Trauma, Intimacy and the Crisis of Ethical Identity in Daniel L. Jensen's *The Bridge Kingdom*

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ABSTRACT

This paper talks about the ethical crisis that emerges from the tension between her hatred towards the nation and emotional attachment. The story revolves around the main character Lara who explores political conditioning and emotional repression through a fractured ethical self. Lara internalizes trauma due to her duty to sacrifice herself for her country and its people. Her marriage to King Aren makes a major impact of psychological conflict where there is destabilization towards loyalty. *The Bridge Kingdom* has a major conflict in the life of Lara through her inner struggle between duty to her homeland and developing love for her enemy. Later she realizes that she was sent to the villain to destroy him for taking revenge for her country and its people.

Keywords: Intimacy, Crisis, Feminist ethics, Trauma, Trauma theory, Ethical identity.

This paper examines identity formation, trauma and psychological conflict in *The Bridge Kingdom*, through inter-disciplinary framework from trauma theory, psychoanalysis and identity studies. It tells about the character of Lara. Her character is shaped through systematic violence and emotional deprivation. In

her life, the behaviour of Lara is changed during her strict practice in isolation, and due to the behaviour of her father towards the children. Due to enmity, she decides to marry Aren, who is merely a political alliance, and it destabilises inherited narratives of national loyalty. This paper talks about a psychological warfare, where Lara is a princess of Maridrina, who is raised as a strategic weapon from her childhood to infiltrate and destroy Ithicane for revenge, and to destroy it she uses her marriage to the King of Ithicana. Later her emotions towards King Aren makes herself to go through emotional isolations, competitive brutality, and ideological indoctrination.

Lara has to make an ultimate choice between her love and the kingdom. She has to be a bridge between her husband and to her own people, or protect her husband and her new home. This paper talks about how propaganda shapes belief, as Lara tries to makes her mission heroic, but it begins to question her morality after seeing the reality of the Bridge kingdom. Lara is a loyal soldier and assassin. She is a leader to her own country and people. Trauma theory centres on concepts of delay, breakdown, and cycling patterns. It emerges repeatedly through memories and actions. The War stories, especially those rooted in Battle literature, commonly highlight how moral boundaries shift and blur. Foe and friend transform into changeable roles. Within Jensen's work, Lara represents this uncertainty: she exists as both an aggressor and a defender; a betrayer and a ruler.

Lara is one of the princesses who lives in the palace of Ithicana. She lives with her eleven half-sisters and her father Silas. Lara and the other eleven are made to train hard for fifteen years, because in the future any one of them might became the Queen of Ithicana and they want to protect King Silas. Lara wants to be queen of Ithicana. However, Silas uplifts Lara’s sister Maylin for the job. After that, Lara knows that King Silas will plan to kill all others, except the one who will be selected the Queen of Ithicana. Lara knows about the King’s plan for killing all the other sisters. So, she kills them. All of them drink soup and

choke. After their death, Lara declares herself as the next Queen of Ithicana. In this novel, the warriors are strictly trained in isolation to be strong and not be defeated by the enemies. Silas orders his soldiers to murder all the servants, musicians, and attendants within the compound. There Erik, her sister's former Master of Arms, and Lara's father Silas die by suicide. This physical framework reflects her split inner world, where unity and devastation exist together.

Lara prepares everything to get her Kingdom back. At first, she infiltrates her new home, and gets a deeper understanding of the war. There Lara begins to question herself, whether she is the hero or the villain. She is not able to control or stop her feelings for Aren. Lara feels indecisive on which Kingdom she must choose, and which kingdom she must save.

Lara's experiences of betrayal profoundly shape her ethical decisions throughout the novel (Jensen 45). Lara thinks of herself as a hero who strives to save her people, only to realize that she is an invader destroying a nation. The challenging thing is deciding whether she is a villain or a hero. In the story, there is a core tension between her mission to destroy king Aren and his kingdom, or consider her genuine developing affection for him.

In the novel, two people who train in strict isolation are Aren and Lara. Lara has been training for many years to fight and protect her place, before she marries Aren. As her feelings for Aren transforms from hostility to fierce passion, Lara finds herself at a difficult situation, unable to destroy Aren's kingdom.

Trauma Studies has usually focused on disasters like genocide, war, people being forced to leave their homes, and violence from colonial powers. Studies are now being done in which scholars analyse how power can cause trauma. This gives a new perspective in reading fantasy books. Scholars focus on

studying the weaker characters who are affected, rather than the ones in power. By looking at fantasy through the lens of trauma, this paper studies how morality and violence are portrayed in fantasies.

The paper also studies how intimacy is seen as a way to break free from a crisis. It shows the character evolution of Lara, emphasizing how a character is not something people are born with, rather something that they decide themselves to be. Princess Lara's mission is to extinguish the Bridge Kingdom of Ithicana. The story shows personal bonds, political truths, survival and morality. Lara believes Bridge Kingdom to be evil but soon develops empathy for its people. She gets stuck in a dilemma.

Ever since her childhood, Lara is not allowed to make her own decisions. The rules she lives by are not hers. They are the ones others give to her. Lara's father uses his daughters to fulfil his purposes. He sees marriages as deals. Women's bodies thus become tools that can be used. This shows how men in power can use women for their own gain. Lara is always taught that King Aren is her enemy. She is sent as a bride to him, to defeat him. But as Lara starts thinking and seeing for herself, she starts questioning war. She also develops feelings towards Aren. Now Lara has to decide which kingdom she will save and which one she will destroy. The Bridge Kingdom and her homeland, both become important to her.

When Maridrina invades using Lara's intelligence, Lara feels conflicted. She has to deal with the consequences of her actions. She wonders if she did the right thing or not, by letting Maridrina in. She tries her best to convince herself that she has not done anything wrong. Nevertheless, she feels guilty. Trauma studies say that a person tries to give themselves a story that justifies their actions, when they feel guilty. Lara does the same. Throughout the story, she constantly tries to make sense of the crisis she is around, and decide the role she has to play in it.

Works Cited

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