husband or partner does not carry out his aggression in an extreme manner right from the beginning, but rather that he employs fluctuating degrees of severity (Collins, 2000, p. 1). As for the first stage of the cycle of violence, the husband or partner might be verbally abusive (Collins, 2000, p. 1). He might also be emotionally abusive or show physical violence (Collins, 2000, p. 1). In response to such attitudes, the abused wife begins to think of ways through which she can calm the abuser down and restore the supposed harmony of their relationship in an attempt to prevent the recurrence of violence (Dressler, 2006). The second phase of the cycle of violence is a phase of 'tension-building' accompanied with 'attempts to calm the batterer in order to avoid repetition' of the abusive incident (Dressler, 2006, p. 462). Cunliffe, Johnson and Weiss (2013) explain the 'tension-building' phase in *Criminal Psychology* as a period in which 'the batterer engages in acts that cause increased friction in the relationship (i.e., name-calling or physical violence)' (Cunliffe, Johnson and Weiss, 2013, p. 464). As for the third stage of the cycle of violence, Walker (2009) explains that abused women experience 'the acute battering incident'. At this stage, the batterer projects explosive attitudes towards the victim. Some women who have been exposed to recurrent episodes of wife abuse, however, might develop the skill to sense when the husband is about to discharge his tension ahead of the actual attack. This gives the victim the opportunity to take whatever action is possible in order to reduce potential damage (Walker, 2009, p. 94). In the final stage of the violence cycle, the husband might express his regret, say he's sorry and maybe even promise he will never batter his wife again. This 'phase provides the positive reinforcement for remaining in the relationship, for the woman' (Walker, 2009, p. 94). Yet, sometimes the violent incident does not pass through all the stages of the cycle of violence explained earlier. In such cases, the victim experiences continuous tension and anxiety in anticipation of potential attacks on the part of her husband. The importance of highlighting the cycle of violence lies in its ability to awaken the victim and assist her in taking positive counteraction against her oppressive husband (Walker, 2009, p. 85).

However, Walker's 'battered woman syndrome' was critiqued by scholars and particularly feminists from a number of angles. As for the first angle of criticism, the term 'battered woman syndrome' 'is a term typically used to refer to women's experiences that result from being battered' (Dutton, Osthoff and Dichter, 2009, p. 1). Yet, this scope of the 'battered woman syndrome' fails to address the experiences of many women who were exposed to non-physical violence such as emotional or verbal violence for example. Secondly, the 'battered woman syndrome' was critiqued for its labelling abused women as passive victims since in many cases abused women counteract against their violent husbands' or partners' behaviour in order to escape their violence:

Although Walker's early observations portrayed battered women as suffering from learned helplessness,

more recent work has documented that battered women actively engage in efforts to resist, avoid, escape, and stop the violence against them. Studies indicate that rather than passively remaining in an abusive relationship, battered women respond to violence in many ways, including reporting it to the police, telling family or friends, seeking shelter and assistance, filing for civil protective orders, separating and divorcing, complying with the batterer's demands, and/or hiding from the batterer. Thus, it should not be assumed that a battered woman who has remained in a violent relationship is demonstrating learned helplessness (Mangum, 1999, p. 606).

Instead of labelling abused women as demonstrating pathological signs of learned helplessness, Mangum (1999) proposes that an abused woman's response must be investigated in connection to 'numerous factors outside her control, including police response, economic resources, social services, court decisions regarding custody and visitation, and, most significantly, the danger she faces' (Mangum, 1999, p. 607). Furthermore, an alternative conceptualization of BWS was introduced in the 1980s under the term PTSD, a term that was acknowledged in literary studies. As explained by Erickson (2007) in the field of literary studies,

The PTSD theory as applied to battered women does not exclusively focus on battered women's perceptions of helplessness or ineffective help sources to explain why battered women stay with their abusive partners. Instead, the theory focuses on the psychological disturbances that an individual suffers after exposure to a traumatic event. The diagnostic criteria for PTSD include a history of exposure to a traumatic event, as well as the following symptoms: intrusive recollection, avoidant/numbing, and hyperarousal (Erickson, 2007, p. 72).

After having pinpointed the various feminist and psychological theoretical views on wife abuse, this paper will provide a summary of Elizabeth Haynes's *Into the Darkest Corner*.

## SUMMARY OF THE NOVEL

The novel offers an in-depth exploration of the experience of the protagonist, Catherine. Catherine was a survivor of an abusive marital relationship, who struggled to liberate herself from her husband's control and reclaim her sense of dignity and self-respect. Throughout the course of this literary work, the circumstances that led the protagonist to remain captive of her abusive marriage were highlighted, showing the complexity of her status as a battered wife.

Some of the most important circumstances or factors that contributed to the continuation of Catherine's oppression on the hands of her brutal husband were her husband's over-powering control, her parents' death and lacking her friends' support when she began considering putting an end to her miserable violent marriage, and, most importantly, lacking the support and protection of upper-hand specialized authorities like the police, for example. Catherine described her husband's controlling practices saying: 'Things got better when I told him I was thinking of taking a sabbatical from

work. I did it as a safety precaution; if anyone from work phoned, or if I let something slip, it would give me an explanation to fall back on. And of course he'd always wanted me to give up work, right from the start' (Haynes, 2012, p. 198).

Through his financial control of Catherine, Lee was able to guarantee that she would never counteract against his oppression; as she would have no power to support her potential resistance: 'And of course he'd always wanted me to give up work, right from the start. I had thought it was because he wanted to see more of me, but of course it was all about control, even then' (Haynes, 2012, p. 198). Yet, Lee's control through violent behaviour constantly fluctuated, and as the severity of the violence incidents escalated, Catherine's fear took greater control over her and prevented her from leaving. At one point, when she felt that her husband's violent practices were overwhelming, Catherine described her desperate need for the neighbour's help to escape saying:

I spent some time looking out of the window, willing someone to see me. I looked over into the next-door neighbor's yard, desperate for them to come out, so that I could bang on the window. I tried banging on the glass with the handcuffs, but the noise was so terrible I was afraid he would come up the stairs. It was pointless anyway. There was nobody to hear, apart from him. (Haynes, 2012, p. 242).

Lee's violent behaviour left Catherine not only physically incapable of taking counter-action against his abuse, but also mentally paralyzed and haunted by the possibility of death: 'When I opened my eyes, my first thought was this: *Today I'm going to die*' (Haynes, 2012, p. 244). With regard to her lacking support from friends, Catherine described this painful experience and how crippling it has been stating: 'Do you know what the worst thing was?... It wasn't sitting in there, in that room waiting for him to come back and kill me. It wasn't being hit, it wasn't the pain, it wasn't even being raped. It was that afterward nobody, not even my best friend, believed me' (Haynes, 2012, p. 172). With respect to Catherine's lacking the support and protection of upper-hand authorities, Catherine shed light onto this crippling aspect of her experience saying: 'I had nowhere to go. I couldn't call the police, could I? He was one of them. They would look at me, and he would invent some story about me being traumatized by some incident he'd been working undercover on, how I was showing signs of mental illness and he'd been trying to help me' (Haynes, 2012, p. 232). This lack of authoritative support renders survivors of marital violence paralyzed since they constantly doubt that taking formal counteraction against their perpetrators would be of any value.

Despite these factors that forced the protagonist to endure her brutal abusive marriage, she finally decided to pick up the pieces and walk away from her abuser: "'It's no good," I said. "I can't do this. You make me afraid, Lee. I don't want to be with you anymore. This isn't doing either of us any good, is it?"' (Haynes, 2012, p. 169). Nevertheless, Catherine's decision to put an end to her relationship with her husband, Lee, was far from being conclusive. Despite the fact that she realized that her relationship with Lee was damaging for her, she went back to him after having decided to leave him several

times. In an attempt to manipulate her feelings and encourage her to stay with him, Lee at one point said: "'Don't," he said quietly. "Don't do this. You regretted it last time"' (Haynes, 2012, p. 169). At another instance, Catherine stated: 'Today is going to be the start of my fight back, I decided \_\_\_ the way I decided every day, until he turned up at my house' (Haynes, 2012, p. 181). This fluctuating attraction to remaining with Lee continued until Catherine begins to slip into the grip of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), into the '*Darkest Corner*' of her mind. Nevertheless, Catherine managed to pick up the pieces and start afresh after Lee is imprisoned and she found the professional assistance she needed through Stuart and Alistair. After having presented a brief summary of the novel, the next section will focus on investigating the protagonist's mental status in relation to her domestic violence experience and its effects on her struggle to liberate herself.

### **THE PROTAGONIST'S MENTAL STATUS AND ITS EFFECTS ON HER STRUGGLE TO LIBERATE HERSELF**

The protagonist of Haynes' *Into the Darkest Corner* does not suffice by providing the reader with a surface description of her mental experience of (PTSD<sup>7</sup>). By contrast, Catherine allows the reader to access her thoughts, to see her constant psychological struggle and to feel her pain throughout her journey with (PTSD). During her conversation with her psychiatric doctor, Alistair, Catherine's psychological struggle is not merely described as an illness which has certain symptoms. Haynes rather gradually introduces the reader to Catherine's illness until she lets the reader live in the depths of Catherine's mind, allowing the reader greater appreciation of her ordeal. Through Alistair, the reader experiences the initial discomfort that consumes Catherine with time: 'It's that pernicious worm of doubt, isn't it? You know full well that the door is locked, the tap is turned off, but still there is that doubt, and you have to go back and check again' (Haynes, 2012, p. 191). Catherine's (PTSD) is pictured as 'pernicious'; it is a parasite that breaks her up gradually until she begins to think of death.

Much research has been done on investigating the various impacts of (PTSD) on the lives of abused women. While some researchers have classified (PTSD) as crippling and destructive (Najavits, 2002; Kubany and Ralston, 2008; Zimbardo, Sword and Sword, 2012), others have unveiled its potential strengthening impact (Ford, 2009). In this paper, both the negative and positive impacts of PTSD on the life of the protagonist are investigated, highlighting how she manages to ultimately break free from her crippling mental status that resulted from her exposure to wife abuse moving towards the revelation of her inner value and strength.

After her initial diagnosis with PTSD, Alistair explains to Catherine the psychological symptoms of her case and the mechanism of her mind when processing ideas that are related to her recurrent wife abuse experience with Lee saying:

The thing you need to remember, Cathy, is that these thoughts have to go somewhere. They are in your head at the moment and they have no way out. That's why

they're so upsetting. You have these thoughts and when you get them, you try and bat them to the back of your mind. You try to push them away, then they will have to come back because your mind hasn't had time to process them, to deal with them. If you let them come, consider them, think about them, then you will be able to let them go. Don't be afraid of them. They are just thoughts. (Haynes, 2012, p. 218)

In response to Alistair's words, Haynes voices the protagonist's fears, putting the readers in her shoes, and allowing them to live her pain and internal struggle: 'You say that. They might be just thoughts, but they're still terrifying. It's like living in a horror film' (Haynes, 2012, p. 218). The fearful thoughts Catherine was experiencing increased eventually to reach a sense of anxiety in which she was entrapped:

I spent the first twenty minutes or so checking all the doors and windows. Everything was secure and I heaved a sigh of relief. I didn't check the bedroom, of course; there didn't seem to be any point. When I went up to bed at about ten, there, on my bed, was a little pile of shiny keys, and a note:

GOT SOME MORE KEYS CUT FOR YOUR NEW LOCKS. SEE YOU LATER XX. [Capitals as in original] (Haynes, 2012, pp. 189-190)

After the first physical injury that is inflicted onto Catherine, she is depicted as anxious and haunted by the constant urge to check if the doors and windows at her flat were tightly locked in order to protect herself and retain her sense of security away from her abuser; especially that she has tried to leave her abusive husband many times, and yet he continues to show up at her place of residence repeating his cyclic violence over and over again. She describes her anxiety and urge to carry out her seemingly endless checking practices that the entrances and windows of her flat have been locked, which become necessary survival 'routines' as the anxiety escalates, as debilitating and crippling:

I checked again, concentrating, my breathing already starting to quicken, my heart thudding in my chest. I couldn't get beyond the image of him standing just on the other side of the door, waiting for me to stop checking, waiting for me to step away from it so he could take advantage. This was bad, very bad. My phone was in the kitchen, Stuart was at work, and in any case I still hadn't seen him or spoken to him since that text. I couldn't leave the door, I couldn't even get as far as the bedroom. (Haynes, 2012, p. 140)

Catherine's wife abuse experience was destroying her life. Researchers in different disciplines have attempted to investigate the negative impacts of violence or trauma resulting from exposure to violence on the lives of the abused individuals including women in literature (Tandon and Kapoor, 2005; Balaev, 2008). For instance, Balaev (2008) argues that violence may result in the individual's experiencing trauma, a status which 'creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity' (Balaev, 2008, p. 149). In his more recent book *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*, Balaev (2012) sheds light onto the ways through which the effects of exposure to traumatic experiences could be investigated

and analysed from a critical literary perspective: 'In fictional portrayals of trauma, the contextual factors of experience and remembering, particularly place and landscape, are meaning-making sites that portray the wide-ranging signification of emotional suffering' (Balaev, 2012, p. xv). The place for Balaev, whether it is the actual setting where the traumatic experience occurred or the larger social context in which an individual is located, enriches the reader's understanding of the effects of trauma on the character. Balaev (2012) elaborates stating the 'landscape imagery functions as a preferred medium to portray the effects of trauma on consciousness and, in particular, dissociative states of the mind, which is one among many types of responses to trauma' (Balaev, 2012, p. xvi).

From literary (Allport, 2009) and feminist (Heidarizadeh, 2015) perspectives, researchers have explored the effects of domestic violence on women in literature which include: 'Anxiety, panic, depression, multiple personalities, paranoia, anger, and sleep problems; tendencies towards suicidality, irritability, mood swings, and odd rituals; difficulty trusting people and difficult relationships; and general despair, aimlessness, and hopelessness' (Allport, 2009, p. 43). One of the most recurrent effects of exposure to spousal violence that is highlighted throughout Haynes' *Into the Darkest Corner* is 'anxiety'. From the perspective of literary criticism, Lois Tyson (2015) explores the psychological status of experiencing anxiety saying: 'Of course, sometimes our defenses momentarily break down, and this is when we experience *anxiety*, the disturbing, often overwhelming, feeling that something is wrong or that we are in danger' (Tyson, 2015, p. 16). Catherine constantly allows the reader to live through her anxiety experiences and panic attack incidents. For instance, while conversing with her psychiatric doctor, Alistair, during one of her therapy sessions, Catherine voices her crippling psychological struggle:

Our hour together was nearly up when Alistair picked up my list again. "I think you should consider that there are a few elements missing from the list," he said. "Such as?" "Think. What's your biggest fear? The real biggie." I thought, not knowing what he meant at first, and then suddenly knowing and not wanting to say. I felt the anxiety responses we'd just been discussing—my heart rate speeding up, my hands starting to tremble. (Haynes, 2012, p. 229)

In addition to the aforementioned psychological consequences of PTSD that the protagonist experiences, Haynes highlights the violence-induced physical consequences that the protagonist was exposed to, including headaches and an overall sense of fatigue. The physical and psychological symptoms of PTSD not only render Catherine feeling crippled during her marriage, but also after she has left the perpetrator. For instance, in line with Allport's behavioural investigation of PTSD resulting from violence-induced trauma (2009), Catherine voices her struggle with the need to perform what Allport (2009) referred to as 'odd rituals', or practices that are constantly repeated by the abused woman to give her a sense of safety that might not be explainable to other people:

Getting up isn't my problem, getting out of the house is. Once I'm showered and dressed, have had something to eat, I start the process of checking that the flat is secure before I go to work. It's like a reverse of the process I go through in the evening, but worse somehow, because I know that time is against me. I can spend all night checking if I want to, but I know I have to get to work, so in the mornings I can only do it so many times. (Haynes, 2012, p. 17)

The protagonist is kept from living her life comfortably because she is haunted by the idea that her perpetrator will reappear in her life and expose her to further abuse. Thus, out of fear for her life, she feels an internal psychological pressure that urges her to check that her apartment is secured. She checks the doors and windows constantly, yet this is not what causes her frustration. What frustrates her the most is her recurrent sense of doubt that her checking has not been performed accurately enough to ensure her safety from any potential confrontation with her perpetrator. Therefore, the checking process is prolonged. The longer it takes, the more relief she feels. However, the protagonist's sense of security and relief is exposed to constant doubt in the efficiency of the safety checking measures she performs which entraps her in an endless cycle of fear, insecurity and self-criticism.

Yet, as pointed out earlier in this paper, while some researchers have argued that the effects of PTSD, like the effects Catherine experiences, could be crippling and destructive on an individual's life (Allport, 2009), others have had opposing views (Ford, 2009). The latter group of researchers have pointed out that despite the difficulties and hindrances caused by such effects, abused women could still challenge them and turn them into sources of strength. In confirmation with the views of this group of researchers, I would like to argue, Catherine reaches the point where she decides that she has had enough, and that her abusive husband must be stopped from controlling her life any further. After Catherine's abusive husband, Lee, was locked in prison where he was by no means capable of hurting her neither physically nor mentally, Catherine realizes that she is not 'trapped anymore' (Haynes, 2012, p. 25). She struggles to break free from her recurrent anxiety attacks. At one point she portrays her desperate struggle saying:

I came around slowly, my face against the carpet, the smell of vomit in my nose. Almost immediately I started to panic again. Stuart tried to get me to breathe slowly. He held me, stroked my face, talked to me calmly, but at first it didn't work. I couldn't even hear him. I threw up again. Fortunately I was breathing enough not to pass out again, but in a way oblivion would have been kinder. (Haynes, 2012, p. 42)

As clearly shown in this quotation, Catherine's panic attacks and anxiety are not always manageable. Sometimes, they are debilitating as she feels incapable of performing the simplest activities like moving freely or even breathing. Nevertheless, with the availability of professional assistance and support, she manages to overcome her painful experience and start anew. Catherine's ability to verbalize her traumatic experience to Stuart enables her to break free

from her internalized fright that had for long entrapped her under Lee's patriarchal dominating control. In the context of abused women's 'healing' journeys, Allport (2009) quoting Gilligan (1998) asserts that:

...finding a voice that has been lost, meaning swallowed, buried deep within oneself, held in silence; finding a way to say what could never be said because there were no words or no possibility of being heard, or because speaking was too risky, too dangerous...Both literally and metaphorically, finding a voice brings one into relationship. (Gilligan, 1998, p. xi)

Thus, finding one's voice with the proper assistance enables her to pick up the pieces, fortify her broken self and become an empowered woman. This healing process explains Catherine's words when she says: 'I forgot about everything except him, Stuart, and the warmth of his hands on my skin' (Haynes, 2012, p. 266). The presence of Stuart does not only provide Catherine with the professional expertise that she needs, but also with feelings of love and attention that fill up the emotional void Lee has left.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Catherine represents the character of a woman who is crippled by oppressive male control through violence. The multi-faceted violence she endures from her husband has been a tool to keep her passive, submissive and controllable. However, there are factors that helped her to end her violent marital relationship. These particular factors have been investigated in detail throughout this paper as aspects highlighting the 'particularity' of her domestic violence experience rather than its generalizability. As the violence continues and the pressure escalates, Catherine reaches to a point of zero tolerance. She decides to take counteraction, to break her silence and challenge male control over her. She tries to reclaim her control over her body by having a sexual relationship after leaving her husband's home, the place to which he has had the alleged right to free access and where he has been able to remain in absolute control over her. She reclaims her voice that has been robbed by the controlling power of her husband, the tyrant male, and overtly embraces her liberation from his domination over her after having made full use of the available power resources.

## END NOTES

1. 'Sociological studies of domestic violence, like Lenore Walker's *The Battered Woman Syndrome*, have influenced literary analyses of what Nancy Armstrong termed domestic fiction. In these literary analyses, the novel exists as both the disseminator of domestic ideology and the narrative and imaginative space in which the boundaries of domestic power can be challenged and subverted' (Carter, 2009, p. 588).
2. 'Most statutes define child abuse in terms of physical abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect. Physical child abuse is the physical injury of a child, resulting from, but not limited to, strikes, shoving, shaking, biting, burning, poking, twisting limbs, and bodily throwing. Child

sexual abuse can occur as a single act or a series of abusive behaviors. It can occur in a single event or over the course of many years. Child neglect occurs when a caretaker by act or lack of actions places the child in a dangerous situation' (Bernades and Wallace, 2007, p. 704).

3. 'Elder abuse is conduct that results in the physical, psychological, or material neglect, harm, or injury to an elderly person. This definition includes abuse by family members as well as institutional abuse. The term material in this definition refers to the exploitation of the elderly person's financial resources. An elderly person is usually someone over the age of sixty-five' (Bernades and Wallace, 2007, p. 704).
4. 'The growing interest in the topic of trauma within literary criticism began in the 1990s. Yet, since Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1996) and Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed Experience* (1996), most analyses regularly employ a narrow definition of trauma culled from only one among many psychological theories, despite the fact that psychology research has produced a multifaceted and at times contentious body of work on the subject over the centuries' (Balaev, 2012, p. 3).
5. 'Voice is part of the physical world, and its psychological power comes from this fact: that it transposes what has no physical manifestation – the psyche, the soul, ourselves' (Allport, 2009, p. 40).
6. 'The concept of patriarchy generally refers to the empowerment of males over females in the social organization of everyday life' (Ismael and Ismael, 2000, p. 185).
7. 'In "Beyond the Pleasure Principle" (1920), Freud defined traumatic neurosis as "a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli" (1984, 303); in 1980, the American Psychiatric Association officially acknowledged the phenomenon of trauma, describing its effects as a new illness coined as "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder" (PTSD). PTSD has been defined as the response to an event "outside the range of usual human experience" (1980, 236), which involves serious somatic and psycho-somatic disturbances' (Nadal and Calvo, 2014: 1).

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