

**Negotiating Non-Violent Subjectivity in a
Desocialised World: Narrative Explorations
of Women's Struggles against Self-Sacrifice.**

Susan Holoubek

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Abstract

The novel “Tracings of Absence” deals with the complex patterns of initiative and restraint that characterise the relationships between parents and children and the ghosts and shadows that haunt them as they negotiate this fraught terrain.

Deidra, a professional Australian woman in her late forties, is searching for her daughter, Jacqui, who went missing in Argentina three years earlier. Through her local contacts she strikes up a friendship with an English Catholic priest, Stephen. Both Deidra and Stephen are grappling with histories of guilt and loss. Both are stuck in limbo, trying to find ways to move forward that don’t involve amputating their deepest feelings and desires.

As Deidra searches through the crowded, vibrant and sometimes threatening landscape of Buenos Aires, she is also compelled to search through her own personal history, sifting memories surrounding her relationship with her daughter for potential clues about her daughter’s sudden disappearance. Throughout this search, she struggles with notions of motherhood and daughterhood, uncertainties surrounding identity and relationship and questions of faith and belief.

The novel addresses themes of yearning and absence and the ways in which we attempt to connect with each other across the chasms of our conflicting desires and faltering miscommunications. It also explores the human ties that lift us up and give us hope and the acts of merciful kindness that lead us to compassion for our own experience and for each other and to a renewed sense of human agency and responsiveness.

In the exegetical essay, “Negotiating Non-Violent Subjectivity: Narrative Explorations of Women’s Struggles against Self-Sacrifice”, I trace the ways in which the major themes of my novel emerged during the writing process, focusing on women’s struggles against self-condemnation and various forms of self-sacrifice. The essay explores critical theory relating to identity construction and patterns of social interaction, giving particular attention to the mimetic theory of René Girard. I cross-reference Girard’s work with the work of other philosophers, theologians, sociologists and feminist critics to both test and challenge some of his central assertions and to explore what began as unconscious artistic resistances to elements of his theory,

particularly as it related to women's experience and certain questions and themes that were taking shape in my novel.

Having introduced the relevant theorists, the essay proceeds through a chronological tracing of the writing process that draws on autobiographical material as well as highlighting discoveries about the narrative craft. It concludes with a brief account of the way in which two other contemporary female novelists have dealt with similar themes to those explored in "Tracings of Absence" and arrives at conclusions about the possible narrative shape of women's resistance to patterns of self-sacrifice.

Statement of Originality

Neither novel nor essay contains any material which has been accepted for the award of any degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution to Susan Holoubek and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

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