



# Scrutinizing the Discursive Nature of ‘Memory’ in Amy Tan’s *The Kitchen God’s Wife* & Ian McEwan’s *The Child in Time*

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## Abstract

Memory transcends the conventional socio-cultural paradigms, reproducing past, dynamically. Omnipresence of memory exposes it to miscellaneous interpretive strategies. Recalling is prone to egocentric fictionalization that defies the time/ space confinements. Accordingly, memory modifies into an influential narrative instrument to picture the unrepresentable. As a discursive discourse, it appropriates contextually; it may preserve the dissident marginalized social voices such as migrant communities or it is utilized to protect individuals from psychological breakdowns, in traumatic events. Confessional nature of memory reveals the bitter familial, diasporic secrets, leading to constitution of a collective identity, among migrants. This study seeks to explore the contingent operations of memory in diverse contextual structures; in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, by Amy Tan, memory operates as a continual strife to formulate a sense of belonging; whereas, *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan is the manifestation of memory’s performance, in an outstanding individual level.

**Keywords:** Amnesia, Discursive Discourse, Memory, Amy Tan, Ian McEwan

## 1. Introduction

Memory’s potential power in deviation of time has invited many novelists to implicate recalling as a favorable narrative strategy, to represent past. Interdisciplinary quality of memory ensures its acceptance as a cultural issue, since it is highly connected to the process of articulation of identity, in individual and collective levels. Memory is an ephemeral, contingent field of struggle in order to be heard; it has a capacity to modify over time and it is open to multiple interpretive acts. This indicates that it is always presented in the form of irregular set of images that are highly linked to the context of remembrance; thus, unlike the claims of history in parading a continuous and meaningful picture of past, there is no chance in representing a holistic and coherent past, based on memories, since there is not a direct correspondence between the event and different recalling strategies that represent it. There have been sharp discrepancies among different patterns of memory’s performance, proposed by critics, but all of them agree upon the fact that memory is an open system that renovates over time. This research seeks to provide an appropriate description of the discursive quality of memory that enables it to operate in disparate dimensions, in *The Kitchen God’s Wife*, by Amy Tan (1991) and *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan (1987). In order to obtain a more explicit investigation of the discursive quality of memory, the operation of recalling is analyzed separately in these novels. However, the conclusion contains the comparative analysis of the novels.

## 2. Theorizing the Discursive Nature of Memory

To initiate the discussion, the active ongoing process of recalling must be contemplated. One major obstacle in memory studies is structuring an objective set of investigations, in psychological and cognitive levels of memory, because it is an unconscious process, as well as a conscious one. This means that a researcher must be acquainted with memory’s process, as objectively as possible, in order to observe, analyze and apply its impact, in different fields of studies.

Theoretically, constructing a consistent frame of methodology, in memory studies, is very intricate, as memory studies interact with other discourses such as medicine, history, sociology and politics. Additionally, there is no reliable proof in memory claims and the ultimate authenticity of recalled memories is always under critical question; moreover, there would be the possibility of misrepresentation of memories, by powerful individuals or institutionalized groups. One of the possible approaches to get access to memory is through observing its performances in personal/ public spheres. However, there is always the possibility of memory’s malfunction that would lead to presentation of a distorted version of past.

Foucault (1969) discusses the discursiveness of all discourses and suggests that they are “unique, yet subject to repetition, transformation and reactivation” (p. 94). It is suggested that a discursive discourse, “modifies its own form, displaces its own data, and reveals at the end of the day, a quite a different task”. According to Foucault, “the space in which discursive event is deployed is not to undertake to re-establish it on an isolation, that nothing could overcome; it is not to close it upon itself; it is to leave oneself free to describe the interplay of relations within it and outside it”(p.

96). Similarly, memory is reactivated in a particular manner that results in production of a novel version of event; its development is determined by present demands of individual or its society. The controversial status of memory and its omnipresence expose it to diverse sets of interpretive acts. Nonetheless, there are conscious or unconscious processes at work to structure the appropriate frameworks, in recalling. These activities are shaped by socio- cultural, political or ideological paradigms of a community.

According to Daniel L. Schacter (2001), memory has the competence to transcend time; it articulates in a credible manner to fulfill egocentric provisions of recalling agent, “sometimes, in the process of reconstructing we add on feelings, beliefs, or even knowledge we obtained after the experience” (p. 9). This, clearly, advocates the active operation of memory’s performance, accompanied by fictionalization. There is no way to indicate the validity of memories, especially, very personal reminiscences. Memory narratives have one thing in common, “structures which include and exclude, voice and silence, conditioning what can be seen and said and by whom... collective narratives leave more room for individual agency even as they provide the framework through which individual stories gain wider meaning” (Eyerman, 2004, p. 163). The capability of memory to appropriate itself is the essential feature that preserves dissident versions of narratives, within the supreme discourse. The highly discriminatory nature of memory narratives and the involved interpretations would facilitate dominant groups to contain dissident stories within their system, in the name of falsified narratives. This tolerance is the only opportunity that alleviates the marginalized groups to preserve their memories. Though, the exclusion of unwanted memories is accelerated, in the name of ‘the legitimate will’ to generate order, in society. This operation is always more problematic, in migration context. The diasporic agents experience a double sense of subjugation, by their fellow migrant communities and the host culture. Usually, the non-confirmative migratory narratives are suppressed by the fear of rejection by other migratory communities, lack of communication due to deficiency in language and a conscious ignorance by dominant culture. Accordingly, memory is a transient phenomenon that can defy the confinements of time/ space; this feature belongs to a ‘discursive discourse’. Memory narratives prove to be social products that might be discriminated by different cultural parameters. These traits are reflected in literature and could be traced by specific analytical procedures.

### *2.1 Articulation of Memory*

The discriminating nature of memory means that, prejudicially, we select, add or exclude parts of our memory. The everlasting process of identity construction explains why the moment of remembrance is always different from the moment of experiencing. Naturalizing the contextual process of recalling would mislead the mind of individuals, in certain ways. Sometimes, the individual’s memory fabricates new versions of an event which seem reasonable; it forces the person to remember a special event; this, usually, materializes after harsh moments such as war and childhood abuse; the process is a way of denial to protect the mental integrity of the individual. Accounts are recalled in fluctuating images and individuals are free to encode, as they wish. This lightens the burden of past and the victim tricks himself in making the meaning out of a reconstructed version of past. Different mental deceptions include the urgency to forget the unwanted memories, too. Here, the mind prescribes the method of forgetting, instead of the painstaking process of recalling. Again, this is a defense mechanism to prevent psychological breakdown.

Daniel L. Schacter (2001) compares the distinct actions of memory to seven deadly biblical sins, which may cause some damages to our mind and body, but they are central to our existence (p. 4). Interestingly, recalling process is not a straightforward one and benefits modification. Sometimes, past images appear to be hazy and no logical order exists among them; here, mind starts to inflict a particular type of order on recalled memories, by arranging them in the form of a logical narrative. These narratives are partially true, but they are, mainly, the product of reconstruction of past, by our rationalizing mind. Constitution of memories, in this sense, may seem natural; there is no doubt, about their articulateness, since “man is hardly a neutral observer of the world” (p. 151). This explains, clearly, why people are trying to make sense of past with an egocentric feeling. Past is in a strong correlation with present and its demands. In the struggle to remember, there is always a yearning to make sense of it; it is the duty of memory to create the imaginary material for the act of remembering; thus, modifications in the content of memories are originated from the egoistic desires of individuals.

### *2.2 Trauma*

Memory struggles to deceive the mind, after great crisis. The fluctuating images of incidents are recalled over and over again by individuals, to make sense of; and these remembrances, are open to interpretation, selection and exclusion. The distorted images of traumatic events haunt the life of individual; although, they are preferred to be vanished from the mind. This part of study investigates the complicated function of mind, in dealing with traumatic events.

It is suggested that “the impact of trauma makes the process of remembering and forgetting more complex than other situations and survivors are therefore particularly likely to express themselves in stories containing elements which are imaginary, disjointed and loaded with symbolism” (Rogers, Leydesdorff, Dawson, 2004, p. 1). It implies that each time a person is haunted by a memory, a constructed version is produced. Schacter points out to the keen durability and the power of haunting memories, after traumatic experiences, “paradoxically, however, attempting to avoid remembering a trauma may only increase the long-term likelihood of persistently remembering it” (p. 10). The result would be the everlasting pain of trying to forget, progressively. Researchers believe that memory is represented as sporadic images in our mind, especially after the traumatic events; however, in creating a conceivable narrative, there is not a guarantee to obtain an authentic image, “even visual memory does not stay ‘pure’, that it can be painted and polished into a satisfying image which can then produce a story, turning visual memory into narrative” (King, 2000. p. 26). The ability of brain to reshape the incidents in a desirable fashion is derived from a natural instinct, to survive; this survival is equal to making

delicate changes in the content and reality of memories and displaying a mild picture of bitter events.

Trauma is different, in the case of migrants. The main chore of memory for migrants is fabrication of a sense of 'self', in accordance with their national identity; the main way of communicating this identity is through talk- stories. The narratives that individuals create might not be wholly their own experiences, but the construction of identity is in close connection with the autobiographical memory and confers a "sense of personal continuity and consistency over historical time that forms the backgrounds for individual's interaction with others and serves as a reference point for self-reflective activities" (Waite, 1993, p. 14). It implies that recalling traumatic events is in the form of the recollection of memories, to satisfy a communal plea. In diasporic context, there is a sense of freedom that is derived from the geographical displacement; this would facilitate the process of forgetting, as well as the process of recalling. Therefore, an imaginary version of past is represented by migrant communities.

Sean Field (2004) suggests that recalling is infused with imagination, something that breaks the borders of place and time, creating a sense of continuity with past for migrants, "the use of nostalgia, exaggeration and metaphors in remembering the past constitute emotionally sustaining myths that support a sense of self and identity in the present"(p.61). This acts as a protective strategy, in encountering the harsh realities of present and future. In the exertion to endure the consequences of trauma, remembering and oblivion are at simultaneous work; it signifies that in order to construct a new sociably acceptable identity, the migrants have to forget their past; it is a natural response to survive in a new environment; since past never vanishes completely, the images of homeland haunts the migrants, forever. The torturous quality of past is represented, in migratory memory narratives, in the form of ambivalent process of formulation of identity; this identity is hybrid in nature. The established identity must satisfy the demands of migrants, in the unsympathetic context of migration; concurrently, it must generate a sense of belonging, among migrant communities. Basically, the mind is capable of distorting the past, resulting in representation of flawed memory. Undermining the authenticity of the portrayed images engenders articulated memory, in which fact and fantasy are fused together, to create a holistic image. However, in the case of migrants, formation of a sense of 'self' is aligned with their national identity.

Nevertheless, there must be a 'will' behind sharing memories. In most cases, especially in the cases of sexual and racial abuses and domestic violence, victims are unwilling to talk about their suffering; this might be because of the fear of later troubles by oppressors or social stigmatization. For migrant communities, this is doubled by cultural impediments; there could be also language barriers that add to the complexity of communicating.

### *2.3 Memory as a Narrative Strategy*

In contemporary fictions, the role of memory as one of the significant instruments of presenting the diverse network of feelings and desires is appreciated by novelists. This section of research is an attempt to investigate the significant role of memory in portrayal of past.

Unlike historical data that must be obtained by reliable statistics, fictional narratives enjoy autonomy, without the official accusation of being unauthentic. Birgit Neumann (2008) states that, "allusions to legends, fairy tales, myth and other stories of dubious historical authenticity suggests the fact and fiction intermingle in cultural memory" (p. 339). This liberates memory from chronological orders of representation and generates an oscillating temporal zone that reinforces a constructed nature to memory narratives. She believes that, "fiction of memory may symbolically empower the culturally marginalized or forgotten and thus figure as an imaginative counter- discourse" (p. 341). In this way, memory becomes an instrument to portray the unspeakable.

No matter how memories are recalled, the most important task is to craft an integrating 'self'; however, "experiences such as war, migration, abuse, assault or serious accident may make the relationship between the self 'before' and the self 'after' much more problematic" (King, 2000, p. 3); therefore, such texts represent a fragmentary, disintegrated picture of the individual. The confusion in demonstration of the trauma includes, "the subjects' complex process of negotiation- of resistance, identification or over-identification, hostility or idealization" (p. 7). The parallel evaluation of the past 'self' and the present 'self,' in reaching a plausible equilibrium may endanger the concept of truth; individual may try to deceive himself consciously or unconsciously, because recalling the painful experiences equals going through those experiences all over again, in the mind. This duality assigns a twofold quality to the memory narratives. Thus, the dynamicity of narration is a blessing to ensure the wholeness of individuals. It is a strategy to protect individuals from mental breakdown.

### *2.4 Amnesia and the Necessity to Recall*

In memory narratives, amnesia becomes the favorite technique of the writers to delay the pain of remembering. However, this is impossible; as the individual tries harder, the memories become more durable. There is a sense of urgency and necessity to recall, in such texts.

According to Esposito (2008), the dilemma of forgetting is "always connected to a form of reflexivity. The one who intends to forget cannot avoid confronting himself and his own procedures of memory construction, while in the case of remembering, one can persist in the illusion of only recording external data..."(pp. 181-2). It denotes that in the process of remembering, an individual may create an illusionary integration with the present context, but in the process of forgetting, the individual must traumatically join the purging of his remembering. In order to forget a traumatic event, the individual must first remember, and then try to cleanse it from his mind.

While employing various strategies to forget, a conscious process is at work, bonded with the social policies. According

to Zur (2004) in the process of amnesia “silence and forgetting are present absences or negative spaces which shape what is remembered. This has a communal aspect, in that there is a tacit agreement about what is to be remembered or forgotten and the ‘forgotten’ is, therefore, as much shared as what is remembered” (p. 50). This highlights the social aspect of recalling, controlled by socio-cultural demands. The confusion of measuring the reliability of recalled memories doubles when accompanied with the process of forgetting.

Rose (2004) believes that, “silence stifles the soul, affects the quality of relationship with others, and accepts an unjust and abusive system of power that renders the victim powerless” (p. 165). Therefore, sharing the painful memories becomes a strategy to protect the narrator from mental disintegration. Accordingly, recalling and oblivion are at the end of the same spectrum and highly connected to each other, in maintaining a mental balance. It is suggested that the ultimate forgetting of trauma is impossible, as the haunting images return. This makes recalling a healing method, not only for psychiatrists, but for writers and their fictional characters too.

The employments of confessional texts are conventional narrative strategies, in migration literature. These stories usually start with death of one of the members of family, urging the others to record an ancestral history. The tradition of confessing is considered a Christian ritual that ensures the salvation of soul. Freeman (1993) elaborates on the confessional nature of memory by suggesting that in all of historical narratives, memory’s role is a fundamental one and fictionalization is the inevitable result, to create a coherent sense of self, “What we also see in Augustine's account, along with any and all other autobiographical reflections, is the primacy of *memory*” (p. 30). The dispersed images are recollected, in the form of memory; thus, they articulate a coherent sense of self in subjects. Discursive quality of memory challenges the authentic presentation of past, generating a modified version, to gratify the personal/ social demands of individual.

Most migrant narratives start in the form of an autobiographical story. In migration literature where the concern of the writer is to find a shared communicative past, collective memory becomes significant. According to Derrida, “what is interesting is that the inheritance is never gathered together; it is never one with itself and usually is inhabited in a contradictory fashion around a secret” (as cited in Morrison, 1993, p. 25). This is true about the works of migrants where there is an urge to find a shared identity regarding the homeland, and ‘Home’ is always related to secrets; since past is an enigma waiting to be revealed. Through memory, agents of recalling gain a new perception of themselves and the world around them.

Based on discussed theories, this study attempts to build its own frame of theory, on differentiating the implication of memory in *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan and *The Child in Time* by Ian Mc Ewan. The discursiveness of memory expands its implication as a narrative strategy and it appears that not only the process of recalling, but the cultural background of recalling agents plays a crucial role in the configuration of remembering. As migration is highly affected by the concept of homeland and construction of identity, the texts of migrant writers are marked by an urge to articulate a shared sense of identity among the characters of the texts. The next section of this research is devoted to analysis of the diverse application of memory in *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan and *The Child in Time* by Ian Mc Ewan.

### 3. Amy Tan and the Discursive Presentation of Memory

Memories of trauma act as a defense mechanism to ensure the consistency of ‘self’. At the same time, recalling or amnesia are the two extremes of a same process; both, have the capacity to heal the individual. In this section, the multiple implications of memory and amnesia, in the novel of Tan, are inspected. Amy Tan, as the descendant of the first generation of immigrant parents, looks for her identity as a Chinese, through her mother’s memories, which are mainly about homeland. Her stories are a rich blend of Chinese mythology and historical strands, fabricated in a fictional network. Almost all of her narratives are based on memories of mothers who try to communicate the familial secrets to their American born daughters.

The capacity to construct stories in a linear, temporal order creates a sense of coherence in individuals, which is then contributed to all aspects of life. In patients with severe cases of memory loss, the sense of fragmentary ‘self’ is the major reason for social withdrawal; it gradually kills the feeling of belonging to a community. In the case of migrant communities who are highly dependent on close familial and tribal intimacies, this memory loss would result in identity loss of a nation; therefore, depriving new generation from the narratives of homeland is considered a moral, fatal crime. This generates a feeling of obligation, in parents, to share their stories with their children before they forget it partially or completely. However, most of the new members of migrant generations are frustrated by ancestral narratives, because it forces them to contemplate, seriously, about their origin; moreover, there are always new versions of stories that challenge the previous ones. Unfortunately, Children’s alienation with their ancestral culture intensifies the sense of loneliness, in migrant societies. Additionally, the failure to communicate with the host culture restrains the process of storytelling to domestic domains.

Tan’s *The Kitchen God's Wife* represents the contingent implication of memory. Winnie, the major character, remembers the incident of her mothers’ disappearance, in many different ways, “over the years, I tried to remember her face, the words she said, the things we did together. I remember her ten thousands different ways” (p. 89). The discursiveness of memory is at work in this novel whist Helen and Winnie remember the same incident, differently. The capacity of memory to re-articulate is to ensure the wholeness of ‘self’, in encountering the bleak realities of life, “my happiest times, my worst times –they are things only I remember, nobody else remembers them. A very lonely feeling” (p. 219). This process is different for Helen who has accompanied her, in her experiences, “but Helen still didn’t

remember. She remembers only a little bit about living in Nanking, about duck kidneys she ate there once and has never had since... For Helen, except for those duck kidneys, it was nothing worthwhile to keep in her mind” (pp. 218-9). Helen strives to forget and thus, amnesia becomes her healing cure; whereas, this solution is recalling exact details of past, for Winnie. Analyzing these characters vividly explains the discursive nature of memory. Both implicate memory to create a sense of wholeness, yet by different methods.

Contextuality of memory, in adjusting with the current conditions of individual is detectable in this novel. Winnie who remembers the happy moments of her past is feeling sad and concludes that it is the dynamicity of memory, “I don’t know why something that made me so happy then feels so sad now. Maybe that is the way it is with the best memories” (p. 349). Just by intuition, Winnie is aware that memory modifies over time and feels depressed about it; this is more painful about the beloved ones, because there is a strong tendency to keep a pleasant picture of them, unchanged, in the memory, “that is the saddest part when you lose someone you love- that person keeps changing” (p. 89). Discursively, memory escapes getting rigidified in the mind; it frequently alters to guarantee the mental well being of recalling agent. Additionally, if it fails, there is another blessing process, amnesia. The power to remember, discursively, is a mental healing activity to ensure the integrity of ‘self’. Apparently, in the context of migration and in this novel, it is in the service of articulation of a collective identity among characters, ending with a trip to homeland. This identity is not a homogeneous national identity, full of irregularity and contingency. It is more like a humane feeling of sympathy that engages the readers of the novel, too.

### 3.1 *Confessional Memory and Constitution of a New Identity*

Unlike the usual memory narratives which utilize memory as a healing remedy or as an elevation of individuals’ consciousness, the immigrant writers, such as Tan deal with the concept of memory in a challenging field. Memory is used not only to heal, but also to articulate a new identity. The confessional nature of memory, in Tan’s work, signifies that secrets of characters are concealed, despite haunting the individuals for many years. In an autobiographical story, these secrets are shared to cleanse the sin of hiding and lying. In the case of migrants, these secrets are always connected to homeland and they are revealed by recalling. Eventually, the characters gain a new insight; a new law is established in their life and the old one is banished. Death, as an external factor, not only shapes the external relations of the characters with their surroundings, but also refashions the way individuals think about themselves.

In her memoir, Amy Tan (2003) suggests that, “Thanks to my mother, I was raised to have a morbid imagination. She often talked about death as a warning, as an unavoidable matter of fact” (p. 17). To preserve the memories of an individual might not be of a great significance in a non- migrant context, but for migrants, each death reminds them that there is a danger of memory loss which is equated to the loss of some part of the identity that was brought to this new world. In the novel, Winnie who is threatened by her long life friend to reveal the secrets is forced to go through a confessional act of recalling; finally her most terrible secret is divulged. She tells her daughter, Pearl, who feels strange with her Chinese values about her real identity. She knows that she will bring disaster to her daughter’s life by disclosing the secrets of past. She is compelled to confess that his father is not Jimmie, but an abusive Chinese man, Wen Fu, who was once her husband; she was raped by him, violently, with a gun on her head. It is only after the death of Wen Fu, that Winnie gets the courage to confess the reality of Pearl’s life. The confessional nature of uncovering secrets in this story, like all the other novels of Tan, is related to home and the desire to unite truly with it, in order to gain a true Chinese identity. The story ends up with a return to China in order to cure Pearl, not only physically, but also mentally. This novel could also be considered a confessional novel, since the plot of the story is interwoven with past secrets that must be revealed. The significant point of confession in Chinese stories is that it establishes a new order in life of characters, creating a new identity for them. Although, Pearl learns about the bitter secret of her mother, she is willing to go to China to reunite with her past. This journey will redeem her with a new gifted Chinese identity.

The novel benefits from the autobiographical elements, in order to verify the incidents of the story. Again the hardship of the life in China, departure to America, leaving two children behind and a reunion with estranged daughter is the central theme of the novel. The most autobiographical element, however, could be the character and story of Winnie Louie, which is similar to Tan's own mother, Daisy Tan who goes through a tragic life before moving to America and leaves behind her children. Tan, artistically, challenges the veracity of history and past incidents by juxtaposing memories of Winnie and Helen in the story. These characters, who have kept each other’s secret in past, seem to have different versions of memories. Winnie is the one who recalls the exact painful memories wonders how Helen could forget them so easily. The authenticity of past is undermined in the story by existence of other versions of memories which all have the claims of knowledge of the past and veracity, “I did not argue... How she always remembers things wrong, always better than what really happened” (p. 78). Winnie is conscious that there is the possibility of changing the past, despite the claims of a rigidified one, as she recalls the time that they changed their past to migrate to America, “Helen always tells me, ‘... you cannot change the past’. She does not remember, she and I have changed the past many times, for many reasons. And sometimes she changes it for me and does not even know what she has done” (p. 62). Sometimes the stories by Helen are so plausible, Winnie herself believes them, “and Helen has told stories about me, so many times, I sometimes believe they are true. That Jimmy was my first and only husband. That she introduced him to me in Shanghai. She was a witness at my wedding, a big, big Chinese wedding” (p. 72). Existence of multiple layers of truth, by different characters shapes the framework of the novel’s discussion on the notion of discursive quality of memory. Characters of Tan’s story are aware of the fact that recalling is subject to amendment, open to interpretation and mixed with fantasy.

Winnie who was hopeful to forget the past is caught in its tangle, “When I came to this country, I told myself: I can

think a new way. Now I can forget all my tragedies, put all my secrets behind a door that will never be opened, never seen by American eyes. I was thinking my past was close forever and all I had to remember was to call Formosa 'China', to shrink all the China into one little island I had never seen before" (p. 71). In her desperate efforts to forget, she understands that memory returns back to reclaim its existence like a ghost, yet in so many different ways, "Now I no longer know which story is the truth, what was the real reason she left, they are all the same, all true, and all false. So much pain in every one.... The past is gone, nothing to be done, just forget it. That is what I tried to believe" (p. 109). For Helen, things are quite different. In order to preserve her integrated 'self', she chooses to change her memory in a way to suit her situation. This is a defense mechanism to prevent the mental breakdown of the survivors,

Isn't that strange? We were at the same place, at the same time. For me, this was one of the worst moments of my life. I remember everything. For Helen, except for those duck kidneys, it was nothing worth to keep in her mind. Why do you think it is? My happiest times, my worst times-they are things only I remember, nobody else remembers them. A very lonely feeling. (p. 219)

Amy Tan challenges the fortified structure of documented histories and replaces it with a more subjective, yet authentic versions of personal memories. Relativity of truth and subjective interpretation plays a pivotal role in the novel, "how could I tell you this, that I met her during the war in China? When you were little, you didn't even know there was a war in China! You thought World War Two started at a place in Hawaii with your same name, Pearl Harbor. I tried to tell you, but you were always correcting me. You said, 'Oh, Mommy, that's Chinese history. This is American history'. It's true, it's true" (p. 172). The vast distance felt between characters of the story and personal perception of incidents is the main cause of misunderstanding among different generation of Chinese.

However, claims of authenticity of personal memories are approved in the last chapter of the story where Helen confesses that all along she knew that she was changing some details of their life, "I have said many wrong things, I thought I was luckier yet. I always told you Wen Fu was not a bad man, not as bad as you said. But all along I knew, He was bad, He was awful" (p. 411). This novel ends with a return to China that could be regarded as a reunion with the origin; the outcome of this journey is healing their estranged relationship and attaining a shared sense of identity.

### 3.2 *Memory as a Means of Subversion for Migrant Women*

Tan's women utilize storytelling as a means of subverting the official masculine truth and substitute it with a more feminine one, by fictionalization; thus, creating a sense of integrated 'self'. The subjective production of truth by marginalized women is a tool to escape the patriarchal power around them; at the end of the novel, it is transformed to American -born daughters as a valuable Chinese heritage. Wenying Xu (1995) examines the strategies of marginalized women in Tan's text, "their production of truths is an act of transgression against established norms and ideals, facilitating the loosening of the foundations of female subject constitution" (p. 86). Moreover, Caesar (1994) suggests that the implication of disjoint English language, used by migrant characters is another strategy to subvert the dominant,

Through much of the novel, after all, it is an elderly Chinese immigrant whose syntax and word choice reflect the patterns of Chinese-accented English, a speech pattern marginalized and mocked by contemporary mainstream American society. Tan helps to give this voice a validity and dignity in the same way that Walker and Morrison have helped to legitimize African American speech. (p. 44)

The best way to escape the tyranny of the patriarchal society is to break the imposed silence by new language. Their weakness in speaking English is altered to a dignity by Tan, something that is often ridiculed in society and media. Tan's characters portray a glorified vision of Chinese values; their inability to speak English adds another dimension to their authenticity.

*The Kitchen God's Wife* is about the desperate efforts of a woman to be heard among abusive voices around her. Winnie, who has lost her children in China, merges into silence; it is only after the death of Wen Fu that she gets the courage to tell the truth of her life. Although the story is loaded with many examples of oppression, the main is concentrated in the story of Kitchen god which resembles the story of Winnie's life. In Chinese version of the story, it is the Kitchen God who becomes the deity, even though he was a miserable husband. He determined the luck and prosperity of each person. But at the end of the story, Winnie who was always in fear of setting a bad luck by Kitchen God is emancipated; she tries amending this fear by creating her own goddesses of luck and changes the name of the statue, "So I bought that mistake. I fixed it. I used my gold paints and wrote her name on the bottom" (p. 414). Surprisingly, Winnie tries to appropriate the Chinese myth with her own situation. By shifting the end, Winnie produces her own version of validity and gains a sense of self affirmation. In a patriarchal society like China, women are the target of severe marginalization. However, Winnie learns to break the imposed silence by substituting the Chinese myth into a subjective story.

The last chapter of the story is called "Sorrowfree" and it is the name that Winnie gives to the little statue; it is the resemblance of her wish to stay forever with her daughter, Pearl, and listen to her stories. The end of the story is the essence of Tan's novel where women start to talk. In this story, it is a woman who is writing the personal history of her own, in a feminine pattern. Storytelling, as a powerful instrument, has the power to position women within the social discourses, by transferring the ancestral heritage to the next generation. *The Kitchen God's Wife* is the record of personal sufferings of women, ignored by the official patriarchal grand- narratives of history. Amazingly, by juxtaposing different versions of memory, Tan challenges the authority of 'History'. In the field of power struggle to be

heard, characters of Tan are representatives of all oppressed women who didn't had the chance to write history. By implication of re-memory, as the main strategy of writing, the characters have the opportunity to break the masculine power and exercise their feminine empowerment.

#### 4. Memory in Narrative of Ian McEwan

This section of research scrutinizes the disparate implication of memory, in *The Child in Time*. Unlike Amy Tan's novel, as an immigrant writer, which is based on revealing a familial secret by sharing it, the characters of Ian McEwan tolerate the burden of recalling, individually. Amy Tan positions her characters in a mutual communication with others, in order to create an immaculate identity paradigm for them; whereas, in McEwan's novel, the protagonist desires to reach the lost order of his life by recalling past, as a remedy.

*The Child in Time* is narrated based on the traumatic abduction of Kate and the dire recalling of her memories by Stephen Lewis, children's author, who tries to preserve her daughter in a tangle of time, memory and desire. During the bitter process of bereavement, he gradually matures and reconciles with his wife, Julie. This reunion is celebrated by the birth of a baby, at the end of the novel. There is another parallel story in this novel, which is concerned with the governmental efforts to make an *Authorized Childcare Handbook*, in order to grow a more disciplined generation. All through the story, Stephen is "caught between the apparent rigidity of the time and its inseparability from believe and perception" and the only way to run off the rigid time zone is travelling in the realm of memory (Morrison, 2003, p. 70). There is a strong inclination to return to past, before the abduction of Kate, by Stephen. The only breakout, to fight the insistent passing of time, is through recalling memories of Kate, "later in the sorry months and years, Stephen was to make efforts to re-enter this moment, to borrow his ways back through the folds between events, crawl between the covers and reverse his decision....There is no absolute time, his friend Thelma has told him on occasions, no independent entity. Only our particular and weak understanding" (McEwan, 1987, p. 14). It is through recalling that Stephen has a chance to retrieve Kate. Unlike the text of Tan which is an identity based narrative that considers the act of sharing memory as a means of identity construction and revealing familial secrets, McEwan's novel implicates memory as a remedy, in the hope of recovering lost order.

##### 4.1 Memory as Trauma

After the abduction of Kate, Stephen undergoes an agonizing process of mourning by recalling his lost child. But what he is unaware of is that her memory is rigidified in his mind, and even if he encounters the child one day, he will not recognize her, since time moves forward without stopping. It is the power of memory to keep pictures of past, as fresh as the moment of the incident. The first pages of the novel are loaded with Stephen's obsessive memories of Kate; it is a futile strife to recall her after two years of abduction. He is aware of the cruel ticking of clock and wonders about the changes of his daughter in time, without him, "Kate's growing up had become the essence of time itself....Without the fantasy of her continued existence, he was lost, time would stop. He was the father of an invisible child" (p. 8). With the intention of preserving her daughter from the tyranny of fluxing time, he identifies Kate with other little girls, "he was studying Kate's face, trying to estimate the kind of life she had. There were no signs of maltreatment. What was most strikingly new was a brown mole high on her right cheekbone" (p. 148). Memory, as a fleeting discourse is also experienced by Stephen, who upon losing his daughter, misrecognizes each little girl with Kate. By fixing the incident, in mind, he is able "to borrow his way back through the folds between events" (p. 14). The ghostly nature of memory is the cause of permanent suffering of Stephen. The omnipresence of images of lost beloved makes the process of curing more complicated and the stages of denial, longer. Analyzing the responses of Stephen indicates that there is no tendency to communicate the memories of past with others. This could be considered a cultural convention in non-migrant literature. Since the traumatic memories are not shared domestically, they must be dealt with, individually. The tedious process of recalling would revive the pain of traumatic experience. However, there is no will to share it with others, in this novel. In the context of this novel, memories operate in the individual level and the traumatic event leave their mark in the life of the character. This is intensified, because the process of sharing memories, with members of family, is missing. The will to share past with others is highly linked to the cultural modes of a society.

According to Malcolm(1952), the novel could be considered a psychological novel where Stephen must "come to terms with the unspeakable experience of losing a child and this leads him to a 'gradual emergence' from the state of shock and reunion with Julie" (p. 95). The memories of abduction are as alive as the incident, because Stephen recalls them over and over again, even in the midst of his official meetings. However, fluxing time proves the futility of his efforts, "but that was before time, the heartless accumulation of days, had clarified the absolute, bitter truth" (McEwan, p. 23). The sensation of loss is intensified when Julie and Stephen are together and what haunts them is 'Kate's absence', which "had set them on separate paths. There was nothing to be shared". The memory of the lost child haunts their life, "the lost child was between them again. The daughter they did not have, was waiting for them outside" (p. 65). Unlike Tan's characters who feel an urgency to share their traumatic past, in *The Child in Time*, there is a conscious tendency to keep recalling painful memories, as an individual act. There is not a sign of sharing memories of the lost child among the parents and memory is constrained to personal dominions. Even when Stephen visits his father, there is no name of Kate; although, everybody is poignant, clearly,

Beyond the physical signs; Stephen had seen nothing of his parent's sorrow. They had not wanted to add to his burden. It was typical of what bound the three of them that they had never been able to grieve for Kate together, and that to say her name, as his father has done, was to break an unspeakable rule. (p. 89)

The importance of 'place' in preserving actual memories, as well triggering them, is traceable, in this novel. Stephen is "transfixed" in the road, where the incident happened, "it was on such a day, he knew that this place gained its importance" (p. 56). The persistent effect of memory is intensified by the place of abduction. "But the call of the place, its knowingness, the longing it evinced, the rootless significance, all this made it seem quite certain, even before he could tell him why, that the loudness-this was the word he fixed on-of this particular location had its origins outside his own existence" (p. 57). By fixing the location and words, connected to Kate's loss, Stephen tries to uphold his daughter, unchanged, in his memory. This tendency to rigidify memories is common for survivors of traumas such as death and abduction. Everywhere Stephen goes, the thought of Kate is with him; all the things he observes "needed a child, Stephen thought, succumbing to inevitable. ... He needed her good influence, in lessons celebrating the specific; how to fill the present and be filled by it to the point where identity faded to nothing" (p. 105). Despite the fact that in migrant writings, even in the case of trauma, there is a search for a shared identity and a sense of belonging to a precise community, the only way to overcome the trauma, in this novel, is by forgetting.

The only way to recapture Kate from strands of past is to re-construct her, in the domains of memory. This, not only, completes the circle of bereavement over the lost child, but also remedies Stephen and Julie psychologically. Only through recalling and disruption of dominating time, there is a possibility of establishing the lost order. While thinking of Kate had broken the heart of Stephen, remembering her special memories award him an ease of mind, "Stephen thought that if he could do everything with the intensity and abandonment with which he had once helped Kate build her castle, he would be a happy man of extraordinary powers" (p. 107). By continual process of reshaping memories, it would redeem the survivors of a traumatic incident. As Stephen goes to buy Kate a Christmas present, he understands how much he misses her and the strange fact is that, "it was getting harder to recall. She was fading, and all the time his useless love was swelling, encumbering and disfiguring him like a goiter" (p. 130). In this case, the therapeutic effect of memory is at work by fading the true pictures of Kate. The disfiguration of child salvages Stephen from mental breakdown.

The story ends up with an intact perception about the notion of love that is celebrated by a new birth, symbolically, the rebirth of love. According to Malcolm, one of the most significant tasks of the novel is "to recover what has been lost, there is a constant emphasis on memory.... Stephen for considerable parts of the text attempts to find her daughter, to fill the void she has left-through incessant activity, with drinks and inane television programs, ... and finally by loving his wife again and having another child" (p. 105). Interestingly, unlike Tan's novel, which focuses on the new mutual discernment of the characters by sharing memories, the characters of McEwan take the responsibility of recalling, as an individual burden; remembering usually occurs in a personal and secure jurisdiction. Stephen and Julie share together, not the memories of Kate, but the necessity to forget her, "I had to stop running after her in my mind. I had to stop aching for her.... I had to go on loving her, but I had to stop desiring her" (p. 213). Malcolm (1952) believes that the fluctuation in time and memory means that there would be redemption in passing time and preserving the memories of lost, "A particular child is lost: children in general grow up and represent the transience and loss that bedevil our lives in time. But the figure of child also suggests that unhappy circumstances can be altered, that the world (or at any other rate British society) can be redeemed, the loss is real but not necessarily permanent" (p. 109). This easily points to the redemptive power of passage of time and flux of memory. By changing the images of the lost child, the lost order of character's life is re-gained; Stephen and Julie reunite by birth of another child that will replace Kate. As memories of Kate fade, a true reconciliation materializes in Stephen's life; it is the end of the thorny process of bewailing for the lost. This novel is marked by appeasement of the characters and overcoming pains of the traumatic memories. In *The Child in Time*, this compromise is accomplished by the birth of a baby and the assurance of re-establishing damaged relationship of Stephen and Julie.

#### 4.2 Power Struggle

History writing and recalling memories are, equally, instruments of empowerment, by which the authoritarian group compose a continuous picture of past, in order to rationalize its actions. The tendency in selecting specified type of memories is a way of maintaining power in domestic and official spheres. The discourse of memory, as well as history, may threaten the present power relations, in a society, and endanger the position of the recalling individual. In McEwan's novel, the notion of power has been blurred in the fictional realm and the writer, cleverly, examines different types of imposing power, by memory and history. Paradoxically, although, the structures of cultural conventions are determined by power network, the patterns of practicing authority are cultural- bond. This illustrates the noticeable differences of modes of exercising power, in texts of writers, with different cultural backgrounds

Despite the postmodern boasting of Mc Ewan's text, regarding the relativity of time, history and memory, there is a tendency in preserving a particular type of memory. *The Authorized Childcare Handbook*, published by Childcare Committee, is an attempt to inflict certain disciplines on child caring discourse. Each chapter initiates with an epigraph which is a part of *The Authorized Childcare Handbook*. The first chapter scolds parent's ideas on the issue of raising children, "... And for those parents, for too many years misguided by the pallid relativism of self- appointed childcare experts...", this creates a sense of official disciplinary control in the system of childcare and prescribes new patterns for raising children (p. 7). Figure of father has been named as the "figure of authority" which prepares the children for "separations to come, separations which are an inevitable part of all growing up"; this quotation approves rigidified educational systems that benefit ultimate superior authority (p. 49). But the most striking manipulation is mentioned in the epigraph of the fifth chapter,

Childhood is an invention, a social construct, made possible by society as it increased



its sophistication and resource. Above all childhood is a privilege. No child as it grows older should be allowed to forget that its parents, as embodiment of society, are the ones who grant this privilege, and do so at their own expense (p. 93).

Selectively, government undermines the present childcare system and exalts the past disciplines, to maintain its dominance by standardization of child caring discourse. This type of manipulation is a natural product of exercising power that aims at legitimization of social acts. In McEwan's fictional society, this exploitation exceeds its usual norms and expands to private spheres of citizens' life. However, not all modes of authorities are practiced explicitly. Frequently, power relations are performed invisibly.

Adam Mars-Jones calls *The Child in Time*, a masculine attempt to interfere with the feminine space to manage it; thus, it demoralizes the key position of women in reproduction, the source of birth and life, something that men have always envied. It is traceable in the last pages of the book, where Stephen helps Julie in delivering the baby, in the absence of a midwife. Mars-Jones accuse McEwan to exploit the feminine spheres and present a authoritative perspective in the novel,

*The Child in Time* is the narrative of pain and loss, but it is also a suppressed drama of symbolic ownership. The irony of its construction is that the disappearance of Kate makes the claims of her parents artificially equal. Only in the absence of the child, does it become possible for the father's claim to be heard so favorably. (as cited in Childs, 2006, p. 64)

The main focalizer of the story is Stephen; everything is pictured through his eyes; in the traumatic abduction of Kate, memories of Julie are completely ignored and what remains is Stephen's share of pain. The passivity of Julie is accentuated by her withdrawal. Only at the last pages of the book, Julie is allowed to talk of her share of suffering, in order to inform Stephen that she has forgiven him, and now she is ready to give birth to another child who symbolically amends their relation. The limited omniscient point of view of the story is a technique to oblige a specified authority on the reader in letting him see the things from Stephen's perspective.

On the whole, the notion of power network and existence of various types of power exercises prevail in the novel. *The Child in Time* is the battlefield of power, in which Stephen's point of view is the governing voice. The desire for national efficiency and a disciplined new generation forces government to create *The Authorized Childcare Handbook*, to preserve the eligible memories of past and create a standards childcare system.

## 5. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to scrutinize the discursive nature of memory in *The Kitchen God's Wife* by Amy Tan and *The Child in Time* by Ian McEwan. It appears that unlike the text of Tan which is an identity based narrative that considers sharing memory as a means of identity construction and revealing familial secrets, McEwan's novel is an individual narrative act that implicates memory as a healing remedy for the traumatic past, in the hope recuperating the lost order. Investigating the discursive quality of memory, in these novels, indicates that memory is a discursive operation that could be depicted diversely in different contexts; however, it is bound to the perpetual struggles in power network.

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