

Unraveled Ties: The Echoes of Loss and Resilience

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Abstract

Displacement caused by conflict, persecution and natural disasters has escalated into a worldwide crisis, impacting millions of individuals. The involuntary expulsion from one's home leads to significant psychological, social and economic challenges, depriving people of their sense of security, stability and cultural heritage. The rising number of displaced individuals globally underscores the pressing need to tackle these issues. Refugees often face obstacles such as language difficulties, legal barriers and discrimination which hinder their ability to adapt to new surroundings. Furthermore, mental health conditions like post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression and anxiety are common among displaced communities which complicates their resettlement process.

This paper explores the refugee experience through the lens of Leon Festinger's Cognitive Dissonance Theory and Eric Berne's Transactional Analysis, focusing on how displaced individuals cope with conflicting emotions, transformed identities and psychological challenges. Roma Tearne's, *The Road to Urbino*, serves as the primary source, offering a narrative context to examine these difficulties. This study seeks to illuminate the intricacies of forced migration and highlight the necessity for sustainable policies that foster inclusion, mental health and long-term support for refugees.

Keywords: Refugee crisis, displacement, forced migration, identity transformation, mental health, adaptation, cultural heritage, discrimination, resettlement, social integration.

Introduction

The experience of being forced to leave one's home due to violence, persecution or natural disasters is incredibly unsettling and emotionally exhausting. Displacement strips away a sense of security and routine which are essential for emotional stability. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 122.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced as of June 2024, reflecting a 5% increase from the previous year. Additionally, 66% of refugees have been displaced for at least five years, highlighting the protracted nature of the crisis (World Bank Group, 2024). Refugees face significant struggles in adapting to new environments. Language barriers, employment difficulties and legal restrictions hinder their ability to rebuild their lives. Children from displaced families suffer disruptions in education, with approximately 27 million out of school in conflict-affected regions (UNICEF, 2023).

This disturbance impedes individual growth and sustains enduring patterns of destitution and reliance. The prevalence of psychological distress among displaced people is similarly high. A recent systematic review of 8,176 Syrian refugees resettled in 10 countries reported a prevalence of 43% for PTSD, 40% for depression and 26% for anxiety (PLOS Medicine, 2020). Despite these hardships, displaced individuals often exhibit resilience, forming support networks to navigate their circumstances. The experience of displacement emphasizes that everyone needs safety, respect and inclusion. Providing urgent aid is not enough to address the hardships faced by refugees; long-term plans must include accessibility, education and integration. No one should be left behind by considering their situation or skills unless efforts are directed toward advancing equality, empathy and understanding. Roma Tearne's, *The Road to Urbino* serves as the primary source for this study.

Roma Tearne: A Voice of Displacement and Exile

Roma Tearne is a novelist and visual artist born in Sri Lanka whose work often explores themes of displacement, migration and refugee experiences. Her stories typically explore the subtleties of belonging, identity and the psychological impact of political upheaval. Tearne's writings are characterized by lyrical and evocative descriptions, particularly of natural environments. Critics have praised her skill in handling sizable casts of characters and lengthy time periods to paint a comprehensive picture of family history. For instance, *Modern Gypsy* noted, "She writes poignantly about the pointlessness of war, about

the brutality of torture and the psychological damage it wrecks on the tortured” (*Modern Gypsy*, “Book review: Mosquito by Roma Tearne”, 2011). This review highlights Tearne’s skill in blending vivid, lyrical prose with deeply human narratives that explore the personal and collective toll of war.

Several of Roma Tearne’s works, including *Brixton Beach* (2007), *Bone China* (2010), and *The Swimmer* (2013), explore the experiences of migrants and refugees, focusing on themes of identity, survival and the psychological implications of displacement that resonate with the struggles of refugee households. She uses her writing to communicate experiences and insights culled after fleeing Sri Lanka when young due to civil instability. By illustrating the interpersonal dynamics among refugee families and how relationships are strained and transformed under the pressures of hardship, her observations find a coordination with the idea of transactional analysis.

In an article “Sri Lanka’s writers must remember and speak out” (Roma Tearne, “Sri Lanka’s writers must remember and speak out,” *The Independent*, 2010) Roma Tearne emphasized the importance of Sri Lankan writers talking about the past for healing and reconciliation purposes. Tearne examines themes of loss, nostalgia and the desire for belonging in her works to shed light on the refugee experience. Her writings provide readers with insight into the resilience and hardships of refugees and further a more nuanced understanding of the emotional and psychological landscape that people affected by displacement navigate. Her stories also provide perceptive perspectives in analyzing the distinct challenges faced by people with disability and refugee families which further extends the discussions of cognitive dissonance and transactional analysis among displaced groups.

The Road to Urbino by Roma Tearne is a powerful and emotionally charged narrative of the problems of displacement, identity and survival through the life of Lynton Ras Rasanagium, a Tamil refugee from the horrors of Sri Lanka’s civil war. Ras’ life is affected by his mother’s violent death and his father’s disappearance which leaves him emotionally traumatized as he flees to England in quest of protection. Ras struggles with poverty, cultural isolation and the weight of his horrific history in exile. His attempts at constructing a stable existence unravel as his marriage fails, leaving him isolated from his daughter, Lola. This fractured relationship reflects the devastating emotional costs of displacement by showing how the struggles of survival in a foreign land can tear families apart.

The story of Alex Benson, an art curator, is intertwined with Ras’ trip which adds richness to the novel through his personal issues. Alex’s life has been defined by grief over

his failed relationship with Delia. This catastrophe has left him emotionally distant, finding purpose only in his work. Alex's professional love for art sharply contrasts with his inability to manage his home life, which also reflects Ras' struggle to balance his passion with familial responsibilities. The loss of Charles' son parallels Ras' own estranged relationship with Lola, stressing the universality of pain, solitude and the desire for reconciliation.

Ras finds peace and meaning in art providing him with an escape from what otherwise would have been a tumultuous life. However, his passion for the Renaissance painter Piero della Francesca's art propels him to steal the renowned picture "The Flagellation of Christ". The act of stealing is an indication of the despair he has in rescuing dignity and seeking justice on behalf of refugees. While Ras looks inward to reveal the ways refugees deal with loss and identity, Sam, brother of Ras, preaches justice in public. This story presents a raw and intimate image of exile, survival and the longing for connection in a world that frequently overlooks the invisible challenges of people displaced by violence.

Inner Conflict and Identity Fragmentation in Displacement

The psychological struggles of the refugees can be critically examined with the help of the theoretical constructs of Cognitive Dissonance and Transactional Analysis. Cognitive Dissonance theory was coined by Leon Festinger in his book *The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957). It points out the psychological conflict refugees are going through where they struggle to reconcile their past identities with the new reality of their existence, while Transactional Analysis was proposed by Eric Berne in his book *Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy* (1961). Berne focuses on how interpersonal relationships may fluctuate in families due to migration stress. Together, these theories form a strong framework for the psychological impact of displacement on individual identity and familial bonds. Using these perspectives, Roma Tearne skillfully portrays the emotional struggles of characters like Lynton "Ras" Rasanagium in *The Road to Urbino*.

Ras' journey showcases the tension between his pre-migration self and the altered identity shaped by forced migration accompanied by the strain that forced migration places on his familial relationships. Through a close examination of the interplay of these theories within the context of displacement, this analysis is able to take a deep look into the intricacies of reconstruction of identity and shifting roles in refugee families and it also provides an insightful understanding of their psychological and emotional experiences.

Cognitive dissonance is a phenomenon that occurs whenever a person feels two conflicting beliefs, attitudes or values together, causing psychic discomfort. These internal

conflicts influence the individual in such a manner that he or she tries to rationalize the inconsistencies by changing beliefs, justifying the conflict or avoiding situations which cause pain. The internal struggle experienced by Ras concerning his perspectives on interracial marriages exemplifies the phenomenon of cognitive dissonance. His assertion, “The truth is, I have never seen a mixed marriage that works.” (Tearne 8), underscores the discord between his cultural convictions and the changing dynamics of contemporary relationships.

Ras’ psychological tension gets severe as he is accused of being a criminal and becomes enveloped in pessimism. At this point, he admits, “I was too busy listening to the dead whispering to me” (Tearne 32), showing a complete breakdown in his ability to deal with the dissonance. The article “Cognitive Dissonance in Groups: The Consequences of Disagreement” by Matz & Wood delves deeper into the concept of dissonance that results from the incongruity between cultural expectations and personal beliefs. Matz and Wood argue that intragroup disagreement can intensify cognitive dissonance because members are driven to conform to common norms while struggling with their own beliefs. They state, “Individuals who experience dissonance within a group setting are often motivated to change their attitudes to reduce discomfort and maintain group cohesion” (Matz & Wood, “Cognitive Dissonance in Groups: The Consequences of Disagreement”, 2005). Ras’ struggle mirrors this dynamic as he wrestles with societal expectations and his personal observations about mixed marriages, furthering his pessimism.

Cognitive dissonance is an uncomfortable psychological state that individuals seek to resolve. Resolution involves a conscious or unconscious effort to align conflicting beliefs and actions. Alex’s inability to face his past with Elena is another instance of cognitive dissonance. His effort to protect his new relationship from painful memories reveals his need to reduce emotional discomfort. Alex’s thought, “For a moment I was tempted to tell her Delia’s story but then decided against it not wanting to resurrect past emotions” (Tearne 142), reflects how people avoid situations that bring cognitive dissonance into the open. In an article “A Brief History of Dissonance Theory,” Brehm suggests that those that struggle with dissonance may attempt to reduce it by using selective omission or justification to preserve one’s own psychological equanimity (Brehm, “A Brief History of Dissonance Theory,” 2007).

The magnitude of dissonance is the level of discomfort or psychological tension that an individual feels when confronted with opposing beliefs, attitudes or behaviors. This discomfort grows in proportion to the importance of the competing aspects and their

relevance to the individual's core values. Ras' battle within his own heart and at war with his generation are resultant of the magnitude of dissonance because deeply held beliefs are negated by deeply or painfully received personal experiences. The complexity of these conflicts in the emotional plane is also discussed in "Cognitive Dissonance: Progress on a Pivotal Theory in Social Psychology" by Harmon-Jones & Mills (1999), where it holds that what gave pain to their conflicted beliefs or actions is central to one's identity. The authors highlight that "the greater the importance of the conflicting cognition to the individual, the greater the magnitude of dissonance experienced" (Harmon-Jones & Mills, "Cognitive Dissonance: Progress on a Pivotal Theory in Social Psychology", 1999).

Ras's nostalgia for his previous life exacerbates the dissonance. Even though he now lives in a faraway country, his thoughts are still anchored in Sri Lanka. He reflects, "The only way of reliving the past is through imagination" (Tearne 36), emphasizing how his current reality contradicts the emotional consolation he takes from remembering his hometown. This paradox is also evident in his sorrow, "Is it possible to be homesick after thirty years?" (Tearne 36). His inability to reconcile his present with his history highlights the psychological tension that characterizes his existence.

The paradigms of cognitive dissonance are frameworks explaining how individuals resolve discomfort caused by conflicting beliefs, attitudes or actions. The key paradigms include Belief Disconfirmation, Induced Compliance, Free Choice and Effort Justification. Belief disconfirmation occurs when new information or experiences challenge or contradict deeply held beliefs, leading to a re-evaluation of those beliefs. This process often causes cognitive dissonance as individuals try to reconcile the new information with their existing worldview. Ras' reinterpretation of the war's effects in Sri Lanka is a case of belief disconfirmation where new evidence challenges deeply held convictions. He reflects: "Where others saw blood and injustice, I saw things that were broken." (Tearne 10). In this way, painful reality is redefined into a coping mechanism in which Ras re-processes his experiences.

Induced compliance occurs when individuals are compelled to act in ways that are inconsistent with their beliefs, often due to external pressure or insufficient external justification for the action. Ras' confession of beating his daughter, "In the end, I smacked her" (Tearne 73), explains that his actions are inconsistent with his moral standards and the dissonance that follows from this behavior causes him to reevaluate his beliefs. The stealing of the painting by Ras is another example of induced compliance. He never sees himself as a

thief as evidenced by the words he pronounces, “I am not a terrorist, I am not a murderer, I do not wish to destroy others. But something needed to be done.” (Tearne 221) and thus can only explain that this act of theft was one in protest over the injustice done during the Sri Lankan civil war. Initially, the theft conflicts with his moral values but due to lack of external justification, Ras internally rationalizes the action as necessary to highlight his homeland’s suffering. This shift aligns his actions with his values, reducing the dissonance between his behavior and self-concept.

Ras justifies his thievery with the statement, “Sri Lanka is also getting a lot of attention as a result of what you’ve done” (Tearne 355). Even though stealing the painting goes against his moral principles, Ras wants to raise awareness of Sri Lanka’s plight. The dissonance his acts produced is outweighed by the desire to draw attention to the suffering of his homeland, demonstrating how people may excuse immoral actions due to outside pressures and a lack of external justification. The study by Festinger and Carlsmith also provides insight to illustrate the concept of induced compliance whereby people change their attitudes to fit their behavior, especially when there is a lack of external justification. They convince themselves of something they didn’t believe in – the task was fun – after being paid an insignificant amount of money to lie about a mundane task (Festinger, L., & Carlsmith, J. M, “Cognitive consequences of forced compliance”, *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 58(2), 203–210, 1959).

Free choice dissonance happens when people choose between two options that have both positive and adverse qualities. The decision frequently results in dissonance due to the awareness of the negative aspects of the chosen option and the feeling of losing out on the unchosen alternative. Alex is emotionally attached to his old jacket which reflects his past life with Delia. The inner struggle for keeping the old memories and forgetting the past comes to the forefront when Elena questions him: “Why do you keep wearing that same jacket?” (Tearne 157).

Effort justification is a psychological phenomenon in which people place a higher value on accomplishments that require great effort regardless of the actual value of the output. The work expended in pursuing a certain goal serves to justify the apparent value of the accomplishment and thus reduces cognitive dissonance. The reflection of Ras regarding the ever-presence of conflict, “Sri Lanka isn’t the only place where there is conflict, I tell you. Conflict and life are working partners” (Tearne 230) explicates the psychological defense mechanism of effort justification. Through framing conflict as an indispensable and

unavoidable component of life, Ras explains why he is continually struggling emotionally. This parallels Sáez's discussion on effort justification where "we tend to value much more those things in which we have put great effort, regardless of the fact that the outcome may be more or less valuable" (Francisco Sáez, "Effort Justification, a Common Form of Self-Deception"). Sáez highlights how people justify their difficulties or investments to avoid the emotional pain of wasted effort, a pattern that aligns with Ras' view of the world.

Navigating Financial Hardships and Refugee Resettlement

Ting Zhang reported that "a 2017 study indicated that EU financial institutions lacked both capacity and willingness to serve refugees, even after 3 million asylum seekers arrived in Member States in the three-year period from 2015 through 2017" (Zhang, Ting, "Often Shut Out of the Financial System, Refugees and Other Migrants Face Economic Integration Challenges", Migration Policy Institute, October 4, 2023). This highlights the systemic challenges that refugees face in trying to integrate financially into their new communities. Refugees like Lola are often denied the tools necessary to rebuild their lives, financial access and security. Ras and his daughter Lola's experience of financial hardship in their new country is captured in the quote, "It's all I can afford!" (Tearne 300), highlighting the ongoing challenges refugees face in rebuilding their lives. This exclusion further exacerbates the cognitive dissonance they experience as they are expected to participate in and contribute to society, yet the system does not provide them with the same opportunities as others.

Protracted war can cause psychological stress because refugees have to change their beliefs and behaviors to adapt to their new reality just like Lola and her family do with their scarce resources. The tension between their hopes for stability and the harsh financial landscape they navigate serves as a constant source of stress shaping their journey toward resilience.

Emotional Withdrawal and the Coping Mechanism of Silence

Emotional withdrawal refers to the process of disengaging from emotional experiences or expressions as a way of coping with overwhelming or painful situations. Silence as a coping mechanism involves suppressing verbal or emotional responses to avoid confronting distressing feelings, often as a way of protecting oneself from emotional overload or trauma. In *The Road to Urbino*, Charles refers to Delia's silence after the death of their son as an act of withdrawal from emotions: "Charles persuaded her to see their family doctor, who told him that trauma affected people in different ways" (Tearne 259). Delia's silence is one way she copes with the overwhelming shock of losing a child.

Delia's silence emerges as profound emotional withdrawal from trauma reflecting an inner conflict between the need to emotionally express the pain and the human instinct to suppress it. This aligns with cognitive dissonance theory where silence acts as a protective sheath but also becomes burdensome, exemplifying the psychological interiority of managing such overwhelming sorrow and displacement. This emotional withdrawal is further highlighted by Delia's reflection on the death of her grandmother Anna: "All my most precious things are gone" (Tearne 149). This quote illustrates how, instead of facing the full weight of her grief, she clings to Anna's crockery set as a symbol of memory and emotional connection, acting as a protective barrier that allows her to deal with her loss in silence while also illustrating how silence can both burden and shield her in times of emotional pain.

Emotional Conflicts and Role Shifts in Displacement

An additional concept to investigate is transactional analysis. Transactional analysis is a psychological theory that looks at how people connect and communicate by examining the ego states of parents, adults and children to better understand behaviour and build stronger bonds with others. In transactional analysis, ego states refer to the three separate mental states that control human behavior: parent, adult and child. Transactions are the interactions between individuals that occur when in one of these ego states. Adult-to-Adult interactions foster healthy communication and relationships. However, miscommunications can occur when one party acts from a Child or Parent ego state. Ras' connection with Helen epitomizes crossed transactions whereby his emotional reactions inhibit effective communication. When Ras yells at Helen, "For Christ' sake, what the hell do you want from me?" (Tearne 50), the interaction manifests how emotional upsurge leads to the breakdown of communication which results in misunderstanding and alienation.

Heather Murray in "Transactional Analysis Theory & Therapy: Eric Berne", explains that "Transactional analysis believes that adult-to-adult communication or transactions lead to the most effective and healthy communication, thus, relationships with others" (Murray, "Transactional Analysis Theory & Therapy: Eric Berne", 2017). This concept reflects Ras' failure to communicate with Helen as an adult-to-adult because his emotional response drags him into a Child ego state which defeats the purpose of their interaction.

Life scripts are unconscious life plans or patterns created in early childhood due to familial and cultural factors. These scripts dictate the behaviors, decisions and responses to situations throughout life, often governing the conduct without any true consciousness of the motivations that usually govern the action. Ras' life script is influenced by his childhood

experiences of discrimination which is reflected in his childhood memory: “Dentists were for the children God wanted to keep smiling” (Tearne 17). This belief shapes his worldview by reinforcing the notion that some people are more deserving of comfort and care than others.

As per “Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy” by Berne, “Life scripts are formulated through early experiences and govern individual responses to life situations and choice making” (Berne, “Transactional Analysis in Psychotherapy”, 1961). According to this notion, Ras develops a perception about himself based on the initial feeling of being ungrateful, therefore negatively impacting his well-being. This also determines his approach towards other relationships and choice-making processes throughout life.

Positive thinking is the skill of focusing more on the positives of a given situation rather than its disadvantages. It involves handling life with optimism, resilience and positive attitudes which can enhance emotional well-being and interpersonal relationships. According to Transactional Analysis, positive thinking enables people to change from negative or harmful cognitive patterns to more adaptive and helpful ones. Alex judges Lola as disconnected with the struggles of the family. He lacks positive thinking and empathy in his relationship with Lola. His statement: “She was fake, acting as though she were a spoiled rich kid.” (Tearne 270), portrays the generational divide and emotional disconnection between him and Lola as developed by their experiences of hardships.

This concept is further elaborated in “The Psychology of Gratitude” by Robert Emmons in which he writes about how gratitude and positive thinking can improve emotional well-being dramatically. According to Emmons, by focusing on what is good in life, individuals can enhance their resilience which will lead to better coping strategies and more meaningful relationships (Emmons, “The Psychology of Gratitude: Robert Emmons on How Saying Thanks Makes You Happier”, 2007). This means that the act of positive thinking is a tool not only for personal growth but also for empathizing and relating to others.

Interpersonal effectiveness in transactional analysis is the ability to speak clearly, assertively and empathically while preserving balance and understanding in relationships. It is accomplished by operating from the Adult-ego state which promotes rational problem resolution, appropriate boundaries and compassionate connection. Delia holding on to her love for painting even after immense loss is an example of positive emotional adaptation. Her statement: “Desire was what we had left” (Tearne 293) reflects the ability to give meaning and purpose to the experiences of trauma.

In “Transactional Analysis: A Framework for Marketing Relationships Expanding the

Entrepreneurial Orientation” Kleindl explores the application of transactional analysis in marketing with regard to developing entrepreneurial orientation in terms of comprehending customer relationships and interactions (Kleindl, “Transactional Analysis: A Framework for Marketing Relationships Expanding the Entrepreneurial Orientation”, 2010). This insight will be particularly relevant in understanding how entrepreneurs can engage in positive relations, much as Delia in the creative pursuit of resilience through her art work.

Conclusion

Roma Tearne’s *The Road to Urbino* delves deeply into the psychological complexities of displacement, identity and survival through the character of Lynton “Ras” Rasanagium. His internal battles, influenced by forced migration underscore the emotional and cultural turmoil that refugees face. Ras’ struggle to reconcile his past with his present, coupled with his fractured family relationships exemplifies the challenge of preserving personal identity while adapting to new realities. His relationships with Helen, Lola and Alex further demonstrate how the stress of migration alters interpersonal connections.

Displacement transcends mere physical relocation; it signifies a profound disruption of an individual’s sense of self, belonging and dignity. The challenges faced by refugees extend beyond basic material needs, encompassing emotional scars that often remain unacknowledged. Genuine support for displaced individuals must extend beyond short-term assistance, addressing the enduring emotional and psychological consequences of forced migration. Integration should not require the abandonment of one’s identity but should foster environments where cultural heritage and personal narratives are recognized and valued. Rebuilding a life involves more than mere survival; it is about restoring dignity, promoting inclusion and ensuring that no one is marginalized within society.

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