

Trauma and Its Consequences: A Žižekian Perspective

Dr. Rahim Mousavinia^{1*} Mahsa Dehaqani²
Dr. Karim Lavimi Motlaq³

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Abstract

This study aims to investigate and analyze the consequences of trauma through the lens provided by Slavoj Žižek. He believes that the unexpected intrusion of the Real into the Symbolic order is called trauma, which gains meaning only in retrospect. Different subjects respond differently to a trauma. According to LaCapra, the usual responses of subjects to trauma are “acting out” and “working through”. The process of “acting out” contains traumatic symptoms including arousal, intrusion and constriction. But by “working through”, the subject tries to come to terms with the traumatic experience and the related loss through mourning. Žižek contends that the continuum of various reactions to trauma ends with the birth of a new subject known as the post-traumatic subject. The prominent consequence of indirect experience of a traumatic event is that an external crisis leads to an internal one, since trauma operates retroactively and attenuates the successful functioning of signification. Therefore, trauma becomes a disorder which entails traumatic symptoms that affect identity and meaning.

Keywords: Trauma, Symptoms, Consequences, Žižek

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Traumas occur as a result of direct or indirect encounters with unexpected traumatic events. The symptoms of a trauma appear after

1. Associate Professor of English Language and Literature, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

*E-mail: moosavinia@scu.ac.ir

2. M.A. in English Language and Literature, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

3. Associate Professor of English Language and Literature, Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz

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such an encounter. Such an experience leads to different individual and social consequences. Reactions to a trauma are regarded as a continuum. Immediate reactions such as flight and freeze can be located at one pole of this continuum and post-traumatic disorders and the birth of a new subject at the other pole. The survivors/victims of a trauma suffer from the traumatic event and are devastated by its remembrance. They carry the memory of the traumatic event in their mind, and experiencing it again or trying to avoid remembering it is painful to them.

2. Theoretical Framework

Žižek believes that trauma results from the unexpected intrusion of the real into the symbolic and gains meaning in the structure of the deferred action. Different people show different reactions to trauma. LaCapra maintains that reactions to trauma can be divided into “acting out” and “working through”. Žižek holds that in the continuum of different reactions to trauma, it eventually results in the birth of a new subject called post-traumatic subject.

3. Methodology

The symptoms of trauma and its consequences have been psychoanalytically examined in the present study. The consequences of a trauma are the individual and social effects of experiencing a traumatic event on the subject. In this study, first the concept of trauma and its definitions by Freud, Lacan and Žižek are studied and then the “acting out” and “working through” reactions and symptoms of struggling with trauma and the post-traumatic subject are introduced.

4. Findings

Traumas work retroactively and appear as disorders with symptoms that affect the identity of the subject and attenuate the functioning of signification. If the disorder resulting from the trauma worsens, its symptoms appear as disruption in cognition and identity. The traumatic event changes the subject’s perception of the self, others and the world. The subject gradually develops a feeling of inefficiency and uselessness, loses its integrity and turns into a new subject with no emotional

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participation or enthusiasm, completely unfamiliar with their previous identity.

5. Conclusion

The main components of trauma studies are constantly changing and redefined, as a result of which numerous patterns and models have been developed to represent the concept of trauma, its symptoms and its consequences. In the present study, by relying on the ideas of the contemporary philosopher Slavoj Žižek, one of the important psychoanalytical models of trauma, and its symptoms and consequences were analyzed. It is concluded that following a traumatic event, individuals undergo an internal transformation. In other words, an external crisis turns into an internal crisis. From a psychoanalytical perspective, due to the direct or indirect experience of a sad event, these subjects suffer a kind of internal crisis, which can be for two reasons: first, because of the retroactive nature of trauma, and second, due to the attenuation of signification.

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