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# Insidious Trauma: A Literature Review

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## Abstract

Despite the promising development of trauma studies as an interdisciplinary phenomenon, the notion of insidious trauma is often relegated to its margins. As a theory with its roots in feminist psychotherapeutic practices of scholars such as Maria Root and Laura Brown, the paradigm of insidious trauma provides scope to discuss mundane and everyday experientialities of trauma that result from socially marginalized positions. The central aim of this paper is to aver that there is a need to expand the category of insidious trauma to explore the quotidian traumas of marginalized groups. For this, the paper presents analogous feminist and masculinist understandings of trauma experienced due to individuals' complex entanglement with the patriarchal discourse. In exploring the notion of insidious trauma through a feminist lens, the paper connects it to the theories of coercive control, patriarchal terrorism, and betrayal trauma. The paper also discusses paradigms of male trauma that concur with the theory of insidious trauma. In this course, the paper presents the historical failure of the diagnosis of male hysteria. It discusses how narrow understandings of masculinity in a patriarchal culture have generated emotionally stunted development in men and foreclosed their avenues to seek help for domestic violence. The paper then posits that expanding Michael Rothberg's category of the implicated subject provides a way to throw light on how the entire patriarchal social structure is complicit in generating male and female victims of its ideology.

**Keywords:** insidious trauma, betrayal trauma, patriarchal terrorism, coercive control, male hysteria, implicated subject

## 1. Introduction

On May 27, 2022, the Indian online news and media website *Firstpost* reported a case of domestic violence experienced by a school principal (male) at Alwar in Rajasthan. The principal expressed that at the initial phase, he had not sought to report this matter "keeping in mind the dignity of his profession" (para 1). However, he later gathered the courage to seek legal support due to his inability to tolerate further the physical abuse that insidiously led to an emotional breakdown. This news report contests the normative notion that women (the vulnerable section) are the only aggrieved section. The report showcases the hidden truth that patriarchal society tends to suppress; that is, males may also be the victims of domestic violence. A few days later, society witnessed another case of domestic violence; however, in this context, history repeats itself. The online news website *The Quint*, on June 1 2022, reported a case of three sisters found dead in a well in the Dudu district near Jaipur, the capital city of Rajasthan. It was reported that the three sisters, Kalu, Kamalesh, and Mamta Meena, were regularly tortured and abused for more dowry. In addition, the sisters were dissuaded from continuing their education, something they were passionate about and exceptionally good at. Instead, they were forced to engage in farming. A sense of limited freedom over their choices, coupled with regular abuse and torture, forced them to the edge of their sanity, and they decided to end their lives by jumping into a well.

The two cases mentioned above aptly capture the concept of Insidious trauma theorized by the feminist psychotherapist Maria Root (1992). This paper argues that this aspect of trauma, where there is a gradual accumulation of traumatic incidents in the victims' psyche, which leads to sudden outbursts, although in different forms, needs more discussion in the field of trauma studies. Although trauma studies have grown expansively from the latter part of the nineteenth century until today, certain forms of trauma, like those discussed in the news mentioned above reports, were never given full-fledged attention within academia. (Note <sup>1</sup>) The paper attempts to discuss this aspect of trauma in detail and highlight the theoretical gaps in trauma studies that have failed to address the nuances of traumas that are not located in a single event, like war, but in the accumulation of multiple episodes that drive a victim to take destructive decisions.

## 2. Method

This is a literature review paper. The paper captures important theoretical frameworks that have developed over time to explain the fluid and elusive notion of trauma. The review focuses on the trajectory of trauma studies as it pertains to the study of insidious trauma. The authors have chosen to review key works in this field of study since the domain has been gaining popularity amongst the scholars of humanities. Further, discussions on insidious trauma are sparse, if available. The paper begins with a quick review of the trajectory of the main field of trauma studies and places within it the discourse of insidious trauma to showcase how as one of the significant aspects of trauma studies, the area has received little academic attention. Through an intensive focus on insidious trauma, the paper draws attention to the major research works of scholars such as Maria Root, Judith Herman, and Laura Brown. The paper then moves on to discuss Evan Stark's theory of coercive control, Jennifer Freyd's notion of betrayal trauma, and Michael Johnson's theory of patriarchal terrorism and argues that these theories of trauma could be studied in relation to theories of insidious trauma because they focus on those experiences of trauma that are not

located in a single event but in the everyday experiences of women in the context of interpersonal violence and control in a household, which are considered normative in a patriarchal society. Following this, the paper discusses theories of male trauma which concord with the model of insidious trauma as proposed by Root and Brown. This section operates on the premise that it is crucial to consider men's experiences of trauma because they are covertly oppressed in a patriarchal society, and they experience certain unique traumas which are often minimized to maintain an apparent sense of male domination. The section then sheds light on the life of men in a repressive patriarchal social structure that forbids their development as emotional beings. Finally, it discusses the need to expand the theory of intimate terrorism to include male victims. The paper concludes by expanding the category of 'implicated subject' to cognize the entire patriarchal social structure as constitutive of the undercurrents of male and female experiences of trauma.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1 Trauma Studies: A Trajectory

Trauma has become "a conceptual touchstone" in our culture and literary studies (Kurtz, 2008, p.1). Kurtz (2008) argues that trauma studies require a conceptual revamping to expand its horizon to include traumatic experiences that are triggered in everyday lives. The word trauma has often been associated with various mass traumatic events in history. However, it originates in the Greek word "wound" (Davis & Meretoja, 2020, p.1), which was used to define wounds with an immediate organic cause. Nevertheless, in the current age, the word trauma is generally used to refer to psychological, emotional, and affective wounds which may or may not have a physiological cause. For instance, the current world could be considered traumatized because of ongoing crises like climate change, environmental damage, and "lockdown trauma" (Davis & Meretoja, 2020, p.1).

This section of the paper quickly traces the trajectory of trauma studies from the modernity of the nineteenth century to the development of literary trauma studies at the junction of trauma theory and deconstruction. With the advent of the enlightenment, several dramatic changes in society led to the development of industries and the expansion of urban settlements that required transporting people and goods via railways. Accidents happened both during rail travel and in industries. This necessitated a discourse that would facilitate monetary compensation to the victims. At this historical juncture emerged the medico-legal discourses of "the railway spine", theorized by John Erichsen in 1866 and "traumatic neurosis", theorized by Herman Oppenheim in 1889 (Lerner & Micale, 2001, p.178), to describe the traumatic aftermath of railway accidents and industrial accidents respectively. According to these paradigms, psychological trauma has its origin in corporeal wounds.

The rise of socio-cultural modernity also necessitated the production of new literary forms that could capture new traumas. The literary form of naturalism emerged in response to the rise of modernity. Naturalism was conducive to representing the traumata that resulted from rapid modernization. Representative works from this period include those by Emile Zola and Blaise Cendrars (Steffens, 2018).

Following this, the psychodynamic model of trauma from the theories of Jean-Martin Charcot and his student Pierre Janet. Charcot conceptualized the model of "traumatic neurosis." (Note <sup>ii</sup>) which despite its root in organic causes, foregrounds the psychological rupture of trauma. Following Charcot's footsteps, Pierre Janet proposed the paradigm of "dissociation" and "traumatic memory" (Note <sup>iii</sup>) which concretized the divorce between psychological trauma and the physical body. Moreover, Charcot and Janet were the precursors of a model of trauma that was solely psychological in nature.

Janet bridges Charcot's trauma paradigm and psychoanalysis of Sigmund Freud. For Freud, the human unconscious played a vital role in structuring a traumatic event. With his focus continually shifting throughout his career, Freud's conceptualizations of trauma began with his famous seduction theory (Note <sup>iv</sup>) and later, Freud restructured (Note <sup>v</sup>) this theory to provide an alternative model. Nevertheless, his work *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) provided a substantial theory of trauma that was very relevant in the study of war veterans. This work explains the trauma of World War I veterans. Here, Freud describes the death drive as a primal principle that organizes the psyche and overrides the pleasure principle. He argues that because of the prominent role of the death drive, repetition compulsion became constitutive of the aftermath of trauma. The term repetition compulsion (later prominent in the Neo-Freudian theories of Caruth) was cognized by Freud as a function of the death drive that causes unconscious repetition of traumatic events to gain mastery over them. In addition, Freud significantly influenced literature because he used literary works to illustrate his concepts. His theories became the foundation of psychoanalytic literary theory, providing a framework for analyzing literary texts.

However, it was the development of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) that consolidated trauma studies (Kurtz, 2018). PTSD was originally developed as a clinical condition (Note <sup>vi</sup>) in response to the efforts of Vietnam War veterans' associations. This diagnosis provided a historically grounded and medically ratified understanding of the trauma that consolidated both the medical and cultural categories of trauma. According to Kurtz (2008), "many of our assumptions about the nature of trauma were undergirded by popular understandings of PTSD" (pp.6-7). He argues that this enabled the concept of trauma to gain momentum in literary studies. Moreover, Caruth (1995) argues for the relevance of PTSD, which provides a way to understand the pathology of trauma. However, for Caruth (2005), there was simultaneously a collision with the impossibility of articulating trauma. Therefore, this fostered a transdisciplinary study of trauma that included literary studies. In addition to the cultural impetus provided by the development of PTSD, the overlap of Holocaust studies and poststructuralism paved the way for the development of literary trauma studies as it is understood today (Davis, 2020):

Poststructuralism and deconstruction primarily focus on the inherent insufficiency of language for meaning-making. These theories were widely criticized for their overt textuality, lack of historicity, and ethical elusiveness. (Note <sup>vii</sup>) On the other hand, the theory of trauma,

isolated from a critical engagement with Holocaust studies, retained historical specificity and ethical concerns. Simultaneously, trauma theory, like poststructuralism, operated with an understanding of the limitations of language for representation. The junction between the trauma theory and deconstruction provided a means to juxtapose textual analysis of deconstruction with the historical specificity and ethical underpinnings of Holocaust trauma theory to analyze trauma narratives.

In this vein, Yale School theorists like Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub, Geoffrey Hartman and Cathy Caruth proposed their theories of trauma. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub (1992) consolidated the bond between deconstruction and Holocaust studies by arguing for a new literary form of testimony. Similarly, Hartman (1995) stressed the innate link between trauma and literature. Hartman asserts that the language of literature can encapsulate the traumatic experience because it operates on a liminal space between knowledge and its lack (Caruth & Hartman, 1996).

Following in the footsteps of Felman and Laub, and Hartman, Cathy Caruth emerged as one of the most prominent figures of 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>-century trauma studies. Caruth defines trauma as "a response, sometimes delayed to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours" (Caruth, 1995, p.4). Caruth asserts the unspeakability of trauma. However, for her, the literary language that mimics the structure of trauma through its experimental forms can potentially transmit trauma. It was from Cathy Caruth's model of trauma emerged Laurie Vickroy's (2002) theory of trauma aesthetics, Anne Whitehead's (2004) paradigm of "trauma fiction" (p.3), and Alan Gibbs' (2014) notion of "traumatic metafiction" (p.31). Joshua Pedersen (2018) argues that trauma in literature manifests through three tropes: absence, indirection and repetition. The trope of absence can be seen in Cathy Caruth's interview with Geoffrey Hartman (1996). The idea of indirection manifests in Felman and Laub's (1992) analysis of Albert Camus' work *Plague*. The third trope, repetition, is present in Hartman's (1995) analysis of S.T. Coleridge's poem *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*.

### 3.2 Insidious Trauma

#### 3.2.1 Feminist Considerations

Cathy Caruth's model of trauma has undergone and still undergoes radical criticism because she focuses on a single event of magnitude as the locus of trauma. Caruth's model of trauma fails to acknowledge that trauma could be a prolonged phenomenon that affects the psyche not at once but slowly corrodes it every day. In this line of criticism, the feminist psychotherapist Root (1992) has introduced the concept of insidious trauma. Insidious trauma helps cognize how some vulnerable sections of the population, such as women and queer people, experience traumatic moments in their everyday lives. This trauma, however, does not fit Caruth's model of trauma because these traumas are located throughout the lives of the oppressed groups.

According to Root (1992), the feminist theory provides scope to categorize trauma as the everyday experiences of violence and oppression the marginalized undergo. She posits that whether an incident or a series of incidents is considered traumatic or not is decided by the subjective processes of the person who undergoes it. In addition, she underlines the necessity to consider psychosocial context as an essential factor in defining a traumatic experience. In her essay "Reconstructing the Impact of Trauma on Personality" (1992), Root discusses insidious trauma as a form of indirect trauma that shapes the subjects' worldview and sense of self. Root (1992) states that: "Insidious trauma is usually associated with the social status of an individual being devalued because a characteristic intrinsic to their identity is different from what is valued by those in power (p.240).

Root (1992) cognizes trauma as a socio-culturally embedded phenomenon. She also notes that the experiences of insidious trauma are normalized by those power structures that marginalize and exploit certain groups of people. Therefore, the subjugation of an individual or a community is considered normative and can be dismissed from the mainstream discussions of trauma studies. She highlights that the frequency with which insidious traumas are experienced shatters a sense of safety and security in the world of the traumatized and causes a constant sense of hypervigilance through an "activation of survival behaviours" (p.241). Further, she argues that insidious trauma could be experienced concurrently with direct trauma.

Root (1992) avers that one of the significant contributions of feminism to trauma studies lies in considering the importance of spirit as an element in dealing with trauma. She theorizes that the experience of insidious trauma crushes the spirit of an individual. For her, this spirit includes interconnectedness among the individuals of a community, personal integrity, intuition, and "validation of intangible senses" (Root, 1992, p.238). She adds that healing through a feminist psychotherapeutic process involves integrating the mind, body and spirit. Root also refers to PTSD (in DSM III) and notes that it fails to address the impact of insidious trauma. This results in victim-blaming because the survivor's response is attributed to their congenital weaknesses and is therefore pathologized.

Like Root, Judith Herman (1992) notes that the advent of the women's movement was marked by the recognition that the "most common posttraumatic disorders are not those of men in war but of women in civilian life" (Herman, 1992, p.28). While rape was already considered traumatic by DSM-III, other traumatic experiences of women have gained medical and cultural significance primarily due to Herman's critique of PTSD. She advocated for a revision of DSM III, and since then, PTSD has been expanding its scope. In addition, like Root, Herman was also antagonistic to pathologizing natural responses to trauma as personality disorders. In this line, Herman went one step ahead of Root by attempting to destigmatize the DSM category of Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD). According to Herman, the category of BPD caused victim-blaming. In place of BPD, Herman theorized the category of c-PTSD or Complex Post Traumatic Stress Disorder in ICD-10 or International Classification of Diseases, 10th edition.

Laura Brown (1995), a colleague of Maria Root, extends Root's and Herman's scepticism of DSM III by addressing insidious trauma. She

consolidates Root's notion of insidious trauma within a single definition:

[T]raumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but do violence to the soul and spirit. (Brown, 1995, p.107)

In this definition, Laura Brown addresses the pivotal role of indirect trauma on an individual's spirit. Brown is also highly critical of the revised edition of DSM III-R (1987) because it provides a shallow definition of trauma. She notes that to be diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (as per DSM-III-R), a person should have experienced "an event outside the range of human experience" (American Psychiatric Association, 1987, p.250). However, for her, this narrow understanding of trauma fails to address the role of oppressive structures and discourses that define the lives of marginalized groups who are constantly exposed to low-grade trauma in their everyday lives. Brown (1995) argues that PTSD in DSM III-R originates from the notion that normal human experience only includes "male human experience" (p.102). To move beyond this definition of trauma, Brown posits a feminist understanding of the trauma that "calls to look beyond the public and male experiences of trauma..." (p.102). Through this, with specific reference to women, she states that one will address the traumas of marginalized groups that do not fall into the rigid category of trauma as defined by DSM III-R.

Further, Brown (1995) argues that pathologizing an individual's personality complicates addressing invisible trauma. It helps the dominant discourses and institutions remain unchallenged as the focus is on the victim. Brown argues for a feminist reconsideration of trauma that acknowledges "that traumatic events do lie within the range of normal human experience. . . it includes a knowledge of the social context and. . . factors [in] the presence of daily and insidious trauma into an analysis of what is now the only real trauma" (Brown, 1995, pp.110-111). This redefinition will not only address insidious traumas but also challenge the institutions that perpetuate these traumas.

Insidious trauma highlights the role of social structures and institutions in traumatic experiences instead of merely focusing on the subjective and phenomenological experiences of trauma. The notion of "coercive control" also does the same: it focuses on women's experiences of systemic oppression in spousal relationships due to unequal power distribution between the two partners in a patriarchal social order. Further, the notion of coercive control also helps cognize those experiences that happen over time and produce a cumulative effect. Evan Stark (2007) coined the term "coercive control" to define the "most widespread and devastating strategy men use to dominate women in personal lives" (p.8). According to Stark, coercive control capitalizes on women's newfound freedom, resulting from feminist movements. As such freedom disturbs men's egos, they engage in different modes of violence to recast a social order that existed in the past. For Stark, coercive control is a political control rooted in the sexual inequality inherent in spousal relationships. Coercive control involves how men control every aspect of women's lives over a prolonged phase of time. Like Root and Brown, Stark argues that this form of control is not merely psychologically devastating for an individual woman but also underscores the form of objective political inequality that underlies these experiences. The theory of coercive control, like the notion of insidious trauma, highlights the socio-cultural factors that create and maintain inequality in male-female intimate relationships.

Normatively, physical abuse in a relationship is taken into consideration by women's movements. Nevertheless, Stark argues that other covert orders of control suppress women. For Stark (2007), coercive control, apart from "repeating" minor physical violence, involves three components: intimidation, isolation and control (p.5). Stark (2007) states that the: [P]rimary harm abusive men inflict is political, not physical, and reflects the deprivation of rights and resources that are critical to personhood and citizenship (p.5). A woman's deprivation of personhood and citizenship is reminiscent of the violation of the spirit that Root talks about in her paradigm of insidious trauma. As postulated by Stark, the theory of coercive control also explains why women become murderers. According to him, the gradual accumulation of violence and abuse in an everyday domestic set-up becomes overwhelming for women when it crosses a threshold. As a result, these women reach a state of mind where they are ready to do anything that would enable them to escape their stifling, claustrophobic, violent and abusive circumstances. Thus, some victims of coercive control even murder their abusers. The trio of sisters, whose suicides this paper refers to in the introduction, stands as a testimony to the consequence of the prolonged experience of violence and abuse.

Both insidious trauma and coercive control help to highlight how the category of trauma, construed as a very personal and subjective experience, could be understood as caused by power and its unequal distribution. These trauma theories help to hold institutions and structures responsible for individual experiences instead of merely analyzing a traumatized individual for the source of trauma.

In a discussion of traumas that are not overtly violent but crush the spirit of an individual, it is vital to address Jennifer Freyd's notion of betrayal trauma. Jennifer J Freyd (1996) formulated the paradigm of Betrayal Trauma (BT) to address the trauma incurred due to the violation of trust in close interpersonal relationships. This includes child sexual abuse and adult interpersonal relationship issues like domestic violence. She formulates this concept, especially in reference to the feminist paradigm of trauma. She states that:

Much has been said about the effects of trauma, especially about fear, anxiety, and terror induced by overwhelming events. Less has been said about the effects of the violation of human bonds and the effects of loss of important human connections. (Birell & Freyd, 1996, p.3)

Much like the definitions of insidious trauma and coercive control, Freyd, in her definition of betrayal trauma, does not focus on those incidents that are overtly violent. Instead, she focuses on what Root would describe as the destruction of the human "spirit." Freyd points out that what is traumatic in her paradigm is betrayal and not violence that ensues. She posits that this betrayal results from losing meaningful human connections based on trust. Hence, for Freyd, betrayal trauma is not simply a result of apparent violence in human relationships but is a result of the betrayal of trust that glues human connections.

Concerning the forms of violence against women, Michael P Johnson (1995) provides a substantial theory. Johnson argues that there are two different forms of familial violence, namely, "patriarchal terrorism" (which he later calls "intimate terrorism") and common couple violence. For him, common couple violence is characterized by an "occasional outburst of violence" in response to isolated triggering incidents. In contrast, patriarchal terrorism is associated with "systematic male violence" resulting from structural inequality between two genders in a heterosexual family unit embedded in a patriarchal society (Johnson, 1995, p. 283).

According to Johnson (1995), the critical difference between these two types of family violence lies in motive. While common couple violence derives from the need to control the onslaught of a particular instance, patriarchal terrorism is more insidious. It uses multiple methods that exercise general control over a woman. Johnson argues that in order to bring about policies, legal reforms and appropriate therapeutic interventions, it is essential that one does not collate these two distinct forms of family violence. For him, patriarchal terrorism is founded on the society's inherent patriarchal order and is often gender asymmetric (that is, the power almost always resides with men). On the other hand, common couple violence results from society's general inclination to violence and is often gender symmetric (both men and women have equal power). For Johnson, patriarchal terrorism is more insidious than common couple violence because it has a solid ideological association with the patriarchal social order. Simultaneously, patriarchal terrorism also uses other modes of control (like those discussed as coercive control).

### 3.2.2 Masculinist Considerations

From the above discussion, it is easy to notice that women are almost always considered the victims of violence and oppression in a patriarchal society. However, according to the real-life example this paper began with: the domestic violence faced by a male principal, there are forms of insidious trauma faced by men as well. These traumas men face primarily arise from being marginalized by the dominant patriarchal order, which oppresses those men who do not identify with and abide by hegemonic masculinity.

Brown, Root, Stark, Freyd and Johnson theorized on the feminist model of trauma. Not much literature exists on masculine traumas. This section discusses the limited literature available on male traumatic experientialities. Mark S Micale, in his work *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (2008), argues that since time immemorial male hysteria has always been side-lined for various reasons. First, as the etymology of the word suggests, hysteria has been historically attributed only to women to keep them under patriarchal control. It was never conceptualized as a disease that could affect men, thus denying male "psychological travails" (Micale, 2008, p.47). However, between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries, certain developments caused the concept of male hysteria to come closer to recognition. Nevertheless, these developments were suppressed in the 1800s due to the hegemonic influence of masculinity that pressed the doctors to maintain differences between the sexes. Thus, in the nineteenth century, "female hysteria thrived as never before", and male hysteria constituted a "story of evasions, resistances, and silences" (Micale, 2008, p.49). Even in the second half of the nineteenth century, with the work of Jean-Martin Charcot, hysteria became a disease of effeminate men and other marginalized groups but never a part of mainstream men's maladies. Even Freud's conception of hysteria was partial because Freud, despite beginning his work with male hysteria, was threatened by the consequences of what such work would do to him and men like him.

These theorists did not properly conceptualize male hysteria because such a theorization would mean confronting and acknowledging their vulnerabilities. The dominant model of masculinity prevented the development of a theory of male hysteria as such a theory would be antithetical to the normal experientialities of men in a patriarchal social order. As a result, male experiences of trauma were never given proper medical attention because such traumas were considered impossible. Even war veteran experiences were given due attention only with the development of the diagnosis of PTSD.

This line of thinking that considers male trauma victims impossible is reflected in the paper "Gender Matters: Working with Adult Male Survivors of Trauma" (2005). In this paper, the author Ximena E Mejia argues that "[n]ot recognizing male survivors [of trauma] and cultural bias has disabled men from seeking help" (p.30). He states that masculinity is a culturally sanctioned value that men internalize while growing up. The consequent desire to appear fearless and invulnerable makes men more susceptible to the effects of trauma. He states that "[b]oys and men are also socialized by the misconception that somehow boys are biologically wired to act like macho, high energy, even violent supermen. . . [they] learn to adopt a stance based on false self, of extreme daring, bravado and attraction to violence" (Mejia, 2005, pp.32-33). Thus, the very process of internalizing the values of masculinity can be traumatizing. He further posits that men are made to feel ashamed for expressing feelings, emotions, vulnerabilities, and lack. He argues that when an individual, a man, is subjected to shame in the long run, it could contribute to developing defensive behaviours in the form of rage and violence. Because of internalizing the values of hegemonic masculinity, men are deprived of existence as emotional beings capable of frailties. This makes men prone to experiencing trauma while simultaneously relegating them to a position where they cannot express themselves or seek help.

In their book *Men's Experiences of Violence in Intimate Relationships* (2019), Marianne Inez Lien and Jorgen Lorentzen use a qualitative method by interviewing men who have undergone intimate partner violence. They argue for a different typology of intimate violence that includes the men's experiences of domestic violence. Their argument begins by dismantling the category of intimate terrorism posited by Michael P Johnson (discussed earlier in this article), who argues that intimate terrorism in the relationship between a husband and a wife is founded on an asymmetric distribution of power and that men always have power over women in a heterosexual unit. According to Johnson (1995), the perpetrator of intimate terrorism is almost always a man because the social structure favours them with power. Nevertheless, Lien and Lorentzen argue that a cultural paradigm shift has happened in the past decade, considering that even men can be victims of domestic violence. They state:

An understanding of partner violence was initially based on the experiences of abused women and violent men in a patriarchal society. This conception must now be developed further to throw light on the severe and systematic psychological and physical partner violence perpetrated against men since both men and women can commit partner violence. Intimate terrorism can be exercised without the partner's physical superiority (Lien & Lorentzen, 2019, p.158).

According to Lien and Lorentzen, the feminist argument for domestic violence focuses on women as victims of domestic violence. Such an argument is based on the physical superiority of men and the asymmetrical power relationships between men and women. However, men's physical superiority has no value when it comes to psychological violence experienced by men in the context of intimate terrorism. They also argue that even though men experience domestic violence, it is difficult for them to seek help. This is due to the patriarchal culture that fails to identify them as victims and their inertia to see themselves as victims because they internalize the dominant notions of manliness and masculinity that patriarchal discourse perpetuates. Lien and Lorentzen posit that the gender-power relationship within a patriarchal society must be reconsidered. This will not only help to explain the victimization of men in male-female spousal relationships but also within gay partner violence.

Lien and Lorentzen concur that the lack of a proper definition of what entails intimate terrorism has excluded considering men as victims. They state that since there is "no *one* truth about serious partner violence and there cannot, therefore, be *one* theory to explain it" (Lien and Lorentzen, 2019, p.162 original emphasis). Therefore, they argue that listening to men's voices about their oppression is crucial. By doing this, we understand the phenomenological experiences of men in violent intimate partner relationships.

### 3.2.3 Insidious Trauma and the Implicated Subject

This section of the paper argues that the category of 'implicated subject' helps cognize the undercurrents of insidious trauma caused by a patriarchal social structure. The notion of the implicated subject was theorized in 2019 by Michael Rothberg to expand the vocabulary of the current social justice model that focuses only on the victim-perpetrator binary (or sometimes the triad of victim-perpetrator-bystander). According to Rothberg (2019):

Implicated subjects occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator (p.1).

Thus, for Rothberg, an implicated subject is a subject position (Note <sup>viii</sup>) occupied by individuals who do not have a direct causal relationship to violence and oppression. An implicated subject produces the conditions necessary for the categories of victim and perpetrator to emerge. Rothberg uses the example of the murder of a man of colour, Trayvon Martin, by George Zimmerman in the United States and posits that to be implicated in the murder of Martin means to occupy those positions which align with power and privilege associated with the whiteness of one's skin. Regarding the murder of Martin by Zimmerman, Rothberg (2019) argues that "the implicated subject is an analytical category that can help us understand *the kind of society* that makes George Zimmerman and Trayvon Martin possible" (p.7 Emphasis added).

The focus of Rothberg on the underlying social structures as the basis of racial violence and oppression has been expanded in this paper to consider the insidious trauma caused by patriarchy. This paper adopts and expands the category of the implicated subject with reference to insidious trauma to highlight how the whole social structure is implicated in generating the subject positions of victim and perpetrator. This consideration also goes with the definition of the implicated subject that was presented previously in the paper: the social structure here is understood as a 'participant' in causing insidious trauma (where the actual agents of harm are those who occupy the structure) without directly engaging in acts of violence and oppression.

Considering the social structure and its discourses of power and privilege as implicated in generating insidious traumatic experiences does not mean discounting the role that individuals play in maintaining and circulating structural power. Instead, it means that insidious trauma caused by patriarchy is predicated not just on individuals who uphold patriarchy but on the entire social structure, including its past and present that these individuals occupy and embody, which nevertheless pre-exists them. This line of thought underlines what Rothberg (2019) states in the following lines:

[B]eyond the unavoidable categories of victims and perpetrators, there is the *need for a larger reckoning with both the structures of power* that undergird such cases and the histories that continue to resonate as afterlives (p.10, Emphasis added).

Rothberg, in his argument, indirectly questions the social structures of power and privilege by positioning individuals in the category of implicated subject. Nevertheless, this paper argues that instead of merely focusing on individuals as implicated subjects, a more significant focus on those discourses that travel across history to the present helps to draw attention to the transhistorical nature of the oppressive discourses whose origin and transmission are not restricted at the individual level. Only by challenging the dominant discourses and ideologies embodied by individuals can one bring social change.

Returning to the notion of insidious trauma, categorizing patriarchal society as implicated in generating insidious traumatic experiences means drawing attention to the larger social structures and discourses that act through the individual players. This paper posits that

through this, one creates the possibility of the emergence of a human subjectivity that is disentangled from these discourses. The emergence of such subjectivities is necessary to break the forms of violence and oppression that cause insidious trauma.

#### 4. Conclusion

Insidious trauma as a category provides a framework to discuss and cognize those forms of trauma and violence that are not associated with a single event of magnitude. In order to situate insidious trauma within the field of trauma studies, this paper provides a rough outline of the main field of trauma studies. It embeds within it the theory of insidious trauma. The concept of insidious trauma is discussed as it appears in the works of Maria Root and Laura Brown. Further, to highlight the inherent incompleteness that characterizes the theory of insidious trauma, other theories of trauma, oppression and violence that are analogous to the notion of insidious trauma are introduced and discussed within the paradigm of insidious trauma. In this process, the paper introduces the concepts of coercive control, betrayal trauma and patriarchal terrorism and connects these concepts to insidious trauma. Since these theories primarily discuss the trauma of female subjects in a patriarchal society, the paper introduces studies that account for masculine paradigms of trauma that originate to argue that trauma resulting from life within a patriarchal society affects both women and men, although in uniquely different ways. Moving ahead, the paper argues that expanding the implicated subject category does not simply provide scope to hold the perpetrators of insidious trauma accountable but also helps highlight the implicated position of the patriarchal social structure within which individuals become victims or perpetrators. Such an understanding that implicates the patriarchal social structure in the everyday trauma experienced by men and women helps focus on those discourses that underlie traumatic experiences. This paper highlights that expanding the category of insidious trauma is the need of the hour because it accounts for those forms of trauma that are not considered traumatizing according to mainstream trauma theories. Due to the hegemonic influence of the neo-Freudian theory of the unspeakable posited by Cathy Caruth, the paradigm of insidious trauma still resides in the shadows. It is imperative that we address the insufficiency of the Caruthian theory of trauma, which focuses on a single traumatic event and its repercussions. In this line, the notion of insidious trauma provides scope to understand those mundanely traumatic traumas that are not necessarily punctual. This consideration helps to expand the scope of trauma studies to include those forms of trauma that have hitherto not been considered traumatic. For literary studies, such an expansion would also mean considering many past literary works that had hitherto never been studied through the lens of trauma as representative of different forms of insidious trauma. Further, at a social level, the category of insidious trauma provides scope to change laws and policies that affect minority and oppressed groups and thus enable political changes. However, for that to be realized, it is vital that the paradigm of insidious trauma be expanded to provide the tools necessary for such a social change.

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## Notes

Note <sup>i</sup>. According to Maria Root (1992) and Laura Brown (1995), what is considered traumatic is dictated by the dominant discourses in society. Therefore some traumatic experiences are more valid for analysis than others.

Note <sup>ii</sup>. Refer to Bond and Craps (2020), pp.17-19.

Note <sup>iii</sup>. Refer to Hart, Onno and Horst, Rutger (1989) "The dissociation theory of Pierre Janet" *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, pp.3-8.

Note <sup>iv</sup>. *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) and *Studies in Hysteria* (1895).

Note <sup>v</sup>. *Interpretation of Dreams* (1899)

Note <sup>vi</sup>. Proposed in the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III) (1980) published by the American Psychiatric Association.

Note <sup>vii</sup>. The discovery of Paul de Man's past publications that marked his position as a Nazi sympathizer was unfavourable to deconstruction (Bond and Craps 58-59)

Note <sup>viii</sup>. Rothberg (2019) makes it clear that the category of the implicated subject is not an ontological one but rather a subject position occupied by an individual concerning a specific history and a given time. When the latter variables change, the subject positions may also change, and the individual could occupy another subject position like victim, perpetrator, or bystander. Rothberg argues that such different entanglements of individuals concerning different histories constitute what he calls "complex implication" (p.8, p.40)

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