



***A House, a Home: Examining the Relationship Between  
Abandonment and Memory Through Minco's The Address  
and Sumar's Silent Waters  
Budynek, dom: Związek między porzuceniem a pamięcią  
na podstawie The Address Minco i Cichych wód Sumary***

## ABSTRACT

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**RESEARCH OBJECTIVE:** The aim of the article is to deepen the understanding of the process of coping with a traumatic situation or experience and coming to terms with emotional or material loss over a period of time with reference to historical narratives *The Address* by Marga Minco and *Silent Waters* by Sabiha Sumar.

**THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND METHODS:** The research problem is to analyze the relationship shared between emotional and materialistic abandonment and the effects of such adversities on children. The research method is the method of comparative narrative analysis: a thematic analysis of the two narratives with the help of drawing a correlation between a short story and a film, both depicting the post-traumatic lives of their protagonists.

**THE PROCESS OF ARGUMENTATION:** The research process was a comparative analysis. The first step was developing theoretical foundations for understanding the problem. Then, I focused on the comparative analysis of the two narratives. The next stage was the analysis and interpretation of the collected research material. The last step was drawing conclusions and suggesting postulates.

**RESEARCH RESULTS:** The comparative analysis of the collected material showed the need for history to rely on the power of narrative in order to understand conflict and trauma. Through the plot of both texts, it is seen that memory and abandonment share a complex relationship with each other. Trauma, even though left much behind with the intention to move on, may garner in present life, causing one to take life-altering decisions.

**CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND APPLICABLE VALUE OF RESEARCH:** There is a need to understand the relationship shared by abandonment, subsequent trauma, and memory. These narratives shed light on the need to understand collective trauma faced by children and the way that trauma is carried on through the generations. In the quest to move on, trauma seldom rests, and war-based atrocities direct individual lives much after their physical culmination. This

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research concludes on the grounds of acknowledging and reworking the narratives that exist in the mainstream.

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→ **KEYWORDS:** **ABANDONMENT, MEMORY, POST-TRAUMATIC, REMEMBRANCE, CHILDHOOD**

## **STRESZCZENIE**

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**CEL NAUKOWY:** Celem artykułu jest pogłębienie zrozumienia procesu radzenia sobie z traumatyczną sytuacją lub doświadczeniem oraz godzenia się ze stratą emocjonalną lub materialną na przestrzeni czasu w odniesieniu do narracji historycznych *The Address* [Adres] Margi Minco i *Khamosh Pani* [Ciche wody] Sabihy Sumary.

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**PROBLEM I METODY BADAWCZE:** Problemem badawczym artykułu jest analiza związku pomiędzy porzuceniem emocjonalnym i fizycznym a wpływem takich przeciwności losu na dzieci. Metodą badawczą jest porównawcza analiza narracji: analiza tematyczna obu narracji za pomocą ustalenia korelacji pomiędzy opowiadaniem a filmem, przedstawiającymi potraumatyczne życie ich bohaterów.

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**PROCES WYWODU:** Proces badawczy ma charakter analizy porównawczej. Pierwszym krokiem było opracowanie podstaw teoretycznych umożliwiających zrozumienie problemu. Następnie skupiłem się na analizie porównawczej obu narracji. Kolejnym etapem była analiza i interpretacja zebranego materiału badawczego. Ostatnim krokiem było wyciągnięcie wniosków i przedstawienie postulatów.

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**WYNIKI ANALIZY NAUKOWEJ:** Analiza porównawcza zebranego materiału wykazała potrzebę wykorzystania przez historię siły narracji w celu zrozumienia konfliktu i traumy. Fabuła obu tekstów ukazuje, że pamięć i porzucenie łączą ze sobą złożone relacje. Trauma, mimo że pozostawiona z zamiarem pójścia dalej, może kumulować się w obecnym życiu, skutkując podejmowaniem decyzji zmieniających jego bieg.

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**WNIOSKI, REKOMENDACJE I APLIKACYJNE ZNACZENIE WPŁYWU BADAŃ:** Konieczne jest zrozumienie związku, jaki łączy porzucenie, późniejsza trauma i pamięć. Narracje te rzucają światło na potrzebę zrozumienia zbiorowej traumy, której doświadczają dzieci, oraz sposobu, w jaki trauma ta jest przekazywana przez pokolenia. Trauma bardzo przeszkadza w procesie dążenia do dalszego rozwoju, a pamięć o okrucieństwach wojennych kieruje życiem jednostek długo po ich fizycznej kulminacji.

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→ **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** **PORZUCENIE, PAMIĘĆ, POURAZOWE, WSPOMNIENIE, DZIECIŃSTWO**

## Introduction

In scientific terms, memory refers to how data or information is encoded, stored, and recovered in one's mind when needed. Humans share a complex relationship with their memory, especially when immersed in a traumatic situation. Emotional and/or material abandonment comes primarily from a traumatic situation. When it comes to children, the effect of abandonment increases manifold. Early adversity caused by traumatic situations is difficult to capture in concise compartments and hence becomes difficult to deal with. Smith and Pollack (2021) argue that current classification systems of early adversity hinder progress in developing effective interventions for young people exposed to early trauma. It has been found that trauma suppression is related to the inability to recall a traumatic situation entirely. Stephanie Lewis and colleagues researched whether exposure to complex traumatic situations is associated with more severe mental health problems and poorer cognitive functioning as compared to exposure to single-incident trauma or no trauma. Their findings revealed that young people exposed to complex trauma during childhood had an increased risk of developing more severe mental health problems and showed reduced cognitive functioning. This means, the younger one is exposed to traumatic situations, the more complex it becomes to evade its effects or to provide help. Traumatic childhood experiences cast a pall on memory. PTSD, or post-traumatic disorder is a confirmed disorder of memory. Studies have concluded that PTSD is associated with lack in memory. There is impairment in the voluntary retrieval of these coupled with an increased incidence of a specific type of involuntary memory sometimes referred to as a "flashback." Earlier, it was assumed that unpleasant intruding memories of traumatizing situations can only be termed as PTSD, research has confirmed that it is in fact, a commonly witnessed symptom in most psychiatric disorders. Numerous studies have failed to find any such distinction when the conditions of people with and without PTSD are compared. Specifically, experiential fragmentation and disorganization are likely associated with highly emotional outbreaks during a traumatic event when cognitive processing is ruptured. In opposition, individuals who suffer from PTSD may be perfectly able to provide a recollection to others of what happened to them that is rehearsed and coherent but that omits details of the worst moments of the trauma.

Both the narratives, *The Address* and *Khamosh Pani*, share a complex relationship between memory and forgetting. In Marga's work, the narrator goes back to the things she gets traumatized by and Sumar's narrative consists of the protagonist willingly keeping her haunting memories at bay in order to live a peaceful reconstructed life for herself. Marga challenges the capacity of war to wash away the memories of pre-war life and Sumar highlights the inevitable memories of the well-forgotten past life. In both plots, the protagonists share a compelling need to forget while delving into a compulsive inevitability to remember.

## The Need to Forget in Marga Minco's *The Address*

Penned by a Dutch journalist, Marga Minco, by the real name of Sara Menco, who herself lost a lot to war, *The Address* is a historical narrative based on before and after World War II. The narrative is about the human predicament that follows the pre-War and post-War period. It is interesting how Marga skips the jarring details of the war and focuses on the pre- and post-experiences, widening the gap between the experiences even more.

The narrative begins in a classic flashback manner. Marga keeps switching from the present to the past, laying her center of attention on memory, making the reading a kaleidoscopic experience. The narrative opens up with an unwarranted encounter. The narrator has visited an address, the owner of which refuses to recognize her. She is subjected to intended humiliation by the recipient and the plot falls into the pre-war world. In this world, Mrs. S, the mother of the narrator, is a privileged Jewish woman. Whereas, Mrs. Dorling, the recipient of the narrator in the first scene and her mother's friend, is a non-Jew. The flashbacks show that Mrs. S would transfer her belongings to Mrs. Dorling, bit by bit, in anticipation of destruction due to war. She also asks the narrator to remember the address, 'Number 46, Marconi Street'. The pressing need to remember during the narrator's childhood overturns to forgetting during her adulthood.

The protagonist, the daughter of Mrs. S, has lost everything during the war and has now made up her mind to take back her mother's belongings from Mrs. Dorling. Her intentions for this visit are clearly paradoxical. She is troubled by the memories of the past and yet decides to go ahead with the revisit. "I was walking in familiar places again for the first time since the War, but I did not want to go further than was necessary."

"I didn't want to upset myself with the sight of streets and houses full of memories from a precious time" (Minco, 1957, p. 3).

When she reaches the house, the woman treats her with a cold reception and doesn't let her into the house. The first thing that Mrs. Dorling remarks when looking at the narrator is, "Have you come back?" (Minco, 1957, p. 1). The denial in Dorling's eyes is clear. She shoves the narrator out even as she is recognized.

She decides to go back despite the ridicule and then she meets the daughter of Mrs. Dorling who lets her in. *The Address* interconnects the relationship between material possessions and memories quite intricately. The narrator is too privileged to realize the value of the silver she has in her house before she loses it. As the narrator enters the household, she traces her past effortlessly. Be it the Hanukkah candle or the burn mark on the tablecloth, all the past seems to wash before the narrator's eyes. This seems quite contradictory as memory studies hint at the fact that not all portions of traumatic memory make up a person's life story. Marga then takes the narrative into the realm of several oxymorons and paradoxes. The possessions might be all found, the memories might rest before her eyes but she experiences a sense of familiar unfamiliarity.

During the narrator's childhood, Mrs. Dorling is an apparition. She comes and goes. She is a woman with a broad back and also, a hope to return, just in case. Even as Mrs. S, the narrator's mother, largely occupies the space as the helpless and naive mother, she

knows no other hope than an old acquaintance who renewed contact in the direst of times. There are times when Mrs. S feels that her friend is taking too much of a burden to 'help' their family but later it is revealed that the woman has no intentions whatsoever to support the family's remains. In fact, the connection that Minco draws between material possessions and memories is worth taking note of. The things that the narrator comes to cherish once again, lose their value when placed in an unfamiliar atmosphere.

The address was correct. But now I didn't want to remember it anymore. I wouldn't go back there because the objects that are linked in your memory with the familiar life of former times instantly lose their value when, severed from them, you see them again in strange surroundings (Minco, 1957, p. 5).

It is important to note that the reliance of trauma studies on literature has increased manifolds. Neumann describes the interlace between literature and memory as twofold: In their world-creation, literary works resort to culturally predominant ideas of memory, and, through their literary techniques, represent these ideas in an aesthetically condensed form (Neumann, 2010, p. 335). Minco, through her work on a post-traumatic, fragmented life lived by the narrator, highlights the compelling need to move on that the narrator feels. Minco stresses the part where her heroine resolves to forget the address her mother once asked her to remember so well. She had, in fact, remembered. But of all the unrevealed hardships, loss, suffering and destitution that she had to face due to war, an episode on Mrs. Dorling becomes insignificant. The narrator comes to the realisation that the abandonment that she had faced due to the war, is not going to be repaired by the sheer disrespect done to her mother's possessions by Mrs. Dorling. By the end of the narrative, the protagonist decides to leave without taking any of the possessions with her, signifying her willing refusal to remember an insignificant address. Minco's protagonist definitely suffers from PTSD. Minco presents a pragmatic approach in her as she does not hold onto the wounds of the past but instead, crawls back, into her present life, with whatever is offered to her. Minco does not present the readers with hope, but rather, the helplessness to continue.

And what should I have done with them in a small rented room where the shreds of black-out paper still hung along the windows and no more than a handful of cutlery fitted in the narrow table drawer? (Minco, 1957, p. 5).

## The Refusal to Remember in *Khamosh Pani*

Residual trauma makes ghost-like appearances in Sabiha Sumar's film. *Khamosh Pani*, or *Silent Waters*, directed by Sumar in 2003, *Khamosh Pani* is an Indo-Pakistani film about a widowed mother and her young son living in a Punjabi village as it undergoes radical changes during the late 1970s. Just like Minco's narrative, *Silent Waters* offers a peep into the life of a middle-aged woman, trying to forget and refusing to remember her traumatic young adult life.

In 1979, Charkhi, a village in the Punjab province of Pakistan, Ayesha lives with her son Saleem, a rather spoilt teenager in love with a schoolgirl Zubeida. Ayesha supports herself and Saleem with her late husband's pension and by giving lessons in the Qur'an to village girls. She refuses to go to the village well, and her neighbor's daughters draw water for her. Her refusal to go to the village well feeds her distance from her past life and also her psychic trauma. A psychic trauma is recognized as being caused when an intense, often extremely violent situation disables the ability of a consciousness to integrate an experience within the narrative, linear memory of an individual. All seems well in Ayesha's life before she has to face her past again. After an agreement between the Indian and Pakistani governments, a group of Sikh pilgrims from India arrives in Pakistan to visit the Sikh shrines. They come to Charkhi, the village they were forced to flee during the bloody partition of India in 1947. A pilgrim wants to look for his sister, who he believes survived the violence. He eventually reaches Ayesha, who refuses to recognize him and encounter her past. It is then revealed that Aeysha, who had later christened herself by her present name, was actually 'Veero,' one of the few survivors amongst a group of village Sikh women lined up to jump into the village well rather than be raped by a Muslim mob in 1947.

Contrary to Minco's convenient break from the visual atrocities of war, *Khamosh Pani* does not shy away from them. It is possible that the film genre makes it more visual and hence, much more traumatising. The medium of film can render otherwise hidden traumatic wounds noticeable and observable, and therefore debatable and negotiable. Cinema is capable of visualizing 'traumata' as it can effectively depict irregular patterns. Film can transport images that have been repressed by the society. The visuals of Veero's suicide are clear which bring the intense flashbacks intruding upon the consciousness back into the social discourse.

Derived from what trauma theorist van der Kolk says about "traumatic memory," it can be stated that film translates sensuous triggers, effects and sudden visceral sensations – such as particular smells and sounds – into film language, alongside other references to the traumatizing situation that are not decoded, such as the interaction between the acoustic level and the camera angles, the diegesis with the acting (Elm et al., 2014). Veero is shown quite well immersed in her present life. She does not wish to scrape the remains of her past but the past comes back haunting her.

Veero is not divided. Her decision is clear. She has converted to the Islamic religion and has made every attempt to take her life out of the swarm of haunting past memories. Sumar makes it a point to prove that it is not all done for Veero. Sumar's film stands as an epitome for all women, sharing a collective trauma, not out of dying, but surviving. According to Kohne, a film can be embraced as an artistic attempt to communicate what can neither be transformed into a shared experience nor transmitted in an undisguised manner. Sumar's film is a reminder that hatred and trauma do not limit themselves to the lap of war. They simmer and are brought to a boil. This is made evident through the character of Ayesha's son, who is a staunch nationalist. The film is set in the post-partition times when fundamentalism has just started setting in Pakistan. Through Zubaida,

the alleged girlfriend of Ayesha's son, Sumar presents a reflection of the younger Veero, who fails to keep Saleem away from the fundamentalist mindset. It is worth noting, how Veero is a prime example of tolerance, even after having faced so much in her life. *Khamosh Pani* presents a realist universe where women do not have a lot of choices. For women like young Veero, it is either death or rape. Even as Veero decides to leave her identity as a Sikh woman behind, her refusal to go to the well represents the horror of it all. The well stands as a metaphor for all the suffering bestowed upon women during partition.

Veero, upon not being able to get herself freed from the ghosts of her past, surrenders. Her suicide may be seen as the end of her misery but not of the collective. In her predicament, Sumar rings the traumatic memories of the collective womenfolk.

## Conclusion

Both *The Address* and *Khamosh Pani* hold evidence of recurring trauma. Their protagonists have moved much ahead in life but encounter their past lives only to face that situation all over again. Minco's narrator and Sumar's Veero, are representations of collective trauma faced by communities during political and social upheavals. While Minco's narrator moves on with her life, Sumar presents a literal dead end to Veero's predicament. Both authors take examples of traumatized female protagonists, trying to move on with their lives. The two narratives share multiple differences as well. While Minco's account is about a daughter, who, willingly scrapes her past in hopes of reviving the possessions that carried the essence of her childhood, Sumar's craft slaps the protagonist with an unavoidable encounter. Minco conveniently skips the atrocious details of the war, while Sumar openly presents Veero's suicide as a 'dead end' to all her suffering with visual details. Minco presents a world where her heroine moves ahead, leaving behind the pointless way in which her memories are arranged, much in contrast to Veero, who is not left with much choice but to end her life. The narratives serve as accounts of individuals, who, having faced abandonment, wrestle through their memories and try to evade their unwanted, painful past lives but are unable to do so. Minco's narrator is driven to her past quite willingly but also, by this unseen force, that despite being pained by the visuals of the streets, visits the address for a second time. While Veero, by the mystery of fate, runs back into the life she once ran away from.

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